



As an organisation, Blessing Bags Melbourne believes the way we speak influences the way we think and the way we think influences how we behave. Inclusive language acknowledges diversity, is sensitive to differences and respects all people.

Creating and maintaining an inclusive culture is everyone's responsibility. Being inclusive includes the way we use language. Language is powerful. What we say and how we say it can consciously or unconsciously offend, intimidate, belittle, exclude, reinforce harmful stereotypes or contribute to the unequal status of individuals.

Language can also have a positive effect. The way we speak to each other can help build and sustain a culture in which everyone can feel valued, respected, and part of the group (included), rather than under-valued, disrespected, and out of place (excluded). Biases, both conscious and unconscious, are often expressed through language. By thinking about our language, and being more aware of our language habits, we can begin to dismantle some of the unconscious biases we hold and the prejudices behind them.

People experiencing homelessness experience mainstream stigma, loneliness and a lack of social integration. These factors are associated with serious physical and psychological health issues.

Many people experiencing homelessness describe how interactions are often framed by stigma. Describing these experiences as rejection, based on their homelessness. This rejection has emotional consequences for people experiencing homelessness, who describe feeling "hurt," "worthless," "sad" and "ashamed." Experiencing rejection constrained the way they positioned themselves in relation to others and their ability to connect socially.

When referring to homelessness it's important to focus on the person, not the circumstance. Using person-first language for example: 'person experiencing homelessness' rather than 'homeless person'. Use language that is relevant – don't refer to someone with their living circumstance unless this is relevant to what you are saying.

Person centered language is a small step, but an important one that can make a huge difference in the way we perceive those experiencing homelessness.