

Investigative research report

What emergency and social accommodation planning and provision will prepare Maleny for future needs?

A joint Rotary Club of Maleny and Maleny Neighbourhood Centre
Research Initiative funded by the Rotary Club of Maleny.

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Executive Summary

Homelessness is a growing concern in Australia: for vulnerable adults, families and youth. How homelessness affects our community now and into the future are phenomena we all should be concerned about, particularly at the local level.

This investigative research was authorized and supported by the Working Group (WG) for the Rotary Club of Maleny (MRC) and the Maleny Neighbourhood Centre (MNC). It investigated social and emergency housing needs and provision for postcode area 4552, within the Sunshine Coast Council (SCC) regional context. The purpose was to determine a pathway for accommodation provision for people in need in the Maleny area. Email, phone and face-to-face interviews with providers were used to collect information on current issues, available services and desirable improvement ideas. Local estate agents were contacted for their perspectives and industry data. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2001, 2006 and 2011 census data quantified community characteristics.

Despite its special characteristics, Maleny broadly fits within national demographic patterns. However, the following variations need consideration. The local unemployment rate has grown a little over time; underemployment is a community characteristic; part-time work is preferred to full-time work (relative to national averages and slightly overall); a relatively old community (age of residents) is ageing faster than others; females outnumber males; and there is a high level of unoccupied dwellings due to combinations of a variety of circumstances.

There is very little public housing; it has been occupied long-term and is currently unavailable. The State government has plans to privatize public housing provision: with unpredictable local implications. There is currently no planning for additional social housing due to relatively small local numbers on the Department of Public Housing and Works (DPHW) Register. Services for those at-risk of losing their accommodation, due to rent arrears, are confined to large centres, the closest being Nambour, Caloundra and Caboolture or through limited outreach offices (e.g. hired at the MNC). Private rental housing is very limited and relatively expensive. The large wedding and holiday industries cater for relatively high-cost short stays with many (sometimes unoccupied) dwellings. Some existing responses to these identified issues are: a high level of 'house-sitting'; community cooperative trading schemes (e.g. Local Energy Transfer Scheme); volunteer accommodation schemes (e.g. Wildlife Volunteers Association / WILVOS); improvised dwellings and shared-house arrangements.

People in need of low-cost accommodation are likely to arrive in Maleny for short-term and longer periods in a gradually increasing stream. This is due to reduced site and service availability in tandem with increasing financial pressure. It is a popular visiting and relocating destination for many groups (e.g. Maleny's indigenous heritage draws visitors who might relocate). Maleny is potentially well suited to social and 'emergency respite' housing for both residents experiencing changed circumstances and 'needy' visitors. However, accommodating infrastructure is currently not in place, nor planned.

The major recommendation of this report is for the WG to focus on collaborative, multi-pronged, preventative approaches (by government and social support agencies) to emergency respite and social housing provision for youth and the general population separately. Community consultation on these issues and potential solutions should be commenced through a press release (see Appendix 8) about this draft report. A funding application should be made by the WG to MRC for action research to record activities, identify further considerations and make recommendations in response to an evolving picture of potential problems and possible solutions.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Authorisation and purpose

This investigative research was authorized and supported by Rotary Club of Maleny (MRC) and the Maleny Neighbourhood Centre (MNC) through the working group (WG). The purpose was to determine a pathway for accommodation provision for people in need in the Maleny area. This report considers social and emergency housing needs and provision for postcode area 4552 (PC4552), within the broader Sunshine Coast Council (SCC) regional context.

1.2 Limitations

This research commenced early in September, 2014. Although, initially, more time and funding were planned, MRC withdrew authorization for this investigative phase of research in mid-October, 2014. The reason was that sufficient data collection had been achieved. Therefore, findings from this report are limited to a period of six weeks. Only 2006 and 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data are available for PC4552. Some minor changes in questions and recoding occurred for 2011 data. Overall, the various tools used by the ABS and estate agencies (including one electronic site) provide some limited variance within the dataset. These limitations provided disadvantages, but also some advantages for the research results.

1.3 Scope

This investigation considers provision of emergency social accommodation: for homelessness and social housing. Future work and reporting should focus on distinct provision of emergency relief accommodation and the development of sustainable social housing as separate projects. It should also consider separately the needs of youth and the general population for emergency accommodation. Similar factors affect services across cohorts and types of provision; however, separate planning is needed to clarify goals and viability.

1.4 Methodology

Staff-members from the broader SCC region 'provision and support' agencies (see Appendix 1) were canvassed via email, phone calls and face-to-face interviews. They provided information on current issues, available services and desirable improvement models / ideas. Local estate agents (see Appendix 2) were contacted for perspectives on these issues. ABS Census data were used to quantify community characteristics in determining potential problems and possible solutions. All quantitative and qualitative data gathered were analyzed and cross-referenced by the researcher in determining significance for the local community.

1.5 Acknowledgements

The researcher wishes to acknowledge the funding and authorizing agencies, members of the WG for ideas and support, all contributors for their input and his family members for their acceptance.

2.0 Discussion

2.1 Identification of a range of needs

This investigation covered two areas of potential concern. The first is accommodation provision for homeless / rough sleeping people who are either visitors to the area or longer-term residents affected by emergent problems. Some of these often-interrelated problems and altered domestic situations include: domestic violence and manipulation; mental health (see Appendix 3); aging; changes in employment patterns and markets resulting in income decline; family breakdown; and lifestyle choice. The second concern is local provision of affordable housing options. Maleny is an expensive community for purchasing and renting accommodation because of interrelated factors including: limited supply issues; proximity to Brisbane and the coast and their real estate markets and transport networks; mountainous hinterland attractions; and affluence.

2.2 Problems with current service provision

Planning for both concern groups is difficult due to the complex and variable emergent nature of the causes. The context is of a generous community (e.g. very high contribution rates to, often international, charitable causes) but one where it is difficult (or unpopular) to provide for local social needs over a longer time period. Availability of accommodation and services is currently limited but there is also no real measure of willingness to assist supply for, or internal and external demand from, either cohort. What is known is that the costs of social housing provision are relatively high and therefore commercially unattractive.

2.3 ABS community profile data

2.3.1 2006

There were 7279 people captured (3525 males and 3754 females) with a median age of 47yrs. There were 2097 families and 3331 private dwellings (av. 2.4 people per household). The median income and expenditure were: weekly income \$750 and rent \$200 while the monthly mortgage was \$1083.

2.3.2 2011

There were 7774 people captured (3721 males and 4053 females) with a median age of 50yrs. There were 2318 families (av. 1.8 children) and 3895 private dwellings (av. 2.3 people per household). The median income and expenditure were: weekly income \$857 and rent \$250 while the monthly mortgage was \$1517. Like the national average, in 90% of cases, rent cost less than 30% of household income.

In the 2011 census (ABS) of PC4552, there were 563 (up 52% from 2006: 371) unoccupied dwellings and 75 (up 39% from 2006: 54) dwellings occupied rent-free. Surprisingly, trends indicate a decline (16.9-15.1%) in the proportion of unoccupied private dwellings, an increase in the proportion who own their homes outright (43.5-46.4%) and an increase in the houses occupied rent-free (9.2-

10.8%). However, trends are based on small percentile changes from one Census to the next. If the trends were to continue, this might suggest people are: increasingly realizing their dream of moving to Maleny and finalizing the mortgage: with house sitting an increasing phenomenon, until the owners resettle or while they are holidaying away. It might also suggest property owners are selling the unoccupied dwelling linked to the mortgage commitment being around 40% higher.

2.4 Combined ABS and real estate data snapshot (2011-12)

Houses (85%) are fully owned (46%) by couples without children (53%), 50-65yrs of age (52%) with a household income of \$300-\$1000 per week (50%), with 44% of people not in the labour force (mostly due to retirement). As discussed earlier, there is a high level of unoccupied dwellings (11.6% 2006 12.1% 2011 in ABS Census data) due to combination of a variety of circumstances. Private rental housing is very limited and relatively expensive.

Despite its special characteristics, ABS census data (2001-11) suggest Maleny broadly fits within national statistical patterns. However some trends need highlighting. The local unemployment rate has grown a little; underemployment is a community characteristic with part-time work preferred to full-time work (relative to national averages and slightly overall); a relatively old community is ageing faster than most other communities; females outnumber males.

Table 1: *Selected ABS Census data – 2006, 2011*

	2006	2011	Australia 2006, 2011
Average Age	47yrs	50yrs	37, 37
Males	48.4%	47.9%	49.4, 49.4
Females	51.6%	52.1%	50.6, 50.6
Unemployed	5.1%	6.7%	5.2, 5.6
Employed FT	47.6%	45.6%	60.7, 59.7
Employed PT	40.2%	41.6%	27.9, 28.7

2.5 Rental market

Dwellings rented Sept 2012-14 (259) represent around 20-25% of the total available housing. Rental properties are in demand and are rented quickly. However, median rents only rose over the period early 2013-14 for 4BR houses, remained flat for 3BR houses but for all other rental types (particularly units), there was a decline in rental prices. After the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008, the market 'cooled' from a 'hot period'. The breakdown of these 259 rentals was: 1BR - 32; 2BR - 35; 3BR - 114; 4BR - 71; 5BR - 7.

Recently, many rental properties have either been rented or taken off the (rental) market. Private rental housing is very limited and relatively expensive despite a high level of unoccupied dwellings. Dwellings sit unoccupied due to a variety of circumstances including waiting for retirement, 'rural (large block, multiple property) industry decline, 'working away' and 'vacant landlords'.

Transient visitors historically do not tend to rent (for long) in Maleny. There are rarely many rental properties available (supply) so the prices remain high due to demand. In Maleny, investors tend not to buy or build for the long-term rental market, especially outside of the town water and sewerage boundary. Purchasers (including new-builds) usually buy to move in; sell &/or replace for living purposes; or sell for capital gain. For renters, there are limited jobs and services; usually the driving and weather conditions mean people either stay and buy, or move elsewhere. The rail towns have much better access to services and allow mobility for service access through variety and ease of transportation. Although people (e.g. on the housing register) would come for reduced rents through social housing, the question of how long they would stay needs consideration.

2.6 Sales market

Over the last two years, sales growth has increased (particularly of larger houses and larger units of three bedrooms plus) after a significantly depressed period the previous two to three years as the aftermath of the GFC. Median price for the small number of units went from \$267000-\$392000 (47% increase) with a current median rent of \$300-330/wk. Median price for houses went from \$450000-\$486500 (8% increase) with a current median rent of \$390-420/wk. These ranges in median prices (e.g. cost of rentals) are because of the use of different tools and time periods.

2.7 Social housing and social needs

No-one would build social housing because of the high cost (and minimal suitable land availability with water and sewerage infrastructure) of the total project (minimum \$650,000 for a single dwelling) mostly because of land costs This is a paraphrased statement by a long-term real estate agent (see Appendix 10 for possible variation).

There is currently no planning for additional social housing in the district and particularly PC4552. This is due to the (relatively) small local numbers (see Appendix 4 provided by Coast2Bay Housing Group North Coast) on the Department of Public Housing and Works (DPHW) Register and the much greater demand from other high need areas (see Appendix 5 provided by Coast2Bay).

Services for those at-risk of losing their accommodation, due to rent arrears, are confined more to large centres, the closest being Nambour, Caloundra and Caboolture.

2.8 Considerations for social accommodation provision

The State government has plans to privatize public housing provision. Therefore, unforeseen changes may unfold for the minimal existing social accommodation in Maleny. This housing once provided for an identified historical need; however, it has been occupied long-term and currently is unavailable.

A repeated theme is that data capture is the critical missing element in determining the level of local demand. The Queensland Council of Social

Services (QCOSS) 'homelessness registry' may assist this even if the principle of this snapshot picture is flawed.

Better data capture is needed through rationalization of Emergency Relief (ER) form entries by local support agencies (e.g. on DHPW register; combining categories - couch surfing and homeless; or just identifying Homeless & Rough Sleeper)

Maleny High School, Marae Gardens (Beerburrum), Lions (Nambour), Coast2Bay (Nambour), and Wiruunga Inc. (Harpers Creek) have and can provide somewhat similar boarding models for emergency accommodation needs. However, part of the supply problem is that they are mostly out of the PC4552 area, each has limited numbers and provide more for a particular group in need. Emergent local needs can be channeled to these short-term providers through service agreements. However, there is high demand and there are gaps in the provision for, often, the most at-risk individuals.

The High School would only address needs for its own students and support is needed for appropriate provision and availability (see Appendix 6).

Wiruunga Inc. is in development, so support is needed if this provision is to be the basis of a service agreement in the future. Wiruunga seems willing for the property and facilities to support homelessness and at-risk individuals through cultural training in bush-craft: rather than just being for people of aboriginal descent. Although not addressed in the data, Maleny's heritage suggests more aboriginal people may come to the home of the 'Bonyi Bonyi' (Bunya nut festival) and may need accommodation assistance.

Coast2Bay, as the only real social housing non-profit corporation in the SCC region, is ready and willing to consider a development project proposal for those on the housing register as well as short- and long-term emergency options. Initially, the main element to establish such a proposal is available land (see Appendix 10) and then fundraising for construction. Establishing a priority placement in a three to five year planning cycle is required once a pathway for these critical elements is established.

2.9 Social needs in a changing landscape

Outside of PC4552, it is reported that more families and individuals in need are heading into forestry areas, going 'underground', moving more often for services or because authorities are more actively moving people on. Economic forces are driving a contraction in head-leasing of properties for social housing. Some existing responses to these identified issues are a high level of 'house-sitting'; community cooperative trading schemes (e.g. Local Energy Transfer Scheme); volunteer accommodation schemes (e.g. Wildlife Volunteers Association / WILVOS); improvised dwellings and shared-house arrangements.

3.0 Conclusion

It is likely that a gradually increasing stream of people in need will arrive in Maleny for short-term stays and longer periods. This likely trend is due to increasing referrals from other communities; reduced availability of sites and services; the attractiveness of the community; changes in currency markets meaning greater competition for space; as well as increasing financial need. Maleny has small numbers and high propensity. Therefore it has supplied or arranged short-term emergency provision(s) for the homeless and rough sleepers, and can in the future. Maleny has potential for social housing projects for PC4552 residents and for attracting those seeking affordable housing to the community. This potential needs to be considered in terms of the context factors that threaten the viability of such projects.

4.0 Recommendations

The major critical recommendation of this report is for the working group (WG) to decide on its initial focus: homelessness, social accommodation or both. If either is selected and addressed separately, the next step is easier to plan and implement. If the answer is both, separate projects are needed. An approach that works for both authorizing agencies could be determined through further community consultation, which is recommended to consider potential future pathways on both issues. In the long-term it is recommended that collaborative, multi-pronged, preventative approaches by government and social support agencies be implemented around both issues.

The final major recommendation is for an action research project to record trial activities, identify new considerations and make recommendations in response to the fuller dataset and the evolving picture of potential problems and possible solutions. The MRC's position is that a separate funding application would need to be lodged for this project: so that application is recommended.

Below see some more specific recommendations about responses to homelessness and social housing issues. An alternative list of sometimes overlapping recommendations also endorsed by the WG is provided (See Appendix 7).

Homeless (including students) and rough sleepers

1. Establish service agreements with established providers (e.g. Maleny SHS for emergency provision based on best-fit protocols
2. Enhance this list of established providers and service agreements over time: enhanced focus on the impacts on children in homeless families
3. Provide training, facilities and resourcing (as available and within limits) for these service agreements to ensure staffing and provision is built on, among others, appropriateness and propriety through principles including social justice, equity, mediation, and responsiveness to individual differences
4. Use existing networks to establish a 'homeless contact and support services' website

5. Canvas authorities and agencies with available data for a more local 'prevention services worker' (e.g. Glasshouse / Hinterland Welfare Network district)

Social housing

6. Use advertising and support processes to attract families and individuals best suited to joining and staying on the 'Housing Register' to access social housing
7. Develop an information database on processes and connections with organizations supporting 'rent-connect', social housing and meeting rent payments and other obligations: to keep more people in rented accommodation as affordability is reduced and the impact of economic change increases
8. Use advertising and support processes to identify property-owners who might consider head-lease or other arrangements to enhance social housing availability
9. Seek land and funding for a special project arrangement with SCC and a social housing provider
10. Commence negotiations with SCC and social housing providers to get 'a better feel' for requirements, best pathways, barriers and get into a planning cycle for future development

4.1 Glossary of abbreviated terms

ABS:	Australian Bureau of Statistics
DPHW:	(State) Department of Public Housing and Works
ER:	Emergency relief
GFC:	Global Financial Crisis
MNC:	Maleny Neighbourhood Centre
MRC:	Rotary Club of Maleny
Postcode area:	PC4552
QCROSS:	Queensland Council of Social Services
SCC:	Sunshine Coast Council
WG:	Working Group

5.0 Appendix

5.1 Appendix 1: Agencies contacted list

Aged Care Seeker
Anglicare
Caloundra Community/Neighbourhood Centre
Caloundra KEIHS (Keys to early intervention & homelessness service)
Care Connect
Coast2bay Housing Group
Community Focus (Discovery Program) Association Inc.
Community Solutions
Church of Christ Housing
Department of Health
Department of Housing and Public Works
Endeavour
Hinterland Welfare Network / Hinterland Community Development
Integrated Family & Youth Services
Lions Emergency Care Accommodation Centre
Maleny High School
'Mdman' welfare
Morris House Landsborough Community Centre
Nambour Community Centre
Nambour Hospital
Need-a-feed Marae Gardens NZ House
North Coast Aboriginal Corporation for Community Health
Partners in recovery
Queensland Council of Social Services (QCROSS)
Queensland Injectors Health Network
Resolve (Mission Australia)
Salvation Army
Shinecare (Shine Community Care - Outreach C3 Kawana Church)
Sunny Kids
Suncoast Care (Suncoast Church Nambour)
Sunshine Coast Clinical Psychologists
Sunshine Coast Council
Sunshine Coast Independent Living service
The Shack (Nambour)
United Synergies
Volunteering Sunshine Coast
Wiruunga Foundation Inc.

5.2 Appendix 2: Real estate agencies contacted

Maleny Property Rentals; Remax Maleny; Ray White Maleny

5.3 Appendix 3: *Resolve* model – taken from website internet document

RESOLVE is a one-off, time limited response to assist people with mental illness who are at risk of losing social housing tenancy due to diminished wellbeing or relapse of mental illness. Participants are provided with:

Up to 30 hours per year of support by case managers and/or broker support services from appropriate service providers.

Resolve program

Cost benefit to society

For every \$1 invested by the Government, the Government saves \$13.50 and the total benefit to society as a whole is \$19.50

Quantified benefits

Overall outcome: Increased capacity to self-help Savings to Government: \$5.5 million over 3 years

Reduced homelessness, reductions in crisis accommodation needs, reduced need for public housing

Savings to Government: \$5.5 million over 3 years

Improved mental health and savings in hospital admissions, police interventions, court and prison time

Savings to Government: \$4 million over 3 years

Ability for other tenants to maintain tenancies

Savings to Government: \$5.5 million over 3 years

Increased time focusing on core business

Savings to Government: \$5.5 million over 3 years

Reducing lost income to business Savings to Government: \$5.5 million over 3yrs

Investment from Government: \$720,000 over 2 years

Points about the methodology

This study used a Cost-Benefit Analysis to evaluate the potential gains to the community from the implementation of the RESOLVE program.

The estimated costs and benefits for each participant were based on data collected from in-depth interviews with RESOLVE program participants, Community Housing Provider managers and health service providers and a range of publically available information.

- RESOLVE program participants: Interviews were conducted with 15 participants in the RESOLVE Program.
- Community Housing Provider managers: Interviews were conducted with housing managers from 4Walls, Brisbane Housing Company, **Coast2Bay** (Nambour and Caboolture), who were managing 27 participants in the RESOLVE Program at the time of the study.
- Health service providers: Interviews were conducted with Under1Roof, Inner North Mental Health Service (Queensland Health), Pearl Program (Sunshine Coast) and Sunshine Coast Mental Health Service (Queensland Health).

The overall costs and benefits of the RESOLVE program were based on the assumption that the RESOLVE program ran at full capacity for 3 years, ie. that 365 people were assisted over a 3 year period.

Intangible benefits

To participants

Greater sense of control over own life
Increased self-confidence, self-help and health maintenance
Improved ability to sustain employment, education/training
Improved relationships with friends, children and associates
Reduced suicide and attempted suicide

To participants' families

Families with children kept together
Reduced disruption to schooling
Reduced exposure of children to homelessness
Reduced disruption to families (as carers)

To housing managers

Reduced stress associated with dealing with mental health episodes
Reduced staff turnover

To other tenants

Reduced tension and disruption to other tenants
Ability for other tenants to maintain tenancies
To health and community services providers
Reduced stress and staff turnover
Better targeting and co-ordination of health and other care services
Reduced escalation of issues to crisis
Reduced demand on homelessness services