

Referral (02) 4324 7239

Office (02) 4325 3540

Fax (02) 4324 7876

ABN 174 7048 6295



Address Rear, 97 Donnison Street

(PO Box 1234) Gosford NSW 2250

Email admin@coastshelter.org.au

Website www.coastshelter.org.au

MEDIA RELEASE

14 May 2007

Homelessness – The Forgotten Issue

“A budget surplus of \$15.8 billion in 2006/07 and a forward commitment for 2007/08 of \$293.6 million to indigenous housing over the next four years is hardly reflective of the “*lucky country*””, Laurie Maher, Executive Officer of Coast Shelter said.

“While it is great to see that the Federal Government at least recognised the needs of our indigenous community, its failure to address the housing needs of the remainder of our community is a downright disgrace”, he said.

Following the announcement of a multi-billion dollar surplus in 2005/06, the Honourable Alastair Nicholson AO in an address to the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations stated “...by addressing the problem of homelessness as a first priority, it gave [Government] a much better opportunity to address the other problems suffered by the respective families, such as poverty, ill health, inadequate education of children and behavioural problems”.

Alastair Nicholson asked, “Why is it left to people like Fiona Stanley and other private citizens like myself to take up the running on this issue? Are we really such an uncaring society, or is it that we just have uncaring leaders that we are not sufficiently committed to remove from office?”

“Homelessness and poverty are the two black marks on our society” Maher said.

Every night of the year, in excess of 105,000 Australians are homeless and of these more than 56,000 are children.

The situation here on the Central Coast clearly reflects the National position.

“Coast Shelter, which is just one of the Central Coast organisations which provides emergency accommodation, houses some 120 men, women and children every night of the year, but still turns away more than three times as many as it can accommodate” Maher said.

In the last month alone, Coast Shelter has had to turn away more than 120 homeless people because of the lack of emergency accommodation.

“It’s no wonder we have such a level of homelessness. When the average house price on the Central Coast is now \$370,000 and the average weekly rent for a two bedroom flat is \$200 and \$246 for a three bedroom house”, he said.

“With in excess of 21% of Australian households living on less than \$400 per week and there being no increase in Public Housing for the past ten years, no wonder the numbers of homeless families, men, women and children continues to increase” Maher said.

Church and community groups have combined to provide meals through the Donnison Street Restaurant. This has assisted many Central Coast families to remain in their own homes. Although approximately 300 meals are provided each day, volunteers have noted increasing numbers who find that they just cannot afford the rent to maintain their accommodation.

Gosford has had a 30% increase in population in the last fifteen years however there will be no increase in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program to assist the homeless in our community. Additionally there is no increase in Public Housing by the State Government.

“It seems as though we are caught between the State and Federal politicians and their spin doctors who tell both the government and opposition that there are no votes in *poverty or homelessness*”, Maher concluded.

-ENDS-

**For further details on this media release contact Laurie Maher
Phone: 02 4325 3540 Mobile: 0418 439 179**