

News Article

Advocates Push for Human Rights Act to Aid Perth's Homeless

A coalition of social services and legal organisations in Western Australia has launched a video campaign to advocate for a state-level Human Rights Act, with a specific focus on addressing homelessness in Perth.

The Western Australia for Human Rights Act (WA4HRA) Coalition, spearheading the campaign, aims to persuade the state government to enact comprehensive human rights legislation in the upcoming Parliamentary term.

Chole Wood, managing lawyer at the Aboriginal Legal Service and a campaign representative, stated, "Western Australia currently lacks comprehensive protection for human rights. A Human Rights Act would provide that protection, ensure government accountability, and allow individuals to seek justice for human rights breaches."

The potential impact on Perth's homeless population was highlighted by Ann-Margaret, Principal Solicitor at Street Law Centre WA, a member of the coalition. "It's key for those experiencing homelessness to have access to shelter and stability." She said, "Without these basic needs, it is hard to enforce and seek every other basic human right."

Campaign advocates argue that access to safe and affordable housing is essential for protecting the human rights of the homeless. Luella Botteon, a solicitor at Street Law Centre WA, pointed out that systemic factors such as the cost-of-living crisis, housing shortages, welfare policies, and government actions are significant contributors to homelessness, rather than individual fault.

The coalition seeks to build broad public support to demonstrate the strong backing for the proposed legislation. The state government has not yet responded to the campaign.

Word count: 242

The Feature Article

Unlocking Human Rights: How a Human Rights Act Could Transform the Lives of Perth's Homeless Population

“Without these basic needs, it is hard to enforce and seek to obtain every other basic human right. A human rights act, we would hope, would include, the right to adequate housing” remarked Ann-Margaret, the Principal Solicitor at Street Law Centre WA.

Ann-Margaret was spot on. The Australian Human Rights Commission has long defined homelessness as a form of human rights violation, a violation that stifles every other human rights in the womb, such as access to healthcare and employment. While at first glance there does not seem to be a perpetrator of homelessness, high cost of living, untreated health issues, financial hardship, and the marginalized social identities (minority, disability, etc.) conjointly and constantly put people out of their homes, resulting in camper life at best and sleeping rough at worst. Meanwhile, the culpability of these factors is masked and de-emphasized by the slapdash efforts from the government: state-led homelessness services serving a quarter of the total homeless population in WA.

The public also appears at times cold-eyed towards the victims. When asked about the causes of homelessness in WA, Luella Botteon, Solicitor & CLE Coordinator at Street Law Centre WA notes “the common misconception that it is their own fault is grossly incorrect” before stating “Individual circumstances such as financial hardship can impact on a person falling into homelessness, but the greater contributing factors are the cost-of-living crisis, lack of housing availability, the welfare system and government policies”. Victims being blamed for their victimhood is hardly anything novel, as evidenced by cases of sexual assault survivors. Only in this case, the blame took on a deficit-leaning tone, attributing the homelessness to being lazy and

incompetent, an easy and perhaps satisfying thing for passersby to say, a tough mouthful to swallow for the homeless, as a Guardian article pointed out in 2017.

Fortunately, we now have people mobilizing towards mitigating the homeless situation in Perth WA. In fact, these groups of advocates may be in the best position to do so given their legal expertise, which can help them navigate through the often bureaucratic process of proposing legislation. Chloe Wood, the managing lawyer at the Aboriginal Legal Service, is currently campaigning for the homeless and having human rights act targeting homelessness passed. “The overarching campaign objective is to say the Parliament pass and Human Rights Act in the next term of government” Wood said. Siding with Wood, Ann-Margaret has also initiated her efforts, offering a critical view that “Australia has signed to numerous international conventions, and these have been ratified, but they do not appear in domestic law” as well as a visionary, strategic statement of “...I think a key barrier is, getting it raised on the government’s agenda...also having the community as a whole understanding the need for a human rights act...”.

Their efforts may prove worthwhile and equip the homeless with stable housing, thus their most basic needs as well as human rights, especially when similar legislation in the U.S. passed in 2021 suggests positive consequences.

Word count: 498

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The Pitch

Hi there,

I’m writing in regards to a potential chance of news story publication in your newspaper. The stories about homelessness on SBS have resonated with me. However,

I've noticed that it's been nearly two years since the last publication of homelessness campaign. In light of the increasing awareness and social mobilization towards both helping the homeless and mitigating the homelessness issue in Western Australia, I would like to present my very own angle on the topic of homelessness, an angle that involves both the social narrative of homelessness and a possible systemic change.

It has come to my knowledge that a group of social service providers and legal organisations are campaigning for the WA government to pass the Human Rights Act in the next Parliament. More specifically, the act has a special focus on the issues of homelessness in WA. The homeless population in Australia has long been a victim whose basic needs and human rights are violated and yet blamed for their situation. Despite the presence of social services provided for the homeless in WA, only a quarter of them are served, showcasing the slapdash effort on the WA government's part. Concerned with the situation, I plan to interview three legal personnel, two of whom are from Street Law Centre and one from the Aboriginal Legal Service in WA given their close involvement in the campaign. This symbolizes the beginning of a revamp of the WA government's attitude towards the issue.

I felt that it is necessary to get the words out there in the initial stage of these efforts, as doing so can potentially help the efforts gain momentum by leaving an imprint among the WA public, who, comprised of people of various professions and expertise, may opt for working towards a common goal. Besides, while the story is undoubtedly aligned with the SBS core value of social justice and civic engagement, it ultimately contributes to the tapestry of Australian civil discourse as a whole because of the value it carries.

I'm looking forward to hearing from you. Thank you!

Best regards,

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Word Count: 345

The Analysis

The selection of the news topic stems from my everyday experience. As I walk through the streets of Perth WA, I often come across people sleeping rough. Seeing the makeshift arrangements of their DIY tent and baggage made me question how in the world an affluent place like Perth still has people whose basic needs are not met. I helped them occasionally by sparing them small changes and gave them food, which was the least I could do, but I wanted to make some larger impacts. Driven by this desire, I selected the topic of homelessness, only found that there is virtually no current data on the homeless population. This contradicts what constitutes news, so I resorted to cover a campaign targeting homelessness.

The framing of the interview question is nuanced and calculated in order to get as much and as diverse a range of information as possible from the interviewees in a timely fashion. Following the interviews, a process of rigorous coding (annotating responses and interpreting meanings from them) was carried out, which then yielded several overarching themes. These themes include the the aim of the campaign, discrimination against the homeless, and the causes of homelessness. While the definition of news is “deceptively simple”, a feature underpinning news is the story of a recent or future event (Harcup & O’Neill, 2016). For that, my piece counts as news.

My feature story kind of walks a line between human-interest stories and informational features because it incorporates elements from both genres. On one hand, the feature story provides interview quotes of people who are keen on the homelessness issue and the campaign information; on the other hand, the feature story attempts to elicit emotions from the readers because it portrays the homeless as “victims” who are disadvantaged and blamed for their predicament. The eliciting emotion part is certainly not to be done at the cost of compromising objectivity, the central tenet of journalistic writing, so was how the feature story was written

(Tuchman, 1972). By quoting and detailing the interviewees' titles, the level of objectivity and credibility increases (Nylund, 2003; Roth, 1998), which is something I did in the news story and feature story, though the requirement did ask us to put the interviewees' titles in the appendix. In addition, the angle is perhaps unique compared to many news and feature stories on similar topics because the story kind of adopts a sociological perspective in which the concept of victim blaming and intersectionality (i.e. the multiple jeopardy of the homeless population based on their identity) are incorporated (Crenshaw, 1991).

As for the pitch, I feel as though it could be enhanced. Nonetheless, adhering to the SBS guidelines, I also mentioned SBS's core value of community engagement, which is listed on the SBS website. There is no flowery language because I believe the contact person will see it for what it is, and if there is value behind it, I get the shot.

Word Count: 498

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