



TALKING POINT

14 May 2020

What if it were me

Every day, I feel an enormous sense of gratitude. I have a job and somewhere to live. I have the luxury of choice. I am grateful that I live in Hobart, one of the most beautiful cities I have experienced.

Yet, as I walk around the picturesque Domain, Cenotaph, St David's Park, Rivulet and leafy city streets a sadness washes over me. As the falling autumn leaves give way to the cold breath of winter I see the glaring hallmarks of homelessness. An increasing number of tents pitched in clusters nestle beneath the canopy of trees.

I have witnessed people whose car is their home, which is a stark and troubling contrast to the houses on the streets in which their car is parked.

Winter is looming and these people need suitable accommodation where warmth, flowing water, food and other basic rights and necessities are a reality not a fantasy.

Overt homelessness is one thing, the hidden side of homelessness brings another layer of worry, particularly for women. Stories of women forced to trade sexual favours for somewhere to sleep are not uncommon. Sexual exploitation is wrong and without excuse.

The social complexities that surround homelessness are many and varied. However one fact is irrefutable; the risk of being discriminated against if you are homeless is amplified.

The loss of a job, inability to find work, no savings, and unaffordable rent all lead to a slippery and scary slope into social disadvantage.

Obtaining and holding down a job, as well as maintaining emotional and physical wellbeing in a state of homeless are all but impossible. Being refused

accommodation and the provision of goods and services due to conscious or unconscious bias and prejudice is likely.

If homeless, the opportunities to pursue, or continue, education will diminish if for no other reasons than lack of technology and insufficient financial means.

A flow on effect of COVID 19 will be the increased risk of homelessness and the cascading effects will be many. Poor physical and mental health, increased risk of ending up on the wrong side of the law, and experiencing discrimination and harassment to name but a few. People will be discriminated against on the basis of their social status.

As we embark upon the post pandemic road to economic and social recovery, a spotlight must be shone on people who are vulnerable. Each of us have the responsibility to ask ourselves the question, what if it were me, homeless and destitute.

If it were me, I know I would feel an acute sense of fear, humiliation and anxiety. If it were me, I would want to be treated with empathy and kindness. If it were me, I would hope that I would not be discriminated against and that my basic human right to have shelter was met.

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