

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Ms Susan Carew

Organisation Name:

Your position or role:

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Drag the statements below to reorder them. In order of priority, please rank the themes you believe are most important for this inquiry into homelessness to consider::

Housing affordability,Public housing,Mental health,Indigenous people,Family violence,Rough sleeping,Services,Employment

What best describes your interest in our Inquiry? (select all that apply) :

Other (please describe)

I am homeless. I am studying Community Services and aim to create Homeless Lives Matter to serve homeless people.

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

Many. Refer to my proposal 'Courtney's Patch Ecovillage'

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

My submission is attached.

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

Homeless services are not available to those on Centrelink. People are opting out of the system as they believe no-one cares. The recent fires demonstrated that the problem is judgement of the homeless as blamed for homelessness rather than an economic externality (market and ideological failure). The prejudices, lack of awareness, indifference, lack of experience and low empathy are barriers that allow a homeless person to stay on the street or move from place to place for years. The prejudice is a silent bias that appears inherent at the highest levels. There are many who suicide as they are not heard, they cannot find an exit. Their potential lost as the label of homelessness is the stigma they can't escape. They are invisible and know no-one cares. It is a tragedy and an indictment on a wealthy society that place the value of material investments over the value of human life who have much to contribute to society.

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5e68d99ae1f49-S Carew Senate Submission into Homelessness.pdf](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Susan Carew

11 March 2020

Parliamentary Committee
Senate Inquiry into Homelessness
Parliament House
MELBOURNE

Terms of Reference

That this House requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report, within 12 months, on the state of homelessness in Victoria, and in particular, the Committee should —

1. provide an independent analysis of the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria ([Refer Courtney's Patch Ecovillage proposal](#))
2. investigate the many social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness; ([refer videos](#))
3. identify policies and practices from all levels of government that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless (Provides insights into those not accessing the system)

My Story of Homelessness



My story was given to *Homelessness Australia* at the Homelessness Conference in 2017.

I am homeless since June 2017. I represent an unseen demographic of older educated women who are independent and prefer anonymity. I am a former market analyst (economics, marketing).

I would like to start by saying **homelessness is not about a house**. It is an impact of structural violence (refer Johann Galtung). This has many manifestations in respect of: economic downturns, impossibility of full employment, poor management, rigid human resource criteria, inequality, status, inconsistent continuity, gender bias, ageism, discrimination, technology replacing people, training transferred to individuals, education, power imbalance, poverty trap, set up to fail, inequality before the law and bullying given perceived vulnerability etc. The pain experienced translates into: uncertainty, stress, sadness, rejection, disempowerment, demoralisation, discarded, value-less, hope-less, social isolation, salient exclusion from access, depression, psychological injury, cancer, dis-ease, suicidal and trapped. I myself have desired to suicide hundreds of times and recently had cancer of which I am now clear.

On June 14, 2017 I was **evicted** from my home in Macleod, Melbourne. It was a converted garage that was deemed by the Council as uninhabitable. Rent was \$150 per week which was the cheapest price I could hope for. Reflectively, I contrast this with a three bedroom home I rented with a partner in Brisbane in 1989 for \$150 per week. The standard of living has fallen despite technology, housing prices have risen (speculators) and housing stock sold off as government ideologies increasingly privatised to pay debt and respond to business interests.

I had no money to store my belongings. I was suicidal given a long term dispute with a public institution and a legal case suppressing my rights to a fair hearing and resolution of a conflict. I was extremely anxious as I felt unsafe and monitored. I packed all my things into a small Suzuki Baleno and travelled to my mother's place in Canberra to recover and regain my strength. There is conflict in my family and some members hold attitudes of myself as a failure and have no empathy or understanding of the bullying I experienced nor my chosen pathway in life, so I cannot stay. I was on Centrelink and actioned a Mental Health Plan to enable an opt-out of activities for 7 weeks. I then drove to Brisbane to find solutions. I have been in this situation many times where I have no idea what next?

On route I was contacted by a Centrelink officer who encouraged me to go to a populated area. An extraordinary statement given I have no place to go. The mindset was to maximise work opportunities not wellbeing recovery from suicidal trauma. There was no offer of emergency help or empathy conveyed, albeit indifference. I was informed I would not be able to put in a second medical certificate after this period expired. In a workplace no-one would deny a medical certificate.

It appeared the attitude was one on assuming dishonesty, not a healthy mutual concern based on trust. In the conversation I was told I was **not in an equal partnership within Centrelink** but outside I was equal. I told her I am a citizen and I am equal. Inequality is the basis of this contractual relationship. This underlies a toxic culture. In Brisbane another officer rang me requesting my address. I informed him I am truly homeless. He said he has to have an address to send letters under legislation. I indicated he could email a pdf. He asked again and paused a long time as if I was not telling the truth. I waited and observed. I was amazed at the insensitivity and the inability to understand the reality of homeless. It is evident there is a housing crisis and when you have no-where to go you will accept shelter anywhere. The compliance mentality only responds to legislation, departmental guidelines and the current ethos of the government of the day. The need for an address is central to control paradigms without any understanding of social or psychological needs in a representative capacity.

I managed to find a house-sit in the Hawkesbury region. I spent this time trying to figure out where I could live and release my **trauma** and manage suicidal feelings. I made a decision to confront the injustice of the legal situation requesting an Appeal from the court. I returned to Melbourne and on route I receive a text from Job Prospects in Heidelberg, a Job Service Provider I was not registered with. They gave me one day's notice to come to a appointment. It was Sunday, I rang and left a message stating I had not agreed to join Job Prospects and that I have issues with the rorting in the system and the ineffectiveness of the service. I received 13 text messages from Job Prospects, one email asking me to reengage. This is a form of **harassment** given I am a conscientious objector to the rorting of Job Service Providers as evidenced by ABC 7.30 Report. I emailed Job Prospects explaining this, he replied and when I wrote again my email was bounced. This appeared a tactic to force a call. I noted my side was ignored in a compliance framework. Yet if a job seeker was rorting, making false claims or earning money deceptively Human Services would track and breach a person and likely cut them

off. It was evident there are different rules for private companies contrasted with welfare recipients. This is discriminatory and clearly **unequal** power and rights.

I spoke with a representative from Human Services (now Services Australia) who indicated I had to re-engage. I requested a review and noted it was not independent and I was denied conscientious objector status. I spoke with a social worker who also encouraged re-engagement and options in relation to activities. I explained I just can't go against what I feel is important. **Ethically** I can't. I am a peace educator having taught values, principled nonviolence and conflict resolution. It is not possible for me to comply. I have issues with **compliance approaches** as inappropriate in the social welfare area. **Therapeutic** interventions are effective in dealing with social problems as healing is required. Psychological abuse is a result of toxic cultures of bullying and policing/compliance models.

I wrote a letter to Centrelink Head Office and I outlined my situation, my eviction, communications with officers, reporting of job providers, my background, intentions and contentious statements. I questioned the diminishment of government responsibility for social security and no accountability. I objected to privatisation of social security and my right to not place myself in a system of abuse or comply if it runs against my ethics and values. I considered it non-democratic. I explained my belief that privatisation uses contract law and questioned obligations under the Australian Constitution in respect of government duty to provide unemployment benefits. I note there is **no mutual obligation** as it is a Liberal Government philosophy and raises issues of exploitation. I submitted my report 'Compliance or Democracy' in 2016 questioning Work for the Dole. I have grave concerns about the system of compliance affecting mental health and impacts of coercion, harassment and bullying. In Victoria bullying is against the law. I also raised issues of business abuse and dismantling rights in the workplace and declining ethics. A key issue I raised was being contacted repeatedly by the Probe Group (debt recovery) to the point of harassment and then a car turning up in my friend's driveway filming. I raised this issue and noted in a Human Services report that debt recovery and ASIO surveillance can **track** movements digitally. I was overpaid rent assistance and have a \$200 debt. It seems I was being investigated but not to find me a place to live but to catch me out as if I am lying. I am not on Centrelink at this stage as I had been cut off a week earlier. I requested debt relief and have had no response yet. *(Note: update the debt was removed earlier on then reapplied and removed again, cited it was a administrative error [on behalf of Minister Keenan]).*

Since this time I have sought to access my **superannuation** as I refuse to re-engage with Centrelink. I have contacted AMP and Ausfund and both have refused compassionate grounds (and severe hardship) for a homeless person to access early release of superannuation. I am told I have to be on Centrelink for 26 consecutive weeks (I was on Centrelink for many years until I conscientiously objected). I've contacted MP Michael Sukker in the local area I was staying seeking advocacy on accessing super, homelessness, help from Human Services, the right to conscientious objection and Probe Group surveillance (on behalf of Human Services). I contacted the Prime Minister twice explaining the matter and concerns without resolution. MP Michael Keenan (Minister for Human Services and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Digital Transformation) wrote me a letter indicating my objection with Service Providers which

was not accurate. I am a conscientious objector to rotting in the system. He did not answer any of my questions in my previous letter, he advised re-engagement and could not provide a letter indicating my eligibility given my desperate need to access \$1,500 in super to live on. He advised that the Superfunds have the final say, AMP says the ATO does, Ausfund read the Ministers letter and refused release. Minister Keenan and Michael Sukker are well aware I am genuinely in hardship, I've been in contact since March 2018.

I realised no-one seems to care. I believe there are powerful **prejudices** against homelessness as economically unviable, victim blaming, punishment for non-compliance, potentially political given peace and anti-bullying work and freedom of speech raising sensitive questions. Not one of my questions was answered and I am clear I have no representation or advocacy. I felt isolated and disempowered.

It is clear people are homeless in part because **they cannot** comply with the system and they are cut off citing breach of contract or they may opt out. In my case, I didn't breach any contract, thus revealing indifference to suffering and **no right to say 'no' to corruption and abuse**. The lack of empathy reflects a disconnected psychology that cannot feel for the 'other'. They are objectified. This is a pattern I have experienced before in senior management. It is rewarded as strong management but is actually poor leadership in toxic cultures unable to respond to humanitarian issues. This is evident in the refugee detention centres where rights are revoked and an intimidating/bullying mentality acceptable. My research revealed multinational companies are penetrating the Australian public sector market as Government contracts out services and responsibilities. In the case of Serco they manage prisons, detentions centres etc. and are positioned to run public sector activities. The public sector is being **privatised** using government funding cuts to orchestrate inefficiency as a justification for privatisation as more efficient. The welfare sector is a test case for privatised, cashless, digitised, profiled and compliance systems with vulnerable persons who cannot defend themselves or protest. This **repressive** system is to be rolled out to the broader community through Smart Cities, NBN and Future Ready plans imported from the USA. This has real implications for the non-profit and community services sector. Not only the lack of accountability of private entities but the pulling out of government which effectively null and voids rights, FOI, privacy, protects trade secret and signatory to the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement. The TPPA enables private companies to sue governments if contracts are cancelled or economic profits affected. It has implications for protest, freedom of speech and human rights. Refer GetUp! and MP Andrew Wilkie's message on a police state.

This submission is an invitation to change this paradigm.

I have produced YouTube videos to inform and invite people to join me in developing solutions.

Solutions to End Homelessness

Introductory Video:

A Proposal for a Courtney's Patch Ecovillage for Homeless Women

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oY1CNGrIMWc>

Proposal to Build the Courtney's Patch Ecovillage for 50 homeless women and girls

<https://ha.worldpeacefull.com/homeless-lives/solution-build-a-ecovillage/>

Scroll to download proposal pdf

Homeless Voices

Homeless Lives Matter Electing to Walk to Parliament

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3HY1E9fdTk>

This Youtube video discusses meeting with homeless people and their experiences.

Triple R Radio Program – Homeless Lives Matter

<https://ha.worldpeacefull.com/homeless-lives/triple-r-fm/>

The programs provide recordings of the actual voices of those homeless.

YouTube Videos on Homelessness

Courtney Herron Homelessness and Violence Part 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-tZPMT-dK8>

Let's Resolve Homelessness Together!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7E97_oHNJY

Homeless Persons Do Not Vote - A Message to Politicians and the Public

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TStgqQ_ylk

Websites

I have empowerment solutions. Refer websites:

- **Happiness Australia:** <http://ha.worldpeacefull.com> (emotional intelligence)
- **Worldpeacefull:** www.worldpeacefull.com (peace initiatives, children's peace education)
- **Worldpeacefull Empowerment:** <http://biz.worldpeacefull.com> (anti-bullying)