



You can help homeless women and children

Every year, thousands of women and children in NSW are homeless. Some are fleeing the terror of domestic violence, others are struggling with the consequences of serious mental illness, drug and alcohol addiction, childhood abuse and neglect or sexual assault.

For nearly 40 years these vulnerable women and children have found a safe place and the support they need at one of a network of almost 20 women-only refuges throughout inner city Sydney. You might know some of the names of these services – Elsie Women's Refuge, B Miles, Detour House, Jean's Place, Stepping Out Housing Program, Women and Girls Emergency Centre and Young People's Refuge.

By 30 September 2014, most of these refuges will close to be replaced by new services that will house men, women, families and children. Under a radical overhaul of services for homeless people in NSW – known as Going Home, Staying Home (GSH) – the NSW Government is funding just one women-only service in inner city Sydney. The consequences for homeless women and children will be disastrous.

We need your help!

We need your help, urgently. Please write personal, heartfelt letters and emails to the following politicians. It's likely that many are not aware of the consequences of closing women-only services.

You can write to:

The Hon. Mike Baird, Premier
office@premier.nsw.gov.au

The Hon. Pru Goward, Minister for Family and Community Services
office@goward.minister.gov.au

The Hon. Jillian Skinner, Minister for Health
office@skinner.minister.gov.au

The Hon. Kevin Humphries, Minister for Mental Health
office@humphries.minister.gov.au

Linda Burney, Shadow Minister for Family Services
linda.burney@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Sophie Cotsis, Shadow Minister for Local Government, Shadow Minister for Housing, and Shadow Minister for the Status of Women
sophie.cotsis@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Your local MP. You can find their details at: <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlament/members.nsf/V3Home>

What can you say?

If you have a personal story to share, please include it. In your own words, you can also say:

- The GSH tender reforms will result in the likely closure of many women-only specialist homelessness services
- The loss of these services will be bad for the health and safety of vulnerable women and children. The problems experienced by these women and children will become more serious and complex and lives will be at risk.
- The GSH tenders include only one service for women. Many homeless women feel safer living in a women-only refuge.
- The specialist homelessness services offer programs that have been established for women, by women, over many years. The staff are experienced and passionately committed to the women they support.
- The loss of the expertise will be a loss to the whole community and will cost the health and community services system more in the long run, leading to increased hospital admissions, assaults, suicides, re-offending/re-incarceration, continuation of drug and alcohol addictions and child safety issues.
- Vulnerable women and children look for services that are located in areas which are well away from where they were living. They usually want to 'disappear' into other communities. For example, a young woman escaping a violent home in Gympie will feel safer and more comfortable staying in a refuge in Sydney's Inner West.

Remember, include your contact details in your letter and ask for a response. Also, keep an eye on the media. There will be more news to come.

What else can you do?

Please share this letter with your network. Ask other people to write. We have very little time to stop the closure of these essential services for homeless women and children.

Further reading

Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday 12 April 2014

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/fears-funds-cut-will-leave-homeless-women-without-shelter-20140411-36i6a.html>

Good Weekend, Saturday 12 April 2014

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/40-years-of-elsie-20140411-36h9v.html>

Thank you.