

**Another World
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The French poet, Paul Eluard, famously said:

There is another world but it is in this one.

This other world is one in which no one is left out in the cold.

It is the world that our CEO Sleepout is all about helping to create.

But that demands a revolution in the way we look at things.

33% of people experiencing homelessness are children and young people.

That's more than 34,000 kids without a place they can call home.

Children who are homeless are more likely to become homeless later in life and raise families who, in turn, also become homeless.

Children in homeless families are more at risk of experiencing disadvantage and homelessness over their lifetime.

You can guess why we haven't solved the problem.

By blaming people for their own homelessness we create more homelessness.

I am haunted by the man who spoke to us at a CEO Sleepout in Canberra a couple of years ago. He began to experience homelessness when he was 13 and had been in and out of institutions since then. When someone thanks God for public toilets because they're nice and warm to sleep in even though they're smelly, you know we have a problem. He was made to feel that it was *his* problem. As long as we, as a nation, refuse to admit that it is *our* problem, we will continue to have the problem.

People experiencing homelessness are denied the right to appropriate housing. But there is also the insecurity, the vulnerability to illness, to violence, to prosecution, the feeling of disconnectedness, the feeling of being seen right through as if you are not there.

You don't create a smart and confident Australia by taking to people with the stick or keeping them below the poverty line.

Our problem in Australia is not the “idleness of the poor”. Our problem is inequality. This is a social question, not a question of behaviour. This is nowhere as obvious as when we look at the number of children and young people who are forced into an experience of homelessness and nowhere as obvious as when we look at what is likely to happen to these children when they grow up because of their experience of homelessness.

We build massive walls around these children and young people. How can we then condemn them for allegedly lacking the “aspiration” to scale these walls?

Our task is to have the humility to listen to the people who can teach us what it is that needs to change in society.

This is where we begin to see the solution; only in the guts of the problem.

The economic and social costs, let alone the personal costs, of leaving the homelessness crisis as it is, are enormous. Some might remember Malcolm Gladwell’s story in *The New Yorker* about Million Dollar Murray, a man who had experienced chronic homelessness, with all the concomitant health problems. When he died it was estimated that the costs to the state of maintaining Murray in his condition of homelessness came out at US\$1 million. Providing him with secure housing would have provided a base from which other problems could have been addressed. Secure, appropriate housing also happens to be good for your health! This is not to say that homelessness is simply houselessness. But common sense tells us that it would be a good place to start. As Philip Mangano, former executive director of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, reminded us: “You do not manage a social wrong. You should be ending it.”

The men, women and children who are plunged into the world of homelessness know well that the solution lies in the heart of the problem.

It is known like a hidden message that lies beneath the surface of our society. If it could be summed up in one word, I suggest that this word would be *dignity*.

It is what we can learn from the people who courageously face another night living beyond the zones of comfort and safety.

It is what we want for each of our own children. It is what all children deserve; for their own sakes as well as for the sake of building a just and fair Australia. That’s the kind of society worth building.

I am delighted that so many business and community leaders are joining us in working to create it.

When we dream alone it is only a dream. But when we dream together it is the beginning of reality.