

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

A vicious cycle of push and pull

Dr Elizabeth Conroy, of the Centre for Health Research, will be investigating if a program to arrest the drift of homeless people from Sydney's greater west to the inner city has been successful. This study has been awarded funding by Mission Australia.

'Historically, there has been a deliberate intention to build the capacity of services in inner Sydney to meet the growing demand for accommodation and other support among the significant numbers of people who are homeless,' says Dr Conroy.

'Together with a shortage of affordable housing, this has had the unintended consequence of encouraging people in greater western Sydney to "drift" into inner Sydney to access services. Mission Australia has noted that, 'the phenomenon of inner city drift can cause people to become dislocated, compounding their physical and social isolation. Over time, people are more likely to become entrenched in the cycle of homelessness. The issue of drift also creates its own problems for the delivery of services in the inner city.'

The need to arrest "inner city drift" and encourage people to remain in their communities was identified as a key objective in the NSW Homelessness Action Plan of 2009. Shortly after, Mission Australia launched an intervention - the Inner City Drift Project (ICDP). Based in Harris Park, the project's catchment includes Bankstown, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Fairfield, Parramatta, Blacktown and Penrith.

In pilot work done to develop the ICDP, several factors were recognised as contributing to the phenomenon of inner city drift. Certain "pull" factors including the concentration of accommodation and services in inner Sydney; a reported greater tolerance of people who are homeless by people in the city; the anonymity and perceived safety of the inner city; and better transport networks. Among



"push" factors were the lack of available, affordable and appropriate housing in greater western Sydney; a lack of capacity in specialist homelessness services; financial hardship; and relationship breakdown, including domestic violence.

Dr Conroy's research will survey services that have formal ICDP links; "first to know" frontline agencies; key stakeholders and the project's service manager. Using anonymous case studies of ICDP clients, it will also document factors leading to homelessness and give context to the risk of "drift". This formal review of the project will flesh out our understanding of drift and determine future directions for such interventions, assisting both the homeless and the broader community.

Project Title: Evaluation of the Inner City Drift Project

Funding has been set at: \$45,000

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