

Growing Stronger: Junction Celebrates 40 Years of Alternatives to Enforcement-based Responses to Homelessness and Poverty

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At the end of the day, a safe, secure and affordable place to live is at the heart of a person's ability — regardless of their age — to stabilise their lives, to grow their confidence and be as successful as they can be. So for Junction, that's what we are trying to do across our services — help South Australians into decent, long-term housing and support them to sustain it.

— Junction Chief Executive Officer, Maria Palumbo

Long before John Elkington's 1997 book, *Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business*, Junction was thinking about sustainability.

Sustainability for the organisation, built on sustainable (non-enforcement-based) responses to homelessness and poverty. This year Junction celebrates 40 years of incorporation. The organisation has always taken a long-term view, encompassing non-financial reporting frameworks from a social and environmental perspective.¹

As a leading social enterprise, Junction approaches all aspects of the organisation in a sustainable fashion. Chief Executive Officer, Maria Palumbo highlights that the organisation's best-case scenario would be for South Australians 'not to need us anymore.' 'That would be our nirvana,' Ms Palumbo said. 'We are building a model so we support people, some who have been through unimaginable adversity, to overcome trauma, to be more resilient and ultimately, to become independent'.

However, until this end, Junction prides itself on an entrepreneurial spirit and fiscally responsible approach.² Entrepreneurship requires new ways of seeing.³ It is about embracing uncertainty, equipping the organisation and clients to manage

factors that are not known and not knowable.⁴ Fiscal responsibility is at the heart of the business, as it should be for all not-for-profits.⁵ Junction was incorporated on August 1, 1979 as Noarlunga Family Services Board, providing emergency housing and support for young people who were homeless in the southern suburbs. With a mission to 'dynamically respond to changing community needs' and support from governments, the organisation has weathered the storm of service reforms, and the global financial crisis, demonstrating the ability to maintain financial capacity over time.⁶

Central to Junction's model is ending homelessness. Junction dedicates resources to preventative services, providing alternative pathways to crime, incarceration, and the cycle of poverty. This approach makes economic sense. Increased costs attributable to homelessness arise through the costs associated with convictions (police time, court time and legal aid) and higher incarceration rates. Homeless people are higher users of the justice system than the wider population. One study identified that 35 per cent of prisoners are homeless prior to imprisonment.⁷

Legal issues experienced by people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, relate to complex challenges including problematic drug and alcohol use, having no fixed address (for example, difficulty of getting bail and managing legal paperwork), as well as a high risk of recidivism due to underlying mental health concerns.⁸ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) findings⁹ identify that on average, the justice system costs \$200 per person each year in Australia, whereas the cost of justice for a person experiencing homelessness is

\$6,100 per annum. AHURI¹⁰ also identifies that homeless users of the justice system incur expenses at a rate more than 30 times that of the wider population. AHURI¹¹ further demonstrates that with intervention, homeless men incur significant decreases in legal costs apart from prison stays. AHURI monitor savings from when homeless people started intervention programs, to after these programs. In terms of legal costs, the average savings for men was significant. When considering factors such as court appearances and arrests, the data showed an average saving of \$2,030 per person.¹²

Junction has been providing crisis-response services for over 40 years. In the early 2000s, then as Southern Junction Youth Services, the organisation opened its first residential care house — providing a home and 24/7 care and support for children under guardianship who could not be placed with a foster family. Before this, some of these children had been living with carers in motels. Today, Junction cares for 39 children and young people under Guardianship in 12 residential care houses in the metropolitan area. This includes a therapeutic support service to help children process and overcome issues related to abuse, neglect and trauma that they have experienced. Junction also manages two community centres — on Kangaroo Island and at Hackham, and offers domestic violence support and counselling, including specific support for sexual abuse.

Homelessness and the provision of affordable housing remains a focal point of service delivery. Junction now manages more than 2,200 properties, including community housing and affordable housing. A decade ago, it was just 133 homes.



The organisation recognises that as a community housing provider it has a responsibility and an opportunity to step up. This means developing and implementing innovative housing models that enable us to provide more specialist housing for people who are living with childhood trauma, disabilities and chronic illness. It also involves reinvesting in maintenance and upgrades to existing properties. In turn, Junction can drive economic growth for South Australia through construction, program maintenance and direct employment, with our own staff numbers growing from 60 ten years ago to around 250 today. The organisation is committed to community development and working alongside our tenants to build neighbourhoods they feel safe in, they are proud of and they want to live in.

In the words of Ms Palumbo: 'We can and do play an effective role in early intervention and generational change. We work with our tenants and clients towards long-term solutions so we are changing lives not just for a night or a week, but forever — for them, their children and grandchildren too. We are growing strong — which is exactly what we want for everyone we work with.'

Endnotes

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4. Knight F 1964, *Risk, uncertainty and profit*, Sentry Press, New York.
5. Bowman W 2011, op cit.
6. Ibid.
7. AIHW 2013, *Specialist Homelessness Services 2012-13*, <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129545629>>
8. Supreme Court of Western Australian 2017, *Homelessness*, <https://www.supremecourt.wa.gov.au/equaljustice/H/homelessness_print.aspx>
9. Zaretzky K, Flatau P, Clear A, Conroy E, Burns L and Spicer B 2013, *The cost of homelessness and the net benefit of homelessness programs: a national study*. AHURI Final Report, No. 205.
10. Ibid.
11. AHURI 2005, *The cost of homelessness and the net benefit of homelessness programs: a national study – Findings from the Baseline Client Survey*, <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/download/ahuri_82014_fr1>
12. Zaretzky K 2013 op cit, p.118.