

Wentworth Community Housing – Heading Home Housing solutions

What is the issue

In Australia, homelessness is a vexed and intractable problem. Every night there are over 116,000 people experiencing homelessness (2016 ABS Census) in a first world country where everyone should have safe, comfortable and affordable accommodation. Across Western Sydney, homelessness has increased significantly since 2011, at a far greater rate than state and national increases.

These issues led Wentworth Community Housing to establish a bold and ambitious initiative to address this overwhelming community concern. Heading Home – Ending homelessness here! is a collaboration of community organisations, businesses and local government who are working towards ending homelessness in the Nepean Blue Mountains communities.

Following a Heading Home initiative in late 2016 focussed on street homelessness, the major unresolved issue remained the availability of suitable homes. This led to the next stage of the project - working on the supply end as well as the demand end. Ending homelessness means finding homes. We can no longer look to social housing to provide the solution to homelessness. The wait times are 10+ years and government is not increasing its property portfolio. Each community has to look within its own resources to solve this problem.

The two main ideas that gained strong community support through community briefings in late 2016 was encouraging home owners to build Garden Flats for low cost rental housing and building a Tiny Homes village.

Garden Flats

Garden Flats or Secondary Dwellings in the backyard of residential homes is a way for home owners to be part of the solution to homelessness and also increases their property value and potentially generates income for the owner.

Garden flats of around 20-35m² are small secondary dwellings and can be built in NSW under the Affordable Housing SEPP. They are designed to be built at low cost in backyards.

Incentive package for homeowners to build a Garden Flat

Wentworth is offering a limited number of incentive packages (up to 10 approved) for home owners that want to go the extra step and offer their home to someone who has had an experience of homelessness. The homeowner finances and builds the Garden Flat and rents the flat to Wentworth for a period of 2 - 3 years at a slightly reduced guaranteed return of \$150 per week, \$7,800 annual rental in exchange for:

- ☑ Guaranteed rental income covering vacancies
- ☑ Free tenancy management
- ☑ On-going support of the tenant.

Wentworth Garden Flat Build Model

In this model, Wentworth finances and builds the Garden Flat and manages the tenancy for a period until the cost of the build is paid off. The modelling indicates that this period would likely be from 5 years upward depending on which variables are factored into the model. Wentworth would recoup initial costs of the build over this period through rental income from someone who has had an experience of homelessness.

Wentworth would pay for the construction costs including costs associated with the planning approval process. Wentworth would manage the DA process and pay the associated costs which are factored into the overall cost of the build. This directly takes the stress off the owner in navigating the planning system and project managing the build.

At present Wentworth is trialling this model with one homeowner. If successful, we will be seeking investment to scale this model in 2020 and offer this to other homeowners.

Tiny Homes Village

Wentworth's Heading Home vision is to establish a Tiny Homes pilot project in Outer Western Sydney as one solution to homelessness. Our 'housing first' not 'housing only' model is scale-able and can be adapted by private, public and not-for-profit sectors in a partnership arrangement.

Wentworth is currently looking for a suitable site in the region. We require a block size from 550 m² to 2000 m² which could accommodate from 4 to 10 dwellings. We require land for a minimum of 3 – 5 years after which time the Tiny Home village could be relocated to another site.

The Tiny Homes pilot will be a mixed 'mini-village' with one or two homes available for emergency use and the remainder for longer term leases and will include the following components:

- ☐ 4 – 10 tiny homes on a residential block
- ☐ Each dwelling will be approximately 20 – 30 m²
- ☐ Independent dwellings - Each unit is envisaged to be a self-contained separate dwelling – depending on the type of DA sought (boarding house, caravan park, medium density) may have some shared facilities such as laundry.
- ☐ A community room featuring indoor/outdoor spaces for service delivery and shared activities is an integral part of service design, especially to meet social and life skills/training outcomes for tenants.
- ☐ Common green space and kitchen gardens.

We expect that some people will wish to transition to more traditional forms of accommodation once they have stabilised and found employment and we hope that some people will consider this as a longer-term accommodation option and be the backbone of the mini-village and create a sense of cohesion and connection for other residents.