GOVERNING HOMELESSNESS:
The Discursive and Institutional Construction of Homelessness in Australia

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Certificate of Authorship and Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Jane Bullen
May 2010
Acknowledgement

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS vi

ABSTRACT vii

PROLOGUE 1

INTRODUCTION 9

My research question 9

Policy and research – shifting paradigms 13

Homelessness: moving beyond empirical studies and the individual versus social structure divide 17

Rethinking homelessness 21

- Discursive strategies and political reasoning – government is a problematising activity 21
- Problematics of government and political rationalities 22
- Problematics of government and governmental technologies 28

The evidence examined 31

The argument 37

CHAPTER 1: GOVERNING HOMELESSNESS AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM 43

Summary of the argument 43

1972-1983: Expansion of ‘homelessness’ from ‘skid row’ to ‘the new homeless’ and the critique of welfare – the Whitlam and Fraser governments 45

1983-1996: The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and ‘active’ citizenship – the Hawke-Keating governments 62

- Introducing SAAP 64
- Emphasising ‘support’ 70

The public sector contracts 73


‘Individualised’ focus 84

Community capacity building through social partnerships to overcome exclusion 89
From 2007: ‘Mainstream Australians who had been knocked sideways by unexpected circumstances’– the Rudd government

Conclusion

CHAPTER 2 FROM CHARITY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT TO PERFORMANCE: GOVERNING HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Summary of the argument

A ‘plethora’ of services and funding sources

The introduction of SAAP and ‘performance’ through expansion and efficiency

Changes to SAAP - ‘performance’ through planning and control
  - forming a homelessness service system
  - regulating service ‘performance’

‘We purchase a set of agreed results’ – ‘performance’ through entrepreneurial government
  - forming a homelessness service system
  - regulating service ‘performance’

Conclusion

CHAPTER 3 CASE MANAGEMENT: GOVERNING HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

Summary of the argument

SAAP services before case management

The introduction of case management

Implementing case management

The effects of case management

Case management and ‘The road home’

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

Appendix 1 Fieldwork method
Appendix 2 Information and consent form
Appendix 3 Interview guide
Appendix 4 Information on Fieldwork Interviewees

BIBLIOGRAPHY
**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Assertive Community Treatment</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFHO</td>
<td>Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>AVO</td>
<td>Apprehended Violence Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES</td>
<td>Commonwealth Employment Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>Consumer Price Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOCS</td>
<td>Department of Community Services (NSW)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DV</td>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>HPAP</td>
<td>Homeless Persons Assistance Program</td>
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<td>NAHA</td>
<td>National Affordable Housing Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-government organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAAP</td>
<td>Supported Accommodation Assistance Program</td>
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<td>SGI</td>
<td>Super Guarantee Component</td>
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<tr>
<td>WESP</td>
<td>Women’s Emergency Services Program</td>
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<td>YSS</td>
<td>Youth Services Scheme</td>
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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses changes in the ways in which the phenomenon of ‘homelessness’ has been conceptualised in Australian policies, programs and services for homeless people since the early 1980s. My experience working in this area suggested to me that a fundamental shift had occurred, away from a policy understanding of the causes of homelessness as being produced by ‘structural’ social and economic factors such as poverty, lack of affordable housing and domestic violence, to one in which homelessness was now understood more as a result of ‘individual’ issues caused by problems or behaviours of homeless people themselves. This thesis asks: how and why had such changes taken place?

I show that, consistent with my experiences, conceptions of homelessness in policy and programs have indeed been understood in homelessness research and commentary in terms of, on the one hand, structuralist conceptions of the causes of homelessness, and on the other hand, explanations that rely on a methodological individualism, with a shift over the last 30 years from structuralist to methodologically individualist conceptions of homelessness. Attempts to reconcile these two explanations, for example by means of the policy concept of ‘social exclusion’, have generally failed in practice to move beyond this dichotomy.

I address the question by drawing on Foucault’s work on ‘governmentality’ and examining both historical official statements about homelessness policies and programs and in depth interviews with people who have worked in the area. I show how policies and programs have a constructive role in shaping understandings of homelessness and of the situations of homeless people. In particular, I show how changes in homelessness policies and programs over the past thirty years involved not a retreat of the state as some commentators assert, but an extension and reconfiguration of political power ‘beyond the state’ through a diversity of service providers. These changes sought to replace the welfare state with an ‘enabling’ state or so-called ‘advanced liberal governmentality’ which characterised the causes of homelessness in terms of ‘dependency’. Homelessness programs became focussed on techniques designed to produce a managed form of self-reliance - interlinking both freedom and constraint. The
policy conceptualisation of homelessness shifted towards ‘individual’ factors and away from ‘structural’ factors. The ambiguous nature of these techniques is reflected in evidence of both improvements and reductions in service delivery, including the exclusion from services of some ‘high risk’ homeless people who could or would not meet case management requirements.