

Every Story is Unique: Every Journey is Different

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Climbing into bed at night, in a house, with my family in their own bedrooms, seems like such a normal thing to do.

But as I lay here:

I think about my day.

I think about my week.

And I think about the struggles and the vulnerabilities of those that have been pushed to the margins of society.

About those that don't have a place to call home.

As an assertive outreach worker in the Central Highlands region of Victoria, my journey has been a profound and eye-opening experience. I work with and walk alongside individuals who are experiencing rough sleeping.

Every day, I see the toll that homelessness takes on the mental and physical health and the wellbeing of these people. I see sadness and fear. I see anger. I see people who are so weighed down by the enormity of their situation that they just don't see a way to create and be part of the future they dream of. However, amidst the hardships, I also see resilience, strength, and the unwavering spirit of individuals determined to improve their circumstances.

We don't normally sit in an office for our meetings or catchups. It's often in a carpark, or in the bush, maybe even the foreshore of a local lake. But wherever we catch up, we are in their space, and the place they are sleeping...

This job has provided me with unique insights into the lives of those facing homelessness.

It has shown me that homelessness doesn't discriminate. I have met some incredible people from such diverse backgrounds.

I have laughed with them, and I have cried with them.

Our role isn't just about finding shelter or accommodation. It's far more than that. We work to understand the underlying causes of homelessness and develop client centred plans to address each individual person's needs.

Every story is unique.

Every journey has been different.

In this role we work to bridge the gap between the services available and the people who need them the most.

We know the first and most significant issue we face is establishing trust and building rapport with those who may no longer have the ability to trust people or services. We work carefully to overcome barriers together. Our role requires patience and empathy, and the ability to adapt to each person's unique circumstances and needs.

Building a strong and trusting relationship is essential.

We face challenges. We face setbacks and disappointment, but there are times of celebration, too.

A simple visit to the doctor. Supermarket shopping. The things that most of us take for granted are some of the biggest steps they have taken in a very long time.

Re-engaging in community and seeing peoples' sense of dignity and belonging return reminds us of the power of human connection and support.

When we witness, and get to be part of their transition, our hearts are filled with hope.

As an assertive outreach worker, I am constantly reminded that homelessness is not an isolated issue. It is more a reflection of larger systemic challenges. Seeing this makes us want to advocate for change, to challenge the stigma associated with homelessness and to be a voice for those that need it.

This journey has renewed my commitment to making a difference. Together, with dedication, empathy, and support, we can strive towards a society where everyone has access to safe and stable housing, where no one is left behind, and where compassion reigns.

Our team is small. Our resources are limited. But that won't stop us. We might not change the world today... But we may change how someone feels today, and that could just be enough.



Photo provided by Allan Martin