



HEADING *home*

ENDING HOMELESSNESS HERE



STAGE 1

Initiating a cross-sector Project Group, mobilising the community and conducting a Registry Week


*Prepared by Judy Spencer for
Wentworth Community Housing
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“ – ending chronic homelessness requires a collective impact at the community level together with a targeted response to people who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk”. It takes a community working together to confront and resolve this problem.”

JENNY RANFT, Divisional Manager, Community Services, Wentworth Community Housing

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Executive Summary

Heading Home – Ending Homelessness Here!

In Australia, homelessness is a vexed and intractable problem. Every night there are over 116,000 people experiencing homelessness (1) in a first world country where everyone should have safe, comfortable and affordable accommodation. Simple to say, but difficult to achieve. Over the years, there have been many attempts to respond to the problem but it remains persistent and unresolved.

In the Nepean Blue Mountains (NBM) district of Sydney, in 2016-2017, there was a bold and ambitious initiative to address this overwhelming community concern. Heading Home - Ending Homelessness Here! was a diverse partnership that brought together homelessness services with real estate agents, local and state government workers, politicians, community groups and local businesses. The project put these representatives around a table to see what could be achieved working together to sort this problem. It was a multilayered, across district project. There was considerable planning with working groups supporting different aspects to ensure its success.

What the project looked to do was:

- Identify people who were homeless through a “Registry Week” to capture a comprehensive picture of this population in the district,

- Ask tailored questions of the people who were identified, using an interview tool called the VI-SPDAT (2) to describe their health and housing needs
- Find accommodation for each person where possible, using Housing First principles, and
- Support them to sustain their tenancy.

It was a significant challenge. After a great deal of work, much was achieved in 12 months. The major unresolved issue remains the availability of suitable homes. To respond to that, in parallel to identifying people in the region, this eclectic group around the table started to develop other potential creative housing solutions. Rather than being limited by minimal affordable housing, efforts are being made to address that in quite distinctive ways. It will take the will and enduring community commitment for these solutions to be realised, so that homelessness in the NBM district can not just be managed but it can end!

(1) 2016 ABS Census Data

(2) Vulnerability Index- Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool

Awards Recognition for Heading Home

Through this project, many people who were homeless were identified, housed and a new way of working within the district was created. It embraced government, non government and corporate sector working together. The project has been honoured with two Awards in 2017:

- *The Western Sydney ZEST Award for Exceptional Community Partnership Project Across a Region and*
- *The Australian Housing Industry (AHI) Professional Excellence in Housing Award for Leading Community Engagement Practice - NSW.*

This recognition from both the Western Sydney non-government sector and the housing industry is a reflection of the way in which Heading Home is both a place-based and a housing initiative.

“The major unresolved issue remains the availability of suitable homes.”

1. Introduction

In the NBM district (Hawkesbury, Blue Mountains and Penrith Local Government Areas (LGAs) it was generally known there were people who were homeless, though actual numbers were unknown. Many were connected to appropriate services for support, however they remained homeless despite everyone's best efforts to find them suitable accommodation. There were also many others who remained homeless who were not identified.

Over the years, different projects have tried to address the problem, some with significant success (e.g. Project 40) but the numbers of people who are experiencing homelessness and the problems people have continue to be troublesome. What this project wanted to do was find the people and look to specifically end their homelessness as distinct from just managing it. It was a tall order indeed!

In 2016, Jenny Ranft, Wentworth's Divisional Manager of Community Services, with support and encouragement from the Board, (particularly Keith Bryant, the Chair) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Stephen McIntyre, approached a range of people to become involved. She came up with the idea of considering "what would ending homelessness look like?" Rather than addressing part of the issue, that is identifying people experiencing homelessness, Jenny's intent was to strike at the core of the problem and find effective life changing housing solutions.

As Jenny explained, social housing alone cannot deal with homelessness, the community sector can provide support but not housing and real estate agents are subject to the vagaries of the market forces. Having said that, through other projects she and her team were involved in, Jenny was cognisant

of agents looking for ways to make more of a commitment to community engagement. As she explained "in developing the project it became clear we needed to work on generating options for housing solutions" so approaching them had real possibilities.

Jo Robinson, the Project Coordinator, and Jenny contacted real estate agents from across the NBM district, Greg Taylor in Penrith, Jeff Donley in the Blue Mountains (Alex Thomson from Theo Poulos also became involved as the project unfolded) and Rachel Goldsworthy in the Hawkesbury. They all had clients who were tenants struggling to pay their rent. They were looking to find ways to help them both from an individual level and at a level that could have a positive impact on their own businesses. Jenny also talked to other like minded organisations, Mission Australia and Platform Youth Services to come on board. Jenny was aware through her many years experience, that there were considerable synergies to be achieved with different agencies working together.

As she said :

"Through our community engagement we brought together leaders from diverse sectors including political leaders from all 3 levels of government, community influencers, leading businesses in the housing sectors such as Real Estate Agents and Mortgage Brokers, community organisations and specialist homelessness services - we believe this is the first time such a diverse group has sat around a meeting table for the purpose of generating innovative housing solutions for homeless people."

The project decided to tackle the issue head on both from an individual perspective as well as a broader community response. Rather than only taking people off Social Housing waiting lists (which are now at least 10 years) and responding in a traditional way, this project applied lateral thinking to the problem and approached it differently. What started off as a coordinated effort to identify, triage and then support people who were homeless into accommodation (something that continues to be difficult to achieve in a timely way), it is now evolving into a more comprehensive and complete response to this obstinate problem in the NBM district.

2. Aims of the Project

The Project aimed to

- 1. Identify the most vulnerable people in our communities experiencing homelessness*
- 2. Provide housing and support to people most at risk*
- 3. Shift community focus from managing homelessness to solving homelessness*
- 4. Increase access to affordable and supportive housing*

2.1 Key Agencies

The project started with specialist homelessness services as primary stakeholders. Wentworth wanted to build on the collaboration of the Right Door 1800 single access project to homelessness services across the district, which is where Mission Australia and Platform Youth Services came on board as key partners. Wentworth, Mission Australia

and Platform work across all three local government areas and are connected with social housing, the local private rental market and local support systems. The shared boundaries made collaboration so much easier. Jenny Ranft and Jo Robinson represented Wentworth in the roles of Project Manager and Project Coordinator. Stephanie Oatley, CEO of Platform Youth Services and Julie Jasprizza-Laus, Area Manager Western Sydney of Mission Australia led their organisations' involvement.

Family and Children's Services (FACS), the real estate agents mentioned in the Introduction, Michael Laing from Hawkesbury Council, Melissa McSeveny from Penrith City Council, representatives from Blue Mountains City Council, including Councillor Don McGregor, and local mortgage broker Robert Lees all brought their own particular expertise to the table.

The community sector was represented by Kris Newton, a strong and committed Manager and Advocate from Mountains Community Resource Centre.

Local print and radio media outlets were invited by the Fund Raising Manager Denise Daynes, who was able to encourage and engage both print and radio media personnel such as Simon Gould and Graham Fitzpatrick to be involved and brought invaluable expertise, networks and contacts to the project.

Felicity Reynolds and Sue Mowbray from the Mercy Foundation shared their expertise in the Registry Week methodology and Janelle Kwong from Micah Projects in Queensland led the data centre for Registry Week and produced the district Fact Sheet.

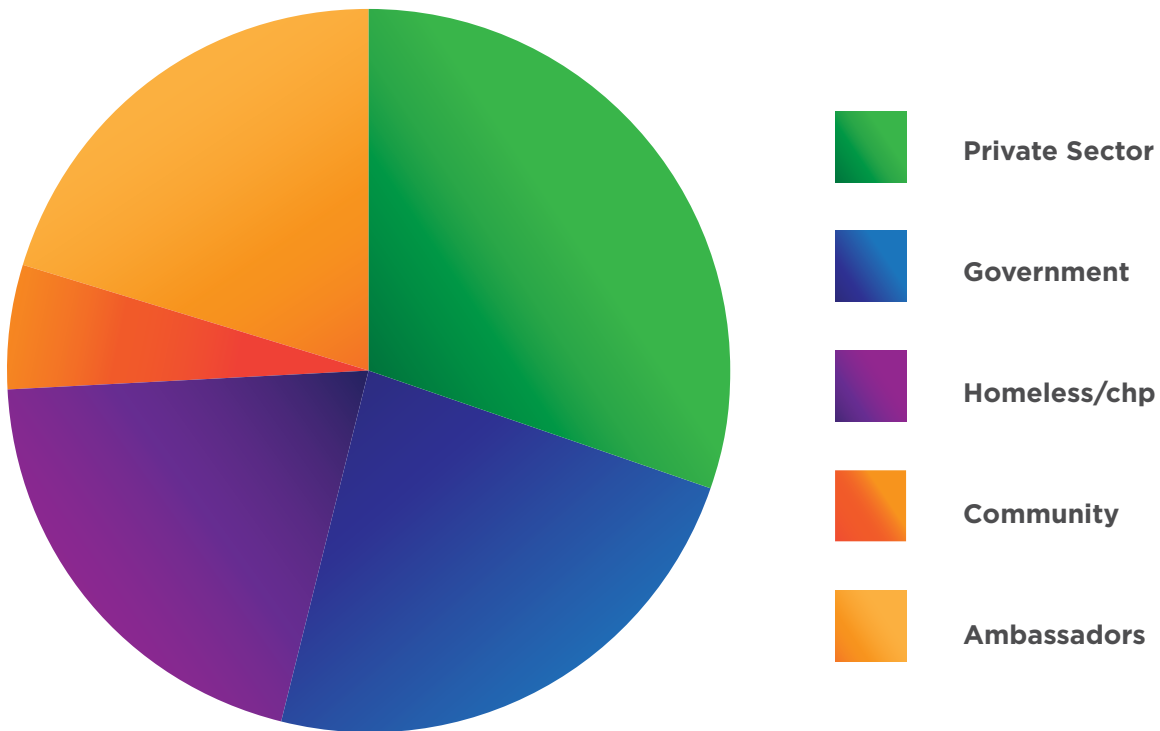
Local Members of Parliament were approached and played key roles at different times. To ensure people were able to commit, they were promised that the project would be time limited with a specified number of meetings. Wentworth was conscious that participation by the private sector took them away from their business and that across homelessness and community services resources were stretched.

The organisations who committed to coming on board the Project Group included:

- Wentworth Community Housing – Project Lead
- Mission Australia – Partner
- Platform Youth Services – Partner
- Penrith City Council
- Hawkesbury City Council
- Blue Mountains City Council
- Mountains Community Resource Network
- First National Stanton and Taylor Real Estate
- Donley Real Estate
- Rachael Goldsworthy Realty
- Theo Poulos Real Estate
- Mortgage Choice Blaxland (in an advisory role)
- Western Weekender (Media Group)
- Vintage FM (Media Group)
- Mercy Foundation (Registry Week Working Group)
- NBM FaCS (early stages of the project)
- Your Town (Registry Week Working Group)

This was an eclectic group of people who came from all walks of life, all wanting to make a difference, bringing their expertise to the table and contributing to resolving this contentious issue. Something of this magnitude had not happened before in the district. The people came from diverse professional backgrounds with different expectations. The thing that united them was their commitment to finding ways to help people who were homeless find a home and re-build their life.

Registry Week Involvement



Registry Weeks have been run before in Australia, so along with the people involved, there was great feedback and information on this aspect of the project from the Mercy Foundation, Micah Projects in Brisbane, the Ruah Project in Perth, Homelessness NSW, the Newcastle Registry Week Project in NSW and the Inner City of Sydney Registry Week Project.

These all informed the way that NBM Registry Week and the broader campaign rolled out. Heading Home - Ending Homelessness Here! is the first project to focus on Registry Week and look to generate local housing solutions through involvement of community, government and the private sector.

3. Project Co-ordinator's Role

With a successful application from the Mercy Foundation of \$50,000 grant, Wentworth was able to employ the Project Coordinator, Jo Robinson. Jo was a key person in the project. Jo's role included:

- Primary responsibility for coordination and roll-out of Nepean Registry Week 2016.
- Organising recruitment of volunteers and team leaders for Registry Week.
- Detailed Project Planning, execution of plans and regular reporting through the Project Group.
- Developing reports and articles for the Media Campaign in conjunction with the Media sub group.
- Developing promotional material with Ambassadors and project members to champion the project across the community and increase reach.
- Leading all Operational components of Registry Week.
- Assisting Mercy Foundation deliver training to registry week volunteers, including the use of VI-SPDAT.
- Coordinate Specialist Homelessness Services and mainstream agencies to respond with housing and support solutions for people with high VI-SPDAT scores.
- Encourage innovative responses from the Project group on housing solutions.

4. Project Group

To provide oversight, make decisions and set directions, the main Project Group was created and included representatives from each of the organisations described.

The Project Group met monthly, starting in June 2016 to coordinate the plans for Registry Week, establish and then hear back from working groups that were focused on different aspects of the project and make decisions about what direction the project would take. These were challenging meetings, where people had different points of view, disparate opinions, and needed time to find a common language, understand and trust each other. In talking with Greg Taylor he said he found the meetings really interesting, meeting people from such different walks of life was very stimulating. He also commented that the way they were run kept people engaged and on task without being boring. It ensured he came back again and again. Jeff Donley reflected Greg's opinion. He felt it was a great project, where he, as a real estate agent, could make a significant contribution, something he continues to do as different housing solutions are now being explored.

Through the overriding Project Group discussions, it was clear that it was vital to know whether the Heading Home project approach was an effective way to identify people who were homeless, offer them supports and where possible, housing options. As a result, Carolyn Quinn Consultancy was commissioned to do a comprehensive evaluation. Through the Evaluation, the Project Group tracks the difference the project is making in the community. The Evaluation also monitors individual client outcomes. Carolyn's work is underway and is separate to this report.

One of the critical notes about the Project Group representatives was that most were senior people who were in a position to make decisions without reference to even more senior people. It helped a great deal in progressing the project, whether that individual was a Senior Manager, a CEO or a Principal from a business, they were a competent decision making body so things happened quickly.

4.1 Project Working Groups

From the main decision making group, working groups were introduced to look at different aspects of the project and report back to the Project Group each month. There is no doubt this was a multi-layered project. The people on these groups included one or more members of the Project Group and also others who had expertise in the particular area. Each is briefly explored below.

4.1.1 Media Group

This time-limited group developed the branding and logo still in use today, graphics for project material, engaged newspapers to tell the story across the three LGAs, developed a Facebook page (still in use today), Twitter presence, conducted interviews on radio and over a dozen articles for newspapers and generally raised the profile of the project. It was recognised that having a media presence was critical to the success of the project. Without being able to let people know what was happening it was not going to succeed.

The project group tracks the difference the project is making in the community



In working cross sector it was important that project group tools were highly visual and immediately accessible to people from different backgrounds. Simple tools such as this, together with a suite of detailed Project Plans that sat behind it, kept everyone on track and on time.

4.1.2 Housing Solutions Working Group

A key component of the project was the Housing Solutions Working Group. There were new players around the table, including the leading real estate agents from all three communities joining homelessness services, state and local government representatives and the local community representatives including mortgage brokers. This was an important group where critical thinking was undertaken. As Jenny said “The group started with blue sky thinking for low cost housing solutions that won’t take years to get off the ground - we wanted to be nimble and take advantage of local community strengths and assets.”

There is a dearth of housing solutions in the community. Rather than seeing this as an obdurate problem, this Working Group sought out answers that were achievable, developing long term innovative housing solutions that could be permanent additions to the local housing sector. The group had to find another way to address the problem than social housing, recognising the solutions are not instantaneous and take a great deal of work to develop. Different people including Kris Newton from MCRN, Melissa McSeveny from Penrith City Council and Michael Laing from Hawkesbury Council were instrumental in bringing forward ideas early in the process. Though many ideas were discussed and eventually discarded, a range of other potential housing solutions were developed over several months and taken to Community Briefing sessions after Registry Week. These are explored later in the report.

4.1.3 Housing First

Housing for people experiencing homelessness was the most critical outcome in the project which is why there was such a strong emphasis on it in the Working Groups. “Housing First” is the model used by homelessness services to support people when they do get a home. It is based on the concept that a homeless individual or household’s first and primary need is to find stable housing and other issues that may affect the household can and should be addressed once housing is obtained. Support services are wrapped around the person or family to support them sustain the tenancy and rebuild their life.

In contrast, many other programs operate from a model of “housing readiness,” that is an individual or household must address other issues that may have led to the episode of homelessness prior to being housed. The Housing First model is quite clear and simple: when people are homeless, give them housing first - a stable home, rather than progressing them through several levels of temporary and transitional accommodation. Having a home can make solving health and social problems much easier.

Housing First underpins all parts of the project. However, as Jo so persuasively said :

“Implementing Housing First challenges us to find proper housing options. It should go without saying that you can’t offer homeless people homes if the homes do not exist.”

This was a sobering but clear thought that kept the intent of the project always in the forefront of any debate.

4.1.3 Registry Week Working Group

Registry Week was the week that involved volunteer recruitment and training for the screening tool the VI-SPDAT, interviewing people who were homeless and subsequent data collection. These steps all happened over five days. This occurred from 28 October to 3 November 2016. Three follow up community briefings happened after this week.

The Registry Week Working Group was key. It was the hub of Registry Week planning. In that sense it was a traditional working group that planned, organised and implemented the complexity that was Registry Week. It was made up with staff from local homelessness services, staff from City Councils, the Mercy Foundation and Homelessness NSW and met regularly in the lead up to the event to ensure its smooth running. Vesna Kapetanovic from Penrith City Council and Michael Laing from Hawkesbury Council were stand out participants, working with other Divisions in the Councils and unearthing maps that were extremely useful in identifying where people may be sleeping; all part of the planning process. Together with the homelessness services, they reflected the comprehensive input that many people had in this

process to help make it work. Additionally valuable input was also sourced from the coordinators of the City of Sydney and Newcastle Registry Weeks.

Other key players for planning Registry Week and subsequently involved with the implementation were Felicity Reynolds, CEO of Mercy Foundation and her Manager of Projects and Communication, Sue Mowbray. Felicity and Sue were extremely helpful in providing support, advice and guidance to this group and also to the Project Group.

Felicity and Sue also facilitated the training for volunteers and coordinated the data entry when information came in at Registry Week and liaised with Micah Projects who produced the Information Sheet following Registry Week. Felicity also brought valuable insights from previous Registry Weeks that was of great benefit to the project. Their commitment and involvement cannot be underestimated.

“Implementing Housing First challenges us to find proper housing options”

5. Three Local Government Areas

One of the fundamental elements that distinguished this project from others was that the project addressed the matter of identifying people who were homeless across three large local government areas (LGAs), at one time. It meant that there were three distinct planning areas, and in fact because of the size and nature of the Blue Mountains, there ended up being four planning areas for Registry Week.

When designing the project it was understood that including all three LGAs was imperative for Wentworth and its partners. This is the Nepean Blue Mountains district, where agencies who work in the area, give their attention to all the three LGAs. It could have been a simpler, easier exercise to focus on only one LGA at a time, but given the enthusiasm and community commitment it was recognized that it could be achieved. As Jenny explained here was no problem in attracting volunteers in each LGA, venues were readily available for training and coordination and site coordinators willing to commit in each area. It was a logistical challenge to manage the rostering of volunteers and deliver training across the three LGAs but it was accomplished with aplomb and little issue.

...including all three LGAs was imperative for Wentworth and its partners.





6. Launches

With all this background work proceeding, it was imperative to officially launch the project and invite the local communities. Any opportunity to raise the profile was seized. There were three major events when it was launched in the Blue Mountains, Penrith and Hawkesbury. It helped to encourage others in the community and broaden the commitment to the process.

At each Launch event participants were asked to make a pledge to become involved in whatever way they could and raise the profile of the project. It led to a range of contributions of goods and services to support people who were homeless and engage with the project generally. People lined up at the Launches, subsequent Community Briefings and on the website to pledge their support.

Seventy six pledges came in from state and federal politicians, local Mayors and Councillors, real estate agents and business owners, and regular members of the public. The pledges ranged from raising awareness and busting myths about homelessness to offers from agents to recommend a person/family exiting homelessness for a property to 10 free pest inspections, health care packs and an offer of a rental property! People proudly held up their pledges in photos that appeared across social media and local press. As Jo explained: “Through this initiative Heading Home highlighted that everyone across the community had a role to play in Ending Homelessness Here!”



7. Ambassadors

At each launch there was an Ambassador, a local community person who had a strong commitment to the project and was able to raise its profile and advocate for it when required.

In the Blue Mountains it was local state parliamentary member Trish Doyle, who subsequently highlighted the issue in the NSW Parliament, in Hawkesbury it was Brodie Druett, a Wentworth Board member and in Penrith it was Tanya Davies who at the time was the Parliamentary Secretary for Homelessness and Councillor Karen McKeown, Mayor of Penrith City Council. They each brought personal reflections around homelessness and made a significant contribution to the launch and to the project.



The project was also able to engage local identity Mark Geyer as an Ambassador who did a short video without charge, the editing and development of the video was also free. The project has an Ambassador who through his own commitment was able to engender support from others, and importantly the focus on the important message of the longer term intent of ending homelessness as distinct from just managing it.

Perhaps most importantly, one of Wentworth's clients, Bill Temple, was prepared to tell his story. Through his short video, Bill became the face of homelessness in the project. He made it real for people in being able to show the difference that stable housing makes. Bill made a significant contribution



as an Ambassador. The video was shown at each of the Launches. There was no doubt Bill's story ensured that many participants became absorbed by what was happening and were then prepared to be actively engaged with the project.

The point about this process was there many donations, community awareness was raised and acted upon, which ensured there was a coordinated response to people who were homeless in the NBM district. It demonstrated that people care and that community members want to be involved in the solution to homelessness, they just needed a focused way to do it. In retrospect it was an extraordinary project and the consequences are now being felt in a positive and life affirming way.

8. Registry Week Rollout

In order to identify people who were homeless and understand their health and housing needs, Registry Week was important to get a real picture of each person, who they were, where they were living, to understand their level of vulnerability, prioritise people for assistance and to start supporting people to find housing. Registry Week was a vital step in the project.

Registry Week was conducted from Friday 28 October to Thursday 3 November 2016. The first 3 days were the training sessions for the volunteers, the second three days were when the interviews were conducted. As explained, this Registry Week was unique in that the three local government areas (LGAs) were canvassed at once: Blue Mountains, Penrith and the Hawkesbury. Each LGA is geographically diverse from each other, encompassing bushland, semi-rural and suburban areas. For this reason there were four coordination Areas based in Penrith, Windsor, Springwood and Katoomba.

The local Area Coordinators were recruited to oversee operations and the safety of volunteers in each Area. Rod Campbell-Ross and Marilyn Kenney from Mountains Youth Support Team coordinated the Blue Mountains Areas, Vesna Kapetanovic coordinated Penrith and Kailene Adams and Jo Robinson coordinated Hawkesbury. The volunteers worked in teams of three with a team leader regularly reporting into the Area Coordinator. The Area Coordinators reported to the Project Coordinator, Jo Robinson. The chain of command was clear and precise and everyone knew their roles.

Thanks to the widespread media coverage and community engagement activities seventy five volunteer were attracted, thirty of whom came from the general public and outside the homelessness services. There were TAFE and university students, FaCS workers, staff from the three City Councils and specialist homelessness services, people from community organisations and groups and others who just wanted to do their part for the community.

8.1 Training

To train the volunteers about their personal safety and the delivery of the Interview tool, the VI-SPDAT, three training sessions with the assistance of the Mercy Foundation and Micah Projects were run. As well as learning how to deliver the VI-SPDAT to highly vulnerable people as safely as possible, the sessions gave volunteers the opportunity to meet their team mates and plan for the next few days challenge.

8.1.1 What is the VI-SPDAT survey tool that was used?

The Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT)

The Registry Week methodology was developed in the USA during the 100,000 Homes campaign and has been used successfully in Canada and Europe.

Micah Projects in Brisbane brought the methodology to Australia and carried out the first Australian Registry Week in 2010 with the 50 Lives 50 Homes campaign. Registry Week has since been held in numerous locations across Australia, including City of Sydney, Perth, Newcastle and Sutherland.

The VI-SPDAT is an evidence informed tool used during Registry Week to prioritise those who are experiencing homelessness using structured interview questions. It is made up of two components:

- The Vulnerability Index (VI) and
- The Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT).

The Vulnerability Index was developed by Dr Jim O’Connell and Dr Stephen Hwang of Boston’s Health Care for the Homeless, and pinpoints health problems that are most

likely to lead to someone dying while living on the street. The SPDAT was developed by Iain de Jong of Org Code, and uses an acuity score to prioritise those most in need of assistance. Org Code and Community Solutions brought the two tools together during the 100,000 Homes campaign.

The Acuity level determines the speed at which response is required. It is a screening tool that measures vulnerability and gives a rating of High, Medium and Low so assistance can be prioritised.

Acuity	Need	Acuity Score
High	Need permanent assistance with housing and support services to end their homelessness	10 or more
Medium	Need brief and shallow support to tend their homelessness	5-9
Low	Need access to affordable housing to exit homelessness on their own	0-4



8.2 Registry Week Implementation

Originally the start time was to be 4.30 am as in previous projects, and it was adjusted to 5am, to ensure the safety of teams going out into the bush or rural areas. There were also day teams to attend high risk areas, food services and Temporary Accommodation, along with a midnight shift team at Mount Victoria railway station to meet the last train.

The volunteers, in 19 teams, covered over 72 identified locations of where people were either currently staying, or had in the past. These included cars, riverbanks, parks, grandstands, drop in centres, train stations, stairwells, carparks, bushland, and camping grounds. Refuges were also approached. The media team ensured good coverage of the project and helped attract many of community volunteers and gain information about where people could be found.

8.2.1 How did they know where to look?

Information also came in from National Parks and Wildlife Rangers, Council Rangers, street based food services, neighbourhood centres, homelessness Services, local City Councils, NSW Police, railway station staff and other concerned community members. These locations were expanded upon with more information coming in from the community as the week got under way. With a land area totaling more than 4614km² it was not possible to scour the entire area, therefore information from the community was vital to ensure maximum coverage.

8.3 What happened in Registry Week?

When talking with Jo she explained Registry Week was a real success in terms of the process itself. The training across three sessions worked well. One session happened at the weekend in Penrith to attract people who could not attend through the week, another in the Blue Mountains occurred at night after work, and the third in the Hawkesbury happened the day before it began. Jo explained “the training got people inspired.”

There was a strict safety protocol developed based on experiences of other sites and from learnings from overseas. Volunteers were required to call in regularly to co-ordinators and they did not go out alone, but with a trained case worker. Interestingly Jo had been to the Newcastle Registry Week, just a few weeks before the NBM one, and she said one of the biggest learnings was not to start too early. The intention was to talk with people before they move on in the day. In the City of Sydney for example, homeless people often leave the place they sleep very early or are moved on, so it was important there that they started their interviews around 4.30 am.

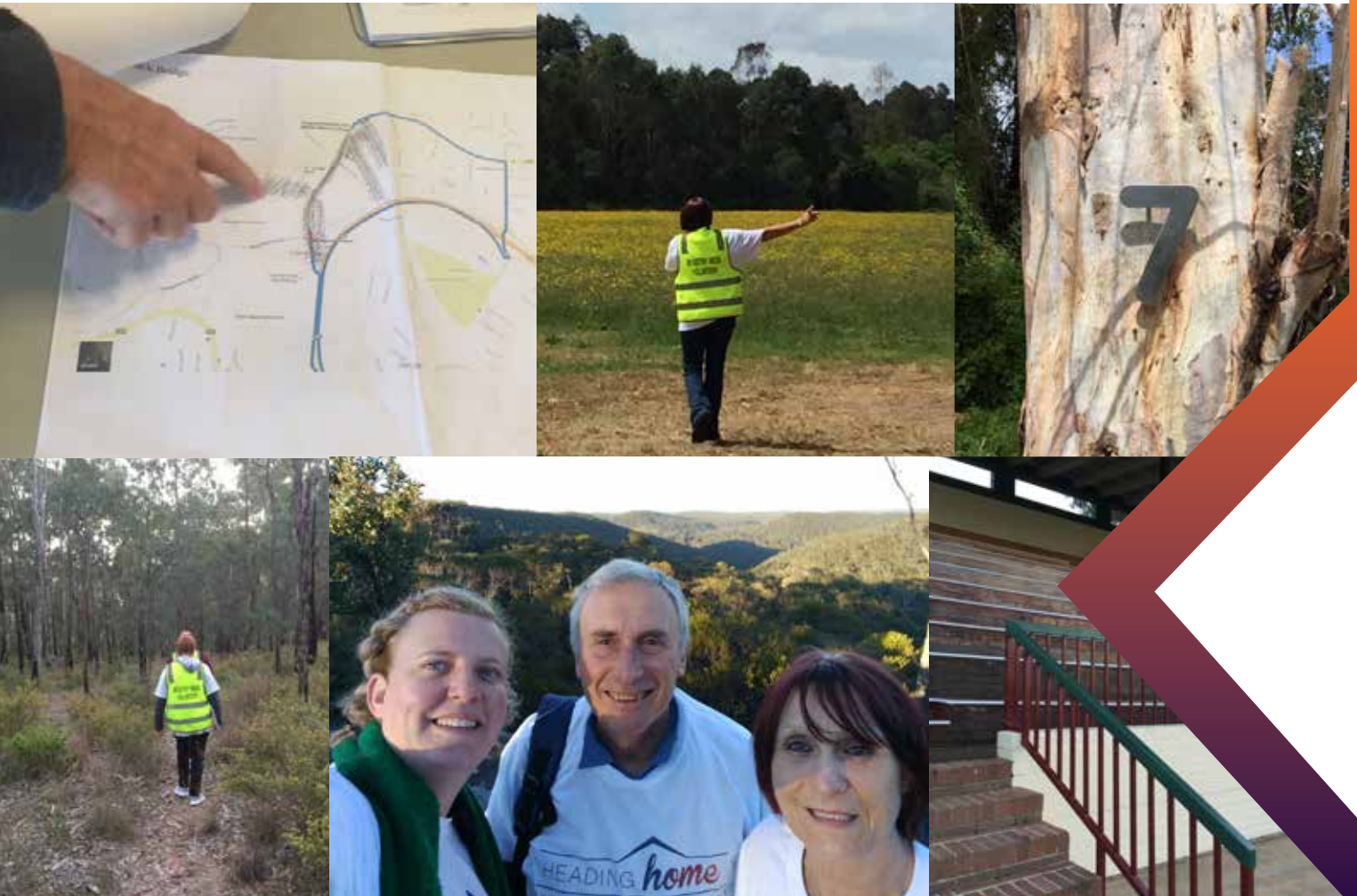
In the NBM district, it was a considered a safety issue not to trample through the bush whilst it was still dark, and some of the people were tucked away in remote parts of the bush area. Waking them up at 4.30 was not a very good idea. As a result, the NBM interviews started half an hour later, as the sun came up.

“Everyone was committed, volunteers were enthusiastic”

People who were homeless were offered a breakfast pack and \$15 to thank them for their time. Volunteers also enjoyed a breakfast at the end of the three days conducting interviews and informal feedback suggests they enjoyed the experience and were glad to be involved.

Jo said when asked what worked well was that *“Everyone was committed, volunteers were enthusiastic. Even in the lower mountains they did not meet a single person but remained involved and enthusiastic over the three days.”*

She said it was a logistical exercise (to put it mildly) to ensure all the VI-SPDAT forms were returned on time to be entered into the data base, so the picture that was captured was correct. Having four sites meant timing was critical. Katoomba’s surveys were scanned and sent down to Penrith to ensure timeliness. Data entry was carried out under Felicity’s direction and supported by staff from both Wentworth and Mission Australia. It reflects the extraordinary commitment from a range of organisations that it was so successful.



9. Registry Week Results

This report is based on the findings from 1st November 2016 to 3rd November 2016.

There were 91 people interviewed during Registry Week including 12 families and a further 44 people were identified who either chose not to participate or could not be woken, totalling 135 people experiencing homelessness across the week. Of those people 49 were unknown to any of the homelessness services.

So far half of those people interviewed during Registry Week have been housed in a range of social housing accommodation and private rental options. More is needed to be done and this is where the possible housing solutions will come into their own. The project was different from anything done before in the district – not only a Registry Week, but a partnership to challenge community views and generate ideas for innovative housing solutions. This means that other solutions are being tried to develop accommodation for people who are homeless. This is not simple or easy and takes time.

Registry Week was a snapshot in time over three days that targeted rough sleepers who are a particularly vulnerable group of the homeless population. It is important to know that the number of people experiencing homelessness over a year is much higher and growing. Between Wentworth, Platform and Mission Australia in the Nepean Blue Mountains district, caseworkers supported 1,068 people experiencing homelessness, and a further 1,626 people to stay in their homes in the 2016-17 financial year.

9.1 What were the results?

9.1.1 Registry Week Profile across the Nepean Blue Mountains whole district

- 79 Individual VI-SPDAT respondents + 12 Family VI-SPDAT respondents = 91 total respondents. This is higher than reported at the Community Briefings which followed Registry Week due to 13 extra VI-SPDATs being conducted during Registry Week but not making the cut off for the data analysis used in the district level Fact Sheet and Community Briefings
- A further 44 people were identified as being homeless but either declined or could not be woken to participate in Registry Week

Refusals

There were 44 people identified but not interviewed comprised of:

17 refusals from teams on the street

Penrith – 7

Hawkesbury – 5

BM – 5

10 unable to woken – mostly people in cars

Penrith – 2

Hawkesbury – 4

BM – 4

17 extra refusals were from clients currently receiving a service from an SHS or on the waiting list.

The following information covers a subset of VI-SPDAT domains.

Gender

31 of the VI-SPDAT respondents were female (34%), 60 were male (66%)

Cultural Identity

- 21 people identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or both (23%)
- 5 people identified as Maori or New Zealander or both (5%)
- There were less than 4 or zero for other cultural identities

Sexual Orientation

13 people identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (14%)

Years Spent Homeless

91 people had spent approximately 232 years homeless – an average of 2.5 years per respondent

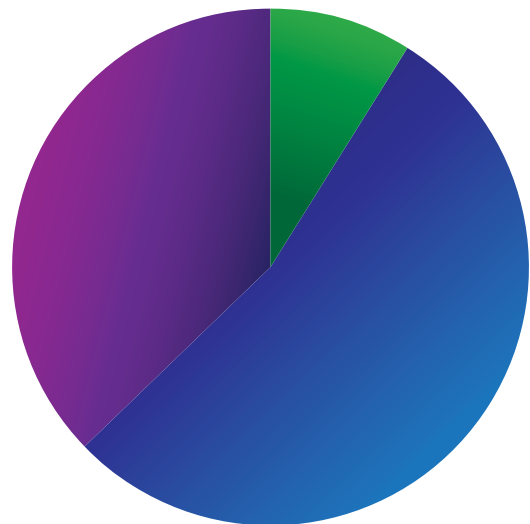
Sleep Location



- **Sleeping Rough 55%**
- **Family & Friends 14%**
- **Temp or Crisis 21%**
- **Other 10%**

Acuity

Acuity under the VI-SPDAT is described as the promptness at which response is required. It is a screening tool that measures vulnerability and gives a rating of High, Medium and low so assistance can be prioritised. In this project the following results occurred.



- **Low 9%**
- **Medium 54%**
- **High 37%**

Acuity speaks to the severity of the presenting issue. Higher acuity represents more complex, co-occurring issues that are likely to impact overall housing stability. The scores for each individual or family fall within 3 categories of high, medium and low.

Those with a high acuity score were people who had multiple issues and were highly vulnerable. People with a high acuity were the first people that homelessness services responded to with support to address immediate safety and then to focus on finding stable housing and assistance to deal with health and other issues impacting on vulnerability and housing stability..

Health System Usage across the Nepean Blue Mountains District

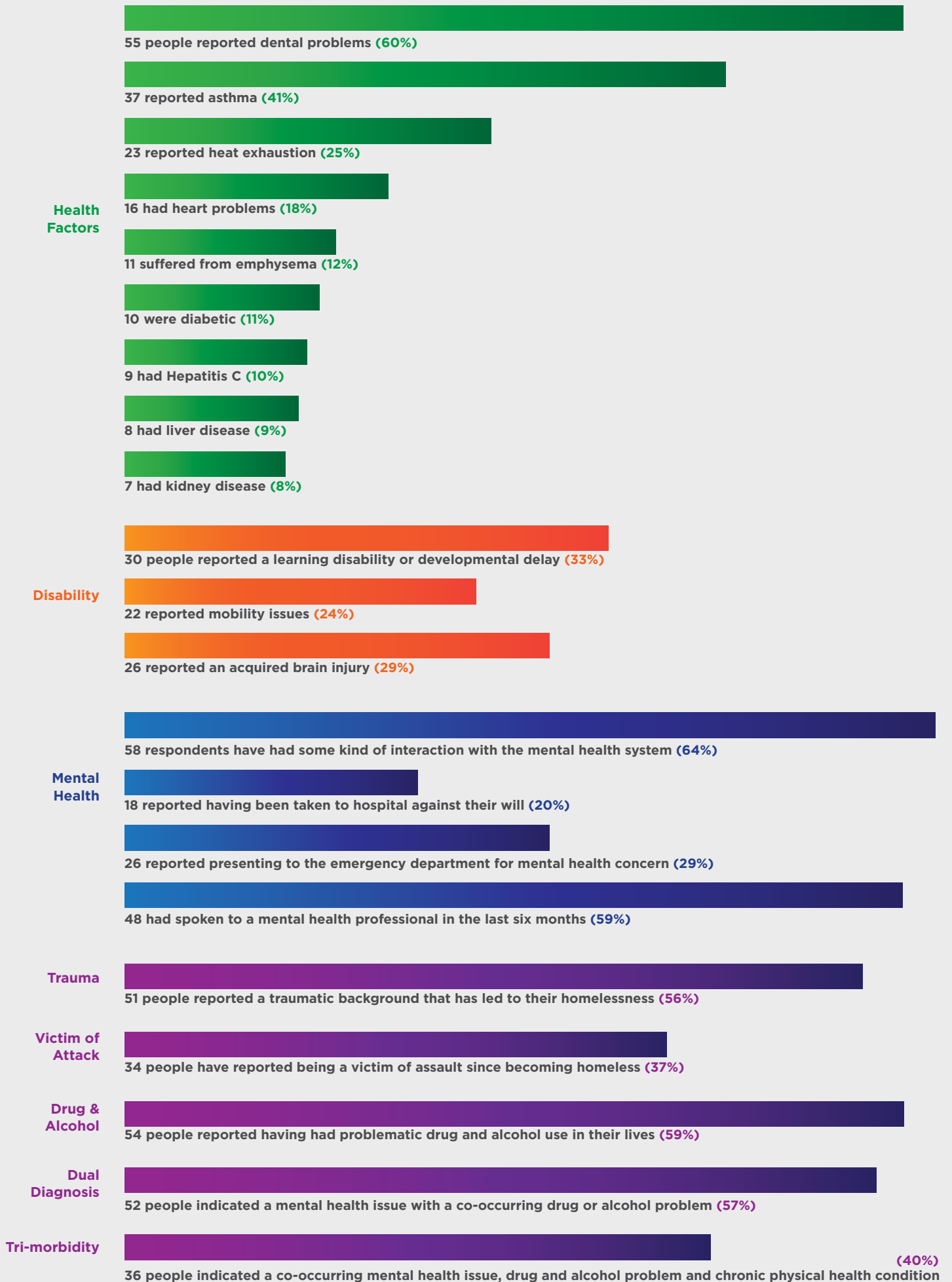
The people interviewed had increased health issues compared to the general population, of particular concern are those health issues that are directly impacted and exacerbated by homelessness. People interviewed also had a significant use of acute health services such as ambulance and emergency department as well as hospital admissions. These levels of vulnerability and use of acute services has a significant impact on both the local health services and the ongoing distress and trauma experienced by each person.

	Emergency Department Admissions	Ambulance Transport	Hospitalisation	Total
Number of Individuals	40	20	27	41
Percentage of total respondents	45%	22%	30%	45%
Total number of incidents	132	43	46	221
Cost to Health System	\$34,320	\$34,701	\$230,138	\$299,159

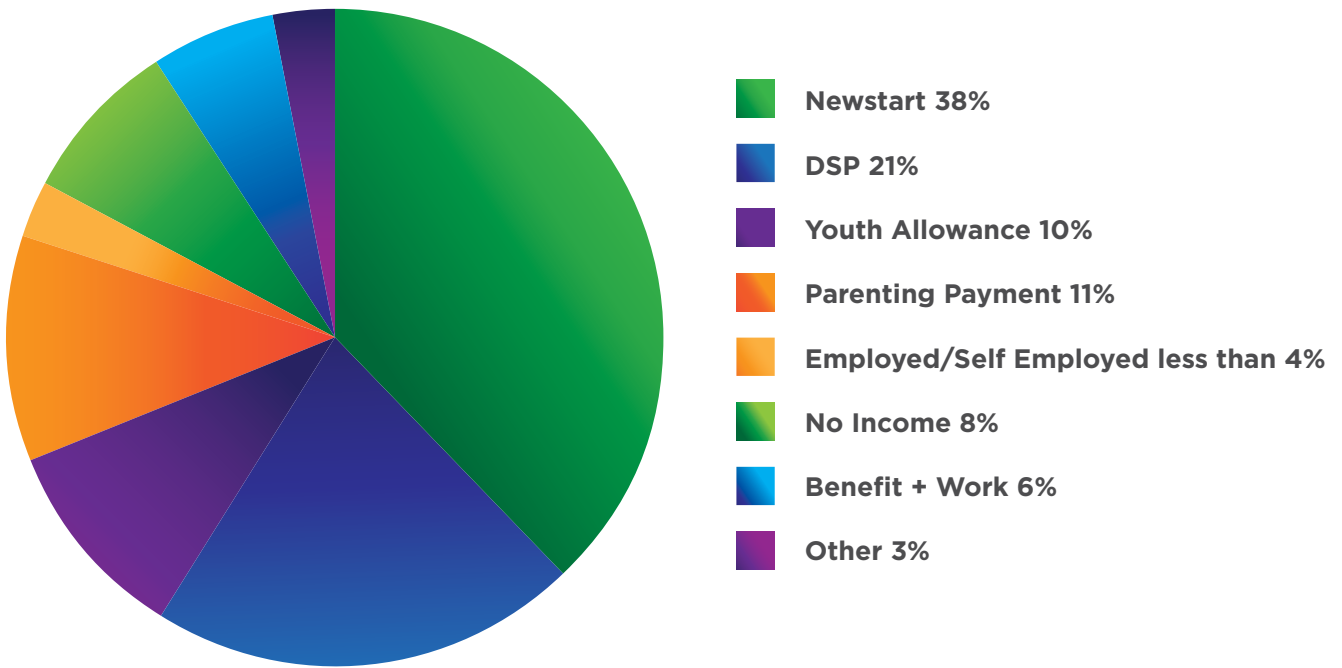
The cost of homelessness across the district to hospital services alone was \$299,159 for the 91 people surveyed, in the six months prior to Registry Week taking place. In just 6 months, homelessness cost the district over a quarter of a million dollars in acute health care alone.

*Costs for inpatient hospitalisation and A&E visit are from the Productivity Commission report on Government Services, 2015 (NSW costs).

*Cost for ambulance transport taken from average ambulance transportation cost NIB January 2015 (excluding Tas and Qld).



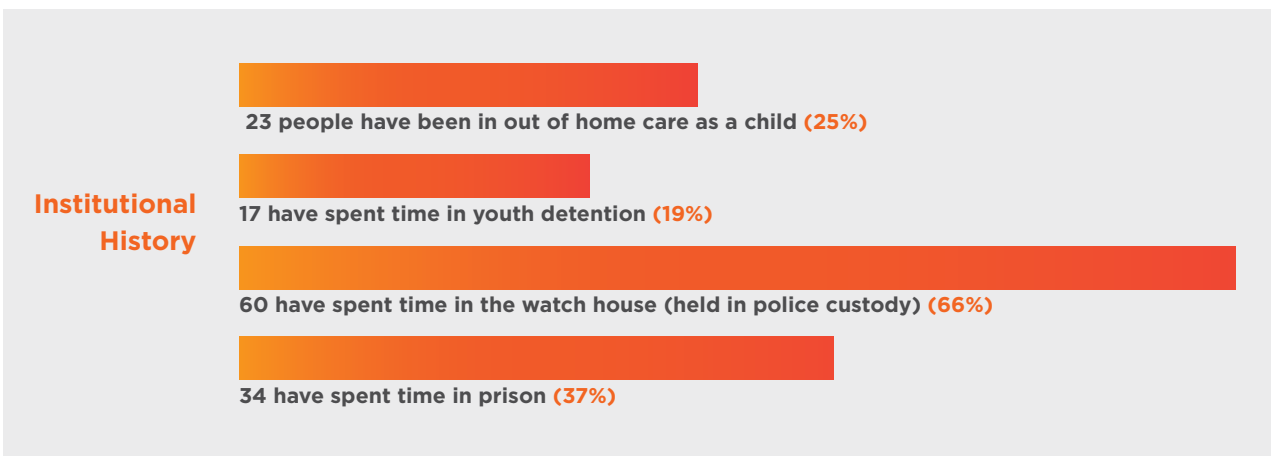
Income



Median Rents per week

	Penrith	Hawkesbury	Blue Mountains
One bedroom unit	\$280	\$265	\$260
Two bedroom unit	\$325	\$335	\$353
Two bedroom house	\$350	\$370	\$380
Three bedroom house	\$430	\$450	\$450

*taken from NSW Family & Community Services Housing, Sales and Rent Report, March quarter 2017



Interactions with Police

64 people had a total of 917 interactions with the police in the last 6 months - an average of 14 interactions per person

9.2 Local Government Areas

Nada Nasser from Nash Partners prepared the local government area results from the district results. Each of the LGA results are outlined separately.

9.2.1 Registry Week Profile in Penrith

- 47 Individual VI-SPDAT respondents + 7 Family VI-SPDAT respondents = 54 total respondents

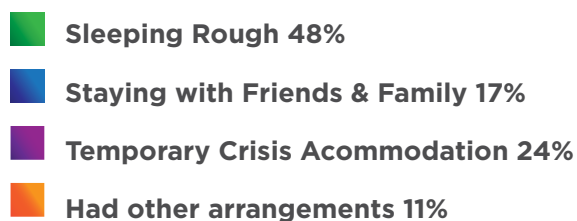
Penrith Gender - 22 Penrith respondents were female (41%) and 32 were male (59%)

Penrith Identity -14 people identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or both (26%)

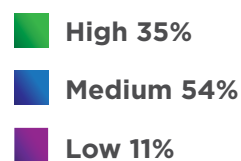
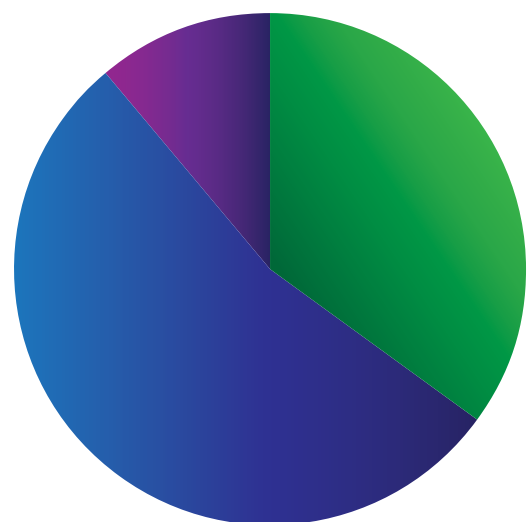
Penrith Sexual Orientation - 11 people identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (20%)

Penrith Years Spent Homeless - 54 respondents had spent approximately 126 years homeless - an average of 2.3 years per respondent

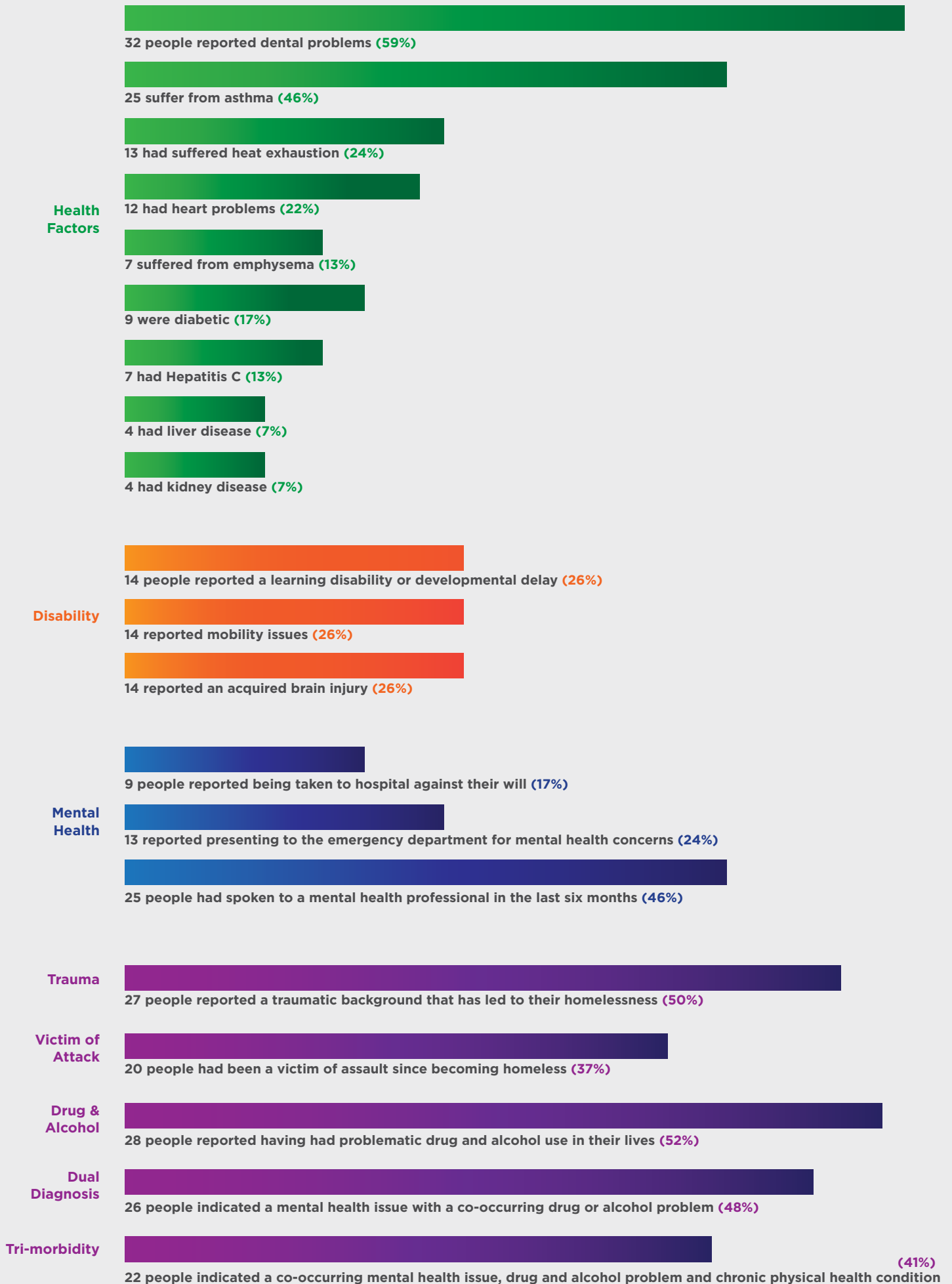
Penrith Sleep Locations



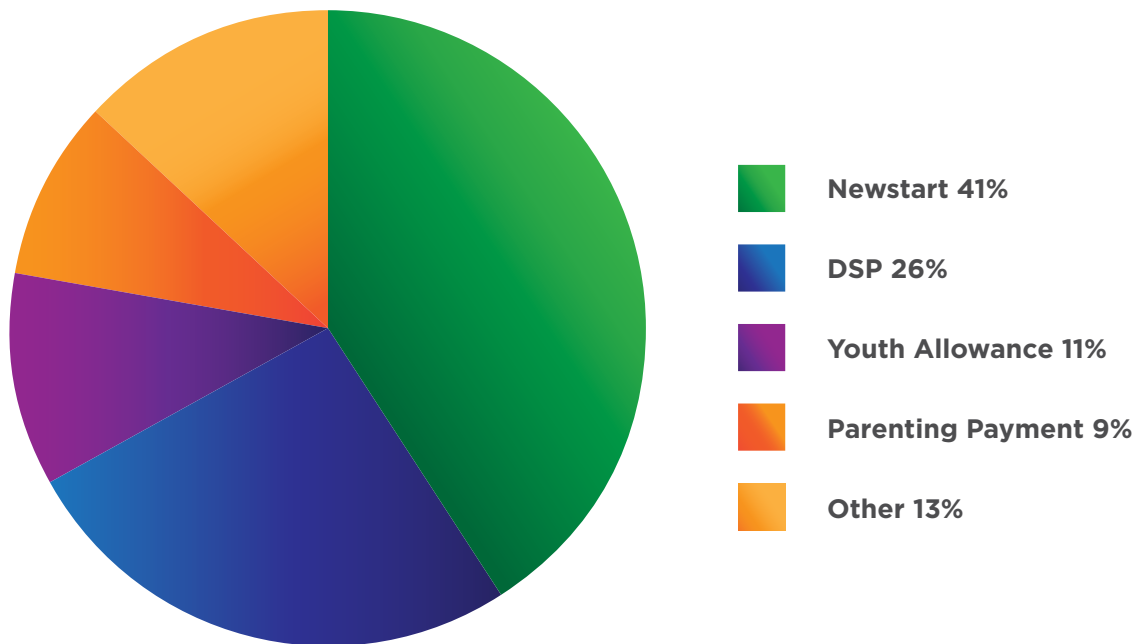
Penrith Acuity



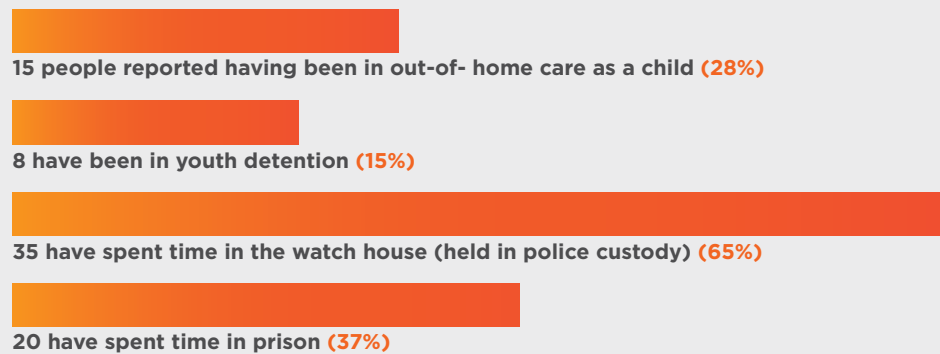
Penrith Statistics



Penrith Income



Penrith Institutional History



Penrith Interactions with Police

38 people reported 771 police interactions in the last six months – averaging 20 interactions per person

9.2.2 Registry Week Profile in the Hawkesbury

- 22 Individual VI-SPDAT respondents + 2 Family VI-SPDAT respondents = 24 total respondents

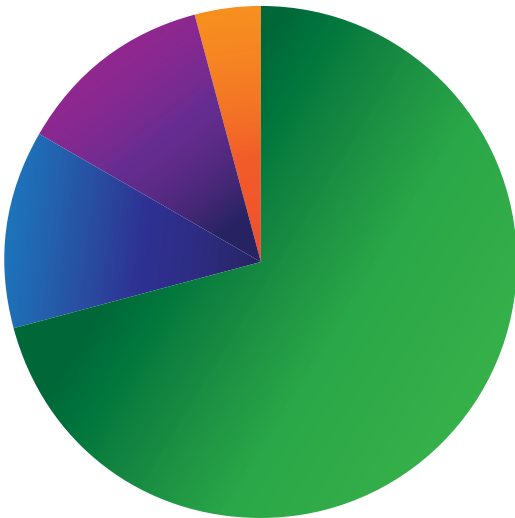
Hawkesbury Gender - 4 VI-SPDAT respondents were female (17%) and 20 were male (83%)

Hawkesbury Identity - 6 people identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or both (25%)

Hawkesbury Sexual Orientation - Less than 4 people identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual

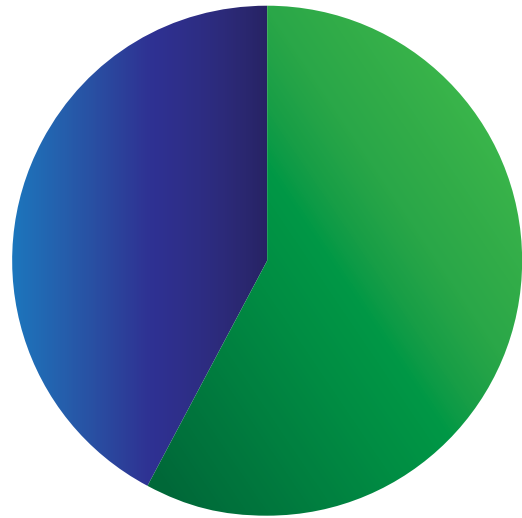
Hawkesbury Years Spent Homeless - 24 respondents had spent approximately 92.75 years homeless - an average of 3.9 years per respondent. This is well above the average 2.5 years across the district.

Hawkesbury Sleep Locations



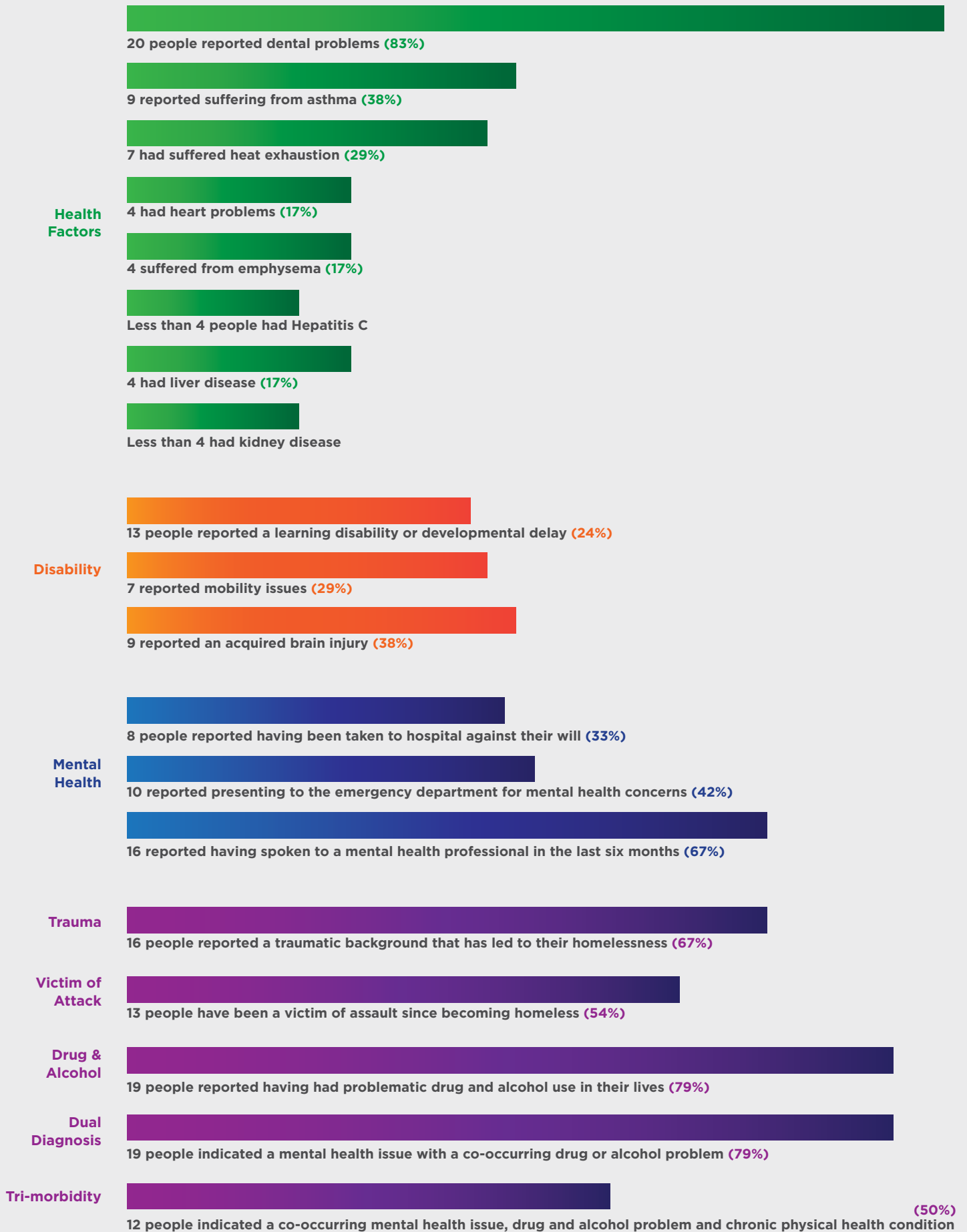
- Sleeping Rough 71%
- Family & Friends 12.5%
- Temp or Crisis 12.5%
- Other 4%

Hawkesbury Acuity

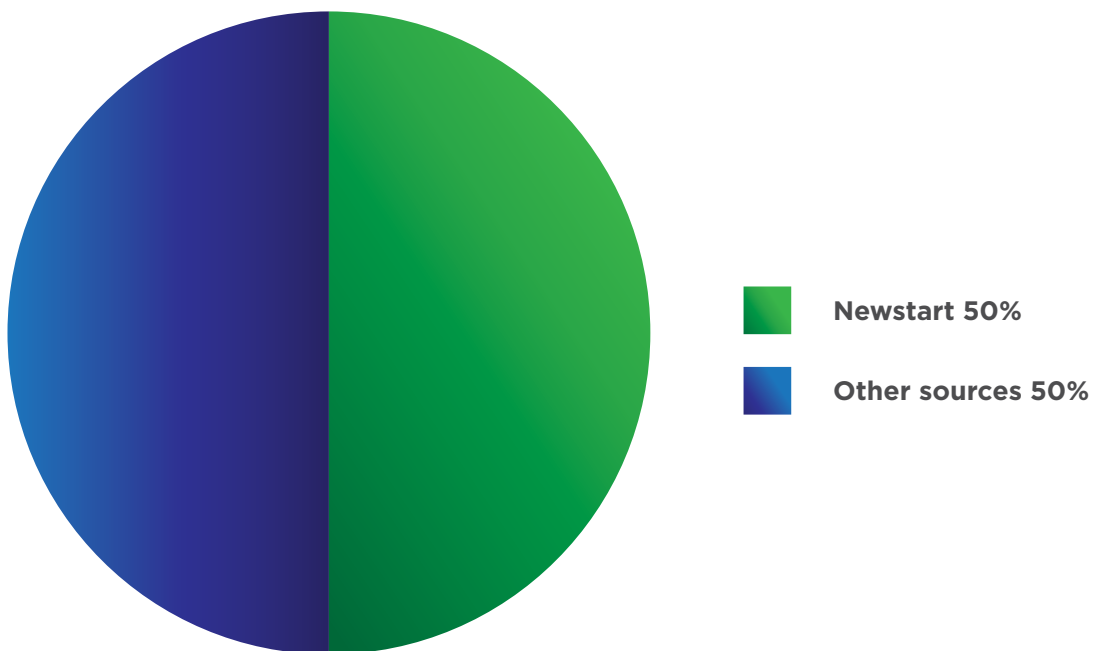


- High 58%
- Medium 42%

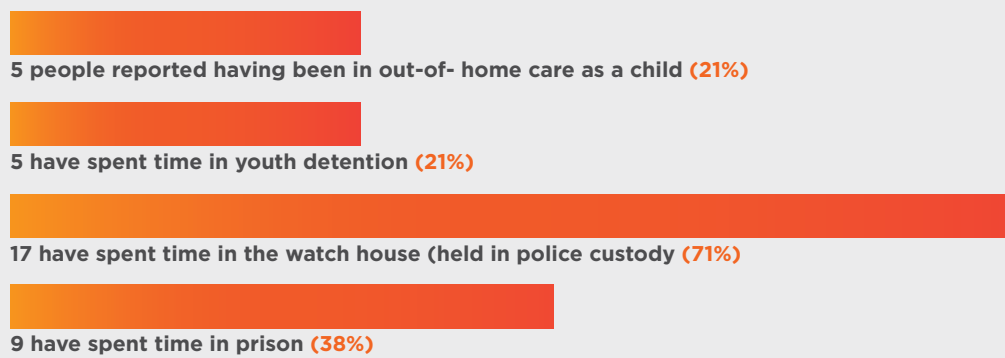
Hawkesbury Statistics



Hawkesbury Income



Hawkesbury Institutional History



Hawkesbury Interactions with Police

18 people reported 122 interactions – averaging 7 interactions per person

9.2.3 Registry Week Results in the Blue Mountains

• 10 Individual VI-SPDAT respondents + 3 Family VI-SPDAT respondents = 14 total respondents

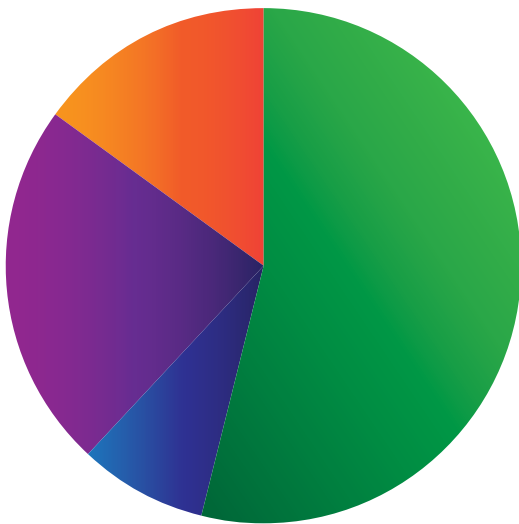
Blue Mountains Gender - 5 VI-SPDAT respondents were female (38%) and 9 were male (62%)

Blue Mountains Identity - Less than 4 people identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or both

Blue Mountains Sexual Orientation - Less than 4 people identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual

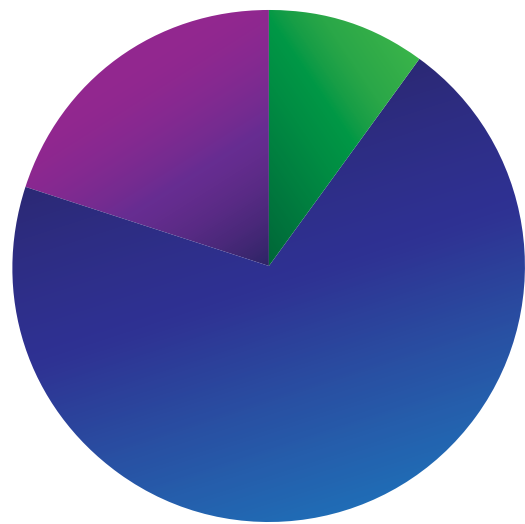
Blue Mountains Years Spent Homeless - 13 respondents had spent approximately 12.85 years homeless - an average of 1 year per respondent. This is well below the average 2.5 years across the district.

Blue Mountains Sleep Locations



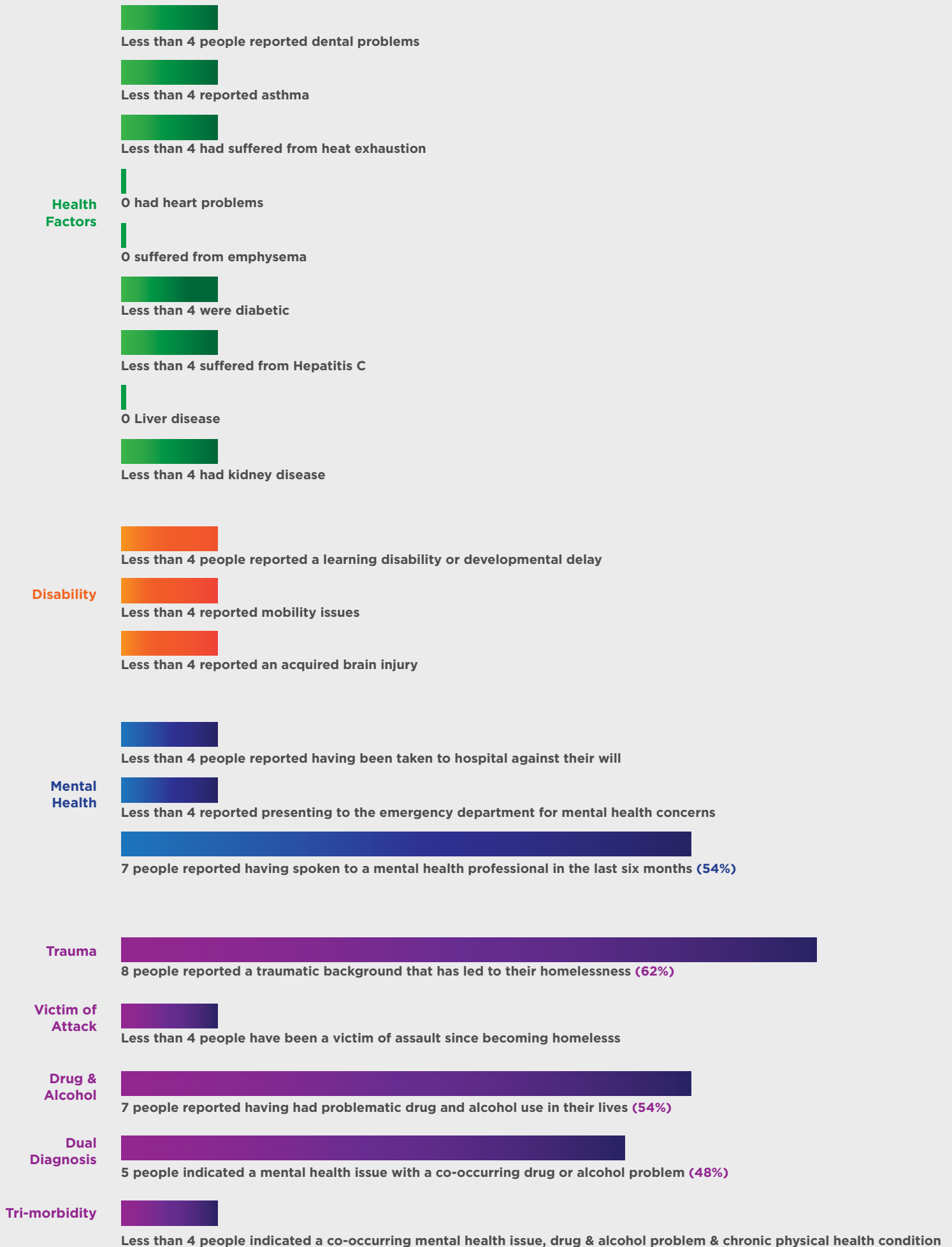
- Sleeping rough 54%
- Family & Friends 8%
- Temp or Crisis 23%
- Other 15%

Blue Mountains Acuity

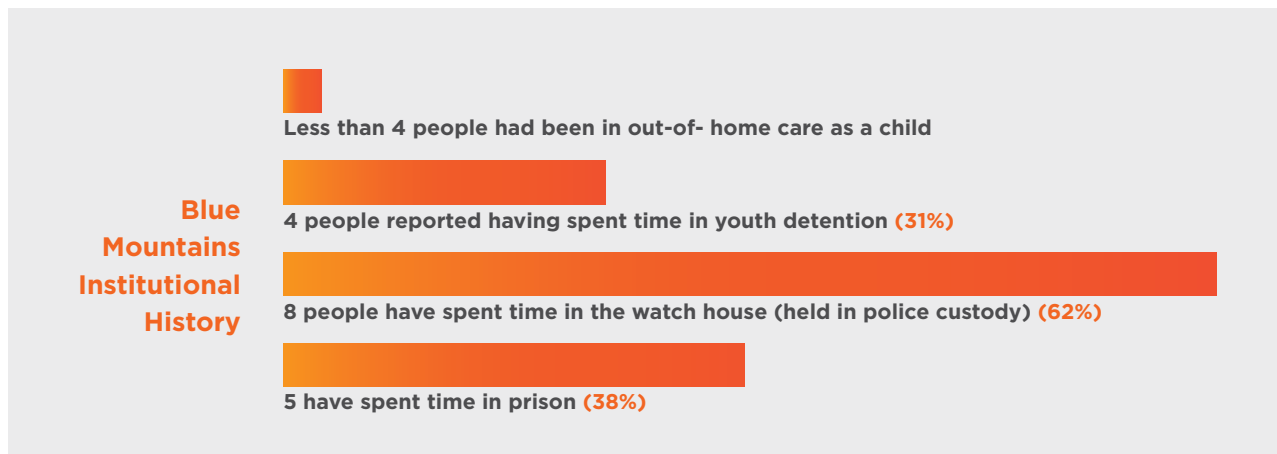
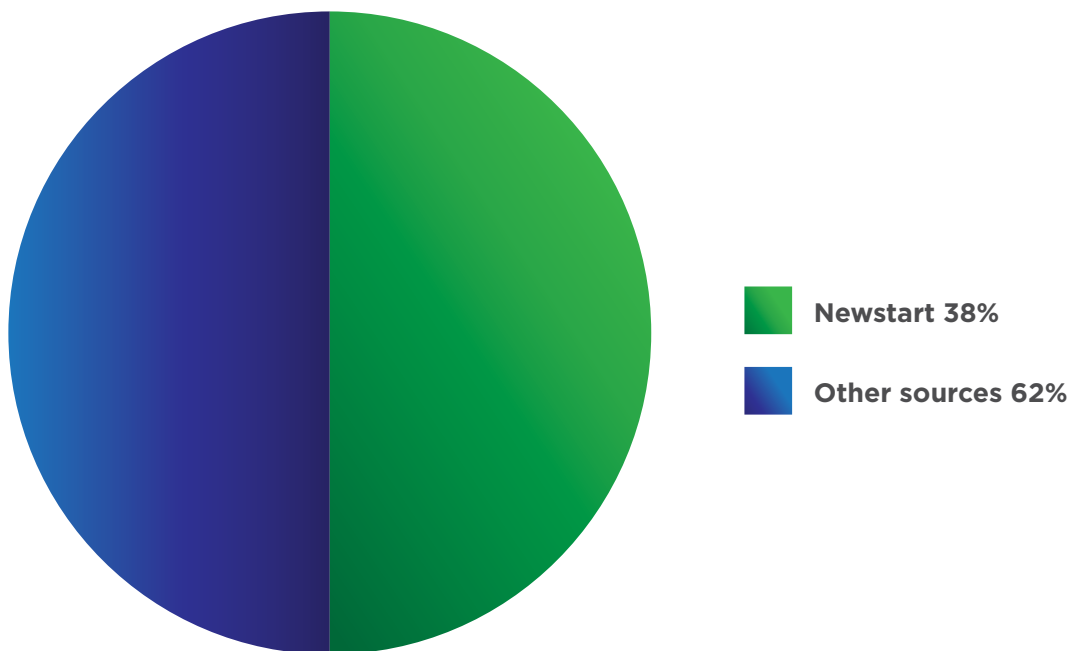


- High
- Medium
- Low

Blue Mountains Statistics



Blue Mountains Income



Blue Mountains Interactions with Police

8 people reported 24 interactions – averaging 3 interactions per person

10. Community Briefings

At the conclusion of Registry Week the data was collated and results were delivered to each of the local communities in the subsequent weeks. There had been three launches, three different training sessions and of course Registry Week occurred in the three LGAs. Initially one briefing was scheduled at the end of Registry Week, but as there had been such a strong commitment from the beginning it was decided with Stephen's support to have the three feedback sessions.

Jo sent invitations to everyone who came to the launches and other people who became involved as the project was underway. As she said there were the greatest number of people at the Penrith session with less at the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains sessions, though given their size it is appropriate. At the sessions the local results were given to the participants but as Jo explained Jenny was keen for it "...not to just be a talkfest. She wanted to continue the community momentum and involvement."

A World Café was held during the briefing where participants, with their cup of tea, were rotated through four groups. They were given information from the Housing Solutions Working Group who had developed a range of ideas for new housing options. It was exciting, creative and as previously explained the work of this group occurred along side all the planning and activities that went into Registry Week.

The ideas from the Housing Solutions Working Group were refined into priorities, and tested through the workshops. They were asked:

- Could this idea work in our community? What resources are in our community that could help?
- Could you be involved?
- Who else should be involved?
A range of ideas were presented and those with most community support were
- A Tiny Homes Pilot project on vacant Council or Church land
- Encourage home owners to build garden flats for low cost housing
- Employ a Housing Locator to access secondary housing markets
- A Pay it Forward program to furnish a home and a home visiting program to connect people with their local community



10.1 Options

From there the ideas have been further refined and there are two that are currently being pursued as a priority for the next stage of Heading Home.

10.1.1 Tiny Homes

Tiny Homes is the housing solution which most caught the imagination from the World Café process. Over 80 people voted for a Tiny Homes Pilot Project and there has been great community support following media on the proposal and interest from local City Councils.

Given the support, the Tiny Home movement was investigated to learn from overseas experiences. A report was commissioned to explore its evolution with recommendations on how to develop it. The Project Group having read the report were not phased despite the amount of work and good will that would be required to get it off the ground.

The Project Group representatives lead by Jenny, Jo, Greg and Kris then connected with the Tiny Homes Foundation who is establishing the first Tiny Homes Homelessness Project in Australia at Gosford.

With the support from Wentworth Board and CEO, the Project Group is now seeking land on which to develop a pilot project and funding to carry out the build. It is a big “out of the box” endeavour but one with real promise and potential to significantly address the problem of homelessness in the NBM region.

10.1.2 Garden Flat Expo

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 to generate income for their family. Over the next year the business sector will be engaged to come on board and hold an Expo to encourage home owners to take up this option.

Tiny Homes and Garden Flats are options that are within the means of local communities and do not take years of planning or significant capital investment to achieve. They are nimble, local responses that build on existing community strengths and resources. As Jenny said “We think that strong communities like Western Sydney can work with these ideas.”

“Tiny Homes and Garden Flats are options that are within the means of local communities”

11. Awards

The report would not be complete without some mention of the recognition for partnerships and innovation received by Wentworth Community Housing in 2017, specifically for the Heading Home project. They each focus on different elements of the project and both are highly valued by Wentworth and the Heading Home project group.

11.1 ZEST Award for Exceptional Community Partnership Across a Region

The ZEST Awards are led by Western Sydney Community Forum, the peak body for the area, representing non-government community services.

Taken from their website:

<http://2017.zestawards.com.au/about>

Begun in 2011, the ZEST Awards celebrate and promote life in Western Sydney and the great things being done by community service sector organisations and volunteers.

Now seven years down the track the awards themselves are promoting new projects each year. A tangible measure of what is working, the awards are also being used to as a promotional tool by government departments to highlight the meeting of performance indicators and by organisations themselves able to promote their own 'best practice.'

When talking with Jenny about the award they received, the ZEST Award for Exceptional Community Partnership Across a Region, she explained Wentworth was delighted and proud to receive it as the Award:

"...recognised that Wentworth and its partners were making a contribution to Western Sydney. Zest is about showcasing innovation and good practice across the not-for-profit sector and the difference it is making to individual lives and to community building. Wentworth is proudly Western Sydney and the ZEST Award is the premier award in the region we call home."

11.2 The AHI Professional Excellence in Housing Award for Leading Community Engagement Practice

The Australasian Housing Institute (AHI) is the professional association of people working and volunteering in the multi-disciplinary social housing industry in Australia and New Zealand. Each year they have an award season where organisations and people who make a significant contribution to the sector are acknowledged by their peers. Wentworth received the NSW Award for Leading Community Engagement Practice.

Taken from their website:

<http://www.housinginstitute.org/Awards>

The Australasian Housing Institute Awards provide an opportunity to showcase social housing success stories. The Awards formally recognise and reward excellence in professional practice, from the grass roots to the most senior levels. They promote to our colleagues and the community at large the difference that social housing professionals make to people's lives.

Jenny said:

"This is an important award because that's our industry. The Award reinforces the value of bringing the private sector into working with social housing. Traditionally we have a transactional relationship with private real estate agents, not a co-design relationship. This award helps to show the benefits of this progress."

12. Case Study

This report concludes with the story of one person met by the Heading Home volunteers during Registry Week. Here is Jason's story.

When Jason's marriage of 12 years broke down, the father of three found himself without a job and a home.

"All of a sudden I was living in the back of my vehicle. It was scary. I didn't have many choices of where I could go", he said, explaining that he previously worked in his ex-wife's family business.

Jason was homeless for approximately four years, living in his car, sleeping rough, couch surfing or living in transitional and crisis accommodation. Without a stable home or job, he hadn't seen his children in several years and his physical and mental health were suffering.

However, it wasn't until Jason was interviewed during Registry Week in November 2016 that the extent of Jason's support needs were realised. Jason scored as a high priority for housing and additional support that could help him get his life back on track.

Wentworth was able to find Jason transitional accommodation, and link him with solicitors, mediators and other support services

that have helped him build his confidence, start to look for work and move forward with custody proceedings in relation to his children. Wentworth has now offered Jason a permanent lease for the two-bedroom house he was living in.

"Just to have that roof over my head and somewhere safe I could lock the door, that was fantastic", he said. "One of the main things that I've missed is cooking, eating regularly, and taking care of my diet. When you are homeless, you basically eat when you can, wherever you can, just to stay alive. I love being able to cook for myself here".

In just a few months Jason managed to furnish the unit and transform it into a home ready for his children.

"At first it was just a house, but now it's actually my home", he said. "My long term goal is to have part custody or visiting rights so my kids can stay with me. If I wasn't in the situation I'm in now, I don't think I'd have any chance of that."

Jason's story reflects the success of this project. He is one of many people who have been supported to find stable accommodation since it began. The challenge remains to find safe and affordable housing for many more people experiencing homelessness in the NBM district.



13. Acknowledgements

We want to thank the following businesses and organisations that provided support to this project.



Your
Invitation
to the inaugural
Upper Blue Mountains, Sunrise, Rotary
Black & Silver Ball
Dress ~ Glamorous Tickets ~ 0428 988 844

\$120

Silent
Auctions
Raffles



Our sincere thanks to Tanya Loviz for permission to use "Let the Present Dance"

\$120

Lucky
Door
Prizes



The Ballroom, Mountain Heritage Resort, Katoomba
Friday 28th, April 2017
6:30 for Welcome Drinks
Terry Rae Swing Band

PROCEEDS WILL ASSIST

HEADING *home*

ENDING HOMELESSNESS HERE



wentworth
community housing