



# **National Housing and Homelessness Plan**

## **Issues Paper**

### **Roseberry Qld Submission**



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## List of Recommendations

- The National Housing and Homelessness Plan includes clauses that ensure diversity of organisations and limit number of contracts provided to single operators.
- The National Housing and Homelessness Plan dedicate a specific section to youth homelessness as a demonstration of the unique and often complex nature of homelessness amongst young people.
- Expansion of Reconnect program and existing Mobile Support programs to enable more individuals to be assisted and potentially avoid homelessness. These services should also be linked to an SHS to create a holistic, client-focused approach.
- Consideration be given to a system of complimentary supports assigned to an SHS, thus reducing double handling and client frustration from having to deal with multiple agencies.
- Any new, purpose-built youth shelters must conform to minimum standards, including ensuite bathrooms, accessibility requirements and focus on safety and security for staff and clients.
- Greater provision of transitional accommodation to alleviate stress on emergency accommodation for clients who require accommodation but do not require 24/7 support.
- Clients in SHS and crisis accommodation be listed as high priority on public housing waitlists.
- That a Housing Taskforce consisting of high-level representatives from federal, state and local governments be created to provide expert advice and guidance to governments on housing policy and matters.
- Tenancy support funding is included with all agreements between government housing bodies and organisations.
- Further supports for small to medium sized organisations are provided to ensure those organisations are part of any housing solution.

## **Introduction**

Roseberry Qld is a regional not-for-profit and registered charity based in Gladstone, Qld and operating in Gladstone, Rockhampton, and surrounding regions. Roseberry Qld have been working in the youth homelessness sphere for over 35 years and operate youth shelters in Rockhampton and Gladstone as well as Crisis Accommodation Programs (CAP) and Mobile Support Programs in both centres. RQ is also a Tier 3 Community Housing Provider with a portfolio of some 112 social and community housing units.

Roseberry Qld are the lead agency in conjunction with Rockhampton Regional Council in running the Rockhampton Homeless Connect event and have run the Gladstone Homeless Connect Event since 2014. In addition, Roseberry Qld are the lead for the Central Queensland Housing and Homelessness Alliance, a group of service providers and stakeholders in the Central Queensland Region that seeks to address housing and homelessness and deliver tailored, data-driven solutions.

Our organisation is well versed in housing and homelessness matters from a regional perspective and is a leader in specialist youth homelessness services.

## **Diversity of Organisations**

Roseberry Qld has witnessed a worrying trend over recent years of governments awarding funding contracts to large statewide or nationwide organisations over smaller and regional based organisations. From our viewpoint, this trend is having a negative affect on client outcomes and has the unintended consequence of no regional variation in operations as organisations follow set procedures, etc. We are well aware that what might work in Brisbane does not work in regional Queensland due to a variety of factors, including geographical distances.

In our experience, the size of an organisation does not correlate with how much support is provided to clients and how involved in the local community it is. We have seen time and time again that smaller organisations, such as Roseberry Qld, are significantly more involved in our communities and tend to focus heavily on client outcomes over number crunching. Roseberry Qld is easily the most active organisation in the homelessness sphere in Central Queensland. The quality of service and involvement in the community is inversely related to the size of the organisation. Roseberry Qld believes that support needs to be provided to small and medium sized organisation to continue to achieve great outcomes and put people first.

This is a factor we believe needs to be taken into consideration when discussing any approach to housing and homelessness. Large organisations see people as numbers and lack the personal connection that smaller organisations such as Roseberry Qld have. All too often

we have witnessed smaller organisations lose funding to larger organisations and the subsequent reduction in quality of service delivery.

We believe that specific support for smaller organisations and those based in regional centres needs to be built into any plans to tackle housing and homelessness and ensure that funding is provided to organisations based on the quality of service delivery and not on the size and/or geographic reach of an organisation.

**RECOMMENDATION: The National Housing and Homelessness Plan includes clauses that ensure diversity of organisations and limit number of contracts provided to single operators.**

## **Youth Homelessness**

It is well known that young people (15-24) are overrepresented in homelessness statistics making up almost a quarter of all homeless people while only accounting for 12% of the population.

Young people present a unique challenge to SHS's and require far more than just accommodation but of support to develop and grow, address barriers and reach goals.

**RECOMMENDATION: The National Housing and Homelessness Plan dedicate a specific section to youth homelessness as a demonstration of the unique and often complex nature of homelessness amongst young people.**

## **Complimentary Services**

Roseberry Qld believe that any effective program needs to be able to deal fully with an individual across many aspects of their support. At the present time, contracts are provided to different services who are tasked with achieving similar goals. Young people, like other individuals do not like being forced to attend multiple services to obtain necessary support. Roseberry Qld would like to see consideration given to providing SHS services the ability to provide complete, wrap-around support to clients via the ability to give more than just accommodation. We believe that complimentary services to SHS's (for example, the Youth Housing and Reintegration Services (YHARS), Reconnect) would more appropriately sit with the SHS service that provides accommodation support. This move would reduce need to refer clients to other services and encourage young people to remain engaged with the supports they are already familiar with.

Roseberry Qld believe that SHS's are uniquely placed to operate as early intervention services also given the connection they already have with communities and the networks they have built up, as well as their specialist expertise. We believe that an expansion of the Reconnect program as well as building capacity within the existing Mobile Support portion of SHS contracts would have immeasurable benefits in reducing the cycle of homelessness.



**RECOMMENDATION:** Consideration be given to a system of complimentary supports assigned to an SHS, thus reducing double handling and client frustration from having to deal with multiple agencies.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Expansion of Reconnect program and existing Mobile Support programs to enable more individuals to be assisted and potentially avoid homelessness. These services should also be linked to an SHS to create a holistic, client-focused approach.

### **Specific Youth Response/Models**

Roseberry Qld believe that youth homelessness needs to be treated as a stand-alone element as it contains a number of specific qualities and attributes that are not evident in the adult homelessness cohort and require addressing. Some of these factors are outlined below.

#### **Factors**

Youth homelessness is a different breed to adult homelessness, both in terms of the needs of clients and the way in which young people experience homelessness. Roseberry Qld believe that focus needs to be put on specific specialised youth homelessness services.

Our own experience, along with significant quantities of empirical evidence, states that young people's experience of homelessness is predominantly couch surfing, as opposed to street sleeping. Our clients (and others) will spend days, weeks or even months couch surfing going from friend or family house to another until they have worn out their welcome. While this may appear to be preferable to street sleeping on the exterior, it is of great detriment to any young person. Without a stable, safe and secure place to call home, young people are unable to complete schooling, attend appointments, receive adequate support for mental health and other issues, secure employment, develop personally and socially, develop independent living skills and escape the cycle of homelessness.

#### **Staffing**

Roseberry Qld, in conjunction with the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition (QYHC) and The Services Union were the instigators of a two-staff model campaign for youth shelters. This campaign came about following Roseberry Qld's identification of the higher risk profile and need for greater outcomes for young people who access Specialist Homelessness Services. In brief, it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide services to young people with trauma backgrounds, like most Youth SHS clients are, and addressing the increasing complexities of their support requirements with mental health, sexual identity/sexuality, drug and alcohol use/misuse, etc on a one-staff model. The risk presented to staff from this combination of factors has limited the clientele that can be supported at any one time. High risk and high needs potential clients are being turned away as the risk is too high under a single-staff model.

Roseberry Qld provide comprehensive and extensive training to staff as existing training options (ie, Certificate/Diploma in Youth Work or Community Services) do not currently



provide adequate training to ensure staff are well equipped to deal with our clients. This training is expensive and time consuming but necessary in order to ensure quality service delivery. Anecdotally, Roseberry Qld are aware of a number of organisations that do not provide in-house training which has resulted in substandard service delivery and lessened client outcomes.

In regional areas, including those that Roseberry Qld operate, it is difficult to recruit suitably qualified and experienced staff. This is a further factor in our provision of in-house training but has made it difficult to retain suitably trained staff due to the inability to pay higher rates.

## **Factors Impacting Youth Homelessness**

### **Mental Health**

The majority of clients seeking service from specialist youth homelessness services (up to 80%) will have a trauma background as a result of family and domestic violence, abuse and neglect. Youth shelter staff are not mental health professionals (though have some level of training in this area) and assist clients through support and referrals to other services. However, often times these services have lengthy waiting periods or the trauma is outside of the scope for services such as Headspace.

### **Personal and Social Development**

Young people (16-25) are in a key phase of their lives where they are finding out about themselves and the world around them. A key plank of support that Roseberry Qld provides to clients is in their personal and social development.

The ability to have qualified and trained staff to work with clients and support them while navigating this journey cannot be understated.

### **Identity**

#### **Sexuality/Sexual Identity**

Young people are still in the stage of finding their identity and sexuality and they require further support than adults who may have an already entrenched sexuality or sexual identity. For many young people coming to terms with who they are sexually is a major component of this stage of their lives.

Roseberry Qld are seeing a significant increase in the number of clients who are transitioning and/or finding their sexual identity. Staff need to be mindful of this and require further training in order to accommodate these clients. Housing these individuals with adults is of great detriment to the individual's physical and mental wellbeing.



## **Accommodating Transgender Individuals**

Transgender young people face higher rates of homelessness, violence, mental health concerns and discrimination than almost any other group.

22% of young trans people reported experiencing homelessness and that same group are diagnosed with anxiety and/or depression at rates of 10 times the Australian population in general. Almost 80% of young trans individuals have self-harmed and 1 in 2 have attempted suicide<sup>1</sup>. All research points to the trans community as being a vulnerable one that requires greater coordination of services and enhanced education of front-line workers.

Roseberry Qld have seen a significant increase in presentations of transgender individuals into our service in recent years. To date, these individuals have been allocated rooms based on their gender on their birth certificate. While this has not been an ideal situation, it has been the only one available given the layout of the shelters and the fact that there are no individual bathrooms within each room. Rather, a shared bathroom is utilised for each area (male and female) of the shelters.

Whilst a major consideration for utilising separate male and female rooms was for safety and security of clients, the additional burden this may place on transgender clients, or the fact that it does not take into consideration gay and lesbian clients has not been adequately addressed.

Roseberry Qld has a longstanding commitment to ensuring the physical and mental safety and security of clients, regardless of backgrounds. Roseberry Qld is committed to diversity and inclusion and makes every effort possible to ensure all sites are welcome and inviting to all.

Transgender individuals already face extreme discrimination, bigotry, and violence simply by being who they are. A youth shelter should be a safe space for all users, regardless of their attributes.

## **Enhanced Support Requirements**

Given the unique nature of dealing with young people in a youth shelter, staff are required to take on a number of different roles at various times from mentor to caregiver to educator to parental figure to nurse and everything in between. The lengthy list of supports that young people need in order to exit a shelter ready to live independently, be resilient and in touch with themselves is almost endless. Young people need more than just a roof over their head to succeed. They require holistic support covering every aspect of their lives. It is not enough just to teach a young person how to cook and clean but to impart onto them an ability to function in a world that they have not been prepared for. The majority of clients that we have seen were disengaged from formal education and have not received education in many areas that their schooled peers have including everything from how taxes work and getting a TFN to healthy relationships and substance use/abuse education. All of this is





provided to clients at Roseberry Qld youth shelters and is an essential component of ensuring that young people are empowered to escape the cycle of homelessness.

### **The “Ideal” Youth Shelter**

Roseberry Qld operate on behalf of the Queensland Government, two youth shelters in Rockhampton and Gladstone. These shelters were purpose built over 20 years ago and no longer meet the requirements of a suitable space for young people. In addition to shared bathrooms, the shelters have dedicated male and female areas. The original impetus for this design was to separate male and female clients and prevent sexual activity and abuse from occurring. With the rising presentation of transgender and gay clients, this design is no longer suitable. Roseberry Qld have found ourselves in the situation where we have needed to turn away a potential client because we had no beds of the relevant gender available while having availability of the opposite gender.

In light of this (and other considerations) Roseberry Qld instigated a project to look at an ideal youth shelter. Roseberry Qld consulted with clients, other Specialist Youth Housing Specialist agencies, the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition (QYHC) and CQUniversity to design the ideal shelter. This design became known as the Shelteristic Model and has become a key focus for Roseberry Qld. The Shelteristic Model provides a space that is safe, accessible, supportive and allows for a level of independence that current shelter designs do not. The Shelteristic Model, like all Roseberry Qld programs, aims to empower clients to address their barriers and reach their goals while learning how to successfully maintain a tenancy and significantly reduce incidences of returning to homelessness.

**RECOMMENDATION: Any new, purpose-built youth shelters must conform to minimum standards, including ensuite bathrooms, accessibility requirements and focus on safety and security for staff and clients.**

### **Exiting Shelters**

Roseberry Qld has observed a significant increase in the length of stay in our shelters and transitional properties due to lack of other options. We believe there needs to be more transitional housing made available to SHS’s as well as a return to shelter and CAP clients being part of the priority list with public housing. At the present time, crisis clients are seen as having a roof over their heads so not a high priority for long-term housing. This has the effect of ensuring clients remain in these short-term, crisis accommodation facilities for longer than is necessary. Our own experience has clearly demonstrated the negative impact of clients on remaining in emergency accommodation for long periods of time as well as the resulting lack of available beds for people in crisis.

**RECOMMENDATION: Greater provision of transitional accommodation to alleviate stress on emergency accommodation for clients who require accommodation but do not require 24/7 support.**



**RECOMMENDATION: Clients in SHS and crisis accommodation be listed as high priority on public housing waitlists.**

## **Housing**

Roseberry Qld believe that affordable housing should be a fundamental right of all Australians and should not be reliant on your income, previous rental experience, or any other attribute. At the present time, there are far too many Australians languishing on housing waiting lists. The current housing crisis has exacerbated these concerns and is resulting in a significant increase in middle-class Australians accessing assistance in one form or another. Roseberry Qld has witnessed a worrying increase in requests for assistance to our services, especially to our Dignity Hub which provides information, advice, referrals, bathroom and laundry facilities and food parcels to anyone in the community. For the past two plus years, we have noted significant increase in double income families accessing this service and seeking food parcels in order to feed their families due to the increasing costs of housing.

Roseberry Qld believe that all levels of government have a role to play in addressing housing and homelessness and that the current crisis demands a focused determination and solutions-driven response from local, state and federal governments, utilising every tool at their disposal to ensure that as many Australians as possible are housed and not facing housing stress or forced to choose between feeding their children and paying the rent.

Organisations such as ours are ready and willing to work with governments but require support to do so.

**RECOMMENDATION: That a Housing Taskforce consisting of high-level representatives from federal, state and local governments be created to provide expert advice and guidance to governments on housing policy and matters, reduce red tape and improve development timelines.**

## **Tenancy Support**

Roseberry Qld's experience as a provider of social and community housing has demonstrated the need for tenancy support to assist tenants to maintain their tenancy, understand their rights and responsibilities and provide other, necessary support. Roseberry Qld is not funded for tenancy support however we have attempted to provide this wherever resources allow to ensure that a tenant can remain in their tenancy. Tenancy support is an essential tool in any social and community housing tenancy as an aid to reduce instances of homelessness amongst tenants and the provision of tenancy skills to those without experience or knowledge in this area. Roseberry Qld have created their own tenancy support tool, the Adaptable Living Program, which assists individuals to gain and maintain a tenancy and address any issues before they significantly impact a tenant. This program has had remarkable success in reducing the number of breaches that participants receive following their participation in the program.



Roseberry Qld believe that an allocation to CHP's for a tenancy support service would significantly decrease existing issues with tenants, reduce breaches and notices to leave being issued by working with tenants to overcome issues and address matters before they accumulate and risk a tenancy and potentially adding to the homelessness statistics.

**RECOMMENDATION: Tenancy support funding is included with all agreements between government housing bodies and organisations.**

## **Rent Assistance**

Roseberry Qld believe that the current rate and coverage of Rent Assistance is insufficient to meet the needs of many Australians. We would encourage a review of Rent Assistance to examine these inadequacies and the development of policy that ensures Rent Assistance is targeted and accessible and does not result in individuals and families being penalised for earning an income.

## **Barriers to Creating New Social and Affordable Housing**

Roseberry Qld is a medium sized regional organisation that prides itself on the provision of quality service to its clients. We have long been interested in developing new social and affordable housing that meets our clients needs however have often lacked the support from governments at all levels to realise these plans.

Smaller organisations are often left out of the picture when it comes to government policy and funding opportunities which assume that an organisation already has significant capacity to undertake the background work of any construction project. In order to be able to take advantage of a number of government grants, an organisation is required to already have substantial funding for project management, council development costs and other costs associated with planning, developing and constructing new or improved housing options. While there has been some support in this area, namely the Community Housing Futures grants and similar, we do not believe that enough is being done to support regional organisations to significantly increase the supply of social and affordable housing.

There are a range of options currently available to governments that Roseberry Qld would like to see initiated or expanded including;

- Reduction/removal of development fees for any new social or affordable housing developments.
- Significant rate reductions for any new social or affordable housing developments.
- Planning assistance and expertise at no cost to not-for-profit community housing providers and/or affordable housing developments.
- Financing assistance – access to funding or subsidies that allows smaller CHP's to design, develop and implement new social and affordable housing developments.
- Allocation of available local, state and federal government owned land for development of social and affordable housing.



- Relaxing restrictions on medium and high density housing developments, especially in areas with little available land and to ensure tenants are located near to services.
- Greater access to development grants to cover rising development costs and/or infrastructure subsidies.
- Alignment of housing policies and programs under a single department rather than the existing arrangement.

**RECOMMENDATION: Further supports for small to medium sized organisation are provided to ensure those organisations are part of any housing solution.**

## Contact Details

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