

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

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Children's homelessness disguised

In the two months of January and February this year Anglican Community Care has received requests for help from 20 children who are homeless. They estimate there are 50 children in the region who are homeless but unseen in our community.

The community is concerned for these children – who range in age from 14 to 17 – and who fall through the gaps of existing support services. As a result of these concerns a working party 'Safe as Houses' was established with representatives from Anglican Community Care, City of Mount Gambier, Housing SA, Families SA, SA Police, Tenison Woods College, SE Regional Domestic Violence Service, SE Regional Community Health Service and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Their main concern over the last four years has been for the children's safety, as they can be living in volatile situations. Anecdotally, they have heard of cases where young girls are living with non-relative men in their 30s and 40s because there is no other alternative or they are 'couch surfing', ie, staying a night in two on the couch of a 'friend' before moving on. As a result of this type of accommodation their true numbers are disguised and the children become 'lost' to Anglican Community Care because current funding for support services is inadequate. Whilst the agency can keep statistics on how many requests for assistance they receive, they cannot follow-up because without timely support the children become hidden from our community.

These local children come to Anglican Community Care for a variety of reasons, which may include family breakdown and lack of both affordable accommodation options and survival skills. These are children that with the right support will be able to become healthy, participating members of our community.

Anglican Community Care is ideally positioned to assist these children but do not have adequate funding to establish and run a project. The Agency is aware that other regional centres have government funded fully staffed services to help this group of children and that the South East has no such service.

The supports Anglican Community Care could provide these children if they were fully funded would be safe and supported accommodation whilst working towards resolving conflict with parents and aiming for family reconnection. Whilst working on this goal they would support the children to continue their education and participate in safe recreation activities. The agency would provide training opportunities in financial management and independent living skills and, where appropriate, make linkages with employment opportunities. Whilst in a caring environment, Families SA staff will be able to access the children in order to assess if further supports and possible care orders are appropriate. Care orders mean that the children would be able to be supported by foster families.

END

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Facts and Figures From Homelessness SA

Who are homeless?

It is difficult to define the entire homeless population but the characteristics people who used the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) funded services for 1999 - 2000 were as follows:-

- more women(55%) than men(45%) were helped by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)
- 36% of the service users were under 25 years of age and 86% were under 45
- 16% were from an Indigenous background, although they only make 1.6% of the population, or 58.9 per 10,000 people
- people from non-English speaking backgrounds constituted 11% of the people who used SAAP services, compared to their 16% of the Australian population
- 67,800 children visited these services

Why are people homeless?

The causes of homelessness are diverse and unpredictable, ranging from job loss, to family breakdown, to poor mental health, to domestic violence to substance abuse.

The single contributing factor to the increasing problem of homelessness in South Australia is the lack of affordable housing.

ABOUT Anglican Community Care Inc

Anglican Community Care support regional and rural people when they are struggling with emotional or financial issues and aim to make a positive impact so people are able to fully embrace life and all its opportunities.

Anglican Community Care Inc has provided a range of human services to rural-regional South Australia for over 21 years. The not-for-profit organisation has successfully established offices employing local staff and management throughout the South East, Riverland and Murraylands areas of country South Australia.

In FY206/07 47,000 people found support through Anglican Community Care's many community programmes. Anglican Community Care employs professionally qualified staff who offer confidential, impartial, non-judgemental services to the community.

They are committed to alleviating poverty, building communities, promoting learning, reducing homelessness, strengthening families, supporting children and sharing cultures.
www.accinc.org.au