

**mobilise**

# Mobilise Outreach: program design

Oct 2023

[wearemobilise.com](http://wearemobilise.com)



# — Outreach is our bread & butter at Mobilise

For those experiencing homelessness, it is a case of “homeless, not helpless.” We can help restore the dignity of people who are sleeping rough in our cities and remind them that people do care. It’s often something as simple as a smile and chat that can remind someone they are valued.

Outreaches are the core of our movement- our “point of difference.” The outreach itself is simple. When we meet someone sleeping rough, we take the opportunity to start a conversation like catching up with a friend. What we are truly offering is our time and attention.

We do this because we want to get to know the people we share our cities with and offer genuine connections to people who are otherwise isolated. As we all know, sometimes it’s the small moments, a good chat or smile from someone that can lift our mood for the day.

The initial Mobilise outreaches found that often, it wasn’t food or money that people on the street needed. It was respect, dignity, and acknowledgement as a member of the society they live in.



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01.

How  
outreach began



# It all started with an Outreach

When We Are Mobilise was founded, there were few outreach programs available to people who wanted to drop in and lend a helping hand. After Noah and his friend set out, they found out that many of their peers were also looking for ways to get involved that were outside the norm at the time.

It all started with a group of mates taking donated loaves of bread to people sleeping rough on the street - uncut and without anything to put on them, people rightly refused the gift! But everyone they came across who was sleeping rough invited them to stay and chat, because the social connection was what they wanted most.

Those insights are still the lifeblood of We Are Mobilise today- the goal of our flagship Outreaches is not to provide food or money, but conversations held in the spirit of curiosity and empathy.

*“Never doubt that a group of committed citizens can change the world.” – Margaret Mead*

# — Outreach is built on the backs of volunteers

As individual volunteers, we've been built from a very grassroots position. People have brought together donations, stored supplies in garages, cars and parents houses.

Without the efforts of fantastic people along the way, donating countless hours to run Outreaches, programs and events. Some models say that an hour of a volunteer's time is worth about \$50, but for us, the volunteer's time is priceless- we couldn't do it without them.

*"...being able to see the utmost effect on people experiencing homelessness and the difference you can make just by having a conversation. ... it was a really fulfilling experience, not only being able to talk to people experiencing homelessness but also getting to meet the other volunteers and seeing their experiences, and the whole process was a really great time this afternoon."*

- Hrishi, Operations and Outreach volunteer 2023



# — Outreach is still our main vehicle for people to get involved and break down barriers

Outreaches are a good experience for both volunteers and our friends on the street.

Our main currency is time. What we set out to do is to make person-to-person connections.

We use the term “friends on the street” because on the Outreaches what we’re looking to do is just that: make some friends, talking to people in the same way that you would if you were meeting for the first time at a party or a café.

There is a stigma surrounding homelessness, but all it costs is a moment of time to break down those barriers that stand in the way of understanding the human story behind the statistic. It takes almost no time at all to realise that people experiencing homelessness are people just like you and I, and they all deserve respect and a roof over their heads.

All are welcome to get involved. Outreaches are a low commitment, 2-hour session on a weekend that is a great opportunity to make a real impact.



# — What we've done so far

150+ Outreaches

In capital cities around the country

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1500+ Care Packages

Delivered to our friends on the streets

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2750+ Hours spent

By our volunteers during Outreaches on the streets

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1,000,000 People reached

People we've reached with our message through social media in FY22





02.

What an outreach  
involves

# — An assertive outreach approach involves going to where the people we want to meet are

When you're sleeping rough, you'll be passed by strangers thousands of times a day. People often avert their eyes and pretend like you don't exist. Very quickly this would become demoralising, isolating and dehumanising.

*"I was coming back from a meeting the other day and passed by a guy up on York St. I said hi as I passed by but stopped after about 5 metres and went back to have a chat. I used your theory and got down to his level and said hello again. I asked him if I could get him a hot drink (it was a cold day!!). He said a hot chocolate, so I went down the street to Starbucks and got him one. It was so nice to see him smile as I came back with his drink. We had a quick chat and I headed off.*

*I know it changed my day and I certainly hope it brightened up his as well.  
A small thing but it felt good to make a small difference."*

— NRMA Outreach volunteer 2023

## **All you need is an open mind**

Outreaches simply involve people walking around the streets of their neighbourhood and stopping to chat with people sleeping rough who would like the company.

Having supplies to give out in a care package helps break the ice.

*Read our care package guide for more info.*

## **Be curious and kind**

It's really important to be socially aware and actively listening to people on the street. Some topics may be traumatic or taboo for that person to discuss, so it's important to respond to cues including changes in voice and body language.

*Read our conversation guide for tips and more info.*

# — Essential components of an outreach:

## Small groups

Approach people in groups <4 people.

## Conversation

Bring icebreakers and conversation starters.

## Debrief

Self-care and reflection.



03.

Why we run  
outreaches

# — Social isolation is a major issue for people sleeping rough

We've heard time and time again from people sleeping rough that one of the worst parts of homelessness is being overlooked and ignored, over and over, every single day that you're on the street.

International research has shown that people experiencing homelessness who 'panhandle' on the street describe "being ignored and subjected to violence, leading them to crave meaningful interaction with passersby."<sup>1</sup> Many people in this situation call for more empathy and compassion from passersby- and society as a whole- for people experiencing homelessness.<sup>1</sup>

Social isolation refers to the feeling of being outside of social groups, or a lack of connection with others.<sup>2</sup> Loneliness is often a symptom of social exclusion, ostracism or discrimination.<sup>3</sup>

Social isolation is also a risk factor for morbidity and mortality, especially among those experiencing poverty.<sup>4</sup> We know that loneliness and social isolation can have huge impacts on our mental and physical health and sense of self-worth,<sup>5</sup> and make it that much harder to break the cycle of homelessness. In Australia, people who reported having a mental health condition were more than twice as likely to have experienced homelessness in their lifetime.<sup>6</sup>

People who have been homeless for a long time may not have support from traditional social networks or family. However, it's not right to assume they have no social networks at all. They often form intricate networks within the 'homeless community'.<sup>7</sup> But these networks can sometimes make it harder to escape homelessness. This is because people in these groups can introduce harmful behaviors that limit their access to common resources and support. Also, friendships amongst people experiencing homelessness can be opportunistic and self-serving, making them less stable.<sup>7</sup>

Programs that attempt to increase social ties among people experiencing homelessness can encounter many obstacles. A common response is to build peer support networks. These programs can provide a sense of connection with others, but they rarely provide bridges that extend people's social networks beyond their immediate social and economic environment.<sup>7</sup>

We run outreaches because we acknowledge that social connection doesn't happen in a vacuum. But can one positive social experience – of being included, of fitting in, of being supported – be enough to set in motion a change for the better? There is evidence to suggest that yes, this can lead to positive outcomes for people.<sup>3 8</sup>

1. Tate, A. et al. (2021). 'Even a smile helps': Exploring the interactions between people experiencing homelessness and passersby in public spaces. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 1-8. DOI: 10.1177/0020764021989385

2. Cruwys, T. et al. (2014). Social isolation schema responds to positive social experiences: Longitudinal evidence from vulnerable populations. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 53, 265-280.

3. Cruwys, Haslam, Dingle, Jetten, Hornsey, Chong & Oei (2014). *Journal of Affective Disorders*.

4. Manton, E. et al. (2014). Public drinking, social connection and social capital: A qualitative Study. *Addiction Research and Theory*, June 2014; 22(3): 218-228.

5. T. Cruwys et al. (2014). Feeling connected again: Interventions that increase social identification reduce depression symptoms in community and clinical settings. *Journal*

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6. ABS. (2016). Mental health and experiences of homelessness. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/mental-health-and-experiences-homelessness/latest-release>

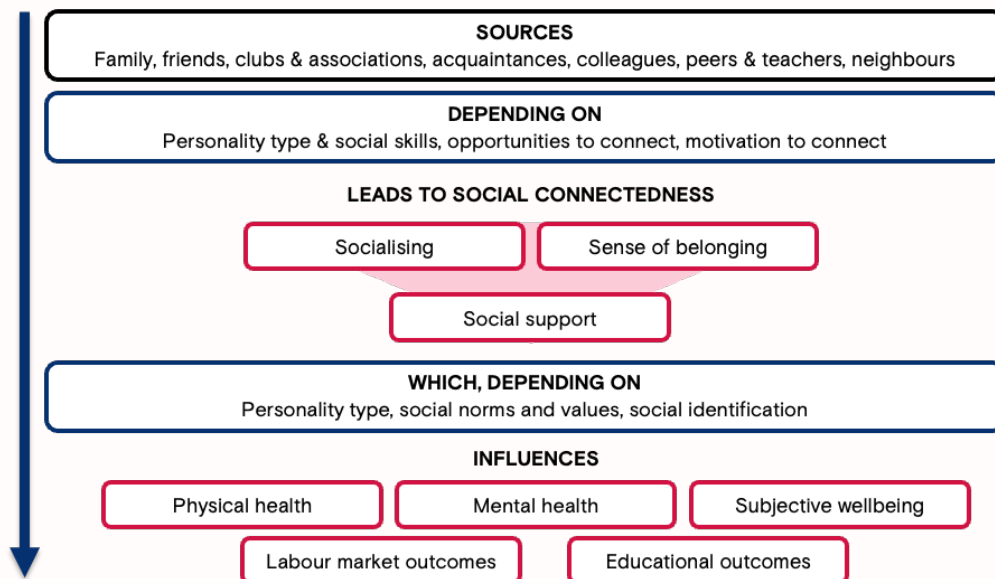
7. Johnson, G., Parkinson, S., Tseng, Y., & Kuehnl, D. (2011) Long-term homelessness: Understanding the challenge - 12 months outcomes from the Journey to Social Inclusion pilot program. Sacred Heart Mission, St Kilda.

8. Moninger, M., Aggensteiner, P.M., Pollok, T.M. et al. Real-time individual benefit from social interactions before and during the lockdown: the crucial role of personality, neurobiology and genes. *Transl Psychiatry* 12, 28 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41398-022-01799-z>

# Positive social connection brings a whole range of benefits for people sleeping rough

Having a conversation with someone humanises them, gives them a chance to tell their story in their own words. In return, volunteers learn about homelessness from a lived experience, and break down stigma they might be holding onto.

Social connection is characterised by having social contacts and regularly participating in social interaction.<sup>1</sup> Social identification involves feeling strong ties to a group and seeing yourself as a valued member.<sup>2</sup> There are three core elements of social connectedness: socialising, social support, and sense of belonging.<sup>3</sup> The development and benefits of social connectedness can be seen in the figure below.



Having strong social bonds can protect against early death and significantly lower the chance of becoming homeless. Connections with family and religious communities are particularly important, while friendships might not have as much impact on preventing homelessness.<sup>4 5</sup>

For those who are homeless, feeling accepted and part of a group can counter feelings of isolation. Positive social interactions can act as support structures, enabling them to establish new social groups.<sup>2</sup>

In a meta-analysis of 148 studies, having good social relationships was found to be as beneficial to longevity as quitting smoking.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, poor social relationships were more dangerous than heavy drinking.<sup>1</sup> You don't need a lot of social connection to get these benefits; there's not much difference in death rates between moderate and highly social people.<sup>1</sup>

However, quality matters more than quantity in social interactions. There's a big psychological difference between simply attending social activities and seeing yourself as a valued group member. So, social isolation isn't just about how much you socialise, but how much belonging or affiliation you feel from these interactions.<sup>6</sup>

1. Manton, E. et al. (2014). Public drinking, social connection and social capital: A qualitative Study. *Addiction Research and Theory*, June 2014; 22(3): 218-228.

2. Cruwys, T. et al. (2014). Social isolation schema responds to positive social experiences: Longitudinal evidence from vulnerable populations. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 53, 285-280.

3. Frieling, M. et. Al, (2018). The Measurement of Social Connectedness and its Relationship to Wellbeing. NZ Ministry of Social Development. ISBN Online 978-1-98-854135-8.

4. K. CORINTH AND C. ROSSI-DE VRIES. (2018). Social Ties and the Incidence of Homelessness. *Housing Policy Debate*, VOL. 28, NO. 4, 592-608. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2018.1425891>

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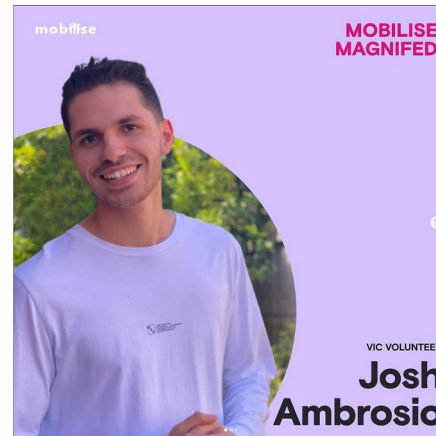
6. T. Cruwys et al. (2014). Feeling connected again: Interventions that increase social identification reduce depression symptoms in community and clinical settings. *Journal of Affective Disorders* 159, 139-146

# — Outreaches provide people with an opportunity to make a difference

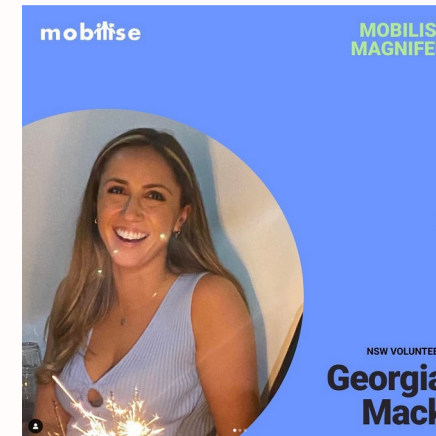
The way our outreaches are designed means there are few barriers to people taking part and making an impact. Outreach volunteers consistently describe how the experience breaks down stigma they held or helped them overcome apprehension toward sharing time and conversation with people from a different part of their community.



*"Mobilise's Outreach program provides the tools and the environment to break down barriers, have conversations, listen and connect."*



*"Outreach is something impactful. Connecting and learning about the experiences of others not only allows others to be heard, but it gives you perspective to challenge your assumptions and learn something meaningful in the process."*



*"Volunteering with Mobilise over the last couple of years has been so incredibly eye-opening. The people I have been fortunate to meet have had such a positive impact on my life."*

# — Outreaches aim to not only meet immediate, practical needs, but develop deeper social connection

## SITUATION

- Homelessness is a pervasive issue in Australia and has increased by 13.7% in the last 5 years
- A key by-product of homelessness is social exclusion or isolation, which has a range of negative impacts on health and wellbeing
- People who are more socially connected are less likely to suffer from harmful stress and mental ill-health<sup>8</sup>
- People experiencing homelessness desire respect and dignity

## INPUTS

- Care packages
- Volunteer & staff time
- Donations/ funding
- Organisational partnerships
- Online platforms, promotional material

## ACTIVITIES

- Sourcing supply donations
- Packing and stocking care packages
- Delivering care packages/ items to people sleeping rough
- Conversations with people sleeping rough
- Volunteer debrief and reflection
- Data collection & impact reporting

## OUTPUTS

- People experiencing homelessness receive essential items and details of relevant health & support services
- People experiencing homelessness are provided opportunities for positive social interaction
- Feedback and data
- Social & other media collateral
- Additional organisational partnerships
- Volunteer recruitment

## OUTCOMES

### Short term

- Functional needs of people sleeping rough are met
- People sleeping rough regularly socialise with We Are Mobilise volunteers
- Volunteers build their understanding of homelessness
- People in the general community are encouraged to develop potential solutions to issues relating to homelessness

### Medium term

- People experiencing homelessness feel more social connectedness with volunteers outside their typical social and support networks
- Outreach experiences and stories of lived experience inform We Are Mobilise storytelling and operations
- Volunteers promote their understanding of homelessness throughout their networks
- Volunteers take advantage of pathways for skill development as Outreach Coordinators or volunteers or staff in other business areas

### Long term

- People sleeping rough increase social identification with the broader Australian community
- Volunteers become change agents for homelessness prevention
- We Are Mobilise embeds Outreach insights into program development to prevent homelessness



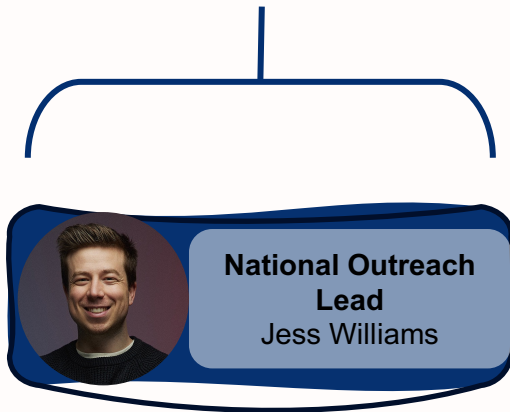
04.

Governance and  
administration

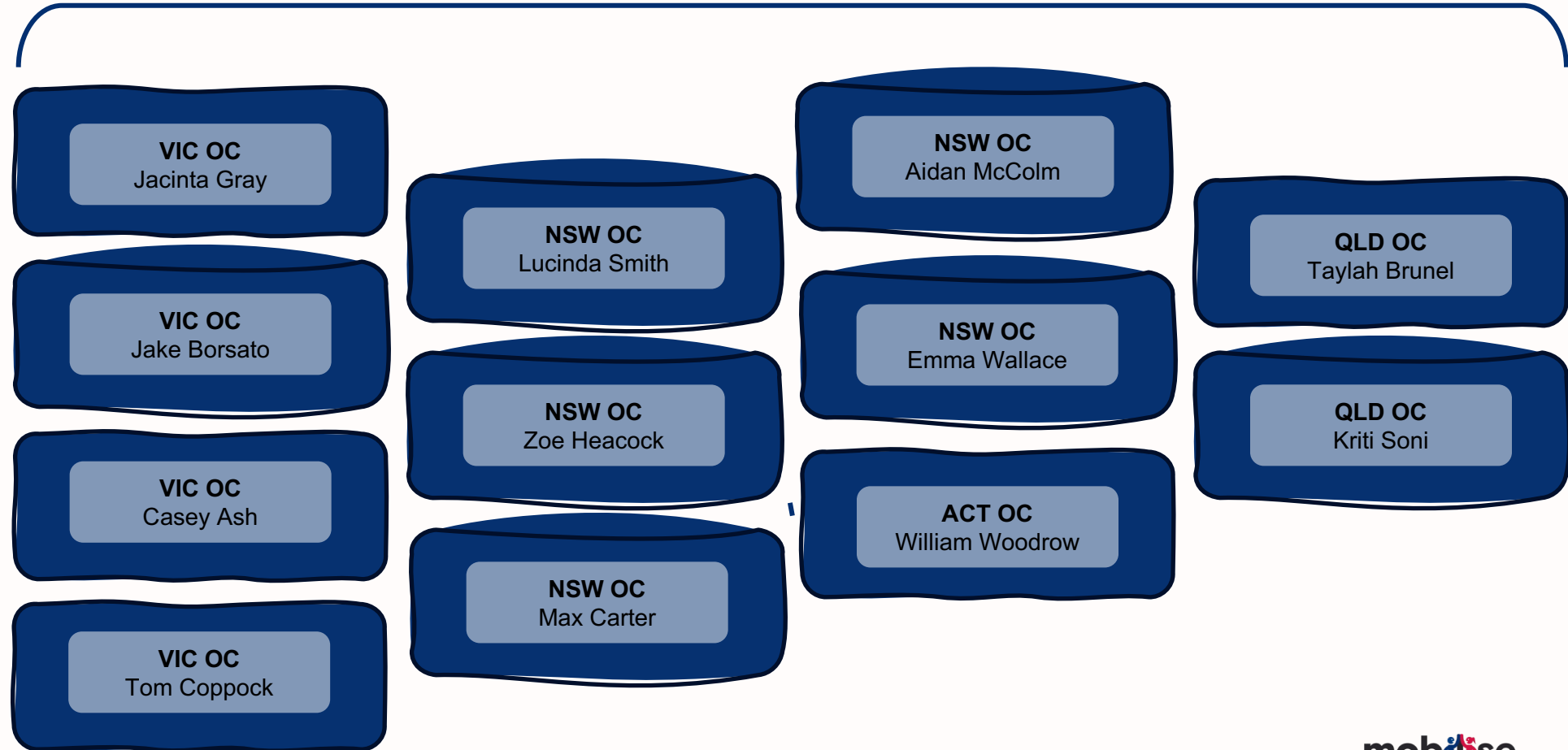
# Teams around the country are supported by a central role

Our National Outreach Lead recruits, trains, and oversees the activities of Outreach Coordinators (OCs), and collects data and insights to share through our storytelling platforms.

Outreach Coordinators are responsible for scheduling, organising and leading regular outreach events in capital cities. They facilitate discussion and debrief for every event, and contribute to inventory supply management (names current at Oct 2023).



Jess has been a long-time volunteer with We Are Mobilise, leading Outreaches since 2021. He came on board as National Outreach Lead in late 2022 and has led the expansion into other states.



# — Outreach Coordinators are responsible for organising and leading outreaches

The key areas of responsibility for Outreach Coordinators are outlined below.



## Outreach

- Run outreach activities each month, including briefing and debriefing volunteers during the outreach.
- Liaise with volunteers & the National Outreach Coordinator to ensure volunteer and team leader commitments.
- Review of outreach processes, to improve the experience for both the Mobilise members and our friends on the streets.



## Resources

- Prepare care packages in advance for each outreach with clothes, hygiene products, food, and water.
- Storage of outreach resources in preparation for monthly outreaches.
- Ongoing stocktake of outreach resources, following established inventory procedures reporting when storage levels are low to request more supplies.



## People

- Build strong relationships with volunteers and Team Leaders, developing a state level community amongst Mobilise members.
- Identification of possible Team Leaders in current volunteer group.



## Reporting

- Reporting post-Outreach results and de-brief comments to the National Outreach Coordinator
- Reporting of outreach statistics and requests for new care package supplies from those experiencing homelessness.

## WHO MAKES A GOOD OUTREACH COORDINATOR?



The ideal coordinator is aligned with our values and our mission. We Are Mobilise was started as a movement to make a difference at a grassroots level, and Outreach Coordinators are the public face of our movement!

Key traits of great coordinators include:

- Excellent communication, interpersonal, and leadership skills.
- Good reporting, organisational, and statistical skills.
- Experience in team leadership and people management.
- Confidence in their conversational abilities and a desire to help others and create a positive experience for all!

*The best coordinators will understand our vision of a society where no one has to sleep on the street.*

# — Safety and impact measurement are two major considerations for outreaches

## Interpersonal and psychological safety: how we look after ourselves and our friends on the street

Before leading an Outreach, we:

- Provide coordinators with Mental Health First Aid training
- conduct a briefing that is informed from the FAQs that we have on our website, outlining what to expect from the Outreach
- go through examples of how best to interact with the people that we come across on the streets. This includes talking about how conversations can go into more difficult topics and subject matter. It's important that the volunteers know how and when to start and leave conversations.

During an Outreach, we:

- go out in groups of three, with new volunteers always being paired with a more experienced team leader
- encourage volunteers to go outside their comfort zone responsibly and not to approach anyone who they think is affected by drugs, alcohol or seem unsafe
- try to keep conversations positive, leaving the people that we come across feeling better than when we arrived
- arm our volunteers with resources that people on the streets may be able to use, e.g., state services sheet and directories like askizzy.

## Data collection and impact evaluation: how we collect and use insights from Outreaches

Collecting information about Outreaches is critical to understanding what impact we're making in people's lives, for both our friends on the street and our volunteers and staff.

Following Outreaches, we collect standard data including how many conversations we're having, how many items we're handing out, how many volunteers attend, and what the experience was like for first-time volunteers via a very short survey.

The Outreach Coordinators also capture insights from the debriefing discussions and use them to influence how we may improve the Outreach experience and potentially for other programs that We Are Mobilise are developing.

*"We head out on the Outreach with the goal of meeting new people and challenging expectations and stereotypes. With that being said, we never want anyone to feel unsafe, we make it a point to only approach conversations with people only when all team members feel confident and keen for a chat."*

- Jess Williams, Nat. Outreach Lead



05.

The future of  
outreach

# — We plan to expand Outreaches to every state and territory in Australia

By 2025 we plan to have Outreach offerings around the country. Each state containing a dedicated team of volunteers, team leaders and Outreach coordinators dedicated to providing conversation and care on the streets.

We want to have a team of 10 Outreach Coordinators, 20 - 30 team leaders and 100 engaged volunteers per state by 2025.

We hope to have the ability to do more than provide a connection and essentials to our friends on the street. We aim to provide our friends with a network of trusted service providers that we can confidently direct them to. Our programs and referral system will ideally be robust enough so we can offer to help people that we come across in the unique and nuanced ways that they may need assistance with. We do not look towards becoming a full, social service provider, more a way to connect the right players in the sector to help people who need it.

Through Outreaches, we only meet the 7% of people experiencing homelessness that find themselves sleeping rough. By 2025 we want to have an Outreach model that sees We Are Mobilise volunteers assisting those that fall into the other categories of homelessness (e.g., in overcrowded or temporary accommodation).



- First QLD Outreach 2023



# Thank You!



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