

Homeless Community Connect



Sage Saegenschnitter



The Homeless Community Connect project was established in November 2008 to enable a more focussed and intentional commitment to those who are homeless in and around the area. The three key aspects of this include engaging with individuals to access pathways out of homelessness, fostering positive relations with the wider residential community, and providing support to Homeless Voice, an independent self advocacy group of people who are homeless.

Mark was an angry man when I started visiting him under the bridge, fuming at the injustice of losing not only his government housing but what had become his home over the past four years. I started visiting him regularly and slowly began to understand his situation and see beyond the anger.

One day Mark offered the following feedback, 'you know the difference between you and other organisations? You actually sit down with us.' From then on Mark opened the door of trust for me to help him. We worked closely with the Housing Department to stop his debt accruing, and I offered personal support to him as he sat through a housing tribunal hearing so he wouldn't lose his cool. We were also able to reclaim his personal belongings from his home, and facilitated the transition for him to access housing once again.

Each person in the community, whether a resident or residentially challenged, has a unique history and personality. Providing time, space, and voice to this goes a long way in understanding each other and breaking down barriers of perception and stereotype. One way this has occurred is through supporting people who are homeless to break through the shame barrier and attend public community meetings.

At a recent meeting three people shared their experience as rough sleepers. Highlighting that far from contributing to the problem, they often share the same concerns as residents around the issues of safety, violence and crime. This dialogue acts as a bridge, reminding us that the only difference between the housed and the homeless is in fact a home, and it is for this that we strive.

Sage Saegenschnitter

**Homeless Community Connect
Phone 0406 983 013
homelessconnect@hopestreet.org.au**

Thanks to the City of Sydney who provided funds to enable this project to get off the ground, those who have donated sleeping bags, swags and blankets to those sleeping rough, and a plethora of other organisations with whom we work to achieve permanent and supported housing for individuals.

Thank you also to GyMEA Baptist Church and Northside Community Church who share the vision and support to maintain this vital role.