

**What would it take to have a Free,  
Publicly Accessible, Hot Shower  
in every Community in Australia?**



**A Conversation Starter  
By Megan Buntine**

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## **Introduction**

Imagine, just for a moment, that you have nowhere to call home...how long do you think you could go without a hot shower?

Whether people are homeless and sleeping on a park bench; whether they are living in their car with their kids because they can't find or afford a rental property; whether they are escaping family violence; or whether they are part of the fastest growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness – women over 50 who have come out of a long term relationship with nothing – they all deserve the dignity and the normality of access to a hot shower.

How can we expect people to feel good about themselves if they can't get a shower?

How can we expect people to maintain interpersonal connections and relationships if they can't get a shower?

How can we expect people to get a job and contribute to society if they can't get a shower?

And why should people doing it tough have to settle for a cold one, when the majority of Australians would expect a hot one as one of our most basic of basic requirements?

## **What prompted this initiative?**

Moving around our country I am increasingly aware of more and more people without a place to call home. Whether it is the young woman I saw sleeping on a sheet of cardboard on the streets of Melbourne, the older gentleman I met living at a bushland campsite near Port Macquarie, or the young couple I spoke to living in their car at a grey nomad stopping spot in the outback, people experiencing homelessness are making a place for themselves wherever they can.

Whilst government certainly has a lot of work to do in this space, many of the solutions required will take time and money, and people are suffering – in a myriad of ways – in the meantime.

There are many amazing organisations and individuals across the country who are doing incredible work to feed and clothe people. There are even mobile laundromats that travel around the metropolitan centres, as well as into the outback, so people can wash their clothes. But a key piece of the puzzle that I see missing on any significant scale is widespread access to a hot shower.

Some municipalities provide some options, and some not-for-profits are doing what they can. So some communities have something some of the time.

But nowhere could I find a coordinated initiative that seeks to resolve this issue on a national scale.

So that's when I started thinking...what would it take to have a free, publicly accessible, hot shower available in every community in Australia? And what am I going to do about it!

## What underpins the work?

The fundamental drivers of this initiatives are:

The Vision – What is needed...

A Hot Shower For EveryBody

The Mission – What we can do...

Work to ensure that everyone who wants one, has access to a hot, free, and publicly accessible shower

The Purpose – Why do it...

To provide all people with the opportunity to meet their basic human need for cleanliness and personal hygiene; and experience the health, dignity, positive associations, and acceptance, that go along with it

The Values – What underpins it...

Compassion – Kindness, care, and non-judgement

Dignity – Feeling worthy and respected

Equality – We all have the same rights

Access – We can get what we need



## **What would it look like?**

It's all about empowering local communities to find local solutions that make the most sense for their own specific circumstances – there will potentially be as many solutions as there are communities. And many of those solutions could require little or no funding!

In some places it could involve opening up an existing community asset for greater access.

In other areas it might mean retrofitting a shower into an existing toilet cubicle, in an existing toilet block.

And in yet others, it could mean building a new shower building, or adding a pre-built shower unit, to the outside of a public building or some other sort of facility – maybe even getting the local school kids to paint a mural on the outside of it.

The possibilities – and opportunities – are endless.

## **What would it take?**

The main things it will take for this to succeed are:

- An acceptance within communities of some responsibility to contribute to the solution locally
- A willingness to get involved and take action where you can
- A commitment to keep going until your local goal is achieved

If we can mobilise the key players within communities in those three ways, we can achieve anything.

## Who are the partners?

Local community leaders and organisations are at the heart of this initiative – without them onboard, we won't get off the start line.

This will include (in no particular order):

- Community leaders
- Local councils
- Sporting clubs
- Service clubs i.e. Lions, Rotary, etc
- Information centres
- Progress associations
- Service stations
- Churches
- Men's Sheds
- Volunteer fire brigades and other emergency services
- Health centres
- Neighbourhood houses
- Caravan parks
- Showgrounds
- Swimming pools and gyms
- Community halls
- RSL groups
- Community foundations
- Private donors
- Local politicians
- And more...

And they will each likely have different roles in different communities.

## Who would benefit?

Obviously people experiencing homelessness are the primary beneficiaries of this initiative.

But there will be many secondary beneficiaries as well...

- Joggers, walkers, runners, and other sportspeople
- Travellers going from A to B
- Emergency responders and people displaced by natural disasters
- People with continence challenges
- Grey nomads (who tend to stop and spend lots of money in communities that service them well)
- Parents and carers of young children

## What is my role in all of this?

A Hot Shower For EveryBody is a not-for-profit social initiative I have created in a private capacity, and I see my role as the pro bono CEO – Chief Everything Officer.



My 'job' is primarily about raising awareness, advocating, and supporting creative thinking, to help enable communities to activate (or put in place) this important community asset for people living in or moving through their area.

## Where do we start?

My existing networks extend across Australia from my years of governance and leadership work with not-for-profit Boards and Executives, local communities, and local councils.

I intend to start with communities who show a willingness to engage and are keen to explore bringing this initiative to their area – taking the ‘low hanging fruit’ first and getting some quick wins on the board.

As success comes and momentum builds, others will no doubt see the importance of this initiative and want it for their communities too.

The initial process in each municipality would involve:

- Step one: I would connect with local people who could potentially be interested in an initiative like this (or who are already doing something similar), to have a preliminary exploratory conversation
- Step two: I would offer to help facilitate a round table discussion with the key players in each community
- Step three: I would offer to assist communities with mapping their key locations and existing assets
- Step four: I would encourage communities to determine what is needed in each location, and help them to develop a plan to address their local need
- Step five: I would cheer on the communities taking charge of their local solution and making it happen!

## **What then?**

Once assets are identified and/or developed, they will be listed on a mobile website where those needing such a facility will be able to identify what is nearby.

Templates for signage will also be provided to communities involved, to enable them to advertise the existence of their assets to those who need them.

Media will be engaged to produce stories about the initiative, to build its profile and brand recognition.

## **Why should you get on board?**

We know our country is in the grip of one of the worst housing crises ever, and the growing rate of homelessness is the pointy end of this social tragedy.

So not only do we have a moral duty and a humanitarian responsibility to do what we can to be part of the solution, there is a real possibility that our motivation to get involved could end up much closer to home one day – with our own friends, family, or even ourselves, potentially at risk of becoming yet another statistic.

Plus, if we can take this comparatively small step to help lift others up, our communities will benefit immeasurably as people are able to become more active and contributing members of society again.

## Want to know more?

I'd really like to talk to you about this important initiative!

Please email me on [megan@mjbconsulting.net.au](mailto:megan@mjbconsulting.net.au) to start a conversation and let's begin exploring how you and your community can get involved in supporting those who need it most, with **A Hot Shower For EveryBody!**

I hope to talk with you soon!

*Megan Buntine.*

**MEGAN BUNTINE**



