

# Tamworth's 'Invisible' Homeless

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*CONNECTING THE DOTS: Preparing for this month's homeless day in Tamworth are members of the Homeless Connect Group, from left, Kim Smart, Eugene Christakos, Graham Cameron, Tanya Rogers, Peter Johnson, Veronica O'Reilly and Lynne Beiers.*

*Photo: Barry Smith*

Most of us are only one pay packet away from despair. That's the message from organisations of a landmark event in Tamworth later this month, aimed at lifting hope among the city's "invisible" homeless population.

To be held a TRECC on July 31, Homeless Connect will bring together dozens of service providers to help open doors for the destitute. Everything from free haircuts and birth certificates to mental health and family support agencies will be on hand at the forum.

Homelessness Service manager from Tamworth Family Support Service Tanya Rogers said people were often surprised at the extent of the issue in Tamworth. "The homeless problem isn't as visible in Tamworth like it is in inner-Sydney", Ms Rogers said. "We have more invisible homeless people who are couch surfing, people that don't have a secure tenancy in their own right. It certainly would number into the hundreds in Tamworth."

She said the spiralling cost of rent in Tamworth meant many families were on the cusp of homelessness. "The reality is a lot of us are just one pay day away from being homeless" Ms Rogers said. "People on benefits and low incomes, or people have just lost their job, are under housing stress because of the cost of rent".

Nationally, about 105,000 people are considered homeless on any given night. Ms Rogers said it was critical homelessness be treated as a community issue. “The stronger every person in a community is the stronger and more economically viable that community becomes” she said.

About 50 service providers are expected to be at the Homeless Connect forum, the second such event to be held in Tamworth. Organisers are encouraging service providers, homeless and those at risk of homelessness to attend.

The event will be held on Thursday, July 31 from 10 am to 3 pm and participants can travel free by either Tamworth Buslines or Hannaford’s buses on the day.