

## Using Tiny Houses to Reduce Homelessness

Rosh Wickramasuriya, Property Officer, AusNet Services

&

Raju Mazumdar, Urban Planner, Projects Manager, Samraj Project and Design

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From This  
<Justin McManus, (2015), *The young homeless woman, 19, studying by her tent in Melbourne*. [ONLINE]. Available at: <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/the-melbourne-teenager-going-to-school-while-living-under-a-bridge-20150601-ghedat.html> [Accessed 26 November 2017]>



To This  
<Tumbleweed Tiny House Company, (2014), *Mt Hood tiny house village* [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://www.tumbleweedhouses.com/tiny-house-lifestyle/tiny-house-community/> [Accessed 26 November 2017]>

The Tiny House concept which began in America, London and Hong Kong<sup>i</sup> has been slowly making its way into Australia. Most people are looking at the concept as a way to combat Australia's housing crisis, by offering cheaper solutions for those struggling to purchase their first home. However, the Tiny House concept should also be used to assist those who have no home at all.

These houses are designed to be off the grid and utilise sustainable solar energy generation, allowing residents to sell of the extra energy generated by the solar panels, as the houses themselves have 'fewer heating and cooling costs'<sup>iii</sup>, thereby providing them with a source of income. Multiple tiny houses could be constructed together to create self-sustaining communities, providing the former homeless with a support base and preventing isolation. These communities would be able to sell the excess food they grow or other resources to the local market(s) for income as well.

In Melbourne the number of people struggling with homelessness has been steadily increasing, with the tent cities in the CBD bringing the issue to light for the masses. Currently, the methods to assist the homeless include going through various organisations such as the Salvation Army, CoHealth and others to donate bedding, clothing, food and other consumables or by volunteering at food kitchens and outreach programs. These methods, while helpful to the homeless in day to day living, do not combat their primary problem of not having a roof over their heads.

However, one organisaiton which is currently offering those struggling with a housing and support program is Launch Housing<sup>iii</sup>. The independent community organisation offers housing and support services, as the organisations is privately funded they depend on others to provide them with the homes for the homeless. To assist the organisation, Tiny Houses which are just **13.75** square meters in size, and

"made from structural-thermal-waterproof integrated panels and purchased online (arrives flat-packed)"<sup>iv</sup>, could be donated . The prices of Tiny Houses start around the price of a car for the basic package and increase depending on the footprint and modifications. At a recent auction in November (2017) house of this type sold for **\$56,000**, in the suburb of Ringwood<sup>v</sup>. Donations could come from money raised via community initiatives, or with the aid of private enterprise or philanthropist's.



<Christine De Silva, (2017), *Tiny Homes Australia's 'High Country' model* sold under the hammer for \$56,000. [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://www.realestate.com.au/news/first-australian-tiny-house-auction-fetches-56000-in-ringwood/> [Accessed 10 December 2017].>

For a non-private option, the tax payer funded, Victorian Government's, 'Towards Home'<sup>vi</sup> program, which was implemented in January this year (2017), aims to rehouse 40 vulnerable homeless in Melbourne by the end of the year. To achieve one of its main objectives, the program is already aiming to utilise housing technology similar to Tiny Houses to achieve one of the objects of the program, with the construction of 30 new permanent modular and relocatable homes on public land.

There are however several factors which hinder the efficient use of Tiny Houses, including,

*Available space and location:*

While the houses themselves do not take up much space, the support facilities (water tanks, solar panels, generators, etc.) will. Without sufficient space multiple houses will not be able to be constructed together, denying those living within a community base.

To allow those living in the Tiny Houses the best chance of getting back on their feet they will need to not only be part of a community but also be located within close proximity to homeless support services, such as those mentioned earlier in the article. Currently most of the areas with space available within the inner or middle ring of Melbourne (close to support services) are being bought by developers to construct apartments or townhouses, which are mainly purchased by overseas buyers, " A quarter of Chinese buying property overseas leave their apartments vacant<sup>viii</sup>, or by those wishing to utilise the short stay market .

*Victoria's Planning Laws:*

The planning laws are themselves restrictive to Tiny houses due to "planning scheme inflexibility and complexity"<sup>viii</sup>. Currently the planning laws are too restrictive to easily allow for a smaller secondary house at the rear of a property, therefore most of these houses are constructed on the urban growth zone in rural or semi rural locations, even if there is room at the rear of properties within the middle ring of Melbourne. Use of Crown Land for housing purposes is also restricted, unless by the government themselves (see 'Towards Home')

One way around restrictive planning laws is to make use of the Tiny House, on a wheel base, which was the type of house sold in the auction.

The reduction of these hindrances could make Tiny Houses an effective tool in reducing homelessness, however it is important to note that the concept will only work on the small scale, it is not a complete solution to the state of homelessness in Melbourne and would need to be paired with other governmental initiatives.

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<sup>i</sup> <<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/aug/25/tiny-houses-micro-living-urban-cities-population-newyork-hongkong-tokyo>>

<sup>ii</sup> <<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/mar/30/could-tiny-houses-help-solve-australias-affordable-housing-crisis>, the Guardian, Thursday 30th March 2017>

<sup>iii</sup> <<https://www.launchhousing.org.au/>>

<sup>iv</sup> <<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/mar/30/could-tiny-houses-help-solve-australias-affordable-housing-crisis>, the Guardian, Thursday 30th March 2017>

<sup>v</sup> <Realestate.com. 2017. *First Australian tiny house auction fetches \$56,000 in Ringwood*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.realestate.com.au/news/first-australian-tiny-house-auction-fetches-56000-in-ringwood/>. [Accessed 10 December 2017].>

<sup>vi</sup> <<https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/giving-rough-sleepers-a-path-towards-home/>>

<sup>vii</sup> The complexity of housing affordability <PIA Magazine, September 2017, Vol. 43 no.8>

<sup>viii</sup> <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-20/tiny-houses-who-wants-them-and-why-the-conversation/8959734>, ABC news, Wednesday 20th September>