

6.1. MM01 Support for our homeless during COVID

The death and subsequent community memorial for Peter, a rough sleeper who spent his final days camped in Arthur St, North Sydney was a cameo of the best and worst of life in Sydney.

The gathering of local residents to honour Peter reflected the innate kindness and respect within our community. However, his death also highlighted the harsh reality that not all Australians have a home and not all homes are safe places to be.

In Peter's case, he had declined offers of suitable accommodation, however, not all homeless people are offered the accommodation they need. Some are forced to sleep rough, while others couch surf or sleep in their cars or live in boarding houses effectively hiding the true extent of the problem.

At the Lower North Shore Domestic Violence Network meeting in June, Police reported domestic violence incidents had increased from an average of 150 per month to 170. Similarly, assaults had increased from an average of 22 per month to 30.

Interestingly, this does not correlate with increased requests for support at local refuges. Marys House in North Sydney reports that it currently has vacancies as referrals go quiet during lockdown when women are unable to reach out. They expect a spike when lockdown restrictions are lifted.

Local Wollstonecraft resident Bec Boyden is a dedicated volunteer with Sydney Street Kitchen and Blanket Patrol. In talking with Bec about homelessness, she brought to my attention the difficulties homeless people face in not having anywhere to put their belongings.

This sometimes stops them from accessing essential facilities such as a shower, toilet or medical services because they are anxious someone will steal the few things they do have. Carrying possessions with them 24/7 is stressful and can result in unnecessary loss or wear and tear on essential items such as blankets or jackets that they need for warmth overnight.

Bec and I discussed the possibility of homeless people being provided with lockers at transport hubs where they could store their belongings. I'm not sure how this could work in practise, but with financial and emotional stress increasing during the pandemic, especially during lockdown periods, it is definitely worth investigating.

I therefore recommend:

- 1.THAT** Community Development staff prepare a report on the impact of Covid-19 on homelessness on the Lower North Shore, especially within the North Sydney LGA.
- 2.THAT** the report explore the possibility of providing lockers at, or near major transport hubs for rough sleepers and include possible ways to work with the State Government and other agencies to provide the service.

3.THAT Council writes to Bec Boyden thanking her for raising awareness of the difficulties faced by homeless people and acknowledge her long-term contribution to Sydney Street Kitchen and Blanket Patrol.

**COUNCILLOR JILLY GIBSON
MAYOR**