



MEDIA RELEASE

“Disastrous” homelessness impact on women with disabilities

(Sydney – Thursday, 9th December) Homelessness is having a disastrous impact on women with disabilities, according to new research by the UNSEEN Project.

UNSEEN is led by social documentarian Belinda Mason (BLUR Projects), in collaboration with the Women’s Electoral Lobby NSW, and has been designed with women to tell real stories of some of the State’s 15,000 homeless women. It provides a unique platform for women of all ages to share their true experiences.

Artist and Paralympian, Caitlin*, 44, became homeless in February 2020 when floodwater engulfed her home, badly damaging the property and taking with it much of her prized possessions. She said finding suitable temporary accommodation was near impossible.

“My home was no longer habitable. The difficulty was, within the context of insurance I was simply a name and an insurance claim number. This process meant I had to advise, explain, and justify my disability access needs in relation to arranging accessible accommodation every single time,” Caitlin said.

This week Caitlin brings her canvas to the UNSEEN Arts Hub which she hopes will help people understand the diversity of people who become homeless, and why.

“Homelessness does happen to women with disability and exacerbates disability. It’s a complete blind spot because it is seen as too hard or not relevant to a particular issue like homelessness. People have a naive view that women with disability are looked after and protected, we are not,” Caitlin added.

“It is so hard to share story because I never thought I would become a statistic any more than what I was already – being a woman with physical disability, cerebral palsy. The impact homelessness has on people with disabilities can be disastrous, and it’s an issue often overlooked, we are just swept under the carpet and some hope that we go away.”

The UNSEEN Project features a small mobile cottage and car, located at Circular Quay as an art installation and performance space, sharing the unique experiences of thousands of women in NSW who have had to endure homelessness. The house highlights the lack of affordable private rental and social housing, while the car exposes the hidden nature of women’s homelessness. This month’s art installation at Circular Quay continues until December 23rd before moving into regional NSW in the new year.

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"Women feel shame in coming forward, therefore they are invisible and uncounted. This is even more complex for women with disability. Changing attitudes around who becomes homeless and why is the first step in breaking the silence women maintain through shame, fear and stigma," said Blue Projects social documentarian Belinda Mason.

"The recent *Home at Last* report refers to disability mainly in terms of aged-related disability. The report speaks about people with disability as competitors to older people seeking accessible and affordable housing, but it does not speak to the needs of women with disability who also become older women. Too many times women with disability, are left out of, or placed on the fringes of conversations about social change."

Nationally, more than 50,000 Australian women are homeless and another 400,000 over 45 are at risk of becoming homeless. Older women are the fastest growing group of homeless people in Australia. In NSW, between 2011 and 2016 the number of women aged 55 and over experiencing homelessness increased by 48% and the number aged between 65 and 74 experiencing homelessness increased by 78%.

"There is not enough support for women with disability to allow them to establish a sense of belonging when they face housing insecurity and homelessness," said Monique Wiseman, Senior Aboriginal Project Officer, Homelessness NSW.

"In some ways, it is half a commitment because only one aspect of a women's identity - being disability - is supported. Recognising the diversity and complexity of financial abuse, domestic violence, and discrimination which women with disability are exposed to when facing housing insecurity and homelessness should be taken into consideration when supporting their needs. Whether women with disability have access to the NDIS or not, there is not clear a pathway to support women with disability seeking safe and accessible housing."

ENDS

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**Caitlin is a pseudonym used for safety reasons. Sadly, the need to protect identity is the case for many women with disability and part of their inability to speak out for fear of being judged, patronised, and bullied due to covert and overt ableism. Hence, UNSEEN is providing an opportunity for women with disability to have their stories heard in a safe environment.*

The UNSEEN project is led by internationally recognised social documentarian Belinda Mason of Blur Projects. The Women's Electoral Lobby has established a portal through the National Foundation for Australian Women to facilitate tax-deductible donations for the UNSEEN Project at <https://nfaw.org/preferred-donors/#1616555139473-bab9be84-4175> and for the Women Ageing Well campaign at <https://nfaw.org/preferred-donors/#1616555330800-3a19a6b1-70e3>.

If you, or anyone you know, needs support please contact the below services:

- *Link2Home: 1800 152 152*
- *1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732*
- *People With Disability Australia: 1800 422 015*
- *Lifeline: 13 11 14*

To find out more about UNSEEN, visit <https://unseen.house/>