



National Squalor Conference 5 November 2009

Public places - private issues: Helping rough sleepers in squalor



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Public places - private issues: Helping rough sleepers in squalor



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Some definitions

- Rough Sleeping (not every rough sleeper lives in squalor)
- Squalor and hoarding when sleeping rough
Conditions anyone would find unacceptable
Squalor Checklists; bedroom? & bathroom?
- Self-neglect when sleeping rough
- Squalor and hoarding in a refuge

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Balancing the rights of all people to be in public places, while respecting the right of communities to live in a safe and peaceful environment. Principle that people will not be harassed or moved on from public places unless there is a threat to security, their personal safety or if they are causing a breach of the peace.

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Relationship with the person is key

• Purpose of your intervention

- How we approach to person;
- build a relationship (note those in squalor or hoard tend to stay in one place);
- Focus on the person's health & safety first, amenity is secondary
- Rough sleepers are given time to become familiar with the rules

• Action informed by the current situation

- flexibility when the person is unwell (physical & psychological) on a planned clean up
- Intoxication

• Regular, predictable visits

- Plan visits and clean ups when person is most likely to be responsive.
- Rough sleepers are notified of scheduled visits to the area (e.g. every Friday morning)
- Give notice before planned clean ups

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Relationship with the person is key



•Consistency in attitude, behaviour & rules

- Go regularly with the same attitude and rules
- All agencies should have the same approach (note that welfare services; police & council have different responsibilities and priorities so these differences need to be dealt with before making arrangements with a rough sleeper)

•Set limits

- To increase cooperation any limits set should avoid variation from visit to visit
- Have agreed standards on what's permissible
 - Health (e.g. no rotting food; proper disposal of sharps)
 - Hygiene (e.g. no defecating on public land)
 - Size of hoard (e.g. use of photos to show size; what will fit in a square metre)
- Replace necessities (bedding, clothing) if removed for health or safety reasons

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Relationship with the person is key



- Short lead times for agreed clean ups
 - Recommend one week (Shorter times may be required for Health & Safety reasons)
- Reward positive behaviour
 - Compliments, shopping, transport as appropriate
- Flexibility and persistence
 - Look for new solutions to entrenched problems (e.g. found storage for material that a person refused to part with; supplied bags for storage which made things look tidy)
 - Ensure the standards are met on that day (where possible e.g. prioritise ill health)
- Consent
 - Have the rough sleeper acknowledge the need for a reduction/clean
 - Always get rough sleepers to agree with what's removed (if it's not abandoned or critical safety issue).

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Ethical and legal questions

- Removal of objects from a public place (theft)
- Removal of personal items

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Partnerships

- NGOs
- Cleansing; Lighting; Footway; Fencing (City of Sydney)
- Police
- Mental Health
- Physical Health
- Local (housed) residents

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Some successful cases



• Couple rough sleeping in squalor

– Before;

- Always an argument about reduction and cleansing
- Was more than 6 cubic metres included rotting food & rotting clothing, foul stench

– Intervention (about 8 weeks (4-5 visits per week) from argument to cooperation)

- Agreed on permissible amount (2 cubic metres stacked neatly; in bags)
- Any health risk (rotting food, soiled clothing) or loose material removed. (no roof)
- Bedding to rolled neatly and moved twice per weeks for cleaning
- They decide what is to go to bring it to allowable level (empowers them)

– After

- Now tidy, no foul odour (local community & police accept the standard of tidiness)
- Now ask for unscheduled reduction

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Some successful cases



- Self-neglect & squalor

- Before;

- Rotten mess; defecate in sleep area; fed rats and pigeons where he slept, foul stench
- Exceptionally poor personal hygiene (soiled clothing; bleeding skin infection, foul odour)

- Intervention (from foul mess to acceptable standards in 3 weeks 4 visits per week)

- Reductions and cleansing decided by council and he was given choice on what bedding to keep. Permitted two bags of clothing and he decided what to keep.
- Any household items removed (e.g. VCR but no power)
- Health risk (dead animals; rotten food) must be removed
- Local residents gave food & he was asked to refuse what he couldn't use that day.

- After

- Now housed. Went to hospital (poor health) then housed.
- Not living squalor. Excellent personal hygiene

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Some successful cases



• Pizza Boxes

- Before;
 - Collected food scraps; waste litter (pizza boxes; plastic bags; food wrapper)
 - Poor toilet habits but toilet separated from sleeping area, very dirty bedding and clothing
- Intervention (from foul mess to acceptable standards in 1 week 4 visits per week)
 - Gave option for self management of squalor and he collected more
 - So then agreed on limit (excepting health risk) and tidiness (e.g. in bags)
 - All material (other than agreed) was removed. Empowered and cooperative when given choice on what to keep.
 - Reductions twice weekly and each time it was a difficult negotiation
- After
 - Was keeping to agreed tidiness standards.
 - Now left location after being assaulted.

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Some successful cases



• Still friends after Guardianship

- Before; was evicted for extreme squalor “worst ever” including collection of **dead animals**
 - Hoard (indiscriminate collection but neat) on the street was about 8m³ (filled a truck)
 - Hoard on the street became a safe haven for vermin (including rats)
- Intervention (6 weeks from uncontrolled hoard to following limits [size & content])
 - Extremely vulnerable woman over 60yo; first priority develop relationship
 - After about 6 weeks agreed to reduction; minor conflict during weekly reductions to 3m³
 - Rewards for cooperation: shopping & compliments. She chooses what’s kept in limit
 - Any health risk (dead animals, soiled clothing) immediately removed
 - Agreed to Guardianship. (Will help support agencies manage collecting when housed)
- After
 - Now buries dead animals she finds rather than collects them
 - Managing the hoard size and vermin risk

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Some successful cases



- Self-neglect & squalor; eviction; getting back on track
 - Before; Self-neglect & squalor led to eviction; then squalor on street
 - Regular admission to Accident & Emergency (A&E) Centres across Sydney; routinely engaged when impatient then disengaged & returned to squalor
 - Continual intoxication and extreme self-neglect & squalor; extremely vulnerable
 - Intervention (8 weeks from self-neglect and squalor to sobriety)
 - Establish single central support, I-CHOSS (used every A&E and still homeless)
 - All connections across Sydney A&E Centres advised of plan to contact I-CHOSS.
 - Assessed and new plan for housing created
 - After
 - Sober for several months; Actively planning for housing
 - Agreed to limits while in shelter

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Thanks, any questions?

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