

Local Government Homelessness Knowledge Hub Case Study



Submitted by **City of Wanneroo**
Case Study **Business Development**

Context

Homelessness is a major social issue in Australia, with the Perth metropolitan area not immune to the matter. As a response the Cities of Wanneroo and Joondalup, alongside the Joondalup Wanneroo Ending Homelessness Group (JWEHG), developed the Regional Homelessness Plan 2018/19 – 2021/22 (RHP). A strategy of the RHP is to “increase engagement with local businesses to build awareness and reduce stigma around homelessness”.

Despite numerous responses to homelessness by federal and state government, local government lacks evidence of the business community’s role in the homelessness sector. In a pilot research project, the City of Wanneroo used a place-based lens to present, for the first time, a descriptive analysis of the business community’s response to homelessness.

In late 2020 the City conducted an assessment to investigate the needs of the business community regarding responding to homelessness as well as advocate for funding to support access to training. This was aimed at increasing engagement with local businesses to build awareness and reduce negative stigma around homelessness. The needs assessment aligned with the following action in the Regional Homelessness Plan.

Building Capacity, Understanding and Engagement	
1.7 Increase engagement with local businesses to build awareness and reduce negative stigma around homelessness.	1.7a Coordinate training for local businesses in relation to responding to homelessness and creating inclusive and respectful services.

Business owners and operators of shops, restaurants and malls often interact with this vulnerable group as rough sleepers solicit help from their customers or seek shelter in and around business premises. Additionally, there is the perception the presence of homeless persons can have a negative impact on businesses.¹

While business owners and operators may resort to calling the police or Council for quick responses, there is no evidence the business community is equipped with long-term strategies to respond effectively to cases of homelessness. This project presented an opportunity to upskill businesses to respond in a compassionate manner that will produce mutually beneficial outcomes.

The project was split into two phases, with phase one being completed in late 2021. Phase two is currently in progress.

Project Phases

Phase one: Gathering and analysing data.

The City investigated the needs of the local business community regarding issues and experiences of homelessness. This investigation was conducted as a needs assessment taking both interview and survey form. A final report was then developed to advise on the findings and recommendations for next steps.

Phase two: Delivering on recommendations.

Development of a Homelessness Resource Toolkit to include access to information on homelessness services was recommended in the final report. The objective of the Toolkit is to enable businesses to feel confident in responding to instances of homelessness facilitating a compassionate and efficient response. The City aims to

¹ The Age. (2015). Homeless people bad for tourism and should be moved on, say residents and businesses. <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/homeless-people-bad-for-tourism-and-should-be-moved-on-say-residents-and-businesses-20150114-12hxs8.html>

focus on 'front-line' businesses such as independent supermarkets/delis, shopping centre management/security personnel, real estate businesses and health care services.

Goals/Objectives

The overarching aim of the project was to collaborate with businesses to enhance their understanding of homelessness, including causes, challenges and availability of support services. The objective of phase one was to identify how businesses currently respond to homelessness and highlight specific gaps and needs. The objective of phase two is to support business in responding effectively and compassionately to homelessness in the community.

Implementation and Results

The following steps were taken to inform phase one:

- Identifying relevant business: This was done through desktop research and involved identifying businesses in known hotspot areas where people have been reported sleeping rough.
- Individual interviews: Identified businesses were contacted and face-to-face interviews took place to understand what issues businesses were experiencing regarding homelessness and how they were responding.
- Surveys: Online surveys were also conducted with relevant businesses to gather information on their needs when responding to homelessness.
- Data analysis: Information received from the business community was collated and analysed to evaluate needs and identify priorities when responding to homelessness.
- Report with findings and recommendations: A report outlining the findings was developed and conclusions and recommendations were put forward.

The Final Report concluded that the business community have an overwhelming desire to help people sleeping rough. The business community is an open door that is providing help and is responding compassionately to homelessness. The following recommendations were put forward to inform phase two, in light of the evidence from phase one:

- Publicly commend and acknowledge the contribution of the business community in responding to homelessness.
- Provide information and resources in the form of a pamphlet, booklet or flyer in hard copy and online to address the information gaps identified in the business community's response.
- Proactively engage the business community as a partner in the homelessness sector.
- Use the current findings as a baseline, then expand the sample size to make it representative of the business community and periodically conduct the same survey to track homelessness response trends among the business community, to better inform service responses in the City.