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“I Don’t Hate Them, They Hate Me” — A Study on the Perceptions of Homeless People in Melbourne and the Implications Those Perceptions Have

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“I Don’t Hate Them, They Hate Me”—

A Study on the Perceptions of
Homeless People in Melbourne and the
Implications Those Perceptions Have

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S.I.T. Australia, Melbourne: The Multicultural Society

Fall 2006

This project is dedicated to everyone who has ever struggled with homelessness or known someone who has struggled with it.

“Remember, we’re just homeless, not helpless.”

--Brian “Stretch” Maher

Acknowledgements:

I would like to acknowledge everyone who took the time to talk to me during this project and share with me their stories, thoughts and visions. I would especially like to thank Julianne MacRae for her brilliant advising and always cheerful face; Bill McKernan for dealing with everything I worried about with a smile; and Brian “Stretch” Maher for opening up to me, and allowing me to understand him and his way of life, if only for a morning.

Personal Note:

Doing this project was extremely important to me. Since I was little I have been aware of people who are less fortunate than me and still I struggle with the concept that some people have so much and others have so little. I would like to think that I've done this project with the utmost sensitivity, open-mind and compassion towards people unlike me. I would like to note, however, that no matter how many people I could've talked to, or how often I could've spent a morning on the street, I will never quite understand what it's like to live without a stable home until I'm forced to do so. Because of this, I won't ever really know what is most needed or what it's truly like to be homeless. In addition, while I would like to think that this project is entirely objective, everyone has prejudices which they cannot escape, and I am no exception. The homeless people who I talked to are all currently working at The Big Issue. I didn't chose to expose myself to other people who were perhaps experiencing something different and/or have a different outlook on life. I understand and except, however, the limitations that this had on my research.

Abstract:

This project examines the general public's perception of homeless people and what impact (if any) those perceptions have on the policies or services available to homeless people. The project also examines what affect (if any) gender, age, level of formal education, annual household income and/or suburb may have on the public's various attitudes. The project's focus is on the perceptions towards and from homeless people, the definition of homelessness, and the policies affecting homelessness. The project's data was collected from the central business district of Melbourne in addition to two inner suburbs, Toorak and Footscray. Much of the qualitative information has been gathered from a first hand experience, including interviews with homeless people and people who work with them. At the base of the research is a survey which has been distributed to the general public. The original hypothesis and agenda of the project was to shed light on the public's perception of homeless people and how that directly affects the policies in place for them, therefore assuming that the way to solve homelessness would be to change the public's perception. The project however, uncovered many things that were not initially expected.

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Introduction:

For my organizational practicum I had the opportunity to spend a week at The Big Issue, a non-profit magazine whose vendors are all homeless, long-term unemployed or physically/mentally disabled. I sat outside one day listening to the vendors tease and taunt one another about various things until the conversation got serious. One of the vendors made a comment about how hard sales were going and how people in Melbourne therefore had no heart. The other vendors chimed in, in agreement and proceeded to tell me various stories that illustrated their point. Thinking more and more about it, I wondered whether they were right and if the people living in Melbourne really didn't care about the homeless who overtly surrounded them, or if they weren't right, what the public *did* think. Further more, I wondered what impact the public's point of view had on the system as a whole. It was obvious that these vendors felt they were being neglected by society, but how hard had they really tried to get out of their situation and back into the mainstream? More importantly how easy was it for them to do it?

If it is difficult to stop being homeless, which presumably (since there are so many homeless people in Melbourne) is the case, why is it so difficult? I thought about the various things at play and wondered not only about public opinion, but how public opinion differed from government action. Maybe society doesn't know anything about what's needed to get out of an unstable home situation and therefore don't know what to ask the government for. Maybe society doesn't know, and doesn't care what the government does as long as it doesn't affect them. Maybe the people who can vote and do, don't care about homelessness but the people who don't vote, do. In addition, what sorts of attitudes are being portrayed to homeless people that would make it more

difficult for them to live in society? Were homeless people being black-listed for being homeless? Having lived in Australia for ten weeks, and heard a multitude of people in that time tell me that what separated Australia from the United States was its citizens' clear and unyielding compassion for one another, I had to find out the answers to these questions and see if Australia's "fair go" value only applied to those with a fixed address.

Since Australia is a democratic country, and the public votes for people to best represent them in their government, my hypothesis was that the public opinion was the major factor responsible for policies regarding homelessness. My hope was that my project would uncover that the public didn't like and didn't care about the homeless and subsequently, neither did the government. If my project were to recognize that public perception was responsible (albeit, indirectly) for the problem of homelessness in Melbourne, it would be reasonable to assume that the way to solve homelessness would be to change public opinion. In addition, if public opinion was responsible for homelessness, the Australian ideal of a "fair go" and the supposedly distinguishable characteristic of Australians didn't really exist. My project, however, ended up shedding light on something entirely different.

ISP Results: Part One (The Beginning)

Perhaps one of the biggest problems facing homelessness is that no one can agree on what it is. It seems simple: home “less” implies no home (something I’m sure almost everyone can agree on), but the question then gets posed, “what’s a home?” While a house or structural shelter of any kind is easy to define, I wasn’t sure that a home would be as simple. Before I started my project I thought I would look at many different definitions of being homeless, in order to understand more about it, more about how people in the field approach it, and so that I could definitively describe whom I was studying.

Homelessness in Australia: Causes and Consequences, says that homelessness is “the state in which people have no access to safe and secure shelter of a standard that does not damage their health, threaten their personal safety, or further marginalize them through failing to provide either cooking facilities, or facilities that permit adequate personal hygieneⁱ.” This definition, however, is not necessarily explicit enough with the words “health” and/or “adequate personal hygiene.” While I may be nit-picking this definition, I feel that there are people who might consider themselves homeless (such as ones being mentally abused in their home) that don’t fit into this definition. In addition, youths that are homeless aren’t included in the definition at all, as they might be in a “facility that permits[s] adequate personal hygiene” or “cooking facilities” but are unable to use them.

Andrew Byrne has recently published a book titled Homelessness: True Stories of Life on the Streets,ⁱⁱ where he interviewed people, most of whom were sleeping rough, about their stories and thoughts. To begin, he goes through what he believes is a

definition of homelessness: “Someone currently living on the street, in crisis or refuge accommodation, in temporary arrangements without security of tenure . . . , in unsafe family circumstances . . . , on very low incomes . . .ⁱⁱⁱ” I think that this definition covers just about everyone. This definition became the one I was about to use for my project when I decided that it would be best to get the opinion of a homeless person and perhaps someone working in the social services field, in Melbourne.

An outspoken, stubborn, frustrated but generally happy twenty-five year old, Brian Maher, offered me his definition: “having no stable fixed address or a place that could cease at any moment.^{iv}” Although I think that this definition could encompass everything that Byrne’s definition does, I decided that I wanted my working definition to be laid out and as specific as possible. Because of this, the ambiguity of the word “stable” in Brian’s definition left me still looking.

The definition that I liked the best came from Virginia Moebus, a woman who has worked at various organizations helping homeless people: “it depends on who you ask!^v” Clearly, this was my problem! I decided, however, that I would use Byrne’s definition, which seems to include every possible scenario, as my working definition for people who I would consider homeless. However, my project was geared towards finding out what the public’s definition of homeless was, not mine.

To build the base of my research about public perception, I developed a survey to be handed out by me, to the general public^{vi}. I struggled with the most efficient, most effective way to create the survey and decided to make it one page in order to keep it short and allow the participants ample time to think about their answers and answer all the questions. Also, I tried to keep it as simple as possible without compromising the

information I wanted to get out of it^{vii}. I decided to do a written survey because I hoped it would yield more accurate responses than a non-anonymous survey where they would have to tell me their answers out loud. I asked some personal questions at the beginning of the survey in order to one, make the person feel like I was interested in their specific information regarding homeless people; two, try to make the subject open up a little more, again attempting to get the most accurate answers possible; and three, I decided to use that personal data to collate my information to see if anything has an affect on perception (i.e. gender, age, annual household income, or level of formal education).

I handed out 300 surveys in all, although I ended up discarding 100 because the surveys had not been filled out accurately. I did my general surveys at Flinders Street Station in order to get the most diverse group of people possible. My hypothesis, and hope, was that the public would be overwhelmingly ignorant and uncompassionate towards homeless people. If these were my findings, it would solidify my original hypothesis and perfectly outline my project.

Looking at Appendix A, one can see my general findings. The results showed that the public didn't know how many homeless people there were in Melbourne. The majority, however, 61%, believed it was less than 5,000 when in actuality it's just over 14,000^{viii}. The survey also showed (at over 77%) that the public believes the rate of homelessness has increased in the past ten years. The public's definition of homelessness is someone who is living on the street, but for over 70% of the surveys, the applicant also believed that homeless people included people living in crisis centers or public housing, temporary housing (including squats and sofa surfing), living in extreme poverty and/or

living in unsafe situations. The “average” homeless person is believed to be male, living in the central business district, between 25-55 years of age and Caucasian.

The most important part of my survey involved questions about why the homeless were homeless and what would be most needed in order to better their situation.

Although again opinions were split and addiction was the leading cause of homelessness, it was closely followed (by less than 3%) by worsening financial troubles and escaping unsafe situations. Only 13.4% of survey participants believed it was a lack of effort on the homeless person that made them homeless. For what is most needed to decrease homelessness, affordable/public housing was shown to be the most important. Giving homeless people jobs, addiction help and food followed next respectively.

In October 2006, Hanover Welfare Services^{ix} published a survey examining the public’s perception of homeless people. I used this survey to supplement my results. In addition, I met with Dr. Andrew Hollows, the head of the research department at Hanover, in order to fully understand the research that was done and the results^x. Dr. Hollows explained that the survey was comprised of two parts; one, qualitative focus groups around the Melbourne area who were engaged in discussion and the other, a phone survey given nationally to 1,000 people^{xi}. The focus groups would be separated by age but try to include a wide variety of people in each age group. The focus groups were not only done to develop more of an understanding about how people really thought, it was done to look at differences that age groups might have on perceptions and/or sympathy of homeless people. The phone survey, however, was done in order to attain and understand what the national perceptions about homelessness were.^{xii}

Although Hanover's survey was different from mine, some of the questions were the same or very similar. Of the questions that both of our surveys asked the results were concurrent. Hanover reports from the focus groups that the "typical" homeless person is thought to be around forty years of age, living on the street and living with a drug addiction of some sort. The reasons associated with becoming homeless include low socio-economic backgrounds and the loss of a job. In addition Hanover reports that not having a strong family support structure is another downfall, something which I associate with my definition of "unsafe situation." The most overwhelming information (although perhaps not the most surprising) of Hanover's report was that the public had little or no idea how large the problem of homelessness was^{xiii}.

From the phone survey, the public seemed to think the average homeless person was slightly younger, aged between 16 and 25 years. Since the majority of the public who took my survey estimated that the majority of homeless people were between the ages of 25 and 55 years, Hanover's results from both the focus group and the national survey, although slightly different, both fit into the results that my survey yielded. Hanover's phone results for why people were homeless included 91% saying drug addiction was one of the reasons, and 81% saying it was mental illness. The same percentage of the latter said domestic violence was a reason. Only 60% stated a lack of effort on the part of the homeless person to be a reason for why they were homeless^{xiv}. Unfortunately I didn't add mental illness as a possible reason for people to be homeless (although almost 1% added it in him/herself). The other top two reasons, however, were again concurrent with the results from my survey. The last question from the survey that was important to my project was a question about who is responsible for helping the homeless population:

85% said that they believed the government is the most responsible; 74% claimed public services provided by the community should care for the homeless; and 65% believed that it was the responsibility of all the members of the community.

To accompany my survey results, and perhaps give me more qualitative data, I conducted three interviews. The first of these interviews was with Virginia Moebus, a woman who works with homeless people at two different organizations in Melbourne. Virginia told me that she didn't think there was such thing as a "typical" homeless person because there were no connecting characteristics like gender, age or race. She thought that the public, however, had an ill-informed opinion about the homeless and thought that they were all "Dirty, older men who are alcoholics and haven't tried to get out of their situation."^{xv} Virginia commented that many services were available for homeless people but sometimes there were waiting lists. She stated that the biggest problem with the system as a whole was that people who go looking for help get turned away. In addition, even with the services that she mentioned to me, she commented that housing was an essential service that is no where close to accommodating as much of the homeless population in Melbourne as it needs to^{xvi}.

My next interview was with Brian "Stretch" Maher, a twenty-five year old male who has lived on the streets for the past seven years. Stretch had been sleeping rough or sofa surfing for most of that time. When I asked him what he thought of society and whether he hated them, he smiled and said "I don't hate them, they hate me."^{xvii} When I pushed further, Stretch explained that people often gave him "horrified looks" and rarely "recognized his existence"^{xviii}. Like Virginia, Stretch had no feeling about the "typical"

homeless person although he thought the majority were alcoholics or drug addicts. When I asked him about services available to him and accommodations, he again agreed with Virginia. “If you want help, you can get it. But you have to look for it. Places to stay are usually overcrowded and expensive. It’s hard to pay for a place to live when you don’t have any money.^{xix}” To add to this, when I asked Stretch what he thought was most needed for homeless people he said “Cheaper housing. And more accommodations; there’s not enough accommodation.^{xx}” Towards the end of our interview Stretch began commenting on what he would say to the public if he had the chance. “Remember, we’re just homeless, not helpless. You try spending a night on the streets and see how easy it is. And you don’t worry about the right people. The one’s who have no voice, they’re the one’s you need to worry about.^{xxi}”

Stretch’s comments about society and what they thought of homeless people interested me. From my survey results, the public wasn’t as overwhelmingly insensitive and disgusted with homeless people as Stretch had suggested. To juxtapose my interview with Stretch, I decided to interview Paul Considine, a member of the community who has lived his whole life, 46 years, in Melbourne.

The interview with Paul began yielding the same results as my survey, in terms of who was homeless, why they were homeless, and how to fix homelessness. He included that “homelessness is a state of mind,^{xxii}” referring to the idea that homelessness is more than not having a roof over your head. When I asked him how/who should fix homelessness and why he thought homelessness was such a problem, he made a comment about society. “I don’t lay there at night thinking about [homelessness]. When you get older, you become kind of hardened to it all. It’s not that I don’t care. There’s just no

hope. And besides, the government is supposed to be dealing with it. There is enough [money] for everyone and the government is supposed to be making sure that everyone gets some. At the end of the day, though, the most important thing for everyone is the money that they, themselves are going to have.^{xxiii}»

The conclusion to be drawn from this information is that the public isn't ignorant, but perhaps worried more about themselves than the homeless, or simply too reliant on the government to take care of the problem. The public understood that many different people were homeless and were homeless for different reasons, but the stereo-type of the older, dirty, drunk man still prevailed. Also, my survey in addition to the survey conducted by Hanover showed overwhelming evidence that the public severely underestimates the number of homeless living in Melbourne.

The questions that I had about the Australian value of a “fair go” and the idea of a fair nation was still unresolved. Given that the public wasn't ignorant, but homelessness was still a big problem, I took what Paul had said to heart and assumed that the problem was simply that people had other things to worry about. Thinking more about it though, perhaps it's still not that simple.

ISP Results: Part Two (The Adjustment)

Although there are many different possible reasons for why I got the survey results that I got, I hope that I got those results because they're accurate. Listening to Paul and comparing my results with the Hanover survey helps me to be confident that indeed my results are as accurate as possible. Since my results are accurate, the question is what do the results mean?

My original hypothesis was that public perception directly affected policies in place for homeless people. This was contrived from the idea that homelessness was such a big problem and growing, but no one seemed to be doing much to stop it. Since Australian's were the "fair go" nation and kept reminding me of their compassion towards one another, it couldn't have been that they knew about homelessness and were doing nothing about it, right? Instead, they couldn't have known. Since policies weren't changing, and the situation wasn't getting better but instead, actually getting worse, it is reasonable to assume that the public really didn't know.

According to my research, however, the public is aware of the problem, although not aware of how big the problem is. If I were to follow my hypothesis' idea but using the results that I got from my survey, there would be services available and policies in place for homeless people, but given the lack of knowledge about the number of homeless, there wouldn't be nearly as much help/services as were actually needed. Partially, since there are services, although not enough (according to Virginia and Stretch, especially when it comes to housing) it seems as though this is a logically revised hypothesis and explains the situation. Since homelessness is getting worse, however, (a fact which the public adamantly agrees with) but there is little talk about policy changes

or increase in funding for services, this new hypothesis cannot be entirely correct. If it was correct, it would assume that with the increasing problem, assuming that the public knew about the increase (which they do), there should be increasing attention paid towards it. But, of course, there isn't.

From the beginning of my project what I really wanted to find out was how to solve homelessness. Instead of trying to address that question directly, I ended up trying to prove a solution for it, instead of figuring out what a solution might actually be. The solution that I attempted to prove was that education of the public would be enough to drastically reduce homelessness. Given the two hypotheses which I came up with, and since neither is correct, I can only assume that my solution isn't correct either. Since Australia is a democratic country, and in a democratic country, the general public votes politicians into office and in return, the politicians make policies, it seems impossible to not prove that the public has an affect on policies made. Why then, was my solution incomplete? Further more, if the public *does* affect the policies and services, and knows the situation is getting worse, why is it getting worse?

In an attempt to answer this last question, many issues are important to look at. One issue to address is the problem of who can vote. In Australia it is mandatory to vote, however, one cannot vote without a fixed address. In addition, it seems from Brian, Virginia and Paul's comments that homeless people are far removed from society and the choices that society makes as a whole^{xxiv}. Given this, not only is the majority of the homeless population not allowed to vote, the small percentage of the population that perhaps can vote, doesn't. If the only people who are voting, are people who know about homelessness, but don't think about it everyday, or have other things to worry about (as

Paul suggests^{xxv}) certainly nothing will ever get changed. Before I calculated my survey results, I predicted that not only would gender, age and level of formal education play a role in the applicants perceptions of the homeless, the annual household income would play a large role too. Since my original hypothesis stated that the public was ignorant and thought that homeless people were homeless because of something that they had done, I thought that the lower the annual household income, the more sympathy and understanding there would be towards the homeless. Because, however, there were no significant differences in my data between annual household income and perceptions or ideas about homelessness, it is clear that in order to truly understand what it's like to be homeless and what is most needed for the homeless; you, yourself, have to be homeless, not just in severe financial trouble.

If my original hypothesis was correct (as parts of it were), then the answer to dramatically decreasing the homeless population would be to educate the general public as to how large the problem is and what is most needed. Then, the public could vote for politicians that would instate policies accordingly. However, I'm not sure that the public necessarily needs to be educated, nor do I think that if the public were to be educated, it would dramatically reduce homelessness. In order to decrease homelessness, the public needs to take their knowledge to the voting poles, make the politicians see how important and large the problem is, and then vote for the politicians who will work to decrease the homeless population.

In 2000, The Australian published a series of articles about the future of Australia called "Advance Australia Where." One of these articles, "Death of the Fair Go,"

provided research that showed that the majority of Australians, 70%, would rather the gap between the rich and poor (which is getting larger) get smaller, even if it meant that the overall wealth of Australia would decrease^{xxvi}. According to this article, it seems as if Australians truly do believe in the “fair go” and are so concerned with the wellbeing of their fellow mates, they would even be willing to give up some of their own wealth in order to achieve it. This, along with the number of times in the past three months Australians have told me that the citizens of Australia are supposed to first and foremost look after one another, seems to confirm the supposed Australian value of the “fair go.” If this value were truly present, however, Australians should be looking out for their homeless, right? Even if the public to continue their everyday lives, the idea of the fair go is that everyone should get equal opportunities. Even the Australians who are homeless, should, by this value, still be entitled to the opportunities that all other Australians are.

Going back to my research, despite the fact that the public doesn’t know how many homeless people there are in Melbourne, with their newly confirmed value, and the knowledge that they do have (that homelessness is on the rise and housing is the most important thing) the problem of homelessness should be an important issue for all Australians to try and conquer. This, however, doesn’t seem to be the case. As Paul pointed out, people don’t “lie awake at night^{xxvii}” worrying about the homeless. Since they aren’t thinking about the homeless, and in turn aren’t helping the homeless, is this “fair go” value really a façade and only applies to those who have fixed addresses? Does the public truly just not care about the homeless as the vendors who prompted my project stated?

It seems to me, after thinking about all of this, that Australia probably does want

to help its homeless, but continues to place that responsibility on the government, without pressuring the government to do anything about it. Perhaps if the public was educated more about the size of the problem and/or exactly what was needed, they would force it to become a major political issue. However, if they were like Paul, and they voted for what was best for them, it seems as if nothing would ever change. Since homeless people can't vote, it seems as if no one (or at least not the country as a whole) will ever be looking out for their best interests and actually forcing the government to exemplify the "fair go."



More Than Melbourne:

While doing this project, I became extremely interested in whether other places in Australia were like Melbourne and if homeless people felt let down by society in other cities. I wondered if maybe other cities had figured out a way to drastically decrease homelessness and open the public's mind to the causes and consequences of being homeless. In order to try and find this information out, I read Andrew Byrne's Homelessness: True Stories of Life on the Streets. As I stated earlier, Byrne's book is compiled of various interviews that he conducted with homeless people or people who work in the field. Everyone interviewed and written about in the book is from Sydney.

The first interview in the book actually is just a series of excerpts from a journal kept by Father Chris Riley. Father Riley "has been working to help troubled teenagers for thirty years."^{xxviii} Throughout the entries, Father Riley discusses what it's like working with the homeless. At one point he admits, "I realized that people may judge me harshly because I had aligned myself with the homeless."^{xxix} He adds, "I realized that when you align yourself with the poor, others will see you as crazy and misdirected."^{xxx}

The interviews with the homeless people in the book are just as, if not more telling about the situation in Sydney. One woman, Sallie explains. "The worst thing about being homeless up the Cross was the 'tourists' that come up from western Sydney. They used to come and throw eggs at us. One of them threw a couple of Molotov cocktails and set a couple of people's sleeping bags on fire. That got really hectic. I remember [a friend] got a little singed 'cause he had a nylon sleeping bag and he couldn't get out of it quick enough..."^{xxxi} Now she's living in a flat but explains what getting it was like, too. "We'd been put on a priority housing list after we got letters from the churches and the

doctors' certificates, and we got the place within three months—but only because we pushed for it. If we didn't have the letters and the support we had, it would have been a lot harder. For people who aren't necessarily aware of what is available, it's so hard for them and they don't know what to do.^{xxxii}»

The book continues with comments like these. In addition there is a lot of mention about how the “community ignores” the homeless, how expensive housing is, and how many waiting lists there are for help and how long the waiting lists are. Henry Thompson says “Some people just walk past. Some people give you a look. I get a lot of women grabbing their bags [when they see me].^{xxxiii}” He goes on to say that he told the woman he wasn't going to take her bag. “She just [looked at me apologetically and said] ‘Oh sorry, I must have mistook you for the wrong type of person.’^{xxxiv}” From reading Byrne's book, it's obvious that the attitudes towards homeless people are not unique to Melbourne.

Conclusion:

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Although my project did not quite turn out the way I had hoped, and the research I collected didn't produce any of my predicted results, my project did give me a fairly good idea about what people in Melbourne think about homeless people. The general public understands that homeless people are homeless for a variety of reasons, many of which have little to do with the actual homeless person or the effort which they have put forward. The public understands the most important thing for homeless people is safe housing, but they don't believe that that's the only thing that will help the homeless. They believe that food, clothing, bathing facilities, and addiction help (among other things) are also needed in order for a homeless person to have the best possible opportunities and shot at returning to mainstream society. I've also, learned that there are a lot of services available to homeless people, but, unfortunately, they have to actively find them. In addition, while these services may all exist, there aren't nearly enough services for the number of homeless that are living in Melbourne.

If people in Melbourne, don't blame homeless people for being homeless, and hypothetically want to help them, why were the vendors that I talked to at The Big Issue so sure that society hated them? Similarly, why do most of the stories in Byrne's book have a comment about society and how horribly society had treated each of the storytellers? I suspect the answer to these questions is two-fold. First, I think that the people who make impressions on homeless people are the ones who think badly about them, and everyone else (even if it's the majority) is forgotten because they don't make an impact on the homeless person's life. Secondly, I think that the homeless population probably feels altogether let down by their society. The society which is supposed to be looking out for them and making fair opportunities for them, have all but forgotten them.

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So, how do you fix homelessness? I'm not sure if homelessness can ever truly disappear but I think that with public education and campaigning, it can be significantly lowered. If the public isn't scared of homeless people, but simply accept them (or at least acknowledge them and give them a chance) I think it will help the homeless people to feel more apart of the community. If they feel more comfortable and apart of the community, I believe they will be more likely and more willing to go looking for help. In addition, if the public and then politicians make homelessness a pressing issue for the government, I think, or at least hope, that it will significantly change policies and perhaps increase funding for services, ultimately getting the homeless population as small as possible.

Methodology and Project Analysis:



If I knew five weeks ago, what I know now, my project would've entirely changed. I think I would've definitely tried to focus more on how to stop homelessness, rather than on the public's perceptions of homeless people. In addition, I'm not sure that I would use a survey if I had to do it again. My survey seems logical for what I wanted to find out, but requires a huge amount of time and effort for results which may or may not help. I'm not sure what I would do instead of my survey, but I would see if I could come up with something else. If I did decide to do a survey, I would probably ask more questions about the fair go and what the most important things are for people to consider when they are voting for their political candidates.

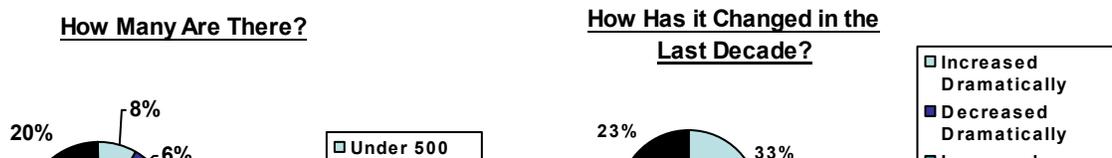
In terms of sheer experience, I would definitely pay more attention to my work and not leave interview notes on the tram! I would like, too, if I had challenged myself a little bit more during this project. If I had to do it again, I think I'd try to push my boundaries and comfort level. Instead of just talking to people who worked at The Big Issue, I would try to open up more to other kinds of homeless people. My own perceptions definitely got in the way of this (I wanted to make sure I would be safe) and while I recognize it, I'm still slightly disappointed in myself for letting them have any affect on my project whatsoever. I think that these prejudices significantly harmed the observations that I made and the data that I was able to collect as an investigator, but in the same sense, I believe that recognizing these prejudices helps me in the future to be a better researcher and maybe even a better person.

When I started this project, I was hoping that I would find out something shocking about Australians. I wanted to find out that Australians had some sort of different DNA than everyone else in the world. While, clearly this was unreasonable, I

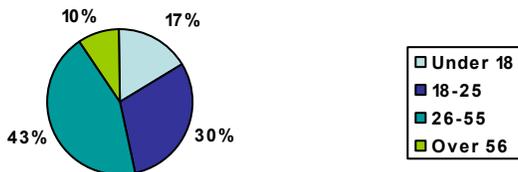
guess I was hoping to figure out why they thought they were so compassionate towards each other and different from the rest of the world. I thought that my project would either prove that they really were different, and had something inherently Australian about them (that made them be polite, drink beer, play Aussie Rules, wrestle crocodiles, and so on!). If I didn't find this out, I was hoping instead to find out that Australians were just like everyone else; they just thought they were different! I didn't really find out either of these things from my project, but thinking about it now, I think that perhaps it's because Australians are both!

Despite the problems with my project, however, I've learned a huge amount from doing this project. I not only was able to meet incredible people who helped me to recognize the prejudices that I have and think about how to get rid of them, but I also learned a huge amount about myself. I learned more about my ideals, passion for crusades, and my need to be both logical and illogical at the same time. I learned that self-recognition of good deeds is incredibly important to me and perhaps, most importantly, I learned to be more critical of my values. Before this project, I often looked down upon people who were ignorant about homeless people or who had preconceptions about people unlike themselves. From doing this project, however, I realized that I have some of those same misperceptions too and in order to get rid of them (if possible), you can't just explain a value or story to make someone understand and change, they need to recognize their weakness themselves, and figure out the best way for them to get rid of it. Had I changed the project in any way, I might not have found out the same things, so it's possible if I had to do it all again, I wouldn't change anything!

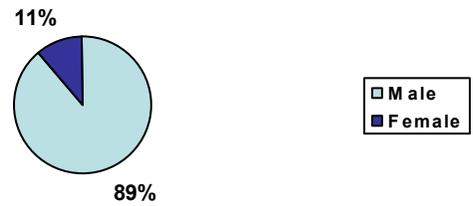
Appendix A: General Findings



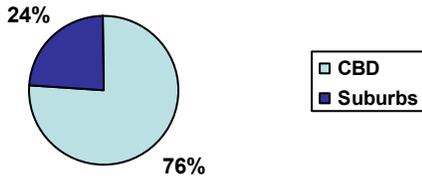
Average Age



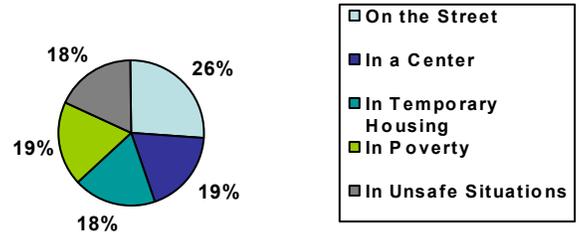
Gender Majority



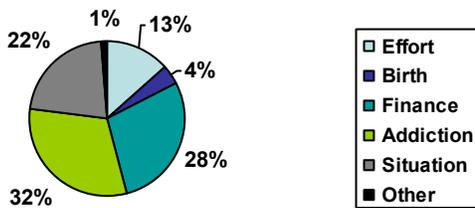
Location Majority



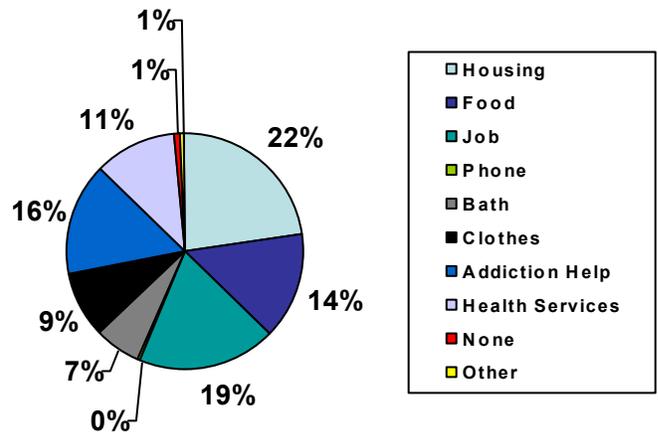
What's the Definition of Homeless?



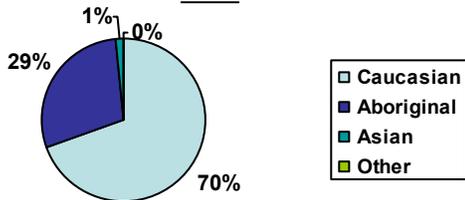
Reason They're Homeless



What Help Should They Receive?

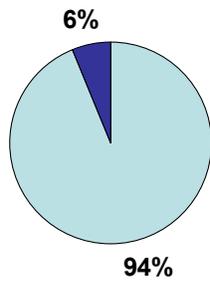


Race

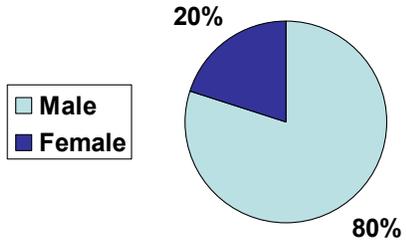


Appendix B: Result Differences According to Gender Majority of Homeless

Men

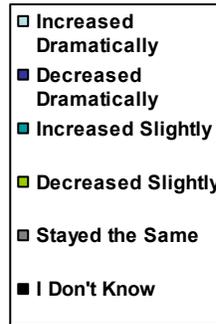
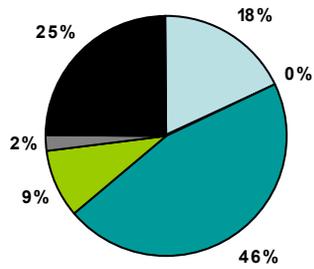


Women

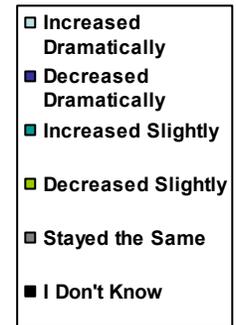
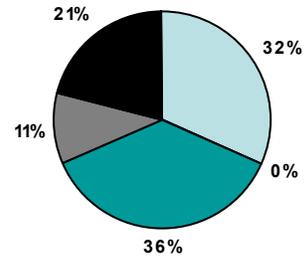


Appendix C: Result Differences According to Age Change Over the Last Decade

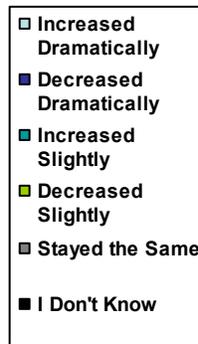
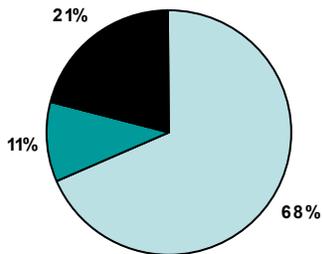
Under 25



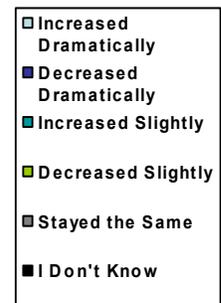
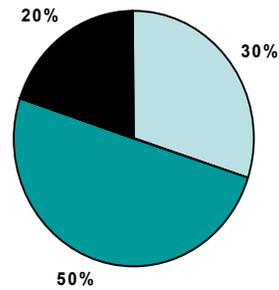
26-40



41-59

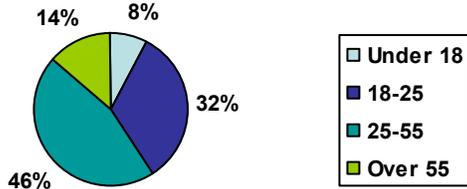


Over 60

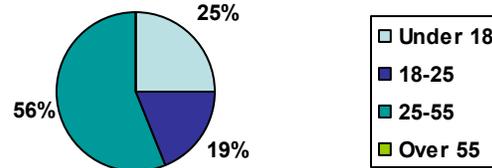


Appendix D: Result Differences According to Age Age of the Majority of Homeless

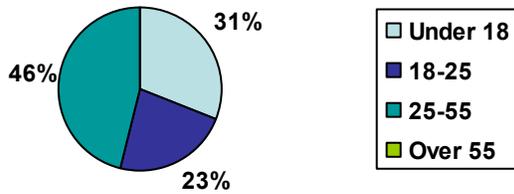
Under 25



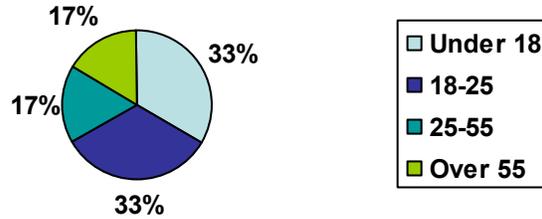
26-40



41-59



Over 60



Appendix E: Public Survey**Gender:**

Female
Male

Age:

25 or under 41-59
26-40 60+

Annual Household Income:

Under \$20,000 \$20,000-\$50,000
\$50,000-\$75,000 \$75,000-\$100,000
\$100,000+ Prefer Not to Answer

Amount of Education:

Year 10 Completed Year 12
Apprenticeship TAFE
University Post Graduate

How many homeless people do you think are currently living in Melbourne?*

500 or less 500-1,000
1,000-3,500 3,500-5,000
5,000-10,000 10,000+

How do you think the rate of homeless people has changed in the past decade?

Increased Slightly Increased Dramatically
Decreased Slightly Decreased Dramatically
Stayed the Same I Don't Know

Which description of a housing situation best describes that of a homeless person?

Currently Living on the Street Living in Refuge/Crisis Centers
Living in Temporary Accommodations Living in Unsafe Circumstances
Living in Poverty** Any of the Above

The majority of homeless people are... (please finish the statement by ticking one of each)

Gender: M F **Location:** in the CBD in the Suburbs
Age: under 18 18-25 25-55 55+
Race: Caucasian Aboriginal Asian Other: _____

Why do you think most homeless are homeless? Choose Three (order answers 1-3: 1 is most probable)

_____ Haven't tried hard enough _____ Have an Addiction
_____ Born homeless _____ Escaped from Unsafe Situation
_____ Worsening Financial Troubles _____ Other: _____

What help is most important for homeless people to receive? (order answers 1-8: 1 is most important)

_____ Community Housing _____ Bath Facilities
_____ Free/Cheap Food _____ Clean Clothes
_____ Job Opportunities _____ Addiction Help
_____ Mobile Phones _____ Health Clinic Access
_____ None _____ Other: _____

Do you believe in the fair go for Australians?

Yes No I Don't Know

*Approximate population of Melbourne is 3.4 million

** Facing Significant Financial Difficulties

Glossary of Terms:**

Poverty: this term is being used to describe someone who is already facing or on the verge of facing extreme financial difficulties. Financial difficulties include not being able to pay rent, major debts, difficulty paying for the necessities of life: food; shelter and healthcare.

Sleeping Rough: this term is being used to describe a specific type of homelessness. The term refers to someone who is sleeping without shelter over them. It is synonymous with sleeping on the street, sleeping in parks, et cetera.

Sofa Surfing: this term is being used to describe a specific type of homelessness. The term refers to someone who is constantly sleeping at someone else's house. It specifically is used to describe someone who is always sleeping at different homes. The term comes from the word "sofa" as in sleeping on a sofa, and "surfing," as in going from place to place, never being quite stable where you are.

Squat: this term is being used to describe a make-shift shelter. It can either refer to an abandoned home where homeless people are sleeping (the people are then referred to as "squatters") or to something that is made in order to try and provide shelter (like boxes, pieces of metal, et cetera).

** Please note that these terms are being defined by me and by how I am using them in my paper. These are not dictionary definitions and the definitions of these words are certainly not limited to the definition provided here.

Endnotes:

- ⁱ Neil, Cecily and Rodney Fopp. *Homelessness in Australia: Causes and Consequences*. 1992. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 1994.
The definition comes from the section titled “definition of homelessness used in this report” from the introduction, pg 8.
- ⁱⁱ A tremendously compelling read in which Byrne has interviewed many homeless and written their stories just as he heard them, to the best of his ability. In addition, one hundred percent of the book’s profits go to the clinics in which he came across and interviewed his subjects.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Byrne, Andrew. *Homelessness: True Stories of Life on the Streets*. Sydney: New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd., 2005.
Definition comes from the introduction section of this book, pg 15.
- ^{iv} Maher, Brian. Personal Interview. 10 November 2006.
- ^v Moebus, Virginia. Personal Interview. 9 November 2006.
- ^{vi} See Appendix E.
- ^{vii} Given that I handed out 300 surveys but only used 200 for my research because the other surveys hadn’t been completed correctly, I think that I probably spent more time worrying about the information I wanted to get out of it, than how simple it was!
- ^{viii} Hollows, Andrew, PhD. Personal Interview. 17 November 2006.
- ^{ix} Hanover Welfare Services is one of the largest social services organizations in Melbourne. It specializes in provided affordable housing and connecting the homeless with services needed. In addition, it does research with the intent of developing or helping to develop governmental policies affecting the homeless or those experiencing a housing crisis.
- ^x Hollows, Andrew, PhD. Personal Interview. 17 November 2006.
- ^{xi} Forethought Research and Maurice Blackburn Cashman Lawyers. *Quantitative Research Report, October 2006*. Ed. Hanover Research Services. Melbourne: Hanover Research Services, 2006.
- ^{xii} Hollows, Andrew, PhD. Personal Interview. 17 November 2006.
- ^{xiii} Forethought Research and Maurice Blackburn Cashman Lawyers. *Quantitative Research Report, October 2006*. Ed. Hanover Research Services. Melbourne: Hanover Research Services, 2006.
- ^{xiv} Forethought Research and Maurice Blackburn Cashman Lawyers. *Quantitative Research Report, October 2006*. Ed. Hanover Research Services. Melbourne: Hanover Research Services, 2006.
- ^{xv} Moebus, Virginia. Personal Interview. 9 November 2006.
- ^{xvi} Moebus, Virginia. Personal Interview. 9 November 2006.
- ^{xvii} Maher, Brian. Personal Interview. 10 November 2006.
- ^{xviii} Maher, Brian. Personal Interview. 10 November 2006.
- ^{xix} Maher, Brian. Personal Interview. 10 November 2006.
- ^{xx} Maher, Brian. Personal Interview. 10 November 2006.
- ^{xxi} Maher, Brian. Personal Interview. 10 November 2006.
- ^{xxii} Considine, Paul. Personal Interview. 11 November 2006.
- ^{xxiii} Considine, Paul. Personal Interview. 11 November 2006.
- ^{xxiv} Considine, Paul. Personal Interview. 11 November 2006.
Maher, Brian. Personal Interview. 10 November 2006.
Moebus, Virginia. Personal Interview. 9 November 2006.
- ^{xxv} Considine, Paul. Personal Interview. 11 November 2006.
- ^{xxvi} Death of the Fair Go.” *The Australian* 17 June 2000, special: Advance Australia Where.
<<http://highered.theoz.com.au/flathtml/extra/where/stories/fairgo.html>>.
- ^{xxvii} Considine, Paul. Personal Interview. 11 November 2006.
- ^{xxviii} Byrne, Andrew. *Homelessness: True Stories of Life on the Streets*. Sydney: New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd., 2005. p. 21.
- ^{xxix} Byrne, Andrew. *Homelessness: True Stories of Life on the Streets*. Sydney: New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd., 2005. p. 22.
- ^{xxx} Byrne, Andrew. *Homelessness: True Stories of Life on the Streets*. Sydney: New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd., 2005. p. 22.

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- ^{xxx} Byrne, Andrew. *Homelessness: True Stories of Life on the Streets*. Sydney: New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd., 2005. p. 30.
- ^{xxx} Byrne, Andrew. *Homelessness: True Stories of Life on the Streets*. Sydney: New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd., 2005. p. 31.
- ^{xxx} Byrne, Andrew. *Homelessness: True Stories of Life on the Streets*. Sydney: New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd., 2005. p. 81.
- ^{xxx} Byrne, Andrew. *Homelessness: True Stories of Life on the Streets*. Sydney: New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd., 2005. p. 81.

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