

# homeless thrive in mine-rich WA

## Government continues to ignore the plight of those most in need

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“Reading the State budget as it came through what stood out is Aboriginal peoples aren’t counted in, we don’t matter once again.”

At the last national census 1,870 Kimberley folk reported being homeless however this figure is now believed to be much worse, in excess of 3,000 say some organisations, especially with many homeless Aboriginal folk in the Kimberley not registered on the Census and others giving addresses of relatives they stayed overnight with on Census night when in fact they are homeless.

**“I wonder some day how Barnett will explain to his grandchildren that when he was Premier of Australia’s wealthiest State, when he presided over a mining boom, the Aboriginal peoples of the Kimberley had the world’s worst homeless rate and the highest suicide rates in Australia,” - Nyikina rights advocate and economist, Sofia Mirniyinna**

A recent Kimberley-only survey by the Human Rights Alliance reaching 300 folk found more than 10 per cent reported homeless and more than 80 per cent said they were doing it tough.

Disturbingly, more than 80 per cent said they knew of someone who was homeless. In line with the 2006 and 2012 surveys more than 90 per cent of the homelessness are Aboriginal folk.

With annual surveys recently completed by the Salvation Army (1,700 survey respondents) and the Human Rights Alliance (2,100 survey respondents) both saying the poor are getting poorer and that poverty and homelessness are on the rise what is happening in the Kimberley is not a good look for Australia in light of the fact that Australia ranks number two in the

world on the United Nations Development Program human index for social wealth and also in that Australia is the world’s 13th largest economy.

Furthermore, Western Australia boasts 46 per cent of Australia’s mining exports and boasts the highest per capita personal income in the country.

Homelessness in the Kimberley has increased since the 2006 National Census, with out-of-control rents due to the influx of mining workers and also because governments have not subsidised communities for inflation

and spiralling cost of living pressures.

Communities in the remote regions are doing it toughest with more folk moving to towns such as Broome, Derby, Fitzroy and Kununurra to sleep rough.

In 2006 the homelessness rate was 638 per 10,000 in the Kimberley with the next worst, the Northern Territory with 248 homeless per 100,000.

The Salvation Army claims homelessness has increased in Western Australia, the nation’s worst performer and the Human Rights Alliance Indigenous spokesperson Natalie Flower said her organisation believed homelessness in the Kimberley was closer to 1,000 in 10,000 with extended families heavily impacted doing what they can for their folk.

The 2006 Counting the Homeless report aggregated 13,391 West Australians with 1,870 in the Kimberley and WA-wide the rate was 69 per 10,000, the highest in the country.

However the Human Rights Alliance said with rising cost of living pressures and with the Census not registering all Aboriginal folk homelessness in Western Australia was closer to 20,000 and more than 3,000 in the Kimberley.

By comparison New South Wales and Victoria have a 42 per 10,000 homelessness rate.

“It would only take a little investment by State and Federal government in our Kimberley communities to provide education, health, jobs and housing to our people, to our youth but they will not do so because in the end they pretend Aboriginal homelessness in the Kimberley doesn’t exist,” Ms Mirniyinna said.

“If Premier Barnett, Indigenous Affairs minister Collier and Housing Minister Buswell cared about the Kimberley’s homelessness, about the no jobs for Aboriginal peoples and our youth here, with Aboriginal youth suicide in the Kimberley highest in the nation, then they would have done something about it.

“Instead they care about Woodside, FMG, Billiton and not about our people. I wonder some day how Barnett will explain to his

grandchildren that when he was Premier of Australia’s wealthiest State, when he presided over a mining boom, the Aboriginal peoples of the Kimberley had the world’s worst homeless rate and the highest suicide rates in Australia.”

The Kimberley has been in the news media with suicide rates among its Aboriginal population at 1 in 1,200 or over 80 per 100,000 - the nation’s worst.

Despite the deaths there is no effective suicide prevention strategy being funded and administered in the Kimberley.

Mowanjium Chief Executive Officer, Steve Austin said the West Australian Government was spending \$150 million on the Derby prison while applications by the organisation for a Youth Coordinator to work with Aboriginal youth have been rejected.

“We get no help,” Mr Austin said.

Nearly three years ago, Director of Legal Services at the Aboriginal Legal Services WA, Peter Collins wrote to the House Standing Committee on Family, Housing and Youth Inquiry into Homelessness Legislation.

Mr Collins called upon the inquiry to consider that there are special imposts upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in terms of homelessness and that special advocacy and advisory bodies needed to be set up. Nothing has been done.



Above: Gilbert, who is half Afghan, half Aboriginal, is 62 years of age and is forced to live in a shanty he put together. Below: This woman is alone and with no home. Her dinner—some chips, a can of tuna and some crackers in an old abandoned house in the centre of Broome. All images Ingetje Tadros.



Top Photo: Another homeless lady who sleeps anywhere she can find a quiet place on the streets of Broome. Above: Monica has nowhere to go and no hope.