

Local Government Homelessness Knowledge Hub Case Study



Submitted by **City of Swan**

Case Study **Development of Midland Alliance To End Homelessness**

Background

In 2018 a visual preference presence of people experiencing homelessness in Midland grew around the same time reports increased from community and businesses about anti-social behaviours, illegal camping and litter. At this time homelessness funding for Midland seemed inadequate and not commensurate with the increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness.

But what were the numbers? We knew homelessness providers were seeing an increase in presentations to their services and large numbers of people were turned away.

Indigo Junction (leading local homelessness service provider) over the course of a year had:

- 6,330 calls for a safe space to stay for which they had no capacity,
- Karnany Resource Centre assisted 4,163 people experiencing some form of crisis which was a 750 per cent increase over 12 months,
- The Youth Service had connections from 584 young people who they were unable to assist as their accommodation was full at a capacity of six.

Second Steps

In March 2019 the City of Swan (Council) declared a homelessness crisis and resolved several actions be initiated. There were discussions within the business units which resulted in the development of internal processes to assist Council and community to navigate homelessness issues.

This included the development of policies/guidelines and provision of training for staff of any agencies assisting in homelessness service delivery. Other organisations and services stepped forward in strategic and operational areas during this time.

There was, for example:

- The development of the Homelessness Roundtable by the Ascension Church,
- A Homelessness Forum with a panel discussion at the Midland Town Hall by a local service club,
- Good governance from within the Midland District Leadership Group (attended by high-level local decision-makers from state, Commonwealth and local government along with the community services sector), to have homelessness listed as one of their five priority areas.

Where does the data come from?

Don't rely on just one source of statistical information, however, ensure once you choose your imperfect way of measuring homelessness, you continue to measure in the same imperfect way.

Look within to where you could gather further information about your community members who are experiencing homelessness. Consider these suggestions:

- A dedicated Local Impact Officer from the Zero Project at Ruah
- Local service providers – particularly useful for emerging issues
- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Connections Week information which can be compared with other local government areas.
- Local government indicators (this could appear under illegal camping, rubbish etc) in the community safety area
- Western Australia Police Force
- Department of Health

To put together some statistical information, in May 2019 Indigo Junction partnered with the City of Swan, and Connections Week was conducted to take a snapshot of the state of homelessness in Midland with the following key points becoming evident:

- 71 individual adults were counted
- 26 families were street present, with a total of 52 children
- Of the 26 families, 92 per cent identified as either Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders
- Families made up 27 per cent of Midland’s homeless compared to just 2 per cent in Perth and 7 per cent in Fremantle

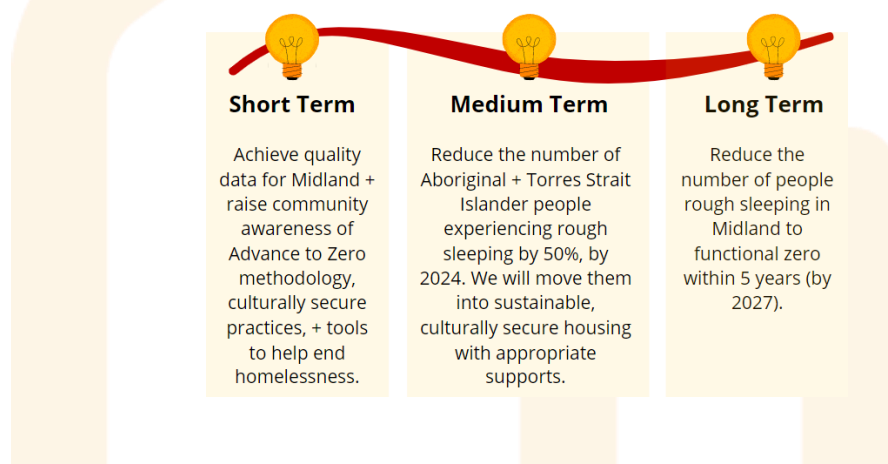
Working Together

The Midland Alliance to End Homelessness (the Alliance) had previously faltered due a lack of local statistical information and knowledge of successful, evidence based, ‘whole-of-community’ strategies and actions that could be implemented collectively to contribute towards the long-term reduction in people experiencing homelessness.

Under the ‘All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia’s 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030’ the Department of Communities provided funding to provide a Midland specific Community Impact Officer from Ruah with experience, knowledge and skills from the internationally recognised Zero Project, to assist with the development of a local strategic plan.

Using the momentum from Connections Week there was a revitalisation of the Alliance and with assistance from our Community Impact Officer, the Alliance recently held two workshops to determine short, medium and long-term goals we will be working on collectively.

Our strategic goals that were developed by the Alliance have been drafted as:



Case Evaluation

To coordinate a myriad of people who must be at the table can be slow and frustrating and requires constant attention and coordination – in this case, by the local government. Homelessness services are overstretched with their core business, particularly the smaller homelessness services who are not in the position to provide additional hours to the development or delivery of a strategy if it doesn’t enable them to mark it off against a key performance indicator.

With interruptions by COVID-19, organisational restructures, staff changes, governmental strategic changes etc, it has taken three years to be at a stage where we have an alignment of Midland Alliance to End Homelessness members with their thinking, education, language and shared actions by those organisations and agencies that provide services to people experiencing homelessness.

People become invisible if no one is funded to count them.

Lesson One:

If dedicated human resources were allocated to the administration of homelessness issues, the process of initial engagement through to development of a shared strategy would be much shorter.

Lesson Two:

Data, evidence, statistics, intelligence is key to starting the real work. Connections Week Report for Midland available is available [here](#).

Lesson Three:

Whilst you are engaging with external agencies, spend some time refining your own homelessness responses. This is a golden opportunity to develop policies and guidelines, train staff, educate councillors, city staff and the community.

Lesson Four:

Engagement, engagement, engagement!

Lesson Five:

Get your expertise in! Local knowledge is imperative but you still need help to navigate the big picture so you can work together for strategic and measurable outcomes.

Lesson Six:

Regularly review the agencies (or people) you need sitting around the table. Keep approaching and reminding people if they've not taken up the offer of being involved.

Lesson Seven:

Actively guide each party sitting around the table to communicate and they will realise they are not adversaries. In fact, they complement the work that each does – watch for that light bulb moment when they realise!

Lesson Eight:

Make sure meetings have value for each participant and their agency and allow a flexible, contemporary approach of engagement by encouraging a 'lean in' and 'lean out' relationship.

Lesson Nine:

Celebrate your accomplishments, no matter how small.