

In relation to the inquiry and reporting on the financial administration of services addressing homelessness in Western Australia, section one (1) the current funding and delivery of services; I would like to, on behalf of our organisation, provide the following insight:

As a provider of Crisis Accommodation Services in Geraldton, whereby we operate a Crisis Accommodation Centre for men, women and families, we have been continuously frustrated by the lack of funding for services on the front line of homelessness in our community.

In Geraldton and servicing the Midwest Region through the support of many transient individuals and families, our centre is one of three that offer Crisis Accommodation along with Chrysalis Women's Refuge and STAY (Short Term Accommodation for Youth) and this leaves us with a large portion of the population to cater for, including those visiting from the rural regions for medical, funeral or family purposes.

Over 80% of those who access the centre are experiencing homelessness, through crisis, family breakdown or due to the severe lack of rental accommodation in our community. Over 67% of those accommodated are Indigenous. We receive no operational funding for the services we supply which also include supported accommodation through our Wandalgu facility and medium-term accommodation through our Aaron Close project.

In 2019, we approached the Department of Communities to request critical funding to assist with the shortfall in operations of the centre between rents raised and costs incurred. At that time, we were experiencing a shortfall of approximately \$50,000 per annum between rent being raised and expenses incurred. This was after greatly reducing wages and other costs wherever possible simply to be able to remain open.

We were told, and have been told repeatedly since, that there was no funding available for crisis accommodation centres. We have had the financial shortfall covered by Sun City Christian Centre since opening and we have informed the Department that we could face imminent closure if relief could not be found for what is a vital service in our community.

Despite ongoing assistance from their team, and we are grateful for their support, we are now three years down the track, having incurred a loss of over \$170,000 and no closer to any offer of funding.

As this inquiry is reporting on the financial administration of services addressing homelessness, and as our service works directly with the hospital, police, mental health and DCP to assist those who have complex needs and are facing or experiencing homelessness, I believe this lack of support and funding is a very real, and very critical need.

We have stated, on multiple occasions, that we do not wish to make this matter political, or to take it to the media, but we are faced with the reality that our service may have no choice but to close if assistance cannot be found. If it wasn't for the ongoing support of the members of Sun City Christian Centre, and private donations of \$16,000 in 2021, we would be already closed.

The pressure on our staff as they face a reduction in hours to keep the centre open, less time to attend to daily tasks, growing aggression and behaviours relating to an increase in drug and alcohol misuse, mental health and a challenging Covid environment is not fair, and not indicative of the tireless work they put into caring for the most vulnerable in our community.

In addition, the Eviction Moratorium placed undue stress on our services, saw an increase in unacceptable behaviour buoyed by the knowledge that they could not be asked to leave and has also seen extensive damage done to our properties which costs our organisation more and reduces the income we can directly receive from Aaron Close which has historically supported the Crisis Accommodation Centre.

I have personally worked in the community services sector for over 15 years and this situation is, in my opinion, untenable unless some very real and immediate assistance can be provided.