

Social Innovation to Solve Homelessness: Wicked Solutions for Wicked Problems

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Social Innovation and Homelessness: Wicked Solutions for Wicked Problems

ABSTRACT

Homelessness is a complex problem that manifests in all societies. This intractable and ‘wicked’ issue resists single-agency solutions and its resolution requires a large, on-going investment of financial and professional resources that few organisations can sustain. This paper adopts a social innovation framework to examine government and community sector responses to homelessness. While recent evaluations and policy prescriptions have suggested better integrated and more co-ordinated service delivery models for addressing homelessness, there is little understanding of the innovation framework in which alternative service system paradigms emerge. A framework that identifies and explains different innovation levels is put forward. The framework highlights that while government may lead strategic level innovations, community organisations are active in developing innovation at the service and client level.

Introduction

Governments are heavily engaged in developing social responses to address intractable, complex problems such as poverty, homelessness, drug addiction and crime. However, long term resolution of these problems or ‘wicked’ issues through government policy making and state-based programmatic action has been elusive. In order to make inroads into resolving these and other wicked issues, attention has been turned to ‘joined-up’ or integrated approaches to securing better social outcomes for citizens and is a policy that has been invested with considerable ongoing resourcing, attention and expectation. In the 1990s there were repeated and extensive calls for integrated services (Konrad, 1996; Waldfoegel, 1997) and, as Peters (1998: 295) put forward, a searching for the ‘holy grail’ of full integration through co-ordinated action and horizontal relations. The issue of homelessness is one of the policy and programmatic targets of the appeal for greater integration of social services by public and community providers to alleviate homelessness and innovation to change conventional approaches that have failed to provide sustained solutions for those without shelter.

It is suggested that while there is a well advanced agenda with the intent for integration, collaboration and partnership working, the frameworks and models for undertaking this joint action are not well understood and have not been fully developed or evaluated (Keast and Brown, 2006). This lack of alignment between policy intent and programmatic achievement has also been a feature of the homelessness service system.

Homelessness is a critical area to examine for progress with developing new approaches for resolving ‘wicked’ issues, as housing is considered a basic right for all citizens (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2008) and homelessness is a problem that has outweighed the resources and policy intent dedicated to it by traditional ‘emergency’ service delivery approaches (Culhane and Metraux 2008). Homelessness is a social issue that affects many individuals including young people, those with mental

illness, drug and alcohol problems or a history of family violence. Recent research has also identified that the traditional groups confronted by a lack of shelter has expanded to include new categories such as family homelessness brought on by rental shortage and financial stress (Eardley, 2008). This widening of the domain of homelessness has severely strained the ability of governments and the community sector to deal effectively with people who are homeless or those at risk of being homeless.

This paper examines integration approaches to resolving the wicked issue of homelessness through applying a framework of social innovation to understand whether or not the calls for integration have yielded identifiable innovative responses within the homeless services system. As such, recommendations for new and innovative mechanisms for joint action and partnership between a range of parties in the government and the community sector may evidence ways of harnessing the innovative capacity of both these sectors to resolve complex problems.

For Mulgan (2006), social innovation involves “innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly diffused through organisations whose primary purposes are social.” It is contended that responding to homelessness is centred on meeting a complex social need for the sustained provision of shelter and the focus of organisations involved in addressing homelessness are primarily social especially with regard to ameliorating social and economic disadvantage of being without shelter and, as such, this constellation of ‘social’ organisations and outcomes fits with the definitional parameters of social innovation.

In line with Osborne and Brown (2005), who argue that innovation may occur in different organisational and sectoral levels and layers and thus may involve the development and/or adoption of new products, services, processes and systems, it is acknowledged that innovation in the homelessness arena may also occur at all levels. Innovation levels may range from new client services through to systems change in terms of the ability to establish a new underlying paradigm for the operation of the service system.

However, it is unknown whether innovation is distributed throughout the homeless service system and if so, which of the levels, parties or types of arrangements involved in homeless services can be considered innovative. The research question considers whether there are first, initiatives and programs in developing integrated approaches to service delivery can be considered successful social innovations and second, whether innovation capacity in terms of responses to homelessness by community sector organisations may be arrayed within a coherent framework of innovation levels.

A case study of the suite of policies and programs in one jurisdiction in Australia is used to illustrate the multiplex issues in developing joined up or integrated responses to resolving homelessness and to determine whether there are initiatives that could be considered social innovations. At a national level, there is recognition that the issue of homelessness has strained the limits of a service system that cannot rely on traditional single agency or lone organisational responses to achieve sustained housing for people:

The current response is not working. Mainstream services like schools, health services, and employment programs often fail to help people who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness. Services don't always work together and people are forced to go from one service to another to try and get help (Australian Government, 2008)

New responses to homelessness across the globe have focused on proposing joint action between stakeholders including between all levels of government from federal, through to state and local spheres and across health, welfare and law enforcement functional departments together with the community sector (Australian Government, 2008; for US examples see Burt and Hall, 2008, Burt, 2009; and for Canada, Pierre 2007, Sereacki, 2007; and, Scotland, Anderson and Tulloch, 2000). Walker et al (2002) in their UK study, however, found that in the context of the service delivery system for homelessness, although there can be genuine new models, innovation generally consists of the adoption of existing approaches or the mixing of elements based on the concept of 'evolutionary' innovation. That is, there is an incremental approach to innovation, which draws on ideas and practices from other sectors and services, rather than the development and implementation of radical changes. However, it is acknowledged that this study was undertaken around eight years ago and there needs to be more recent empirical evidence added to the stock of knowledge.

The paper analyses a current attempt to develop an integrated approach that crosses over conventional functional boundaries and draws together a broad array of parties to deal with homelessness. The adoption of a new horizontal 'hub-based' model of service delivery seeks to integrate actors across many different service areas and organisations in the homelessness arena. The hub model and the various innovative approaches emergent through increasing demands for integration and working together is argued to fit with the 'connected difference' theory of social innovation as described by Mulgan et al. (2007: 5) in which the innovation itself is a combination of prior experiences and service pilots, cuts across organisational, sectoral or disciplinary boundaries and finally, creates 'compelling new social relationships between previous separate individuals or groups that matter greatly to the people involved.'

We argue that resolving homelessness needs a 'wicked solution' that goes beyond simply providing emergency shelter or each service provider dealing with the health, welfare, educational or accommodation

issues as they emerge. As Rhodes (1997:21 stated, “Messy problems need messy solutions”. The paper offers the results of a policy initiative to respond more effectively to the problem of homelessness. The methodology draws on the evidence a case study to demonstrate and assess a new role the community sector can play in the provision of services to people who do not have sustained access to housing and around whom an assemblage of multiplex problems converge. The paper concludes The range of responses to resolving homelessness jurisdictions across the globe is outlined in the following section.

Homelessness as a Wicked Issue and Integration as a Wicked Solution

In an evaluation of homelessness in the District of Columbia, Burt, Pearson and Montgomery (2005) conclude that the most effective strategies to prevent homelessness rely on a mix of community and institutional initiatives comprising a range of programs and policies such as supportive services coupled with permanent housing; the establishment of Housing Courts and their effective use of mediation; access to cash assistance for rent or mortgage arrears; and finally, the use of shelter only as a fast transition to housing. In another study, Burt (2009) outlines developments in responding to homelessness in California as focusing on providing integrated approaches to provide more permanent housing options.

Crane, Warnes and Fu (2006), Pierre (2007) and Sereacki (2007) argue there is a need for governments to work horizontally within and across jurisdictions in collaborative governance initiatives to solve homelessness. Burt’s (2009) study of initiatives to resolve homelessness for people who are mentally ill in Los Angeles found the different groups across the community and public sectors were working together not just by co-ordinating activities and sharing information but developing joint action that was unique in the history of policy and practice in that jurisdiction. Burt (2009) concludes that the initiatives were underpinned by a focus on systems change and efforts for collaboration.

Burt and Hall (2008) found that the efforts to develop an effective response to the issue of homelessness in Washington were hampered by having no sponsor until the election of a Mayor with an agenda to address homelessness, no ‘table’ at which to discuss homeless issues and no permanent housing as part of the portfolio of resources for addressing homelessness, only a reliance on shelters. In their study, Burt and Hall (2008) found that novel approaches and initiatives to offer housing focus on those who are long-term in shelters and reported that those who suffer chronic homelessness require intensive health services for individuals, and that the overall costs to the system are relatively smaller to provide supported housing for those individuals.

Tosi (2005) utilises a case study of two associations adopting a strategy of multi-dimensional action in Italy to determine the role of re-housing in the re-integration of homeless people into community/society. Tosi’s (2005) findings support elements of hub-based model (e.g. increased

connectivity and access to services) along with access to information on paths in and out of homelessness that recognise fragile situations and need for ongoing support post re-integration. Crane et al (2006) summarise UK initiatives in relation to preventing homelessness, acknowledging the need for greater collaboration between agencies. An initiative to not only resolve homelessness for individuals but to end homelessness by providing new housing stock is Common Ground, an organisation that works with public agencies, nonprofit and for-profit developers, to create housing based on a model of integrating mixed-income workers with those who were formerly homeless (<http://www.commonground.org/>).

Despite their variation in context, location and client service level, a common denominator for all of these studies is the call for better integration of services for homeless people. The focus on integrated responses and service delivery to resolve homelessness is a common policy and practice prescription across many Western nations.

However the ways in which integration is achieved differs according to the mix of public, private and third sector parties involved in service delivery and the systems change, integration vehicles and ability to create new approaches to chronic homelessness. Sereacki's (2007) research adopted a case study approach to examine Canadian innovations for improving social housing and also mirrored and supported a hub model in that it provides examples of cases where collaborative alliances were used to reduce costs and increase the pool of resources. The integrated model is examined to determine whether this approach can be considered a social innovation, and what the requirements for developing, improving and extending this framework might involve.

Case Study Method

Similar to other studies investigating homelessness, a case study methodology is adopted in this research (see for example Tosi, 2005; Crane et al, 2006; Sereacki, 2007). A case study is ideal to map the highly fluid and evolving situational context of policy and programmatic responses in specific locales (Yin, 2003). The method is flexible in that policy documents, interviews and focus groups with key informants can be added to the mix of techniques and this approach was adopted in this study. It focuses on one jurisdiction in Australia as a case study of a particular type of integration strategy and is examined to develop an understanding of the complex array of issues that need to be considered when resolving a wicked issue such as homelessness. The case study sets out the overarching policy and reform agenda and investigates a case study of community sector program responses to this policy agenda.

In June 2005, the Queensland government committed significant funding to the *Responding to Homelessness Strategy* (the Strategy). This whole-of-government approach sought to extend existing services and develop new and innovative models of service delivery and practice. Specifically the aim of the strategy was to “create an integrated homelessness service system and to reduce, over time, the number of people who are completely without shelter by enhancing existing, and implementing new initiatives, responding to homelessness and public intoxication” (Queensland Government, 2005).

In practice, the Strategy comprises a suite of some thirty-two initiatives based within these departments developed and offered in conjunction with community agencies organised under six themes that sought to provide a holistic service for homeless people including, legal, health, housing and welfare; increase the stock of accommodation options and ensure the viability of homelessness services.

Funding of was allocated to implement projects that both enhanced and extended the existing array of homelessness intervention and support services provided by the state. Key initiatives funded were service hubs for assisting homeless people, crisis accommodation and an information service, measures to deal with public intoxication and a suite of programs around early intervention services to prevent homelessness. Although this list indicates that an array of services was funded under the Strategy, there was particular interest in delivering integrated services through the implementation of a hub services model.

Case study evaluation examined the impact of the Strategy and levels of integration and service coordination and innovation across three selected geographic locales. Distributed across the state of Queensland, these sites offered different social, economic and geographic contexts for understanding the impact of policy that sought to bring the service delivery stakeholders into a new paradigm and relationship for addressing homelessness. Specifically, the case studies provide an in-depth qualitative view of the selected service initiatives and their outcomes, highlight examples of innovative practice and identify the level of interconnection within the service system, as well as factors that have impacted on the achievement of these outcomes.

Findings: Innovation and innovation capacity

The findings of the case study indicate that community organisations are engaged in a range of activities and processes that are outside of, or which supplement the range of normal practice. It

suggests that there has been considerable thinking and reviewing of action that has resulted in a shift in ways of working.

As part of its change agenda the Strategy was looking for new and innovative ways to enhance and link up services and systems. The case study findings in relation to innovation indicate that integration innovation occurs within different spaces, for different purposes. The existence of innovation in different spaces highlights that innovation is not just about the creation of new processes, programs and services. Rather, it can involve an array of activities and approaches that build on and extend existing services and structures.

Osborne and Brown (2005) suggest that innovation is found across different layers of organisations. The findings indicate that these layers can be identified across a service system. The empirical findings of the homelessness service system evidenced broader strategic initiatives, novel programs and improvements to client services. The results of the investigation into the sector found that that the initiatives could be considered innovations in terms of their newness and social innovations the way that these approaches built into a systematic change for thinking about homelessness. While the eradication of homelessness is still elusive, the hub model has paved the way for new thinking about what is possible for returning people to sustained shelter. The unresolved issue is the lack of housing availability in areas that have high demand for all types of housing. Delineating between strategic innovation, program innovation and client service innovation offers a way of understanding the innovation system for homelessness and the contribution of each element to the overall

Strategic innovation

The Responding to Homelessness Strategy is a good overall example of strategic innovation in that it seeks to restructure the entire system of services to resolve homelessness. The inclusion of departments previously not directly engaged in addressing homelessness helped to garner a more holistic government and community approach.

The introduction of initiatives such as the Homelessness Diversion Courts have impacted at the structural strategic level by addressing public order homelessness as a social not legal issue and focussing on the referral of offenders to support services. This innovation is considered to be an important advance on dealing with homelessness issues.

Program innovation

The findings distilled a number of innovations that coalesced at the program level of operation. Some of these are set out below:

Hubs

The Service Hubs were a new initiative established as the model for service delivery. In essence the purpose of the Service Hubs is to provide homeless people, or those at risk of homelessness, with coordinated and therefore easy access to a wide range of housing and support services within a target location. The target group for this initiative includes clients who are chronically homeless and those with multiple and complex needs. Clients were to be assisted through direct service delivery and/or through referral to other services including a housing provider. The intention was for the Service Hubs to play a central role along the continuum of services including front line engagement, immediate assessment of support needs, provision of facilities to meet basic needs, case plan development and brokerage, referrals and advocacy.

The underlying conceptualisation for the Hub model of service provision was centred on the understanding that ‘joined up’ services were inherently more accessible to clients as well as more effective and efficient. This approach aligns with the integrated service delivery framework put forward by Wolch (1996). Moreover, there was an expectation that the Hubs would become a service location where specialist knowledge and intervention skills would amass, creating a collective service space such that:

The theory was they would be pretty much like a centre of excellence, where organisations come together.

To assist with the process of joining up previously autonomous (and often competing) agencies, a series of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) was stipulated as part of the Service Agreements. These MOUs were put in place within individual hub consortia partner agencies. The rationale for formalising and documenting the relationships between the hub actors via an institutionalised arrangement such as an MOU was that it would provide a basic framework to guide the shift from single agency working to a collective approach.

There was a general agreement across the case study respondents that a co-location model with its mix of services in the one location ‘makes sense’. The ease of assistance to clients offered by a closer clustering of services was considered to be highly beneficial, especially for clients with multiple and related service needs. The close proximity of the venue to existing clients and the

stability of a single place of contact were also identified as providing for continuity of service. As Wolch (1996) noted, many clients become territorial and are reluctant to engage with services outside of their normal environment. Other agencies also commented on the inherent benefits that co-location could offer in terms of stronger relationship building and overcoming agency turf issues. Informants theorised that that these strengthened relationships could be used as a catalyst to enhanced integration which could be leveraged particularly for the more difficult or intractable client issues. On the other hand, concern was expressed that in such a tightly coupled arrangement, clients may be reluctant to raise service complaints and that confidentiality and privacy rights may be compromised.

There was a level of consensus across both government and community sectors and at all levels of operation that good relationships, both existing and those facilitated through the Strategy, have contributed to improved service system integration. However, this was qualified by the view that there needed to be some processes in place that set a framework in place to formalise, capture, and, if necessary, replace relational capital within the sector.

I think on a person to person level, it [service system integration] is working quite well. There have been some good relationships made with key people and agencies. Where it tends to fall down a bit is the formal connections, so if people move there is nothing to forward it, there's nothing institutionalised.

Overall, the perception was that the integration of homelessness services came down to individual people and agencies making it happen. That is, people and services with vision and the willingness and wherewithal to see this vision through to fruition. At the same time, there was awareness that relationships alone may not be sufficient to achieve integration and that more formalised plans and processes are also required. In the non-government sector such institutional arrangements have mostly taken the form of interagency networks.

The hub model of community sector organisations working across organisational boundaries is an example of an integrated approach to developing a response to homelessness. It established a new way of operating, bringing services together to share common resources and avoid duplication.

Alternative accommodation innovation

A clear example of innovation in responding to the accommodation crisis was the purchase of a motel that was refurbished for social housing purposes. The example of the motel was cited as a success story in not only gaining access to more accommodation in a tight rental market, but was highly appropriate for delivering the type of services sought by service recipients and providers. The motel represented a large-scale boost to the resources available to the sector.

Another innovation was the supported accommodation for young people that combined life skills, budgeting and assistance with a tenancy that provided quality furnishings and living space along with programs that offered high level for maintaining the tenancy.

Client service innovation

Operating on a small-scale but with far-reaching consequences for those who are homeless have been several activity programs. Two quite different programs have delivered positive outcomes of encouraging well-being and employment. An Employment Program at a community-run drop-in centre and an Art Program run by a community organisation offer new ways of engaging those who are homeless. The framing of a zero-alcohol policy for participation within an Occupational Health and Safety requirement has eased the burden of a ‘policing’ approach to alcohol and has also had positive results for those participating in the activities.

The employment program is a small enterprise that allows homeless people to earn money by packaging up small-scale building supplies on a contract basis. The art project involved providing an art space and supplying art materials to those who attended each week over a number of weeks. The resultant artworks from the first course were displayed in a gallery and were made available for sale. Several people have been able to continue developing as artists and selling their artworks on a commercial basis.

Mobile service options such as outreach, and mobile services clustered around a client have shifted the service model from an agency to a place-based model which is more client-centric. Tapping into the existing mobile phone connectivity of clients has enabled service providers to better stay in contact with clients and remind them of forthcoming appointments and use these as vehicles to contact other, more disconnected clients. The availability of free calls, including mobile phone calls to a community organisation allows clients safe and more immediate access to information and services. It also acts as a connector between clients and service agencies where previously there was a need for agencies to use resources to identify client whereabouts.

A further example of a novel approach was the way in which organisations maintained access to services for those who are homeless. Those who are homeless do not have easy access to meeting the eligibility requirements of government departments for some benefits, and service providers have been innovative in developing ways of assisting clients to meet these obligations such as providing addresses and assisting with the provision of identification documentation.

Increased innovation and entrepreneurial strategies by very involved and bright service workers does not alleviate the fact that resources are less than the need. Referral sources that in fact locate at-risk early intervention families and individuals much earlier might be better interacted with at the interface with banks, churches, schools, and real estate agents. Whether or not reducing referral sources is used as a way to reduce client access and pathways, or instead as better and more efficient and appropriate means to learn of clients that fit neatly into early intervention classifications, raises philosophical and definitional issues about the intent and purpose of early intervention and the Strategy overall.

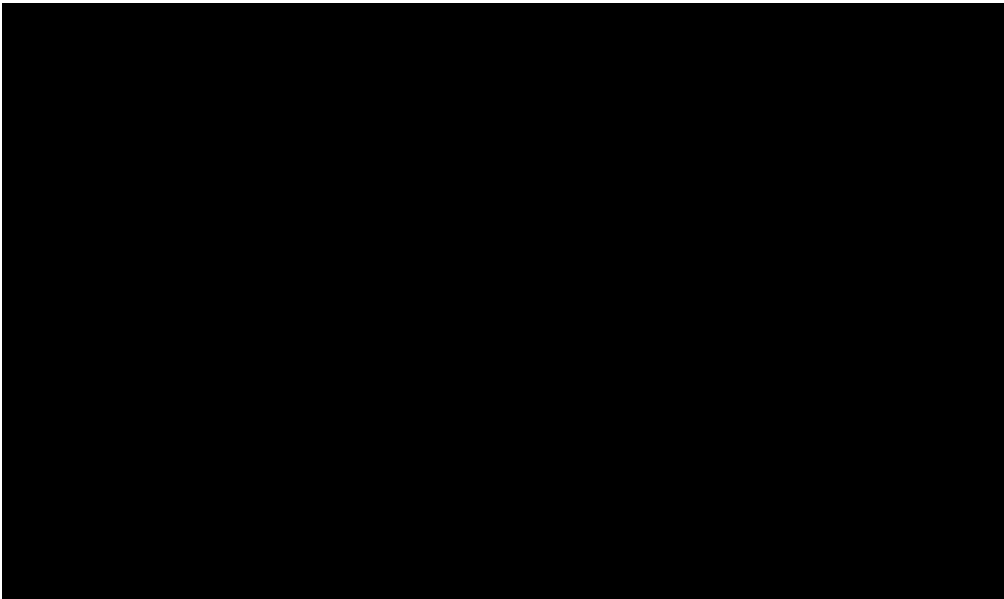
It was interesting to note that when community sector respondents were requested to identify the innovations in their work there was often silence, followed by almost a discounting of the initiatives as ‘pragmatic responses to need’. Incremental innovation is the main model of innovation highlighted. Due to the intractable nature of the complex problems addressed by the community sector, novel ways of dealing with short-term issues have been developed. ‘Innovation-on-the-run’ is the norm for services which have been stretched beyond capacity and still are required to find shelter and draw on scarce resources to not only house clients but bring together the requisite services (health, medical, counselling, budgeting and welfare) for their complex needs. However, over the longer term, the integrated services through the hubs have the potential to develop into

Discussion:

Integration requires that there are changes to the existing system and it is clear that this is not going to happen without innovation at all three levels. Figure 1 outlines the findings in relation to innovation in the homelessness service system. It summarises the way in which innovation could be considered as multi-faceted and operating at different levels. This re-conceptualisation of service and system innovation draws out the distinction between levels of innovation and the effort and resources required to formulate requisite and sustained integration.

As Figure 1 displays, these innovation types occur at the client service, process, and strategic/systems levels of operation.

Figure 1: Integration Innovation Spaces



Importantly, it should be noted that the bulk of the innovation activity is occurring at the client service level. It is likely this outcome is a product of both the immediate need for creative service responses and the funding models that have allowed flexibility and space at the service delivery rather than the strategic level. It is possible this result reflects the funding intent which focused on incremental rather than large scale systems change. This result concurs with the findings of Walker et al's (2002) study of housing innovation in the United Kingdom which found that most innovation was evolutionary rather than revolutionary for the sector. An supports the view of Osborne and Brown (2005) that innovation occurs at various layers within a service system.

The community sector was much less involved at the process level of innovation. Where such initiatives were identified they appeared to be a result of longer term effort and higher level planning, often accompanied by a program champion. Less evident across all case studies were innovations at the strategic/systems level. In one case study there was horizontal and vertical strategic links forged, over time, which deliberately incorporated new actors into the strategic decision making and planning processes. This cross-fertilisation of personnel and expertise was innovative of itself and also contributed to strategic innovation the outcome of which is meshed knowledge and action being directed to the specific region. This sustained level of interaction was not a common feature of the other cases. Creating such an innovation space at the strategic level requires significantly more funding, joint planning and pooled resources. Furthermore, it is highly dependent on an ongoing commitment from all parties to bring the objectives to fruition. System innovation is derived from individuals who can see 'the big picture' and know the step to achieve

this and have the capacity to mobilise people to collective action. It is argued that together these elements create an innovation space to develop new processes and systems.

On the surface the co-location hub model appears to be quite straightforward. However, it is a much more complex and difficult arrangement than simply locating a set of services in the one spot. The moulding of a number of autonomous agencies with different approaches, service foci and ethos into a relatively coherent body is a challenge. Moreover, it can take number of years to build the kind of relationships that support trust and interconnection of resources and programs and this requires additional financial support (Keast et al 2004).

A co-location hub model is characterised by tighter-coupling of agencies. This requires much more effort in relationship building, establishing common purpose and blending services. The literature on multi-tenant service arrangements is clear that such an approach requires more time and resources at start up as well as on an on-going basis (Brotsky 2006). In these models more work is generated through the need to undertake additional processes such as holding meetings, developing agreed governance arrangements and establishing agreed terms of engagement for the participating agencies. As acknowledged in earlier studies, integration can cost before it pays (Leutz, 1999). While the community sector has developed innovations in a range of areas, it is suggested that government has a role in helping develop the capability and capacity to undertake these tasks. Moreover, it is argued that government should invest in developing in-house capacity and commitment to innovate. While innovative individuals operating at the grass roots level are found to be vital for the services system to operate and adapt, innovation capacity remaining only at this level puts in jeopardy the ability to achieve process and systems change.

The aim of the Strategy in terms of developing innovation in services, processes and systems and the impact of this on integration may have been too ambitious. This result is made evident in the lack of recognition of the community and government sector workers in articulating their work in an innovation context. Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that social innovation in a number of forms and levels can be identified. Increased funding and attention has been directed to resolving the issue of homelessness and moving people along the pathway from homelessness to sustained tenancy under the Strategy. There has been a perceived progression from a fragmented response to homelessness resulting in competition for scarce shelter options to a response that applied varied solutions to aligning information, resources and expertise to establish shelter and resources in order for people to move along the pathway from homelessness to sustained tenancy. The hub model and the various innovative approaches emergent through increasing demands for

integration and working together is argued to fit with Mulgan et al's (2007: 5) 'connected difference' theory of social innovation as multiple and cross-cutting initiatives link services and people to provide for new access points onto the pathway to sustained shelter have been evidenced in this study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, community organisations and government working to develop and establish innovative ways of giving people the skills and capacity to move along the pathway from homelessness to sustained tenancy is a key strategy to begin addressing homelessness. Integration and the development of new services provided a strong foundation to an overall improvement to the homelessness service system. New service models have added depth to the array of services and support previously available to clients. These new service models, which cross an array of areas including housing and support, early intervention, service and referral hubs, health outreach teams and court diversion services relieve some of the pressure experienced by existing services with limited intervention options. In doing so, the new services shift the intervention focus from predominantly a crisis orientation and have offered existing supported accommodation services the additional resources and support to better meet the needs of homeless people with complex and multiple needs.

Innovative strategies and practices were found to occur primarily at the service/client level of operation of community organisations. These innovations were created by drawing on the knowledge, expertise and networks of service providers to creatively navigate the service system. From the insights generated from this research, community or third sector organisations may be better positioned through their on-the-ground presence, their ability to undertake 'innovation-on-the-run' and their already-established linkages to bring together elements of the services system to foster innovation. Thus these community organisations bring to the service delivery system a more flexible and adaptive response in areas of extreme social disadvantage that may be more difficult to cultivate for their public or commercial counterparts.

Future research would consider whether additional training, support and resourcing is required to advance beyond improvisation or 'innovation-on-the-run' to a more deliberate and considered approach to innovation. It becomes apparent that for such innovative services, programs/process and systems to be developed and embedded, it takes time, commitment and targeted and adequate funding. Success of innovative endeavours relies not just on developing integration mechanisms and structures between stakeholders but on building relational capital between the parties – in essence the development of 'wicked solutions'. Innovation outcomes from the process and strategic

systems level, however, require the provision of a conceptual space to develop new initiatives, evaluate risk/reward and devise implementation strategies.

For innovation to develop, thrive and be adopted there is a need for an adjustment in current practices and monitoring processes to encourage, adequately resource and make room for exploring, experimenting and correcting mistakes. Social innovation through developing responses to homelessness policy may be considered in terms of a framework that delineates the different levels and innovation type in conjunction with amount of funding allocated and degree of shared resources. Further testing of this model would offer better targeting of scarce resources and a coherent strategy to determine the requisite innovation spaces required to systematically address homelessness.

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