



MEDIA RELEASE

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Breaking the Cycle of Aged Homelessness

Today's release of *Counting the Homeless 2006* has heralded an increase in Australia's aged homeless, however, recent research conducted by Australian Catholic University and Catholic Community Services has found that with sustained effort the cycle of homelessness experienced by older Australians can be broken.

Of the 77 clients participating in Catholic Community Services' Housing Support Program (HSP), almost all self disclosed multiple experiences of being homeless. Overall they had 149 different experiences of being homeless. "This reflects the recurrent nature of homelessness for many people" said Janis Redford, General Manager Catholic Community Services.

The Housing Support Program is unique in its approach, working with older people who are at risk of losing their tenancy and becoming homeless often due to cognitive impairment, mental health issues, squalor and lack of living skills.

The program demonstrated an ability to significantly reduce the risk of homelessness, through an intensive and ongoing case management program to assist clients to maintain housing tenancies - involving assessment, assistance and coordination of services for the client. Over 75% of HSP clients achieved positive results, either maintaining tenancy or had tenancy issues completely resolved. Given the previous experience of clients, with recurring episodes of homelessness, this is a significant achievement.

Understandably for clients, achieving secure tenancy is a life changing experience. Having a voice and being actively involved in making choices about their own living situation, is very important for clients with a history of recurring homelessness. Roslyn, an HSP client made the decision to live in a share house. "It's so comfortable having another heartbeat in the house," says Roslyn. "It gives me a great sense of security. It feels like a home."

Prior to this she had been living in supported accommodation for 9 months following a long history of recurring homelessness. In addition to advocating for Roslyn with accommodation options, HSP supported Roslyn with financial management issues, accessing mental health services and developing social networks.

Catholic Community Services

T: 1800 225 474

F: 1800 049 967

Referrals Fax: 1800 032 136

PO Box 858, Epping NSW 1710

www.catholiccommunityservices.com.au

Unfortunately for Roslyn and other clients in the HSP they are at risk of losing the support that is helping them regain independence and of course without it they are at risk of re-entering the revolving door of Homelessness. Without quick resolution to Commonwealth/State agreements in NSW around homelessness, we are at risk of people re-entering the cycle of homelessness.

Successful programs that can demonstrate results need to be supported on an ongoing basis, and at least continued until alternative programs are set up, so people like Roslyn have a chance to live securely and to help stem the growing tide of elderly homeless.

“It needs to be a parallel approach, find secure accommodation options for those that don’t have it, but also importantly help those in accommodation to achieve security and independence”, Janis Redford said.

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For further information contact:

Robyn Rowlison

Marketing & Corporate Partnerships Manager
Catholic Community Services
Ph: 02 9855 2555 Mobile: 0410 005 866
Email: rowlison@chcs.com.au

About Catholic Healthcare

Established in 1994, Catholic Healthcare provides aged, healthcare and community services across New South Wales and south-east Queensland. With a vision of creating sustainable and vibrant ministries of care, Catholic Healthcare supports sick, frail, elderly and marginalised people in residential aged care, seniors living, hospitals and through a diverse range of Community Services.

About Catholic Community Services

Catholic Community Services provides a diverse range of services in the home, in the community and in day centres to the elderly, people with a disability, people with a mental illness, people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and children, youth and families. Our clients live in metropolitan, regional and rural NSW.

More information is available at our website www.catholiccommunityservices.com.au