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MEDIA RELEASE

Poverty is not a lifestyle choice: UnitingCare West

During Anti-Poverty Week 2017 community service provider UnitingCare West (UCW) is calling for all West Australians to ask themselves, ‘What can I do to make a difference?’

The organisation has warned that unless poverty is addressed through a whole of community approach, the gap between the haves and have-nots in WA will continue to widen.

The stance is in-line with UCW’s commitment to the Alliance to End Homelessness, a local collaboration of not-for-profit organisations and community leaders. The Alliance is looking to harness community support to create and execute a 10-year strategy to end homelessness in WA.

Amanda Hunt, UCW CEO, said Anti-Poverty Week (16 – 22 October), was an opportunity to make people aware that poverty can impact anyone, regardless of what postcode you live in, your work, or family history.

She said Homelessness Australia statistics reveal that 12 per cent of Australians live in poverty - 2,265,000 people, including 575,000 children.

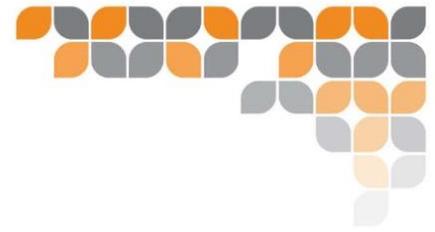
“Poverty is not a lifestyle choice. People do not aspire to live from one day to the next wondering whether they’ll be able to keep the electricity on, they find themselves in that position for a whole variety of reasons, many beyond their control,” Ms Hunt said.

“Every one of us is potentially only six missed pay cheques, illness, or a marriage breakdown away from financial hardship. For many people that is a very sad reality and one that is extraordinarily difficult to reverse.

“Often it’s a lack of support systems and positive relationships beyond the welfare cycle that keeps people from moving ahead to access education, training, housing and employment opportunities.

“At a grassroots level, all of us as a community need to help those living in poverty with increased opportunities for civic and economic participation, to feel connected and experience a sense of belonging.

“On a government level, providing affordable housing options for people experiencing poverty is vital in creating a sense of security and building connections with community,” she said.



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Ms Hunt said UCW's Creditcare service was part of a network of financial counselling providers across WA overwhelmed by the growing demand for support.

In the second half of 2016 WA Government figures showed that metropolitan financial counselling services received 6,244 requests for help, scheduling 3,675 appointments and working with 2,290 clients across 2,209 cases.

Disturbingly, 3,094 calls for assistance went 'un-met' because a financial counsellor was not available.

Requests for assistance rose by more than 30 per cent to 8,654 in the six months to 30 June 2017. Counsellors scheduled 3,580 appointments and worked with 2,383 clients across 2,263 cases. An additional 4,633 clients were turned away.

Clients continue to present with multiple debts and complex issues. Unemployment and under-employment remain key issues, with many people having to make difficult decisions to sell their homes after initial debt moratoriums have lapsed.

"The rise of the 'Working Poor' is another stark reminder of just how easily any one of us can find ourselves at risk of poverty and why it's an issue we should all make a pledge to help eradicate."

People can find out how to participate in local Anti-Poverty Week activities at:

<http://www.antipovertyweek.org.au/>

To register your support for End Homelessness WA visit: www.endhomelessnesswa.com

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Contact Creditcare for assistance: 9220 1288

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