



SUPPORT: Refuge staff support workers Ashleigh Taylor, Beth Ford, Cath Petteit and Specialist Homeless Service manager Trish Thomas.

Familiar face to help the homeless

By MICHÈLE JEDLIKA

HELP for the homeless in Inverell has amalgamated under the umbrella of Specialist Homeless Services with Pathfinders of Armidale, and local Trish Thomas is in the managerial role to steer the ship.

Trish is a familiar face in local social services, recently working with EACH Reconnect/Youth Connections before the Inverell service folded in late 2014.

Pathfinders Specialist Homeless Service was created from the new NSW government Going Home, Staying Home reforms. Trish oversees services in Armidale, Glen Innes and Inverell.

Within Inverell, Trish is managing the Pathfinders

Women and Children's Refuge for women aged 16 and up, which has been operating as the Inverell Refuge since 1989.

The Specialist Outreach Service provides support for youth, families, single men and women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

"So we've expanded to cover all age groups," Trish said.

Trish said the outreach service was key for people compromised by access to transport, distance, who felt uncomfortable visiting the office or sleeping rough.

"Then the staff would meet them wherever it felt most comfortable for them. And so that is very much going to where they are," Trish said.

She said the approach was a community effort, working closely with other service



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providers in town to offer the best solutions for every resident at risk.

"The rough sleepers are probably the more sensitive area, and how do we go about doing that with other services to let them know who we are, how to get the services to them. So that takes some real-

ly creative thinking," Trish said.

Pathfinders has an agreement with community housing provider Homes North. They maintain a residence in Inverell to give the recently homeless a three-month transition into self-sufficiency. Homes North covers the tenancy responsibilities while Pathfinders offers the support to regain confidence and resilience. Trish felt there was value provided with service's flexible model to empower those experiencing homelessness or at risk.

"It's about how you get the support that you need," Trish said. "That's the greatest thing about being able to be flexible; you listen and you hear what they believe that they need. That's what it's about."