

**Ending Homelessness is
Everyone's Business!**

Regional Forum - October 2012

**The W. T Onus (Aboriginal Hostels Limited)
and Merri Outreach Support Service
Partnership**

Presenters: Faye Halatanu & Tim Cotton

Introductions

- I'm Tim from Merri Outreach Support Service (MOSS). Candy and I will be talking to you today about the partnership service that Aboriginal Hostels Limited and MOSS are running at the W.T. Onus Hostel in Northcote.
- I've been working at MOSS for about 9 years, mostly at the Northcote branch.
- MOSS is primarily funded to provide case management services to people who are experiencing homelessness
- Assisting people into housing is an important part of what we do, but just as important is ensuring that our clients and their kids maintain their housing and make the most of what our community has to offer.
- We know that ending homelessness is more than just providing housing. Connections to community are really important for making a house into a home.

Background to the partnership

In my first few months at MOSS I became aware of a number of things that are relevant to the reason that I am here today:

- That there is a large number of Aboriginal people living in the northern suburbs in Melbourne.
- That Aboriginal people experience homelessness at a disproportionate rate compared with other groups in the community.
- That despite this, mainstream homelessness services often report that they don't have a lot of Aboriginal people seeking homelessness assistance from their services.
- I wondered why this was and where were Aboriginal people going for help with homelessness?
- Rob Sago, the MOSS manager encourages MOSS staff to seek out ways find solutions to gaps in the Homelessness System and to keep an eye on new funding initiatives that could lead to opportunities to do something about those gaps.
- The Partnership that MOSS has with AHL is an example of this.

Background to the partnership

- North East Housing Service referred a single father with two children to the MOSS team that I work in.
- This referral prompted a visit to the W.T. Onus Hostel where the family were staying and the start of a productive partnership with the staff there.
- At that time Trudy Bell was the SAAP worker at the hostel. During the visit Trudy referred two more clients to me and it soon became clear that there were a high percentage of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness staying at the hostel.
- So when an opportunity came up to apply for DHS funding we applied and were successful. AHL & MOSS went into partnership with funds under the Intensive Case Management Initiative (ICMI).

The W. T. Onus Hostel

- W.T. Onus Hostel is one of 110 hostels that Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL) run across Australia.
- AHL provides safe, culturally appropriate accommodation for Indigenous Australians who need to live away from home to access education, health care, training and employment or who are experiencing homelessness.
- AHL seeks to improve their resident's access to services and economic opportunities in order to “close the gap” in Indigenous disadvantage.

AHL statistics

- In 2010-11, AHL provided approximately 487,000 nights of accommodation to Indigenous Australians.
- AHL directly operates 54 hostels, one Visitor Park (150 person capacity) and 14 IYMP houses around Australia. AHL also provides some financial assistance to other non-government organisations to operate a further 47 hostels.
- AHL hostels provide (in most cases) three meals a day – that's approximately 1,500,000 meals per year. In a typical day, some 1,475 individuals stay with us.
- Many of our guests are families – we have a range of accommodation from singles, doubles and family rooms (which vary according to location).
- AHL employs over 500 people – and in 2010-11, 77 per cent of these were themselves Indigenous Australians.

AHL policies

AHL has clear policies that:

- require children to attend school whenever possible.
- prohibit use of alcohol and illicit drugs.
- insist on courtesy and respectful behaviour.
- ensure fees are affordable and fair.
- ensure our hostels and houses are welcoming and home-like.
- We have found the partnership with MOSS very helpful because homelessness is a big issue for many of our residents.

Who have we worked with?

During the 2011 / 2012 financial year the W. T. Onus & MOSS partnership assisted a total of 56 people. Of the 56 people:

- 53 identified as Aboriginal, 2 identified as Torres Strait Islanders and one client was Anglo – Australian.
- 21 were males, 35 were female.
- 25 were children under the age of 14.
- 4 single fathers with 11 children.
- 7 single mothers with 14 children.

Referral Sources

- 53 clients were referred by staff at W.T. Onus.
- 2 clients were referred to the program by the Koori Court in Broadmeadows
- 1 client was referred by Koori Connect.

Outcomes

Housing outcomes:

- 5 family units went into transitional housing
- 5 family units went into Office of Housing
- 2 family units went into Aboriginal Housing
- 1 client went into a Yarra Community Housing property.

Good relationships = better outcomes

We would like to acknowledge all the staff and services that have worked alongside us to achieve some great outcomes. Without these relationships and partnerships and our shared commitment to working together we would not have been able to achieve as much as we have so far.

Thanks!

- All the staff at W.T. Onus Hostel : Gail Hearn, Candy Montgomery, Kathy Pappriell, Tricia Doherty, Karen Calcedo should be acknowledged for providing a warm and safe environment for the families and single people that they have housed ,
- The regional manager of Aboriginal Hostels Ltd Rita Stewart has supported the partnership since it began,
- The Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) Fitzroy provided medical , dental, podiatry and psychiatric support to W.T. Onus clients,
- Aboriginal Family Counseling Service especially the Koori Kids program,
- The Centre for Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) at Austin Health especially Robyn Low
- Westgarth Primary School – welcomed 10 children who were clients of the program,
- Thomastown Primary School – provided on-going support to 6 children
- Management staff at MOSS particularly Rob Sago, Richard McKinna and Tony Littman
- Karen Pearce, Tashiana Chengubraydoo and Lulu Chung from Aboriginal Housing Victoria are just fantastic.
- Daniella Duse and Darren Fraser and the rest of the staff at the Preston Office of Housing.
- Yappera Child Care.
- MIND – Victoria St, Brunswick.

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