No room to move?
Report of the Outer West Rooming House Project

The Salvation Army Adult Services
Community Outreach Services
April 2011
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The project

The Outer West Rooming House Project ran for 14 months from November 2009 through January 2011. The project was developed, auspiced and managed by The Salvation Army Adult Services Community Outreach Services, Kensington.

The vision for the project was to provide both active and proactive support to people living in privately run multiple occupancy rooming houses in the municipalities of Brimbank, Maribyrnong and Hobson’s Bay, in Melbourne’s western suburbs.

A major difficulty in providing services to this group of people is the ‘invisibility’ of both the rooming houses and their occupants. The rooming houses are run privately and often beneath the scrutiny of government and welfare services. Many rooming house occupants are unaware of their rights, or of locally available services. Coupled with this is a high degree of fear about speaking up against rooming house proprietors for fear of being evicted.

In this context, the project piloted an innovative and effective service response for rooming house occupants. The project received funding for a 0.5EFT worker position over twelve months. Using this resource, the project:

- conducted a survey of 84 rooming house occupants, which provided valuable information for local councils and for the planning of interventions
- provided a range of services to a total of 73 clients, leading to some significant positive outcomes
- undertook substantial partnership development work with local services, local councils, and Salvation Army Corps.

Key findings

The survey results showed a picture of significant differences amongst the profiles of rooming houses and rooming house occupants across the three municipalities. However, there were some common themes. Overall, quality of life for those living in rooming houses was poor, with significant safety issues, negative impacts on health, and lack of basic facilities such as cooking equipment and bedding. Most of those surveyed wished to live elsewhere. However, many felt trapped by the lack of affordability of private rental, and believed that rooming house living was their “only option”.

The Rooming House Project clearly demonstrated that with targeted support, other options were possible. The project assisted six households to achieve permanent housing, and another three households to move into transitional housing. A number of clients were assisted to access much-needed medical services, childcare and other community services.

One of the key findings of the project was that rooming house occupants are often not aware of or engaged with local service systems which could assist them to meet their needs. Although often referred into rooming house accommodation via the service system (often through a Housing Information and Referral service at an entry point agency), many people are confused about where to go for further assistance, and very few had received any follow-up.
The key issue is the expectation from the service system that individuals will “go to where the services are”. Many individuals surveyed faced a range of barriers to accessing services in this way. There is a need to review the accessibility of services within the Opening Doors framework in the light of this finding.

The key to the project’s success was its use of assertive outreach, service in-reach, and a linkage-based approach. The project clearly showed that engaging with rooming house occupants in their normal living environments is far more effective than expecting them to reach out to services of their own accord. The Rooming House Project demonstrated an effective and resource-efficient model of service delivery to a group of people who often find it difficult to access mainstream services.

Looking to the future

There is a strong continued need among the rooming house population in the region for a service of this type. While the core elements of the service model should be retained, there are a variety of ways in which the service could be auspiced and structured. It is also worth considering whether this service model could be of relevance to rooming house populations in other regions of Victoria.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that the Salvation Army Adult Services:

1. Actively pursue the establishment of an ongoing assertive-outreach based program targeted to people living in rooming houses in the outer west.
2. Actively pursue improvements within the local Opening Doors structures and processes, to ensure that rooming house occupants are able to access housing and support resources appropriate to their needs.
3. Advocate with local councils and the State Government in relation to broadening the scope of rooming house standards to address the living environment.
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Permission has been granted by individual clients for their photos to appear in this report
1. **INTRODUCTION**

This report presents the findings of the Outer West Rooming House Project (RHP), which ran for 14 months from November 2009 through January 2011. The project provided an innovative and effective service response for occupants of rooming houses in the municipalities of Maribyrnong, Brimbank and Hobson’s Bay, Melbourne. In addition to surveying rooming house occupants and achieving significant client outcomes in its own right, the project also uncovered systemic problems in the way in which the homelessness assistance sector responds to this group of people. The report presents the results of the survey, details the project’s service delivery model, and identifies the need for ongoing targeted service provision for this vulnerable population.

**Community Outreach Services**

The Rooming House Project was developed and auspiced by Community Outreach Services (COS), a social program area of The Salvation Army Adult Services. Adult Services operates within the umbrella of the Melbourne Central Division of The Salvation Army’s Southern Territory.

COS consists of a cluster of programs which work with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness:

- Melbourne Street to Home Program
- Places
- Young Adults Program
- Women’s Accommodation and Support Service
- Intensive Case Management Initiative.

The Rooming House Project was closely associated with the Places program.

**Rooming houses in Melbourne**

Rooming houses are dwellings in which residents rent bedrooms, rather than self-contained apartments, and have shared use of common facilities such as bathrooms, kitchens or lounge areas. In contrast to shared housing, rooming house residents exercise no control over who else lives on the premises.¹ Rooming houses have provided low-cost accommodation for people in Victoria for many years. In recent decades, rooming houses have been increasingly utilised by homelessness assistance organizations as an emergency accommodation option for people experiencing homelessness. Decreasing housing affordability and low rental vacancy rates, particularly from 2006 onwards², has seen many people ‘squeezed out’ of the

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private rental market. Coupled with extensive public housing waiting lists and shortage of other crisis or transitional accommodation options, this has resulted in private rooming houses becoming the only option for many people seeking accommodation.

The changing usage patterns of rooming houses has resulted in greater transience of rooming house residents, an increasing proportion of women and children amongst the rooming house population, and a higher proportion of residents who are vulnerable or have complex needs.³

Rooming houses in Victoria are subject to the provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic) as well as other legislation including the Health Act 1958 and Building Act 1993. Rooming house residents typically do not have a tenancy agreement. Rooming houses may be operated by private landlords, or by not-for-profit organisations. The past decade has also seen the emergence of private companies which head-lease large numbers of houses and sublet the rooms. In some cases these landlords operate outside of legislative provisions.

Melbourne’s community sector has for many years expressed concern over living conditions in rooming houses. From 1997 the Inner Urban Rooming House Project advocated for improved regulation of rooming houses. From 2007, the ‘Call This A Home?’ campaign⁴ attracted significant media attention and was successful in persuading the Victorian Government to review regulation of rooming houses. The Rooming House Standards Taskforce released its report in September 2009, and the Victorian Government agreed to adopt all 32 recommendations of the Taskforce. These included:

- Mandatory registration of operators and premises
- Improving standards of safety and amenity
- Strengthening compliance and enforcement
- Increasing the supply of alternative rental housing.

The Taskforce also led to the rollout of the Accommodation Options for Families program, which seeks to reduce the number of families accommodated in unregistered rooming house accommodation and assist families to secure longer term support and more appropriate housing options.

The Outer West Rooming House Project

Motivation

In 2008 – 09, Community Outreach Services staff were increasingly responding to people living in desperate conditions in substandard rooming houses. With housing and support services already operating beyond capacity, these people were often unable to access alternative accommodation or support. The Places program, with its emphasis on outreach to people in marginal accommodation, was finding an increasing proportion of its time being taken up with responding to those in rooming houses.

COS identified that a major difficulty in providing services to this group of people is the ‘invisibility’ of both the rooming houses and their occupants. The rooming houses are run privately and often beneath the scrutiny of government and welfare services. Proprietors often operate outside the Residential Tenancies Act and can be very resistant to allowing welfare agencies onto the premises. Coupled with this is a high degree of fear


⁴ http://www.callthisahome.net/
amongst people living in the rooming houses about speaking up against the proprietors for fear of losing their accommodation.

Local government agencies were also often unaware of rooming houses operating within their municipalities. The needs of most rooming house residents were both unrecognised and unmet.

Against this backdrop, COS sought to establish a short-term project to map and actively address the needs of this ‘invisible’ population.

Aims
The vision for the project was to provide proactive support to people living in privately run multiple occupancy rooming houses. The scope of the project was the municipalities of Brimbank (focus areas: Sunshine and St Albans), Maribyrnong (focus on Footscray) and Hobson’s Bay (focus areas: Altona and Laverton).

The initial aims of the project were to:

1. Profile rooming house occupants
2. Reducing occupants’ social isolation
3. Document and meet occupants’ immediate needs.

As the project evolved, it became apparent that social isolation was not a primary concern for many of the rooming house occupants surveyed. For this reason, the second aim was backgrounded, and a stronger focus on providing housing support and family support was introduced during the middle stages of the project.

During the planning stages it was also thought that the project might play a significant role in providing evidence for public advocacy around poor living conditions in rooming houses. While the project did gather some evidence in this area, the momentum of the ‘Call This A Home?’ campaign and Rooming House Taskforce ultimately made this less necessary, and the project focused instead on exploring service delivery models that could respond to the needs of rooming house occupants.

The project also set out to enhance the integration of the work of COS with Salvation Army Corps operating in the outer west of Melbourne. While intended to provide practical support in delivery of some types of services, this was also seen as of benefit in itself in strengthening networks among the Salvation Army’s Corps and Social Services components.

Resourcing
The Rooming House Project was funded through a contribution of $49,000 from The Salvation Army Melbourne Central Division’s Social Program Development and Innovation Fund. The majority of this grant was to be directed to a 0.5EFT worker position for a 12-month period, with the remainder covering welfare and logistical costs.

Due to staffing changes, the Rooming House Project worker position was filled for only part of the project duration. For the remainder of the project, the Places worker undertook dual roles (Rooming House Project part time, Places part time). Due to the tight integration of the project with Places, this worked well in practice. The two staff members who undertook the project work over the 14 months were Georgina Standfield and Melissa Bantock.

Timeline
The project commenced in November 2009 and concluded in January 2011. It was implemented in three phases:
1. Identifying rooming houses in each municipality and conducting a survey of rooming house occupants (Phase one)
2. Trialling support interventions over a 4-month period, guided by survey outcomes (Phase two)
3. Linking supports to local resources to increase ongoing sustainability (Phase three).

Governance
The project was auspiced by Community Outreach Services and managed by the COS Manager (Melinda Kidgell), who reported to the relevant Adult Services Group Manager.

The Assertive Outreach Project is a partnership between services operating in the Western suburbs of Melbourne. The intent is to more effectively utilise existing resources and knowledge, and to provide assertive outreach to people living in unsupported, inappropriate and substandard housing. In addition to COS, AOP members include the Western Region Health Centre, Saltwater Mental Health Service, the Royal District Nursing Service and the Tenants Union.

The initial intention was to establish a project-specific Reference Group including external stakeholders. However, consultation with stakeholders identified a lack of time to commit to a new structure. Instead, the project used the existing structure of the Assertive Outreach Project (AOP). During the project duration, the Rooming House Project became a standing item on the agenda of the monthly AOP meetings. AOP members were consulted on the framing of the questionnaire, assisted with surveying in Maribyrnong and Brimbank, and provided guidance in relation to the support interventions to be trialled during phase two of the project.

Acknowledgements
Community Outreach Services wishes to acknowledge the many sector and community partners who contributed to the success of the Rooming House Project. While there are too many organisations to name them all individually, COS would particularly like to thank:

- The Salvation Army Melbourne Central Division’s Social Program Development and Innovation Fund
- The Salvation Army Adult Services network and leadership
- Salvation Army Corps in Werribee, Altona and Footscray
- The City Councils of Maribyrnong, Hobson’s Bay and Brimbank
- Partner organisations within the Assertive Outreach Project
- SASHS Accommodation Options for Families Program
- Other partner organisations within the Local Area Service Networks in the North and West Metro Region.
2. **Profile of Rooming Houses and Occupants**

Between December 2009 and March 2010, the Rooming House Project conducted a survey of rooming house occupants across the municipalities of Maribyrnong, Hobson’s Bay and Brimbank. The survey had three main aims:

- to provide local councils and services with clear information on the rooming houses within their municipalities, and the people living in these forms of accommodation
- to gain an understanding of the experience of occupants within the rooming house environment and in accessing homeless services
- to inform the type of support provided during subsequent stages of the project.

In order to undertake the survey, project staff carried out a substantial mapping exercise to identify rooming houses operating within each municipality.

**Methodology**

**Identifying rooming houses**

The project team identified registered and unregistered rooming houses within the project’s catchment area, and systematically visited these over a four month period. Potential rooming houses were identified through:

- the existing knowledge of the Places worker and other COS staff
- conversations with Places clients and other rooming house occupants, many of whom had lived in multiple rooming houses in the area
- local council lists of registered rooming houses
- asking other services in the local area, specifically the two access point services (Metrowest Housing and SASHS), who frequently provided Housing Establishment Fund brokerage to people to assist them to access rooming house accommodation.

In this way, a total of 77 potential rooming houses were identified and visited by the project team during the mapping phase. Table 1 shows the distribution of properties visited during Phase one, by municipality. In total over the 12 months of the project, around 100 privately run rooming houses in the three municipalities were visited on one or more occasions.

Having identified a potential rooming house, two staff would travel to the dwelling and knock on the front door. If it was answered, staff would ask whether it was a rooming house. In the majority of cases, the occupants confirmed that it was operating as a rooming house. However, in some cases the property was either clearly abandoned, or was no longer operating as a rooming house. Where no-one answered the door on an initial visit, the project team would usually return at a later time and try again.
Table 1: Properties visited during Phase one, by LGA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LGA</th>
<th>Number of potential rooming houses visited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hobson’s Bay</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maribyrnong</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brimbank</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Surveying occupants
The survey tool was a questionnaire (see Appendix) which was developed and trialled in December 2009. Consultations occurred with the project team and Adult Services more broadly to determine the structure of the survey. The content of the questionnaire covered:

- socio-demographic information on the resident
- basic information on the facilities, occupancy and conditions within the rooming house
- the individual’s experiences which led them to live in the rooming house
- the types of services or assistance received over the previous 6 months
- the services or support that the individual wanted.

Within each property confirmed to be a rooming house, occupants were door-knocked and invited to participate in the survey. All individuals were informed of privacy and confidentiality provisions, and informed consent was sought.

Where an individual agreed to participate, the questionnaire was administered through a verbal interview in a private area of the rooming house (usually in the individual’s room, but sometimes elsewhere, for example outside). The interview generally took about fifteen minutes to complete. Responses were recorded either by the staff member, or directly by the interviewee.

Participants were asked if they would allow a photo to be taken that could be included within the study, and written consent was obtained if they agreed. Interviewed participants were informed of their right to skip questions or cease involvement at any stage; no participant prematurely ended the interview. All results were confidential and completed questionnaires were recorded anonymously using a code. Participants received a $20 supermarket food card.

The large majority of the interviews were undertaken by the Places worker and/or the Rooming House Project worker. A student on placement assisted with some interviews in December, and staff of AOP partner organisations conducted some interviews within Maribyrnong and Brimbank during the month of February.

During Phase one, a total of 84 questionnaires were completed. Table 2 shows the number of individuals surveyed, by municipality. It is important to note that the 84 responses do not represent 84 separate ‘households’, as for some couples or families, more than one member of the household completed a questionnaire.
Table 2. Respondents to rooming house occupant survey, by LGA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LGA</th>
<th>Number of occupants interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hobson’s Bay</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maribyrnong</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brimbank</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>84</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data was collated and analysed using a purpose-built MS Access database, with additional analysis conducted using MS Excel.

Communication of results
Due to the project imperative of involving local government in service provision, each local council was provided with written information on survey results and emerging trends for their area. Follow up meetings were scheduled with representatives from Hobson’s Bay and Brimbank City Councils where findings and recommendations for support interventions were explained and advocated for.

Results: Rooming house profile

Due to the project’s focus, all of the rooming houses profiled were privately run, multiple occupancy rooming houses. However, the mapping exercise and survey did identify significant differences in the types of rooming houses operating across the three municipalities.

During Phase one, the project did visit and survey residents in all known rooming houses within the three LGAs. While there may have been a few unregistered rooming houses that were not identified through the mapping process, it is believed that the survey data does cover the large majority of rooming houses in the area. The information is therefore believed to be reasonably representative of the general profile of rooming houses in these LGAs at the time of the survey.

Information on rooming house characteristics was recorded through the occupant questionnaire. Because the questionnaire did not record the address of the rooming house, results in this section must therefore be read as proportions of occupants surveyed, rather than proportions of rooming houses profiled.

Rooming house occupancy
Three types of rooming houses were identified: male-only, female-only and mixed gender rooming houses. No student accommodation was represented within the sample.

Figure 1 shows that the majority of respondents from Maribyrnong were residing in male-only rooming houses, while all rooming houses identified in Hobson’s Bay were mixed gender. Two respondents from Brimbank were residing in female-only accommodation.
27 of the 84 survey respondents (32%) reported that there were children residing in the rooming house where they were staying.

**Number of bedrooms**

The majority of rooming houses in these LGAs were relatively small (4 or 5 bedrooms). Figure 2 shows the distribution of survey responses by number of bedrooms in the rooming house. Although the graph shows a relatively large number of responses from rooming houses with 10 or more bedrooms, these responses are believed to result from many questionnaire completions in just a few large rooming houses.

**Facilities**

Rooming houses varied considerably in their standard of amenity. A significant factor was the nature of facilities provided.
15 respondents (18%) reported that their rooming house had makeshift rather than fixed bedrooms.

While almost all respondents had access to a shared bathroom and kitchen, only 31 respondents (37%) had access to a shared lounge area.

In some cases, basic household equipment was either not provided, or not in working order. Figure 3 shows that less than 60% of survey respondents had access to a working fridge, while only one fifth had a working washing machine on the premises.

Figure 3. Survey respondents with access to basic household equipment

Rent
The questionnaire did not collect dollar figures of rent paid by respondents, hence it is not possible to provide a median rent figure. However, anecdotal evidence from project staff was that the cheapest rent they were aware of during the project was $140 per person per week, while typical rents were in the range of $170 – $180 per person per week. For most individuals, this had to be paid from their government payment, plus rent assistance.

Most rooming houses charge rent on a per-adult basis. Couples or families would therefore typically be paying $300 – $350 per week or more for a single room.

Registration
The registered / unregistered status of the rooming houses also varied significantly across LGAs. In Hobson’s Bay, all the surveyed rooming houses were registered, while in Brimbank, most were unregistered. This reflected the different methods of operating of rooming house managers in different municipalities, as well as the varying levels of preparedness of the local councils to drive registration processes.

Transience of rooming houses
The project found a significant level of transience, not only among rooming house occupants, but among the rooming houses themselves. This was particularly prevalent among the smaller, unregistered rooming houses. A substantial number of these rooming houses closed during the project period while others opened in neighbouring areas.
In some cases this was due to external factors (e.g. the owner of the property not renewing the lease to the rooming house manager), however COS staff came to the view that a significant amount of change was due to operators of unregistered rooming houses attempting to stay ‘one step ahead’ of compliance processes. Frequent changes were also noted in the business names and legal structures under which some rooming house operators functioned.

Results: Occupant profile

As expected, the survey of rooming house occupants showed a diverse group of people, all living in poverty and many with complex health issues and other needs. Again, the results varied across the three municipalities.

Given the many operational and contextual factors that affected the sampling process, and uncertainties around the full size of the rooming house population in the study area, the results cannot be taken as representative. However, they do provide a general sense of the diversity in this population.

Gender

Of the 84 residents surveyed, 58 (69%) were men and 26 (31%) were women. The proportion of women in the sample is high compared to the traditional rooming house profile (mostly single males).

Figure 4 shows that while males constituted around 80% of respondents in the LGA of Maribyrnong, they were only 58% of respondents in Hobson’s Bay.

Figure 4. Survey respondents by gender and municipality

Age

The ages of survey respondents ranged from 17 years to 76 years. The majority (71%) of those surveyed were aged between 20 and 49, with most of the remainder (25%) aged 50 or older. Figure 5 shows the age distribution of respondents.

Figure 5. Age distribution of respondents

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Ages for all respondents are calculated as at 1 January 2010.
Figure 5. Survey respondents by age band

Figure 6 shows that the LGA of Maribyrnong had a much higher proportion of survey respondents aged 50 and over (50% of respondents for the municipality) than the other two LGAs. In contrast, Hobson’s Bay and Brimbank had higher proportions of respondents aged less than 30 years.

Figure 6. Survey respondents by age band and municipality

Living arrangements (household type)
Of the 84 residents surveyed, 56 (67%) were living by themselves. The remainder were living either with a partner, as part of a family (single or dual parent with child/ren) or as part of another grouping (e.g. carer arrangement, group of friends).

Figure 7 illustrates that the household type profile of respondents varied considerably across the three LGAs. The large majority (85%) of respondents in Maribyrnong were singles, with no families interviewed in rooming houses in this LGA. In Hobson’s Bay, in contrast, less than 50% were singles and around one third (10 respondents) were living as part of a family unit. Some of these families had full-time care of their children in the rooming house; others had shared custody arrangements in which the children lived in the rooming house.
part of the time. These families had in total over 15 children in their care, ranging in age from 3 months to 16 years.

Figure 7. Survey respondents by living arrangements

Country of birth
Figure 8 shows that about three quarters of respondents were born in Australia, with significant minorities born in the United Kingdom, Africa, Europe, and the Asia / Pacific region. No significant differences across municipalities were observed from the survey data on this variable.

The large majority (96%) of survey respondents were permanent residents of Australia.

Figure 8. Survey respondents by country of birth
Income and employment status

Of the 84 residents surveyed, 77 (92%) indicated that a government payment of some sort was their primary source of income. The largest number of respondents for any income category was for Disability Support Pension (33 respondents or 39% of the total), indicating significant health and disability issues amongst this group. Three respondents (4%) had no income at the time of the interview. Figure 9 shows the distribution.

Figure 9. Survey respondents by primary source of income

![Figure 9: Survey respondents by primary source of income]

While only one respondent listed wages / salary as their primary income source, an additional 6 respondents (7%) stated that they worked part time (generally to supplement their Centrelink payment). Figure 10 shows that almost all of the remainder (74 respondents or 88% of the total) were not in the labour force.

Figure 10. Survey respondents by employment status

![Figure 10: Survey respondents by employment status]

Given the low rate of employment amongst this group, and reliance on Centrelink payments, it is not surprising that many respondents experienced chronic poverty. This was exacerbated as in many cases, respondents were paying 50% or more of their income on rent.
Housing history
The survey collected a range of information on respondents’ previous housing experiences. The length of time that respondents had spent living in rooming houses varied greatly; the shortest was one week, while the longest was 38 years. While the median duration of rooming house residence was one year, the average was around three years, reflecting the small minority of respondents who had been living in rooming houses for ten years or more. Figure 11 shows that around half of respondents had been living in rooming houses for one year or less, while around 17% had been living in rooming houses for 6 years or more.

Figure 11. Survey respondents by duration of history of residence in rooming houses

37 respondents (44%) had lived in rooming houses in other suburbs during the 6 months prior to the interview.

Table 3 shows that a number of the survey respondents had previously owned their own home, while a significant number (21 respondents or 25% of the total) had experienced sleeping rough at some point.

Table 3. Prior accommodation types of survey respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation / tenure type</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home owner</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public housing rental</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional housing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent free accommodation (couch surfing)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis accommodation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvised dwelling / slept rough</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 12 illustrates that over half of the respondents (48 people, or 57% of the total) had accessed their current rooming house accommodation via referral from an agency. In most cases this was via an Initial Assessment and Planning (IAP) service at one of the local entry point agencies.

**Figure 12. Survey respondents by means of accessing their current rooming house**

![Bar chart showing means of accessing the rooming house](image)

Experiences leading to residence in rooming house

The survey explored what experiences and issues had led the person to live in a rooming house. The structure of the survey categorised these issues under five main themes: financial, relationship, housing, health, and substance use. Unsurprisingly, each of these categories was strongly represented in the experience of respondents.

Figure 13 shows, for each of these main areas, the percentage of survey respondents who had experienced issues in that area. Around 65% of respondents had experienced financial difficulties which had contributed to them ending up residing in the rooming house, while 62% had experienced (or were currently experiencing) health problems and a similar percentage disclosed substance use issues. The survey did not collect data on whether health and substance use issues predated the commencement of rooming house accommodation. For some individuals these issues may have been caused or exacerbated by the rooming house environment itself.\(^6\)

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Difficulty in finding affordable alternative housing was a key factor cited by many of the respondents. Many commented that the rooming house was their “only option”. Related issues included:

- lack of affordable housing vacancies
- lack of a private rental history and references
- lack of savings to cover bond and rent in advance
- discrimination in the private rental market.

27% of respondents stated they had been evicted or asked to leave their previous accommodation, while 50% stated they could not afford other accommodation. 13% mentioned loss of employment or income as a key factor leading to them residing in the rooming house.

Over half of the respondents (52%) stated that the breakdown or end of a significant relationship (for example, through divorce, separation or the death of a partner or parent) was a factor contributing to their residence in the rooming house. An additional 6% were fleeing domestic / family violence or abuse.

While only 2% of respondents reported a diagnosed psychiatric disability, 39% stated that they experienced significant mental health issues such as depression or anxiety. 20% advised they had a physical or sensory disability and/or significant physical health problems. 4% advised that they had an Acquired Brain Injury. Over a quarter of the respondents (27%) had previously experienced long-term care in hospital.

52 respondents (62% of the total) reported having used alcohol or other drugs frequently within the 6 months prior to the survey, although only 13 individuals (15%) were reported as having a chronic substance use problem.

Just under half of the respondents (49%) reported having had contact with the criminal justice system, although it is unclear whether this was in the role of offender, victim, or other party. A number of respondents had spent time in prison.
Access to services; Community linkages

Most survey respondents across all three municipalities reported that they had little, if any, contact with support services. The most commonly accessed services were the local doctor and local material aid services. In particular, respondents were generally not aware of or linked to services provided by local government.

Although 57% of respondents had accessed their rooming house accommodation via a housing or support service, very few respondents had experienced any follow-up from the service once they had been placed in the rooming house. These issues are explored further in section 4 of the report.

Most respondents reported that they spoke to only a few people during the week, including fellow residents. This limited social contact reduced their capacity for social support or integration into the community.

Life in the rooming house

The survey gathered substantial qualitative data around the experience of life for rooming house occupants in these three municipalities.

A small number of respondents stated that they enjoyed the experience of rooming house life; that they were satisfied with their accommodation, and would not choose to live elsewhere. These tended to be single males, often in their forties or older, who had lived in rooming houses for some years. These men had independent bedrooms containing a sink and were receiving regular outreach support.

However, most of those interviewed stated that they were only living in the rooming house because they could not access any other accommodation. Their experience of life in a rooming house was of paying high rents for minimal space, lack of basic furnishings or household items, and a dirty and unsafe living environment. Many people in this cohort wished desperately to escape from these living conditions, but felt trapped in rooming house accommodation due to lack of money or rental history.

Residents’ experience was impacted by the mode of operating of the rooming house manager (companies operating predominantly unregistered rooming houses tended to have poorer living conditions), as well as the mix of other occupants of the rooming house at the time. At a broader level, the operation of the service system in particular areas also impacted the type and accessibility of support that was available to occupants.

With weekly rental typically costing around $170 per person per week (58% of Newstart Allowance with maximum rent assistance or 40% of Aged or Disability Pension with maximum rent assistance), rooming house occupants experienced difficulties in meeting day to day expenses, such as travel tickets, medicine, food or child care. Most were unable to save any money towards bond or rent in advance for a private rental property. This pattern of high rents effectively trapped people in a cycle of chronic poverty.

For families, the high rents often saw multiple family members crowded into a single room (the survey found up to 6 people living in a single room). Cramped living conditions and lack of privacy created additional stress for occupants.

Many rooming houses (especially unregistered ones) lacked basic household facilities such as working fridges, ovens, or washing machines. Some respondents reported eating on the kitchen floor due to lack of furniture.
No linen or blankets were supplied and often where multiple family members were sharing a room, there were insufficient mattresses supplied. The state of cleanliness of the rooming houses was often very poor.

Respondents also raised more general concerns about safety within the rooming houses. Many had experiences of personal items being stolen, or being threatened or abused by other occupants. For families with children, these concerns were especially serious.

Food security in particular was a major issue for many occupants. Lack of kitchen utensils such as pots and pans made it impossible to cook. Even where equipment was available, shared kitchens frequently resulted in food being stolen from communal fridges. For individuals with little money to spare, it was often difficult or impossible to replace this stolen food.

At a deeper level, many of those experienced a sense of anger and shame at being forced into these poor conditions. The sense of being marginalised within the community was profound, and impacted on people’s ability to participate in society and on their sense of self-worth.

Results: Needs

The survey revealed a high rate of need amongst the respondents, across a wide range of life areas.

Housing

For many of those surveyed, the rooming house was a poor accommodation option that impacted negatively on their safety, physical and mental health, and ability to participate in society. The majority of respondents wished to escape from rooming house accommodation, but could not see a way out.

Only 13 of the 84 respondents (15%) were on the Early Housing waiting list, despite the fact that many had had prior contact with housing or homelessness assistance services. Only a minority were aware of the Early Housing application process. Some stated that they had the paperwork required, but needed assistance to complete and lodge it.

Health

52 of those interviewed (62%) identified significant health concerns, ranging from mental health issues (often depression or anxiety) through to chronic or terminal illnesses (diabetes, cancer).

Practical support

Many people needed assistance with material aid for basic expenses and household items, such as travel, food vouchers or cooking utensils.

Some people requested support to attend appointments or to access local services such as childcare or school holiday programs.

Priorities

The survey asked a range of questions to identify priority areas for service delivery. In general, the areas seen as highest priority by respondents were housing, health / medical care, material aid and employment / training.
assistance. Figure 14 illustrates this through the responses to a question asking survey respondents to rank a number of life areas in terms of their importance to the respondent at the time of the interview.

For families, family linkage and support also emerged as a significant area of priority.

Counter to initial expectations, respondents did not appear overly concerned about social isolation per se and did not place a high priority on social activities. Also, although over half of respondents disclosed frequent alcohol and/or other drug use over the preceding 6 months, accessing substance use treatment services (such as counselling or detox) was not a priority for most respondents.

Figure 14. Survey respondents’ ratings of priority of various life areas

Summary

The survey results paint a picture of significant differences amongst the rooming houses operating across the three municipalities.

- In Maribyrnong, the rooming houses tend toward a more traditional model, with a population of predominantly single males and an average age older than that of the other two municipalities.
- In Hobson’s Bay, there were a substantial proportion of younger families, often headed by a single parent.
- In Brimbank, the population was mixed, but the large majority of rooming houses visited were unregistered.

Overall, quality of life for those living in rooming houses was poor.

The results clearly illustrated a range of complex needs amongst rooming house occupants, with priority areas including housing, material / financial aid, health / medical care, and family linkage and support. These priorities informed the service interventions developed in Phase 2 of the project.
**Case Study: Alex and Julie**

The Rooming House Project met Alex and his partner Julie* during the interviewing phase. Alex had terminal cancer and was unable to work; Julie was his fulltime carer. Julie’s adult daughter came out to Australia to be with the couple during this difficult time, however she was unable to find employment and not able to receive any income due to her residency status.

Alex and Julie found that rooming house accommodation was the only option available to them. The rising cost of private rental in Footscray and the increased competition for lower end rentals made it difficult to get approval for private rental. Alex and Julie were paying a significant amount of their income (DSP and Carer’s Benefit) towards renting two rooms in the rooming house, which made it difficult to save the money required for rent in advance or bond. Alex was in and out of hospital and in constant pain, which made it almost impossible to find time to inspect and apply for private rental properties.

Alex and Julie lived in the rooming house for ten months. The lack of privacy in the rooming house became more and more significant as Alex’s health declined. Alex commented that the deterioration of his health led him to feel a decline in his dignity, and this was compounded by the lack of privacy.

The RHP linked Alex and Julie to the Places program, which was able to assist them to lodge a Segment 3 public housing application. The expected wait time for public housing was over two years.

The RHP liaised with local real estate agents to try to assist the family to find private rental. Eventually Julie’s daughter was able to secure employment and was approved for a three bedroom private rental property with her mother and friend on the lease. They were able to afford the rent when it was divided between them. However, they required financial support to establish the tenancy. Places assisted with brokerage money via the Housing Establishment Fund, which helped to cover the cost of rent in advance and a fridge. The family also accessed material aid from Places and St Vincent de Paul for basic household furniture.

Having safe affordable housing was of great benefit to Alex and Julie. A safe space for Alex’s family and friends to visit was invaluable for the couple due to Alex’s limited ability to get out and about. Alex commented that the house really felt like a home, and had a positive influence on his general wellbeing. The family were able to cook in their own kitchen and Alex could access a private bathroom.

Alex spent almost three months living in the new house, making good use of the extra space and privacy. However during September 2010 Alex’s health took a rapid decline, and he passed away on September 14th. Even if it was only for a short time, it is good to know that Alex had access to the basic human right, safe and affordable housing, before he died. Julie, her daughter and their friend continue to live in the house and call it home.

* Personal details have been changed to avoid identifying clients
3. **SERVICE DELIVERY**

In addition to mapping rooming houses and surveying occupants, the Rooming House Project had a strong service delivery component. This aspect of the project met immediate needs of individuals who engaged with the project, including those surveyed during Phase One. However, it also implemented a service model based around assertive outreach, and developed and trialled specific types of interventions which could then be generalised to other programs.

The project was successful in achieving these aims, and showed some outstanding outcomes from service delivery.

**Service model**

The service model developed by the project was based around a set of six core principles and service modalities: a client-centred approach, flexibility in responding to needs, a partnership-based approach, assertive outreach, service in-reach, and a commitment to linking people to existing local services.

**Client-centred approach**

The project had a commitment to discovering what mattered to rooming house occupants, and acting on this. In the planning stages of the project, a set of hypotheses had been formed about what types of services would be of interest to the target population. The results of the survey led to a different set of interventions being implemented.

**Flexibility in responding to needs**

Rather than being tied into a set of rigid guidelines about how and when services would be delivered, the project was able to work in ways that responded to the individual situations of clients. This included being able to provide a range of different types of practical support as needed by the client.

**Partnership-based approach**

The project had a very strong emphasis on developing partnerships with local stakeholders. As well as making strong use of the Adult Services network, the project continued to strengthen partnerships with the Assertive Outreach Program, homelessness assistance services, and with local Salvation Army Corps. The project also worked hard to build strong relationships with local councils in order to:

- increase their awareness of the profile of rooming houses in their LGAs
- motivate them to increase the accessibility of their social services to rooming house occupants
- provide information which would be of use in carrying out councils’ regulatory responsibilities regarding rooming house registration and inspection.

**Assertive outreach**

The existing practice experience of the Places program suggested that people living in rooming houses were an ‘invisible’ population, who were not being served by existing office-based services. This view was strongly reinforced by the survey findings. In order to locate and engage with people living in rooming houses, it was
necessary for the project worker to visit rooming houses and proactively approach occupants to build rapport and ascertain their needs.

Service in-reach
Rooming house occupants face a range of barriers in accessing mainstream, office-based services. Rather than expecting people to leave their accommodation to travel to an external service location, the project had a commitment to bringing the service into the individual’s normal living environment. The effectiveness of this approach in producing outcomes quickly was clearly demonstrated by the housing in-reach component of the interventions.

Linkage to existing local services
The project clearly identified that there are existing local service systems (albeit under-resourced) with service obligations to rooming house residents within their municipalities. These systems include mainstream services (such as Centrelink), local government services, and community-based housing services and support providers. People living in rooming house accommodation fall into the category of secondary or tertiary homelessness, and are therefore entitled to access housing and support options provided through the Homelessness Assistance Service sector. However, in the absence of assertive outreach-based support, they remain significantly marginalised within the system. The fact that local service systems are not being widely utilised by rooming house occupants is an indication of the need for better accessibility and linkage, rather than for the creation of duplicate support services. The project therefore worked hard to bridge the gap between alienated clients and existing services.

Interventions
Service delivery took place throughout the project.

During the survey, interviews often identified a range of immediate and longer-term needs. The project was able to respond to immediate needs with linkage to an appropriate service. Due to the project’s close integration with the Places program, it was often possible for Places to provide material aid or to link the individual to (e.g.) health services. A number of individuals or families with very significant needs became ongoing-clients of Places.

Where longer-term or less urgent needs were identified, the project recorded these, and staff attempted to follow up with the individual later in the project. This was not always possible, as sometimes those interviewed had moved on (or in some cases, the rooming house had closed down) by the time the worker returned.

Following completion of the survey, the project moved into Phase two (piloting support interventions). This took place over a four-month period, commencing around May 2010. During this phase, a set of key intervention strategies were developed and piloted. The support interventions were guided by the survey responses and were therefore different in each municipality. The interventions piloted were:

- Housing in-reach
- Support and linkage for families
- Provision of cooking utensils
- Information packs.

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In Maribyrnong, a number of services were already providing outreach to rooming houses. Therefore, a decision was taken to focus the direct support interventions in Brimbank and Hobson’s Bay. In Maribyrnong the project focused on facilitating a more coordinated approach to assessment and referral within the Assertive Outreach Project.

In addition to (and in conjunction with) these strategies, the project also provided a range of generic types of assistance and support, including referral and linkage, assistance with exploring accommodation options, practical support (e.g. transport to appointments), and material or financial aid.

Each of the piloted intervention strategies is discussed in more detail below.

**Housing in-reach**

Within Brimbank, only two out of 19 people surveyed had submitted an Office of Housing (OoH) application. During Phase 2, the Rooming House Project revisited rooming houses within Brimbank with the specific task of supporting residents to complete applications for public housing.

The segmented waiting list application process involves a number of steps; people often require some support to understand and complete it. While this form of support is available to some extent through homelessness assistance access points, most rooming house occupants found it difficult to access. The housing in-reach approach attempted to make the OoH application process accessible to isolated rooming house residents. The project found that individuals were welcoming and relieved that this type of service had become available to them.

Housing in-reach was piloted in Brimbank 2 days a week for an initial 4-week period. Posters were placed in each of the rooming houses advertising assistance with housing applications through assertive outreach. It was first thought that it may be an enormous challenge for some of the occupants to engage and meet the extensive requirements needed to be able to submit applications for early housing. However, this proved not to be the case. On average it required 3 to 4 visits by the in-reach worker to gather relevant information and acquire the documentation required by the Office of Housing. During the in-reach pilot period, contact was made with 14 people resulting in the submission of five Segment 1 applications and two Segment 3 applications.

Once completed, it became apparent that housing in-reach should be offered to rooming house occupants in all three municipalities. The expanded in-reach program visited rooming houses across Maribyrnong, Hobson’s Bay and Brimbank. It assisted rooming house occupants to complete and submit a further 12 OoH applications: ten Segment 1 and two Segment 3. All applications submitted through the housing in-reach process were ultimately successful. Due to its success, housing in-reach has been adopted as an ongoing element of service delivery within COS.

While being added to an OoH waiting list doesn’t offer an immediate exit from homelessness, it is a significant interim outcome which offers hope and is a step towards long-term housing. It is an investment in a future housing outcome that would not have been possible without support.

**Support and linkage for families**

The survey identified a number of families with significant support needs living in rooming houses within Hobson’s Bay. Some family support interventions were initiated during the survey period due to circumstances warranting immediate attention. During Phase two, family support continued to be the focus of outreach interventions in Hobson’s Bay.

All the families supported received assistance to seek alternative accommodation. Families in rooming houses face multiple barriers in accessing private rental. On average families and individuals require around $1000 to
assist them to move from a rooming house into a private rental market property. Given the limited income and high rent paid by families living in rooming houses ($300 per week or more), they find it extremely difficult to accumulate enough money for rent in advance or bond. They may also find it difficult to access this much money through the Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) or bond loan assistance schemes. The situation highlights the effect that low vacancy rates and high rental yields have on low-income earners.

The rooming house project directly assisted two families to access the private rental market. These families were provided with rent in advance and supported to access a bond loan. The families were also assisted to access furniture via Salvo Stores vouchers provided by the project, and were linked to services such as St Vincent de Paul for further material aid.

As part of the Victorian Government’s response to the Rooming House Task Force (2010), funding was provided for some housing agencies to provide assistance to families living in rooming houses, through the Accommodation Options for Families (AOF) program. Subsequently, policy was changed to stop families being placed in rooming houses as emergency accommodation.

The RHP worker made contact with the AOF program based at Salvation Army Social Housing Service (SASHS), and strongly advocated for an appropriate outreach response to the families in Hobson’s Bay. The AOF program agreed to provide outreach services to three families that the project had identified. Arrangements were made to meet the families at their rooming houses. The RHP worker was able to introduce the families to the AOF worker, providing a smooth transition.

All three families were offered immediate assistance by AOF and within six weeks had been moved out of the rooming house. Private rental was accessed for two of the families, and public housing for the third family. AOF also assisted the families with advocacy, establishment support and linkage into employment and training services. AOF continued to liaise with the Rooming House Project and Places, and an additional 4 families were linked to AOF through this mechanism prior to the end of the project.

The combined work of the RHP and AOF, using an assertive outreach approach, was essential to achieving these outcomes for these families. The outreach support component was vital as it built trust between the worker and the family and facilitated access to the AOF program. The families had believed they had limited options, as they had originally been supported to move to the rooming house by an access point with little follow up. The families were unclear how to make new contact with the access point, and were confused by the Local Area Service Network (LASN) structure.

A different approach was taken with another family. The project worker assisted this family to complete a Segment One OoH application. Through the advocacy and service liaison efforts of the project, the family was able to access ongoing support through a Family Outreach Service, and was housed in a transitional property.

In addition to housing assistance, the Rooming House Project provided other forms of support and linkage to families. Families that moved into private rental accommodation were provided with transitional and establishment support, including providing information about the local community and locally available services, assistance in enrolling children into local schools, and linking to ongoing supports when required.

The project also supported families to access a variety of programs including childcare sessions at no cost, and a school holiday program with financial assistance from The Salvation Army to cover costs. In one case, children were able to access the children’s music program at the local Salvation Army Corps without having to be placed on the waiting list. The project’s partnership-based approach was essential to achieving these outcomes.
Food security: provision of cooking utensils
Many rooming house occupants required basic cooking utensils such as pots and pans, to allow them to prepare meals. The Rooming House Project explored a variety of approaches to meeting this need. The project assisted numerous residents through Vic Relief material aid requests, however this process was time consuming and did not allow an immediate response.

A more effective approach would be for each rooming house to be provided with a full set of pots and pans every three months. The project explored various funding options for this type of assistance to the registered rooming houses. Initially, Vic Relief was approached, however due to their assistance being targeted at individuals they were not able to support a group approach.

The project managed to source items directly from a distributor at cost price, providing significant cost savings. The project commenced discussions with various stakeholders regarding funding and distribution options:

- A proposal was put to Hobson’s Bay Council to fund this initiative as part of their Emergency Relief / Food Security program
- The Council suggested that local Community Centres in Laverton and Altona might be useful storage and access sites
- The Salvation Army Altona Corps stated that they would support the purchase of cooking utensils, and were open to suggestions of ‘sponsoring’ a rooming house.

Discussions were still continuing at the end of the project as to the best way to meet this need. One of the difficulties with supplying utensils on a per-property basis is that they need to be regularly replenished, as they are damaged or taken with occupants as they move on. Supplying utensils to individuals may mean that they are better looked after, however transient individuals may not have the means to carry around large amounts of cooking gear with them.

Another approach suggested by some councils was to pre-prepare frozen meal portions and distribute these to individuals living within rooming houses. This could potentially fit with a volunteer-based meal distribution program.

Information Packs
Occupants of rooming houses in Hobson’s Bay commented on the lack of information about services available in the local area. This was often due to being new to the area. In response to this expressed need, the project and Hobson’s Bay City Council developed information packs which included basic information about the area, contact information for housing assistance, public transport, material aid and some council services. The packs were distributed during assertive outreach visits.

AOP service coordination
In Maribyrnong, the Rooming House Project determined that establishing a more coordinated and streamlined approach to the assertive outreach component of the AOP would be of more benefit than adding an additional support resource. While a number of services were providing outreach to rooming house occupants, there was little consistency in the way assessment were being conducted, and no clear protocol about how to identify and respond to housing and health needs.

The Rooming House Project prompted discussions on this issue. These resulted in two of the AOP assertive outreach services (Places and Abode) to focus on assessing and addressing housing and health needs. The focus on health and housing has been a consequence of program exposure to client vulnerability scales and their effectiveness as an objective measure of need. Once these needs are identified, the residents are assisted
to access the appropriate support via either Western Region Health Centre / RDNS for healthcare, or COS for housing.

The AOP is now aware of the housing in-reach model and are able to make direct referrals. The Abode and Places programs are also preparing a brief summary document that could be distributed to staff in the group to ensure consistency of support interventions. This should prove useful due to the high staff turnover in the group and variations in outreach models.

Effort and outcomes

The Rooming House Project operated with resourcing of 0.5EFT for a period of just over a year. In that period, around 100 privately run rooming houses in the three municipalities were visited on one or more occasions. Through this process, the project provided services to a total of 73 clients. These services varied from material aid, through linkage and referral, to intensive case management. Most clients received more than one type of support. This impressive output was only possible through the strong partnership-based approach of the project.

Table 4 quantifies some of the services received by clients of the project. In this context, the term ‘client’ refers to the individual receiving service. In a few cases, multiple members of a household directly received services; this is reflected as multiple clients in the table below. However, where a parent received services and these indirectly benefited children, these indirect benefits are not shown in the table. Some services provided (e.g. transport assistance, provision of information packs, ongoing case management) have not been quantified.

Table 4. Summary of services provided by project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service type</th>
<th>No. clients provided with service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service linkage:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Places</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Community Outreach Services</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Flagstaff</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Accommodation Options for Families</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Housing and/or support service (other)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Assertive Outreach Project</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Other service information and/or referral</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Office of Housing assistance</strong> (incl. advocacy, assistance to access bond loan, provision of information)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing in-reach</strong></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family support and linkage</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Material aid and/or financial assistance</strong> (incl. HEF, food, furniture, cooking utensils)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As already noted, the project achieved significant outcomes for a number of clients. The most obvious of these were in the domain of housing. For the individuals and families who were re-housed as a result of the project’s efforts, the effects could be profound. Stable safe housing provided a base from which people could regain a sense of dignity, and begin to make changes in other areas of their lives, such as pursuing employment and training opportunities. It also had a major positive effect on people’s mental health. However, the project also had success in less obvious areas such as enabling individuals to access needed medical care, or opportunities for children such as school holiday programs.

Table 5 quantifies some of the client outcomes to which the project contributed. These are not necessarily outcomes that the project achieved “by itself”, however they are outcomes that would have been unlikely to occur if it were not for the work of the project. The project did not have a formal outcomes data collection system and many of the more subtle, but equally important outcomes are not reflected in these figures.

Table 5. Summary of some client outcomes achieved during the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>No. achieved during project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>• Individual placed on Early Housing wait list (Segment 1)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual placed on Early Housing wait list (Segment 3)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual / household moved into private rental</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual / household moved into public housing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual / household moved into transitional housing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual / household moved into other improved housing situation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>• Individual received needed medical care</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material needs</td>
<td>• Individual / household food security improved</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships / family</td>
<td>• Family received respite via childcare / school holiday programs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>functioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

The Rooming House Project recognised that traditional office-based service delivery modalities were of very limited effectiveness in providing services to rooming house occupants. The project developed a specific service framework based around assertive outreach, service in-reach and linkage to existing local services. This
framework was used to pilot a range of interventions, most notably housing in-reach and family support and linkage.

The project clearly demonstrated the benefits of these interventions, with some very significant outcomes achieved for the individuals and families who received services.

Due to its linkage-based approach, the project was a cost-effective approach to delivery of services to this population.
Case Study: Kim, Mark and family

Kim, her partner Mark* and their four children (aged from three to ten years old) were living in a single room in a rooming house. They had initially been referred into the rooming house by the local entry point service, but had received no further follow up. This was Kim and the children’s first experience living in the area and living in a rooming house.

Kim and Mark received Centrelink income. The family’s rent was $310 per week for one room; they had little money available for daily living expenses. Kim and Mark were reliant on public transport to get around, and when they had no money for a ticket they were housebound. Their reliance on public transport and having the children in tow made it difficult to look for private rental options.

The family shared the common areas of house with four other tenants, who had behaved aggressively towards them. Due to concerns for their safety, Kim or Mark had to accompany the children when they used facilities such as the bathroom, kitchen or garden areas. The older children had been enrolled into the local school, but the younger two children remained at home all day in the room with Kim. After school hours and on weekends, the family of six would often be confined to one room.

Kim and Mark had few belongings with them; most of their possessions were in storage. They had been provided with one single and one double bed between them. Other residents would take their food from the fridge. This left them short of food but having already spent their money. Eventually they persuaded the landlord to provide a fridge in their room. They were charged extra rent for it, even though this is illegal.

After reporting that they felt unsafe, Kim, Mark and children were moved by the landlord to another rooming house, in a different suburb. This move added to Kim’s feelings of isolation. The children remained at the same school, but the journey time had increased and the school was no longer accessible by foot.

The Rooming House Project assisted the family in a range of ways:

- providing material aid for transport to get to appointments and look for housing alternatives
- providing cooking utensils and supporting them to obtain a separate fridge in their room
- negotiating with the local council for the family to access four free sessions of childcare. In addition to respite for the parents, this provided the younger children with positive peer experiences
- funding access to the local school holiday program for the school-aged children
- assisting Kim to link with the school’s family support worker, who provided support and information on local services and resources.

RHP was able to link Kim and Mark with Family Support Services in the North West. The family were approved for a Transitional Housing property and ongoing support. COS helped the family to lodge their public housing application, while Places provided support for the move into transitional housing.

Obtaining appropriate accommodation and ongoing support has made a huge difference to the family. The children are more settled and the older children are now attending school regularly, while the younger children are able to access kindergarten and childcare. They are able to play in any area of the house without safety concerns. Kim’s mental health has improved, and Mark has been able to secure employment. The rent is affordable, enabling the family to meet their other living expenses.

* Personal details have been changed to avoid identifying clients
Permission has been granted by individual clients for their photos to appear in this report
4. Evaluation

In addition to demonstrating the effectiveness of assertive outreach and service in-reach in meeting the needs of people living in rooming houses, the Rooming House Project also led to some important learnings in the area of process and service system functioning.

Process

Emotional Impact

The survey of rooming house occupants (Phase one) had a strong emotional impact on the staff involved. Although workers had expected to find people living in difficult situations, the intensity of hearing so many stories of desperation in a short period of time proved to be greater than expected. The interviewers were particularly impacted by seeing people with serious health issues (in some cases, terminal illnesses), and families with young children, living in poverty in such terrible conditions.

Many of the interviewees expressed a strong sense of being trapped, and having no other options. By the end of the survey process, project staff also found that they experienced some sense of powerlessness and a loss of confidence, which in some ways mirrored the experience of those that they had interviewed. This was compounded by the nature of the survey phase, with its focus on in-depth assessment but limited opportunities for service response.

While staff did receive support and informal debriefing during the survey phase, at the end of Phase one COS recognised the need for more formal support processes for those involved. A period of formal independent debriefing enabled staff to process their experiences, and to integrate the learnings from the survey to form a new perspective on the needs and context for those living in rooming houses. This new perspective was invaluable in informing the later work of the project.

Subsequent phases of the project placed a greater focus on regular, proactive staff support processes including:

- fortnightly individual supervision
- regular meetings of the RHP and Places staff, including a component of ‘check in’ around how staff were travelling.

Individual staff members also planned in other forms of self-care.

If a similar survey process was to be undertaken in future, it would be worth considering:

- a greater awareness of the potential emotional impact on staff implementing the survey
- limits on the number of interviews conducted per staff member per week
- more formal, regular debriefing processes during the survey period (e.g. daily or weekly debriefing sessions).

Engagement with Salvation Army Corps

One of the initial intentions of the project was to strengthen ties between the work of COS and the local Salvation Army Corps in the three municipalities targeted by the project. It was envisaged that there would be mutual benefits for both the Rooming House Project and local Corps from this partnership:
• the project would receive volunteer support from Corps that would be of significant assistance in providing in-reach services to rooming house occupants. The area of providing social activities and reducing social isolation was one where volunteers could have played an active role

• Corps members would receive support and training during the project.

The project did liaise with the Corps in Werribee, Altona and Footscray. This led to some involvement of Corps in the work of the project, and some positive outcomes, for example the Altona Corps were willing to assist with material aid and with facilitating access to their children’s music program.

However, overall the level of engagement between project and Corps was lower than expected. There were a number of reasons for this:

• the initially foreseen focus on social activities did not eventuate; the results of the survey saw the project focus on housing in-reach and family linkage, both specialist activities with limited opportunity for volunteer involvement

• Corps were limited in their human resources, and often had existing program commitments that they needed to meet

• within the constrained time and resources of the project, there was limited opportunity to undertake the relational ‘legwork’ necessary in establishing a fully formed partnership.

It is clear that there is value for both social programs and Corps in pursuing closer working relationships. One of the insights generated through the project was that the partnership tended to work better where the project had specific, concrete requests that the Corps was able to action. This tended to focus joint efforts on achievable goals.

Partnerships and local government engagement

The project’s focus on establishing and strengthening partnerships was one of its key success factors. Partnerships with other local service providers had multiple benefits for the project:

• they provided a reference point for the thinking of the project

• they provided additional resources for some project activities such as surveying

• they allowed services to develop consistent, focused approaches to meeting the most pressing needs of rooming house occupants

• they allowed for easy, efficient linkage of clients to services they needed.

In the bigger picture, this model of operating also allowed for system-level efficiencies. The project had a strong commitment to linking clients to existing services, rather than creating additional rooming-house specific support services that duplicated those already in existence in the community. This clearly placed the emphasis on issues of access. The project demonstrated that positive outcomes can be obtained with only minimal resource additions, using a linkage-based approach.

The project also had a strong focus on informing and engaging local government. This recognized the dual role that local councils play, as both service providers (whose services should be accessible to local residents, including those living in rooming houses), and as implementers of the rooming house standards and registration system.
Initial reactions from the three councils varied significantly; some were aware of rooming houses operating in their municipalities, but were keen for more information; others had little knowledge of the situation on the ground. RHP staff organized meetings with Maribyrnong City Council and Hobson’s Bay Council at the commencement of the project in order to provide information about the project.

Briefings were also provided to Maribyrnong, Hobson’s Bay and Brimbank Council representatives once the survey results were known. Briefings included rooming houses numbers in the relevant municipality, and the demographic profile and vulnerabilities of the people living in the properties. This information significantly enriched the understanding of local councils about the situation in rooming houses in their municipality. For example, Hobson’s Bay council had been unaware of the relatively higher proportion of families utilising rooming house accommodation in their LGA.

This engagement process has led to local councils taking a more proactive view of their obligations in relation to rooming house occupants. Councils have expressed a willingness to work with community organisations to ensure that rooming house residents are informed about, and able to access, local services. The engagement has also given further impetus to council strategies in relation to improving housing choices for residents on low incomes. As a result of the project, COS staff have been consulted in relation to Brimbank Council’s research into affordable housing solutions, Hobson’s Bay Council’s food security / emergency relief task force, and remains a member of the Brimbank Rooming House Task Force.

Effectiveness

The resources provided to the project allowed for one part-time worker for a period of a little over twelve months. Given that the initial four months were occupied with the survey, and were followed by a short break for debriefing and planning, the intensive service delivery component of the project lasted for around seven months.

In this time, some significant client outcomes were obtained. These included six individuals / households moving into long-term housing, and three other clients moving into transitional housing. These housing shifts had positive flow-through impacts on other areas of clients’ lives. Quantitative data on outcomes is presented in section 3 of this report.

It is particularly striking that despite the short duration of the housing in-reach pilot (2 days per week for 4 weeks), 7 OoH applications were completed and submitted, including 5 Segment One applications. If it were not for the in-reach work of the rooming house project, it may have taken years for these clients to gain a place on the Early Housing wait list.

Given the unique nature of the project, it is difficult the benchmark its effectiveness against like services. However, initial indications are that the project was highly effective given its level of resourcing.
The service system

The project identified significant issues with the current operation of the Opening Doors initiative in the region. Opening Doors is an area-based service coordination framework which is intended to provide timely and effective access to homelessness and social housing services. The framework is based around Local Area Service Networks which are intended to lead to consistent and effective practices around assessment and resource allocation. The framework designates ‘entry point’ services which are the access points to the homelessness assistance service system.

The Rooming House Project found that many of the rooming house occupants surveyed did not understand the entry point system. More than half of the respondents had been referred into the rooming house via a housing or support service (44% had in fact accessed the rooming house via the Housing Information & Referral service at one of the local entry point services). However, even these respondents were confused about where they should go for further assistance, and were generally not aware that they could re-access the entry point service for further support. While this may be partly due to inconsistent practice at the entry points (some workers not clearly informing clients that they can re-access), it is also likely to be due to the limited capacity of people to absorb information while in crisis.

Most rooming house occupants also had little knowledge of other local services (the one exception tended to be their Job Network agency – which they needed to attend in order to keep receiving their Centrelink payment). Since occupants had often not previously lived in the area where the rooming house was located, it is unsurprising that they were unaware of services available in the area, or how to access them.

None of the families referred to the AOF program by the RHP were aware that such a service existed, or even that there were entry point services operating. It is clear that in the absence of an assertive outreach framework these families and individuals are very unlikely to have equal access to the range of support and accommodation options available within the region.

Even where occupants were aware of the possibility of accessing entry point or other services, they experienced barriers in doing so:

- many were not able to travel long distances to attend services (because of limited mobility and/or lack of money to purchase public transport tickets)
- some were not able to attend appointments because they needed to care for their children or other family members
- if they did travel to entry point service, in some cases they faced long wait times with no guarantee of any improvement in their situation
- there were often long waiting lists for transitional housing or support services

Entry point services operate within a high demand situation with quite constrained resources. In this environment, they are forced to prioritise which clients will receive assistance. People already living in rooming houses tend to be perceived as less in need than those without any accommodation.

Opening Doors does include an expectation of interim response by entry points. This means that entry points proactively monitor the status of clients who they have placed in emergency accommodation, while waiting

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for medium- or longer-term housing or support vacancies to become available. The experience of the project suggests that this interim response is rarely occurring for those placed in rooming houses. This is related to a range of factors including the resource constraints of entry point services, and the yet to be introduced LASN Support Services’ interim response initiative.

At the same time, the experience of COS has been that they have been operating below capacity due to a lack of support referrals received from entry points, and that many of the referrals they do receive are for clients with relatively minor needs compared to those who were engaged by the rooming house project. This has been a source of frustration for the program. For the added bureaucracy of the LASN system to be worthwhile, there needs to be a proactive process that ensures that entry points are able to engage, identify and refer clients with significant needs to appropriate support services.

The project findings do suggest a need to review the way in which Opening Doors is operating in the region. In particular, it suggests the need to explore ways to:

- Clearly communicate to clients that they may re-access entry point services for further assistance
- Provide information to clients on other services available in the local area in which they are being accommodated
- Strengthen the interim response function
- Ensure that services are accessible to clients with limited mobility, limited resources, limited time and other commitments.

The project demonstrates compellingly that assertive outreach and service in-reach are more effective modes of working with rooming house occupants than office-based models of service delivery.

**Impact of the Rooming House Standards Taskforce**

Changes recommended by the State Government Rooming House Standards Taskforce came into effect shortly before the project commenced. These included a range of recommendations covering structural and amenity issues.

The project staff had the chance to observe the impact of these changes over the course of the year, and to compare conditions in registered and unregistered rooming houses. Staff reached the conclusion that changes to building regulation requirements have had little to no impact on the quality of the living environment of the residents. In registered rooming houses, some changes did occur in relation to fitting locks to external and internal doors (although in some cases these were broken). However, other significant issues remain in common across both registered and unregistered rooming houses, including:

- Lack of basic household equipment and furnishings, particularly cooking equipment - a working fridge, oven, pots and pans, microwave
- Inadequate provision of bedding – in many cases a mattress was provided but no bed; where multiple people were accommodated in a single room, there were often insufficient beds
- Additional charges being levied for provision of heating and lighting.

Local councils are already investing in the building regulation process and is it acknowledged this deals solely with the fabric of the building and not the internal environment and conditions people are living in. There is a strong argument to be made for broadening the scope of the standards and inspection process to cover the issues noted above.
Summary

Although only limited evaluation was possible, from the evidence available the Rooming House Project was an effective and resource-efficient approach to service delivery to a group of people who have been poorly served by mainstream service models. The key strengths of the project were its service delivery modalities of assertive outreach and service in-reach, and its strong emphasis on partnerships and linkage to existing local services.

Key learnings were generated in relation to the emotional impact on staff of the survey process, and the ways in which this might be managed in future.

The project also identified room for improvement in the operation of the local service system, particularly in the accessibility of housing and support to rooming house occupants via the structures of the Opening Doors initiative.
5. **CONCLUSION: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

The Rooming House Project identified a substantial group of people living within rooming houses in the municipalities of Maribyrnong, Hobson’s Bay and Brimbank. These people tend to be ‘invisible’ both to local councils and to the local service system.

The project clearly demonstrated that this cohort are often living in quite desperate circumstances, and have a range of needs including housing needs, financial / material needs, health and medical needs, and employment / training needs. Those interviewed by the project voiced a very strong theme of being trapped in poverty and in their current living situation – the rooming house appeared to be their “only option”.

The project found that rooming house occupants in this region are often not aware of or engaged with local service systems which could assist them to meet their needs. The key barrier seems to be the expectation from the service system that individuals will “go to where the services are”. Many individuals surveyed found it difficult to access services in this way.

The Rooming House Project piloted an alternative service delivery strategy for this cohort. Rather than duplicate existing services with a new set of “rooming house specific services”, the project took the approach of linking clients to existing local services. The key to the project’s success was its use of assertive outreach and service in-reach. The project clearly showed that engaging with rooming house occupants in their normal living environments is far more effective than expecting them to reach out to services of their own accord. Through this approach, the project was able to achieve some outstanding outcomes in a relatively short period of time, and with minimal additional resourcing.

There is a strong continued need among the rooming house population in the region for a service of this type. While the core elements of the service model should be retained, there are a variety of ways in which the service could be auspiced and structured. It is also worth considering whether this service model could be of relevance to rooming house populations in other regions of Victoria.

There are several related areas in which change could be pursued to improve outcomes for rooming house occupants. These include advocacy around broadening the application of rooming house standards, and advocacy around improvements to the way in which Opening Doors operates in the region.

The project was initiated and run by the Salvation Army Adult Services. It is therefore suggested that the onus sits with Adult Services to consider ways in which these issues can be pursued.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Salvation Army Adult Services:

1. Actively pursue the establishment of an ongoing assertive-outreach based program targeted to people living in rooming houses in the outer west. The focus of the program should be on linking rooming house occupants to existing local services, and in particular to Opening Doors housing and support resources. This will require:
   a. pursuing ongoing resourcing for such a program
   b. negotiating the program auspice.

One option would be to embed such a program within the local homelessness assistance service system. Basing a roaming house outreach role at the western entry point (SASHS) would facilitate linking rooming house residents with TAP process / resources. Such an arrangement may be possible to resource as part of the interim response negotiations that are currently occurring in the LASNs. It
would be vital that the role have an assertive outreach focus to bring people into the system, rather than being an Interim Response 2 role.

Another option would be to establish rooming house-focused outreach support roles at local councils. This would have the advantage of being able to connect with rooming house regulation processes and to link occupants with council-operated services.

It is also possible that a combination of these options would provide the best outcomes.

2. Actively pursue improvements within the local Opening Doors structures and processes, to ensure that rooming house occupants are able to access housing and support resources appropriate to their needs. Changes to information provision, interim response processes and access mechanisms may be required.

It is suggested that these issues are pursued through the impending Opening Doors Evaluation process, as well as through discussions within local LASNs.

3. Advocate with local councils and the State Government in relation to broadening the scope of rooming house standards to address the living environment. In particular, the standards should include items relating to the provision of basic household facilities such as cooking equipment, bedding, and heating and lighting. These requirements could be integrated with existing registration and inspection processes.
## APPENDIX: ROOMING HOUSE RESIDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

### Rooming House Resident Profile

| Contact Date: | __________________________ |
| Worker providing contact: | __________________________ |

| Initials: | __________________________ |
| Gender: | __________________________ |
| Age: | __________________________ |

### Section One:

#### Country of birth/ cultural identification:
- Name of country born in: __________________________
- Resident Status: Citizen / Permanent Resident □ Asylum Seeker □ International Student □ Migrant □ Refugee □ Other □
- Ethnicity: __________________________
- Aboriginal or Torres Straight Islander: Yes □ No □ Not Known □

#### Income Type:
- No income – registered/awaiting benefit □ No income □ Wage □
- Centrelink Payment □ Type: ____________

#### Employment:
- Not in labour force □ Workcover □ Employed full time (35 hours per week or more) □ Volunteer □
- Employed part time (less than 35 hours per week) □ Works part time & receives a government benefit □

#### Student Status:
- University student □ Primary/secondary school student □ Employment training □
- Short course □ Community course □ TAFE □ Government/Centrelink course □

### Housing / Rooming house arrangement:

#### Boarding/rooming House / private rental □

| Suburb: | __________________________ |
| Length of stay in current address: | _______________ Week/s __________ Month/s __________ Year/s |
| Reason for living in this Rooming House: | __________________________ |
| How did you access the rooming house? | __________________________ |
| Word of mouth □ Housing, Information & Referral service □ Housing support service □ Newspaper □
| Family/friends/acquaintance □ Prison services □ Rooming House Proprietor □ Crisis Support Services □
| Other □ |

#### How many bedrooms within rooming house? 4 □ 5 □ 6 □ 7 □ 8 □ 9 □ 10 □ 11+ □

| How many current residents? | 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ 5 □ 6 □ 7 □ 8 □ 9 □ 10 □ 15+ □ 20+ □ |
| Female only □ Male only □ Mixed □ |
| Are children living in the rooming house: Yes □ No □ |
| Age of children living in the rooming house: | 0-5 □ 5-12 □ 12-16 □ 16-18 □ |
| Estimated □ |

#### Rooming house facilities:
- Fixed bedrooms □ Temporary/makeshift bedrooms □
- Shared toilet/bathroom, lounge area & kitchen □ Shared kitchen & toilet/bathroom □
- Shared bathroom □ Shared kitchen □ with working; oven □ fridge □ dish washer □
- Garden/outdoor space □ Garage/car space □ External cleaner of common spaces □
- Washing machine/laundry □

#### Are you currently living on your own? | __________________________ |

### Housing History:

| Length of time of living in Rooming Houses? | _______________ Week/s __________ Month/s __________ Year/s |
| Have you lived in rooming houses, in other suburbs, over the last six months? If so, where | __________________________ |
| Have you ever lived in any of the following? | __________________________ |
| Private rental □ Owned/owner of home □ Rent free accommodation □
| Crisis accommodation □ Transitional housing (THM) □ Community housing □
| Improvised dwelling/sleeping rough □ Office of Housing (Commission Housing) □

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Page 1 of 6
Section Two: What experiences have lead you to live in a rooming house?

What Financial experiences have resulted in you living in a rooming house?
(loss of income/employment, temporary increase of expenses, natural disaster)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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Have relationship issues lead you to living in a rooming house?
(for example, relationship breakdown, break from family, fight with other residents)
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________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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What housing experiences have contributed to you living in a rooming house?
(for example, eviction, rent too high, issues with other residents)
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How would you describe your Health? What have been your health issues?
(Physical & emotional health)
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Do you &/or have you in the past six months frequently taken drugs &/or alcohol? Yes ☐ No ☐

Have you experienced any forms of long-term care? Yes ☐ No ☐
(for example, hospital, rehabilitation)

Have you had any contact with the criminal justice system? Yes ☐ No ☐
### Section Three: History of service supports / Types of Assistance received during the past six months:

**What housing services have you accessed during the past six months?**

Have you used accommodation services?  Yes □  No □

Which services? For what?

________________________________________________________________________

Have you accessed HIR service/s?  Yes □  No □

What did SAAP / HIR services provide? What was the outcome of support?

________________________________________________________________________

Do you have a completed housing application?  Yes □  No □

If so, which one?  OoH Segment 1 application □  OoH segment 2 application □  OoH segment 3 application □

Have you accessed financial aid?  Yes □  No □

Which services? For what?

________________________________________________________________________

Have you accessed child &/or youth services?  Yes □  No □

Which services? For what?

________________________________________________________________________

Have you accessed counselling services?  Yes □  No □

Which services? For what?

________________________________________________________________________

Have you accessed drug & alcohol services?  Yes □  No □

Which services? For what?

________________________________________________________________________

Have you accessed advocacy services?  Yes □  No □

*(for example, Tenants Union, Consumer affairs, Homelessness Advocacy Service)*

Which services? For what?

________________________________________________________________________

Have you accessed employment & training services?  Yes □  No □

Which services? For what?

________________________________________________________________________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Have you accessed health &amp; medical services?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which services? For what?</td>
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<td>Have you accessed immigration &amp; settlement services?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which services? For what?</td>
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<td>Have you accessed legal support?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which services? For what?</td>
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<td>Have you accessed material aid?</td>
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<td>Which services? For what?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you accessed pastoral/spiritual services?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which services? For what?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you participated in recreation &amp; leisure services?</td>
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<td>Which services? For what?</td>
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<td>Have you participated in social activities?</td>
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<td>Which services? For what?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you access transport &amp; storage services?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which services? For what?</td>
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</table>
Section Four: Your ideas for a better system

If we could change your situation over night, what would you want changed?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

If housing was to come in a year or two, what support would you want while you are waiting?
(If participant does not know, suggest “topics discussed within sector are, access to food/material aid, access to housing support services/duty system, more social activities &/or someone to talk with”)

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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In your life, at the moment, which of the following areas is most important to you?
(number 1 most important to 7 least important)

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<tr>
<th>Area</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial / Material Aid</td>
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<td>Social activities</td>
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<td>Housing / accommodation</td>
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</table>

If we could put services in your rooming house tomorrow what would you see as most important?
(number 1 most important to 5 least important)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
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<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Welfare support</td>
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<td>Support Services that visit me</td>
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<tr>
<td>Someone to visit and talk with</td>
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<td>Leisure/sport/social activities</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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</table>
How many people do you speak to within a week?

Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience living in a rooming house?