



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Communities**

When there's **no place to call home**

Stories of people who have experienced homelessness in WA



Some of the content in this book may cause distress or trigger traumatic memories for people. If you need to talk to someone, support is available:

Lifeline: **131 114**

CrisisCare Helpline: **(08) 9223 1111** or **1800 199 008**

Kids Helpline: **1800 55 1800**

Entrypoint (referral line for homelessness support): **(08) 6496 0001** or **1800 124 684**

The Samaritans 24/7 Anonymous Crisis Support: **135 247**

Women's Domestic Violence Helpline: **(08) 9223 1188** or free call **1800 007 339**

Men's Domestic Violence Helpline: **(08) 9223 1199** or free call **1800 000 599**

Throughout this book, there may be references to agencies that no longer exist. Please note that Homeswest is now the Department of Communities.

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Introduction

On any given night in Western Australia, there are more than 9,000 people without a home. These numbers highlight the magnitude of homelessness but do little to reflect the real human stories.

Many people are quick to blame homelessness on the individual experiencing it rather than the countless reasons that put a person at risk. The stories in this book highlight many of the devastating circumstances that any one of us could find ourselves in, at any time.

Sharing these deeply personal stories can help dispel some of the myths surrounding homelessness. It allows us to create a fuller understanding of how people become homeless and the kind of supports that make a difference.

The stories collected will help reshape the narrative about people in our community who have endured life without a home. A narrative that is complex, distinct, and showcases the resilience and strength of those who have experienced homelessness.

There is so much we can learn about homelessness when we listen to those who have experienced it. These stories offer unique insights into what our homelessness response system looks like from the inside and how it impacts everyday lives.

These stories were collected as part of the public consultation process for the Western Australian 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness. The opportunity to contribute to this project was an open and transparent process. Through face-to-face and online consultations, organisations and services who had clients wanting to share their story were invited to express their interest. The Department of Communities specifically engaged with people who were connected with a service provider to ensure that support was available to address any concerns that may have resulted from participating in the project.

This book provides a platform for people who often remain unseen or whose voices are unheard. As such, these stories have not been edited and they specifically reflect the views of individuals. They do not represent the views of service providers, the Department of Communities or other funding bodies.

For privacy and safety reasons, some participants have requested that they not be identified. The names of these people have been changed and are marked with an asterisk*

Minister's Message

This book offers invaluable insight into the impact of homelessness on individuals, families, and the broader community. I am grateful for the people who have bravely stepped forward to share their experiences in this book.

While there is good work currently underway to support people experiencing homelessness, it is clear from the stories outlined across the following pages that there are also areas for improvement – our policies and services must aim to respond to the needs of every individual.

The McGowan Government is committed to rising to this challenge, and has commenced a critical analysis, alongside the Western Australian community, of where we can collectively improve our efforts to end homelessness.

Underpinning our commitment is a determination from the most senior levels of Government to seek innovative solutions, support collaboration, focus on outcomes, build from an evidence base and, most importantly, place people at the heart of our response.

This book demonstrates that commitment and our determination to ensure that the decisions we make in Government are informed by the experiences of people we are seeking to support.

The stories outlined across the following pages will help guide action and policy change throughout Government and the broader community. They will be of significant value in the development of the McGowan Government's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness.

I am honoured to launch this book on the behalf of those who have experienced homelessness in our community and thank those involved in its production.



Hon Simone McGurk MLA
Minister for Community Services



Alice*

When I was 14, I started experiencing a lot of problems at home with my mum. She was beating me, and I just didn't feel safe at home or loved. I just felt so much pain. The bad experiences I was having at home made me a very shy kid and I shut myself away from everyone else. I didn't have many friends at all. I was still going to school, but it was awful because I was always getting bullied. Being originally from Ghana and not having English as my first language, I faced so many barriers.

When I was 17, I decided to move away from home. I didn't have anywhere to go, but I just ran. I moved into a temporary room with a family friend and was there for about a year. I went to Centrelink and told them my situation. I was connected to a social worker, this support was only over the phone though. She helped me organise my Centrelink payments, which was good.

Not knowing where I was going to go next was really difficult. I didn't have time to build friendships because I was under so much pressure to find where my next accommodation would be. I also felt a lot of mental stress. It's really depressing just carrying everything around.

I then started to move around quite a bit, from Rockingham, to Baldivis, to Bull Creek. I was staying in share houses that I had heard about through friends. This was scary at times though. Some of the men in the houses made me feel unsafe because they would get aggressive and sexually harass me. If you're a young girl without a permanent home or long-term accommodation, frequently moving from shared house to shared house, this situation is almost inevitable.

So, I packed my things and ended up on the streets with my suitcase. I didn't have anywhere to go. I ended up googling my situation to try and find suitable accommodation. I managed to find a bed with Calvary Youth Services down in Mandurah. All the other places close to where I was living were full. Calvary were able to link me in with Foyer and I have been living here for two years now. I feel so stable and safe. I can focus on other things like finishing my university degree and finding a job.

I really wish that Centrelink were able to connect me with Foyer or other suitable accommodation options straight away.



Kelly

I lost my home a little while back. I was grieving at the time and took drugs, thinking it would heal me. I just wanted a quick fix. We have been homeless for four years now. There are eight of us – me, my husband and our six kids. We have been faced with so much discrimination in the private rental market. No one wants to house a family of eight. We have applied for so many houses, even the scummiest of places where no-one would want to live. But we still get rejected and we don't get reasons why.

It impacts the kids so much. They go to school stressed because every time we settle, we have to uproot and move again. One of my kids told me the other day that they would get severe depression and anxiety if we were to move again.

We have finally been placed in transitional housing, but we now have to prove why we need priority housing. If we don't get priority housing, we have to go back to the private rental market where we get discriminated against. It's like a revolving door. There are so many steps and hurdles. No wonder people just give up – the system is set up for them to fail.

Heath

I had a pretty good and stable life – wife, kids, house, and business owner. It all fell apart so quickly though after I got injured and couldn't work. We lost the house, had to give up the business, my wife left with the kids. And just like that, within a year I was left with nothing and had nowhere to go. I was lucky enough to stay with friends for a bit, but you start to feel like a burden and it's obviously not a long-term solution. I couldn't get a rental property because I had no rental history. I couldn't get the dole because the business was run through a family trust. I couldn't get public housing because although they took my house away, the title was still under my name.

It was impossible to get the ball rolling and I faced so many hurdles just because I couldn't tick a box.

My headspace went downhill pretty rapidly. I even went out to the bush and tried to kill myself. When you do everything right, but you still lose it all, what's the point.

One day down at the soup kitchen, a lady linked me in with Accordwest. They helped me get housing and this really laid the foundation for me to start putting my life back together. I was finally able to get my operation and I got myself a job working at the tip. If I hadn't found that job, I would have gone back to the same place with nothing. You just need that one person to give you a chance. Having a house has also helped me resolve things with my family and we are together again. It's really brought back such a positive mindset for me.



I have to wear everything of value so I don't lose it or get it stolen. People just take your stuff when you don't have a secure home.



Mali

I've experienced homelessness a lot during my life and I even came to Bunbury homeless. It's a hard cycle for me to break because my injuries prevent me from working and drug abuse and addiction have always been a problem. I get the Newstart allowance, which has helped me rent a few rooms off friends, but I have so much debt from bills and fines and that pretty much leaves me with nothing. I don't even have enough money for the bus and I have to rely on my push bike – which actually got stolen last week.

When I fell pregnant, my partner and I had nowhere to go. We kept staying with friends, which gave us shelter at least, but it was never a place I could make a home. When we had the baby, we were staying with friends, but they had some domestic episodes that were reported to the police.

This is when Child Protection got involved and they took my baby away because they deemed the accommodation unfit and unstable. But that house was the most stable place we had stayed in a long time. We had no other options.

To get my baby back, I have to find somewhere to live, but where am I meant to go? No one will give me a rental property because I'm not appealing enough. And I don't have any photo ID so it's really difficult to even apply for public housing. There are so many silos and boxes you have to try and fit into. If someone could have helped me get a house first, my son never would have been taken away. Now I have to constantly prove to Child Protection that I'm a good person and that's so tiring. I just want my family back.



Bonita

When I was homeless, I would always stay with friends or family. I'd squeeze my two kids on the couch with me, waiting for housing.

It was depressing and I would get lots of horrible thoughts – self-harm, leaving my kids. Being homeless can affect you in so many ways.

I get frustrated because when things start working well up here in Broome and we do something good with ourselves, they shut it down. The Community Development Employment Projects program was something that worked really well. Everyone had a job and responsibility to the community. It was inclusive employment and it wasn't a system based on handouts. But when this stopped, people were brought back to the poverty line.

Holly Rose

My story has nothing to do with drugs or alcohol, it's about my mother's decision. My mum has bipolar disorder. Three years ago she went on a holiday to the USA and I haven't seen her since. I was 20 and she just left me to look after my younger sister who has high functioning autism.

A lot of people have zero idea about the reasons behind homelessness, it's not just caused by family violence or alcohol.

The definition of homelessness is not having a stable house. The day I became homeless I went into Centrelink. I'd just broken up with my partner and I told them I had no family or couch to sleep on that night. The lady at Centrelink turned around and said, 'That's not something I can help with' and just gave me a list of phone numbers.

I struggled a lot to find a service that would take me because I was 20, I was on the cusp between adult and youth services. When you become homeless there's a hotline you can call but they say there are no beds, then what do you do? Services have expectations that you have to engage. But it's overwhelming, you can't always meet their requirements and then they kick you out. There's not enough compassion and you feel ashamed.

When I became homeless I was in my second year of nursing. I was living in my car and sleeping at the uni library until I confided in one of my tutors and she gave me a pamphlet for Foyer Oxford. I dropped out of nursing after being homeless but I'm now in my first year of a social work degree at Curtin. I didn't understand homelessness until I was homeless. What happens to the people who aren't so switched on? There needs to be more awareness about what to do and where to go as well as more education in schools.



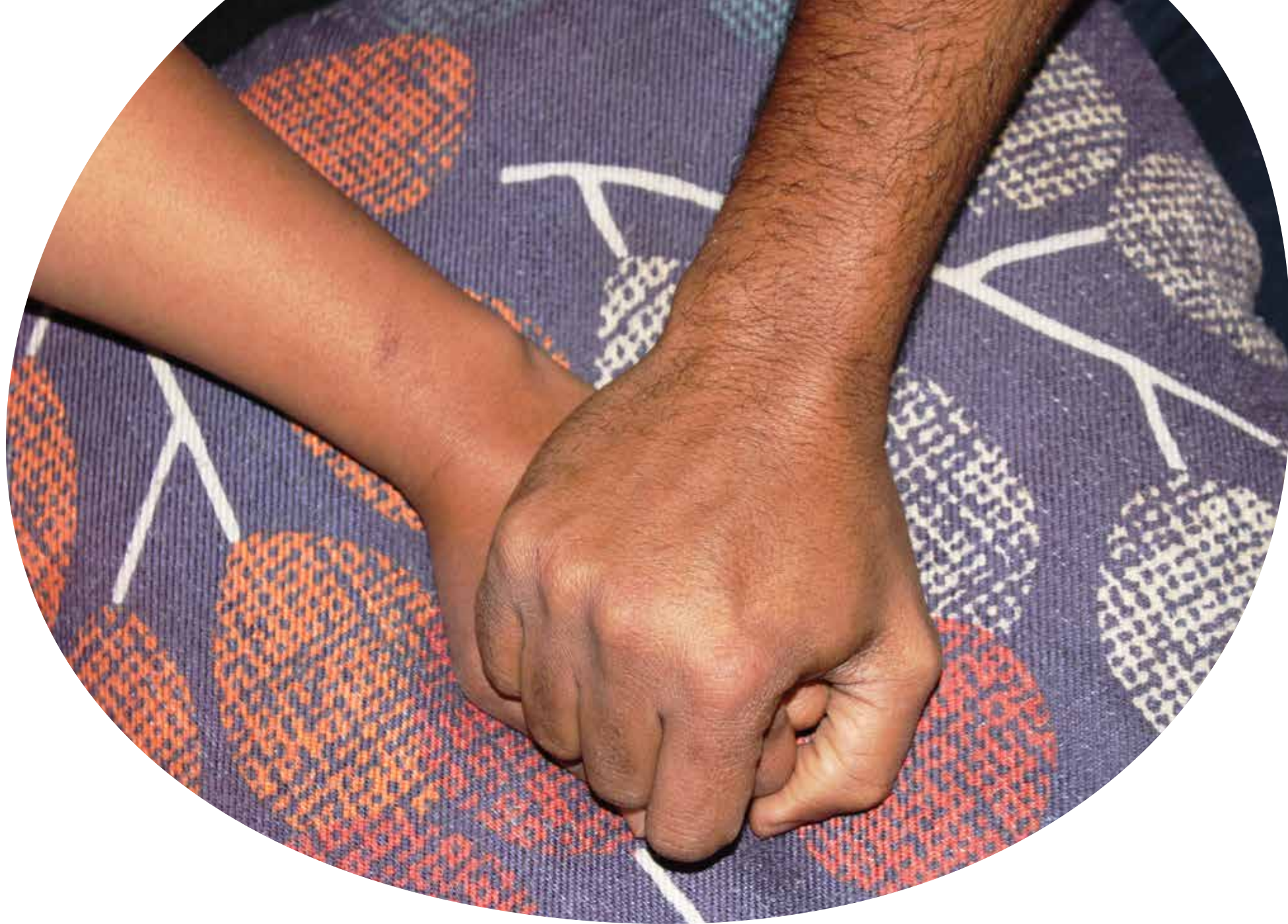
Gary and Missy

Starting at the beginning? I grew up in government hostels and since I was 15 I've been on and off the streets. I was kicked out of the hostels for various reasons. My parents thought I was too much trouble and didn't want anything to do with me. I eventually got off the streets into a share house, got a job and a forklift ticket. I moved into private rental accommodation and was okay for a couple of years but then I had a mental breakdown. Missy got real sick and wasn't eating. I got so worried about her, I couldn't go into work, I was crying everyday – it wasn't good. Then one day, she got over it but by that time I had been laid off. My boss didn't like me taking time off to take care of Missy, but how could I not? I was so depressed; I've had her since she was a puppy, she's my family.

So then I lost my house because I couldn't pay the rent. I went back to my mum's and lived in her carport for a while, I had a tent and blankets so it was okay. Things started to get strained living there, my family didn't want Missy or me there, so we left. I've been on the streets for a few months now, this is my second time in Tom Fisher House, and it's like a 5-star hotel compared to the places I've been! This is the only place that allows dogs. I can't use public transport because they won't allow Missy, so we walk everywhere.

I've tried applying for houses but the minute they see me and Missy, they see a junkie and his dog and give an excuse about the room or house being taken. Some people have told me to just give her up, but I can't; I can't give her up after all this time. I feel guilty because I know I'm letting Missy down. She's so old and struggling to walk. I know that we won't have much more time together.





Sarah*

I am Sudanese, I am Muslim, and I was homeless.

When I was 22, I came to Australia from Sudan with my ex-husband. We were on a refugee visa and I got free English classes at TAFE, but my husband wouldn't allow me to go; I only went when he felt like taking me. I had no friends, no family, spoke no English and didn't know what to do. While I was pregnant and after I gave birth, I experienced severe domestic violence from my ex-husband. My son and I were taken to a women's refuge, but that was very hard living there. It wasn't safe for us and we eventually went back to my ex-husband. I had another child and eventually separated from him. I went back to Sudan with my two children for a holiday but when I landed, he took my children away from me at the airport. I had a hard time trying to get them back.

I eventually got re-married and had another child. I made the decision to move back to Australia because it was the only way all my children and I could stay together; under Sudanese law I cannot have my children from a previous marriage stay under the same roof as my new husband.

I came over with my three children but had nowhere to go. I had \$200 with me and needed help with accommodation. I called Entrypoint and they said they didn't have anywhere for us but could put us in a hotel for a few days. We stayed there for a bit but eventually were taken to a refuge.

The refuge helped us get in touch with Multicultural Futures and they provided us accommodation. I was able to bring my husband over so we could be a family again. Living in that house was so good; it was about the community and the neighbours – they made us feel like we belonged.

We have now got into public housing and I am going to start my education certificate soon. I just want everyone to know that we, as refugees, don't want to be homeless and get free money from Centrelink. We just want a chance, we don't like getting money from Centrelink; we want to get jobs and be a part of our communities.

These are my
reiki healing
bracelets. They
give me strength
and remind me
everything will
be okay.



Samantha*

When my husband, myself and the kids arrived in Australia some years ago, we bought a house and had lots of opportunity ahead of us. Things turned quickly though. My husband got caught up with the wrong crowd and started using meth. That was the trigger for the downwards spiral. It came with lies, paranoia, losing his job, not paying the mortgage, adultery. It also triggered the domestic violence. I was being psychologically, emotionally and financially abused.

When I decided that it was time to leave, I found a rental property. But my husband was on a campaign to destroy me. He sent vexatious emails to real estate companies, so they refused my applications. He called Child Protection to try and get the kids taken from me. He also harassed me through social media and put my personal information up on inappropriate websites, which really put us at risk. He was always finding loopholes in the system and

setting me up, which meant that I have had to continually justify my innocence and it's so tiring. I couldn't think straight most days. I was hyper-vigilant and in a state of terror. I wasn't even able to sustain a job because I was terrified I would come home and the kids would be gone, or the locks would be changed.

When I asked for help, I was constantly told by police officers and the children's court to just move away and start a new life. But that would just isolate me for attack. It was important to stay where I have a support network and where people know my situation. I just wanted breathing space and somewhere safe for me and the kids. I came to the refuge and Safe at Home found me a transitional house, and now we have longer-term housing with Homeswest. Family court proceedings are still ongoing, but I've started studying community services at TAFE and I'm trying my best to maintain normality for the kids. I will not be defeated.

Kaitlin

My life was going alright until I was about 17 when I started using drugs. My family didn't want me at home when I was using so they sent me to detox centres. When I would get out of those, I went into transitional housing but that didn't last long because I would just start using again. I really didn't know where to go. I applied for public housing, but that was such a long wait. I stayed at friends' houses all over the place to try and get away from my problems – Kalgoorlie, Esperance, down south. I was constantly getting moved around and no accommodation services would take me in because I was using. There is almost no service that allows you to access it if you are on drugs. But if I just had a roof over my head and didn't have to move around so much, I would have gotten clean.

It was really hard, having to move and never having anywhere stable. Now that I'm at Foyer, I've been able to really turn things around. I've gotten clean, started studying and I even got myself a casual job. I'm also working on the relationships with my family.

Mackenzie

I was living with my mum, but there was domestic violence going on and a lot of other family issues. So, when I was 15, I left home and lived with a friend until I turned 16. I quit school because I had to find a job – I wasn't eligible for youth allowance until I was 16. Through some friends, I heard about crisis accommodation services, but I struggled to find information online. You have to be so specific with what you're searching for to find the right service. This type of information should definitely be more accessible, maybe taught through schools or something like that.

I finally got a place in crisis accommodation. It was good there, they helped me get my youth allowance sorted. But I really had no freedom with the curfews and it was so far away from my home and what was familiar to me. So, I moved in with my Grandparents, but we didn't get along because I was experiencing violence there too. It was really hard having to move around all the time. I feel so much more stable now that I'm at Foyer. It's allowed me to go back to school and I'm looking for a part-time job.





George

I had a normal, happy life but within two months it all went down the drain. I separated from my partner and found myself living in my car after not being able to afford the rent on my own. I met my new partner soon after, but she was on the verge of being homeless and when she came over from South Australia, we lived in my car together for over a year. It was hard living in such a small space with another person, we struggled to get by. We had to find food, shelter, escape the heat of the day, and were harassed by security guards and the owners of personal properties. Safe spaces for us in the car were limited.

That's one of the biggest things out there – you're so vulnerable. And unless you're on the other side of the fence, you have no idea how soul destroying it really is.

I suffer from depression and anxiety. I'm always worried that someone might attack us or steal our things. It tears me to pieces and I'm still on medication. It's also so hard to find a job. The moment employers realise that you don't have an address, they move on because they think you're unreliable. We have to keep our head above water though, it's so easy to drown out there. Places like the Salvation Army help a lot. They give us somewhere to have a hot shower, a regular feed and we can wash our clothes. What we really need is somewhere safe to go at night and more temporary accommodation – we need somewhere secure to leave our possessions. Homeless people just get moved along way too easily. They are seen by everyone as a threat. But all we want is somewhere secure and safe.

I'm so happy today because after 10 years, we have finally been given a house. It's going to be life changing for us and I think I'm going to finally get to see my kids after all this time.

Anne*

My mother is an Aboriginal woman and my father is a wadjela. I was not raised by my birth mother. The woman who raised me was abusive. The things that went on in and around my home environment were so damaging to me as a child and I became homeless at the age of 13. I lived on the streets for a long time or slept on couches.

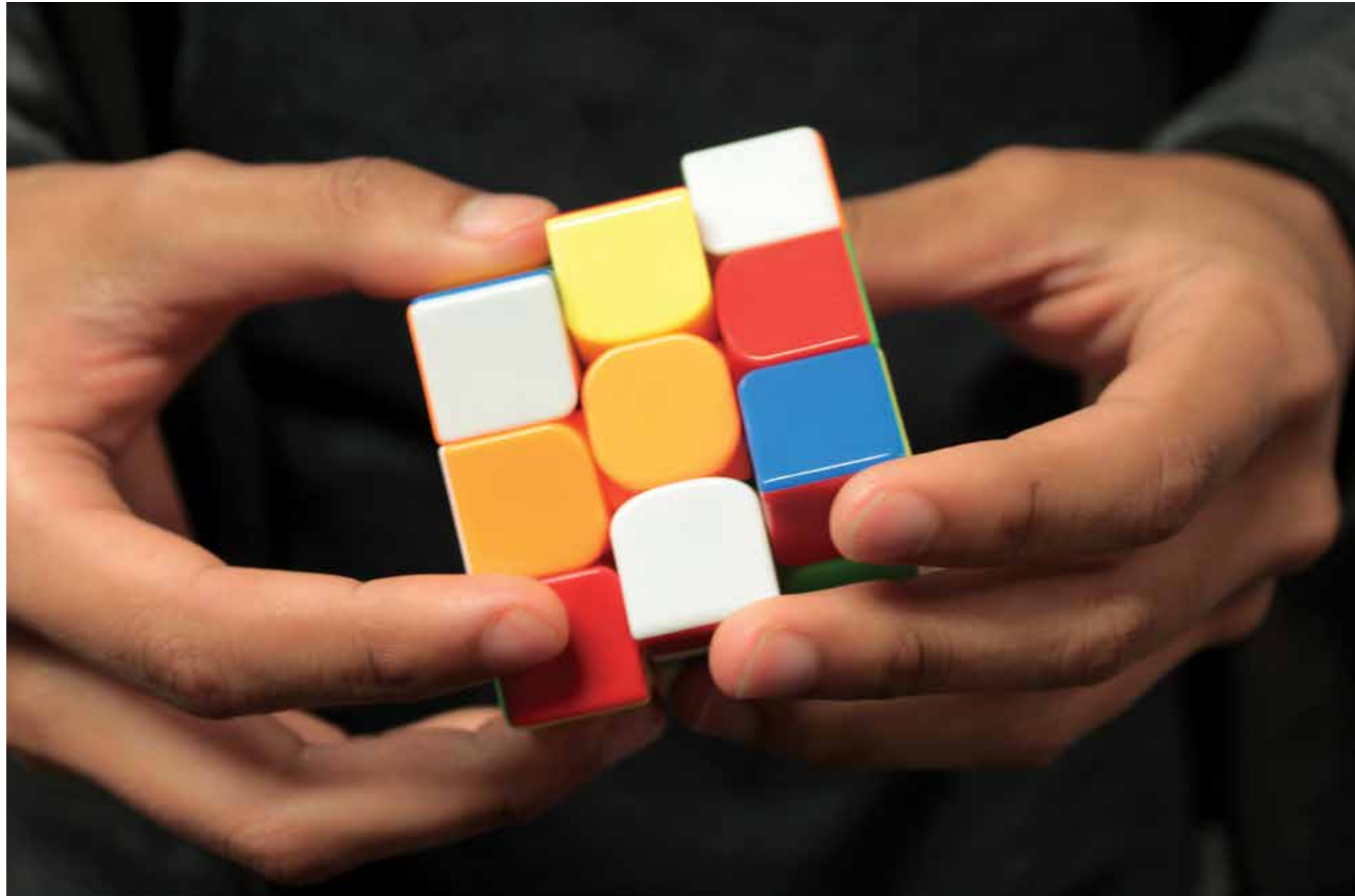
People living on the streets get a bad rap. No-one listens to the stories of people's circumstances and why we are the way we are.

We take drugs to stay awake and not get raped. The places to sleep rough in the city are limited now as they have taken them away and moved us on. We get judgement from the private rental market. People don't realise the shame you feel to even walk into Homeswest. There are so many empty houses. I don't understand why we are waiting so long to get one or why they can't be turned into safe places for us to stay.

I lived in Tasmania for a while where I became a chef. Over five years I lost my business and my house. I had to move back to WA with my babies and I got sick. I only have my daughter with me now and the other kids are living with their dad. We were living with my auntie and, due to family violence, we had to leave quickly without our stuff. We ran with just our suitcase and had to leave our pets behind. It is all heartbreaking.

We found a safe place to stay at Wooree Miya. It takes a certain type of person to work in a place like this and other places need to take a lesson from the staff here around cultural sensitivity. I am studying community services now as I want to work in aged care. I want to help the elders who are sleeping on the streets as I feel they have lost their culture and spirits.





Peter*

In November, I was kicked out of home because of family issues. When I left, I didn't have a job or Centrelink. I started reaching out to services for crisis accommodation and managed to get into one in Armadale. I was really happy about it, but I decided not to go because they had restrictions and curfews – it felt too controlling. I then started contacting hostels where you can work to pay for a room. This was better living conditions for me, but I didn't last too long because it was hard to adapt, and I couldn't balance all the work because I also had another part-time job.

I really struggled and needed some sort of allowance to help me get by. It was so hard to get Centrelink because I had to get evidence from my parents that they weren't supporting me anymore and that it was unreasonable for me to live at home. But why would they ever give consent to that. They became uncontactable. It was really tough, I went weeks without knowing what was going on. My other option was to get my situation verified by a service, but I didn't really have much contact with any. I pretty much had to be in crisis with no home before I was eligible to get help.

Since being at Foyer, I've had a case manager who has been an advocate to help me process all these things. Foyer allows me to balance my life and have control. I can work part-time and manage my Centrelink payments, which helps me save money for uni. I've just started studying aviation, but I have to pay for everything up front because I'm not a citizen. I really wish entry requirements were easier, so I could have got help sooner.



Louise

I got into my first relationship when I was 16. I was on a good path but then we separated. I was 21 when I met my second partner and that's when the meth came into it. He introduced me to this lifestyle.

I have four kids, one to my previous partner, two to the man who introduced me to drugs and I just had a baby girl a few months back.

I've only been homeless once; that was when I had a relapse and went back to using meth. After I relapsed, I felt so ashamed, especially because I was pregnant. I had been clean for so long, but I relapsed because of all the stress I was under.

I found myself living in my friend's shed for a few months with my two children. My eldest son from my first relationship was living with his father at the time. It was such a horrible experience; being pregnant and living in a shed in the dead of winter.

My two kids have asthma and the cold made it worse. I have a good relationship with my parents, but I couldn't ask them for help. Not after relapsing.

I ended up having my daughter really early and she had to stay in hospital in Perth for six weeks before transferring down here to Bunbury. My parents took care of my other kids whilst I was in hospital. During the time my daughter was in hospital I was able to find accommodation with Accordwest. I am currently in transitional housing with my three kids and hopefully moving onto some more permanent accommodation.

I still struggle with wanting to use, but every time I do, I reach out to my social worker. I am currently having specialist drug counselling and it's really helped. I don't want my kids to have to go through the same things I went through. I always tell them 'you don't want to be like me'.

Stacie

In 2016, I was living in Yarloop in a Homeswest house with my four children (11,10, 7 and 5 years old). We lost everything in the bushfires and it was scary becoming homeless. The stress of the situation took me to a point where I almost left my children without a mother. This led to a situation involving family and domestic violence where I was assaulted by my mother. To escape the violence, I uplifted my children to Queensland.

My mother applied to the Family Court to get custody of the children, so the Court ordered me to return to Western Australia and for the children to be attending school by the start of the school term. I tried to get a place to live in a short timeframe but had no luck. I bought tents and camping gear to go 'camping' near the beach. I had no car and no house but managed to get the kids to school as ordered. We had to sleep rough for two months before getting a house from Homeswest. Working with Child Protection enabled me to get a house quicker. It appeared to me that Homeswest properties are left vacant for so long when they are being maintained, which is frustrating when you are homeless.

The kids appear strong and have been handling it well with all the dramas that have happened in their lives. The older children are more worried about losing me than themselves. They have fears about losing the house again. The kids and I now play soccer to bring some fun and positivity into our lives.

Kim

When I was made redundant, I couldn't pay my rent, I got evicted with my 13-year-old daughter. I don't take drugs, but I considered doing illegal things to get money to pay rent. My strong morals and will stopped me. Due to my situation, I was forced to choose to stay with my ex-partner (who is not my daughter's father). The situation became dangerous as he was mentally and verbally abusive and threatened to get physically violent. So, I got a few things, my daughter and two cats and we lived in my car for a few days until my brother encouraged me to move down to Busselton and he helped me to get to a women's shelter.

This got me to where I am now, in transitional housing with Accordwest. I have found employment and am looking at caravan parks to stay until I get a few more payslips and can hopefully find a home. The waiting list for public housing is too long and it appears unfair that some are given priority and others in my situation are placed on the waiting list. I am now considering home-ownership as a future option. I am looking to stabilise my income and find a permanent home for me and my daughter.



Ian

I experienced lots of struggles growing up. I had a stroke when I was six. That's where a lot of my PTSD stems from. I was in a coma for six weeks at the children's hospital and I remember it being a horrible place to be. I became a kid with a disability and my parents used this to claim benefits.

My dad was in the Military, so we were always moving around. Home was never a safe place though. He was violent and aggressive most of the time and he had PTSD too. My parents split, but my mum always found new partners who were more important than her children.

When I was 13, I lost three of the most important people to me; my grandma, my poppy and my dog. My dog was my only friend growing up – my family, my support. I went into a black hole. Things were really hard and that was when I left home. I couch surfed for a bit then ended up living in a caravan. I didn't know where to go or what to do. What type of pre-pubescent teenager is going to know what Centrelink is? I ended up just lying about my age to get a job so I could pay for food and school.

I'm not a quitter. School was important to me, so I tried to not let anything stop me from going – not even the bullies.

School caught wind of me being on the streets. They linked me in with a social worker who helped me get on to Centrelink. She also linked me into the pilot Foyer program. I had an interview and got in. I lived there for nearly four years. It gave me my own space and time to focus on myself. While I was there, I did TAFE courses and studied a lot – I was always looking for that mental stimulation to keep me out of trouble. Mental health has always been a real struggle for me. Foyer was able to link me in with Headspace. This has been really good as it allows me to talk about the dark stuff instead of drinking my pain away.

Volunteering has also been really good for me. I have a passion for animals and dinosaurs – I've always wanted to be a palaeontologist. I've been volunteering with the museum for four years now and I love it so much. I also volunteer at Kanyana.

Since leaving Foyer, I've been living in private rentals and had some really great jobs. I've actually got an interview this afternoon!



These sunnies represent the start of a new life for me. I remember driving away from our home on the way to the refuge and I realised I left my sunnies behind. I couldn't go back though, so I pulled into a petrol station and got this new pair and I've had them ever since.



Rebecca*

I've had to overcome a lot in my past, but things started to really spiral for me when I found out my partner was using meth. He became emotionally and psychologically abusive toward me. He completely isolated me, making sure I had no contact with my friends or family. The paranoia was the worst though. When he was on his comedown, he would accuse me of infidelity and other outrageous things. I wasn't even allowed to make eye contact with anyone when I left the house and I couldn't dress the way I wanted or get my hair done. He had complete control over me. I got very depressed. There were days I couldn't get up to take the kids to school.

He agreed to try for a fresh start. We got some counselling, moved into a new house together. Things were going good and we decided to have a baby. But during the pregnancy, the abuse and meth use got bad again. Because of his meth use, we received two move-on notices. I loved my home and I didn't want to leave. But he put me in a position where I had no other choice.

I decided to call Entrypoint and they linked me in with crisis accommodation. The kids and I moved into the refuge so he couldn't get access to me. This was the safest thing for us, but I had to leave so much of my life behind.

Finding accommodation in the private rental market was a challenge. My good rental history was ruined because I was left with so much debt to fix the damage he caused. I told them I left because of domestic violence. I even had support letters from the crisis accommodation to try and prove I was a good applicant. But I got nowhere, and no one would give me and the kids a go.

We are now getting ready to move into a transitional house, thanks to the staff at the refuge. I'm feeling scared to do this on my own, but I'm so grateful because we wouldn't have anywhere else to go if this wasn't available to me. I'm also doing group therapy in Rockingham to get the skills to deal with stressful situations. It's really helping with my mental illness.

Netta

I experienced domestic violence from my ex-husband, it went on for 31 years before he threw me out in 2017. The domestic violence was pretty bad, one event left me with a spinal injury and needing to use a wheelchair. I am also profoundly deaf. It was really hard when he threw me out; it was a Sunday. I went to the Salvation Army Church for help and they were able to find me a room at a backpackers for four days. Then a place came up at the Beacon. I was signed up to the Street to Home program and that helped me heaps.

I've been with the Street to Home program now for over a year and it has been great. They've also linked me into NDIS programs so I have got ongoing support. It's hard finding a place that is wheelchair accessible, but I found my forever home through Access Housing and it is wheelchair accessible. I've been in here since January 2019 and its just me and my cat Bailey.

I had two cats before. I wanted to move out of the Beacon as soon as possible so I could get a cat again. Bailey is everything to me and he is one of the reasons to wake up in the morning. He makes a big difference in my life. One time, I fell from my chair and had to call an ambulance. Bailey wouldn't let the paramedics near me and watched them closely as they helped me.

I really like volunteering, it's important to me. I teach English to Chinese and Japanese students as well as teaching the elderly how to use computers and iPads.



Photo credit: Homelessness Services (The Beacon), The Salvation Army

Jamie*

I was 15 years old when I became homeless, it happened at school so I had the support of the school Chaplain who gave me phone numbers for crisis accommodation. One of my friend's family was really supportive and they helped me make the phone call and then dropped me to Y-SHAC.

I had numerous slip ups with my mental health and was no longer able to live by myself in a transitional house, resulting in me going back to crisis accommodation. My mental health was a major factor to not being able to stay at services and despite my insight behind it, it was hard. I was jumping from service to service, three weeks here, three weeks there. I was in a sense lucky that every time I had to find crisis accommodation, there was a bed available. I don't know where I would be if there were no beds available. I've even presented to hospital before and accessed social work support around housing there.

Due to my age, it was a struggle to figure out what to do with me. I was lucky in a sense, because I was in the care of the CEO [of Child Protection]. I was put into my own house rather than foster care because who wants a 15-year old foster child?

I was 15 and living on my own and going to school. I was travelling between Victoria Park and Mandurah to school every day, but I couldn't cope. I ended up going to three different schools. My problem was that Child Protection didn't pick up their game. I had a caseworker from Child Protection and Y-SHAC. My Child Protection caseworker was quite absent, although they had a high case load, so it wasn't really their fault.

My last school in Mandurah was really good with pastoral care and they supported me and believed in me, it was through that school that I felt a belongingness and a turning point. I'm now in my second year of a social work degree.





Aaliya

A few years ago, I moved to Perth from Newman. I managed to get my own place, but I lost that in October last year because of family and domestic violence episodes. I was blacklisted and couldn't find anywhere stable for me and my son. I did stay with family for a bit, but there were lots of drugs and alcohol around. So, I started staying in refuges.

Getting by is hard. I have so many debts and fines that get deducted from my Centrelink payments. I have to pay for medication for my children as well. It doesn't leave me with much.

I need a fresh start. I don't want to have to support my family's bad habits anymore. I wish I had super powers to erase my memory of everyone that has hurt me.

I just want to get somewhere for my kids to come back to. I've got until November to get my kids back. If I can't find a home and sort things out before then, Child Protection will go ahead with an 18-year order. I'm trying to get on priority for public housing. I've got an interview next week, so fingers crossed.

Not having a stable home has stopped me from knowing more about my culture. I'm Noongar—Yamatji and I want to know more to help me understand. I'm hoping to go to TAFE soon to do general education and then do a photography course. I really love photography.

Being homeless makes me sad. Every morning, I go for a walk with my baby boy and my headphones in. We look at all the houses and dream of owning one. Or at least just having a place where I can unpack my things and settle in.



Ben

In November 2014, I got really sick. Everything started to fall apart from there. I couldn't work, I lost my job, my kids and partner left. It didn't take long until I had to move on to the streets. I spent the first six months without a car. It was really hard because at least when you have a car, you have somewhere to sleep. I had some friends who gave me a car, but it broke down and I couldn't afford to fix it.

I had no money. You can't get Centrelink unless you have an address. You're stuck with nothing. For the time I was living out of the car though, I just had no hope. I chose to stay alone. I didn't trust anyone else on the streets.

I finally decided to go and live with my parents. But they lived in a small regional town and I felt so isolated – there was nothing there for me. I only lasted four weeks until I moved to Mandurah. Things started to turn around when I connected with WestAus Crisis Care. They gave me a stable place to settle and sort my life out. They put a roof over my head. Having this support was life-changing. Before I came to Mandurah, there was really no help. I was just passed from person to person. After two weeks, I was given the opportunity to start a traffic management course and within four months I started work. Being referred to job network services was the biggest turnaround for me. I had purpose. It is important that we get more places and services like this.

Rueben

I was only 13 when I left home with my mum to get away from domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse. I went from house to house, dropped out of school and things were difficult. I didn't have anywhere stable and no positive role models to look up to. I felt too young to link in with any services. It meant that I had to grow up really fast, and I started getting involved in drugs and crime.

And just like that, 10 years passes by, most of it spent in prison. Every time I was released from custody, it was always easier to turn back to crime. It becomes your second home. You have food, shelter and don't have to worry about the rest of the world.

I'm out this time and trying to get my life back on track. It's not easy though. How can you get a job when you have no work experience and no personal references? It's really hard for me to ask for help.

I've had to look after myself my whole life. But I was lucky enough to find someone who believed in me and saw my potential. My partner has helped me find my first rental property and has encouraged me to get support from Calvary Youth Services. It is through this program that I was referred to Jobs South West. I'm now studying to become a youth worker so I can teach young people not to make the same mistakes. I don't want them to experience what I did, or have any regret.

If you can change someone's circumstances, you can save their life.

Having stability has also helped me reconnect with my mum. Sadly, she is sick with breast cancer, but she is my motivation to change.





Sylvia

When I was 14, my mum's partner was violent with me and I was thrown out of home. I stayed for a short time with other family and then lived on the streets. It was hard on the streets, so I took drugs and alcohol to cope.

I had to fight to keep good sleeping spots near the shops in the city and under bridges out of the wind and the rain.

I had street friends who died from overdose or who were raped. I felt so alone and unsafe.

I moved to Queensland for two years but had to flee after my partner became violent with me. I got a place in a refuge for 12 months and Foundation Housing helped me get my first house.

I have known my partner since we were 14 and he is the father of my five-month-old twin babies. He has also been homeless and has drug and alcohol issues. At 24 weeks pregnant, I had to stay in hospital for the rest of my pregnancy due to the high risk from violence in the home. While I was in hospital, my partner and other family members created problems at the house and caused damage. When I left hospital, I had the locks changed to keep family out. They still broke in, even lifting tiles off the roof to get in. After the last assault by my partner, my babies were in danger, so I had to flee with them to another refuge. That house is still boarded up from all the damage and blood from the violence at the house.

I want to break the cycle of violence for my babies, my little miracles. They are my new life and my new family, just us three against the world. We are glad to be at this refuge because it is safe for us and they support me. I am hoping to get a house through Centrecare in a couple of months. A safe place for me and my children.



Mohammed

I came to Australia in 2011 after fleeing Afghanistan; it was very hard especially when you're trying to learn a new culture and a new language. I didn't have any family or friends here. I was all alone. I was sent to Tasmania first, but couldn't get a job. I then moved to South Australia because people said it was easier to get a job there. I couldn't find one. Someone told me that Perth was a good place to get a truck driving job. So, I moved to Perth and stayed in a backpackers hostel. I kept on trying to get a job, but I just couldn't.

Eventually I ran out of money and had to sleep in Kings Park. My friend and I would sleep under the stars on the grass in Kings Park and then during the day we would go to the libraries and try and look for work. We stayed in Kings Park for three weeks and used the barbecues to cook our food at night.

I had a settlement caseworker and I only met him once. He didn't support me much but told me to go to Centrelink. I went to Centrelink and sorted out my payments. I didn't even know I could get Centrelink! I asked them for help because I was homeless, and they told me to go back to the caseworker. Then my friend met Alec who was at Uniting Care West;

Alec said he would be able to get my friend a place to stay. But my friend said he would only come if there was room for me too! We both went to Wilf Sargeant House and that helped us so much! I was able to get my truck driver's licence and work with employment agencies.

Alec and I have stayed in touch over the years, and through places like the Multicultural Futures Centre I was able to secure a job and now have the highest licence in truck driving. I can drive any truck!

You know, it's usual for us refugees to be homeless. We don't know where to go, we don't have family to support us and we don't know how to ask for help either.

Donna

I'm not really what people would consider homeless; I have a roof over my head but it's just not enough space for me and my grandkids. I have two grandkids. They came to me last October when their mum went to rehab. I was only supposed to have them for a couple of weeks whilst she was in there. I have been living in these units that are specifically for single people, right near the beach. It's really lovely; but now I have my two grandkids and I have to look after them. So, I can't stay here anymore.

I just recently got awarded custody of my grandkids through Child Protection and yesterday I was just approved for a new rental. Child Protection were really helpful for us, they gave us so much support and helped us get the house. A few years ago, I was working full time doing FIFO but then I had heart failure and lost my job. All of a sudden, I didn't have any money. Most of the money I earnt on FIFO went on supporting my daughter with her meth habit like trying to get her into rehab, buying stuff that the kids needed or paying her rent. I didn't think I would be parenting a three and four-year-old again but you know, it's family.

There are so many things I can't do now that I used to do before, simple things like going for a walk on the beach in the early morning. I can't do that now, not with the bubbas at home. Now that I have two kids to support, I have to find some sort of job, but nobody wants to employ a 58-year-old woman with a heart condition.

I don't know where my daughter is now, well I do know, she's couch surfing around the area, but I just don't know who is with her. Meth has a lot to answer for; making people homeless and breaking families apart.



Naydeene

My story has a happy ending because I've gone from homelessness to home ownership. It wasn't easy though. When I was living in the Pilbara, my drug and alcohol intake really impacted my decision making.

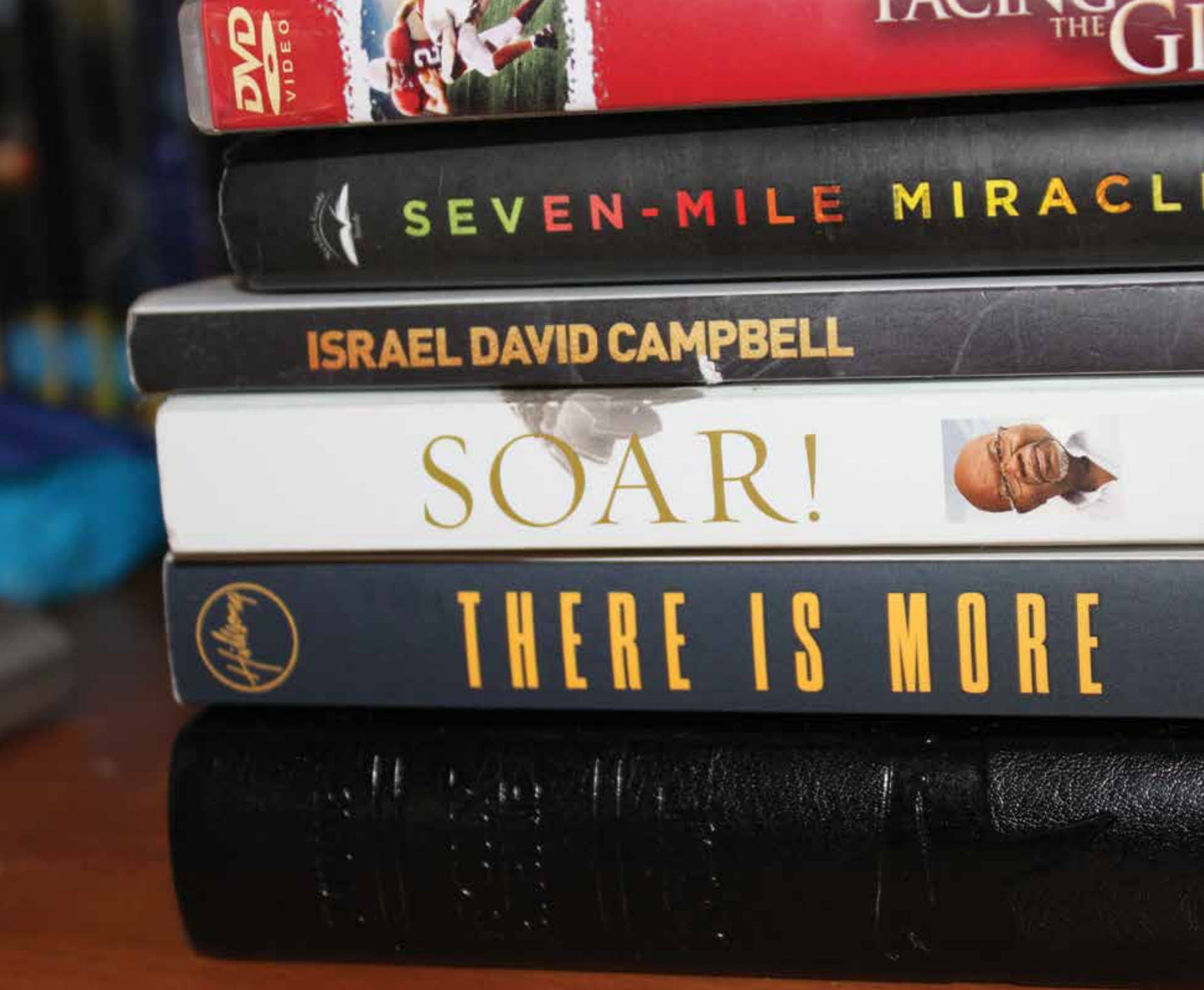
Intergenerational trauma is real. I've had to cope through domestic violence, foster care, poverty and spiritual stresses. You can't even begin to imagine what this does to your mental health.

I also dealt with lots of discrimination from the private rental market and it was hard to find someone who would give us a chance. I was lucky that I had a lot of support from family. We couch surfed a lot, which meant that at least we had somewhere to sleep at night. Seeing my son sleeping on the floor next to me was the hardest thing. I knew there was more to life than this.

The reality is that the system keeps you in poverty. When you finally get into public housing and begin to set yourself up, the minute you find employment and earn too much you're faced with a choice – either give up your home or quit your job. The private rental market isn't even an option because it's too expensive or we have to deal with discrimination.

In terms of getting services, it's a waiting game. But in the meantime, our situation deteriorates. Every time I did get support, it was a band-aid fix because no one actually educated me on what I had to do. I was never taught how to budget or save up for a house. That's why I've started up my own business to empower people to have the tools needed to resolve their housing issues.





Jakob*

I grew up in and out of care of different family members after being removed from my mother. When I was 15, I moved into Indigo Junction crisis accommodation. I tried a few different crisis accommodation hostels and always came back to Indigo Junction. I moved from crisis accommodation into transitional accommodation and had a little unit to myself. I felt scared all the time and would run back to Indigo Junction through the night when I was scared. I would have all of my stuff in one room and surround myself with weapons to feel safer.

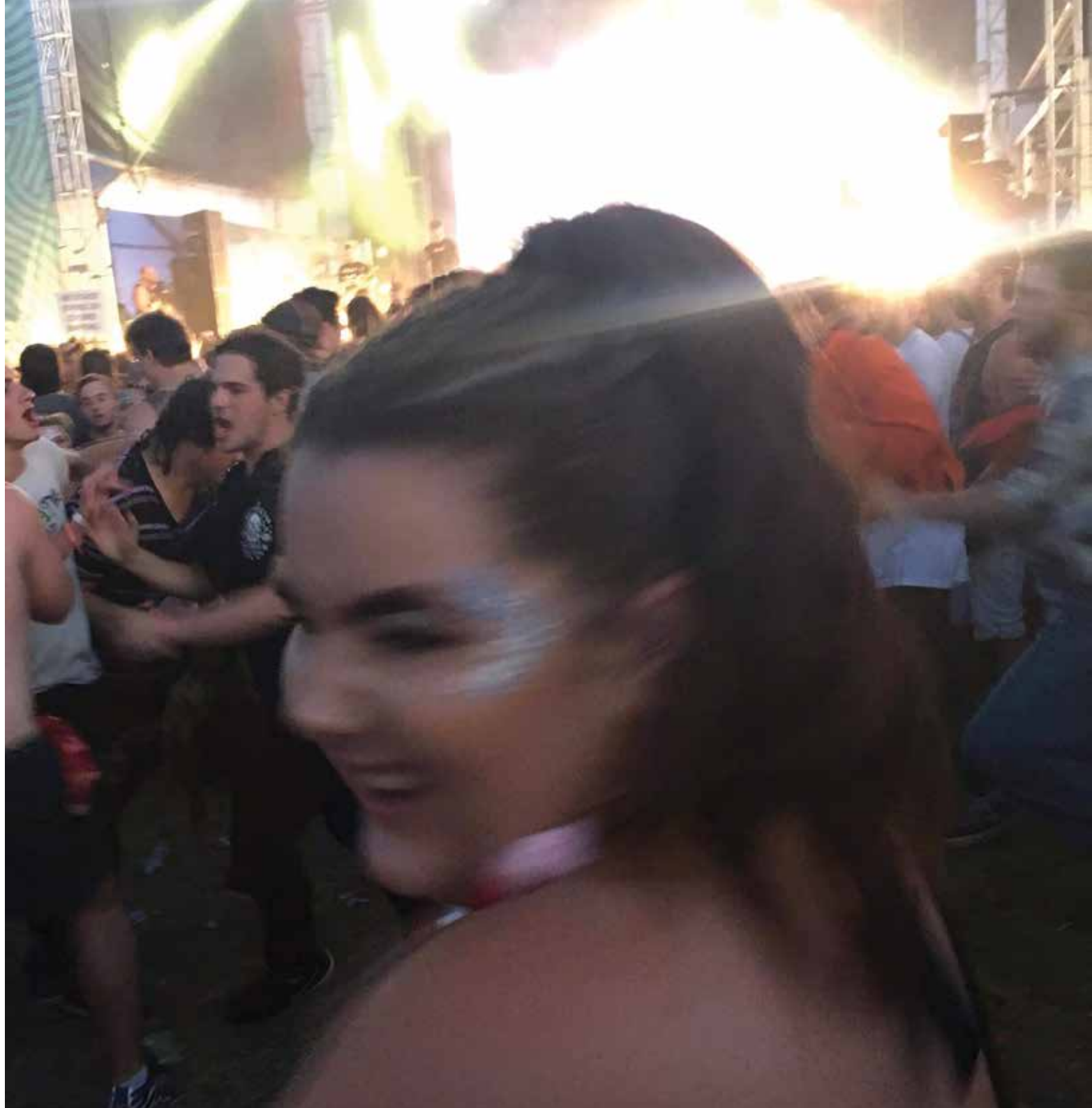
I had issues with drinking, drugs and fighting and was always getting into trouble. I spent 18 months in prison for assaults which I look back on and can see how I was so angry.

Eventually, Indigo Junction started their Living Independently for the First Time (LIFT) program which was a leaving care program. From here, I learnt more skills budgeting and taking care of myself – I have no family to teach me these things and Indigo Junction helped with all of that.

Eventually, I was allocated a long-term house through the LIFT Program and have been living by myself now in the same little place for 18 months. I have studied and am on my way to getting my license.

Having a stable home that I feel safe in has been the turning point for me.

I am going back to Church regularly and am looking forward to becoming a youth pastor. My faith is very important to me and so is the church community.



Shaz

I remember going to Centrelink for the first time and telling them my mum's given me two weeks to leave and they told me 'that's not 100 percent homeless'. They didn't have much care about how to help me and they didn't give me the option to speak to a social worker. I tried to get into crisis accommodation, but they just gave me a voucher for one night's accommodation in a backpackers hostel.

I was really lucky, I had a friend who had been homeless and she was really supportive. She told me that a lot of these places aren't safe and that you have to hide your valuables. It was really scary, I'd prefer to sleep in my car in the park.

When I was homeless I had to hit up people I hardly knew. You have that embarrassment, especially when it's out of your control.

I could stay with friends but then their Centrelink would get cut off, or their landlord would see the extra mattress on the floor. I used to think that there was so much more out there for people who were homeless than there is. There needs to be more education and awareness about what to do if you are homeless, even in high school. My mental health has improved so much just by being in Foyer. I've just graduated with a diploma in nursing and I'm going to start university next semester.

Jody

I have a three-year-old granddaughter who lives with me due to family breakdown. In 2018, we lived in a caravan under a shed on a property in Toodyay. We were evicted from the property as the Shire threatened the owner with fines as the caravan did not meet regulations for us to be able to live there.

We had nowhere to live and began sleeping rough or 'camping' as my granddaughter calls it. She pretended we were sleeping in an enchanted forest, so she could feel safe. I do not mind sleeping rough on my own, but it is not okay for her.

She has asked not to go back to the 'broken house' again [the caravan], as she does not like it. I have to care for her and keep her safe, so we need a permanent home to live in.

I went to Homeswest and was put on the waitlist and have been trying to get priority housing for almost two years now. There have been issues around getting the required paperwork to support me getting priority housing. I have been to a financial planner as requested, showing I am not in a good financial position and have been actively seeking private rental accommodation but have been declined due to my finances. Thankfully, I have secured temporary housing with Accordwest for 12 months while I get things sorted.





Suzie*

I was living over east with my ex-husband; I had to leave him because the domestic violence was very bad. I came to Perth last year to get away from him. I have nine kids. I have no family or friends here. I went to the multicultural centre in Cannington and they put me in touch with a social worker there. We tried finding accommodation, but we couldn't. At the time I was staying with my friend in Armadale, but then it got too much. We ended up staying, all nine of us, in my car for one night. I went to Homeswest to see if they could help but they just gave us some phone numbers. I called Entrypoint. They said they couldn't find anywhere for us, but they paid for our motel for three nights. I was still in touch with my social worker and he got me in touch with Multicultural Futures and they were able to help me into transitional accommodation. At this time, I was heavily pregnant, so it was very stressful.

Multicultural Futures helped me find a house through Homeswest; I love having my own home. It's close to the kid's school and the shops. Once the baby is old enough, I will go back and do some language classes, my language needs to be stronger.

It's not hard looking after nine kids, what's hard is being homeless.

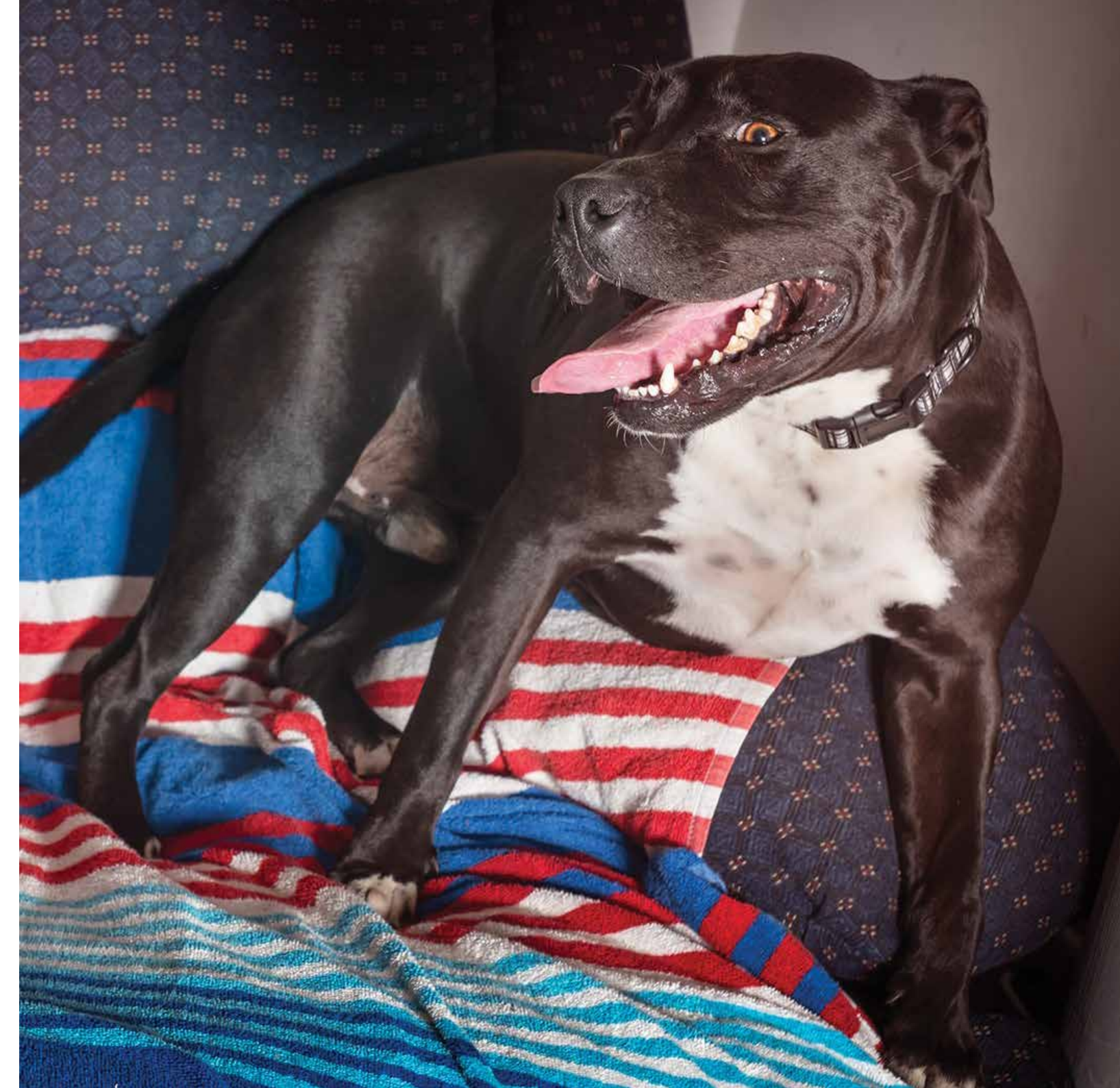
Meredith*

My name is Meredith* and I am a mother to three beautiful children and one dog called Baxter. I became homeless in 2018 because of domestic violence; I stayed at the Graceville Centre with my youngest son for ten months. I've been linked in with the Street to Home Program since I came to Graceville; I got a house in October 2018 through the Department of Communities. I was given a 3-bedroom house with a huge backyard. It was pretty daunting to live in this huge place with my 3-year-old.

When I was homeless, I promised my kids we will get a dog as soon as we found a home.

I got Baxter off Gumtree for free as the previous owners were unable to care for him anymore. I got Baxter first for protection and safety, but he is so much more to us. Baxter is a valuable asset to our family and like one of the kids. Not only does he give us a great sense of security, but he is the best company. I reckon everyone who can, should adopt a dog. In April 2019, I was able to be reunited with my oldest son; I am still linked in with Street to Home and Community Mental Health for ongoing support.

Photo credit: Homelessness Services
(The Beacon), The Salvation Army





Alisha*

I came to Australia in 2002 from Africa – at that time I was living over east with my husband and children. I have eight children; I know it's a lot! I experienced domestic violence from my ex-husband; he was not like that in Africa. He was such a nice, caring man when we lived in Africa, but coming here changed him. Whether it was the stress of coming somewhere new and learning a new culture and new laws, I don't know but it changed him.

My family and his family ended up coming here; there was a point that there were over 50 of us in one house.

I had this beautiful house that I was renting and all of a sudden there were all these people in it. I was still responsible for the lease and it got to a point where I had to get everyone out – there was so many fights and so much violence from my husband. He blamed me for everything going wrong. I ended up working really hard to get everyone housed but it didn't help me; the house I rented was damaged and the bills were extremely high. I had to get a loan to cover the damage and the bills.

I ended up leaving my ex-husband and had to move to Perth for my safety. I keep to myself and stay away from the African community as much as I can. I just don't want to deal with the drama. Now my son is having issues and wants to be on the streets with his friends. I am trying really hard for him to get back into school. Multicultural Futures helped me get this house and now they are helping me with him. If he doesn't want to go back to school, that's fine but he needs to get a job or something to keep him busy. I believe we were given an opportunity to come to Australia and we have a purpose; I am going back to school.

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