

Groups' uncertain future

WELFARE ORGANISATIONS COULD BE FORCED TO FIND NEW HOME AFTER LANDLORD DECIDES TO SELL SITE



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Two leading Shepparton welfare and advice agencies are facing an uncertain future because of a decision by a church to sell the property they rent.

The Broomfield St house is occupied by Goulburn Valley Community Care and Emergency Relief and Goulburn Valley Pregnancy Support.

The organisations believed they had a long-term home when they moved in two years ago.

Community Care manager Diane Broom said the agency supported about 6000 people a year with food, clothing and other support.

She said she was disappointed with the decision of the Apostolic Church of Australia to sell the house.

The property is owned by the church, but managed by South Shepparton Community Church.

"It is pretty terrible for the clients, the volunteers and Shepparton High School students who established the vegie garden," she said.

Church spokesman Mark Rumble said about eight months ago the community church bought the old St Andrew's Uniting Church to house its charity organisations and as its first permanent place for worship. Mr Rumble said the church had kept two mortgages for eight months and the sale was needed to relieve financial

stress and provide equity for renovation of the new base.

Mr Rumble said the church valued its tenants and their charity work, which was why the decision to sell was delayed for so long.

"We are incredibly supportive of them and want them to continue there, we do value what they do and are extremely concerned for them," he said.

"Any other landlord wouldn't have gone to the extent we have to keep the property for so long."

Mr Rumble said the church would prefer to sell to a buyer willing to allow the present tenants to remain for the long-term.

"We would desire to sell the property to someone who would leave the tenancy as it is," he said.

"We will be fighting with these people to find somebody, we believe there is somebody out there who will do that and that is who we want to speak to."

Ms Broom said the organisation was perfectly located for clients and well-established and having to move could be the end.

"To move out of here could basically mean we have to fold," she said.

Pat Moran said the Pregnancy Support group had moved three times in five years, but she understood why the church needed to sell the house.

"They are not bad guys at all, they do so much work in the community," she said.

"We just hope someone will come out of the woodwork and buy the house and rent it back to us."



Future shock: Sue De Boer and Diane Broom (above) are concerned for the future of their organisations after their landlord decided to sell the house they operate from (right).

Pictures: Ray Sizer



Domestic violence huge problem for court



At the coalface: Magistrate Stella Stuthridge has observed many types of domestic violence.

Picture: Ray Sizer

By Fiona Broom

Spend a day in a courtroom and you will hear case after case where domestic violence has played a role.

It may be a person charged with assault or sexual abuse.

It may be someone whose life has spiralled out of control because they were a victim of, or witness to, violence as a child.

Shepparton Magistrate Stella Stuthridge sees the damage domestic violence causes on an almost daily basis.

"The amount of matters that we see that have a connection with family violence is extraordinary," Ms Stuthridge said.

"It's one of those things that we say is at the core of a lot of what we do."

Ms Stuthridge said not every child who experienced violence had trouble with the law later in life, but it could lead to drug and alcohol addictions and problems with violence," she said.

"It does seem that a large

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— **MAGISTRATE STELLA STUTHRIDGE**

number of people that appear in court tell a story of having grown up in households where there is domestic violence," she said.

"There's clearly some form of correlation — it's not linear, but there's a correlation."

Shepparton's domestic violence cases take many forms.

"Sadly we see what people classically understand as family violence — that is a male partner assaulting a female partner — but we also see a whole range of other variations, including teenagers being very violent against their parents, often we see elderly grandparents being violent with each other, or elderly people being violent

towards carers, or carers being violent against grandparents . . . (or) violence between aunts and uncles and stepchildren."

The number of applications for intervention orders "has increased dramatically" during recent years, Ms Stuthridge said.

While part of the rise could be attributed to orders being easier to apply for and police being more proactive about family violence, Ms Stuthridge said it was likely violence was on the rise.

"I think you would find that the increase is so large that you can't possibly account for it all just from the increase in response, so that worries me a little bit," she said.

Factors that contribute to

the 25 to 50 orders applied for each week in Shepparton include intergenerational poverty, high levels of unemployment and economic stress, as well as isolation because of language barriers or being new to the area.

"Where a population is not well bonded to its community I think you get a higher incidence of family stress and a higher incidence of violence," she said.

Ms Stuthridge said there was still a "huge amount" of domestic violence that did not get reported, particularly that which was hidden.

"It's the family violence that spills out into the street that the neighbours hear, or the family violence that happens down the supermarket, or the family violence that gets so bad someone rings the police — there's a whole raft that's never reported," she said.

"We will regularly see people come in with horrendous histories of violence who are taking action for the first time after decades of abuse."