



What most people can appreciate is the financial cost of homelessness to the whole community – Maria Palumbo

THERE'S a Guy I know who isn't the bloke he used to be.

Rewind to 2011. An alcoholic, living on welfare benefits and on the streets, Guy did whatever he could to get by. He took drugs to escape reality – even if it meant ending up in hospital. At least he'd get a bed for the night.

By his own admission, Guy was living at a cost to himself, his family, and everyone who tried to help him. Not to mention the public purse.

Homelessness happens to individuals. Sometimes it extends to families and even children. But it impacts everyone. More than most of us think.

To quote Common Ground founder Rosanne Haggerty: "Permanent supportive housing saves money for communities ... reducing the burden on jails, shelters, and local social service sites, reducing the high public costs of those systems. At a time of unprecedented strain on local budgets, ending homelessness makes clear financial sense."

Put simply, if you help someone into a home and work, they start earning money, spending more and paying taxes. Improvements in their health, confidence, social and support networks follow.

It can be really hard for most of us to understand homelessness. Generally, it is complicated and the result of many factors – trauma, domestic violence, family breakdowns, unemployment, mental illness and addictions or all these things.

But what most people can appreciate is the financial cost of homelessness to the whole community. It's only in the past decade that governments



have been realising the solution to this problem doesn't lie solely in providing a bed for a night. It's about stable housing and addressing the issues that lead to rough sleeping.

When it comes to dealing with homelessness, SA is doing better than every other state. We have led the nation in reducing homelessness and, importantly, supporting people to never fall back into the cycle.

Common Ground, set up by the State Government with support from the business community, epitomises this. It brings together housing with community support and resources – from medical and dental services to counselling and opportunities for education and training. Importantly, it works.

Around 95 per cent of people who come to live at Common Ground don't fall back into homelessness. Two tenants have even gone on to own their own homes.

I also acknowledge the goodwill of some truly generous individuals and corporates – particularly Common Ground's foundation sponsor Santos, which has prioritised community funding to this cause.

Without this investment, our mental health system would be under greater pressure. There's no question permanent supportive housing reduces high use hospital admissions and many types of crime.

As the strain increases on government budgets, businesses and our own hip pockets, we can't lose sight of the enor-

mous difference a home can make.

Getting back to Guy. After coming to live at Common Ground in 2011, the 35-year-old has now been clean and sober going on three years. An AA leader, he has a job and is studying towards an Honours in Science from Flinders University. He is leading a fulfilling life. Contributing to his community. Giving back where he can.

Guy's achievements inspire us all at Common Ground. Yet, he's the first to acknowledge he has more work to do. He's only human. Aren't we all?

MARIA PALUMBO IS THE CEO OF COMMON GROUND ADELAIDE. NATIONAL HOMELESS PERSON'S WEEK RUNS FROM AUGUST 4-10

HARD: Homeless people are forced to sleep in uncomfortable conditions. Most of us are used to