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Hard Times

A GLIMPSE INTO HOMELESSNESS IN WEST AUCKLAND

Reina Tuai Harris | Social Policy Analyst

The Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit | August 2015

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INTRODUCTION

He waka eke noa.

A canoe which we are all in with no exception.

This report is intended to reflect the story of people who are sleeping rough in West Auckland by presenting the korero of nineteen people who chose to participate in the report process. One of the people who spoke to us described his experience of sleeping rough as *Hard Times*. We thought it appropriate for *Hard Times* to be the title of the report because it describes the experience of sleeping rough and is also a reason why people sleep rough. Times are hard for increasing numbers of people in Auckland and there is a growing divide between the haves and the have nots.

The Salvation Army is an organisation that has a history of providing support and advocating for those most in need in society. The Salvation Army is a faith-based Christian organisation motivated by values that include equality, inclusion, and human rights. From a Salvation Army perspective every human being deserves the right to shelter. The impetus for this report came from the staff at the West Auckland branch of The Salvation Army, The Faith Factory. Frontline workers there became concerned about a perceived increase in the numbers of rough sleepers in West Auckland and wanted to better understand the issue.

Reports that explore issues like this are important. Firstly, when frontline organisations are noticing changes such as increases in rough sleepers then that needs to be highlighted because it can be an indication of a greater social problem. The primary problem relates to housing availability and affordability in Auckland, and it is a problem frontline organisations are unable to deal with on their own. Changes are required in the current policy settings. Intervention needs to occur from central and local Government to reduce the degree of suffering and harm experienced by people who sleep rough and to ensure that as an inclusive society the thoughts, hopes and experiences of rough sleepers are just as valid as those of other population groups in shaping policy settings in New Zealand.

CONTEXT OF ROUGH SLEEPING

Definition

The New Zealand definition for homelessness was published in 2009 by Statistics New Zealand. Statistics New Zealand defines homelessness as '... living situations where people with no other options to acquire safe and secure housing are without shelter, in temporary accommodation, sharing accommodation with a household or living in uninhabitable housing'¹. Rough sleeping refers to those who are homeless and without shelter, and is the most extreme and obvious form of homelessness. It is the most extreme because of the significant hardship experienced by people that sleep rough. It is the most obvious because of the high visibility people have when they make their home on the streets, within what can be considered the public domain.

An Insight into the Issues

Homelessness in the form of rough sleeping is complex. A range of factors can drive people to rough sleep: relationship breakdown, poverty, unemployment, traumatic events, prison release, job loss, and lack of affordable housing, to name a few². Mental health is a significant issue because it is both a driver for rough sleeping and a condition developed and worsened by rough sleeping.

Rough sleeping has been described as a lifestyle that is easy to get into, hard to get out of, and easy to transgress back to³ and addressing the issue of rough sleeping extends beyond the provision of accommodation. It is also known that the length of time people are exposed to rough sleeping increases the likelihood of the creation of homelessness as a lifetime lifestyle⁴.

The ethnic groups that feature most highly in the statistics for rough sleepers in New Zealand are Maori and Pakeha New Zealanders⁵. The numbers of those sleeping rough are hard to gauge as there is no accurate national data. One of the difficulties arises from the fact that in order to be counted by Statistics New Zealand you have to be living in a dwelling. In 2009 the Housing Shareholders Advisory Group reported that the national number of urban people sleeping rough or living in improvised dwellings was likely to number less than 300, with 500–1,000 people living in rural improvised housing⁶. Organisations that work with rough sleepers have some, and perhaps the most accurate information, on how many rough sleepers there are in particular areas.

The Auckland Context

A recent City Mission report showed an overwhelming increase of rough sleepers in Auckland Central. Their count in 2014 recorded 147 rough sleepers, an amount that is just over double the count in 2013 of 69 people⁷. Over the past ten years the average number of rough sleepers identified on each count equated to 71 persons⁸. The count in 2014 is double the average yearly number

over the past ten years.

During 2014 staff at the Faith Factory, alongside a number of other agencies who regularly engaged with people who sleep rough in and around Henderson noted an increased prevalence of street homelessness in the commercial areas of West Auckland, in particular around central Henderson. The increase was thought to be a spill-on effect of the increase in rough sleepers in Auckland Central and elsewhere in Auckland.

Housing availability and affordability are significant issues in Auckland. Auckland's population is growing rapidly and it is projected this will continue, resulting in an inadequate supply of houses to cater for natural population growth. The demand for houses in Auckland is further intensified as the immigration rate into Auckland surpasses the migration rate out of Auckland - people who choose to immigrate to New Zealand choose to immigrate into the big cities, particularly Auckland. The housing picture for those on low incomes and in difficult circumstances in Auckland is grim. Salvation Army Community Ministries staff throughout Auckland have noticed an increase in the numbers of people and families presenting who are homeless. When asked about housing options for people a staff member at the Faith Factory commented:

[There is] None!! We find it extremely difficult with the number of enquiries we get around housing ... there is the camping ground in Ranui and a boarding house that charges about \$280.00 a week for a room—it's just unaffordable for our clients.

The reality is that there is nowhere for staff to refer people with acute housing needs as the provision of emergency housing in Auckland is inadequate. If a person does manage to access emergency housing, the next difficulty is finding available permanent housing. As Diane Robinson the Auckland City Missioner said recently,

Places like Monte Cecilia [emergency housing] can't get people out, so there is no 'in' because there is no 'out'⁹.

Essentially, the more unaffordable and unobtainable the market becomes, the more hardship the most vulnerable people in our communities experience.

OUR RESEARCH

The research and policy objectives proposed for the survey were to establish the extent and nature of street homelessness in central Henderson and the surrounding areas; to gain some understanding of the factors which have contributed to people becoming and remaining homeless on the streets of West Auckland; and to use the information and insights gained from this research to develop ideas for responding to the needs of the people identified in this research. A structured survey was developed by The Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit, and this survey was used by frontline West Auckland Salvation Army staff and volunteers who invited rough sleepers to participate in the process¹⁰.

Ethics and Privacy

Training was delivered to the staff and volunteers undertaking the surveys. Importance was placed on ethics with an emphasis on respect, voluntary participation, informed consent and privacy. No personal details such as names, dates of birth and places of birth were recorded or any other information that could identify an individual person. The completed questionnaires were only available to members of the research team. Information gathered from people who participated in the survey has only been used in support of the research objectives, and for no other purpose. Once *Hard Times* was published all completed questionnaires were destroyed¹¹.

Conducting the Survey

The initial interviews for the survey were conducted in and around central Henderson for two weeks from 27th November to 11th December 2014. Ten interviews were completed during this time by Salvation Army staff and volunteers. Contact was made with potential participants in the survey through local social service agencies and church groups who regularly provide support to homeless people in Henderson.

Another five interviews took place with rough sleepers who attended a community meal at the Faith Factory on the 15th of April 2015. The remaining four interviews were completed during May 2015 by staff engaged with rough sleepers at the Faith Factory. The cut-off date for the surveys was 31 May 2015. Of the estimated 40 rough sleepers in the West Auckland area nineteen participated in the survey and shared their stories.

Presenting the Initial Findings

At the beginning of the project it was decided by Faith Factory staff that The Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit would meet with the interviewers, Faith Factory staff, and rough sleepers to present the initial

findings of the survey back to the community.

This presentation took place on 15 April 2015 at the Faith Factory and some rough sleepers were in attendance. The initial findings from the ten completed surveys were presented back to the group of people who attended the gathering.

Unstructured Focus Group Discussion

Following the presentation back to the community an unstructured focus group discussion took place. The discussion lasted approximately thirty minutes and was facilitated by a Salvation Army staff member. Comments and questions during this group discussion were recorded by another staff member.

This group discussion was impromptu and was not part of our proposed methodology. In a sense, this method was community directed and led; a group discussion was how the community wanted to talk to us about the issues relevant for them. As the insights provided at the discussion were from the rough sleeping community in a manner that the rough sleeping community chose, presenting their commentary was considered a significant contribution to this report.

Staff Comment

Staff at the Faith Factory who regularly work with rough sleepers were asked what they thought should be done to assist those that sleep rough in the area. In addition to continuing to assist rough sleepers with practical needs, staff consider it important that a full time social worker be employed to engage with rough sleepers and support them to achieve long term goals and objectives.

OUR RESEARCH FINDINGS

What is presented in this report is intended give prominence to the voice of the nineteen participants, so care has been taken to portray their stories. The insights provided by the participants then serve to direct our understanding of the issues that they experience. Firstly, a section by section presentation of the survey results is offered. Then, three individual experiences from rough sleepers are illustrated by presenting their answers to the survey questions. Finally, we present the comments from the focus group discussion.



RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY

Nineteen people participated in the survey. The following is an outline of their responses. The responses are categorized in terms of gender, age and ethnicity, description of living circumstances, details of support the person is receiving, history of a person's homelessness, health and wellbeing, needs and plans and final comments.

Gender, Age and Ethnicity

Gender

Just under two thirds of the responders to the survey were male (12), with six female responders. One participant did not specify their gender.

Gender	No. of Participants
Male	12
Female	6
Unanswered	1

Age

The age of the participants ranged from under 20 to over 60 years old. There was a small cluster of four participants in the 20 to 30 year old age bracket. One participant did not disclose their age.

Age Range	No. of Participants
Under 20	1
20–30	4
30–40	2
40–50	2
50–60	1
Over 60	1
Unanswered	1

Ethnicity

Most participants identified with being either Maori or European. Just under 50% of participants identified as Maori (9 in total). Almost as high were the 8 participants who identified as European, as described by a variety of terms, including European, Pakeha, Kiwi and Palangi. Eight people reported more than one ethnicity.

Ethnicity	No. of Participants
Maori	9
European/Pakeha/Kiwi/Palangi	8
Pacific Island	1
Other	1

Living Circumstances

Sleeping Place

Respondents were asked to name the specific place where they were sleeping at the time of the interview. No consistent pattern emerged, with a wide variety of places to sleep being identified. The responses are outlined below:

- In a van in Henderson
- Streets Henderson
- Tent
- Ranui outside with shelter
- Bowling green
- Under a building
- Bridges
- Car park
- Gazebo
- In a park
- McDonalds
- Container
- Car
- Van
- Carport

Length of Time in Same Spot

13 of the 19 responders have slept in the same place for over a month. For some they have been sleeping in that same place for years. For one person they have been sleeping in the same place for over ten years.

Time in Same Spot	No. of Participants
Less than a Month	6
Over a Month less than a year	7
From one to four years	4
Five years plus	2

Length of Time in West Auckland Area

In terms of geographical location, 18 of the participants had been sleeping rough in the local West Auckland area for over a month, with 11 participants living rough in the area for over a year. One person reported that she had been sleeping rough on and off for 11 years in West Auckland.

Length of Time in West Auckland Area	No. of Participants
Less than a month	1
Over a month less than a year	7
From one to four years	7
Five years plus	4

Keeping Warm

Participants were asked how they kept warm. Most reported that they used blankets, clothes or both to keep warm. One person reported that she 'kept

moving' in order to stay warm. One person reported staying close to her boyfriend, while one woman reported that in addition to blankets and pillows her cat helped her to keep warm.

How Participants Kept Warm	No. of Participants
Just Clothes	5
Blankets, sleeping bag	13
Stays close to boyfriend	1

Keeping Dry

When asked how they kept dry whilst sleeping rough, people who had vehicles to sleep in did not consider keeping dry was an issue for them. One person who was new to sleeping rough reported that she could not sleep because she could not keep dry saying 'it got wet and it was windy'. The person using a tent noted that condensation in the tent made it difficult to stay dry. Other people in the survey reported different strategies they used to keep dry such as:

- Get whatever shelter I can at the bowling club and bus shelters
- Just go under a building
- Stay under the shelter and move with the direction of the rain
- Any shelter or ordinary place
- Container
- Tarpaulin
- Building
- Raincoat
- Van
- Stay under shelter

Sources of Support

Income

Almost all of the participants reported that the main source of income they received was a benefit from Work and Income. Some reported that they supplemented this income by 'work from time to time' or from begging. Most of the people reported that they were on the Sickness Benefit or Invalids Benefit. Three people reported that they did not receive any income assistance from Government. Two people reported that their main source of income was from employment.

Income Source	No. of Participants
Sickness Benefit	6
Invalid Benefit	2
Unidentified benefit (WINZ)	2
Unemployment Benefit	2
Supported Living Payments	1
No Regular source (Koha/passers-by/begging)	3
Work	2

Support from Government Agencies

Most of the participants reported that the primary Government agency that supported them was Work and Income. Other people reported that they were receiving some support from health care agencies. Six participants reported they received no support from any Government agency.

Government Agencies	No. of Participants
Work and Income	10
Health Agencies (Waipareira/Wai Health DHB/Equip)	4
None	6

Support from Other Community Agencies

Organisations that people identified as supportive were The Salvation Army, Ranui Baptist Church, City Mission, Waipareira, Autism New Zealand and Richmond Fellowship. One person said he got support from the local library where he was able to access the internet. One person had support from an educational organisation; he had enrolled in courses at Unitec. Showers were utilized at West Wave Pool and Leisure Centre by one person. Two people reported they received no other support from community agencies and one person found an organisation unhelpful.

Agency Accessed for Support	No. of Participants
The Salvation Army	8
Waipareira	5
Autism NZ	1
Ranui Baptist Church	2
Other Faith based organisations (e.g. City Mission)	4
Local Library	1
No support	2
West Wave Aquatic and Leisure Centre	1
Unitec Institute of Technology	1

Family and Friends

Eight people reported that they did not receive any contact and support from family and friends. One person said that they are 'independent'. Another person said that they 'did not want to be burden' and one person reported he was the 'black sheep of the family and alone'.

The other ten people reported varying levels and types of support they received from family and friends including:

- Mother in Whangarei, phone contact but have not seen her for seven years
- Not much to do with my brothers but I get to see my kids whenever I want [has four girls who live with her brothers]

- Sometimes friends let me stay at their house
- Brother in Mount Eden, occasional visit
- Cousin
- Weekly phone call from Mason Clinic
- Other homeless
- Little bit of contact with Dad ... three [adult] kids one up north and two in Auckland, but do not help
- Family member helping to manage funds
- Up and down with mum, unsafe boyfriends and family don't really want me around
- See sister if I have money

History of Homelessness

Length of Time Homeless

When asked the length of overall time people had been homeless only one person had been sleeping rough for less than a month. Seven reported they had been homeless for a matter of months. Ten people had been homeless for over a year, and some moved in and out of homelessness; 'six months boarding ... six months on the street'. Another person said she lived on the streets for '13 years on and off'—when things became difficult in her living environment she would return to the street.

Length of Time	No. of Participants
Under a Month	1
Months	7
Over a Year	3
Over Five Years	4
Over Ten Years	3
No Answer	1

Why They Started Living on the Streets

The majority of people spoke about difficulties within their home environment and families as being the key reasons they started living on the streets. For some the family environment was unsupportive and included addiction issues, or the participant was the victim of, or witness to domestic violence. One person left a structurally unsafe house that was damp and rotten while another person moved as there were rats in the house. Another reported being evicted, and another spoke of rent arrears. Some had a history of institutionalisation through Child Youth and Family Services or Corrections. One man said that he had been in care since he was 7 years old, then in prison. To him accommodation feels like a 'lock up' and he feels a sense of 'freedom' living on the streets. One person felt there was no other option as Child Youth and Family Services care had ended and she had 'nowhere else to go' as her family home was 'unsafe'.

What Keeps Participants on the Street?

For many of the participants the primary reason that they said they stayed on the streets is because they are unable to access accommodation and unable to afford accommodation.

When asked why they continued to sleep rough some participants reported they found living on the street liberating, and that it enabled them to maintain independence; one man stated that by living on the street he has 'got my own freedom'. For others issues such as alcohol dependency and domestic violence were seen as significant factors.

Some people commented on the friends and communities they have living on the street, indicating that the rough sleeping community is a supportive factor when rough sleeping. There is a 'community of friends in rough sleepers' and what keeps them on the streets is 'Being around people I know, friends'.

Reasons for staying on the streets included:

- Unemployed
- Rental costs
- Alcohol dependency
- Can't afford it ... boarding houses not good to live in
- Can't get a house
- Can't get board or lodgings
- Can't live with family, can't afford to pay rent and food
- Can't afford to rent/board/own own home
- Lack of money
- choosing partner over accommodation

Health and Wellbeing

Health

Of the nineteen people interviewed 14 identified as having physical or mental health issues, or both. Some people reported significant physical health issues such as cancer and major surgery.

Health and well-being issues reported:

- Mental Health from injury
- Arthritis
- Heart attack
- Asthma
- Suicidal
- Autism and Hay fever
- Brain Injury from being beaten up
- Anxiety
- Cancer
- Mental Health
- Paranoia
- Titanium Rods in leg
- Depression
- Stress
- Diabetes
- Depression

- Tooth decay high pain
- Ear problems
- Anger Management
- Sleeplessness

Safety

Two thirds of the participants (12) reported that they had no concerns about their safety. Three people reported that sometimes they had concerns about their safety. Four people said that their safety was a concern; one person commented that she was scared of assaults from her partner. One participant responded, 'Yes, people in the meth houses are scary'. Three people commented that they addressed their safety concerns by staying with a group of people.

Concerned for Safety	No. of Participants
Yes	4
No	12
Sometimes	3

Victims of Assault/Theft in the Last Twelve Months

Although most people did not have any concerns about their safety, over half of the people reported that in the last twelve months they had been the victims of assault, theft, or both. One person reported that they had experienced assaults from members of the public. This person said that to keep safe from such assaults he would 'sleep and eat with a group of people'.

Social Connections

Most people identified other rough sleepers as the main source of their social connections. One person reported that Waipareira Trust and The Salvation Army were the places he would meet up with his friends on a regular basis. Other rough sleepers were identified as a protective factor where 'everyone looks after each other' and they feel safer 'sleeping with a group of people'. Other organisations that people found support from were Autism New Zealand and Richmond Fellowship. Family/whanau connections were limited for most rough sleepers.

Identified Source of Social Connections	No. of Participants
Friends	7
Other Rough Sleepers	8
Family	2
Other Networks	2

Happy Living on the Streets?

Participants were asked if they were happy living on the streets. Some people reported that they were happy, one person saying he was happy because he has 'never been hassled and looks after himself'. One person said he was 'happy

enough'. The majority of people (10) reported that they were not happy. One person said that she was 'unhappy on the streets and didn't like stealing for food'.

Happy living on the streets?	No. of Participants
Yes	6
No	10
Ambivalent/sometimes	3

Needs and Plans

Immediate Needs

One of the most pressing immediate needs that people identified was shelter, 'A place to live' and 'A home' (9 of the 19 responders). Other needs identified were warm clothes, blankets and things such as money and work. Participants also identified people or relationships as an important immediate need for them.

Immediate Need	No. of Participants
Money	3
Food	1
Clothes/blankets	4
Cell Phone	1
Showers	1
Shelter (House/tent/Flat)	9
People (Friendship/Family/Positive people)	3
Work	2
Re-licence Vehicle	1

Needs Over the Next Weeks/Months

Accommodation was identified as the highest need over the next weeks/months. One person wanted 'To be settled in a house so that my children can stay with me, even for a few days a week'. Other things people said they needed were practical things such as bank accounts, identification and assistance in getting a source of income. One person said she wanted to 'get on a course'. People also identified employment as an important need, one person stating that he was 'Mainly looking to get work ... casual'. Again, people identified friendship, company and family as important needs for them in the upcoming weeks and months.

Needs over the next weeks/months	No. of Participants
Accommodation	4
Employment	3
Blankets/Clothes	3

Social connections (family/friends/company)	3
No Needs identified	3
Financial assistance (money/income/bank account)	3

Help

How Can The Salvation Army Help?

The majority of the people who answered this part of the survey reported that they were already receiving help from The Salvation Army. The answers here reflect the way The Salvation Army currently provides help to the people who were surveyed. In addition, people also expressed ways they thought The Salvation Army might help in the future.

People commented that they utilized the laundry facilities at the Faith Factory to do their washing, and the bathroom facilities to shower. One person said, 'They [The Salvation Army] are doing what they're doing ... very helpful'. One of the people who utilized the facilities at the Faith Factory spoke of how he also volunteered at the Faith Factory and was part of the team. He said that volunteering made him 'feel useful'. Most people thought The Salvation Army's provision of food and kitchen facilities was helpful. One person said he would like The Salvation Army to 'keep me warm and fed'.

Two people asked for The Salvation Army to advocate for them at Work and Income or Housing New Zealand, saying they needed 'An advocate that can go along with someone to WINZ to support'. They felt they needed someone to help express their concerns to someone who may not understand them at services such as Work and Income. One participant expressed the desire for The Salvation Army to 'push the issue to Government'.

People requested help with accommodation to 'get me off the street' or to 'find permanent accommodation'. Another person asked if The Salvation Army could support them with furniture if they found a place to stay. Some people needed things like blankets, clothes, and Identification. One person said that he needed an overnight bag because he had no way of transporting his belongings.

Help from The Salvation Army	Participants
Blankets and Clothes	3
Laundry Facilities	3
Showers	4
Advocacy	2
Kitchen/Food	8
Overnight Bag	1
Accommodation	3

Hopes and Plans

People who participated in this survey were asked if they were hoping or planning to be living somewhere else in the future. One person commented in this section on how they considered support should be delivered saying, 'Maybe having one on one support workers so they can get to know them individually and can tell the facts of their true situation'. One person stated that he was 'looking to get a job and a three to four bedroom house so he could have his mokos over to visit'. Another person also saw home as a way to develop bonds with whanau saying she wanted a home in order to be 'reconnected with her children.'

Most people shared that they hoped for accommodation:

- A garage to live in
- A flat by myself
- It's always in the back of our minds
- Live by myself in a unit
- Somewhere, anywhere
- West Auckland
- In a house
- Same area ... new house
- West Auckland in my community
- Hoping to live in my own little place
- Henderson if possible
- Southside

Final Comments

People were asked if they would like to make any final comments and six people chose to respond. One person commented that she 'stays at half way houses sometimes'. One man expressed he was 'Concerned about price of housing and condition of housing; Brother with mental health housing ... Disappointed with focus of Government'. Another person commented that what was annoying was '... the litter on grounds in the streets. Concern about immigration; too many people in too quickly and we don't have the infrastructure'. One person said in his final comment that 'The Salvation Army is awesome'. Another person said, 'Most rough sleepers don't get enough money to make it work; 'kronic' is a big problem for most of them' and another person commented that he 'tries not to break the law while he is rough sleeping; this is important to him'.

EXPERIENCE OF A YOUNG PERSON ROUGH SLEEPING



Photo is representative only

I am **seventeen**

Child Youth and Family Services
care has ended

I can't go home as it's **unsafe**

I have **no income**

I have **no where** else to go

I slept in the park for two weeks

I sleep close to my boyfriend to
keep warm

I do not like stealing for food

I am **worried** I might get really sick

I have some **good friends** on the
street and my boyfriend does not like
me to see my old friends

I need help at the moment
with showers food and some clothes
and to get an income

I want to be on a course

I hope to have a flat one day
and I need more education

EXPERIENCE OF A ROUGH SLEEPER LIVING IN A VAN

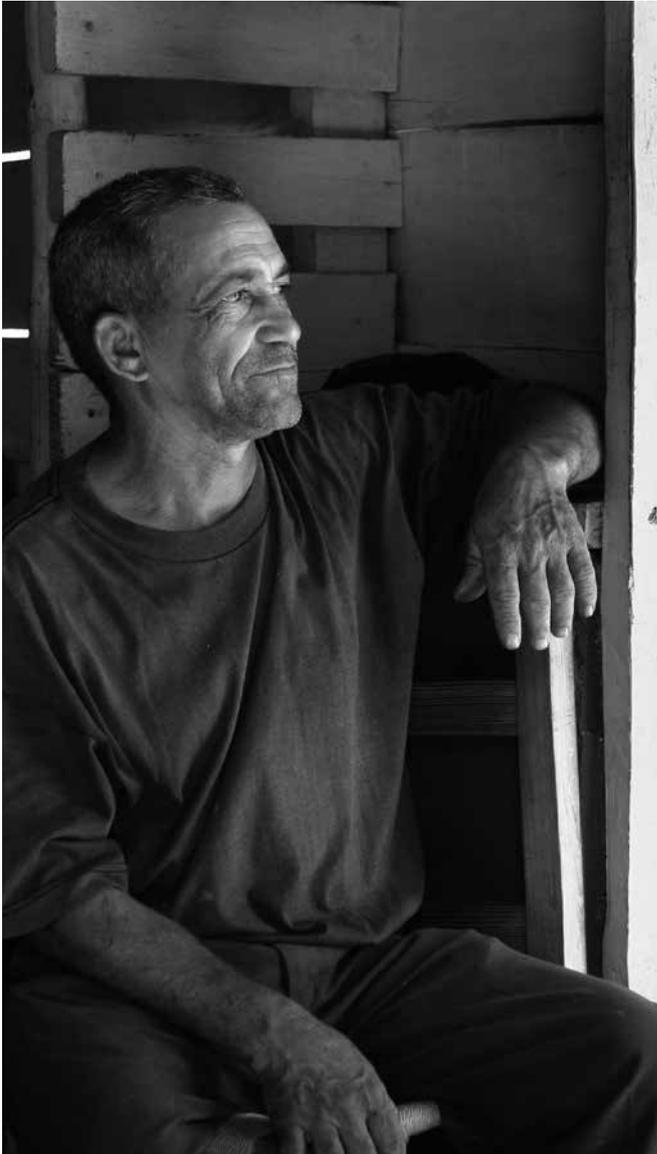


Photo is representative only

I started living on the streets as I was having **trouble** maintaining my relationship

I have been **living in my van** for nine months, it is dry

I do not feel like I'm doing it rough like some people **I am lucky** as I can move on if I get work

My van needs WOF and rego and I need work

I use the showers and washing machines at **The Salvation Army** and I could use some blankets and clothes

I am unhappy on the street I have **depression** and can't sleep

I hope to get a job and a house in West Auckland

I want a two to three bedroom house so that **my mokos** can come over and visit

I am concerned about the price of housing and the condition of housing

I am dissatisfied with the focus of Government

EXPERIENCE OF A LONG TERM ROUGH SLEEPER

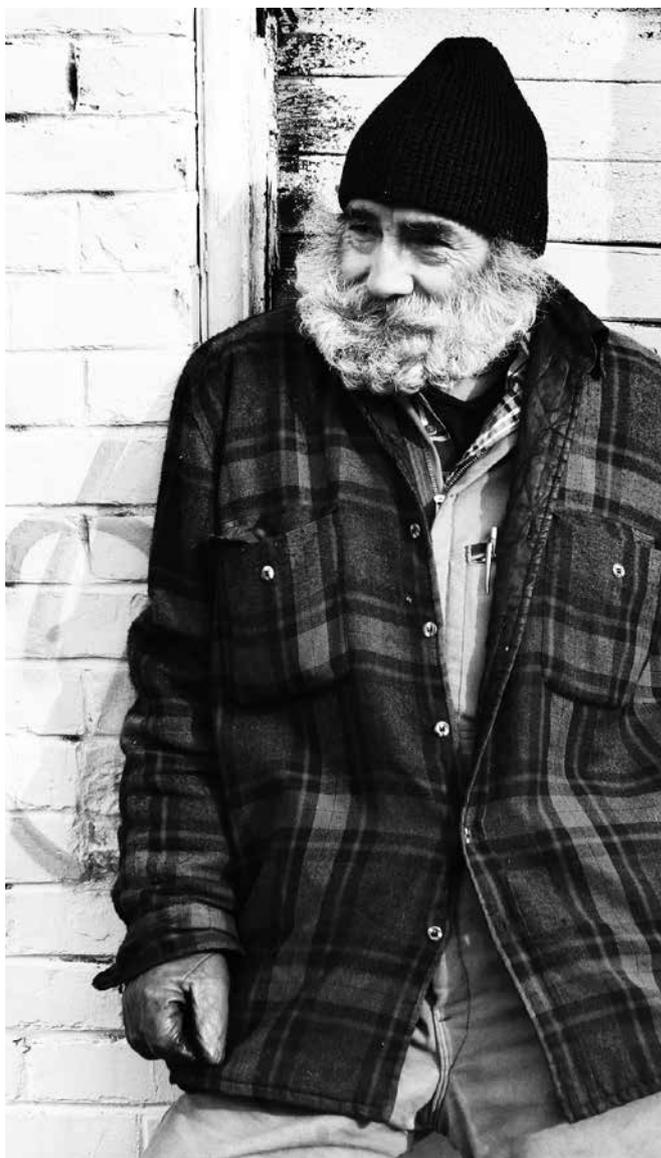


Photo is representative only

I have been in care **since I was seven** then in prison

I usually spend six months in a **boarding house** and six months on the **street**

I get **anti-social** in accommodation

I am happy **sleeping rough**, it makes me feel **safer** and I got my own **freedom**

I have **good friends** from the street we meet at the Trust every day and at Waipereira

I have **mental health** issues, I take my meds every day

I have **cancer** and an operation coming up and I need accommodation so I don't get an infection

I have everything I need, I just need friends around, I do need accommodation only because of health, I have some **support people** helping me to find accommodation

I try not to break the law when I am rough sleeping, it is very important to me



GROUP DISCUSSION COMMENTS

A Focus Group discussion was held with some members of the rough sleeping community facilitated by Salvation Army staff at the Faith Factory on 15 April 2015. This commentary was written down by a Salvation Army staff member and is presented below:

Housing Affordability

- can afford rent, but not food or power
- How do landlords get away with high charges without food?
- \$260 without food in some places down to \$170 places without food
- a person also homeless paid rent and they only had \$5 left for food
- \$180 per week accommodation without food is too hard
- West Auckland is one of the worst in the region—can cost up to \$300 per week for a 1 bedroom unit.

Housing Availability

- Too much focus on families and there is a need for more 1 bedroom units
- Nowhere for single females to go; most places cater to single men, families but not single women
- St James on Howe Street in town offers accommodation (but some people don't want to leave the West Auckland community where their friends and support services are)
- Apartments up Edmonton Road should get elderly in there – only 4, unsupervised at present.

Police Interaction With Rough Sleepers

- With winter coming in, people just want somewhere safe, dry and warm where the police don't hassle them
- Police tend to pick on people who are sleeping rough in West Auckland at 2–3 am in the morning and asking them to move along
- If harassed by the police or others they just end up moving on to the next town over to rough sleep at.

The Homeless Community

- The homeless community in West Auckland are very transitional. Young ones get kicked out of their house; have partner violence or it's more about fun and games for them. Sometimes the younger ones steal from the older homeless
- There is a sense of friendship amongst some of the homeless community in West Auckland.

Advocacy

- WINZ are unhelpful despite The Salvation Army advocacy and support
- An advocate that can go along with someone to WINZ to support, someone to help them express their concerns to someone at WINZ who may not understand them
- A food grant given from WINZ, where are they going to put it? And they're only given 3 days to use it.

Mental Health issues

- The majority of the homeless have mental health concerns and illness ... things deteriorate at night
- Homeless people may respond that they're happy on the survey but a lot of people mask it—it's a human thing; pride to mask the depression and mental illness that comes with being homeless
- People are afraid to look out
- Housing options for people with mental illness; they just get sent to hospital that's all.

Comments About Where the Information Should Go

- Maybe to the media but avoid John Key
- Can it be used to help assist into employment?

Other Comments

- WINZ ask homeless people to get rid of their possessions to move into a unit
- People want to feel safe.

CONCLUSION

Insights From the Experiences Shared

There are limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn in this report because of the small sample size in this survey. The report thus primarily tells the story of people who sleep rough in West Auckland. Some of the stories and experiences told to us reinforce common issues shared with other rough sleepers in New Zealand and internationally. Aligning with the national ethnic composition of rough sleepers, the majority of rough sleepers in West Auckland are people who identify as Maori and New Zealand European. As with international and national understandings, the stories tell us about the difficult life experiences and circumstances that some rough sleepers have. The stories and expressions also tell us that physical and mental health issues are a real concern for those who sleep rough. However, the stories are not all about difficulties, they highlight the resilience of people and the strong sense of friendship, safety and camaraderie that exists within the rough sleeping community.

There are things shared that we hope will open up further dialogue. From the survey it is evident that some people who slept rough have been victims of crime in the last six months, in some cases they have been victims of serious assaults. It is highly unlikely that these crimes were reported to the police and therefore these people may not be getting the support they need. Speaking about interactions with the Police, respondents said they often feel hassled and harassed. In our view it would be good if the Police reflected on the comments of the rough sleepers with a view to obtaining improved interactions and relations.

The most prominent issue of concern for the community of rough sleepers in West Auckland is availability and affordability of housing. Although the issues of affordability and availability may not be unique to Auckland, the Auckland context means that rents are high and increasing, and landlords are able to be much more selective with their tenants. The reality is that there are people that do not get selected as tenants, and if they do the high rent can mean a rental property is unsustainable. The consequence of the restricted and expensive market means an increase in homeless people and rough sleeping in Auckland.

Another important part of the survey relates to the hopes and plans of the people who participated in this report. Many people said they hoped for some type of accommodation and it is apparent that if they could choose they would like to be in accommodation. With any type of intervention motivation is vital to begin any form of change and to make any changes sustainable. When people expressed that they hoped to be in accommodation they showed their motivation and desire to change their situation. However, the core issue is that there are few available, suitable and affordable options for them.

Research tells us that early intervention is important in order to change the trajectory of a person and to limit the degree that a lifestyle of sleeping rough is entrenched. In effect, there is a pressing need for intervention and it needs to occur. Both staff and a rough sleeper in West Auckland told us that what may be most helpful is someone to engage with rough sleepers and provide wrap around support and assistance to get them into housing. It is considered that having a dedicated person to work with those sleeping rough in West Auckland would be a starting point to tangible and effective intervention.

Framework Moving Forward

Fundamentally, shelter needs to be considered a human right. Once shelter is considered a human right then a duty or obligation rests on the State. As it stands today there is no legal responsibility on Government to ensure shelter is provided for those in need. If it chooses the Government can ignore the plight of homeless people, such as those who took part in this survey.

We consider that there needs to be an obligation to provide for people who are unable to provide shelter for themselves. The necessary intervention is the creation of a right to shelter. If a right exists a legal duty can be created and then there is an obligation on Government to protect the rights of people who are homeless.

Social Housing West Auckland Moving Forward

Going forward we must work from the premise that shelter is a fundamental human right and that the duty to ensure all citizens have shelter lies with the State. There are a few unanswered questions that need to be explored further in the West Auckland context: what does social housing look like in the area; is there enough social housing; and is the housing responding to the need?

This report has not explored these questions in depth but it is considered that there is an urgent need to increase the supply of social housing in West Auckland and especially the supply of smaller one and two bedroom units. According to a register of people on the waitlist for Housing New Zealand homes, the greatest number of applicants in New Zealand are from the Auckland 'Super City' and West Auckland has the second highest number of people on the Ministry of Social Development waiting list¹².

Some of the rough sleepers who participated in this report had insights and contributions to make in relation to what they thought social housing should look like in the area. They expressed their belief that housing for the elderly needed to be a focus as well as housing for single people. They had an idea of accommodation in the area and had ideas on who the accommodation should go to. We consider that an emphasis on planning needs to take place and the

perspectives of people in the rough sleeping community should be included in any planning for social housing in West Auckland.

Intervention in the Market Moving Forward

The provision of sufficient social housing is one element that can provide relief for those in need but it does not address the key causes of the problem. There are systemic problems inherent in the housing market and the usual ways in which markets work. The Salvation Army have completed a significant amount of research on housing outlined in our seven publications in the subject ¹³.

We have consistently championed the importance of housing for community, family and nation building and as a determinant for positive social outcomes. It is considered that Government intervention in the market through policy is necessary and that a new and brave direction in housing policy should occur. The issue of housing supply should be addressed at both central and local Government levels.

It is not just organisations concerned with social justice like The Salvation Army that have expressed concern about the current housing issue in Auckland. Economists have raised concerns, the Reserve bank has raised concerns. The issue must be addressed, and both central and local Government have a responsibility and ability to intervene.

One starting point in moving this process forward would be for Government to meaningfully engage with communities of rough sleepers and include their perspectives in policy direction and solutions. The absolute priority in New Zealand is for a humane and inclusive society. Shelter should be considered a fundamental human right and one that the State is obliged to protect.

APPENDIX ONE: SURVEY

West Auckland Homelessness Survey Interview Form

Interviewers names
Date of interview
Location of interview
Have you checked that the person being interviewed has not already participated in this survey? YES / NO
Have you discussed privacy and research ethics with the person being interviewed? YES / NO
Are you satisfied that the person being interviewed has given their informed consent to take part? YES / NO
Details of the person being interviewed
Their gender
Their age (estimate if necessary)
Their ethnicity
Description of their living circumstances
Location of where the person is sleeping?
How does he/she keep warm?
How does he/she keep dry?
How long has the person slept where they are sleeping now?
How long has the person been sleeping rough in the local area?
Details of the support the person is receiving
Where does he/she get money from?
Is the person being supported by any government agencies? (W&I DHB mental health)
Does he/she receive support from local community agencies & if so what sort?
Does the person receive support from his/her family & friends?
Details of the person's history of homelessness
How long has the person been sleeping rough & living on the streets?
Where else (locations other than present one) has he/she lived on the streets?
What made him/her start living on the streets?
What keeps the person living on the streets?

Health & wellbeing status
Does he/she have any health problems & if so what are these?
If yes is the person getting support for these?
Is the person ever concerned about their personal safety?
Has the person been a victim of an assault or theft in the past 12 months?
Does the person have any friends they see or meet regularly?
Is the person happy living on the streets?
Details of their needs & plans
What does he/she need the most right now?
What does he/she need over the next few weeks or months?
How can The Salvation Army best help him or her?
Is the person planning or hoping to be living somewhere else sometime in the future?
If yes where?
If yes what help does he or she need to get there?
Other comments or concerns

Please finish by thanking them and reminding them of the assistance available locally from The Salvation Army.

APPENDIX TWO: ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethics Statement For Street Homelessness Research

This statement provides those people participating in The Salvation Army's West Auckland Street Homelessness Research Project with a description of the ethical standards that will be applied to this research and a description of the expected behaviour of those people running the project.

1. Participants in the research project will at all times be treated with dignity and respect. They will have the nature of the project accurately described to them before their consent to participate is requested. This description of the project includes the project objectives, timeframes and the uses to which the research may be put.
2. Participants in the research project have the right to withdraw from the project at any time and may ask that their responses to questionnaires are deleted from the collection of data at any time up until the research is published. Researchers will leave their contact details with all participants to allow this to happen.
3. Researchers will at no time offer guarantees, promises or implications of assistance to potential participants as a means of gaining their participation. Researchers will make all potential participants aware of the fact that this research project is independent of the work of the agency whose help they are seeking.
4. Participants in the research project will have their identity protected at all times during the research project and following completion of the project. Personal details which may allow for the identification of individual respondents will not be recorded. This includes the respondent's name, date of birth and place of birth as well as any other distinctive characteristic of any respondent which might possibly be used to identify them.
5. All completed questionnaires will be destroyed once the results of the research project are completed and published. Until they are destroyed questionnaires will not be available to any person outside the research team.
6. Information gathered from this research project will only be used in support of the research objectives and for no other purpose. The researchers and The Salvation Army provide guarantees that they will at all times comply with the legal requirements of the Privacy Act 1993.

ENDNOTES

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