

# THE STORY OF A NIGHT SHELTER FOR WOMEN

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In July 2005, I was invited to a meeting by Clare Ahern RSJ, Provincial of the West Australian Josephites. Several other Provincials or their Reps were there too. Clare had been inspired at the ACRLI Gathering in 2005, following a reflection on Mark 8:22-26 to invite the WA Leaders to come together in partnership around a common project. Over the next few months, we met regularly, prayerfully reflecting on possible projects that would assist the poor of the city. We decided to call ourselves the 'See More' Group!

We visited places that already provide support in different ways to the poor in the city. In Perth, the Archdiocese has set-up or supports places with names like Ruah Community Services, The Shopfront, Linda's House Of Hope, Daydawn Advocacy Centre, and Anawim Refuge And Night Shelter for Aboriginal women. We visited The Big Issue outlet and met those who sell the papers. We invited people to speak to us about the services they provide.

The St Patrick's Parish of Fremantle outreaches to the poor of Fremantle in a very dedicated and supportive way. They have a 'Soup Kitchen', and provide many Health Services from that Centre. They also have Lodging Houses and Refuges for Men, but nothing for women. So, while Fremantle is becoming a place for the 'Trendies', it also has a growing number of poor who sleep in the parks. At the end of several months of discernment, research and advice from local Social Workers and the Police and the Nyoonar Patrol, we decided to explore the possibility of working towards a small night shelter for women in Fremantle. A Night Shelter operates between 8pm-8am.

The exploration continued. We discovered that the Government would be very pleased to support such a venture. The Minister for Housing has come up with a \$50,000 grant to pay the rent. The house that has been chosen belongs to the St Pat's Fremantle Outreach. This also ensures that the Night Shelter will operate from under their umbrella. This includes staff training and mentoring, the Insurance and general support.

Two Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart have taken on the Management of the Night Shelter, which has been named The Sisters' Place. One of these Sisters is Julia Della Franca. Sisters from the different congregations, who have been involved since the beginning are involving themselves in so far as it is possible. There are so many ways that we can assist. The Sisters' Place opened in June. And since the opening, The Sisters' Place has provided overnight accommodation for five nights a week. The register shows that there have been 280 "heads on beds" in that time. So obviously there is a need being filled here in Fremantle.

The Mission Statement says:

***The Mission of The Sisters' Place is to relieve suffering and bring hope by providing dignified safe night accommodation to temporarily homeless women.***

**E**ach evening The Sisters' Place van (also provided through a Government Grant) leaves for the Pick Up. The Red Cross Food Van provides food for the homeless, and some of the women clients avail themselves of the opportunity to then spend the night in The Sisters' Place.

In the five months since it has opened The Sisters' Place has attracted the attention of many different people, from school students, families, local Council and the Superintendent of the Women's Prison. Donations of sheets and blankets, nighties, knickers and other clothing have been gratefully received. Gifts of money are especially useful and assist with the wages of the extra overnight person that is necessary.

So, we invite you to join with us in praying for the success of this venture of collaboration between Congregations. It is a small start, however we hope that it will continue to provide a space and a place of safety and hospitality for some of the poor women of Fremantle.



Left to Right – Bernice Moore, Marg Finlay IBVM and Julia Della Franca RSJ