

Hundreds homeless

Statistics paint a shocking picture

ALMOST 900 people across the Loddon region are homeless, and nearly half of them are in Greater Bendigo, according to one of Australia's leading agencies charged with dealing with the issue of homelessness.

Shock figures released yesterday showed that in the statistical subdivision of North Loddon, which includes Loddon, Central Goldfields and Mount Alexander shires, 360 people were recorded as being homeless in the 2006 Census, representing a homeless rate of 74 per 10,000, and approximately 178 peo-

ple were living in improvised dwellings or on the streets, the highest number of people on the streets in any subdivision of Victoria.

Loddon Mallee Housing Services chief executive Ken Marchingo yesterday welcomed the release of a major study into Australia's homelessness.

Mr Marchingo praised the Federal Government's endeavour to tackle homelessness and to include

public housing in the stimulus plans unveiled as part of the assault on the global financial crisis.

He described Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's instructions for all Government MPs to visit a local homeless shelter in their electorate not long after winning the November 2007 election as the opportunity to "create a little bit of a wave in the bureaucracy".

"We need to remind people at a

local level that others are doing it hard."

Mr Marchingo said he believed the growing problem of homelessness in Australia was not so much a result of the global financial crisis as it was the "decade of neglect and inaction" by the Howard government.

Official Bureau of Statistics data out yesterday also showed that in the statistical subdivision of Great-

er Bendigo, 381 people were recorded as homeless in the 2006 Census, a rate of 46 per 10,000.

Of this figure 146 people or 38 per cent were temporarily living with relatives or friends, while 117 people (31 per cent) were in homelessness assistance accommodation.

Sixty-six people (17 per cent) were living in caravans, while 47 people (12 per cent) were in boarding houses.

Five people (1 per cent) were living in improvised dwellings or on the streets.

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IT'S a problem most Australians don't want to know about and one most of us know even less about, but the issue of Australia's rising number of homeless people refuses to go away.

Figures released yesterday point to an alarming 25 per cent increase in the number of people who were homeless in 2006 when official Census data was collected.

Those at the coalface believe the real numbers are in fact significantly higher.

Young people account for about one in three of Victoria's 23,000 homeless, and most disturbing is the 20 per cent increase in the number of people roughing it on the streets since the 2001 Census was completed.

All this points to a significant drain on the resources of organisations such as our own Loddon Mallee Housing Services, a group with few, if any, peers in the Western world.

The Bendigo-based group's views and experiences should therefore not be overlooked, and what CEO Ken Marchingo has to say on the subject he deals with every day does not always make for pleasant conversation.

But it's real and the issue will never be resolved unless decisive action is taken now and strategies are put in place to curb the further growth in homeless numbers, and this requires a co-operative effort from government, agencies and the community.

Importantly, yesterday's release of a comprehensive report should allow the Federal and State governments to better target more much-needed aid at those communities who are experiencing the highest level of homelessness, or who equally cannot cope with the demands from the community.

What do you think?
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