



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

This is the Executive Summary only - full report is here - <http://www.seafordcc.org/forum/viewtopic.php?F=20&t=280>

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.

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