

**QUEANBEYAN PALERANG REGIONAL COUNCIL AFFORDABLE
HOUSING STRATEGY
RESPONSE**

**SUBMISSION
BY**

ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY CANBERRA/GOULBURN

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INTRODUCTION

The St. Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn welcomes the opportunity to submit a response to the Queanbeyan - Palerang Regional Council (QPRC) Affordable Housing Strategy. The Society acknowledges and commends the Council's proactiveness in commissioning the study that has translated into the development of the Strategy. The Society believes this is a timely initiative, as it responds to the current need for innovative strategies to address Housing and Homelessness challenges from across all levels of government in Australia.

The Society's submission is informed by our role as a leading charity and service delivery organisation, supporting vulnerable people in the Canberra/Goulburn region, a region that includes the QRPC. Through our network of volunteer conferences in Queanbeyan and Braidwood, we have been an active and a willing stakeholder, offering much needed support to vulnerable people who live and experience the difficult housing challenges that the Affordable Housing Strategy seeks to address.

Our submission by way of the recommendations below is our demonstration in the confidence of the process and in the ability of the Affordable Housing Strategy to provide guidance towards addressing the Housing and Homelessness situation in the QRPC.

Post this public consultation process, the Society is keen to partner with the Council and to play key roles as would be necessary in the implementation of the 17 Strategies in the Affordable Housing Strategy.

ABOUT THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY CANBERRA / GOULBURN

The St. Vincent de Paul Society (the Society) is a member based lay Catholic organisation that has been assisting people experiencing poverty and disadvantage in the region since 1924. We seek to shape a more just and compassionate society by working to address the causes of poverty and injustice, with a focus on prevention and early intervention.

As a registered charitable not for profit organisation, we are operational in the Australian Capital Territory and in surrounding southern and western regional areas of New South Wales. The Society's conference model of support has members¹ of the Society undertake visits to the homes of people experiencing disadvantage, including those at risk of homelessness. Members refer those at risk to our homelessness services, where staff then offer case management, support services, and referral to other agencies to help keep people at home.

The Society believes in a 'Housing First' approach, that all people in our community have the right to a home. A home is not just a roof over one's head. It provides a sense of security, a place to which you belong, a place from where you can build a life. Specialist responses are provided for women and children wishing to leave family and domestic violence while retaining existing housing. While a stable housing situation will offer a better starting point,

¹ A Conference Member of the Society is a volunteer who joins a conference and attends regular meetings which include scripture discussion, prayer, reflection and how to improve assistance given within the local conference area. A member takes part in the work of the Society providing assistance through charitable works including home visitation.

the provision of concurrent ‘wrap around’ services is also critical to building a sense of community and improved quality of life.

There are presently² 520 Members, 1482 volunteers and 242 employees working to deliver person-centred care in the most efficient way possible. The passion and dedication of our members, volunteers and employees is evident in the many programs and services we operate, some of which are outlined below.

- **Street to Home Program** supports people who are ‘sleeping rough’ and/or experiencing long-term chronic homelessness through case management and assertive outreach. The program provided case management to 75 rough sleepers and outreach to 184 more in the last year.
- **Families and Youth Program** provides outreach support services to families and young people in the ACT currently at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness to enable them to access and maintain safe, secure, independent and affordable housing. The program supported 112 families throughout the year.
- **Samaritan House** is a 13-bed facility in Canberra that provides crisis accommodation and support for men experiencing homelessness, working to break the cycle of chronic and acute homelessness. The service supported 79 men throughout the year.
- **Blue Door Program** is a drop-in centre located in the middle of Ainslie Village in Canberra. It provides support to those living in the village and beyond in the form of meals, emergency relief material aid, information, referral, and support. The service had about 1,500 drop-ins per month and provided some 34,000 free meals throughout the year.
- **Night Patrol** operates across Canberra and Queanbeyan on every night of the year from its 2 vans and with the support of 300 volunteers. It provides food, material items such as jackets, sleeping bags and hygiene items, and most importantly, an opportunity to engage socially with companions who are experiencing homelessness and/or social isolation. It served 7,992 companions throughout the year and provided 5,212 material items.
- **Community Inclusion Program**, which operates out of the Oaks Estate and is a designed for people living with psycho-social disabilities who are ineligible for National Disability Insurances Scheme (NDIS) funding. It is funded by an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Grant from the Australian Government. It exists to build innovative ways to increase the independence, social and community participation of people with a psychosocial disability who are ineligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. It provides advocacy, support, information, referral case management and the development of activities in response to identified needs. The program supported 276 companions throughout the year.
- **Justice Housing Program** provides accommodation options for individuals who otherwise would remain in detention due to a lack of suitable community-based accommodation. The program also provides accommodation support services to women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved with the criminal justice system, with a focus on trauma-informed, gender-informed and culturally safe practices. Funded by the ACT Government, the program is a core element of its

² As of January 31, 2023.

Building Communities Not Prisons initiative, which seeks to address the lack of available and affordable housing for people released from custody.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Our responses are informed by the observations of our Conference members (our network of volunteers and members of the Society who support those in need in their respective communities), formed by their work interactions with people in need of housing, housing support services and with like-minded organisations, with whom we partner to provide support services and solutions.

This is complemented by the Society's experience in delivering programs as mentioned above, which provides us with good insight into the real issues of housing and homelessness within our region.

Presented below is complementary contextual information to what the QPRC may already know but forms a basis on which we make our input by way of the recommendations in response to the 17 Strategies in the Affordable Housing Strategy.

- The re-emergence of the mining industry³ in the Braidwood enclave has directly impacted the cost of rental units within the town so much so that, Conference Members report difficulties for essential workers such as Teachers, Nurses, and Doctors to find accommodation now.
- Conference members report the limited numbers of public and social housing dwellings make it difficult for low-income earners and specifically those on Jobseeker to find accommodation at existing market prices.
- Our members report their experience of long waiting periods of up to 24 months for allocations into public housing. This situation members perceive is due to the ineffective maintenance regime, limiting the existing public housing stock.
- Members have also observed that most of the public housing properties are not disability friendly. This makes it difficult for people with disability in any form to find appropriate housing within the public housing option.
- We have also observed a trend where people earning a \$1000 a week have been priced out of the housing market and have resulted to sleeping in cars or caravans.
- Members of the Society have observed that the only way refugees get allocation for accommodation is when there is evidence of them being victims of domestic violence or abuse. In most instances, it has been observed that consideration is made only for women , women with children and not men.

³ <https://pybar.com.au/dargues-gold-mine-from-construction-to-gold-concentrate/>

CASE STUDIES

Conference members have shared several relevant case studies relating to housing affordability in the region. Some of these are outlined below:

Queanbeyan Palerang Regional Council

- I. In Queanbeyan, a father needed to show proof of work to maintain his family accommodation. As a result, he was compelled to combine walking long distances and taking public transport to get to his construction worksite in Tuggeranong in Canberra. The Queanbeyan Conference acquired a bicycle for this father. This brought relief for the family of six (6), with the mother and two kids living with disability.
- II. Our Conference was alerted to a student who resided in a public housing facility but needed care support for her baby. Members worked with her by providing warm clothing and case management support. She has been able to take care of herself and the baby and has recently graduated.

Across Vinnies' Operational Region

- An older couple lost their house in the bush fires and wanted to stay on their land. As a result, they are living in a rundown caravan. They have health issues and with increasing building costs and a scarce market of skilled tradespeople they are not likely to be able to rebuild their home.
- Several middle-aged Aboriginal men have been couch surfing just out of town for over 10 years without services, coming to town weekly for supplies and with no real hope of ever finding reasonable accommodation. Those Aboriginal families that do have housing are often inundated with those who don't. Real and often severe difficulties face them on a regular basis. The conference recognises these local Aboriginal families as those most in need.
- A conference received a call from a mother of an adult son that was at risk of suicide. The son, along with his partner and their baby were evicted from some converted farm accommodation as a result of complaining about persistent mould in the building which was affecting the family's health. With no alternative, he moved the family in with his mother who was then threatened with immediate eviction from her own lease for having too many in the house. The conference, without any crisis housing options, could only refer them to Mission Australia's housing service and the Social Justice Advocates Renovated Caravan project, both of whom had nothing available.
- A 37-year-old single mother of 5 children on parenting support has lived at 6 different addresses in the last 10 years due to inability to secure stable rental. Has often needed assistance with food and utilities as she has struggled to pay her private rental. Often there have been excessive electricity bills. Her housing has been inappropriate for her needs.
- A 42-year-old single man of Aboriginal descent on Newstart has spent much of the last few years moving between family members and is currently living in a caravan. He has had help with food vouchers as he is prone to running out of money to purchase food. Needs stable, single person, supported accommodation.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE STRATEGY

The Society finds the propositions in the Affordable Housing Strategy to be well thought through and summarily comprehensive enough to addressing the intended challenges identified within the Housing sector in the Regional Council. The intent with which we make this submission in terms of the following proposals, is to strengthen what is already a very good technical document.

- i. The Society adopts a Housing First Approach. This approach focusses on providing housing first and then wrap around service to provide ongoing support. Providing case management support for those living in transitional housing is an important service.

People who are experiencing homelessness/sleeping rough have accompanying needs that must be addressed as part of any effort to address their homelessness such as the provision of affordable housing. Increasing social service support has proven to have long-term good returns in this regard.

- ii. Based on our experience with the Justice Housing program in ACT, we know that people exiting prisons and correctional facilities will require additional support alongside the housing options provided under the Affordable Housing Strategy. It is therefore recommended for this cohort of vulnerable people to be included in the housing provision. Consideration in terms of housing options and social support services should be given to “Out-of-Care” and “Foster Care” within the QPRC housing strategy.
- iii. Based on the recent announcement in the Federal Budget regarding building affordable and social housing across the country, there is opportunity to partner with Non-For-Profit organisations in the providing of housing and homelessness services. As part of the Funding or Fundraising Strategy, this option could be explored further.
- iv. For those on Jobseeker, who are mandated to participate in job-related training, the provision of social service support through case management is recommended. This would help avert the situation where accessing the training itself becomes an extra burden on people who are already facing considerable housing stress, experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

RESPONSE & RECOMMENDATION PER STRATEGY

2.2 ADOPT THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRATEGY

Strategy 1

- Consider including a citizen representative in the Affordable Housing Advisory Group. This could also be a representative from a Non-for-Profit organisation that represents citizen groups or interests.

Strategy 2

- The breakdown of the indicative budget of 3,775 additional affordable (including social) housing dwellings by 2041 is very helpful. The Society however recommends that, this is further disaggregated according to the geography of the Council. It is important to know where these units will be built so local actors can monitor and keep track.

Strategy 3

- To set indicators on the existing housing units that will receive housing maintenance procedures. In as much as increasing the existing stock of affordable housing is important, it is equally important to maintain the facilities to ensure their condition is good for use.

2.3 INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF CRISIS, SHORT-TERM, TEMPORARY & TRANSITIONAL ACCOMMODATION

Strategy 4

- Propose for consideration, the adoption of the Functional Zero Approach in the delivery of the accommodation in the Regional Council. This approach is being adopted by local governments and agencies across the Australia and there is already some interest by some local Queanbeyan Not-For Profit organisations.

2.4 ADVOCACY TO INCREASE SOCIAL HOUSING SUPPLY

Strategy 5

- The Society does not have any further recommendations on the sets of actions outlined under this strategy.

Strategy 6

- The Society does not have any further recommendations on the sets of actions outlined under this strategy.

2.5 DIRECT CREATION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

2.5.1 Use of Council Land for Partnership Developments

Strategy 7

- The Society supports the proposition to develop affordable caravan parks with smaller manufactured/tiny homes on sites in Braidwood, Bungendore and Queanbeyan. Particularly in Braidwood, this is recommended as a matter of high priority. It should therefore be prioritised and executed in the early phase of the Strategy.

2.5.2 Use of Other Public Land for Partnership Developments

Strategy 8

- The Society supports the sets of actions outlined towards the development of the **Register of Public Land**.
- Recommends the development of Social Cohesion Housing Models that encourage a sense of community and communal living.

2.5.3 Redevelopment of Public Housing to Increase Diversity & Yield

Strategy 9

- The Society recommends to also put in place measures that will ensure that monies accrued from the sale of the public houses sold on the open market are re-invested into the local economy.
- Consultations should be extended to include stakeholders within the private and not-for-profit sectors, who may be interested in providing technical opinions and expertise in support of zoning or redevelopment actions.

2.6 FACILITATIVE STRATEGIES

2.6.1 Increase Supply of Affordable and 'Lower Cost' Housing through the Market

Strategy 10

The Society does not have any further recommendations.

Strategy 11

The Society does not have any further recommendations.

Strategy 12

The Society does not have any further recommendations.

2.6.2 Encouraging and Prioritising Affordable Housing Developments

Strategy 13

The Society does not have any further recommendations.

2.7 MANDATORY INTERVENTION

2.7.1 Development of an Affordable Housing Contribution Scheme

Strategy 14

The Society does not have any further recommendations.

2.7.2 Mandating Housing Diversity

Strategy 15

- Based on our experience and observation in the ACT, the Society recommends that the Council avoids large scale affordable housing developments. Rather adopt the use of the low-density salt and peppering approach as is being used by the ACT Government now. It is the generally accepted view that locating large numbers of vulnerable and disadvantaged people together is not ideal.
- Consider increasing the provision of housing options that caters for the need for large/big vulnerable families.
- The Society recommends the consideration of developing more accommodation options specifically designed for young people and persons living with disability.

2.8 ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

2.8.1 Administration

Strategy 16

- The Society recommends the inclusion of a feedback mechanism as part of the administration, management, and monitoring of the progress on the Strategy. This could take the form of an annual feedback or learning session with identified stakeholders.

2.8.2 Asset Management & Maintenance

Strategy 17

- It is important to appreciate the level and extent of maintenance required on existing Social Housing within the LGA. It is recommended for a maintenance audit on the existing stock to be done, developed into an action plan, and attached to this Affordable Housing Strategy as an Annex or in a separate publicly available document.

CONCLUSION

The St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn, through its Queanbeyan and Braidwood Conferences, express appreciation to the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council for the engagement and opportunity to comment on this Housing Strategy.

Together with our Members, Staff and Volunteers, the Society remains open to further engagement and collaboration with the Council in the future, towards addressing housing and homelessness issues.

CONTACT DETAILS

Kwadwo Owusu
Social Justice and Policy Coordinator
Kwadwo.Owusu@vinnies.org.au
Mobile: 0491 022 398
Tel: 02 628 2722