

Local Government Homelessness Knowledge Hub Case Study



Submitted by **City of Rockingham**
Case Study **Response to Homelessness**

Background

The City of Rockingham developed the Rockingham/Kwinana Homelessness Interagency Group (RKHIG) in 2016 in response to hosting an 'emerging issues' forum with community that highlighted homelessness as a priority concern for community. The RKHIG has broad representation of paid staff and volunteers across the support services sector who have a role in supporting people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity.

From 2016 - 2018, the RKHIG continued to raise and identify that a lack of assertive outreach for people experiencing homelessness was a significant gap in the community, and as the numbers of people experiencing homelessness become more visual, the need to respond was heightened. The Salvation Army was partially funded to deliver an assertive outreach service, however it was part-time and not solely for the purpose of homelessness.

The funding model for that service changed in 2020 and it resulted in there to be no dedicated homelessness assertive outreach service available within the City of Rockingham. At this time, it was estimated there were approximately 35 people experiencing chronic homelessness and in excess of 130 people experiencing other forms of homelessness (based on data provided by The Salvation Army).

In late 2018 early 2019, concerns were raised by The Department of Fire and Emergency Services of deliberately lit fires in a bush area of state government land in East Rockingham, referred to as the 'Ward Road Bush Camp'. This area for a long time had been a known location for people to camp/live, however it had not posed any major problems and was an area that didn't raise concerns by residents. This was until disputes commenced between occupants and fires were lit, posing risk to life and risk to the surrounding industrial businesses.

Case Evaluation

The City advocated to the state government to respond and a temporary Full-Time Project Officer - Homelessness was allocated within the Department of Communities to assist in transitioning people off this site into accommodation. The Ward Road Bush Camp highlighted again, the desperate lack in assertive outreach and dedicated homelessness services in Rockingham, in particular accommodation options. It also highlighted the strength of local sector partnerships which supported the transition of 22 people being housed off that site at the time.

In September 2019 the City of Rockingham initiated a strategic leadership group with a focus on homelessness. The group comprised of decision makers from lead agencies who frequently assist people experiencing homelessness in Rockingham and included Anglicare WA, The Salvation Army, the Department of Health, Peel Mental Health, Palmerston Association, St Patrick's Community Support Centre and the Western Australia Police Force. The initial meeting was chaired by the District Director - Department of Communities and a presentation on the Zero Project was delivered by Ruah Community Services. This group committed to develop a collaborative way forward, focussed on the three priority areas of:

1. Data Collection
2. Assertive Outreach
3. Accommodation

These priorities then guided the way forward for the RKHIG. During this period, the City of Rockingham was approached to research other solutions driven by community such as community lockers, Sleepbus, showers and land to be allocated for a homelessness campground. The City obtained feedback from Shelter WA and others to present multiple discussion papers to Council to encourage a shift in focus from temporary solutions

- that may enable continued homelessness - to focussing on three priorities set by the strategic leadership group. This resulted in Council allocating funds to deliver for an Assertive Outreach Service for three years (currently under contract delivered by St Patrick's Community Support Centre) with the focus to support individuals and capture more data.

Subsequently, the data previously identified and collected informed advocacy by the City to the state government to consider Rockingham be funded via the Housing First Homelessness Initiative (HFHI) and for a Common Ground facility be built in the region (Rockingham, Kwinana, Mandurah). Both advocacy efforts were successful.

Current Status

As of 2022, the City of Rockingham has homelessness, housing insecurity and housing as priority areas for continued advocacy. The City of Rockingham continues to support the sector as an active participant on the Zero Project with officers attending the grass roots and improvement team meetings. The City of Rockingham is active in providing training to the not-for-profit sector and community on areas that build resilience and enhance support capabilities such as mental health first aid and budgeting workshops. In addition, the City of Rockingham provides funding through its Community Grants Program to local agencies and partners in providing letters of support to assist groups to attract funding. The focus of the RKHIG has shifted toward coordination of emergency relief and the City of Rockingham is involved in supporting another transition from the Ward Road Bush Camp.

