

THE PATH HOME

Exploring pathways
out of homelessness:
Insights from
lived experience.

Uniting

Acknowledgment of Country

by Josey Hansen (RIP)

Uniting WA kaadidj Noongar Moort Keyen Kaadak nidja boodja narnga ngaala yangka ngaalang noondakiny maar. Ngaala karnitjdjinang baalabiny kooranyi Midjiyoop boodja kepa. Ngaala maara-baron yira-ak kooralong kalyakool Bardip Yira-Maaman boodjara karroyal ngaala karodjin Koorakor birdiyar, koora, yeyi.

Uniting WA acknowledges the Noongar People as the Traditional Custodians of this land on which we provide our services. We recognise their unique and spiritual connection to Country and waters. We value the oldest continuing culture in the world, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Contents

Introduction4

Background4

Lived Experience Advocates5

Methodology6

Limitations7

Recurring Themes9

Key Insights13

Insight 1 - Empowerment is foundational14

Insight 2 - Human connection is transformative16

Insight 3 - Finding a path home is complex and ongoing18

Insight 4 - Community fosters healing20

Insight 5 - Stability needs more than shelter22

Conclusion25

About Uniting WA26

Introduction

This report is the result of an exploration of the lived experiences of individuals finding their path out of homelessness in Perth, Western Australia. Based on qualitative research conducted through a focus group and interviews, it reveals the complex intersection of physical, psychological and societal factors that affect people on their journey into, through, and out of homelessness.

The report distills recurring themes and key insights that reveal how empowerment, connection, and sustained, person-centred support—delivered through a collaborative service ecosystem—enable long-term stability and sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

Background

Uniting WA is a not-for-profit community services provider operating throughout the Perth metro area and in the Great Southern region of WA. Uniting offers a diverse portfolio of services to support some of the most vulnerable West Australians.

Our programs span the areas of homelessness and crisis accommodation services, family and children's services, mental health and disability support, as well as financial wellbeing and reintegration services. We are also a registered Tier 2 Community Housing Provider.

The ongoing affordable housing crisis is a major driver of homelessness in West Australia, and the state has the highest rate of rough sleepers nationally. Nearly one in four people experiencing homelessness in WA are living in improvised dwellings, sleeping in their cars or out on the streets, as compared to the national average of nearly 7%.*

In response to the growing number of people facing homelessness in Perth, Uniting WA launched the first stage of an advocacy and awareness campaign in 2024. The Path Home educated West Australians about the journey out of homelessness, through a photography exhibition and storytelling. The campaign demonstrated that while homelessness is a wicked problem, it's not impossible to solve.

The second stage of The Path Home was launched in 2025, shaped by insights from independent research conducted by CoreData WA. This foundational study explores the experiences and perspectives of people at different stages on their journeys out of homelessness, revealing the critical role of human connection and the complex conditions needed to sustain long-term housing stability.

These findings informed the development of The Path Home short documentary film and storytelling in a variety of other formats, which centres the voice of lived experience to drive community understanding and impact.

[AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS. \(2023\). ESTIMATING HOMELESSNESS: CENSUS METHODOLOGY, 2021.](#)

Lived Experience Advocates

Uniting WA's Lived Experience Program nurtures and harnesses the insights of Lived Experience Advocates (LEAs): people who have lived a specific life experience, which is separate and distinguished from academic or technical expertise.

At Uniting WA, we nurture deep and enduring relationships with LEAs, who are people who have engaged with Uniting WA services and have first-hand experience of life circumstances including:

- » Homelessness
- » Living with disability or mental health challenges
- » Experiences of Out of Home Care or the child protection system, or
- » Being affected by financial hardship, family breakdown or domestic violence.

A person with lived experience will often identify systemic flaws or gaps in services that others don't see. Their observations help refine and improve service design, deliver more effective community education and even shape public policy.

Lived Experience Advocates bring a voice to unseen or vulnerable cohorts. In turn, LEAs often report feeling purposeful and empowered that their difficult experiences are utilised to foster better outcomes for others in similar situations, as well as the broader community.

Uniting WA adheres to an organisational Lived Experience Framework, which guides the ways in which we engage and amplify the voices of lived experience in our work.

Methodology

In May 2025, CoreData WA conducted in-depth interviews and a focus group with Lived Experience Advocates (LEAs) at various stages on their journey out of homelessness. Participants included LEAs who had accessed and/or resided at a range of Uniting WA homelessness and housing services, including:

Tranby Engagement Hub

Tranby Engagement Hub (Tranby) is Perth's only 365-day-a-year crisis support centre for people experiencing homelessness. Tranby offers a safe, welcoming space where people can access meals, showers and other practical support, as well as medical care, legal services, counselling, and one-to-one advocacy support to help them take the next step on their journey out of homelessness.

Koort Boodja

Koort Boodja supported crisis accommodation service provides immediate, short-term housing for individuals experiencing homelessness. Koort Boodja acts as a critical first point of stability, helping individuals transition from homelessness into safe and supported accommodation. Koort Boodja provides:

- » Low barrier access to safe, welcoming accommodation and wrap around supports
- » Advocacy and engagement with a 24/7 support team
- » Capacity-building and a stepping stone to more long-term housing options.

Homeless Accommodation Support Service (HASS)

HASS offers longer-term supported transitional accommodation (up to 12 months) for people on their journey out of homelessness, and can be particularly valuable for vulnerable cohorts such as women and older people. It provides individuals the time and support needed to begin rebuilding their lives, develop independence, and prepare for permanent housing. HASS provides:

- » Case management to assist with building stability and setting goals to promote wellbeing and housing security
- » Wraparound services including 1:1 practical, emotional and social support
- » Support to build independence and life skills required to transition to long-term housing.

The Together Program (TTP)

TTP supports pregnant women and new mothers facing homelessness, together with their children. The program provides stable housing, specialised case management and essential healthcare, together with:

- » Safe, family-friendly accommodation, for up to 3-years
- » Intensive wrap around support services
- » Parenting and emotional support tailored to individual needs.

Independent Living Program (ILP)

ILP provides long-term housing and tailored support for individuals living with long-term mental health challenges. It addresses both housing and mental health needs, adopting a supportive landlord model that helps participants maintain their tenancies, stability and reduce the risk of homelessness. The Independent Living Program provides:

- » A supportive landlord model with ongoing emotional and practical support
- » Continuity of care with trusted Tenancy Support Workers
- » Assistance with medication, routines, and community engagement.

Limitations

As with all qualitative research, the findings presented are based on the lived experiences and perspectives of a specific group of participants.

While the sample is not statistically representative of all individuals who have experienced homelessness, the depth and richness of the insights provide valuable understanding of the human dimensions and complexity of navigating the path home from homelessness.

Participants were at different stages of their journey, which may influence how they reflect on their experiences. However, this variation also strengthens the findings by capturing a broad spectrum of perspectives.

The research focused on individuals engaged with Uniting WA services, and as such, the findings reflect the experiences of those who have accessed support. While this may not capture the experiences of those who remain disconnected from services, it offers critical insight into what enables recovery when support is available.

To adhere to Uniting WA's trauma-informed approach and ensure participants felt safe and supported during the interview process, a Support Worker and Uniting WA staff member were present during the interviews.

THE PATH HOME

Recurring themes

Throughout the study, several recurring themes emerged that reveal the emotional, relational and structural elements that consistently supported individuals to move forward from homelessness.

The findings highlight what works, and why it matters.



Connecting at Uniting
WA's Koort Boodja

Recurring Themes

Human connection and relationships play a vital role in sustaining the journey out of homelessness.

Personal relationships – whether with Support Workers, other service users, or Lived Experience Advocates – were significant at every stage in participants' journeys out of homelessness. Once on the journey, personal relationships provided trust, empathy, and a sense of belonging that helped people feel seen, heard, and valued, which in turn motivated change.

Empowerment helps individuals overcome the mindset barrier that prevents them from seeking help.

In addition to demonstrating that change is possible, moments of connection were described as turning points in a mindset shift from hopelessness and self-blame to reclaiming self-belief and agency.

Rebuilding a life is a complex challenge that requires enduring, enabling support.

Participants emphasised that moving on from their experiences of homelessness is not a point-in-time event, but a long-term process made possible by ongoing, personalised support that addresses both practical needs and emotional wellbeing.

Sustainable support requires depth of knowledge and sector experience.

A holistic, trauma-informed and person-centred approach—delivered with empathy and supported by strong sector networks—was consistently described as life-changing, offering not just housing but safety, dignity, and hope.

THE PATH HOME

Key Insights

Finding a path home from homelessness is complex—but it is achievable when the right support is in place.

The following insights capture the turning points, enablers and conditions that shaped participants' journeys out of homelessness.

Each insight is grounded in lived experience and reflects the real-world impact of a trauma-informed, person-centred approach. These findings are not just stories, they are evidence of what drives sustainable change.

INSIGHT 1:

EMPOWERMENT IS FOUNDATIONAL

The path home begins when people believe change is possible, and are supported to take the first step.

Mindset is a key barrier to accessing help – overcoming it requires trust, agency and strong relationships. The probability of accessing support is dependent on the mindset and mental health of the person experiencing homelessness, which can play a role in the openness to seeking or receiving help.

When speaking of this mindset, participants identified fear or lack of trust in others, which made it difficult to accept help when it was offered; and feelings of shame, guilt and worthlessness, depression and suicidal thoughts, which impacted their ability to see a way out of their situation.

“I’ve already stopped using drugs and alcohol ...
I still work hard on my recovery today ... my life is
too valuable, I’ve got too much good stuff going on.”

PARTICIPANT IN THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

“I want to take the initiative and go and find work ... I’m
excited. This is like the next chapter after being homeless.”

PARTICIPANT IN THE TOGETHER PROGRAM

Participants spoke about being constantly in survival mode, living hand to mouth and focusing on their immediate needs.

- » They were frequently moving locations searching for safety, or being moved on by security or the police
- » Some carried a weapon for protection due to fear of violence
- » Social isolation and loneliness were common; while some found comfort in the solitude initially, this changed over time.

The uncertainty of their situation created an environment of ongoing fear and vulnerability, and many experienced a decline in both their mental and physical health.

- » Some became trapped in a negative mindset, unable to envisage a way out
- » Physical health was affected due to a lack of access to nutritious food, fatigue, exhaustion and sometimes substance use and/or abuse
- » Mental health impacts included: stress, anxiety, depression, panic attacks, suicidal thoughts and paranoia
- » Some turned to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism.

The importance of personal agency and being ready to take proactive steps to change their situation, were emphasised by participants as enablers of seeking and receiving help.

- » Empowerment came from being treated with respect by Support Workers and staff, and helping them to see a future beyond day-to-day survival
- » Support Workers helped participants take ownership of their journey and start to believe in themselves again
- » Participants described a mindset shift from hopelessness to hope.

“ I would say [I’m at] the starting point [in my journey] ... but it feels like everything is coming to plan a little bit, I can sleep better. I can think better now. ”

PARTICIPANT AT KOORT BOODJA

INSIGHT 2:

HUMAN CONNECTION IS TRANSFORMATIVE

Critical moments of connection often marked the turning point on the journey out of homelessness.

Key touchpoints via Outreach and Support Workers helped many see a way out of their situation. Turning point moments tended to be characterised by human encounters that sparked hope.

Outreach Workers initiated life-changing conversations on the street, and referrals to Tranby Engagement Hub (Tranby) or accommodation services often came at crisis points in participants' journeys. Some were diverted from crime or suicide after meeting a Uniting WA worker. Participants described Uniting WA as the first place they felt truly helped, and many said they wouldn't be here without it.

“Luckily I seen [a Uniting WA outreach support worker], and I was like, nah, you know what, maybe this is a sign and I’m not going to go through with [the robbery].”

PARTICIPANT AT KOORT BOODJA

“I was talking to somebody that had a similar path to me... I can remember thinking ‘if they can do it I can do it’ and that was the first time I experienced real, legitimate hope.”

PARTICIPANT IN PRIVATE RENTAL ACCOMMODATION

These human encounters included:

- » A chance meeting with a Uniting WA service user, who mentioned Tranby
- » A conversation with a Lived Experience Advocate (LEA) or Peer Support Worker who had walked a similar path and moved on from homelessness
- » A conversation with a Uniting WA Outreach Workers who referred the participant to Tranby
- » Referrals to accommodation, mental health or alcohol and other drug services (e.g. Cyrenian House, The Beacon)
- » A referral from a mental health worker during a hospital stay.

Through getting to know the individuals and their unique needs, Uniting WA was able to provide unique, personalised and practical help along the journey such as:

- » Support navigating complex systems (e.g., Centrelink, NDIS)
- » Helping them to find a suitable job, including connections to job search resources
- » Fitting out their new home with furniture and all necessary household items
- » Installing ramps, and extra locks to make sure the participant felt safe within their home
- » Obtaining identification, a phone and Smart Rider for the participant, and assisting them to obtain rental history.

“ I thank Uniting for what they’ve done to help me ... They took me to Homeswest (sic) and I’ve got a house through that, and Uniting actually had a lot of input ... It’s a pathway to your own home.” ”

PARTICIPANT IN PUBLIC HOUSING

INSIGHT 3:

FINDING A PATH HOME IS COMPLEX AND ONGOING

Sustainable pathways out of homelessness are about more than a home – it's about being seen, heard, and valued.

The research reveals the importance of social and human capital in people's journey out of homelessness. While access to basic services like showers, food and clothing are critical, broader social supports – such as those provided by Support Workers – and practical help, were also essential in supporting people out of homelessness.

“We build that kind of rapport with the support workers with Uniting ... just having someone believe in you made that whole difference in our day.”

PARTICIPANT IN PUBLIC HOUSING

“That's a given that we know damn well that you guys [at Uniting] have got us and our best interests at heart ... ‘Ohh [name]. Good to see you. How's it going with your daughter?’”

PARTICIPANT IN THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

Uniting WA staff remembered names and made eye contact, helping participants feel human again. They built rapport through small, meaningful and personal gestures:

- » Participants described Uniting WA staff as genuinely caring and empathetic, with their best interests at heart
- » Emotional support helped rebuild participants' trust and self-worth
- » Participants described staff as people they could rely on to be there for them when they needed support
- » One participant described Uniting WA as a "safe place" and "home" for the period that they were homeless.

The types of enabling support provided through Uniting WA and others, which in turn provided sustained connection or support overcoming ongoing challenges, included:

- » Offering a safe space to meet and gain access to basic amenities (Tranby)
- » Ability to meet and talk to other service users
- » A hot coffee and a conversation
- » Counselling
- » Familiarity with the complexities of their individual situation, which built reassurance and trust.

“ I want to say the most important thing was the empathy. A smiling face. Eye contact. They remembered my name. These little things mattered because I felt like I didn't exist ... Empathy, rather than sympathy, is very important. ”

PARTICIPANT IN PRIVATE RENTAL ACCOMMODATION

INSIGHT 4:

COMMUNITY FOSTERS HEALING

Healing from experiences of homelessness is grounded in community, through shared experiences, mutual support and a sense of belonging.

Community plays a key role in moving on from homelessness. Participants expressed that support systems and community connection play a critical role in helping them on their journeys. Conversations with others who have overcome similar challenges, together with positive interactions with support services like Outreach and Tranby Engagement Hub (Tranby), instils hope and motivates the pursuit of change, while access to stable accommodation and consistent support has a significant positive impact on mental health and overall wellbeing.

“How many times have we walked through that [Tranby] kitchen and sat with all the gang there, and ‘how you going, brother, how you going, sister?’ ... I’ll go hang out with them, you know?”

PARTICIPANT IN PUBLIC HOUSING

My life now is completely different... I have a job that pays well. I have my family back in my life... I trust myself, I trust others... I feel like part of the community now.”

PARTICIPANT IN PRIVATE RENTAL ACCOMMODATION

All participants have undergone personal growth and transformation following their experience of homelessness, influenced by positive role models, and access to emotional and practical support. Primarily, participants built community and a sense of belonging through:

Tranby Engagement Hub and other homelessness services:

- » Outreach Workers create a vital first point of connection, connecting people to services they often don't know existed
- » Informal communities formed around Tranby and other services
- » Participants described feeling “part of the community” and supported for the first time
- » Participants described meeting up with other people with lived experience of homelessness as a source of joy.

Other service users:

- » The service user community helped reduce feelings of isolation
- » Shared accommodation, particularly when paired with similar people to them, fostered peer support, comfort and accountability.

Lived Experience Advocates and community:

- » Participants found strength in talking with people who could relate to their experience
- » Many participants expressed a desire to engage with the broader community and help others facing similar challenges, in recognition of the role this played in their own journey out of homelessness.

“ I surround myself with a lot of positive people who are on the same journey as I am ... I associate myself with people who have found a new way of life and as long as I do that, I feel as I have nothing to fear. ”

PARTICIPANT IN PRIVATE RENTAL ACCOMMODATION

INSIGHT 5:

STABILITY NEEDS MORE THAN SHELTER

Stability is sustained through structure, skills and support – not just shelter.

Capacity building and ongoing support enables stability and a sustainable pathway out of homelessness. Participants see moving into accommodation as an important and emotional milestone in their journey, however this milestone was rarely discussed in isolation. Instead, participants anchored these experiences to the enabling support they received from organisations like Uniting WA – both while experiencing homelessness and after exiting homelessness.

“They helped me get teeth. Now, what housing organisation does that? They’re my landlords. They’re giving me teeth.”

PARTICIPANT IN THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

“I’ve been very lucky, I’ve had the same lady the whole time ... It’s really been one of my issues, abandonment issues. But they stayed with me and we talk... We share photos of our dogs...”

PARTICIPANT IN THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

None of the participants take their current situation for granted, with the stark reality of how life used to be still influencing the way they live their lives today – all appear to carry residual trauma from their past experiences.

- » While not all participants are yet at a stage where they feel they are thriving, all felt positive about their futures and there is a shared sense of optimism about the road ahead.
- » Participants consistently highlighted the importance of ongoing support from Uniting WA in shifting their mindset
- » Many participants feel more motivated to get their life on track, but nearly all acknowledge that this remains a work in progress and requires sustained effort; routine and goal-setting play a role in maintaining focus and preventing a relapse into homelessness
- » Participants spoke of this routine being facilitated by Support Workers and staff members as part of wrap around service delivery.

Specific and ongoing support provided to participants included:

- » Regular emotional check-ins from Support Workers
- » Help establishing daily or weekly routines, goal-setting and monitoring progress towards goals
- » Life-skills training (e.g., budgeting, cleaning) to build independence
- » Crisis support via access to Support Workers to call during challenging times
- » Access to medical services to fulfill medication needs and mental health services
- » Consistency and reliability of Support Workers, which countered feelings of loneliness and fear of abandonment.

“ With The Together Program for the mums there ... I think it’s really great that we have support over the weekend as well. ”

PARTICIPANT IN THE TOGETHER PROGRAM

INSIGHT 1:

Empowerment is foundational.

INSIGHT 2:

Human connection is transformative.

INSIGHT 3:

Finding a path home is complex and ongoing.

INSIGHT 4:

Community fosters healing.

INSIGHT 5:

Stability needs more than shelter.

Sustainable pathways out of homelessness are built on enduring human connection—fostering empowerment, healing, and stability through compassionate relationships, community, and long-term, person-centred support.

Conclusion

Homelessness is not simply a lack of housing—it's a complex, deeply personal experience shaped by trauma, disconnection and systemic barriers. This report reveals that finding stability after these experiences is not only possible, but achievable when individuals are met with the right support, at the right time, and in the right way.

The voices in this report make it clear: the journey out of homelessness begins with belief—in oneself, in others, and in the possibility of change—and is sustained through meaningful relationships, personalised support, and a sense of community. These are not abstract ideals, they are tangible, scalable conditions that can be delivered through a trauma-informed, person-centred approach.

The recurring themes identified in this research—**empowerment, connection, enduring support, and community**—are more than observations. They are strategic levers for change, grounded in lived experience and frontline practice. They reveal what works and why it matters, and they challenge us to embed these principles into service design, funding models and policy.

Key insights from this report highlight the critical role of outreach programs, frontline staff and peer-led support in creating turning points in people's lives. They demonstrate that stability is not just about shelter, it's about structure, skills, and the assurance that someone has your back. They also underscore the transformative power of elevating lived experience as a source of wisdom, leadership, and change.

Importantly, these insights do not belong to one organisation alone. They reflect the collective strength of the ecosystem of homelessness services in Perth, where collaboration, compassion and continuity of care are essential in helping people reclaim dignity, stability and a sustainable pathway home.

About Uniting WA

Uniting WA is a community services organisation of the Uniting Church Western Australia, driven by a deep commitment to compassion, respect, justice and inclusion. Uniting supports thousands of West Australians each year with a range of tailored, person-centred services, from homelessness and housing, mental health and disability, to family crisis support and financial wellbeing.

As an organisation, Uniting celebrates diversity and welcomes all people regardless of ethnicity, faith, age, ability, culture, language, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Uniting is bold and imaginative, working collaboratively to empower individuals, break cycles of disadvantage and strengthen communities.

Learn more about The Path Home.

The Path Home features interactive online experiences that bring to life the journeys of three individuals who have experienced homelessness—and found their way forward with support from Uniting WA.

Through a blend of video, storytelling, and lived experience, each story reveals not just a path to housing from homelessness, but a deeper journey of courage, complexity and connection.

unitingwa.org.au/path-home

Partner with us.

Partnerships power change. Head to **'Get Involved'** on our website to explore partnership opportunities with Uniting WA.

unitingwa.org.au/get-involved

Backed by supporters, partners and funders, our team of nearly 500 employees and 200 volunteers are proud to deliver a range of services that have a lasting impact on thousands of West Australians each year.



Uniting WA team member with a previous Uniting WA service user.

THE PATH HOME

EXPLORING PATHWAYS OUT OF HOMELESSNESS: INSIGHTS FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE

This report is the result of an exploration of the lived experiences of individuals finding their path out of homelessness in Perth, Western Australia.

Based on qualitative research conducted through a focus group and interviews, it reveals the complex intersection of physical, psychological and societal factors that affect people on their journey into, through, and out of homelessness.

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