



## Another side of homelessness

*The complex issue of what to do to relieve homelessness in the city is high on Residents 3000 members' list of concerns. Whilst most love the vibrant city life there are some aspects that need a continuing community effort to achieve and maintain a high standard of livability for all.*

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Long term residents of the CBD are well aware that from time to time, pockets of unacceptable behavior that effect people's safety, arise within particular precincts. In this case, an area around the top end of Bourke Street is causing great concern. Residents, people working in the local shops and businesses and tourists have been reporting evidence of drug use and abusive behaviour amongst the homeless who congregate around the Salvation Army headquarters.

The story of one such person brandishing a syringe and threatening a young girl in a coffee shop demanding that she give him a free cup of coffee "or else" has appalled residents. Females workers need to be escorted to their vehicles in the 35 Little Collins Street car park as they do not feel safe. Damage to vehicles parked during the day has occurred.

People have reported that calls to the police are in vain, sometimes taking more than an hour to respond to the call. When the police finally arrive, the particular problem is long past. If there were more police patrolling the streets, it is possible that problems could be prevented before they happen.

Some of the homeless obviously have mental health issues that are not being addressed. They have nowhere to go. They need professional help. This is not the situation that the community wants. There are solutions and examples of cities doing a better job to care and rehabilitate people who find themselves homeless. It does not need to be a life sentence!

### Residents take action

In a combined effort, Residents 3000 Inc, EastEnders Inc and the Bourke Street Precinct Inc collected 153 signatures in an attempt to resolve the Bourke Street homeless problem. The petition suggested a course of action that residents believe should relieve the present situation. The recommended actions included:

- Establishing a police booth/kiosk on Bourke Street to cover the East End of town and the current problem area;
- Increasing police patrols in the nearby car park and adjacent laneways to control drug use;
- Increasing community housing, support and funding for the homeless, who so badly need our help to conquer circumstances that have led to an under privileged life;
- Giving more support to the Salvation Army to assist them to limit the congregation and camping of homeless people along Bourke Street;
- Providing help to homeless people with obvious mental illness that can be brought under control with modern medical care. Note that mental conditions left un-attended for a long time are much more difficult to address.

The three presidents of the community organisations, Rafael Camillo, Jenny Eltham and Hani Akkawi took their petition to our local parliamentary representative, Ellen Sandell MLA to explain the severity of the



problem and to ask that she lobby the State Government to take steps to resolve this particular problem and similar ones in other precincts of the city.

The Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Sally Capp who is also aware of the petition, has taken some action, by sending a police advisor to consult with Residents 3000's president, Rafael Camillo. The idea being to fully understand the problem and to gather more information.

Rafael was advised that police no longer conduct regular foot patrols around the city as was the custom many years ago. Policing is conducted by motor vehicle only. Without foot patrols, the activities within obscure laneways, continue without any checking mechanism. This was a surprising and previously unknown revelation.

### **Bi-annual street count results – July 2018**

The extent of homelessness in the city has been highlighted again in the bi-annual street count just last year. Almost 400 people were sleeping rough across five inner Melbourne council areas, the street count found — and many of these people (42% in the survey) were on the waiting list for public housing.

Trained volunteers who visited streets, parks and laneways on the wintry day of June 19 last year counted 392 homeless people in the municipalities of Melbourne, Port Phillip, Yarra, Stonnington and Maribyrnong. Overall there were 279 rough sleepers counted in the City of Melbourne last year.

There is no doubt that homelessness is a big and complex problem. But putting our community head in the sand and saying it is too big a problem to tackle, is simply not the Australian way.

### **Big problems can be solved with many small steps towards improvement**

Residents are trying to alert the State Government, the Police and the City of Melbourne about a particular area of concern. Maybe finding innovative ways to tackle this one problem will lead to repetition in other problem pockets and over time, the homelessness problem can be reduced and eventually eliminated. We should aim for that regardless of difficulty.