



McAuley Community Services for Women

A ministry of the Sisters of Mercy

Submission to the City of Melbourne's proposed changes to its Activities Local Law.

Independence

McAuley Community Services for Women welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the conversation about the City of Melbourne's proposed changes to its Activities Local Law.

About McAuley Community Services for Women

McAuley Community Services for Women provides much needed accommodation and support services for women and their children who are escaping family violence, and for women who are homeless.

In 2016, we assisted over 600 women and children to rebuild their lives, supporting them on their journey towards independence and safer futures. McAuley Community Services for Women is a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy. We run family violence and homelessness services that are holistic in approach, providing a joined-up service for women leaving family violence through to providing them with help to secure employment:

McAuley Care: Victoria's only 24/7 safe, accessible crisis accommodation and support for women escaping family violence, as well as a refuge program.

McAuley House that provides accommodation and support for women who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness, many with poor physical and mental health.

We have restarted **McAuley Works**, a jobs-ready and employment program for women experiencing homelessness or family violence. Using a case management model, McAuley Works provides intensive, tailored services to each woman it supports, including post-employment assistance, with the single aim of helping women secure good jobs or to access training that will help themselves and their families financially.

We also run **Engage to Change**, a prevention program aimed at educating employers and workforces about what family violence is, how to recognise it and help employees who are experiencing family violence by referring them to specialist services.

Our views on the new policy

We share similar views to Launch Housing and others in the homelessness sector, and that is that the new wording is so broad it effectively bans rough sleeping in the city. Further it gives council officers the power to confiscate unattended items, forcing homeless people to pay a fee to get them back.

The Activities Local Law 2009 already bans camping in the city: "Unless in accordance with a permit, a person must not camp in or on any public place".

Under these amendments, a description of what constitutes camping will be deleted:

"... in a vehicle, tent, caravan or any type of temporary or provisional form of accommodation".

The current situation

McAuley Community Services for Women acknowledges that the City of Melbourne faces a complex situation with an increasing number of people sleeping rough in the city.

We understand the proposed amendments are designed to ensure public places are clean, safe and accessible for all community members, we believe the effect will further stigmatise people who are homeless.

The triggers for homelessness are well known and include housing affordability, family violence, mental illness and unemployment. Many of these factors are beyond the control of individuals, as such, individuals should not be blamed for their homeless state. To date, Melbourne City has actively tried to understand and deal with homelessness within its boundaries and as its own homelessness and housing strategy highlights, it is not illegal to be homeless.

The way forward

In January 2017 we were among the 30 homelessness, housing and social services that wrote an open letter calling on the City of Melbourne to review its amendment proposal.

In short, the letter pointed out that a key cause to homelessness is the lack of affordable housing, and secondly, homelessness is a long term, systemic issue which cannot be solved by quick fixes aimed primarily at making the City look pretty for visitors and workers.

We believe that, in the first instance, the City should meet with the people who are homeless and service providers to discuss how best to manage their possessions while they try to find somewhere to live. This can be done in conjunction with existing outreach services such as the Royal District Nursing Service and the Salvation Army and in conjunction with a fast-tracked housing plan.

Around 11% of women who come to McAuley Community Services for Women have experienced 'rough sleeping' and we continue to offer our support to the City of Melbourne as we all try to resolve homelessness.

McAuley Community Services for Women

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