



The ‘despair, the isolation of homelessness’: Kerry recounts experience

Kerry Willems hasn’t forgotten the despair she felt at being homeless, even after three years in secure accommodation.

The woman who now lives and works in Forbes unexpectedly found herself sleeping in her car, with no money to buy food, no clothes, no facilities for personal hygiene, and “the absolutely intoxicating fear of being alone”.

“That’s when I realised the struggles, despair, the isolation of homelessness,” Ms Willems said.

In her plight Ms Willems found support from CatholicCare Wilcannia-Forbes and other organisations, which enabled her to regain employment and then a private rental property.

She shared her painful experience recently at a Homelessness Week event at Forbes hosted by CatholicCare Wilcannia-Forbes to raise awareness of the issue.

“Those days are now gone for me, but they will never be forgotten,” Ms Willems said in a speech at the event on August 2.

“It is still very real and can happen to any one of us at any time.”

Before she became homeless, Ms Willems had always been employed, and even owned a successful florist business in Sydney for a time.

Her experience is not uncommon - the number of homeless people aged 55 years and above increased by 28 per cent between the 2011 Census and the 2016 Census, Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows.

Ms Willems is particularly concerned about the rates of homelessness among women in the age bracket.

“I was once one of those statistics,” she said.

Through CatholicCare Wilcannia-Forbes, Ms Willems received accommodation in the women’s refuge, and it was there she “finally saw the light starting to shine again”.

With support from the organisation’s team members, Ms Willems was able to regain employment.

“Once I was employed, I was then able to start applying for private rental properties,” she said.

“I have now been employed for three years with Woolworths and in my safe little home.”

Ms Willems says to be able to share her story means the world to her.

“Sadly, so many people do not have the strength and the courage to get where I am today,” she said.

“I fought my homelessness and won.”

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We respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging



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