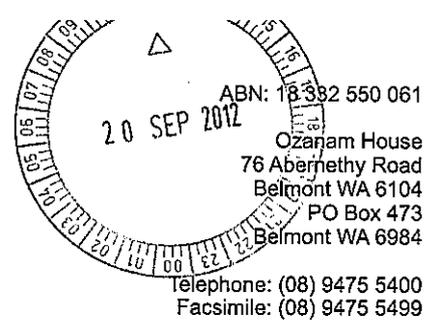




St Vincent de Paul Society
(WA) INC
good works



19 September 2012

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Hon Brian Ellis MLC
Chair
Standing Council on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Mr Ellis

Petition No 137 – Emergency Accommodation for the Homeless

Recently, the St Vincent de Paul Society was made aware of the abovementioned petition and, as one of Western Australia's largest and longest serving emergency relief providers, we have significant experience in dealing with those who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

We are very supportive of any efforts to make more emergency accommodation available and to provide greater access to the spectrum of affordable housing options. We recognise the efforts made by the State Government through the Community Housing Provider framework and the efforts made by the Government under the National Partnership Agreement on Homeless (NPAH). But more must be done.

It is very important that the spectrum of housing options is available in the community, including emergency, transitional, affordable rental and affordable ownership. The difficulty in Western Australia, at this point, is to provide suitable emergency and transitional housing (along with the wrap-around supports) to those in need, while increasing the amount of affordable and social housing available.

Unfortunately, the Society is in a position where we receive requests from members of the Western Australian community in need and the requests we receive for support in finding emergency accommodation or maintaining accommodation is at its highest level. In the 2011/2012 financial year payments made by the St Vincent de Paul Society to support those in the community to find accommodation (emergency or other) or meet accommodation payments increased by 39.1%. This represents the single largest increase in emergency relief expenditure over the past twelve months. Furthermore, 60% of the 79,203 people we provided emergency relief or welfare to in the 2011/2012 financial year involved families or singles with children and, in our experience, these groups represent a significant increase in the number of homeless over recent times.

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Without taking away from the importance of providing housing to other groups in our community, some of the critical target groups that we must focus the delivery of housing options to include families and single parents with adolescent children. These groups are generally not considered in the development and delivery of emergency and transitional accommodation, with many of the current options separating the family unit or making it difficult to place them into appropriate accommodation. The provision of ongoing affordable housing for young adults is also a critical one, the impacts of which are felt by the community and we experience daily through the Passages Resource Centres for homeless youth in Northbridge and Mandurah (a joint venture between St Vincent de Paul and the Rotary Club of Perth).

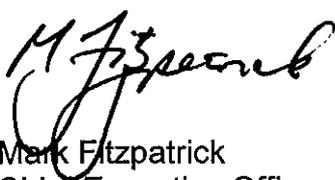
Further, much of the housing under the initiatives noted in the submissions you have received mentions developments in or close to the City of Perth. However, it does not reflect the need of the broader community. For example, in the Mandurah area for the July period alone one in four clients the St Vincent de Paul Society interviewed were homeless, including 45 adults and 21 children. Of these, three quarters would be categorised as primary or secondary homeless. The area of Mandurah, and indeed the greater Peel region, is not effectively represented in the provision of emergency, transitional or affordable housing despite the high number of homeless.

In short, the focus of the Government needs to address:

1. The need of greater emergency housing, particularly in proximity to major facilities and transport.
2. Greater transitional housing (of up to 6-12 months) with community organisations providing wrap-around services to support sustainable tenancies and accommodation options.
3. More affordable rental housing provision by growing current initiatives, specifically through working more closely with local government agencies to identify and acquire parcels of unused or underutilised land for affordable housing.
4. Focus on the placement of families (particularly those with adolescent children) and young adults.
5. Ensure the provision of housing outlined in items 1-4 above are delivered in specifically targeted areas in the metropolitan area of Perth and in Mandurah.

The social impact of providing effective housing availability across the spectrum of housing options has been well documented. It is important that the State Government focuses more on addressing the housing needs in Western Australia for all members of our community.

Yours sincerely



Mark Fitzpatrick
Chief Executive Officer

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