

Local Government Homelessness Knowledge Hub Case Study



Submitted by **City of Fremantle**
Case Study **Tent City: A collaboration of services**

SUMMARY

A camp for people experiencing homelessness began operating at Pioneer Park, Fremantle on Boxing Day 2021 without the City of Fremantle's approval.

The City worked with lead support services, the state government and other key stakeholders on finding long-term solutions to the camp's occupants ongoing care and accommodation needs. The City's position was that, despite the best intentions of camp volunteers and donations from the broader community, the camp was not delivering the long-term assistance and care that its occupants needed and prevented the work of professional service providers.

There were increasing concerns about public safety, both for the occupants of the camp, and for the broader community who are impacted by its ongoing presence in Pioneer Park. The City worked in collaboration with support services, the state government and the Western Australian Police Force (WA Police) to provide a compassionate and welfare-focused approach to resolving the camp and returning the park to the broader public.

DETAILS

The City was approached on Monday, 21 December 2020 by a group under the banner Freo Street Kitchen with a plan to deliver a short-term food service for people in need over Boxing Day. This became a campsite and a focal point for people from around Perth and country WA, with an estimated 80 people sleeping at the park. At the time, no indication was given of the intent to camp at the site. The camp was supported by volunteers who donated food and other supplies.

Notwithstanding that the camp was not approved, the City's primary focus had been trying to safeguard the wellbeing of people within the camp and the broader community. While the camp provided short-term support for vulnerable people, a temporary set up in a public park was not a viable long-term safe solution, or an appropriate use of the park.

The City received several complaints from nearby businesses about noise and unsocial behaviour emanating from the camp. There had also been increasing complaints from residents and community members regarding the camp, the ongoing presence of the camp in the park and the perceived growth of the camp of up to 100 tents.

WA Police reported increasing instances of violence within the camp, including assaults with weapons. Camp organisers made it clear they would prefer to manage security issues in-house, although WA Police and Community Safety Officers continued to be an ongoing visible presence at the camp.

The City took action in relation to the operation of the camp to protect the health of occupants. This action included daily emptying of bins and toilet cleaning. The City continued to provide electricity and security services including daily visits to the camp by Community Safety Officers and ongoing CCTV surveillance.

The cost to the City of providing basic hygiene services (waste collection and toilet cleaning) is approximately \$986.80 per fortnight for waste collection and \$1,136 per fortnight for toilet cleaning. The City undertook pressure washing and hosing around the area at a fortnightly cost of \$1,210. A further \$8,910 was spent to date on additional Community Safety patrols in and around the camp.

A working group was formed with service providers including St Patrick's Community Support Centre (St Pat's), Uniting WA, Ruah Community Services, the Department of Communities, WA Police and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation along with representatives from the camp to collaborate on how the camp could be resolved in a manner that is as compassionate as possible and provides maximum support to the vulnerable people congregating there.

St Pat's outreach staff attending Pioneer Park undertook a VI-SPDAT (vulnerability indicator) assessments to assess the individual needs and vulnerabilities of those staying at the camp.

The assessment determined

- 23 per cent identify were at risk of violence
- 42 per cent had legal issues
- 88 per cent had AOD indicators, with 58 per cent having tried treatment before but returned to using
- 58 per cent had mental health indicators, with 27 per cent having been hospitalised for this against their will. Of those that indicated they had mental health issues, almost third had not seen a mental health professional in the past six months
- 66 per cent indicated some form of disability, mostly serious head trauma or brain injury
- Total number of people 70 tents about 100 people
- Estimated that the people in the park are 50 per cent local and 50 per cent from Perth and surrounds

Occupants of the camp included a cohort of elderly people aged over 55 years, and approximately 20 single women. At least two families with young children presented at the camp and engaged with support services for alternative accommodation as a matter of priority. The Department of Communities facilitated one family's return to country.

The City was in daily contact with service providers, WA Police and support services regarding the welfare of people within the camp and options for immediate short-term and ongoing support. The City met regularly with the Department of Communities and other state agencies. City staff had regular contact with camp organisers, and made it clear the camp was not authorised.

St Pat's extended its opening hours to include Saturday/Sunday and a public holiday Tuesday, from 7.30am-2.00pm. The extension of operating hours for this time was to support occupants at tent city at Pioneer Park. Campers were encouraged to attend St Pat's to assist in their needs, with regular sessions twice per week with agencies who could assist with medical, legal, Centrelink matters.

Pioneer Park was leased to the City of Fremantle from state government. A decision was made to return Pioneer Park to state government temporarily to allow for a more coordinated approach between Department of Communities, WA Police, and additional support services in managing the camp at Pioneer Park. The Department of Communities arranged crisis accommodation for the occupants at Pioneer Park and the camp was wound up on Saturday, 23 January 2021.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

The two relevant pieces of legislation that control camping are the *Caravan Parks and Camping Grounds Regulations (1997)* and *City of Fremantle Local Government Property Local Law (2002)*.

- Under the City's Local Government Property Law, a person shall not without a permit "camp on, lodge at or occupy any structure at night for the purpose of sleeping on local government property", or "erect any tent, camp, hut or similar structure".
- Under the *Caravan Parks and Camping Grounds Act*, a person cannot camp on land other than in a caravan park or camping ground without written approval.

