A community response to homelessness

Newcastle & Hunter Homelessness Interagency Network is a network open to all services & organisations across the Newcastle Local Government and the Hunter Region that work with people impacted by homelessness.

Purpose:

NHHIN is a network committed to working on issues and identifying gaps in the Newcastle Local Government and the Hunter Region that impact on people experiencing homelessness. NHHIN is representative of and open to all homelessness related organisation’s within the Newcastle LGA and Hunter Region. Promoting the premise that Homelessness is everybody’s business.
Our aim as a network is to advocate on behalf of Newcastle Local Government and the Hunter Region that work with people impacted by homelessness, sector workers and provide opportunities for networking, partnerships, consultation, training and planning within the sector. NHHIN is committed to access and equity, social justice, cultural relevance and diversity to guide our work for implementing positive change within the sector.
NHHIN = A working group

History:

NHHIN started around 2000 and was initiated as a result of a report on homelessness commissioned by Newcastle City Council, written by Stuart Davis-Meehan of Key Insights.

Mission Australia funded Newcastle City Council to employ a Homelessness Strategy Officer to:

- To resource and facilitate
- Manage, review and evaluate the implementation Annual Action Plans
- Provide advice to State and Federal
- Promote an action oriented approach
- Identify funding opportunities
- Annual forums

There were originally a number of working groups reporting to a steering group, but in the end it became one group.

Mission Australia was no longer able to provide funds for the NHHIN Convener and withdrew this arrangement with council in 2008.

Since then the operation of the NHHIN has been reliant of services self nominating to chair the interagency while another service nominates as minute taker.
Some of the projects that came from the NHHIN include:

- Homelessness in the Hunter: An Induction Kit developed by Key Insights
- Hunter Homelessness Assessment & Referral Service (Became Signpost - no longer funded)
- Hunter Homelessness Law and Advocacy Service
- The Art of Reaching People (TARP) – assertive outreach pilot project
- Consumers’ Forum Homelessness Working Group (in partnership with Homeless Persons Legal Centre)
- Streetsmart (Diners at Streetsmart participating restaurants provided a donation)
- This Way Home
- Homeless Connect Day
Hunter Homeless Connect is a volunteer not-for-profit organisation that co-ordinates the annual Hunter Homeless Connect Day. The day links people to vital services such as accommodation and housing providers, health and wellbeing, legal and financial assistance, employment, study, and support to people who are homeless, doing it tough and at risk of homelessness.

An environment that maintains dignity
Fosters a culture of connectedness
Encourages a sense of being a valued member of the community

Hunter Homeless Connect Day is delivered by a ‘community coalition’ of government and non-government services and volunteers, with in-kind and financial support from organisations,

Each year since 2009 up to 1,500 guests have been welcomed at the annual Hunter Homeless Connect Day, accessing a one-stop-shop
Human and community services, plus receiving free haircuts, massages, immunisations, birth certificates, bedding, phone cards, food, clothing and much more.

Compass Housing current lead agency
Homeless Connect Day Website
“This Way Home” is a joint effort between Catholic Care Hunter-Manning, Samaritans, Salvation Army, Mission Australia, Nova for Women and Children, NSW Family & Community Services, Compass Housing, Baptist Community Services and Newcastle City Council.

“This Way Home” recognises the impact of homelessness on people and offers a service modelling that acknowledges these impacts. Case management, case co ordination, case linkages and active support.

Current Programs/Planning: Rent it Keep It, Smart Recovery, MHFA, Parenting Programs,

The project provides 28 units offering medium-term and temporary accommodation for people in the Newcastle area.

“This Way Home” aims to link people with appropriate services to support them in sustaining their accommodation and developing the skills to obtain and maintain long-term tenancy in the private or public housing sector.

This Way Home’s focus is to move beyond simply managing homelessness to breaking the cycle of homelessness permanently.
Responding to Going Home Staying Home Reforms
Responding to Going Home Staying Home Reforms

Homelessness services fragmented from competitive tendering process. Information was difficult to obtain services were fearful FACs moved in to a state of probity concerns that left services unsupported.

The NHHIN became less important services struggled to sustain service delivery, work on tender proposals, exploring partnerships and retaining staff.

**The NHHIN responded with arranging 2 forums for the sector**

The peak bodies, Homeslessness NSW, DV NSW and Yfoundation attended, All homelessness services were invited - funding bodies were excluded An opportunity for the sector to share their fears, receive information, understand aspects of the reform process that were often vague.

**Still the NHHIN continued**

meet, share information & discuss sector issues. Attendance decreased with added workload & further decreased once SHS funded contracts were at fewer numbers.
2016

**NHHIN did not disappear**

The spirit that had previously created innovative approaches to homelessness in the Hunter needed to morph

New political climate - New concerns for services working in the sector –

New climate in homelessness services and the issues facing people experiencing homelessness

**More than SHS services**

Justice, NGO’s, Health, Other Government- Council, Human Services

**Social Justice & Advocacy**

Paramount to survival

Its role in the current climate of inadequate social policies & political driven decisions

Lack of regard to the importance of shelter and the impact of poverty on people’s ability to obtain shelter and/or to maintain a standard of living.

It is currently in a good place, its energy and relationships are strong and the NHHIN is in a good position again to be able to work on some great community projects

Homelessness NSWx3 part Community Consult starting May 2016

We currently have a good relationship with all our peaks and *The Big Question* has proven to be a great agenda item to give us the opportunity to advocate to them directly about issues and advocate needs in regards to the Hunter.

Vacant Chair