



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

**Homelessness**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 31 May 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 31 May 2011  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Dr LEIGH

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

(Fraser) (NaN.NaN pm)

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (16:13): With her voice shaking and fighting back tears, she says:

It is horrendous being homeless. You feel so disconnected from other beings and you feel so ashamed to be homeless. I absolutely believed I was worthless and that nothing would change.

Breaking down, she continues:

I cannot remember the last time I had a place to call home, somewhere I was safe.

Asked when the last time she felt safe was, she wipes the tears from her eyes and whispers:

I cannot remember.

Suzie, a 39-year-old single mother of two, is one of 570 Australians who by the middle of next year will be living in a Common Ground apartment. Susie will have a place to call home, to feel safe and from which to rebuild her life. Housing affordability and homelessness was the number one issue raised when I held a community sector roundtable in March. In the 2006 census around a thousand Canberrans were recorded as being homeless. Founded by New Yorker Rosemary Haggerty in 1990, Common Ground offers homeless people permanent, affordable, safe and high-quality supported housing. Common Ground is about providing stability, support and hope to the homeless where there was none before. Currently, Common Ground has projects in Adelaide and Melbourne, with Sydney, Brisbane and Hobart coming on line next year. Here in Canberra a team of dedicated people have been working tirelessly to provide support and hope to those who are homeless in the ACT through our very own Common Ground project. I hope this project will become an intrinsic part of tackling homelessness in Canberra. Through the project, there are plans to build up to 100 one- and two-bedroom apartments in Reid for singles and families; to provide them with affordable, attractive, well-managed and permanent accommodation; to house the most vulnerable and link them to support services; to offer the safety and security of having a 24-hour seven days a week concierge service; and to provide opportunities for people to regain control of

their lives. I want to pay tribute to the Common Ground board: the Chair, Stephen Bartos; Jon Lovell; Peter Sandeman; Simon Rosenberg; Captain Jennifer Wheatley; Diane Kargass AM; David Mathews; and finally the inspirational program coordinator and the person who has assembled this great team, Liz Dawson.

The last word belongs to Suzie, who says:

Today I have hope in my life. Today I have a belief that I can try everything. Today it is different. I am somebody. It is an amazing gift I have been given, a second chance to build a life I never thought I would have.