

A watercolor illustration of a city street scene. In the background, a tall brick church tower with a circular window and a domed top stands prominently. To its right is a multi-story building with a light-colored facade. In the foreground, a dark car is parked on the left, and several figures are walking on the sidewalk. A large, dark, leafy tree is in the center, partially obscuring the church tower. The overall style is soft and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and a muted color palette of blues, greys, and earthy tones.

City of Launceston **Homelessness Statement of Commitment** 2024



City of
LAUNCESTON

Rio Launceston

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Acknowledgement of Country

In appreciation of the rich history and cultural heritage of our city, we recognise Tasmanian Aboriginal people as custodians of this land.

We honour the resilience of Palawa people of Lutruwita, who have endured the challenges of invasion and dispossession while steadfastly preserving their heritage, identity, culture and rights.

In the spirit of mutual respect and collaboration, it is our sincere belief that working together with the Aboriginal community, who represent the world's most ancient continuous culture, offers us invaluable opportunities to learn and grow.

Our deepest respects are extended to both past and present Elders, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people residing in and around Launceston.



Mayor's Statement



Launceston is experiencing homelessness at a rate that it has never experienced before.

While homelessness has existed in some form in our community since Launceston was established, it has become more prominent with increases to the cost of living and since the COVID-19 pandemic.

These events have sparked a great deal of financial, social and housing stress – and many of the impacts are ongoing.

We know that there is also significant diversity in those being impacted by homelessness, which highlights the multidimensional causes that contribute to this complex social challenge.

As this issue has evolved over recent years, the City of Launceston has sought to better understand the role our organisation can play alongside the other important contributions from essential service providers and tiers of government.

The Council has taken a number of steps to engage with service and support agencies, and those experiencing homelessness, culminating in the development of this strategic document.

This statement is the next step forward for the City of Launceston in addressing the issue of homelessness in our City.

It will enable the City of Launceston to act strategically in its response, with a person-centred dignity-first focus.

While the Council will continue to explore a range of opportunities to assist those doing it tough and the wider community, this statement is the framework within which we'll act.

It also aligns our organisation with evidence-based national and international initiatives, positioning the city to leverage opportunities in best practice to create a united and action-oriented approach on homelessness in the community.

It's hoped that the efforts of our organisation to better understand and respond to the needs of the homeless community will have a positive impact on the overall well-being of Launceston residents into the future.

While this is our first step in this area, it is an important one.

As we move forward, it's vital for the Council and community to show empathy and understanding as we continue to work collaboratively together.

MATTHEW GARWOOD

Mayor



Chief Executive Officer's Statement



The City of Launceston makes decisions on behalf of over 70,000 residents, so it's vital that the Council considers the views of the community when making decisions and choosing a direction on what matters.

It's commendable to see the commitment and proactive approach of the City of Launceston in addressing the complexities of homelessness within the community. The emphasis on aligning actions with values and the focus on caring for the community reflects a responsible and compassionate organisational ethos.

Certainly, homelessness poses formidable social challenges with intricate and multifaceted causes. Although local government typically has restricted influence on the root factors leading to homelessness, the City of Launceston is committed to assuming a leadership role with a people first approach.

The establishment of the Homelessness Advisory Committee in 2022 was a significant step, showcasing a collaborative effort involving various service providers, government entities, and community representatives. This diverse representation, including individuals with lived experiences, indicates a holistic and inclusive approach to understanding and addressing homelessness.

In our response to the evolving nature of homelessness, and in a coordinated approach to the needs of the Launceston community I am excited to introduce an innovative statement aimed at maximising organisational efficiency, fostering innovation, and ensuring sustained and responsive action for our organisation and community.

The statement reviewed annually is structured around seven principles, each serving as a foundation to identify focus areas and prioritise projects. The Council is committed to considering these principles at every stage, emphasising inclusivity and community-driven solutions.

Through the statement, the Council now has the scope to provide short, medium and long-term solutions for those sleeping rough in our community, in collaboration with other tiers of government and key stakeholders.

SHANE EBERHARDT

Acting Chief Executive Officer

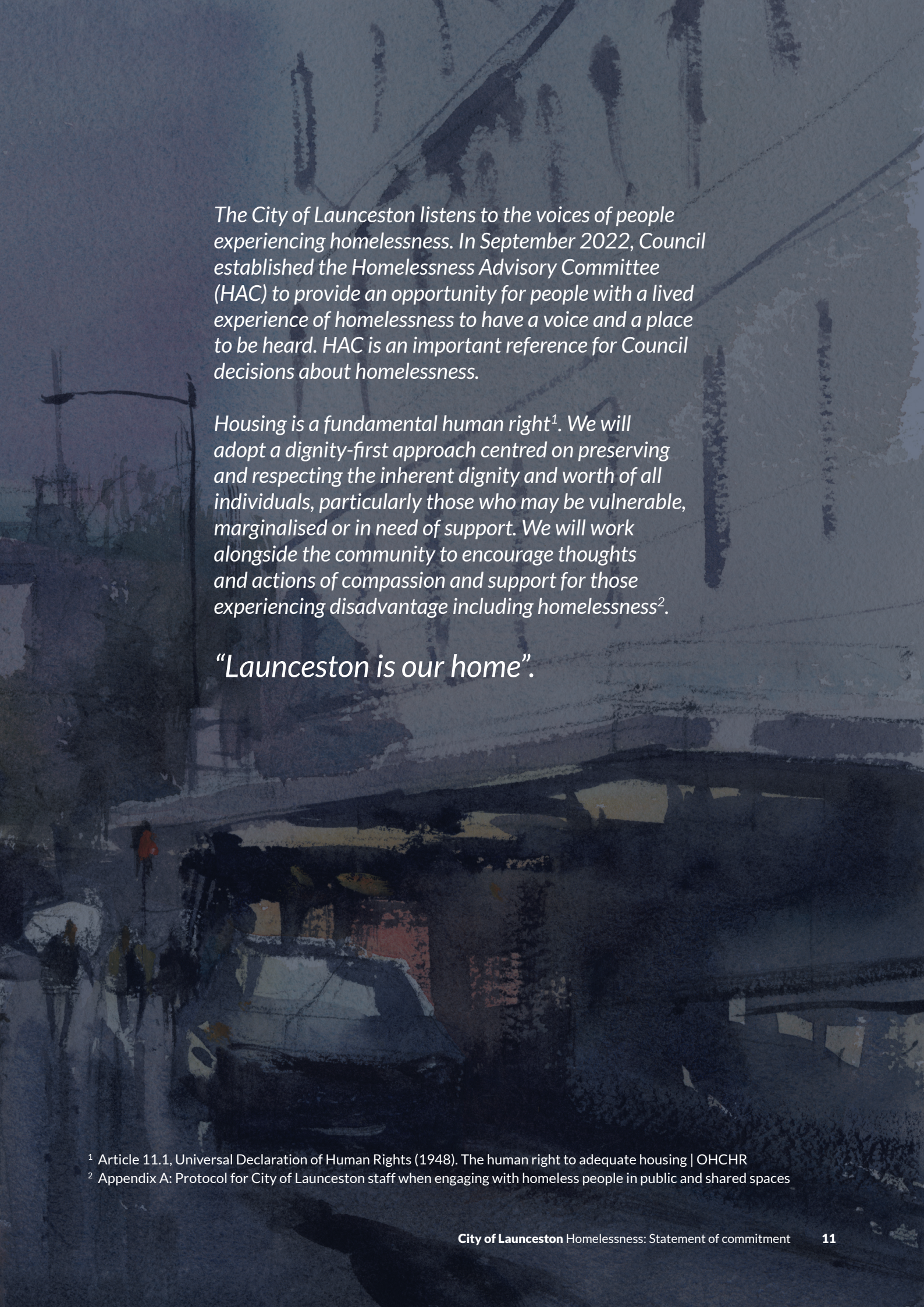


R. G. Anderson



Our Vision

The City of Launceston (the City) envisions a community where every individual has access to safe, stable and affordable housing, where homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring. Our vision is built upon the primary principles of compassion, equity and dignity-first. We aim to foster a society where homelessness is not an inescapable destiny but a challenge that can be overcome through collective action and support.



The City of Launceston listens to the voices of people experiencing homelessness. In September 2022, Council established the Homelessness Advisory Committee (HAC) to provide an opportunity for people with a lived experience of homelessness to have a voice and a place to be heard. HAC is an important reference for Council decisions about homelessness.

Housing is a fundamental human right¹. We will adopt a dignity-first approach centred on preserving and respecting the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals, particularly those who may be vulnerable, marginalised or in need of support. We will work alongside the community to encourage thoughts and actions of compassion and support for those experiencing disadvantage including homelessness².

“Launceston is our home”.

¹ Article 11.1, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The human right to adequate housing | OHCHR

² Appendix A: Protocol for City of Launceston staff when engaging with homeless people in public and shared spaces

Background

From 2016 to 2021 Launceston has had a significant increase in people experiencing homelessness:

- People experiencing homelessness increased from 236 to 442 people, resulting in an 87% increase.
- People sleeping rough in Launceston increased from 12 to 57, resulting in a 375% increase³.

On Census night in 2021, 122,494 people were estimated to be experiencing homelessness across Australia; representing an increase of 5.2 per cent since 2016⁴.

In 2021, a homelessness response group, comprising community members, government representation and community service providers, was established to address the escalating demands resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and adverse weather events. This initiative not only aimed to tackle these critical issues but also had a significant positive impact on the community.

By establishing this group, the community demonstrated its willingness to confront homelessness as an urgent, escalating and evolving issue, recognising that collaborative and strategic efforts were required to address the growing demand for assistance and support among those impacted by these challenging circumstances.

As a direct result of the response group's efforts, council formalised the HAC in September 2022. The HAC is a diverse assembly, including individuals who have personally experienced homelessness, representatives from the homelessness and housing sectors, community service providers, allied health services, neighboring local governments, and state government officials. This comprehensive composition reflects our community's commitment to supporting vulnerable communities and ensuring all voices are heard.

In January 2023 the City of Launceston appointed a Community Development Officer - Inclusion, demonstrating a tangible investment in creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for those in need.

Recognising the significance of collaboration among various organisations and individuals in this field, the City of Launceston is an active participant in the newly re-formed Northern Community Action Group (NCAG), established in March 2023.

This collective effort strives to connect and coordinate operational information and resources efficiently, addressing and responding to the community's pressing priorities. In doing so, Launceston is actively working towards positive community impact and enhanced support for those experiencing homelessness and related challenges.

This homelessness statement aligns with four of the seven strategic priorities of the City of Launceston Strategic Plan 2014-2024, underscoring the comprehensive and interconnected nature of homelessness. An integrated approach ensures that the City is working toward a more inclusive, resilient and supportive community for all its residents, including those experiencing homelessness.

These strategic priorities are:

- ***We Connect with our Community and our Region*** through meaningful engagement, cooperation and representation.
- ***We are a Progressive Leader*** that is accountable to our governance obligations and responsive to our community.
- ***We Serve and Care for our Community*** by providing equitable and efficient services that reflects needs and expectations of our community.
- ***We are a City Planning for our Future*** by ensuring our approach to strategic land-use, development and infrastructure investment is coordinated, progressive, and sustainable.

For further information please refer to the City of Launceston Strategic Plan 2014-2024.

³ State of the City, City of Launceston 2023.

Throughout this statement of commitment, the City of Launceston adopts the Australian Bureau of Statistics descriptions of operational groups whereby; Homelessness is:

When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives, they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to, space for social relations.

⁴ Homelessness Australia: Statistics & Facts | The Salvation Army Australia

Statement of Intent

At the City of Launceston we commit to addressing homelessness in our community. These seven principles will guide our actions and initiatives:

- Change the narrative;
- Engage the community;
- Facilitate cohesive services;
- Strive towards prevention;
- Engage in data informed decision making;
- Advocate;
- Ensure transparency and accountability.

Each principle plays a crucial role, coming together to create a united and action-oriented approach aimed at addressing homelessness in our community.

Homelessness is a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society. Recognising that not one group or person can address a complex challenge like homelessness, we must work across sectors to bring our community together. While street homelessness in Launceston is the most visible and vulnerable experience of homelessness requiring action, the City of Launceston seeks to respond to a broader experience of homelessness, such as those in temporary or overcrowded accommodation. This statement of intent demonstrates our aspiration to have a tangible and lasting impact on homelessness within our municipality.

We uphold the inherent right of every individual to participate in society, encompassing social, cultural, economic, physical, spiritual and political involvement. Recognising the diverse strengths, capabilities, and resources possessed by each individual, we listen to voices of lived experience and acknowledge the collective contribution these voices bring to our community's overall wellbeing.

Individuals' experiences within our community may vary significantly and we acknowledge the presence of barriers within the built environment, social structures and information access, which can hinder people from thriving and actively participating in society. These barriers encompass factors such as limited employment opportunities, poverty and low levels of literacy and numeracy, health challenges, family violence, stigmatisation, discrimination, and housing affordability. We commit to advancing social inclusion and actively combatting discrimination based on attributes listed under Section 16 of the Anti-Discrimination Act of (1998).

This statement of intent reflects our shared dedication to addressing homelessness in our community. Together, with the support of our community, we will work towards making homelessness a thing of the past and create a brighter, more equitable future for all.



Our Commitment

The City of Launceston commits to the principles outlined below. These principles will guide the implementation of actions.

Change the narrative

We will continue to work with the community to strengthen knowledge, awareness and understanding of the causes and impacts of homelessness on individuals and groups.

Engage the community

We will continue to engage with our community, including individuals and people experiencing homelessness and housing vulnerability, and stakeholders, such as government agencies, non-profit organisations, faith-based groups and the private sector to foster collaboration and coordination in our efforts to combat homelessness. A united community is an impactful community.

Facilitate cohesive services

We recognise that homelessness frequently stems from multifaceted and complex factors, such as structural inequity, mental health concerns, substance dependency and traumatic experiences. We are committed to innovative and sustainable action by working with comprehensive support services to address the unique needs of individuals facing homelessness in our community.

Strive towards prevention

The City of Launceston is uniquely positioned to identify community needs and factors that may lead to homelessness. Using this knowledge, we can connect with people at risk of homelessness through service providers before they hit crisis point. Through relationships with service providers in the homelessness space we can identify root causes such as unemployment, access to mental health services and lack of affordable housing, and work towards prevention.

Engage in data informed decision making

We commit to using data and evidence-based practices to guide our homelessness initiatives. We will regularly assess the effectiveness of our programs and make necessary adjustments to ensure our homeless community is treated respectfully and has access to necessary services.

Advocate

We will advocate for people experiencing homelessness and innovative and sustainable housing policies at local, state and federal government levels. Our advocacy will be targeted toward increased resource allocation.

Ensure transparency and accountability

We will maintain transparency in our actions and be accountable to our stakeholders and the community. We will report regularly and openly with community about our homelessness response on our website, across social media and in publications.

Principle Action Areas

Using the guiding principles, we will create effective actions addressing homelessness in our community. This requires a comprehensive approach which involves government agencies, non-profit and community organisations and allied stakeholders. The following actions are intended to achieve lasting positive change for people impacted by homelessness.

Change the narrative:

- Facilitate community discussion and coordinate responses about the root causes of homelessness, and the importance of supportive, socially just solutions.
- Coordinate community engagement to reduce the stigma surrounding homelessness.
- Build trust and rapport with our community at risk or already homeless to encourage individuals to access services and housing.
- Foster a Council environment of continuous learning and development that produces equitable and active outcomes and focuses on the community's overall wellbeing.

Engage the community:

- Bring together government agencies, non-profit associations, community groups and individuals with lived experience of homelessness to form a collaborative task force and committee.
- Involve local businesses, faith-based organisations and healthcare providers in the planning process. Facilitate clear communication channels to expedite action.
- Stay informed about best practices in addressing homelessness and adapt our action plan accordingly.
- Support community through engagement in public awareness campaigns.
- Maintain productive, proactive and responsive relationships with street outreach teams to connect with unsheltered homeless individuals and families.

Facilitate cohesive services:

- Establish coordinated partnerships, responses with agreed roles, and well-defined roles and responsibilities⁵.
- Through our connection with housing providers, we will continue to support the need of available permanent supportive housing options.
- Advocate for low and no cost inclusive events, recreation and activities in parks and public spaces.
- Ensure a council-wide, cohesive approach to dignity-first decision making in project and program planning, development and operations.

Strive towards prevention:

- Establish and evolve our position in the prevention of homelessness.
- Seek to have a seat at the table in best practice of preventive measures for homelessness.
- Ensure we are involved and informed on initiatives, programs and projects in prevention.
- Engage in data informed decision making:
- Define clear and measurable goals for reducing homelessness in our community.
- Set specific objectives for reducing the number of unsheltered homeless individuals, improving access to healthcare, and increasing permanent housing placements.
- Conduct an annual assessment of the homelessness situation in the community including the number of homeless individuals, their demographics and the causes of homelessness.
- Analyse the existing resources and services available for homeless individuals and identify gaps.
- Establish a system for tracking progress and evaluating the effectiveness of the homelessness action plan.

Advocate:

- Advocate for, and implement policies that support affordable housing, tenant protections and homelessness prevention at the local and state levels.
- Develop a formal communication structure with state and federal governments to work on specific projects of mutual benefit and issues of concern as well as provide a conduit for information sharing between state and local government.

Ensure transparency and accountability:

- Develop a clear multi-year budget that outlines how funds will be allocated to the City of Launceston's programs and services.
- Identify and secure funding sources, including federal grants, local revenue and private donations.
- Provide an annual report.
- Develop an annual action plan that will be updated quarterly.
- Review online information quarterly regarding homelessness.

⁵ Mitchell, 2023

Strategic review

This statement is to be formally reviewed annually to ensure the City of Launceston remains adaptable to the evolving needs of the community in addressing homelessness.

There is an identified need to remain responsive to the needs of our community. To continue to work in a manner that is fluid and remains current there will be a separate action plan developed.. This action plan will be reviewed quarterly to guarantee the ongoing effectiveness and relevance of implemented actions, and their effectiveness.



Featured Profile – Rod Gardner



I am Rod Gardner, a Launceston Aboriginal artist who has a passion for painting, always striving to master a craft for which I have the highest respect. Having experienced homelessness throughout my life, I have spent thousands of hours walking the streets of Launceston. Now, I paint the streets of my home, which brings great joy to my life. It's important for me to make my family proud of me and my work. My hope is to make Launceston proud of itself through my paintings.

I have taught myself by studying online and drawing and sketching every day. It is a passion, and I enjoy learning and creating. I want to use my skills and love of art to represent my community.

My goal is to catch a fleeting moment-in-time and for the viewer to find joy in looking at my work. My hope is that others can experience the different moods each work may evoke, both visually and emotionally, and to inspire them to take out their own watercolour brush.

I love to be an observer of life as it unfolds around me and capture its essence through drawing and painting. I am intuitive, responsive, and passionate. At the end of each day, I love to look at the last painting I have done and dream about the next one.

Those who know me know I have a fairly short attention span which enables me to respond to my environment, work quickly, and capture something magical in a moment I have witnessed - this is my way of working.

I feel very lucky to have received a mentorship with Jonathan Bowden in 2016, Jonathan has become a close friend, advisor, and champion of my practice. I now teach through the Leonie Duff arts studio in Launceston, deliver regular workshops for my community through the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, and Riawunna, UTAS.

My main areas of interest are city, land, and waterscapes, portraits of my community, and reflecting community events and gatherings. My paintings celebrate colour, form, and texture. I work in watercolour and sometimes charcoal, both indoors and outdoors - plein-air. Everything is created a-la-prima (in one go). I don't always paint what I see; I sometimes change shapes or colours, depending on how and what I feel. Working quickly, I often leave incomplete areas inviting the viewer to use their imagination to complete the story.

I hope you enjoy these reflections.

ROD GARDNER





APPENDIX A



Appendix A

Protocol for City of Launceston staff when engaging with homeless people in public and shared spaces.

This protocol (The Protocol) has been developed to offer guidance for City of Launceston staff when interacting with people experiencing homelessness. This protocol reflects City of Launceston values, and supports interactions based on dignity and respect, free from all forms of discrimination.

The Protocol does not override existing laws or regulations, or the enforcement of those laws or regulations. The Protocol does not prevent government or non-government organisations from taking appropriate action where health or safety is at risk.

Underlying principles of the protocol

People experiencing homelessness have the same rights as any member of the public to:

- be in public places;
- participate in public activities or events;
- carry with them, and store their own belongings;
- request or decline support or assistance.

All people contribute toward a safe and peaceful environment and respect local communities and businesses.

People experiencing homelessness have the same right to provide feedback, make formal complaints and request a review of decisions as any members of the public. Upon request, staff should provide details of how to lodge complaints or feedback.

In conjunction with the Protocol, any relevant legislation should be complied with for effective engagement and collaboration when delivering place-based support and services.



The Protocol

A person experiencing homelessness should only be approached by City of Launceston staff if:

- The person requests assistance.
- The person appears to be distressed or in need of assistance.
- The person's behaviour threatens their safety or the safety and security of people around them.
- The person is displaying anti-social behaviour that is negatively impacting on local residents and/or businesses.
- The person is sheltering in areas that may place their or others' health or safety at risk (for example, during extreme weather conditions, high vehicle movement areas, or by sheltering in unsafe buildings).
- The person is sheltering in a location that impedes City of Launceston's ability to maintain infrastructure and/or services.
- The person's behaviour is likely to result, or has resulted in, damage to property, or negatively impacts the conservation of nature or objects, places or features of cultural value, including Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- A City of Launceston staff member is seeking to engage with the person for the purpose of sharing information.

Where an approach is made under the circumstances outlined above:

- All approaches should be positive, empathetic, and respect the person and their circumstances. Culturally appropriate behaviour and language should be used during all interactions.
- The person experiencing homelessness may feel threatened on approach. To reduce this perceived risk, City of Launceston staff must identify who is most appropriate to engage. Things to consider include:
 - the person's culture, religion, gender and age;
 - the number of staff/workers that approach the person (minimum two); and
 - whether an alternative service provider should be initiating the interaction.
- If there is no risk, concern, breach or unlawful behaviour, respect a person's choice not to engage.

If a person consents to assistance, staff should provide:

- Appropriate support or services directly
- Advice, information, or assistance to connect to available, appropriate and, where possible, local supports or services; or
- A relevant contact point that the person can call or go to for further advice or help if they choose to in the future.
- Additional support or assistance may be required during extreme weather conditions and natural disasters.
- Managing the relocation of shelter locations:
- It is City of Launceston's current position that members of our homeless community who are residing in various locations across the city will not be asked to relocate to an alternative location unless there is a necessity to do so for reasons as outlined in The Protocol.

In the instance that relocation is required, the following engagement process is to occur:

City of Launceston staff are to initially engage with outreach workers from local service providers to advise of the necessity for relocation.

Work with service providers as required to support appropriate engagement with the person or people impacted in line with The Protocol.

In the instance where effective engagement is unable to be achieved due to health and safety concerns of officers and/or outreach workers, escalation may be required. Escalation should be directed to Tasmania Police.

Glossary

Affordable housing: This type of housing is usually defined as housing that is rented at a lower than market rate, often specifically for essential or key workers who have low to medium income levels.

Community Housing Providers (CHP's): Community housing providers (CHPs) provide rental housing to tenants who earn low to moderate incomes. CHPs may own some properties and also manage properties on behalf of investors, institutions and state and territory government.

Homelessness: The state of being without a home.

Houseless: A term being used to reduce stigma that describes a person that does not have a house to reside in.

Housing affordability: The term 'housing affordability' usually refers to the relationship between expenditure on housing (prices, mortgage payments or rents) and household incomes. The concept of housing affordability is different to the concept of 'affordable housing', which refers to low-income or social housing.

Housing stress: Is typically described as lower-income households that spend more than 30% of

gross income on housing costs (ABS 2022).

Lived experience: Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations, constructed by other people.

Sleeping Rough: Anyone who is living on the streets, sleeping in parks, or squatting in derelict buildings for temporary shelter.

Social Housing: This type of housing is for people on very low incomes who can't find suitable accommodation in the private rental market. It may often include groups with very specific needs, for example someone who is escaping DFV, has a disability or is homeless.

Stakeholders: A person with an interest or concern in something. In this document something pertains to homelessness.

Transitional housing: This is a short term supported housing, aimed at bridging the gap between homelessness and longer term housing.

⁶ What is community housing? – Community Housing Industry Association

⁷ Community housing providers: reporting for affordable housing | Australian Taxation Office (ato.gov.au)

⁸ Oxford Dictionary

⁹ Housing affordability in Australia - Parliament of Australia

¹⁰ Housing affordability - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au)

¹¹ Oxford Dictionary

¹² Launch Housing (2022), as cited in Mitchell (2023)

¹³ What is community housing? – Community Housing Industry Association

¹⁴ What is community housing? – Community Housing Industry Association



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