



Government
of South Australia

Department for Families
and Communities

*Caravan Parks:
An affordable housing choice supporting place and
community?*

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The study

- Explored the non-tourist use of caravan parks in SA
- How many residents? who are they? why are they there? what's it like?
- Some exploration on industry trends

- Extensive analysis of ABS Census data
- Interviews with caravan park proprietors
- Surveys of residents

2006 Census

- 5500 people in 3030 CP dwellings in SA
- 28% decline from 2001 (7602 people)
- 13.7% of these households (414) included children
- 39% income < \$500 pw
- 30% full time employment
- 48% aged over 50 years

How many caravan parks?

- We found 225
- 112 permitted non-tourist use
- 104 participated in survey of managers (won't discuss results)
- Total 2313 non-tourist sites (much less than Census – 3030)

Survey of residents

239 residents completed surveys

- **Lifestyle choice:** 141 (63% - cf ABS 58%)
- **Workers:** 46 (19% - cf ABS 30%)
- **Marginally housed:** 42 (18% - cf ABS 13%)

(After Chamberlain & Mackenzie)

Perception 1: CPs are a negative housing option

- Very high levels of satisfaction with living in caravan parks (8% unsatisfied)
- Different for different groups:

71% marginally housed

94% lifestyle choice

100% workers

Advantages

- Most identified multiple advantages (mean 6.5 per respondent)
- Only 2% said there were no advantages
- Advantages differed between groups

Workers

1. Low maintenance (67%)
2. Roof over head (63%)
3. Less to worry about (63%)
4. Affordable (60%)

Highly pragmatic – housing of convenience, easy come easy go, no 'buy in', doesn't matter much

Lifestyle choice

1. Affordable (63%)
2. Safe & secure (59%)
3. Peace & quiet (57%)
4. Friends & social aspect (51%)

Value community & social life; safety & scrutiny; peace and quiet

Marginally housed

1. Affordable (60%)
2. Low maintenance (55%)
3. Safe/secure (42%)
4. Roof over head (42%)

Least satisfied; identified fewer benefits; having a place to live was what counted.

Community?

Friends, social relationships; sense of community; & security (from living close to others) were important for 67%

- Lifestyle choice 76%
- Marginally housed 56%
- Workers 47%

Community?

“I would recommend life in a park – lots of company and meet different people, lovely spot”.

“Everyone looks out for each other, you can go on holidays and leave your home open and it’s still quite safe”

“Living in a park when my husband was ill was good. The support was fantastic. They kept an eye on things and the community rallied”.

Community?

“It’s a good thing for people on their own, always people there for you”.

“Living alone, without developed social skills (I have had a severe hearing impairment since I was 19) it’s less socially isolated in a caravan park than in rented accommodation”.

“Good neighbours, we look out for one another. Don’t get lonely. Always people to talk to”.



But it depends on the
neighbours...

“The people who do best here are those who work at keeping a good community. Ferals, freeloaders, have no place in a caravan park.”

“If someone doesn’t get on with a neighbour it’s difficult because of the closeness”.

“It’s alright if there’s a good community, like here”.



Disadvantages

- Low levels of dissatisfaction
- 34% - no disadvantages
- Far fewer disadvantages identified (mean 1.8 per respondent)

17% no disadvantages

1. Small living space (43%)
2. No storage space (43%)
3. Shared bathroom (43%)
4. Insecure tenancy (43%)

44% no disadvantages

1. Lack of storage space (12%)
2. Park rules (12%)
3. Poor access to facilities (shops etc) (11%)
4. Insecure tenancy (10%)

Marginally housed

17% no disadvantages

1. Small living space (35%)
2. Too close to neighbours (23%)
3. Lack of storage space (21%)
4. Feel isolated (19%)

*In poorer quality accommodation & parks,
there for different reasons, and with
different neighbours*

Perception 2: Living close to others is a problem

Disturbances from others, privacy and problems with neighbours were seldom reported as issues

- 84% said privacy was not a problem for them – especially the ‘lifestyle choicers’ (92%)

“The small living areas create a close bond.”

Living close

1. Who your neighbours were
2. Quality and nature of accommodation
3. Reasons for being there

Perception 3: An option of constraint (not choice)

- “Affordable” the main reason for all 3 groups (41% overall)
- Affordability was usually described in a positive way
- Marginally housed the only group for whom lack of choice was really a factor (*no choice or nowhere else to go* – 35%)

A positive choice

“I can afford to live here and I really like it”.

“My wife and I find this lifestyle the most affordable for our pension payments and the most enjoyable in relation to meeting people”.

“I don't have to look after things like a yard and have maintenance of anything, but I have got my own little bit of land”.



But still, constraint is real

“If I could afford it I would live in a home outside”.

“I live where I can afford to and remain independent yet near family.”

“If I won a lot of money I’d buy my own home”.



Perception 4: Damaging to health

- Self-assessed health status:
 - 21% poor to fair
 - 79% good to excellent
- Change in health status since arrival:
 - 15% worse
 - 66% the same
 - 19% better

Changing health

- For those whose health had improved, the most commonly identified factor was reduced stress
- Decline was usually age-related
- Strong theme of sense of security because of surveillance and informal community support in park

A positive impact

“Since moving into the park I’ve been better in mind, more content”.

“Peace of mind: that’s why my health is better”.

“My health has improved because there’s no stress”.

“When undergoing chemo-therapy, the park owners would check on me regularly and other residents kept an eye on me”.

A positive impact

“It’s easier living in a park with health issues, you have everyone around you. People look out for each other”.

“When I had a stroke someone found me very quickly”.

“Everyone would come to my assistance if I need it but they don’t intrude”.

Pulling it together


- There are significant differences amongst residents in terms of their experiences, reasons for being in a park, perceptions of park life
- It can be a positive housing choice & experience, combining benefits of location, amenity, affordability, community & social support

The “lifestyle choicers”

- The largest group, and the happiest
- Are in better quality parks, with better quality accommodation
- Choose to be there
- Get significant benefits from location, community, social support and affordability
- An attitude of ‘home’



But....

- A “low income retirement village”
 - Financial vulnerabilities
 - Security of tenure and rights
 - Quality of life influenced by management, attitudes and decisions
 - And the neighbours
 - Challenges in ageing in place
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Workers

- A large group (30%)
- Very pragmatic attitude
- Move on
- Location, convenience, affordability,
- Relatively undemanding in park environment

Marginally housed

- The smallest group; the most vulnerable and the most difficult
- Less satisfied
- In poorer standard accommodation & parks
- The group it works 'least well' for

Marginal

- Most likely to be there because of limited choice (relationship breakdown, poverty, homelessness)
- They challenge the community of others
- Generally not welcomed by other residents or management

Implications

- It doesn't have to be bad – it can be very positive
- But there are vulnerabilities
- Challenge is to maximise the positives and minimise the negatives

“It's a mental thing: if you're inclined that way and want to live in a park, it's good, but if you're forced into it, it could be detrimental.”

Full report

www.dfc.sa.gov.au/research/

(Follow link to publications)