



SLEEPLESS IN SEAFORD - Executive Summary
SLEEPING ROUGH: GATED CAR PARKS AND OTHER RESPONSES
An exploration of Housing Loss & Homelessness

SEAFORD HOUSING ACTION COALITION

17 March 2017

NOTE THAT THIS ONLY THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - THE FULL REPORT CAN BE DOWNLOADED HERE - [HTTP://WWW.SEAFORDCC.ORG/FORUM/VIEWTOPIC.PHP?F=20&T=280](http://www.seafordcc.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=280)

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Coalition Members:

- St. Anne's Parish Social Justice Group

- St Vincent de Paul Mt Eliza Conference Social Justice Group

- Seaford Community Committee

- Residents of the Seaford Beach Cabin Park

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- We are unaware of any previous study of people sleeping rough, or of statistics regarding the number of people sleeping in cars locally or otherwise.
- In general however there seem to be two categories of people sleeping in cars: 'longer term homeless', eg mental illness, substance abuse, or rental blacklist issues; and 'recently homeless' people who have suffered a relationship breakdown, domestic violence, or injury, and have few support networks. Having lost their income and consequently their accommodation (particularly given rising housing unaffordability), these people still have their car.
- Another set of people sleep in their cars because their pet makes them ineligible for much rental accommodation.
- Impacts of sleeping in cars include: assault and robbery; chronic sleeplessness and exhaustion associated with discomfort and constant alertness to danger or being 'moved on'; consequent reduction of coping skills, confidence, resourcefulness and mental health; social disenfranchisement through lack of access to basic hygiene (showers, clothes washing), services and education (fixed address, internet), and storage of possessions. Anecdotally, it is likely that many people living in cars would have a very constructive and co-operative attitude to a service such as a Gated Car Park.
- Our initial estimates of the number of people sleeping in their cars provided by local police, caravan park managers and others range from 1-2 to 8-10 per week. Anecdotal information, from people we know, and from our understanding of the low-profile kept by people sleeping in cars (especially women), suggests that these numbers would be a significant underestimation.
- On the one hand, the acute shortage of crisis accommodation in Seaford - Frankston - Mornington Peninsula appears to be acknowledged by all welfare, health and accommodation services in the area. At the same time the message from some in the sector is that no-one needs to sleep rough or in cars.
- While the government appears to be conscious of the issue and is looking to support 'affordable' and 'low-income' social housing initiatives (eg the new Wintringham project in Frankston), we are currently unaware of any project to address the need for 'emergency' or 'crisis' accommodation in our area. The continuing decline in caravan/cabin parks and budget hotels, and the unsuitability of many rooming houses, means that the shortage of emergency housing is dire. The nearest supported emergency accommodation to the Peninsula is at Endeavour Hills, Dandenong and St Kilda.
- If we are unable to provide sufficient emergency accommodation, it should, we submit, be incumbent on all parties to seriously consider transitional or interim initiatives (such as on the Gated Car Park model) that would provide a level of safety and minimal amenity to people forced to sleep rough.
- Amenities that are needed by people sleeping in cars include: safety, shower, clothes washing, access to phone charging and computers, and (especially for those sleeping rough) secure storage for possessions. Additional services that should be provided are support in terms of referral to professional health, welfare, accommodation, (and pet veterinary) services. In addition, on-site case-management, desirable but difficult, might partially be met by regular visits from agencies.

- It is recommended that a plan be developed for a 12-month trial of a facility on the 'Gated Car Park' model in the Seaford/Frankston area. This would include preliminary investigations into: a management model (including security); suitable location; potential funding support from government, community and private sources; potential collaboration with professional support services; and potential community sources of volunteer support.

OVERVIEW

'There is a perception that all homeless people have mental illness, drug and/or alcohol abuse and anti-social behaviour. In reality a relationship breakdown, unsafe home environment or job loss can leave someone in sub-standard accommodation, in a car, on the street, couch surfing or in a rooming house.

Whatever the reason, when a person becomes homeless or is without secure accommodation, it becomes extremely difficult to maintain a job, attend school and manage the simple things in life we take for granted.'

Community Support Frankston: <http://www.frankston.net/erhelp.htm>

It is clear that sleeping rough, including in cars, is uncomfortable, stressful, fraught with danger of assault and robbery, and also of being 'moved on' by authorities. It deprives people of access to good (or even just warm) food, showers, clothes washing, and access to basic communication, such as the internet, and mobile phone charging.

It also worsens social disenfranchisement, reinforcing diminishing confidence and self respect.

Sleeping rough (including in a car) leads to sleep deprivation, which worsens problems with mental health, and weakens coping skills and resourcefulness.

Evidence from elsewhere in Australia seems to suggest that there are two groups of people sleeping in cars: a longer-term group that has chronic issues; and a newer group which has unexpectedly found itself in crisis through unemployment, health breakdown or relationship breakdown. The latter group is especially sensitive to the decreasing affordability of housing and shortage of crisis accommodation. Our primitive survey of people sleeping in cars has found clear evidence of the former group in the local area, but is as yet nowhere near advanced enough to identify the latter group.

At this stage the evidence regarding the number of people who might use a local Gated Car Park is not clear. It does not seem to be high, but significant enough to justify a trial.