

SPECIAL HOMELESSNESS EDITION

On the 29th March 2021,

local service providers held a Humanitarian Crisis Call to Action at the foreshore to bring to light the problems we are facing within our community and our sector. Tents were erected in the park, with real life stories attached to them, to demonstrate just where things are at.

This is what our CEO, Kelly Hansen had to say on the day.



The Perfect Storm

Take a look around you, this is the emerging picture of Homelessness in the Hunter, in fact, more than likely all over the state. On most of the tents are real life stories, feel free to walk around and acquaint yourself with what the frontline services, know and deal with every day. **There is no housing.**

There is no housing for people on Centrelink payments or low income earners, and none for the new emerging cohort, middle class socio-economic couples. **Let me repeat, there is no housing, - full stop!**

So what of those people living this crisis, finding themselves homeless and unable to access assistance and crisis shelter. Well, if you have a car, we sigh with relief, and offer our facilities of laundry, blankets, showers, toiletries, food and places to rest for the day.

We work on how we can put safety plans in place as you sleep in your car, couch surf, stay in overcrowded premises, remain with the perpetrator, or rough sleep in areas deemed safer than others such as under houses and stairwells. Sometimes you might have to be separated from your children, you living in the car or tent while your children stay with family.

Heaven forbid if you're an older person, but still under the age for the aged pension, even worse if you are female. Gendered inequality and long-term gendered poverty already places you at risk of homelessness now let's just add to this.

We knew this was coming, predicted in the 2020, Equity and Economics report commissioned by NCOSS and other peak bodies; "A wave of Disadvantage across NSW: the Impact of the COVID 19 Recession". Clearly, a new pandemic would hit, that of increased homelessness and poverty if Job Seeker and Job Keeper rates were reduced after the pandemic time limited increases.

Let's be clear, this crisis we find our communities in, is a chosen course of action, a political choice by both our state and federal governments.

This perfect storm, politically created, has been exacerbated by an exhausted Temporary Accommodation budget, stretched during the COVID lockdown. *(con't over)*

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Kelly's speech continued



The State government's response however has been to return to previous restrictions. Access to Transitional Accommodation for individuals and families are based upon unrealistic obligations.

Once you've utilised 28 days of temporary accommodation, that's it - there is no more for you. **NO MORE assistance.**

The extraordinary thing is, we know there is nothing out there, absolutely no affordable rentals, yet we continue to request the impossible. We have the end of the moratorium on evictions, and are now seeing a major increase of 'no ground evictions', we have rentals sky rocketing, and demand outstripping supply with 60 people +, turning up to inspections. Let's not forget that rents in the private market have been beyond the scope of all on low incomes. I'd suspect that the Anglicare's December Rental Affordability Snapshot with no rental affordability for Job Seeker payment would now be or coming close to zero affordability for most low income earners and other Centrelink recipients.

We have the added problem of an influx of people from the city and interstate into regional areas, squeezing out usual renters, offering more for properties, and offering 6 and 12 months rent in advance. Other rental properties have become AIR B&Bs, more lucrative with the attraction of domestic travel.

Our State government could have chosen to invest in social housing and maintain an expanded Temporary Accommodation budget. Our Federal government had the opportunity to simultaneously ignite the economy, create jobs and provide long term affordable housing after COVID 19, we instead get a meaningless increase to job seeker with the wonderful pairing of "dob in a bludger" hotline and of course, no social housing.

Not only are we horrified by the political responses to homelessness and poverty, we are all bloody exhausted, attempting to address the un-addressable, requiring those experiencing homelessness to jump through hoops and meet unrealistic obligations only to find themselves no further to resolving their housing crisis, a housing crisis not of their choosing but of our governments' choosing.

As services we have no control over the structural barriers that drive homelessness in our communities and of course, the structural poverty pervasive in this society. **It is up to our governments to fix this and that is what we are demanding - a Call to Action.**

We have services here today from Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens and Maitland. The upper Hunter is in the same predicament, at capacity and nowhere to turn to. This is not just impacting on specialist homelessness services, but also those within the community sector attempting to assist and address complex issues however the Band-Aid of brokerage can only do so much for the perilous situation we find most of our clients in.

This is an emerging Humanitarian crisis, people without shelter, utilising precious funds to get by, unable to sustain a standard of living. People, women, youth and men living in cars, living tents, couch surfing, rough sleeping or staying in domestic and family violence situations.

We are one specialist homelessness service of many in the Hunter. We currently have at least 9 women on a wait list for crisis accommodation in Lake Macquarie, either living in cars, sleeping rough or couch surfing. We had as of February, 88 women waiting for intake assessments or for rapid response, with 4 to 5 intakes occurring daily.

Intake is now booked two weeks in advance. Yet we have no crisis accommodation available, and those seeking assistance are often unable to utilise Transitional Accommodation or have reached their 28 day limit. We surpassed our contracted target numbers back in February.

Men and Homelessness

Ryan Pryor, from Matthew Talbot Homeless Service and St Vincent de Paul Society, had this to say about the strain their service is under at the recent Humanitarian Crisis call to Action.

Since August last year, we have observed on average a 5% increase in referrals each month to date. Last month (February), we had 119 referrals from people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

We're seeing not just an increase in single men accessing our services but also a larger number of families needing our support. The main reason people are accessing our service is due to the difficulties they are experiencing in acquiring an affordable private rentals.



More frequently we are seeing rental inspections with 40 or more people in attendance. At one inspection, one of our case managers counted 77 people in attendance for an average 3-bedroom home with a weekly rate of \$480.

When speaking with Real Estate agents, we are told that a single father with 2 children on low income or a welfare payment, just doesn't stand a chance against other more "favourable" income streams.

And it's not just the people accessing our service who are experiencing these challenges, some of our staff and others I have spoken to in the sector are also feeling the strain of finding their own affordable private rentals.

As of this morning, we have 82 referrals including families waiting to be allocated a case worker. Our Team of 7 caseworkers are strained and at capacity. This is an all too familiar scenario echoed across the sector.

Our Team are calling people daily and offering advice over the phone to people until they can be allocated a case-worker, which at the moment can take up to 7 weeks. When people hear this, they're scared and ask "What am I going to do until then?". The only reassurance we can give them is that we will keep in touch with them until such time that their case is allocated.

We are seeing more people with complex mental health needs, higher numbers of people experiencing family and domestic violence, higher rates of eviction and a higher number of child protection concerns.



Now is not the time to cut funding to the sectors that work at the coalface in supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. In the past 2 years we have experienced catastrophic bushfires, an International Pandemic and most recently devastating flooding, the outcome of which we are yet to face.

We are asking our government to recognise and respond to this crisis as a matter of priority.

Candlelight Vigil



At dusk on a Wednesday night in early May, Newcastle, women and men, including survivors of domestic and family violence, gathered at the old tram sheds by the Harbour foreshore, to remember the women murdered, mostly by men known to them. Speeches were made, poems recited, a smoking ceremony was held to smoke out bad spirits and candles were lit as a minutes silence was held in remembrance of the women who have been taken from us too soon.

This vigil was organized by Rachel Bond and Trisha Pender of the University of Newcastle's Gender Research Network, as part of The Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month, on 5 May 2021. It was also supported by the Newcastle Domestic Violence Committee, Warlga Ngurra Women's Refuge, Nova for Women and Children, and Jenny's Place.

A moving visual display made up of white dresses for each murdered woman, decorated by loved ones and those who work in the sector, provided a stark reminder of how many we have lost.

Many thanks to the Walk a Mile Koori Style crew who had the grim task of hanging them all up. They also set up a fire pit where the fragrant green gum leaves were smoked for the cleansing ceremony which was performed to the haunting sound of a didgeridoo. The smoke was slowly woven in and around the dresses as the people silently followed.

Powerful speeches were made by Rae Hopkins from Warlga Ngurra Aboriginal Women's Refuge, Jenny's Place and our own CEO, Kelly Hansen. The recurrent theme was the huge problem and the small funding. Services are desperate for more money, housing, workers. We are all desperate for affordable housing.

But most importantly, and this was Kelly Hansen's point, we are in desperate need of an attitude change – from men in general and particularly the men in power in this country.

As a male problem, there will never be any real help.

As the Australian Services Union Secretary, Natalie Lang, so rightly says: "You cannot say in one breath that you are concerned about the mistreatment of women and then cut the funding to essential services and women's refuges."

The poem, Because of Her We Can, was recited by Maree Edwards, Hidden Scars was recited by Kathy Edwards and The Scream was recited by Janette Hoppe.

This poem was followed by a minute's silence, then a collective scream from everyone gathered in the tram shed: 'ENOUGH'!!!

Listening Campaign Stories

Hunter Homeless Connect conducted a listening campaign in partnership with the Hunter Community Alliance to hear local stories from people currently experiencing homelessness or going through hard times, to talk about their situation and provide them with a voice. These are just some of their stories.



**Hunter
Homeless
Connect**

"I'm here because of my financial situation. Private rent is so high, and then there's bills. I literally have to come here to get food. I have to use a credit card, otherwise I'm living on nothing".

Michael accessing food relief at Jesmand Neighbourhood Centre

"We are so limited by what we can provide. People come in for food relief and we can give them food, but then what? They need somewhere to live. There are so few affordable rentals out there"

Jesmand Neighbourhood Centre Manager

"I was homeless for four months. I got out of the weather by going to shopping centre car parks and sleeping under bridges. It was hard. I wrote to the mayor of Maitland about converting shopping centre car parks to sleeping havens. I even measured it up. You could bring services along like DARA and Orange Sky laundry, and have security on.

People could have a bed, hot food and wash their clothes. I think it just makes sense. It's an easy solution.

They weren't interested. They said it would be dangerous. The homeless are a big forgotten voice out there. Maybe I will talk to the mayor of Newcastle. I think the numbers of homeless people are heaps more than what is reported."

Craig at the Big Issue street soccer

"There are so many empty buildings, how hard is it to fix them up so there are more places for people to live?"

An extra 200 bedsitters in Newcastle would make the world of difference.

With the COVID supplement we could afford to pay for rent and hotels when we needed them.

Naw we are used to spending \$1200 a fortnight. When the payments go down I won't be able to afford to live".

Sarah and Glen
Rough sleeping and looking for affordable accomodation in Newcastle

"We are seeing more older women in their 60's. We have five rooms (at the refuge) here and we haven't had a vacancy in months.

We are seeing not just disadvantaged people, we are also seeing everyday people in need too.

They come in for help with food and electricity bills.

It's so sad.

We need more refuges and housing stock. If we turn them away, where do they go?"

Warlga Ngurra
Women and Children's refuge

Hard times for tenants

Hunter Tenants Advice Service

Hunter Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service provides information and advice to tenants of the Hunter region and has done so for more than 20 years. In the first three months of 2021 Hunter Tenants experienced the highest demand ever.



In 2021 48% of our advice related to tenants facing eviction, and we have already spoken to 500 members of our community facing eviction, many of these tenants have Notice of Termination without grounds. Tenants in NSW can be evicted for no reason...we say this is not reasonable and it is not fair.

I will share the story of Tracy.

Tracy received a notice of rent increase and responded to the landlord seeking to negotiate a lesser increase and requested repairs. The next day she received a no grounds notice to vacate the premises. While a tenant can dispute such a notice, there's no guarantee the tenancy will not end. Tracy felt pressured by the landlord and the agent to move out. Tracy has applied for as many places she can find within her price range on Disability Support Pension but has been unable to secure a rental. Tracy is now homeless with her pet dog. Tracy wanted to point out how difficult it is to secure a private rental property and how this impacts on so many people in our community right now. Tracy wanted to emphasise the medical and mental health impacts becoming homeless can have on us.

Every day, tenant advocates in our service talk to tenants who are in tears because they have a notice of termination. A termination can mean leaving your community, changing kids' schools, loss of access to transport, and moving away from support systems.

The loss of security and community have immeasurable costs.

Tenants with pets facing eviction tell us they're desperate to find housing that allows these members of their family to move with them and will face homelessness before having to give up a pet. We say that blanket pet clauses refusing pets is unfair.

We know that people are exiting viable tenancies into homelessness. Homeless services are overloaded, and our community members are having to couch surf and live in their cars because of lack of housing that is available and affordable.

Legislative change is possible. Ending no grounds evictions and banning blanket pet clauses can be done. It is also time to consider legislative change to regulate rent increases. As demand for housing increases, so does the rent. People are being priced out of their homes.

In the Hunter Region we are experiencing record low vacancy rates. Without an increase funding for social and affordable housing and the creation of incentives for building affordable housing it is likely this housing crisis will continue and escalate.

We call on all levels of government to work on both short-term and long-term actions to address this housing crisis.

Funding for social and affordable housing, and targets for inclusionary zoning are needed to increase housing stock.

Increase in resources to Specialist Homeless Services and Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services will assist in reducing rates of homelessness and ensuring vulnerable members of our community do not end up on the streets.

Changes to tenancy laws to take away the right of the landlord to issue notice without reason, a ban on blanket pet clauses and instruments to ensure rents rise at a reasonable rate can also have positive impacts on our housing crisis and are long overdue.

Enough is Enough!

We Marched 4 Justice!

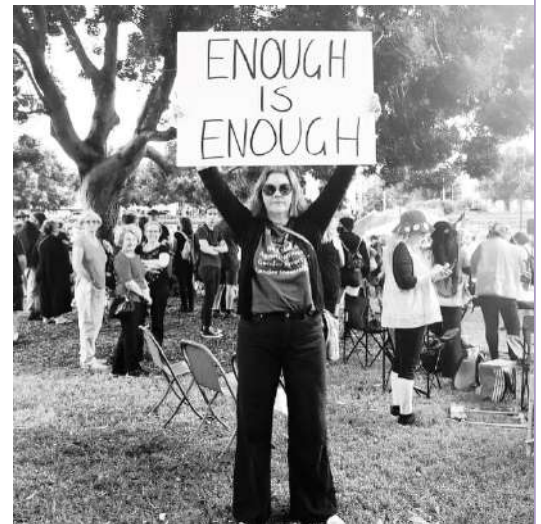
15 March 2021

On 15 March, 2021, women gathered in huge groups around the country. Tens of thousands of women at 40 rallies expressing their outrage at on-going, long-ignored gendered violence towards women in Australia, culminating in two separate allegations of rape aimed at a Senior Staffer at Parliament House and the then Attorney General, Christian Porter.

Women are angry and tired of fighting for fairer legislation, better treatment of victims of male violence in the justice system, stronger penalties for perpetrators, education for young people, better funding for frontline services for victims and above all: **Just. To. Be. Believed.**

There were calls for real structural and systemic change including:

- Full independent investigations into all cases of gendered violence and timely referrals to appropriate authorities. Full public accountability for findings
- Full implementation of the 55 recommendations in the Australian Human Rights Commission's Respect@Work report
- Lift public funding for gendered violence prevention to world's best practice
- The enactment of a Federal Gender Equality Act to promote gender equality. It should include a gender equity audit of Parliamentary practices



The women of Newcastle were no exception, with hundreds gathering at Civic Park. Holding banners and placards they were vocal in their outrage with chants of 'Enough is Enough'.

They listened to speeches and stories from survivors before marching on the steps of the Town Hall building and demanding change from the nation's leaders.

Nova for Women and Children were well represented at the march.



Dresses Of Sorrow

#DressesOfSorrow

In the past month (before writing this) another **four women and a baby have all been killed** in separate incidents of the most tragic and unfathomable final acts of family and domestic violence. **That's now 12 this year.**

Kelly Wilkinson (27) sought the help of the police, nearly every day from late March until her violent murder, allegedly by her former partner with children close by.

At just nine (9) months old, Kobi Shepherdson was violently murdered, allegedly by her father, who had a criminal history of domestic violence against both her and her Mother.

Lordy Ramadan (48) also murdered - police are investigating her partner's liability with this crime.

Giustina Lawlor (53) a holocaust survivor, living SE of Melbourne, her son charged with her murder.

Judy Bednar (78) found collapsed inside the home and despite efforts by emergency services, was pronounced dead at the scene. Her son Christian Lawlor, just 22 charged with manslaughter.

None of these women, nor this child should have died

May was domestic violence prevention month; and yet women and children are still losing their lives to domestic violence at an average rate of **one per week**.

Heart-sick at bearing the grief of these deaths year after year, frontline domestic and family violence workers from Newcastle have been bearing this burden for way too long and they've had enough.

On Monday May 24 2021, we made our voices heard.

A contingency of local frontline workers and their allies, drove all the way to Canberra, to hold a peaceful protest on the front lawns of Parliament House. Here they displayed approximately 150 dresses, each one lovingly made to commemorate the life of a woman murdered in Australia over the past 5 years.

Each one of these dresses are the silent stories of violence against women.



Dresses of Sorrow

Then...we took it to Canberra!

The brainchild of Warlga Ngurra, Nova were proud to have stood along side them and everyone else involved in or attending this great event. Some left Saturday, others drove down Sunday and it was certainly a cool and early 7am start on the Monday morning for all!

It was all hands on deck. Four large marquees were erected along the width of the lawns, with metres and metres of clothesline wire then strung up to hold the dresses. The huge We Say No to Violence Banner, courtesy of Got your Back Sista, made a statement on the lawn behind us, as the dresses swung in the chilly Canberra breeze. It was a stark and sombre statement of these needless deaths, but a firm message to government that it's time to take enduring, sustainable action to protect the lives of all women and children.

We were extremely grateful to have the attendance and support of some inspiring female ministers too. Our own Member for Newcastle, Sharon Claydon MP, who has always been a great supporter and advocate of our local services, the Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP, and Linda Burney MP, just to name a few.

During the morning we heard from each of the frontline services in attendance, poems were recited and the names of the women murdered this year were read out, paying homage to their lives. At the end of the display, and after carefully packing up the dresses, a representative from each group attending then made their way into Parliament House, with the intention of then gifting these dresses to our government. It was our way of handing this burden over to them, to remind them of what's happened and to make them accountable. And it nearly didn't happen! Security initially refused their entry - as well as the gift, but it was Sharon Claydon that eventually got them through for us. Not content with taking no for an answer, she personally came down and explained the importance and significance of the dresses to security, who only then, reluctantly let them through. During this time, both Rae Hopkins from Warlga Ngurra, and our CEO Kelly Hansen met with Linda Burney to talk some more about the issues we face on the frontline and what needs to happen.

The recent budget is just a starting point, but so much more is needed to prevent domestic and family violence, and protect the women and children in our communities. [#DressesOfSorrow](#)



The Butterflies on this dress, sadly represent the children murdered by violence.



Ways to Donate

Help others, just by shopping

We're excited to announce our partnership with Betterthat.com – a new online marketplace helping you shop with purpose. Up to 25% of their net commission revenue goes to good causes (like us!)

Not only will you shop exclusive brands and get better prices, but you'll also be making a social impact too. Use this link <https://bit.ly/3tuKn6p> to start shopping and supporting us today.



Getting Savvy with QR

We're seeing QR Codes here, there and everywhere these days, and we've joined the party!

Thanks to our friends at Benojo, we now have a new donations website making it much easier for you to make donations with your credit card.

Did you know that unlike many Charities, Nova makes a firm stand that we **do not use any** of your donations towards administration, marketing, wages etc. 100% of funds received are used to assist the women and children we support.



Our Values

Nova for women and children is based upon a feminist philosophy and is guided by the principles of social justice that are;

- Act with good intent
- Focus on strengths
- Promote collaborative, innovative and inclusive practice
- Embrace diversity
- Work respectfully

We will work with you to make sure you receive the best possible assistance to avoid becoming homeless or, if you are homeless, to access safe, affordable and secure housing.

We are committed to working with you in a respectful way that protects your dignity, is fair, and does not discriminate. **#WomenAndChildrenMatter**

OPENING HOURS

General Office Hours:

9am to 4.30pm
Monday to Friday

We are closed on weekends and public holidays.

Please Note:

The Newcastle office is closed to the public on Tuesdays, except for pre-booked appointments.

CONTACT US

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Novawomen1

AFTER HOURS

If you are a woman escaping domestic violence, requiring after hours assistance please

Phone: 1800 656 463