

# Support Needs of Homeless Households in Nelson

## Terms of Reference

The Centre for Housing Research, Aotearoa New Zealand (CHRANZ) awarded a grant of \$1,400 to fund research into “Support needs of homeless in Nelson”. The aim of this research is to determine the demographic profile, accommodation needs and support needs of a population defined as homeless or potentially homeless in Nelson. This information provides knowledge on the barriers to access for vulnerable groups to housing and their support needs. It will aid Nelson Tasman Housing Trust to develop action strategies; provide information to existing providers of emergency and temporary accommodation and provide information to government organisations, e.g. Housing New Zealand Corporation, Nelson City Council and Probation Services.

This research follows preliminary research conducted in 2005 which relied on agencies knowledge and experience of unsatisfactory housing in Nelson, the results indicated that over 100 people are in unsatisfactory housing

## **Homeless Definition**

Homelessness for this purpose is defined by Chamberlain, (1999), which is used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to systematically enumerate the homeless population.

This definition has four categories

1. “Primary: people without conventional accommodation such as those who ‘sleep out’, or use derelict buildings, cars, railway stations for shelter.”
2. “Secondary: people who frequently move from temporary accommodation such as emergency accommodation, refugees, and temporary shelters. People may use boarding houses or family and friends accommodation just on a temporary basis”.
3. “Tertiary: people who live in rooming houses, boarding houses on medium or long-term where they do not have their own bathroom and kitchen facilities and tenure is not secured by a lease.”
4. “Marginally housed: people in housing situations close to the minimum standard”, e.g. overcrowding”

## **Methodology**

A questionnaire survey of a sample population will provide quantitative and qualitative data on household characteristics, reasons for homelessness, housing and support needs. The methodology for this research required people whose current accommodation was not adequate, to participate. A simple questionnaire was used (See appendix 1), which was completed using a structured interview. The questionnaires were given to a variety of local community organizations (see appendix 2), for the organisations' support worker to complete the questionnaire with their client. Other questionnaires were completed by the researcher herself and assistant where homeless people were not already in contact with a support agency, e.g. Night Shelter.

## **Client Group**

Questionnaires were handed out to many local organizations in February 2007, and 33 were completed, either by the organization or by the researcher, Jane Worthington. (See table 1). Those interviewed were generally long-term residents of Nelson, with 69% having lived here for over 1 year.

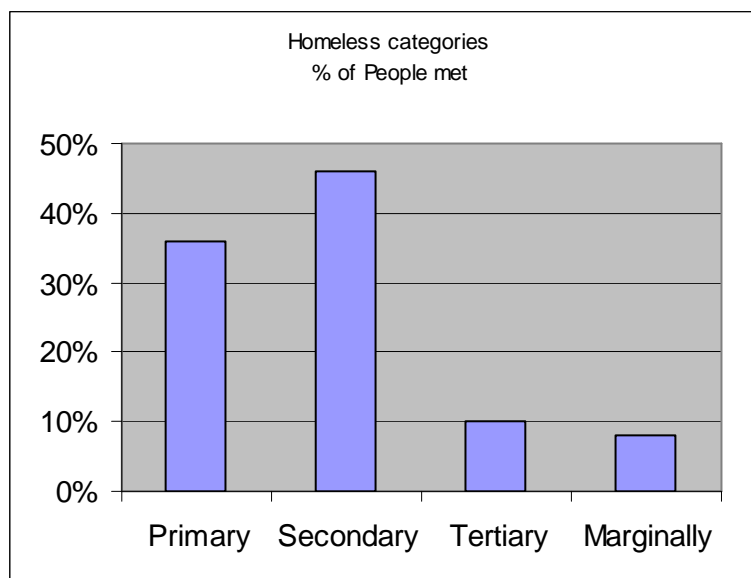
Agency	Number of questionnaires completed
Night Shelter	4
Probation	1
Woman Support	12
Police	2
Camp Site/Back Packers	2
Private – personal	2
Deaf Association	1
Salvation Army	5
House44	4
Night Shelter (sighted) Men moved outside, not keen to be part of the survey	10
Total respondents	33

### Limitations of the Research

The agencies that returned the questionnaires often work with individuals or very small families. No questionnaires were received from agencies working with larger families, thus the results of the research are reflective of smaller groups and individuals. These agencies also work with clients who tend to fall into the category of Primary, Secondary or Tertiary people, as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In addition a camp site and back packer's were protective of their client's confidentiality and though the managers/owners were willing to talk to the researcher they did not make available any individuals/groups with whom to complete the questionnaires.

Taking into consideration which agencies completed the application, and whom the researcher interviewed, it must be concluded that the following research results do not cover any groups living in category 4, marginally housed people,. Further there are more people in Nelson who fall into the 3<sup>rd</sup> category (tertiary people living in backpackers and camping sites) than are actually recorded in these statistics.

(Table 2)



### Time Frame

Questionnaires were handed out to many local organizations in February 2007, and 40 were completed, either by the organization or by the researcher, Jane Worthington. The researcher had many challenges in making meetings within the planned timeframe. Initially the assistant researcher who was to work with Jane, found that doing the research "Was not for her", when the pilot programme at the Night Shelter was conducted. The next research assistant Jane tried to engage missed appointments to action the questionnaires. Fortunately, in October Penny Molnar, Primary Health Nurse, made a Social Work student on placement available. Finally in October the research was completed.

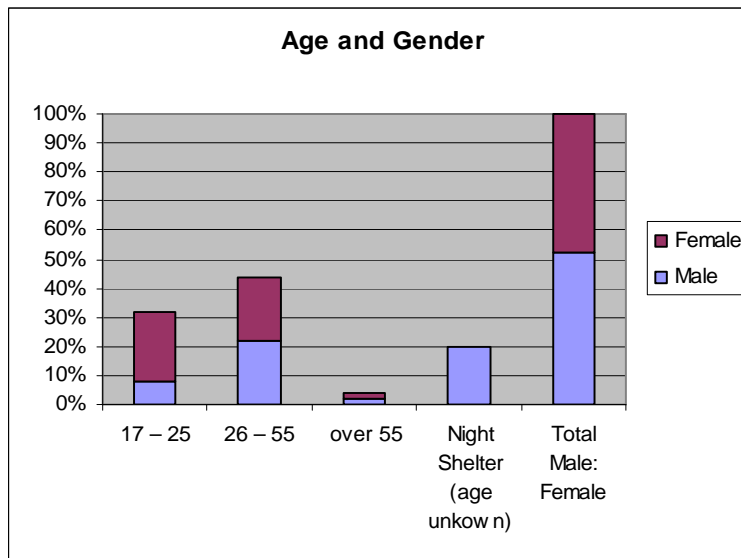
**Confidentiality**

No personal details were recorded, and communication was done in confidence between the researcher and the respondent. All information collated will be analysed and presented in a report format to NTHT, and submitted to all other agencies involved.

## Findings

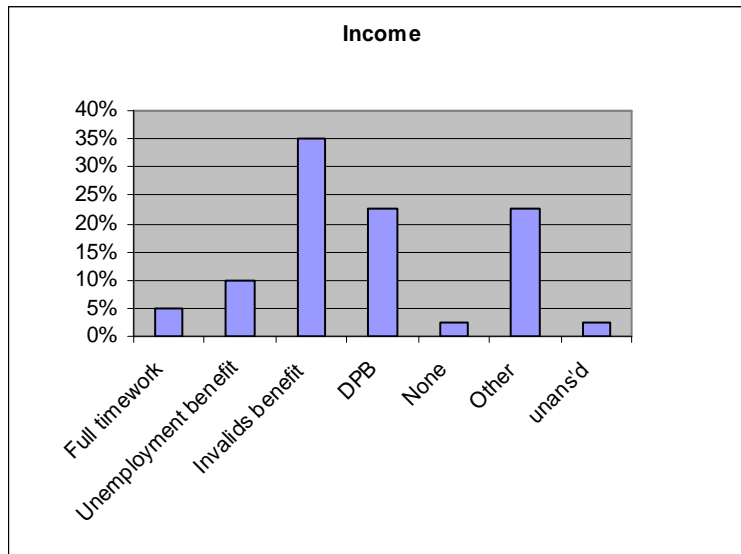
### Current Situation

#### Age and Gender



There were almost as many women (48%) as men (52%). The one night shelter in Nelson is for men only. This high percentile of women in unsatisfactory accommodation immediately highlights the need for emergency and temporary accommodation, such as a women's night shelter. Most individuals are under the age of 55, suggesting that current facilities may be adequate for those over 55 years.

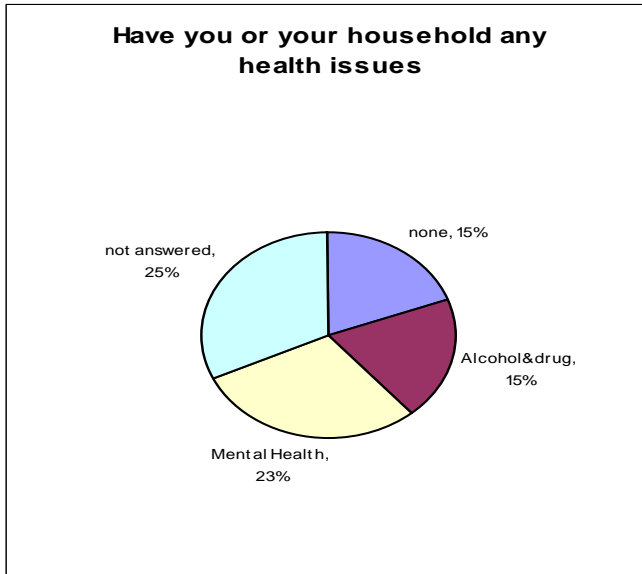
#### Income



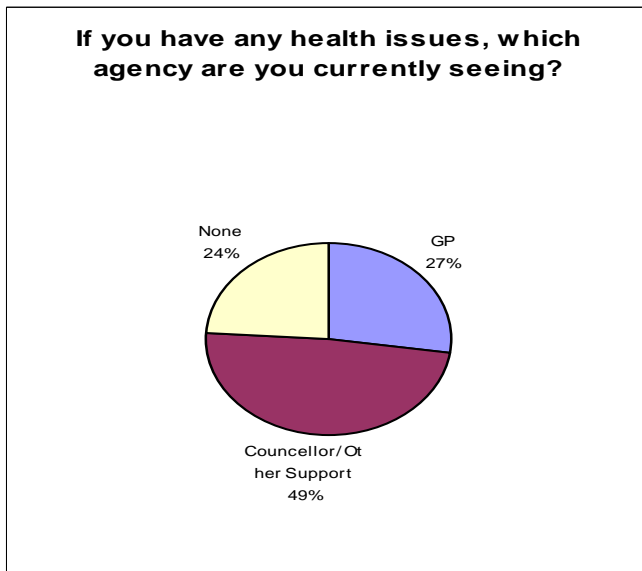
The vast majority of respondents are dependent on Work and Income New Zealand, as benefits account for 68% of income. Thus to ensure landlords receive payment, rental agreements need to be done in conjunction with Work and Income. More appropriate accommodation was indicated by the individuals as a priority, as all but 5 were looking for other accommodation. Those not looking felt it was pointless to do so until they had an income.

## Current Situation

### Health

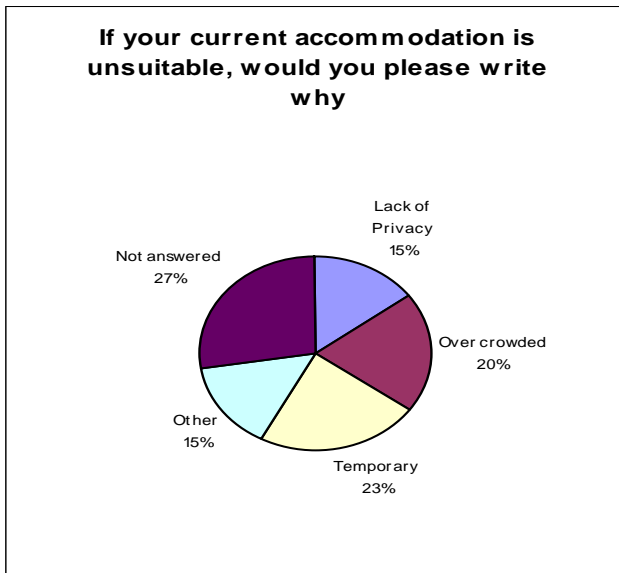


Responses to this question were unclear. 25% did not wish to reply and 15% said "none". A further 25% advised they had mental health issues, e.g. depression, bi-polar and 15% had alcohol and drug issues. Support for those with mental health issues and/or addictions would seem necessary to assist the tenant's stability to remain in longer term accommodation.

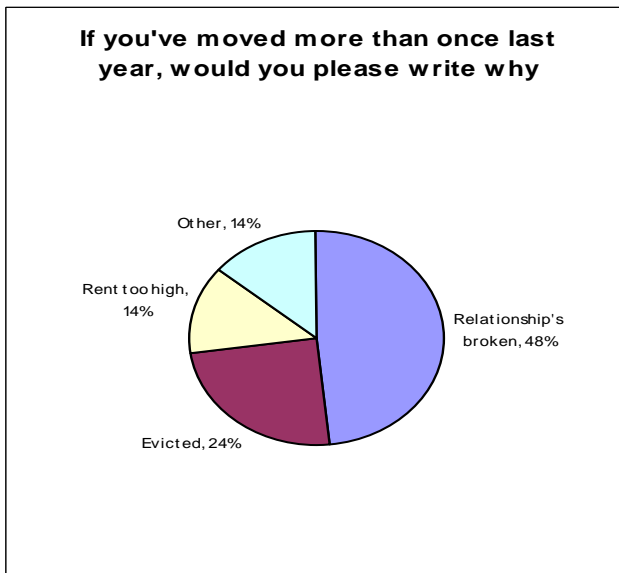


Of those that said they had health issues, 76% said they were either seeing a GP or a counsellor or other support person. This support will need to continue to assist the tenant's stability to remain in longer term accommodation.

## Current accommodation

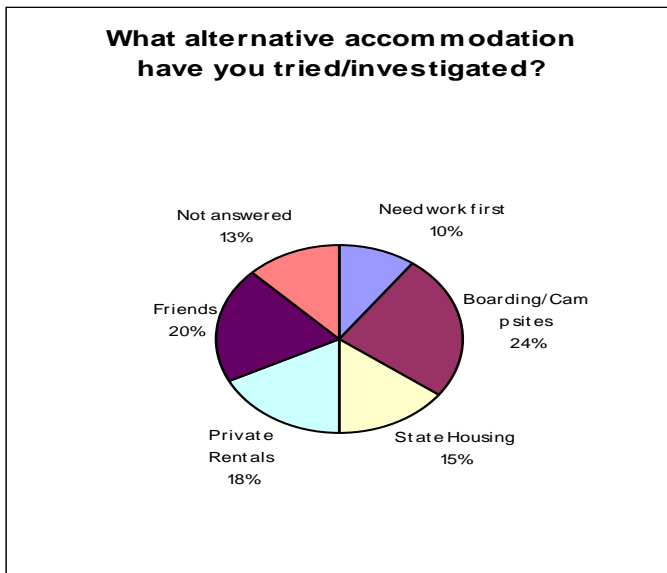


The 15% who mentioned lack of privacy were mainly those who lived at the Night Shelter. Those in over crowded situations (20%) were those sleeping on the couch of a family/friend.

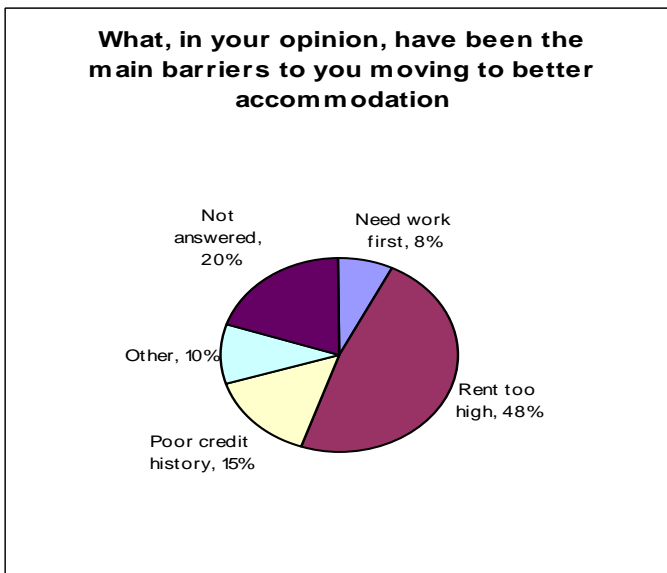


The most common factor (48%) for moving accommodation was relationship breakdown. These relationships had been with a partner or with their parent/family. The cost of rent was reported as being too high (14%) and eviction were the other two factors (24%). Lower rent would seem paramount, as is on-going support, to assist tenant's stability to remain in longer term accommodation.

## Alternative accommodation



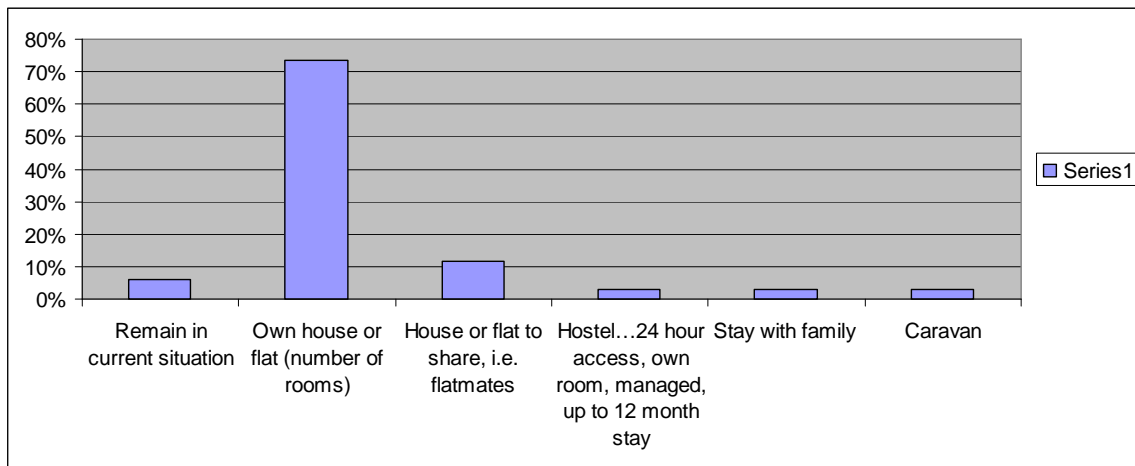
Most respondents had tried looking for alternative accommodation, only 10% had not, saying that they needed work first. All other types of accommodation had been attempted.



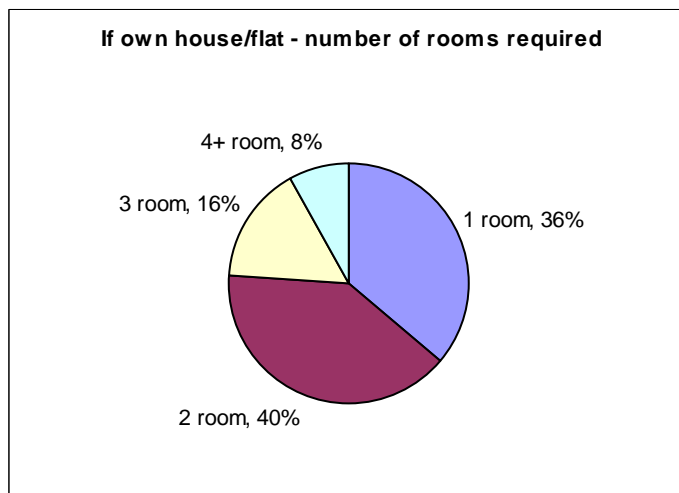
Without question the cost of rent was viewed as the main barrier to moving to better accommodation (48%). This provides confirmation for the need of more affordable i.e. lower cost rental properties being available. A poor credit rating, (15%) suggests for a need for Work & Income to re-consider the criteria for rent which can be paid direct to a landlord to ensure this is not a barrier for tenants to secure a home.



## Preferred Situation Accommodation



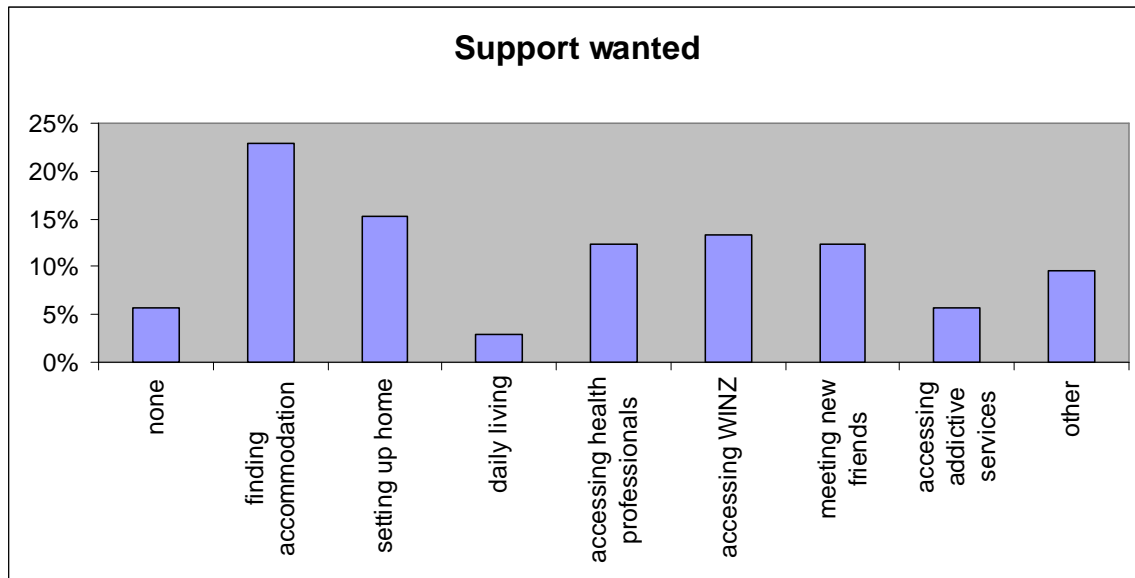
The vast majority seek to have their own their home (74%). Some clients clarified this further explaining that they did not want a large home, "just four walls" and "when I walk outside my front door I have a small piece of ground I can sit on my own in".



The response to this question must be considered alongside the fact that this research was generally limited to individuals, rather than families. Thus, the need for one or two room accommodation would be adequate in many cases to meet their needs.

The vast majority (74%) cited having their own home as the most desired accommodation to meet their needs for stability and security for themselves, and/or their families.

## Support Wanted



Only 6 respondents did not want support. Confirming that almost 90% did want support. Many wanted help in finding accommodation, and once in a home the need for support did not diminish. In particular setting up home, accessing health professionals, accessing Work and Income and meeting new friends were seen as important elements to establishing home life. This indicates a need for ongoing community based support while it may be short term, the research suggests it may need to be available in the medium term (6 months), for some people, but was viewed as most desirable when people first moved into new accommodation. Funding appropriate, affordable and accessible accommodation is paramount. It has become clearer to the researcher that without support the cycle of eviction or losing accommodation and the cycles of transience will continue. It cannot be overemphasised the cost of these cycles of change to the individuals involved as well as to the social fabric of the community.

## **Analysis**

- 48% women: 52% men are currently homeless
- 68% of the homeless are on WINZ benefits
- At least 38% of the homeless said they had mental health, alcohol issues
- 49% of the homeless are seeing a councillor or other support worker
- 35% of homeless felt crowded in (15% lack of privacy and 20% overcrowded)
- 48% homeless had moved due to relationship breakdowns. 24% evicted. 14% rent too high
- 80% said they'd looked/looking for alternative accommodation, but
- 48% said they couldn't move as rent was too high.
- 74% would prefer their own place mainly in a one or two bed-roomed home.
- 82% wanted some form of support

A complicating factor to the current homeless people is the recent change in legislation for seasonal employment. Employers of seasonal workers need not provide accommodation. Some employers have set up contracts with some accommodation providers to pay the rent direct from an employees' wage. This creates a situation where there are even less private landlords willing to provide more accessible or lower priced accommodation.

## **Conclusion**

Nelson does have a homeless population, which consists of both men and women. There are currently very limited resources for both men and women in need of emergency and temporary housing. A Night Shelter for men with only 4 beds and a caravan at Tahunanui Motor Camp site for others (maximum 3) and a further cabin could be made available in limited situations.

At the time of writing this conclusion a further unit has been installed at Tahunanui Motor Camp. This is a cabin style accommodation unit which can house 4-5 maximum. While this extends the capacity of Nelson to accommodate those in emergency situations, it must be confirmed that stays are for only 1 week, with a conditional further week under discretionary agreement. Stays are also contingent on an appropriate social agency taking the 'lead' to provide appropriate support for the 'tenant' to secure more appropriate and secure accommodation.

Some of landlords/managers who do provide low priced accommodation, e.g. camp sites and back-packers are genuinely caring landlords, and strongly respect their client's confidentiality rights.

In general there is a need for an increase in all types of accommodation at a lower rent and an indication for Work and Income to consider how to pay the rent direct to a landlord to ensure stability of tenancy for selected 'clients'. Many people who are currently homeless are moving in cycles of transience, i.e. they may find accommodation, but within a short time move on; and many also have mental health issues and/or addictions. To ensure stability of the tenancy, social work support for homeless people in newly provided accommodation is paramount to the tenant remaining stable in their home.

## **Recommendations**

Community agencies need to work collaboratively with Nelson City Council, private landlords, Housing NZ, and Work and Income New Zealand to respond more appropriate to the needs of the homeless in Nelson.

In particular the following issues require responses:

- Emergency and temporary accommodation for women, including appropriate social work support;
- Further emergency and temporary accommodation for men, including social work support;
- Support for the homeless in finding appropriate accommodation;
- Medium term social work support for the homeless once appropriate accommodation has been secured;
- Work and Income to review the criteria for direct rental payments to landlords, while social work support is in place, to ensure security of tenure;
- More affordable homes at lower than current market rent.

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February 2008