



Laurel House
sexual assault support service

Submission to:
House of Assembly Select Committee
on
Housing Affordability



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Trading As - Laurel House – July 2019**

Note: Due to time limitations, this submission has not been formally referenced but all source material and articles for additional reading on the subject matter are provided at the conclusion of the submission.



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25th July 2019

The Secretary – Mr James Reynolds
House of Assembly Select Committee on Housing Affordability
Via Email: housing@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Mr Reynolds

I refer to your letter dated 20th June inviting comment on the inquiry by the House of Assembly Select Committee on Housing Affordability. Thank you for providing this opportunity for the North and North West Tasmania Sexual Assault Support Service, known as Laurel House, to participate in the process and to advocate on behalf of not only our clients but for all Tasmanians having trouble finding and affording stable housing after experiencing sexual and domestic violence.

It is acknowledged that the Select Committee is requesting information on twelve specific areas of focus. Laurel House has chosen to limit its responses to those topics which we feel highlight the lived experiences, views and concerns of our clients:

(d) the impact of a lack of affordable housing on the implementation and outcomes of other State Government programs;

(l) any other matters incidental thereto.

This submission, prepared through the Laurel House 'lens', seeks to provide the Select Committee with insight into the direct links between sexual / domestic violence and homelessness which is identified as one of the primary causes of, or pathways to, homelessness in Australia. It also aims to outline the impacts a lack of affordable housing has on people who have experienced or are experiencing domestic and sexual abuse.

In addition to the written information contained within this submission, Laurel House extends an invitation to the Select Committee to meet with the Board of Management, Staff and Clients to hear in person the devastating effects the current lack of affordable housing is having on people's lives.

Yours sincerely

Justine Brooks
Chief Executive Officer



Table of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

- a) Increasing the affordable medium term and long-term housing options for people escaping domestic violence will alleviate some pressure on the crisis shelter system as well as having a broad range of flow on economic benefits across other sectors such as health, mental health, education and justice systems.
- Provision of affordable and stable housing in a 'rapid' or quick response manner to those escaping domestic / sexual violence increases their recovery changes and dramatically decreases the likelihood of them returning to the violent situation.
- b) An increase of 1 bedroom units or supported housing models is also needed specifically for the provision of housing and support for perpetrators of domestic violence who are excluded or removed from the family home. While it can be counter intuitive to provide support to the perpetrator, particularly if they are facing legal action, without affordable and stable housing, the rehabilitation prospects for that person are negligible, reoffences are almost guaranteed and the cycle continues involving more vulnerable people, including children. Making provision for the perpetrator to voluntarily leave the home more easily allows the non-offending party to remain in the home which provides stability for the remaining occupants, particularly children who likely have a network of friends, school and activities in the area.

Recommendation 2

That State or Federal Government provide financial assistance for housing costs for a temporary period for people escaping domestic violence to access or to remain in private rental housing as a long-term option. The Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) scheme currently operating in areas of Victoria offers a successful model. This has been demonstrated to be effective in assisting eligible people to access sustainable long-term private rental, which has the broader benefit of reducing the pressure on shelters and the demand for social housing.

Information about PRAP: <https://www.wayssltd.org.au/how-we-can-help/private-rental-access-program-prap>

Recommendation 3

That Social Housing and affordable housing providers relax their eligibility criteria for people escaping domestic violence, especially those with children. This would allow people, particularly women who are predominantly affected, who may technically have a 'home' or name on title but no financial means or income, to access affordable housing programs. Once legal matters are resolved, a review could take place to determine whether they are still entitled to the assistance.



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Introduction

Laurel House is a not-for-profit sexual assault support service across Northern Tasmania, including the East and West Coasts and both King and Flinders Island.

Laurel House provides a range of services to survivors and their support people, including face-to-face and phone counselling, a 24-hour crisis service and outreach to rural and remote areas. Our therapeutic counselling services support all ages and genders and we also provide support through the forensic, medical and legal process, as well as referral and information services. Laurel House offers community education, professional training and debriefing to professionals working with survivors.

The Laurel House team has first-hand knowledge and understanding of the challenges people face as a result of sexual and domestic assault. Domestic and family violence, which includes sexual assault, is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. According to the 2008 White Paper on homelessness, *"fifty-five per cent of women with children and 37 per cent of young single women who seek assistance from specialist services do so to escape violence"*. Conversely, the fear of homelessness due to lack of affordable accommodation can be a determining factor for people remaining in a domestic or sexually violent relationship or situation.

Response to Inquiry

(d) the impact of a lack of affordable housing on the implementation and outcomes of other State Government programs;

Domestic /family and sexual violence is **the** leading cause of homelessness for women and children. According to the 2008 White Paper on homelessness, *"fifty five per cent of women with children and 37 per cent of young single women who seek assistance from specialist services do so to escape violence"* (The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness, 2008).

For sexual violence victims, safe and affordable housing is often even further out of reach, due to the effects of trauma, economic insecurity, and lack of resources in the aftermath of sexual violence. (Mindlin & Vickers, 2007)

The *Safe Homes, Families, Communities: Tasmania's action plan for family and sexual violence 2019-2022* was launched on the 1st of July 2019. As part of the development of the plan, broad consultation carried out identified, amongst other issues, that the lack of crisis and appropriate medium to long term housing options for both victim-survivors and perpetrators has, and will continue to impact on the ability to deliver and effectiveness of the various crisis services and options to assist. The lack of affordable housing is a major barrier to women leaving domestic violence. The financial, emotional and social barriers to leaving domestic violence are so significant that many women remain, with their children, in



unsafe relationships, as they are forced to choose between domestic violence and homelessness.

In a study of rural women who had been sexually assaulted, the women indicated that without housing, other services to address the violence were not likely to be helpful (Logan, 2005)

Similarly, marginalised groups characterised by a complex mix of financial, social and mental health disadvantage, are overrepresented in both categories of being affected by domestic/sexual violence and homelessness.

Housing affordability remains a critical issue and a deciding factor on whether a victim-survivor leaves or choose to remain in their home after domestic violence. In practice, many people experiencing domestic violence are likely to be financially dependent on their partner or rely on dual incomes for housing and daily living expenses. Remaining in the private rental or mortgaged family home may not be sustainable as they cannot afford the rental, or mortgage payments. Invariably domestic and sexual violence, leading to relationship breakdowns increases the demand for affordable accommodation for single parent families.

(I) *any other matters incidental*: Prevention vs. Intervention

The complex but direct relationship between sexual and domestic violence and homelessness.

The direct relationship between family and sexual violence and homelessness is well documented, in fact, domestic and sexual violence is identified as one of five typical pathways into homelessness in Australia. The other predominant pathways are understood to be mental health, substance abuse, youth and housing crisis. Domestic and sexual violence is also identified as a primary factor linked to 4 of the 5 homelessness pathways. In other words, while domestic and sexual violence is, in of itself, a direct pathway to homelessness, it is also a leading cause or factor in mental health issues, poorer educational outcomes leading to lower paid employment, substance abuse and youth leaving home prematurely.

Domestic and sexual violence often leads to repeated patterns causing deepening feelings of hopelessness. An individual escapes the situation but then finds themselves under enormous financial pressure when there are not enough support systems in place, particularly affordable housing, which all too frequently leads to the choice between homelessness or returning to the violence. This issue is particularly devastating for women with children who are unable to break the pattern of cycling in and out of homelessness, some over a period of many years, leading to chronic health / mental health issues, self-



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worth and employment challenges making it even more difficult to establish themselves if support systems and stable housing options are not available at the time that they need them.

In 2009, KPMG estimated the cost of domestic violence to the Australian community at \$13.8 Billion annually. This study demonstrates the broad impact of domestic violence across the community as well as the economic benefit of domestic violence prevention.

Imagine the positive impact if \$13.8 billion was invested annually into preventative measures, including the construction of affordable housing, rather than as a delayed response to trauma.

Laurel House suspects that the direct and indirect links between domestic violence, including sexual violence, and homelessness are not fully understood by Government, certainly not to the extent or level that we know it to be. Housing affordability and homelessness are not simply about supply and demand, although it is acknowledged that increases in demand have brought the homeless issue to a crisis point in some areas. However, it is also noted that domestic and sexual violence are occurring at greater levels than ever seen before and yet funding and support systems have not increased at the same rate. It is our assertion that if a study was conducted with all Tasmanians currently experiencing homelessness, including unstable housing, a prevalent underlying cause/s would be trauma related to domestic violence, including sexual violence, mental health, substance abuse and the breakdown of the family unit.

Until we develop more robust prevention strategies, as a society we must be better prepared and equipped to respond to those who experience domestic and sexual violence. We need to provide them somewhere safe and stable to retreat to in order to commence their healing journey with support. This will give them the best opportunity for success and help break the cycle not only for them but for their children also.



Reference List and further reading:

- (1) Weeks & Oberin 2004). Johnson, Gronda and Coutts (2008) *On the Outside: Pathways In and Out of Homelessness*
- (2) Women, Domestic Violence and Family Violence and Homelessness: A Synthesis Report
Department of Social Services – Australian Government
<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/women/publications-articles/reducing-violence/women-domestic-and-family-violence-and-homelessness-a-synthesis-report?HTML#3a>
- (3) The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness, 2008
- (4) (KPMG, National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women, 2009).
- (5) *Safe Homes, Families, Communities: Tasmania's action plan for family and sexual violence 2019-2022*
- (6) (Chung *et al* 2000; Patton 2003; also Weeks & Oberin 2004
- (7) Keys Young report *Against All Odds: How Women Survive Domestic Violence* (1998a)
- (8) National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children Fourth Action Plan (2019–22) Consultation summary report
- (9) Dr Zoë Morrison -The parameters of social inclusion in Australia: on social exclusion, social justice, homelessness, family violence and sexual assault, Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA)
- (10) Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence – Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute:
https://www.ahuri.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/37619/AHURI-Final-Report-311-Housing-outcomes-after-domestic-and-family-violence.pdf
10. Spinney A and Blandy S - Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
Homelessness prevention for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence: innovations in policy and practice

Information about Private Rental Access Program: <https://www.wayssltd.org.au/how-we-can-help/private-rental-access-program-prap>

<https://www.launchhousing.org.au/service/private-rental-access-program/>