

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

CWA RIVERINA GROUP ONLINE AWARENESS EVENT

A ROOF OVER HER HEAD: WOMEN, HOMELESSNESS AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN THE RIVERINA

Wednesday 22 September 2021

CAREVAN WAGGA WAGGA – carevanwagga.com

Is Carevan working on a takeaway format at present? Looking at that as an option in the future?

Carevan currently makes and freezes meals which are distributed by around 15 local charities and service providers. Pre-COVID however, Carevan operated its Dining with Dignity program – a sit-down meal format at venues around Wagga Wagga. Carevan catered for 30 people per meal through Dining with Dignity, and any extra or leftover meals were made available for takeaway. The suggestion to move to a takeaway format has been raised but is still to be discussed by the Carevan Board.

Carevan is looking forward to resuming its Dining with Dignity night-time meal service once COVID restrictions ease – possibly as soon as mid-October (if the NSW Government reaches its target of a 70-80% vaccination rate). In the meantime, Carevan will continue to focus on providing frozen meals that service providers can give out to their clients – takeaway of a different kind.

What skills do Carevan need in the background to support going forward?

Carevan currently has 80 trained volunteers who are involved with meal preparation and distribution to service providers or volunteer to assist with other aspects of Carevan's operations. This includes office administration, shopping and stock management, cleaning/checking the Carevan vehicle, gardening and building maintenance and grant writing. All Carevan volunteers must complete a Police Check, Working With Children Check and Safe Food Handling training, as well as a training and orientation session run by Carevan.

Carevan is always looking for more volunteers. In addition, they gratefully accept donations of non-perishable food and personal hygiene items which they also distribute via local charities and service providers.

Email carevanwagga@gmail.com to enquire about volunteering and support opportunities.

Are we reaching those in real need?

Carevan is always working to 'get the word out' about the service it provides through different avenues, so that people are aware that meals are available. Carevan promotes its service via Facebook, radio, flyers at the Wagga Wagga Library, doctors' surgeries, cafes, churches, neighbourhood hubs, playgroups, childcare centres, etc as well as via letterbox drop.

In addition, Carevan has a close working relationship with all of the charities and service providers which distribute the meals made by the Carevan team. Each service provider places an order for a quantity of meals each week. This can change week to week depending on demand, and Carevan adjusts its meal preparation accordingly to ensure each organisation has what they need. For example, Salvation Army workers take fresh meals out to homeless and needy people at Wilks Park at North Wagga every Tuesday night. Carevan supplies the fresh meals, as well as frozen meals, which last for a day or two. Salvation Army also visits the area behind the Wagga Tourist Information Centre on Tuesday night to give out meals to people who gather there and provide frozen meals to welfare clients who visit their store.

ARGYLE HOUSING – argylehousing.com.au

Do you have an idea of the sort of upskilling/reskilling that would help these women? Is this something that would help?

Argyle Housing's primary focus is on providing and managing secure, Social and Affordable Housing for people on low to moderate income. However, we actively link our clients with services which can support them to increase their financial security, health and wellbeing. This varies from individual to individual. For example, a woman who has been out of the workforce for a long period, may need access to education and training opportunities which assist them to re-enter the workforce.

Is the long wait for one- and two- bedroom homes because that is all that affordable housing developments provide for single people or because single women are happy with a small unit or duplex? I worry that things like 'tiny homes' are presented as a housing solution for older women, instead of dignifying them with a choice of a small house or cottage with a proper pet friendly yard and garden?

In general, there is a lack of homes to rent of all types. The choice, at present, is simply not there and it is something which needs to be addressed.

For people who own rental properties in the Riverina (or elsewhere) how can we work with Argyle Housing?

Argyle Housing currently operates in seventeen local government areas in NSW. Their property portfolio consists of leasehold properties managed for private owners as well as properties owned and managed by Argyle Housing and properties managed on behalf of Housing NSW, ACT Directorate of Community Services, and other community housing providers.

If you would like to explore the opportunity to lease your property through Argyle Housing phone 1300 274 953 or email wagga@argylehousing.com.au

How do private property investors get involved without risking rent loss, etc? Does Argyle Housing act as primary tenant and their client is the sub-tenant?

Yes. The lease agreement for a privately owned property is between Argyle Housing and the property owner. Argyle Housing then rents the property to a tenant and

manages all of the relevant aspects of the tenancy arrangement in accordance with the lease agreement. The rent is covered by Argyle Housing, minimising the risk of rent loss.

SISTERS HOUSING ENTERPRISES – sistershousing.org.au

How do we break the cycle early in a woman's life? What are tools women need to increase resilience, financial security, and independence (even when we are in a relationship)?

Education is key. This needs to start early and continue across different stages of our lives. Financial literacy provides an important foundation for financial security, and there are a number of organisations which provide financial literacy programs in schools and which are specifically targeted at women over 55.

Relationship breakdown and domestic and family violence are the reasons a large proportion of Sisters Housing's clients are seeking accommodation support or are at risk of homelessness. Programs like Respectful Relationships Education Programs 'Love Bites' and 'Love Bites Junior', which are run in schools, are vital to helping young people have relationships which are free of physical and emotional abuse.

What do we need to do to ensure programs that educate young people or different age groups are available in our region; or are made more available in our region?

The first thing to do is: do your research. Find out what is available now and what is needed by talking to schools and community organisations in your city or town. This enables you to see where the gaps are and find ways to fill them, through grants or community-based fundraising activities.

Organisations such as CWA are well positioned to partner with community-based organisations to reach out and raise awareness of the needs. This enables communities to be involved and become part of the solution.

A medium to long-term view is great, but crisis accommodation is the elephant in the room.

As a service provider, Sisters Housing's long-term vision is to assist women to be safely housed. While there is a need for temporary and crisis accommodation in the short-term, without exit points to longer term housing options there is a blockage in the system. Crisis accommodation is a short-term solution to a much longer-term problem and is an immediate solution to sleeping rough, at risk of homelessness or experiencing domestic and family violence. However, it lacks stability for women and children in the long term. The need for more crisis accommodation is ongoing, and people often ask Sisters Housing how many rooms they would need. This is a difficult question to answer, as unless we more options for the longer term, we will have women and children who are forced to live their lives in crisis settings.

From Dr Joe McGirr, Member for Wagga Wagga:

Absolutely. There is demand across the board for more housing, both emergency and longer term. My office is contacted frequently by people who find themselves

struggling to find housing quickly. We are fortunate in Wagga Wagga to have organisations like St Vincent de Paul's Edel Quinn centre, Wagga Wagga Women's Health Centre and Sisters Housing Enterprises, that can work with other providers and Department of Communities and Justice to provide emergency accommodation.

DR JOE MCGIRR, MEMBER FOR WAGGA WAGGA

Is the decrease in social housing because of the move to NDIA LT SDA housing with the incentives that are provided to move people from government housing to avoid the government maintenance bill?

I don't believe this is the case. One of the biggest issues seems to be that there is an increase in demand for social housing, without any real increase in the available housing stock. The growth in demand for social housing comes at a time when the private rental market is also being squeezed. There are simply not enough houses to meet demand at the current time and the most vulnerable members of society are, unfortunately, most likely to be impacted.

Here in Wagga, we are going to see enormous change and improvement with the Tolland Renewal Project, but sadly this will take time. We must continue looking at ways to increase the availability of housing.

Is the increase in crisis demands on the homelessness system undercutting the wrap-around services for early intervention that was part of the 2013 reforms?

There is certainly an increasing demand, which is putting pressure on existing services.

There has been a lot of work done by the government since 2013. In 2016, the government released the *Foundations for Change* discussion paper to seek the views of people, groups and organisations across NSW about the changes we need to make to the way we respond to homelessness in NSW.

The government has also released the *NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018–2023*, which was aimed at delivering a framework to enable agencies and services to identify vulnerability early, help manage the risk factors that make a person vulnerable, and reduce the complexity of the service system. For the first time, we have established accountability across government so that all agencies – including Family and Community Services, Health, Education, and Justice – share responsibility for preventing homelessness.

More recently, the Together Home program was launched. Together Home is a \$122.1m program that aims to transition people away from homelessness and into long-term stable housing, while improving overall personal wellbeing through wraparound services. In Wagga Wagga, 10 packages were funded initially, with a further 11 in the second tranche of funding. A third tranche of funds is due to be announced shortly.