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Chamber pledges its support for homeless

THE Ringwood Chamber of Commerce has pledged to support the area's homeless youth thanks to social worker Les Twentyman.

by LEONORA ELLIOTT-BRUCE

With up to 500 young people spending every night on outer-eastern streets, the Sunshine outreach worker was guest speaker at a Ringwood Chamber luncheon last week.

Delivering a powerful speech to the packed auditorium, Mr Twentyman pleaded with members not to turn their backs on the younger generation.

Criticising education cutbacks, Mr Twentyman said the state's youth were in crisis.

"Things are very critical for our youth — economic rationalists have a lot to answer for the state our young people are in."

Young people were being told to "tread water" when looking for a job, and were the "best educated unemployed kids in the world," Mr Twentyman said.

Suicide among young Australians was the highest in the world and crime was an easy option, he said.

"Just about every day I get calls from schools to say there's going to be gang fight after school and we're not talking about knives — we're talking about machetes, meat cleavers and guns — these sorts of things are being forced on to young people through the things they watch on TV."

They were becoming a subculture, Mr Twentyman said.

"Kids can die and no one gives a stuff — if an animal is dumped or mistreated it gets more attention in the media."

"Just the other day I heard of five kids who had died in St Kilda and it didn't even make the newspapers, but if an athlete gets caught with steroids or a horse is hobbled, it's front page news," he said.

Mr Twentyman said the community

had become de-sensitised to the plight of young people.

Doncaster/Templestowe youth housing worker, Ms Kerrie Jackson, joined Mr Twentyman in highlighting youth homelessness as a hidden problem in the outer east.

She said every young person she encountered in her work had come from an abused background.

"They're not just teenagers who have had a fight with mum or dad — they have all been abused either sexually, physically or emotionally," she said.

"People think that it doesn't happen out here — that it only happens inner city and in the western suburbs — well it happens here too."

Ms Jackson co-ordinates a refuge for eight young people.

Last year, 187 youths were referred to the house — 14 found accommodation.

She said there was a critical shortage of emergency housing for youth.

In Ringwood, Mullum place was struggling to keep up with demand, Ms Jackson said.

Five hundred youths seeking emergency accommodation had been referred to that house last year.

"They were able to accommodate one-third," she said.

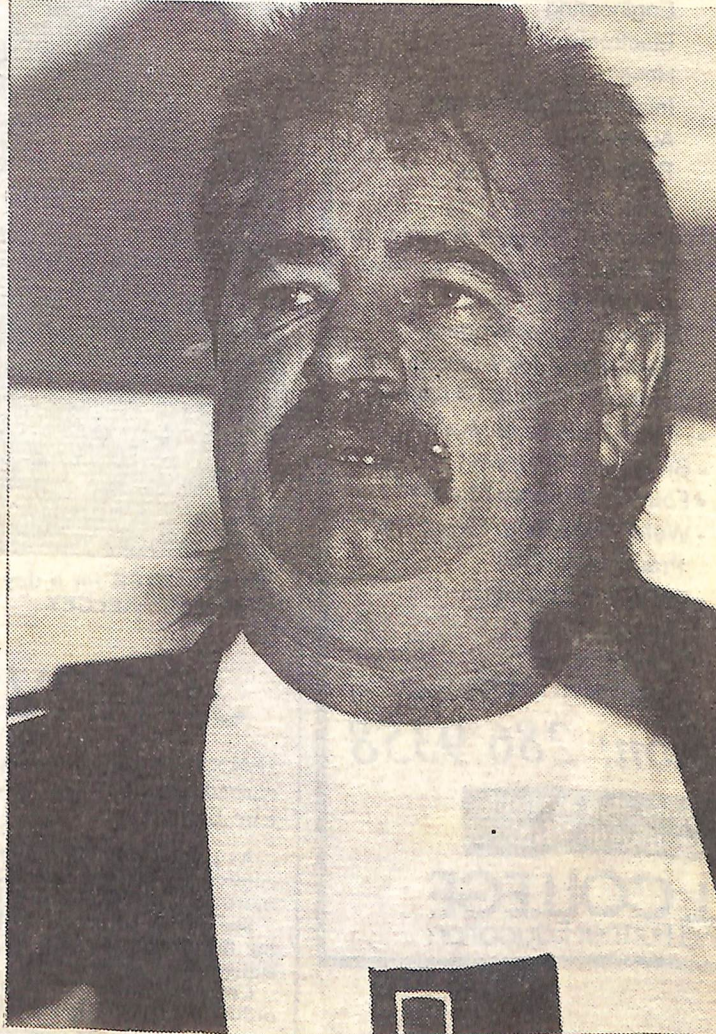
"Why is it we don't believe there is a problem in the outer-eastern suburbs — we export all our young people."

"It's simply unacceptable to have someone sitting in an alley wrapped in a blanket out here — but if we saw someone wrapped in a blanket in the city that would be acceptable."

Ms Jackson called for community support.

"Without community donations we cannot survive," she said.

The Chamber will support youth homelessness in the area by raising funds for emergency accommodation houses.



PLEA for youth... social worker Les Twentyman calls for help from Ringwood business.

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Minor changes for Deakin

THE Federal seat of Deakin, which covers most of Ringwood, has been largely unaffected by changes to Victoria's federal electoral boundaries announced last week.

Under the changes, Deakin lost most of South Croydon back to Bayswater Rd to the seat of Casey but gained parts of Heathmont, Donvale and South Blackburn.

Boundary changes were made in order to decrease Victorian representation in the House of Representatives by one member.

"Deakin is largely unaffected. Most of the existing seat hasn't changed, our changes are quite peripheral," Deakin MP Ken Aldred

said this week.

Mr Aldred said the new boundaries kept his seat within two municipalities along the natural boundaries of the Dandenong Creek and the new Eastern Freeway.

"I'm very glad the community of interest has been maintained and made even stronger," he said.

Mr Aldred said the seat also remained politically similar, with Blackburn South pro-Labor but Donvale and Heathmont Liberal areas.

"By the time you balance the loss and collection on a two party preferred basis it's much the same," he said.

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Housing crisis hits many older women

by LEONORA ELLIOTT-BRUCE

A GROWING number of lone women are forced to sleep in their cars while searching for affordable housing, according to a support group.

The Eastern Housing Association, formed last February, is calling on older women in housing trouble to come forward to form a housing co-operative to help push for more affordable housing in the outer east.

Association spokeswoman Ms Kate Coleman said there was "quite a need" for affordable housing for older women.

She said many were over 45 — too young to be eligible for older persons accommodation within public housing and too old to receive a supporting parents benefit or for a family housing program because most had grown up children.

And private rental costs were prohibitive.

"These women are presenting themselves at emergency accommodation housing groups but because it is a relatively new group there are no statistics.

"Many have known nothing but the family home for years and years and then all of a sudden their marriage breaks down, the family business folds, properties are lost and these women find themselves with their car, some clothes and not very much else," Ms Coleman said.

This group of destitute women had been silently growing for the past four to five years, she said.

"It is really awful — they have nowhere to go," Ms Coleman said.

Public housing was often not an option because of huge waiting lists.

"There are about 65,000 people waiting for public housing throughout the state, the waiting list is about 10 to 12 years," she said.

A solution to the problem was forming a housing co-operative program which would aim to provide affordable housing with security of tenure.

Ms Coleman said the association would attempt to establish a Common Equity Rental Housing Co-operative Program.

"It allows small community housing groups to form co-operatives that members collectively manage, ultimately providing viable, long term, non-profit rental housing co-operatives.

"If enough women express interest in forming a group like this we would like to hear from them and would begin work on it early-in 1995," Ms Coleman said.

For more details ring Ms Coleman on 629-4888.