Foreword

This edition of Parity highlights the work being undertaken to reduce homelessness in Western Australia (WA). The partnership approach between the community services sector, government and mainstream services has ensured services have made a real difference to the lives of those who find themselves homeless.

Of interest in this edition, is an article that outlines the history of homelessness funding across the decades in WA and the different focus over that time, all striving to achieve the best outcomes for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

We know the causes of homelessness are complex and that anyone can find themselves in this situation through a variety of circumstances. It is for this reason the responses to homelessness also have to be varied in order to meet the requirements of all those in need of support and assistance to get their life back on track.

In 2010, the Government launched the State Plan: Opening Doors to Address Homelessness 2010–2013, setting out the overarching plan to reduce homelessness. The Plan shifted the responses towards early intervention, a better integrated services system and a focus on breaking the cycle of homelessness. The State Plan builds on the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH).

The State Plan outlines the outcomes and key principles for implementing an improved integrated approach to homelessness and aims to bring all relevant agencies together to open doors to improve the circumstances for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness, as well as preventing people from slipping back into homelessness.

In 2011–12, Regional Homelessness Plans covering the State were developed between local community, government, and non-government stakeholders. The first six monthly reports submitted in March 2012 highlighted that many regions had successfully progressed their priority areas.

The State Plan and the Regional Homelessness Plans are designed to maximise service integration at all levels. This has served to build a strong foundation for NPAH services as well as additional new innovative collaborations between NAHA, NPAH, and mainstream agencies.

WA has a strong history of new and innovative service practice and the injection of additional State and Commonwealth funding through the NPAH allowed the development of new service options. The diversity of WA and the challenges faced by rural and remote services has always required flexible approaches in often difficult circumstances. The NPAH funding has been vital to building onto the existing NAHA services and tapping into the expertise in the sector and establishing improved service integration achieving better outcomes.

I am pleased to report that in 2011–12 all NPAH programs exceeded their targets and services are working effectively to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to:

- obtain accommodation and sustain their tenancy in the long term
- stabilise ‘at risk’ tenancies and address the issues impacting on the tenancy
- remain in their own home following domestic violence when it is safe to do so, and/or
- minimise the impact of homelessness on children in order to break the cycle of intergenerational homelessness.

Key capital achievements under the NPAH include:

- The Oxford Foyer
- St Bartholomew’s Lime Street Facility.

Significantly, an innovative Acute Homelessness Night Shelter has also been funded through the State Budget for capital works and operational costs to establish a night shelter for chronically homeless adults in inner city Perth. This is expected to be operational by March 2014.

I am proud of the progress we have made to date and thank all our community sector and government partners for the significant changes we have made in the lives of many.

Hon. Robyn McSweeney MLC
Minister for Child Protection; Community Services; Seniors and Volunteering; Women’s Interests; Youth
Editorial

This edition of Parity celebrates the work of the specialist homelessness sector in Western Australia (WA). Bringing this work together highlights themes in homelessness in the big state of WA.

However the most distinctive feature that emerges from this edition is perhaps not the first thing that would spring to mind. What stands out about our sector in WA is the genuine partnership between all levels of government and the many non-government organisations and bodies that are working with homelessness on the ground.

The sheer size of the state leads to quite different experiences for those living in the capital Perth and those living in the regions, particularly the most remote regions. Remoteness creates a raft of issues shared by several Australian states and territories, particularly Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

The growth in mining has significantly increased the population and wages in the state and this in turn has had a negative impact on access to affordable housing. This impact is greatest in the mining centres, a problem that is not confined to, but most acute in WA. Indeed, the growth in population, and overall wages and wealth in WA can be understood to be its most extreme form, a model for the affordable housing crisis that currently affects all Australian states and territories.

The Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia and WA have disproportionately large numbers of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, particularly in regional and remote areas. However, Indigenous homelessness is not just a remote and regional issue, as increasing numbers of Indigenous people, like everyone else, are drawn to metropolitan centres in search of employment, services, health care and housing.

These issues of housing affordability, domestic and family violence, youth homelessness, chronic homelessness and Indigenous homelessness are national in nature. The distinctive WA response is an outstanding level of genuine stakeholder partnership. This is apparent between all levels of government with the many homelessness service providers, as well as across sectors including mental health, drug and alcohol and the police.

To some extent this collaborative partnership may be made easier by the significant financial investment by the state government in the work of the sector. Of course this is facilitated by the wealth of the state, flowing from the mining boom and its attendant growth.

Concrete examples of this collaborative work include the Western Australian Council on Homelessness which involves the federal and state governments with the sector. The Specialist Homelessness Services Conference held in May this year, was itself a partnership between state and national Governments. This successful event is another fine example of the willingness to work together towards the achievement of common goals and objectives.

The generous support of both the WA Government and key players in the WA homelessness sector for the production of this edition of Parity, further underlines this willingness to enter into partnerships around homelessness.

This edition of Parity is the fifth in the series of state and territory editions. This series commenced in 2008 with the South Australian edition followed by the New South Wales edition in 2009, the Queensland edition in 2010 and the Tasmanian edition in 2011. The aim of these editions is to shine a light on local policy and practice in these jurisdictions and share those practices across the country.

The WA edition of Parity is appropriately, a bumper edition. It demonstrates that even with big spaces and big issues, genuine collaboration between government, the non-government sector and other stakeholders, is indeed the best way to go.

Jenny Smith,
CEO, Council to Homeless Persons

Acknowledgements

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CHP would also like to extend our special thanks to Sandra Flanagan in the Department for Child Protection WA for all her work in helping to bring this edition together.

Thanks also to Robyn Martin from Curtin University, Chantal Roberts the Executive Officer of Shelter WA and Paul Fiatou from the University of Western Australia for their support for and their work on this edition.

Glossary

Western Australia: WA
West Australian: WA
National Affordable Housing Agreement: NAHA
National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness: NPNAH
Department for Child Protection WA: DCP
Department of Housing WA: DoH
Street to Home: S2H
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs: FaHCSIA
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse: CaLD
Safe at Home: SAH
Hardship Utility Grants Scheme: HUGS
Transitional Accommodation Support Services program: TASS
Introduction

Robyn Martin
School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work, Curtin University

Chantal Roberts
Executive Officer, Shelter WA

Paul Flatau
Director of the AHURI Research Centre, University of Western Australia and Director of the UWA Business School Centre for Social Impact

It gives us great pleasure to introduce the first ever Western Australian edition of Parity. This is a bumper edition showcasing top quality homelessness services and programs within WA. The edition covers three main themes — the policy framework, service delivery and practice responses, and the major issues we face in responding to homelessness. Western Australia is a unique state in terms of size, distance, diversity of population, resources and culture.

This edition draws our attention to how these factors shape the lived experience of homelessness. Some of the specific responses discussed include regional homelessness plans, location specific iterations of national programs like Street to Home and the close links between government and non-government service providers and tenants. Another significant theme is the collaboration between government and non-government service providers and tenants. Another significant theme is the collaboration between government and non-government service providers and tenants.

We begin the edition with a retrospective from two of the most respected people in the WA homelessness space, Genevieve Erney and Helen Miskell. They have both worked in homelessness for over 30 years and their article provides, for the first time, a journey through homelessness policy and practice responses in Australia over the last thirty years.

The specialist homelessness system has been transformed in the last three years with a host of National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) grew out of previous ground-breaking work in Western Australia’s Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) Innovation and Investment Fund. NPAH initiatives could be rolled out so quickly in WA because they were built on past trials (both successes and relative failures).

A number of articles in this special WA edition of Parity provide insights into how the NPAH and other homelessness-related programs have been rolled out in WA. Key themes evident in the descriptions of new or expanded specialist homelessness services include person-centred approaches, relationship based work, individualised attention, flexible responses and investment in the empowerment and self-determination of people who experience homelessness.

A further theme is the collaboration between funding bodies and service providers and the links service providers have forged with mainstream and specialist services to ensure people who experience homelessness, or who are at risk of doing so are assisted with dignity and professionalism. This shows that understanding of, and responses to, homelessness in Western Australia are contemporary and reflective of international good practice.

In sharing stories of people experiencing homelessness and the journey to improve the specialist homelessness system, it is clear that workers, managers, policy makers and activists are deeply committed to improving the lives of people affected by homelessness. There are stories of perseverance and hope in this edition. It is affirming to have the Western Australian Police contribute to this article — reminding us that homelessness is everyone’s business. The overview of the history of homelessness in Western Australia provides a backdrop to the articles that follow.

There are also a number of challenges put to the reader in this edition. In particular, the ideas around ‘conditional tenancies’ as described by the Department of Housing and Anglicare. These articles invite us to explore ideas about mutual obligations and reasonable expectations of housing providers and tenants. Another significant challenge on the horizon is the uncertainty of NPAH funding after June 2013. Some contributors have highlighted this as a source of deep concern for all involved in the specialist homelessness system.

At the time of going to press [16 Nov. 2012], Federal Minister for Housing and Homelessness Brendan O’Connor had announced (on 14th of November 2012) that the Gillard Government would be approaching the States and Territories to negotiate a new homelessness partnership. Since that announcement, the Select Council of Housing and Homelessness Ministers, which met in Brisbane on 16 November, has also committed the States and Territories to match the funding to be provided by Federal Government for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. The Select Council comprises of Federal Minister Brendan O’Connor, and housing ministers from Australia’s States and Territories. We trust that all parties will come to a new agreement that adds to past responses to end homelessness, following consultations with the sector.

The challenges associated with housing in Western Australia are explored from a variety of angles in this edition including regional and remote experiences, and the difficulties young people, and Indigenous and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people face in accessing housing. The difficult experiences of these groups are reported across Australia, but the particularities of Western Australia such as the extremely high cost of housing and limited availability of private or public tenancies compound these marginalised groups’ problems in accessing housing. Unfortunately, this edition does not contain discussion on other marginalised groups’ such as people with disabilities or gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, queer, transgender or intersex people’s experiences of housing and homelessness.

Despite these difficulties and challenges, it is clear from the contributions that there is an overwhelming commitment to build and expand quality professional relationships between government and non-government organisations and practitioners. It is also evident that there is considerable individual and collective effort to resolve homelessness in Western Australia. We invite you to delve into the Western Australian edition of Parity and celebrate the hard work and determination of all involved in the homelessness area.
Rusty Peters is one of the most distinguished and creative artists working in the Kimberley and Australia today.

A senior Gija man of Juwarru skin Rusty Peters’ practice is driven by a highly conceptual and philosophical approach to thought, story-telling and image making.

His works have brought together detailed explorations of his Gija country’s Ngarrangkarni (Dreaming) alongside challenging re-tellings of the historic events that have taken place here since colonisation. Rusty Peters is represented by Warmun Art Centre.

Peter’s work Baarran is a multifaceted story combining a sense of home with the ecological knowledge of the Ngarrangkarni and experiences of love and longing alongside a wicked sense of humour. This is a story Rusty firstheard from his mother’s father.

Transcribed from Gija by Frances Kofod, below is an excerpt of Rusty speaking about this work, Baarran:

This is a place called Baarran, north of Wurranggan. This is a Dreaming place. This is the place of the painted lizard, the homes of the painted lizard and the marsupial mouse are down here. Here at the top are the homes of rasp-tailed goanna and the hill country goanna. Here are the fire places for all those people in dreamtime.

This place is my father’s father’s country and our mother’s father’s country. This is the mist they saw poor things. When they looked they saw the brightness of the fire on the horizon to the north, the south and the east.

That’s all the story for them. These, in the middle, are their fire places. Here at the bottom are the homes of the painted lizard and the marsupial mouse. Those are the camps belonging to the rasp-tailed goanna and the hill country goanna up on the hilltops.

‘Here, let’s all talk to each other here.’

‘No, you two come up here.’

‘No, this one is too short poor thing, he might get tangled up and trip over in the grass. Poor thing he’s short, a short man.’

Those two (the hill country goanna and the rasp-tailed goanna) went down here. They were all singing and saying things about the others and laughing and talking together about when all the young women would come back. ‘I’m the one, I’m going to jump on that girl with the big breasts and bite her’, said this marsupial mouse (a little short man in dreamtime).

‘No, no, you are too short.

‘No,’ the short man reputed, ‘I’ll climb a tree and then jump down from there, goodness me.’

This is his camp where he goes inside. This is the place where the painted lizard, the rasp-tailed goanna and the hill country goanna sat talking together. They each had their own camp but they used to go up and down. Thrasp tail goanna and the hill country goanna used to go down because the mouse was too small. No, that little one, the marsupial mouse was too small, he didn’t go up, he was a short little man in the Dreaming. That is why when we see him today he is small.

That is all the story for them. That is the song belonging to the hill country goanna, when he sang about the brightness: Fires are glowing bright far away in the distance, fires burning bright far away. Fires are glowing bright far away in the distance, fires burning bright far away.

My mother’s father used to tell me about this one. He used to sing to us (and we would ask) ‘What are you singing grandfather?’

‘Well this is not a love song, it is the song belonging to that hill country goanna. This might be like a love song, we’ll sing it when they come back later,’ they said to each other. They might love us, goodness me.

Well that’s all about them.
Chapter 1: The Policy Framework

A Brief History of the Western Australian Homelessness Service System
Pre-1985 to 2012

In the nearly 30 years we have worked in the homelessness sector we have seen many changes to the way homeless services are planned, delivered and measured in WA. We have seen huge changes in the way homelessness is perceived by the general public and in the range of people who become homeless. We have also seen massive changes to the housing system which has inevitably affected the availability of housing, the client groups seeking assistance and the type of support services required.

Pre SAAP

Prior to 1985 homeless services were supported through a range of Commonwealth and State funding initiatives. The major programs were the Homeless Persons Assistance Program, Domestic Violence services and women’s refuge funding and the Youth Services Assistance Program.

On 17 November 1983 a review was tabled in the Commonwealth Parliament that recommended, following negotiations with States and Territories, and consultations with women’s and youth groups, Aboriginal organisations and service providers for other people experiencing homelessness, all Commonwealth crisis accommodation programs should be brought together under a single Act of Parliament. The review recommended that this Act provide funding to the States and Territories, embody a five year Commonwealth–State agreement, and be accompanied by the establishment of Commonwealth–State co-ordinating committees which would also include representatives of relevant non-government organisations.

The aims of the program were to:

- provide improved and more equitable funding of approved services and fund new services in areas of high need and to move towards improved wages and conditions for workers
- move progressively during the program to improve the assessment of the need for services and to distribute funds on the basis of improved assessment within each state and territory
- facilitate the involvement of service providers in advising on program needs and priorities.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program –the joint Commonwealth and State initiative pulled a number of disparate responses under one flagship program. While single men’s services and youth services were generally accepting of the concept, domestic violence services were not. They viewed their service response as linked to the Women’s Rights agenda — not as a response to homelessness. Refuge workers demonstrated, but the new SAAP still went ahead.

A number of homeless men’s services and day centres were ‘excluded’ on the basis that the Commonwealth funding was too low and to include them in the program would require significant State Government investment.

SAAP I 1985–89

In 1985–86 the Commonwealth and the States and Territories established the first Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Agreement (SAAP I). In WA SAAP provided funding for 58 services across three program areas; youth, women (DV) and general, with a program budget of $6.2 million per annum.

At the same time as the SAAP was established so too was the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) ‘A parallel program providing capital grants for crisis accommodation.’ In WA SAAP was administered by the Department for Community Services (currently Department for Child Protection, DCP) and CAP by Homeswest, (currently the Department of Housing). To this day, homelessness operating funding and capital funding are administered in separate departments requiring good interagency working relationships.

Initially, the program commenced with the ideal of a genuine partnership where government and non-government agencies would jointly recommend funding decisions to Ministers. The program was managed by a SAAP/CAP Coordinating Committee with three Sub-Program Committees.

The Co-ordinating Committee had membership from each sub-program area, Commonwealth and State Departments for Community Services, Commonwealth Department of Housing and Construction, and Homeswest and was chaired by a member of the Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS). The sub-programs were:

- Women’s Emergency Services Sub-Program (WESP) with membership of all funded service providers.
- General Sub-Program (GSAAP) with membership elected from those agencies providing accommodation and support services via the Council for Homeless Persons.
- Youth Sub-Program (YSAAP) with membership from a field via the Youth Accommodation Coalition of WA.

The role of the Sub-Program Committees was to establish policy and funding priorities for each specific Sub-Program.
The need to accurately describe the program and monitor service use resulted in two major national collections. In 1987–88 a one night census collection was held to collect client characteristics and needs information and a two week collection monitored the level of use and demand for services.

In January 1989, a national evaluation of the program was completed. The report ‘Homes Away From Home’ by Colleen Chesterman recognised the achievements of the program and made recommendations for SAAP II including:

- the abandonment of the legislative acknowledgement of the sub-programs, WESP, GSAAP and YSAAP
- the identification and focussing on the needs of various target groups
- emphasising the transitional nature of the program.

SAAP I focussed on the provision of short term crisis accommodation such as night shelters and refuges and was characterised by collective decision making by government and non-government services with final funding approval resting with the Commonwealth Minister.

SAAP II
1989–95
Following the Chesterman evaluation, the Commonwealth and States agreed that a joint, cost-shared program to assist the homeless should continue. Key elements that remained the hallmark of the program were put in place, including dollar for dollar matching of all new funding and a level of indexation.

The agreement stipulated a new requirement for three year service agreements which would contain nationally consistent core provisions including target group, service policy and objectives, conduct of services, user rights and participation, access to disadvantaged groups, service evaluation and provision of data.

Administrative arrangements were refined to streamline approval processes. These included revised advisory processes, service reviews and a requirement for State Plans. State advisory arrangements were changed to a Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) with membership of State and Commonwealth Government Officers, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and an independent chairperson and a Joint Officers Group (JOG) of State and Commonwealth Government Officers.

The MAC provided advice to Commonwealth and State Ministers and approved the work of the JOG which was to develop State Plans, needs based planning, funding priorities (service type, target groups and localities) and accountability measures, service standards and performance indicators, data needs and evaluation measures.

The first Western Australian SAAP/CAP State Plan was for 1989–91. Some of the highlights of that first report are:

- A budget of $3.7 million in 1989–90.

Commonwealth funding for CAP funding increased each year from $1.135 million in 1984–5 to $3.7 million in 1989–90.

The establishment of base minimum salary and oncost levels and minimum levels for 24 hour youth crisis services and single men’s services.

An estimated 900 people per night accommodated in SAAP services.

A key change in SAAP II was the move towards more medium, longer term and ‘exit point’ services to break the cycle of dependency on short term crisis accommodation. Many of the new services and funding increases were for this purpose.

In June 1989 there was a special council meeting of Social Welfare Ministers to consider the Human Rights Commission Report on Homeless Children — The Burdekin Report. As a result additional funding was provided to expand medium and longer term accommodation and support services for young people, develop culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal young people and improve current services through staff training.

Funding of $1 million per annum was provided under a new program, the Youth Social Justice Strategy, referred to as ‘Burdekin funding’, which was closely aligned but separate from SAAP. In WA, 13 new services were funded, six of which were in country locations. These ranged from services in country locations for Aboriginal at risk youth to long term accommodation options in the metropolitan area.

The Youth Social Justice Strategy funding was rolled into SAAP from 1 July 1995 and service funding made recurrent. The majority of the original Burdekin services are still operating.

SAAP II Improved administrative and reporting arrangements and expanded the focus of the program towards more medium, longer term and ‘exit point’ services to break the cycle of dependency on short term crisis.

SAAP III
1995–2000
The SAAP II Agreement was due to expire June 1994 but was extended to June 1995 to allow the Commonwealth and State to negotiate the new Agreement and to allow for the new Supported Accommodation Assistance Act to become law.

With a Labor Government at the Commonwealth level and a Liberal Government at WA State level, negotiations around the new Agreement were tense with WA and a number of other states refusing to sign until a number of matters were agreed, including streamlining
administrative procedures to enable state governments to make funding decisions based on agreed plans.

While negotiations continued, the Commonwealth had no mechanism to release payments and WA received no Commonwealth funds for six months until the Agreement was finally signed on 7 December 1995. The State Government ensured that all services were funded and the program continued as normal. Payment from the Commonwealth was made retrospectively in January 1996.

SAAP III saw further changes to the administration of SAAP and the development of service delivery.

Through the Bilateral Agreement with the Commonwealth, Western Australia was the only state to negotiate and gain additional flexibility to manage SAAP III. The Western Australian SAAP Agreement had an attached Joint Approvals Framework, which enabled the State Minister to approve funding allocations within an agreed planning framework. The Western Australian initiative in 1995 has enabled the States and Territories to seek further flexibility as the new directions for the next phase of the program unfolded.

A Joint Project Approvals Framework was agreed. The Commonwealth no longer approved the funding of every SAAP service and project. Instead a three year rolling State SAAP Plan would be developed between the Commonwealth and State setting priorities, including new services for the coming year. Only changes to services outside of the State Plan would require joint Ministerial approval.

While the MAC was no longer a requirement, WA chose to continue with a Ministerial advisory mechanism and the establishment of the SAAP State Advisory Committee (SAAP SAC) was endorsed by the Cabinet of Western Australia on 15 May 1995. The Joint Officers Group was no longer required.

Some of the other key changes were:

- the introduction of the SAAP National Co-ordination and Development Committee (CAD)
- the introduction of a National Data Collection
- a national approach to case management
- the development of service standards and funding of support projects to assist services to implement them.

The first State Plan under SAAP III 1995–96 to 1997–98 recorded annual funding of $15.7 million to 109 services as at April 1996.

In 1996 the SAAP SAC embarked on a state-wide consultation with the sector to seek feedback on the plan and develop the 1996–99 plan. Teams consisting of a SAAP SAC member and a Departmental officer visited six country locations and held four metropolitan workshops. Following this a full day workshop was held with representatives from each area and sector peaks, as well as six SAAP SAC members to collate feedback and develop recommendations. This resulted in the following new initiatives:

- an induction training program for SAAP staff
- interdepartmental protocols.

In December 1997 the Crisis Assistance, Supported Housing (CASH) Award WA was implemented in WA. The Department funded the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) to assist SAAP services to address the CASH award. The State and Commonwealth contributed additional funds to meet the costs of implementing the Award and by 1999 total funding increases of $5.8 million a year had been provided to SAAP services.

By June 2000 SAAP funding in WA had increased to $23.6 million a year for 119 services.

The National Evaluation of SAAP III noted a number of areas for further development and set priorities around those areas that required more attention.

The focus of SAAP III was on developing the sector, improving the quality of service provision, and measuring client characteristics and needs.
### Summary:

**How the homeless programs in Western Australia have changed since the 1980s**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Name</th>
<th>Funding at Commencement</th>
<th>Administrative and Advisory Arrangements</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Key Documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior to SAAP Pre 1985</td>
<td></td>
<td>A range of separately funded programs.</td>
<td>Fixing immediate crises</td>
<td>Commonwealth Parliament Hansard The Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAAP III 1995–2000 $15.7 million</td>
<td>Joint Project Approvals Framework SAAP State Advisory Committee Three Year rolling State Plans</td>
<td></td>
<td>developing the sector improving the quality of service provision, measuring client characteristics and needs</td>
<td>National Evaluation of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, National Evaluation Team April 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAAP V 2005–09 $29.6 million and $1.3 million</td>
<td>Funding approvals by State Minister only. SAAP State Advisory Committee</td>
<td>Innovation and Investment Fund</td>
<td>The (evaluation of) SAAP V Innovation and Investment Fund Strategy in Western Australia, Paul Flatau and Anne Coleman 2008 Evaluation of the SAAP V Innovation and Investment Fund Family and Domestic Violence Early Intervention Pilot Outreach Projects, Dr Colleen Fisher, Dr Moira O’Connor, Dr Andrew Guilfoyle, July 2008.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAHA 2009+ $34.7 million NAHA NPAH $135 over four years capital and operational</td>
<td>Western Australian Council on Homelessness</td>
<td>National Affordable Housing Agreement National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness</td>
<td>Western Australian Auditor General’s Report, Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in Western Australia, Report 13, October 2012</td>
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### SAAP IV 2000–05

In SAAP IV and program priorities were set out in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreed in principle between Community Services Ministers at a Commonwealth and State and Territory level. The MOU provided for four Strategic Themes:

1. Client Focussed Service Delivery
2. Integration and Collaboration between SAAP and other Service Systems
3. Increasing Performance, Knowledge and Skills

Administrative arrangements were further devolved to the States, with the Commonwealth Minister no longer required to approve new services. A National Strategic Plan would set a work program and evaluation and reporting framework. The states would be responsible for administering the program at a state level and could ensure that services are funded to meet state priorities.
Administrative data on funded services was now provided via the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) which operated the National Data Collection. Ministerial advice was provided to the State Minister by the SAAP State Advisory Committee consisting of Government and sector representatives with an independent Chair.

In 2000 the GST was introduced with increased complexities in financial administration for government and services alike. In recognition of increased costs and the potential for increased demand, the Commonwealth provided an increase to the funding base that did not require dollar matching.

The WA State Homelessness Strategy 2002–06 Putting People First proposed a shift in emphasis from the provision of crisis services to services designed to break the cycle of homelessness.

The WA Government injected an additional $32 Million over four years into innovative services, including:

- Nine private tenancy support services, five metropolitan, three country and one for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) people in the metropolitan area.
- Two specialist financial counselling services for young people.
- Three services, one metro-wide and two country, to assist for young people leaving state care.
- Increased services to assist homeless children in country domestic violence services, and in services for homeless families; and support for young parents living in transitional youth accommodation services.

Following and evaluation of the Strategy in 2006, most of the funded services were rolled into SAAP V.

SAAP IV included a focus on preventing homelessness and continued to focus on skilling the sector through provision of training, improving service delivery through monitoring of standards and developing links with other mainstream agencies via the protocols.

SAAP V 2005–09

Administrative and reporting arrangements continued as for SAAP IV.

The fifth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP V) Multilateral Agreement commenced on 1 October 2005. The Bilateral SAAP IV Agreement was due to expire 30 June 2005. However, it was extended 30 September 2005.

The annual funding at the commencement of SAAP V was $29.6 million.

In July 2006 the WA Government provided additional funding to SAAP services of 10 per cent on the State component of SAAP to assist with service viability.

The key driver of sector reform in SAAP V was the Innovation and Investment Fund with $4.8 million in funding over four years ($1.3 million per annum) provided jointly by the Commonwealth and WA Governments.

Following an expression of interest, ten projects were funded to address three Strategic Priorities of SAAP V:

- early intervention and prevention
- multiple support needs and linkages
- post-crisis transition.

The initiatives were tasked with ‘doing things differently’ to achieve better client outcomes. Evaluation of the initiatives was planned from the beginning and a key aspect of each was the inclusion of Action Research into service model.

Two evaluations were conducted, a general evaluation of the whole strategy by Paul Flautau and Anne Coleman, and evaluation of the Family and Domestic Violence Early Intervention Pilot Outreach Projects, by Dr Colleen Fisher, Dr Moira O’Connor, Dr Andrew Guittaye, July 2008. Learnings and findings from these pilot projects were pivotal in the development of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) initiatives.

SAAP V focussed on innovation, trialling new ways of working and learning from action research and evaluation.

NHA 2009 Onwards

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Intergovernmental Agreement on new Federal Financial Arrangements saw a rationalisation of Specific Purpose Payments. The creation of the new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) incorporated the former Commonwealth State Housing Agreement and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. This locked in base funding for the State without the need for joint decision making.

The fifth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Multilateral Agreement (SAAP V) ceased on 31 December 2008. Services previously funded under SAAP were now funded under the National Affordable Housing Agreement which commenced on 1 January 2009. Annual Commonwealth/State base funding was $34.8 million.

In 2012 the Western Australian Government provided an additional $4 million per year to address viability of homelessness services (NAHA and NPAH), representing a 15 per cent increase on the state component of funding.

In 2012–13, 117 services will be funded via NAHA services for a total of $45.8 million.

A Western Australian Council on Homelessness was established to advise the Minister on issues related to homelessness.

The White Paper on homelessness, The Road Home, was launched in December 2008, by the Commonwealth Government and outlined a national approach to reducing homelessness. Through the COAG process the Commonwealth and States have agreed to an additional $800 million over four years for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). WA received $135 million over four years for capital and operational costs.

The NPAH was closely aligned with the White Paper and centred on three core strategies:

- prevent homelessness and intervene early so that fewer people become homelessness
- break the cycle of homelessness so fewer people remain or re-enter homelessness
- connecting the service system.

In WA 81 new services were funded through the NPAH to deliver programs addressing the core strategies. A number of the WA NPAH initiatives are described in articles in this issue of Parity.

The WA Auditor General has conducted an audit on WA’s implementation of the NPAH. The report was tabled in the State Parliament on Wednesday 25 October 2012, and was largely positive, noting that the NPAH initiatives had made a positive difference for people experiencing homelessness. However, the report also noted that ongoing uncertainty over the future of the Agreement risks a loss of service delivery capacity and cutting short support for people experiencing homelessness.

A Final Word

At the time of writing, October 2012, WA is once again at a funding crossroads. Uncertainty over the future of NPAH funding post June 2013 is of great concern.

In response to the Auditor General’s report the WA Department of Premier and Cabinet noted “the OAG’s (Office of the Auditor General) concern around the uncertainty of the programs funded under the Agreement continuing after June 2013. Despite repeated requests, the Commonwealth Government has not yet engaged in negotiations to extend or renew the Agreement”.

Footnotes

2. Source: Briefing note to Minister for Community Services on the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program written by Genevieve Errey on 6 March 1986.
3. Western Australian Plan 1989–91 Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, Crisis Accommodation Program
4. Letter from Hon Peter Staples MP Minister for Housing and Aged Care to The Hon Kay Hallahan MLA, Minister for Community Services 3 November 1988.
The Western Australian
State and Regional Homelessness Plans

Sandra Flanagan
Senior Project Officer, Department for Child Protection WA

The Western Australian Council on Homelessness (WACH) was established by the Minister for Child Protection as an external advisory body to government on homelessness matters in February 2010. The Council is made up of community services sector and academic representatives with members from key State and Commonwealth government departments.

The Council’s first task in its inaugural year was to develop the State Plan for Homelessness in WA. The WACH developed the vision, outcomes, guiding principles, action areas and commitment outlined in the State Plan. Through this process emerged the need to also develop regional homelessness plans.

Without access to permanent safe accommodation and support, people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience poor health, inadequate schooling and education, violence, prolonged unemployment and social isolation. Responding to homelessness is fundamentally linked to housing. However, it is also much more than this. It involves providing support to meet health, employment, social and personal needs.

The Western Australian Homelessness State Plan 2010–2013: Opening Doors to Address Homelessness was developed to identify an important vision to address homelessness and represented a commitment and renewed focus on intervening early to prevent and reduce homelessness in WA.

The State Plan outlines the outcomes and key principles for implementing an improved integrated approach to homelessness and aims to bring all relevant agencies and services together to open doors and improve circumstances for people who are at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. It supports the three key strategies of early intervention, better integrated service system and breaking the cycle. The State Plan also identifies the action areas to support flexible and responsive services for people when they are homeless and to prevent people from slipping back into homelessness.

The diversity of WA and the unique issues across the regions require customised approaches. Regional Plans were developed across WA to implement an integrated service system response to homelessness at a local level. It is not just the role of specialist homelessness services to address homelessness. To be successful, a variety of services and sectors have a role to play, including mainstream and allied services, government and community services.

Regional Homelessness Planning commenced in November 2010 with workshops in each region facilitated by the Department for Child Protection (DCP), WACH and involved local stakeholders. Discussion papers were prepared for each region in 2011 followed by further workshops where three key priority actions for each region were identified to form the regional homelessness plan for 2011–2012.

The plans focused on the following action areas, as identified in the State Plan and aimed at assisting people to access and sustain housing, address underlying needs which exclude them from the community and prevent future episodes of homelessness:

- range of housing options
- employment, education and training
- health and wellbeing
- connection with community, family and friends.

A solutions focussed approach was used to facilitate the workshops looking at the current responses and additional responses for the future. Group discussions identified the local strategies which were anticipated to commence and/or completed within 12 months. Regional Homelessness Plans were signed by all key players in the regions, with many regions hosting signing events to promote and acknowledge commitment to the implementation of the regional homelessness plan.

Progress reports from each region have indicated sound progress towards completing their identified actions. Examples include:

- an extranet directory of agencies
- regular forums with a focus on homelessness
- establishment of a new night shelter
- increased collaboration between key agencies
- the development of strategies to reduce gaps in service delivery
- community ‘connect’ events for homelessness.

The process of developing the regional plans has arguably been more important than the end result. Bringing people together with a focus on homelessness and initiating conversations around innovative strategies has been enormously successful in raising awareness and creating a positive momentum to address homelessness throughout the broader sector. With renewed energy and a better understanding of the role and scope of local agencies, important partnerships have been formed and improved integration achieved.

State and Regional Plans will be reviewed in late 2012 to early 2013 to identify the next actions in a strategic response to local homelessness.

The State and Regional Plans can be found of the Department for Child Protection website at: http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/services/community/Pages/Homelessness.aspx
Commonwealth Government Homelessness Programs in Western Australia

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)

Reconnect Program for Homeless Youth (or at risk of Homelessness)

The Reconnect program takes care of young people who may not have the best start in life by providing them with a supportive and safe environment and the help they need to work their way back from homelessness. The Reconnect program has been running since 1998 and is currently funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

Reconnect is a community based early intervention program for young people 12 to 18 years, (young people aged 12 to 21 for Reconnect — Newly Arrived Youth Specialist services), who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families.

Reconnect aims to address the underlying reasons for a young person leaving home: family conflict, family separation, school related conflict, violence, poverty, drug use and mental health issues. The service providers work closely with other agencies to support both the young person and the family, and provide counselling and practical support.

Between 2000 and 2012 Reconnect assisted 66,000 young people and their families, including 5,670 in 2011–12 alone. As a result, earlier this year the Gillard Government decided to extend funding for 2012–13. Funding of $24 million will be invested in more than 100 services in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote locations around Australia, including a number of specialist services such as the nine Indigenous and 13 Newly Arrived Youth Specialists.

Background

Since the mid-1990s, social policy has seen an increased focus on early intervention. In 1996, the Commonwealth Government set up a taskforce to oversee the creation of early intervention pilot projects. Reconnect was one of the first projects established as a result.

In the Australian Government’s 2008 White Paper on homelessness, The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness, Reconnect is specifically recognised as an effective program for reducing youth homelessness which will continue to play an important role as an early intervention program.

Reconnect also provides an example for other early intervention programs by demonstrating how it works with critical ‘first to know’ agencies such as schools, health services and Centrelink.

Behind Reconnect’s Service Delivery

Reconnect breaks the cycle of homelessness by providing counselling, group work, mediation and practical support to the whole family. Service providers also ‘buy in’ other services to meet the individual needs of clients, such as specialised mental health services.

Reconnect is viewed as a key program to promote family reconciliation through managing conflict and improving family communication. The program’s outcomes include:

• the young person returning home
• creating ongoing positive family relationships which provide the young person with emotional and physical support
• reconciling the young person with other family members for example grandparents or siblings, both parent(s)
• the young person accepting that independence is appropriate for them
• establishing a viable support system for the independent young person that includes a member of his or her family.

Reconnect also fosters engagement with employment, education or training, and the community and helps to build community capacity for early intervention in youth homelessness.

Reconnect in Western Australia

In Western Australia Reconnect services are delivered by several service providers, including MercyCare, Parkerville Children and Youth Services, Mission Australia, Accordwest and Albany Youth Support. The services cover a broad area of WA, from Perth through Margaret River to Albany and Denmark.

There are also a number of Reconnect outlets which provide services for young people who require some form of specialist service delivery. They are:

• Burdekin Youth in Action that delivers services to young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people residing in the Shire of Broome
• Outcare, that services young people who have been in contact with the justice system
• Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS) that works with newly arrived youth.

In 2011–12 Reconnect services in Western Australia provided support to 632 young people, with more than 90 per cent reporting an overall improvement in the young person’s situation at the end of support.

‘Working with Accordwest has made me more independent. I have a strong handle on depression and understand about self-care and self-respect. I feel more able to commit to my studies now and have stronger independent living skills. I feel more able to rebuild my family relationships’

(Accordwest’s client)

Recent Reconnect Program Evaluation

FaHCSIA recently commissioned the Australian Catholic University’s Institute of Child Protection Studies to evaluate effective intervention strategies for working with young people who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. Two publications were produced, including a literature review and an evaluation report on the Reconnect program’s interventions.

Both publications and other relevant information are available on the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs website www.fahcsia.gov.au.

HOME Advice

The Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program assists families who face difficulty in maintaining tenancies or home ownership due to personal or financial circumstances. The program’s early intervention approach prevents families from needing to use crisis accommodation services.

The Gillard Government has committed nearly $3 million, over 2012–14, to deliver the HOME Advice Program through a partnership with the Australian Government Department of Human Services, Centrelink Services and community agencies in each state and territory throughout Australia. Each site delivers services to families within the relevant Centrelink Customer Service Centre area boundary.
Background
HOME Advice program began in 2001 with the Australian Government committing approximately $5 million over three years for a new Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot (FHPP). The pilot was an initiative of the National Homelessness Strategy and signified the first national early intervention effort specifically directed to family homelessness.

A particularly innovative component of the new initiative was the partnership model between community agency pilot sites and local Centrelink Offices. This model articulated that the community service provider, along with their participating Centrelink Office would trial localised approaches to identify and assist families at risk of becoming homeless.

The aim of the FHPP was prevention — to increase families’ capacity to avoid homelessness as well as to build capacity in the local service system to respond more effectively to the needs of at-risk families. This was to be achieved through a bifurcated approach — working directly with at-risk families to help to stabilise their situation, while also working on broader systemic issues through collaborative partnerships with other services. The purpose of the partnership was to develop local strategies to enhance the local community’s capacity to respond to family homelessness.

Following a review of the program in 2003, the Australian Government committed to continuing the program and it became known as the HOME Advice program.

HOME Advice in Western Australia
In Western Australia the HOME Advice program is provided by Anglicare WA. The service, known as Anglicare Stabilising Homes (ASH), covers the Mandurah Centrelink Customer Service Area Boundary.

In 2011–12 ASH provided assistance to 75 families, with close to 70 per cent of these families reporting an improvement in their situation after contact with the service.

The service provides a range of interventions to support families. These include developing budgets, advocacy and supportive linking with a range of other services including medical services and employment services.

National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in Western Australia
A total of $135.16 million in funding has been allocated to WA under the NPAH. Of this, the Commonwealth is contributing $66.79 million.

There are 19 NPAH initiatives currently being delivered in Western Australia and all are operational.

The Western Australian Implementation Plan contributes to the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) objective that people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion and contributes to the following NPAH outcomes:

- fewer people will become homeless and fewer of these will sleep rough
- fewer people will become homeless more than once
- people at risk of or experiencing homelessness will maintain or improve their education, training or employment participation
- people at risk of or experiencing homelessness will be supported by quality services, with improved access to sustainable housing.

Specifically, Western Australia is focussing on domestic violence prevention, public and private tenancy, rough sleepers and leaving care/correctional facilities. Much of this correlates to the priority areas highlighted in the 2006 Census which were rough sleepers, children and young people and those most likely to use temporary accommodation, family and friends.

Some of the services supported under the NPAH in WA include:

- St Bartholomew’s Lime Street Facility, which is an example of a new service model within a purposefully designed facility that fully integrates NAHA, NPAH Street to Home, and Aged Care funding to support the aged homeless population. Recently opened, this 148 unit facility provides flexible accommodation options and the opportunity to support people to move from crisis to permanent housing. It will also provide flexible long term, crisis, transitional and aged care accommodation options for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- Oxford Foyer which will house 100 disadvantaged young people between the ages of 16 and 25, including 36 young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Communal training and office space is being incorporated into the site, and it will be staffed 24-hours-a-day, seven days-a-week. The site is located on the grounds of the Central Institute of Technology campus and within walking distance to other education and training facilities.
Where do I Fit In: The NPAH So Far

Nikki Bollard
Project Manager, NPAH Implementation, Department of Housing WA

As the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) has evolved I have learned many new aspects of service delivery to people experiencing homelessness and I am never surprised at what can be achieved when all agencies work together. In my 20 years of working in human service related fields I have never seen such collaboration and cooperation as I have during my involvement in the NPAH. It has achieved better connected services, helped clients see where they fit in to housing and been the platform on which some have rebuilt their lives.

The Western Australian Department of Housing’s (DoH) involvement in the NPAH over the last few years has seen many highlights and challenges — one of the most amazing being a person who went from being homeless to a homeowner in a very short period of time.

Among the challenges we have faced the most confronting was the change in the housing market. During the NPAH an environment of rising private rental costs and an undersupply of affordable rentals has prevailed. This has increased pressure on the lower end of the rental market causing a reduction in rental housing turnover and a flow on reduction in rental vacancies in both the public and private sectors. Despite these difficulties in the housing market, over the past two years, 728 public housing properties have been allocated to people experiencing homelessness across the State to house over 1,640 people by 30 June 2012.

Other challenges that also arose were the availability of suitable housing stock in some locations, staff turn-over and tenants and neighbors getting on together. Challenges can be overcome through relationships between regional housing offices and the service providers. The value of good working relationships can never be overstated as a vital key to client successes. We have developed new, productive, working relationships with non-government colleagues in Specialist Homelessness Services, the Street to Home program, and Housing Support workers responding to drug and alcohol, mental health and corrective services clients and of course our own clients have been assisted by Public Tenancy Support Services.

Our relationships with colleagues in government agencies have also brought the benefit of housing to their clients who might otherwise be homeless. The implementation of NPAH in WA shows how multiple agencies can work with clients to achieve a safer home or accommodation and the ways to sustain them.

Housing is fundamental to people gaining control over their lives. Our homes provide stability, help us to define where we are in the world and are the catalyst that enables us to reach out to employment, education and other opportunities. The NPAH has been a champion for people experiencing homelessness even to the extent of assisting them to become their own champions.

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The early stages of support may require a high degree of government and non-government inter-relationships to assist a client to get their world back on track. To get success all relevant agencies and support people need to be at the table to resolve crisis situations or help to move

Figure 1. Strong relationships between government agencies and the non-government sector have been fundamental to achieving outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homeless.

While the roles are vastly different, good relationships have allowed the agencies to work together — for instance, the department’s Housing Service Officers may make a Housing Support Worker and tenant aware of rent arrears — the support worker then assists the client to address the debt and put in place an action plan including financial counselling and referrals to emergency relief or the Hardship Utility Grant Scheme (HUGS).

‘Where do I fit?’ is a way of working together with our joint clients to look at the realities and possibilities to help the client on their way from ‘Where in the world am I?’ to this is ‘My best world’. NPAH services are, on one hand, about practical support for clients, and on the other hand, about developing clients’ skills. I have found that talking with clients about where they see themselves now, where they think they could get to with some support and what they need to do themselves is a successful way to help clients to develop their own story and goals. This is standard brief intervention therapy, a great way to prompt the beginnings of change. With clearer mental images the client can begin to express where they want to be in the future and the sort of support and skills they will find most helpful.

Respectful relationships, with their Housing Support Worker as an advocate and access to treatment or therapy are essential enabling supports to clients.

In her presentation ‘Framework for Success’, Francesca Robertson promotes starting with the client’s strengths, and looking for early signs of positive change, in this way it is possible to build on these to achieve the client’s goals. This approach is based on the client as the expert in their world. By encouraging and coaching clients to aim for their best it is possible to arrive at a plan they can achieve.

All our clients want to live in a safe place, belong to a community at some level and to have positive relationships that meet their particular needs. Throughout NPAH we have observed the impact that housing with support can have on the quality of a client’s life.

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Figure 2. The housing continuum shows where a client might fit or move through homelessness.

Public Housing

Affordable Housing Strategy

Public Housing

Community Housing

Affordable Private Rentals

Affordable Home Ownership

Figure 2. The housing continuum shows where a client might fit or move through homelessness.
the client forward, similar to a ‘Strong Families’ type of approach of shared responsibility where ‘family members and agency workers come together to share relevant information, identify goals and develop a plan to help meet the family’s needs’. However, in the NPAH situation it could involve relevant agencies and support people coming together to plan to help meet a family’s or an individual’s needs.

The more physical, mental, behavioural or addiction issues a client has, the more difficult it is to find a suitable accommodation outcome. The reality is that multi-morbid issues or illnesses present as real barriers to independent living and this is when relationships and integrated service approaches are most required. Clients with complex needs are at the epicentre of these relationships.

Appropriate housing allocations are preferable to achieve a ‘win win’ outcome. The Department of Housing staff work with the NPAH service providers to ensure enough information is gathered so that an appropriate allocation can be made wherever possible. Where the allocation is not ideal but is preferable to homelessness, the support component is absolutely essential to the success of the client’s tenancy. It may mean that the client needs more intensive assistance to get good outcomes and we know persistently working together is beneficial in these circumstances. While this may be aspirational, we need to remember that some clients can and will change their worlds for the better when they are informed and committed to a course of action.

The A Place To Call Home program assisted a person experiencing homelessness who was on the Department’s waitlist, as a priority. Over a period of about 18 months this person turned their life around to such an extent that they have a good job and with the assistance of Keystart was able to purchase their own property.

The A Place To Call Home program required the department to purchase 33 dwellings in the metro area. Homeless clients would be taken off the department’s priority waiting list and be supported by a NPAH service provider in their new home. The department was actually able to purchase 34 properties and with thanks to the Department of Child Protection the service provider was also able to support the clients housed in the 34th property. This was a case of collaboration by all parties working together to achieve good outcomes for the clients.

NPAH services in partnership with government have achieved the targets set so far for the NPAH in WA and an evaluation of the outcomes is under way. With a half a year of imperative work ahead before the end of NPAH we continue to carry out our roles providing dwellings and working together to assist people experiencing homelessness to achieve the lives they hope for, that so many of us take for granted.

Footnotes


The Impact of State Government Initiatives on Homelessness in Western Australia

Andrew Hogan  
Chief Executive Officer,  
St Bartholomew’s House Inc.

State government supported initiatives, including in recent times the St Bartholomew’s House (St Bart’s) Lime Street accommodation project, will help make a significant impact on homelessness in WA. Large scale projects such as Lime Street provide a resource for not only accommodation needs, but also for the delivery of services, care and support to assist people experiencing homelessness move through a process of growth, rebuilding and reconnection back into the wider community.

St Bart’s is in the process of planning its next big capacity enhancement with the redevelopment of our old homeless and aged care facilities in Brown St, East Perth for affordable housing.

It is clear that housing affordability and availability is a key issue for our community and our goal with this redevelopment project is the provision of affordable housing for older people at risk of homelessness.

In WA we have population that is both fast growing and ageing and whose needs are becoming even more acute. There is a need to invest in accommodation and support resources and programs to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness to help them through that experience and prevent them becoming homeless again.

In order to have the most impact, National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) initiatives need to be reviewed and updated to reflect the current situation and build on the first three years of service provision and the lessons learned. These programs are currently being evaluated. In order to ensure these programs are able to meet the needs people experiencing homelessness and have optimal impact, these initiatives need to be continued and they need to incorporate the information and advice that comes from the evaluation process.

These initiatives represent a new direction for the agencies involved and have helped build important relationships and improved collaboration and information sharing among WA homelessness services. This can only lead to more positive outcomes for people experiencing homelessness by providing services that are appropriate and tailored to individual client needs.

National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) funding is an important resource that provides appropriate and meaningful support that helps prevent clients from cycling back into homelessness. Often, the opportunity of first contact with people experiencing homelessness or someone at risk of homelessness is a key moment and services need to provide for the specific and individual needs of each client.

A combination of both supported accommodation options and tailored, individually focussed services and supports is the best way to ensure good outcomes for clients and prevent them cycling back into homelessness. Given the growth profile of WA and our changing demographics, it is vital that the focus remains firmly on the provision of accommodation, services and support to people experiencing homelessness.

In this way, government initiatives will have the maximum benefit and impact. However, the withdrawal of government support for the accommodation and support needs of people experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness would be catastrophic and would see a significant worsening in the level of disadvantage and despair in the community. Any withdrawal of services and support will also have a significant financial cost to the community via increased numbers of emergency medical and hospital admissions, law and order problems and social service impact.
In addition to the measures currently being undertaken, other specific services and resources are also needed.

For example, St Bart’s has expressed the need for an in-reach, linkages program to allow mental health services to provide more care and support to people experiencing homelessness who are accommodated in specialist homelessness services. The purpose of mental health linkages would be to facilitate a multi-disciplinary approach that provides a rapid response to client needs. It would support collaboration between the mental health and accommodation services to benefit the client by giving them a more individualised and appropriate response. The overall purpose of a mental health linkages approach would be to provide early intervention to prevent hospitalisation and to improve the connections between mental health services in the community.

There is broad recognition that many people who face homelessness have significant undiagnosed mental health issues. Mental health linkages and in-reach services would assist in providing tailored support and care plans for these clients to help them move through a process and prevent them cycling back into homelessness.

There is also a real need for more emergency and crisis accommodation for basic shelter and safety for rough sleepers. While there is a ten bed shelter in the planning phase, this will not meet the demand. Additional emergency accommodation services will need to include women, singles, couples and older people. Couples accommodation options are already under resourced, as are the options for women who are not experiencing domestic violence issues but are who are homeless.

The sobering up centre, Bridge House, is limited to opening hours of evenings and nights only which establishes barriers for those who are intoxicated during the day. If this resource was opened 24 hours a day, there would likely be a reduction in incidents involving police and referrals to accident and emergency medical services.

Improved staffing levels in supported accommodation and drop in centres would help ensure client needs are met. Services work with a diverse and challenging client mix, many of whom have very complex needs. In order to ensure client needs are met and prevent the cycle of homelessness continuing, improved staffing levels and resourcing are required to engage each client individually.

Increased housing and accommodation options remain an important and growing need here in WA. In planning housing options for people experiencing homelessness, consideration needs to be given to transport linkages and access to services that prevent social isolation and provide support networks.

At St. Bart’s we remain very concerned about the issue of homelessness among older people. We see this as a critical issue. Apart from the increased capacity of our own residential aged care program from 20 to 40 beds in the new facility, there have been no significant measures implemented in WA at either a state or federal level to reduce older homelessness. There is looming gap in the provision of emergency accommodation developing, especially for older women.

The Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA) Program is one that warrants additional attention. We recommend that the State Government add value to the ACHA program by providing a pool of emergency, transitional and affordable secure accommodation for ACHA providers, with consideration given to security (safety), access to public transport, health services and social networks.

We recommend the expansion of the ACHA program in WA and that the State Government match the Federal Government investment dollar for dollar. In addition, we believe that the State Government should negotiate with Federal Government to increase the ACHA program within the metropolitan area and the major regional centres of WA.

Rent affordability issues and increased utilities costs are having a severe impact in the community, particularly on older people, where any rise in living costs can place them at risk of homelessness. Very low vacancy rates in the private rental market, combined with high median rents and extended wait-lists for public housing can lead to severe financial and emotional stress and an increased incidence in both physical and mental health issues. Services and resources that are aimed at improving rental affordability and availability need to be a priority issue. These initiatives should include investment in socially affordable housing projects, land availability, less red tape and lowering costs for land development.

The key issue here is maintaining momentum and keeping the focus firmly on the provision of appropriate accommodation options for people experiencing homelessness.

While the projects discussed above are all important in providing options and services, there remains a great need for more accommodation options to ensure that people experiencing homelessness can find shelter, a home of their own and support so they move through the cycle of homelessness to live full, independent and happy lives.

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**Mercy Care**

Santina was referred to MercyCare’s Housing Support Service by a Salvation Army Supported Accommodation Service where she was housed in a transitional house. In April Santina and her three children were housed in a Department of Housing property. She identified her need for ongoing support in relation to cleaning, household management and budgeting, and with managing children’s behaviours. She also had a goal of getting a part time job when she was settled. Over the next six months she committed to the Housing Support Service and worked towards, and achieved, her goals. She wants to work as a teacher assistant (education support) and will complete certificate III on Friday 9th November, and then study towards Cert IV.

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**A Nice Place To Call Home**

Wake up in the morning, birdies ever so sweet. Flying on the trees singing tweet tweet tweet. People walking by saying “hello, how are you?” This really helps in case I’m feeling blue.

The staff as well ready to be there If I’m worried or need some care A beautiful home built by many I’m grateful to them all, I hope they’re happy Where I live is better than grass, a building or floor after floor Thanks to all the builders and St Barts for my front door. St Barts you’ve done it again for another person Thanks to you all, I’m glad you get some of my pension.

Helping hands are helping hearts There is hope and fresh new starts A nice place to call home and appreciate what we have A place where all of us can grow and be truly glad A place to be happy and accept all the help given So we can all achieve our dreams and enjoy living, And live our lives so that we can all be achieving And have faith in the good things that we believe in.

Damian – St Barts’ 2012
Chapter 2: Program Service and Practice Responses

The Street to Home Program

The Street to Home program is an innovative and comprehensive response for rough sleepers under the joint Commonwealth–State National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH).

The program was jointly developed during 2009 through a series of meetings between the Department for Child Protection (DCP), representatives from specialist non-government homelessness service providers, the Mental Health Commission and the Department of Housing (DoH).

The Street to Home program is an integrated model to assist people sleeping rough in the Perth metropolitan area to stabilise their situation, access long term accommodation and end the cycle of homelessness.

Clients are provided with outreach, wrap around support services and accommodation through the three interrelated components of the program: Assertive Outreach Teams (AOTs), Housing Support Workers (HSWs) and a Mental Health Mobile Clinical Outreach Team (MCOT).

The AOTs make initial contact with rough sleepers wherever they are living or spending time, with the aim of building trust and confidence and working with them to address their basic needs, including linking them with MCOT.

The MCOT comprises a part-time Consultant Psychiatrist and two full time Clinical Nurse Specialists. These clinicians provide an outreach service for rough sleepers with mental health and drug and alcohol assessment, intervention and medication management, and referral and active support to access and/or continue engagement with community mental health services.

The HSWs provide active support and assistance to clients using a Housing First approach as appropriate. Clients residing in crisis or transitional accommodation, who are at risk of returning to primary homelessness, may be supported under the Street to Home program. HSWs accept referrals from AOTs and from crisis accommodation services, and assist clients to access appropriate long-term accommodation, based on an assessment of their needs. The HSWs can also refer to MCOT if necessary.

This collaborative approach has enabled the services to successfully engage with rough sleepers and those at risk of becoming rough sleepers and enabling them to be securely and sustainably housed.

The program’s partnership approach involves service managers, the MCOT, Department of Housing and the AOTs and HSWs meeting on a regular basis to monitor and improve client outcomes, streamline service delivery and discuss and develop client management techniques.

Since its commencement, the program has been successful in linking clients with appropriate mainstream services and almost 80 per cent of clients have been accommodated in public housing, community housing, lodging houses, private rentals and other forms of accommodation.
‘A Good Life’

Nina Crosland  
Manager, Homeless and Transitional Support Service,  
St Bartholomew’s House

We can all name the people who time and time again access our accommodation and drop in services. While they reside with us they take part in case management, get involved in activities and begin to progress. But then that brick wall goes up and it all means for nothing.

At St Bartholomew’s House Homeless and Transitional Support Service we see a number of residents who cycle from one accommodation service to another. These people have often experienced a relapse of some kind and they would either give up and leave, or be asked to leave, due to the structured nature of most accommodation services.

We seek to provide a program where there will be a consistent case worker in that person’s life. Regardless of what happens, they can build on the progress made at one service and they can continue that support when they move to the next service instead of having to start all over again. We recognise and acknowledged that our current systems often fail these people and that they require a service that is more flexible to their individual needs, is more intensive and one where there is greater access to more specialist resources.

We sought funding to implement this idea. Through the Social Innovation Grants scheme of the WA Department of Communities we began the lengthy and time consuming process of putting in our application.

This new approach to tackling long-term homeless in Perth fitted the criteria required for innovative thinking. The initial idea was for a three year program. However, with the competitive nature of the grants process, we were advised to review our proposal and as a result we received funding to run a two year pilot project; ‘A Good Life’.

This innovative project is based on the ability to have a flexible client-centered approach with access to a reasonable sum of brokerage money to assist the person journey out of homelessness. The project is not focused only on housing and accommodation. Although that is one of the elements of case management, it is not the primary focus of the project. However, we can argue that without a stable home, it is difficult to make progress as that person will continue to experience trauma and poor mental health and therefore development is hindered.

The question remains, however, of what to do in the situation where there is little or no housing to offer. Because of current economic developments in WA contributing to the lack of affordable housing and the greater demands being put on homelessness services to support increasing need, we have been forced to think outside the box.

For this reason we believe an individualised and creative approach is required to get the most out of current systems and assist people to break out of the cycle of homelessness. To achieve this you first have to ask, what is a successful transition out of homelessness? Is it a house, a home, or family reunification; or is it something less solid? We examined the previous research undertaken by Groundswell, an organisation in the United Kingdom that sought to define a successful transition out of homelessness by obtaining the perspectives of people who were formerly homeless.

The report by Groundswell, titled The Escape Plan sought to establish the critical success factors that have enabled people to successfully move on from homelessness. The study found that a successful transition out of homelessness was generally associated with four or more of the following factors where people feel:

- they have control of their personal finances
- they want to be a part of a community outside of the homeless community and have taken steps towards achieving this
- their accommodation is now their home and have made some kind of investment in it such as decorating or buying new stuff for it
- some kind of stability in their accommodation and not that it is going to fall apart or be taken away from them imminently

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The Model

The project proposed to set up a pilot program over a two year period to identify, monitor and support 24 clients to overcome their homelessness and cease the need to use homeless services. The aim of the project is to empower people experiencing chronic or long-term homelessness and equip them with the confidence and ability to make informed choices and take control of their lives. This is based on the view that the chronic or long-term
term homeless are a group which have become institutionalised and have deep rooted habitual patterns, who know nothing but the homelessness system. Through intensive case management, client’s complex issues will be targeted and self-esteem and social skills built up by therapeutically intervening over a long-term to assist in restoring hope and motivation.

We believe that the engagement of community based services is the key to breaking a person out of the homelessness ‘bubble’ and working with them to re-integrate back into society. A partnership approach will empower the client and reassure them as support will be provided from multiple sources. This approach allows the client to feel part of a team, which in turn brings feelings of responsibility and accountability for their actions.

This intensive support is critical to assist the client break through the barriers they will face when they experience a fight or flight situation; that is, when they have reached the time when they have taken what they need for a service and are ready to move on to the next step. At this point the project will work with the client to face their fears and flaws and do so in a supported environment via the following steps:

**Step 1:** Intensive Assistance and Co-ordination

**Step 2:** Early Intervention and Prevention (Therapeutic and Practical)

**Step 3:** Building Up and Developing Skills

**Step 4:** Integration and Linkage to Existing Services

**Step 5:** Collaborative working

**Evaluation**

With any project there is the necessary element of measurement and evaluation to identify the tools and interventions which have worked and those that have not. We looked at using a multi-phase evaluation to attempt to identify beneficial supports and monitor the progress of clients.

One tool is the Outcomes STAR model, which takes an outcomes approach to service delivery.

The Homelessness Outcomes Star, created by Triangle Consulting, looks at ten key areas in a person’s life around:

1. Meaningful use of time
2. Managing Tenancy and accommodation
3. Offending behaviour
4. Emotional and Mental health
5. Physical health
6. Managing money
7. Drug/alcohol misuse
8. Social Networks and relationships
9. Self-care and living skills
10. Motivation and taking responsibility

The outcomes approach is a continuous cycle of enquiry and service improvement based on factual information about what is being achieved.

**The Outcomes Learning Cycle** encompasses the following:

- **Clarify outcomes** — what are we trying to achieve? Agree on the intended outcomes of an activity, service, or program.
- **Measure outcomes** — what are we actually achieving? Record the outcomes that you achieve in a systematic way to enable the information to be collated.
- **Analyse and draw learning** — what can we learn from the outcomes achieved? Collate the information and draw learning about what is and what is not working.
- **Make changes** — what changes should we make as a result of this learning? Plan and implement changes to service delivery.

This is also very transportable for client and other accommodation agencies.

**Objectives**

- Enable systemic service design changes for ‘institutionalised’ chronic or long term homeless residents.
- Encourage co-operation and shared learning for Perth’s homelessness providers.
- Create a replicable yet personalised approach to supporting individuals with entrenched and highly complex needs.
- Foster a culture of cooperation and shared accountability with long-term homeless clients.
- Generate substantial tax-payer savings by successfully exiting the long-term homeless from the crisis system.
- Maximise the use of specialised case management software and inter-agency communication through the Infoxchange.
- Identify the key measures which prevent people from successfully transitioning from homelessness to independent housing.

There will be a multi-phase assessment approach to continually evaluate the client throughout the program. This will allow us to identify what services have been provided and what networks have been set up. More importantly, this will show changes to the client’s perception of their own success and illustrate any improvements in engagement, motivation and outlook on life. In addition, undertaking post-service questionnaires will look at the how the client perceives the benefits of these services.

We value the understanding that can be gained from taking into account a service user’s perspective. We aim to use client’s individual perceptions and ongoing changes in these perceptions as markers for the assessment of progress and success of the program.

The overall evaluation will also look at a cost-benefit analysis of the service provided to the client. In particular we will look at the benefits of their transition out of homelessness, compared to the cost of continued homelessness.
Perth Registry Week 2012: Challenges, Collaboration and Looking Forward

Ros Mulley
Executive Manager, Ruah Community Services

The Registry Week campaign was initially developed in the United States of America (USA) and the first Australian Registry Week was held in Brisbane in June 2010. Subsequently, it has been run in Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart, Townsville and the Nepean area of New South Wales. The aims of the campaign have been to systematically identify the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness on the streets and link them directly with housing, while providing immediate assistance to those most in need.

Registry Week activities in the USA and in the eastern states of Australia have been linked to innovative programs that have delivered housing and support services to the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the results from the Vulnerability Index (VI) surveys provide a method for some of the Street to Home (S2H) programs to identify and prioritise clients.

The plan for conducting a Registry Week event in Perth was initiated by Ruah Community Services in mid-2011. The initial response from the homelessness sector (both government and non-government) was less than enthusiastic. There were concerns regarding the invasion of people’s privacy, queries relating to informed consent and opposition to raising people’s hopes when the availability of affordable housing is extremely limited.

The focus of Perth Registry Week was to gather accurate information about the health and support needs of people sleeping rough in inner city Perth and then to seek to prioritise them for housing and other services based on their assessed vulnerability. Additionally, we wanted to raise the awareness of the community about the issues related to homelessness and to seek innovative community responses.

Between 14 and 16 August 2012 from 4:00am to 6:30am, nine teams of over 80 volunteers drawn from the homelessness sector, mental health and other community service organisations searched the streets of inner-city Perth to find and interview people who were sleeping rough. Later on those days, interviews were also conducted at youth and adult homeless drop-in centres and soup vans. Other volunteers assisted with data entry and providing meals and support for the teams.

The teams used the VI as the survey tool. It is based on research by Dr Jim O’Connell of Boston’s Healthcare of the Homeless Program and collects the name, date of birth and photographs of people, as well as data on their health status, institutional history, duration of homelessness, crisis accommodation use and previous housing situation. His research shows that certain medical conditions place a homeless individual at a high risk of dying if they remain on the streets. People who have been homeless for more than six months and have at least one of eight major health risk indicators are identified as vulnerable. During the Perth survey, three people were identified with six risk indicators, three with five, six with four, 16 with three, 28 with two and 41 with one risk indicator.

With appropriate consultation, the VI was slightly adapted for Perth and has enabled the commencement of a register of individuals who are experiencing chronic homelessness, are sleeping rough and who are at highest risk of premature death.

Collaboration
Registry week was a collaborative effort of community agencies. These included the WA Police and state and local government, with invaluable support and encouragement from the eastern states through Micah Projects in Brisbane, the Mercy Foundation in Sydney, HomeGround Services in Melbourne and the Australian Common Ground Alliance.

The Mobile GP and Mobile (Mental Health) Clinical Outreach Team (MCOT) were supportive from the start and gradually by early 2012 when local government indicated they would financially support the event, we were on our way. This led to a Registry Week Steering Committee being formed, which included representatives from the Department of Housing, Department for Child Protection (holding the homelessness portfolio in WA), City of Perth, City of Vincent (these four agencies, along with Ruah Community Services, provided the funding for Registry Week), WA Police, Mobile GP, MCOT, the Salvation Army and St Bartholomew’s.

Special comment must be made regarding the support of the WA Police in assisting to plan the campaign and then fully participating in the event. The benefits of the positive relationships that developed and the breaking down of stereotypical images cannot be underestimated.

Andrew Davies, from Perth’s Mobile GP Service gave unstintingly of his time. Along with his team of nurses, who arrived at 3.00 am each morning and with senior staff from WA Police and Ruah, they formed the Emergency Response Team.

The Salvation Army team provided hot breakfasts prepared with lots of TLC for all of the volunteers, who were most appreciative of this as they returned from their early morning surveying duties.

The Nyoongar Patrol team provided exceptional assistance in surveying Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness and the Anglicare Youth team assisted with the surveys of young people, which were carried out during the day.

Russell Oliver of MCOT said:
‘working together was a fantastic experience and really broke down a lot of barriers. Everyone was there because they genuinely wanted to help people’.

Nina Crosland, Manager from St Bartholomew’s commented:
‘The positive feedback from staff who relished the opportunity to work with workers from other agencies was a fantastic outcome. It fired up enthusiasm and a desire to get involved with the bigger picture, and this is the take home message for our service: to recognise the value in working in partnership, in sharing of information to create a stronger more united service area.

It was a great opportunity to be part of the steering committee to see a collaboration of non-government and government representatives at the table all keen to invest time and effort into this worthwhile project... We hope to see the data gathered being utilised as leverage to shape the sector and create more innovative models of working in the future.’

Niall Rhatigan, Manager, Passages Resource Centre:
‘Perth Registry Week was a great opportunity to get to know other services and build strong working relationships. It was a chance to feel part of something bigger and work towards creating the best possible outcomes from what we have to offer right now, rather than what we hope to have in the future.’
This snapshot has brought to the fore the value of a more assertive approach from services and the need to identify those people who are most ‘at risk’. It has led to what seems to be a much more accountable level of service provision and services seem to feel more comfortable asking each other ‘Why?’ when a client’s needs cannot be met adequately... The Vulnerability Index has served as a ‘wake-up call’ in relation to some areas of our service provision.’

Challenges
Some of the challenges we encountered in planning and delivering Registry Week in Perth included:

- Initial resistance to the idea from various parties.
- Deciding to hold the event in the middle of winter rather than in warmer months, which would have resulted in a larger number of interviews. Having generated the interest for Registry Week, we did not want to wait many months before proceeding with it. Also, a winter survey would identify those who are the neediest; having nowhere else to sleep but the streets and parks, despite the bitter cold and rainy weather.
- Running Registry Week without having any other campaign in place in relation to follow up or readily available housing. This was a valid point made by those who opposed Registry Week but not a valid reason why we should not run the event. Our hope was that Registry Week will be the start of an opportunity for the entire community to identify innovative and collaborative solutions to the issues of homelessness.
- Resourcing for the coordination of an ongoing response to those identified by the survey, as well as maintenance and updating of the database remains an issue.
- The perennial debate about ‘Housing Ready’ and ‘Housing First’ approaches continues. There is now general acknowledgement that Housing First needs to be a part of the range of options for those experiencing homelessness.

Opportunities

- Any response to homelessness needs to be a whole of community response with not just government expected to solve the problem. It requires a concerted effort from governments, community groups and service organisations and the corporate sector, to work together to find innovative solutions. There is opportunity for us here in Perth to create a campaign which enables us to house the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness that is similar to the campaigns in the eastern states and in the USA (for example, 100,000 Homes, USA, 50 Lives 50 Homes, Brisbane and Hobart, 90 Homes for 90 Lives, Sydney).
- Perth would benefit greatly from having a Common Ground building (already underway in Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia). The Australian Common Ground Alliance has already indicated support for this to occur—if appropriate interested parties can be identified.
- Perth Registry Week 2012 only covered inner city Perth. There are other parts of the Perth metropolitan and outer metropolitan areas, as well as WA regional areas where homelessness is a major issue and a Registry Week event would be useful for identifying individuals and prioritising them for services and housing. Ruah Community Services would be happy to share the experience gained to assist in organising further Registry Week events in WA and data collected can be added to the already established database.

- There is general agreement from a number of agencies in the Street to Home team, with endorsement from the Department for Child Protection, that Vulnerability Index surveys can be completed for new homeless clients, so that their details can be added to the Register.
- The Street to Home teams and Day Centres for the Homeless are already working together to provide follow up for those identified through the surveys as the most vulnerable.

- There is an opportunity for government and non-government agencies to work collaboratively, adding to the Register and using it to target available housing and support resources starting with the most vulnerable in an effort to reduce chronic homelessness.

- The data gathered can be used to advocate for the needs of people sleeping rough as well as contributing to the development of innovative approaches and solutions.

Perth Registry Week provided an unforgettable experience for all those who participated in it. We look forward to using the information gathered and the relationships established to build further collaboration and solutions to address the issue of homelessness in Perth and the rest of WA.

Anyone interested in more information regarding Perth Registry Week, please contact Ros Mulley at Ruah Community Services
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or email: Ros.Mulley@ruah.com.au

References
Watkins L and Pritchard, J August 2011, ‘The art and science of service linkages’: Research commissioned by Ruah Community Services and funded by Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FAHCSIA)

Good News

We had a young client who was heavily pregnant. DCP were involved and were going to place the child in custody due to no housing. A house became available before client gave birth, keeping child and client together. This was the client’s first ever house as client had been transient since the age of 12. She has re-engaged with TAFE, linked with Mental Health provider and developed new friendships within her area. She is now seeking employment through a Job Network Provider, is reunited with her Mother and has made contact with Father. She has successfully lived at her current address for over one and a half years. In her survey feedback she said she was extremely grateful for NPAH program and the kick start it gave to her life.
Community Supported Residential Units: Working in Partnership

Linda Borrison
Manager, Mental Health Support Services,
St Bartholomew’s House

In 2008 St Bartholomew’s House (St Bart’s) was awarded the Non-Government Organisation (NGO) contract to manage four metropolitan Community Supported Residential Units (CSRUs), an accommodation model included in the WA Mental Health Strategy 2004–07. The sites opened between December 2008 and February 2010 and provide medium to long-term accommodation for 97 adults living with mental illness who have support needs of between two to four hours a day.

The WA CSRU program fosters partnerships between the public mental health service, the Department of Housing (DoH) and the chosen Non-Government Organisation (in this case St Bart’s). The main aim of the program is to provide adults living with a mental illness access to home-like accommodation that is safe, stable and secure. Staff support residents with their daily living activities in order to equip them live and participate in the community.

Each CSRU site is head-leased from DoH and houses between 22 and 25 people. Although the CSRUs are licenced as Private Psychiatric Hostels, and as such have to comply with the Department of Health standards, the sites are all à la carte designs of units similar to any other housing development. Residents live in one, two or three bedroom units. Everyone has their own bedroom and bathroom but share the kitchen and living areas. There is a separate unit that houses the staff office as well as communal areas that all residents can access.

Lotterywest granted funding to furnish the 60 houses across the program. All units are fully furnished and equipped with linen and electrical items. In keeping with the aim of the CSRU being ‘home-like’, furniture was sourced from regular shops, not hospital suppliers. Residents are encouraged to add their personal touches to the units as for some this may be their long-term home.

Under the leadership of a Program Manager each site is run independently within the overall St Bart’s strategy, policies and procedures. A Site Coordinator oversees the day-to-day running of the site and there are St Bart’s support staff rostered twenty four hours a day seven days a week. A Health Promotion Coordinator works across all sites providing specialist advice and input.

The public mental health service provides the clinical care and back-up that each resident needs. Each CSRU has a service agreement with their local mental health service that sets out the roles and responsibilities of all parties in the support of the resident.

The referral pathway is via the local public mental health service, where there is a dedicated CSRU Liaison Officer and follows an agreed process. Both St Bart’s and the local mental health service are involved in the selection of residents. A panel comprising of representatives from St Bart’s, the local mental health service and an independent community member then have the final say on the appropriateness of the applicant for the vacancy. The primary eligibility criteria are that the person is homeless or at risk of homelessness or inappropriately housed; that they have a serious and persistent mental illness; that they have links to the area and that they are aged between 18 and 65 years. The program is designed for individuals and does not accept couples or families.

When moving into a CSRU residents agree to abide by the house rules and engage in the program, as this is not just accommodation. Of course, not everything runs smoothly or has positive outcomes. Sharing living space can cause conflict between residents and staff need to intervene to negotiate a solution. For example, one resident did not like the fact that his housemate stayed up late watching the television and disturbed his sleep. A set of headphones was provided and the situation was resolved.

Alcohol and illegal drugs are banned from the sites and violent or intimidating behaviour is not tolerated. These behaviours can lead to the accommodation being withdrawn and the resident moving to alternative providers.

St Bart’s staff use the Outcome Star as a change management tool. Motivation is often low, so residents are encouraged to take ownership of their action plans; to set their goals and the steps needed to achieve those goals. Examples include a resident who trained with a community group and then ran the 14km HBF Run for Life. Another group of residents made two quilts for families in need in Cambodia. The residents of another Villa made a video about their home which they entered into the local arts festival – and won! A number of residents work part time, volunteer or are studying. But for some CSRU residents maintaining stable accommodation is a major achievement in itself.

This stability of accommodation has proved a relief for a number of families of residents. One mother commented that she felt reassured that her son was safe. Whenever possible CSRU staff work closely with residents to reconnect with their families and include them in their support plan.

All sites hold regular residents meetings where group activities and site issues can be discussed. Residents’ views are also garnered in an annual survey. The results have been generally positive with 90 per cent finding the housing suitable to their needs. A similar number agreed that their wellbeing had improved as had their ability to form and maintain relationships.

Although for some residents the CSRUs will be their long term home a number of residents have moved on to less supported or independent living in the community. The partnership between St Bart’s and the public local mental health services was a new venture for both sides and has led to a better working relationship. The continuing development of a partnership approach to supported accommodation will lead to job satisfaction for staff and positive outcomes for residents.

St Bartholomew’s residents with one of their quilts for Cambodia
A Partnership to Assist People with Alcohol and Drug Issues Secure Independent Accommodation

Dace Tomsons
Manager, Client Services and Development (South)
Drug and Alcohol Office,
Department of Health WA

Many people with alcohol and drug use problems struggle with securing and maintaining suitable and stable accommodation. A history of erratic tenancy, no references and financial difficulties mean that even those people who are in treatment are forced back into unsuitable and insecure accommodation. Support to secure and maintain suitable accommodation is critical to recovery.

In 2009 The Housing Support Worker Drug and Alcohol initiative was funded through the Commonwealth and State National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) to prevent people with drug and alcohol issues becoming entrenched in homelessness by providing support to access and maintain stable long term accommodation. A key element of the support is a commitment from the client to address drug and alcohol issues through engagement with treatment services.

In the metropolitan area a total of six specialist alcohol and drug homelessness workers provide intensive case management to each client. Along with providing assistance to secure accommodation, case workers also link clients to a range of mainstream services including education, employment and training.

In the south western corridor the service is being provided through an innovative partnership between Palmerston Association, a respected not for profit alcohol and other drugs (AOD) service provider and Anglicare WA, a longstanding provider of accommodation and social services.

Anglicare WA has the lead agency role and Palmerston provides AOD expertise and referral networks. As part of the collaboration, a half-time AOD housing support worker is subcontracted to Palmerston’s Fremantle office, and an Anglicare WA AOD housing support worker is co-located in Palmerston’s Mandurah office. Most significantly, the partnership facilitates an exchange of knowledge, skills, expertise and professional networks, ensuring the best possible service was delivered to the clients. The partnership has been formalised in a memorandum of understanding and has delivered effective services over the contract period. In the two years up to June 2012, 110 clients have been assisted by the partnership.

The service operates through a simple step-by-step protocol.

Ms P is an example of the success of the partnership. Ms P is a 41 year old woman of culturally and linguistically diverse origins with severe co-morbid concerns. At the time of referral from Next Step, she was in urgent need of housing assistance. Because Ms P had been unemployed for two decades, due to her illness, she was not able to secure accommodation for herself and her husband who was in long term rehabilitation at that time.

Following assessment, an application for accommodation was made to the Department of Housing in Fremantle. A suitable property was secured in June 2010 and Ms P signed the lease agreement for a two bedroom duplex in Spearwood.

The partnership was able to assess and house Mrs P within four weeks of her coming to the attention of the agencies.

Mrs P has continued to live in the property and will probably remain there for the rest of her life. She reports that over the past two years her physical and mental health has been more stable than over the previous 20 years. After 12 months of intensive work and support, Mrs P was able to leave the NPAH program but maintains regular contact with the agency. On these occasions, she never fails to express her gratefulness and appreciation for the housing assistance the NPAH partnership has provided.

This is an excellent example of long term change being achieved through great cooperation between organisations. Such collaboration is a powerful tool for addressing homelessness.
The Journey to Lime Street: Creating Partnerships that Work

Lynne Evans
Former CEO, St Bartholomew’s House
and Nina Crosland
Manager, Homeless and Transitional Support Service, St Bartholomew’s House

Having an idea and bringing it to fruition are two very different aspects of developing a building. St Bartholomew’s House Lime Street was opened in August 2012. However, its inception was in 2006. It is frustrating to know that even with the best will in the world Lime Street has taken six years to become a reality.

What finally eventuated is a unique building that includes crisis, long term and aged care accommodation co-located with the St Bartholomew’s House corporate offices. The building also has many ‘green’ aspects including solar and wind power, LED lighting and storm water recycling with the whole idea to make the building as sustainable as possible and reduce the ongoing maintenance and running costs.

The sustainable initiatives were made possible by a 750,000 dollar Jobs Fund Initiative in 2010/11 as part of the Federal Government’s stimulus package.

Historical Information

St Bartholomew’s House has been providing accommodation and support for people either homeless or at risk of homelessness since 1963.

St Bart’s, as it is affectionately known has grown in size, stature and reputation, especially in the last 15 years.

This continual reviewing of service delivery allowed St Bart’s to concentrate on quality improvement and make changes that are more consistent with a self-reliance rather than welfare model.

Getting Started: Making the Dream a Reality

The St Bart’s Board and I started looking for properties around East Perth that might be available and in a reasonable price range.

Eventually we identified land available next to the Perth City Farm in Lime Street East Perth.

We met with the Chair of the City Farm Board to discuss our ideas and found out that some land adjacent to their lease was owned by the government under management of the East Perth Redevelopment Authority (EPRA).

In 2007 we took our concept plans to the then Minister for Planning Alannah MacTiernan, Ms MacTiernan was sold on the idea and wrote to ask EPRA to release the land to St Bart’s. EPRA were not altogether keen as it meant they were losing money and that was not part of their remit. They had also started looking at a development plan for the area and had not planned to have a homeless service in the middle of their new urban precinct.

Keeping the Pressure On!

In May 2009 following protracted discussions a 40 year peppercorn lease to St Bart’s was signed. Development Approval from EPRA was agreed in December the same year.

In the meantime, the Department of Housing had changed its policies in relation to allowing non-government organisations to project manage their own developments provided that due process and due diligence were adhered to. Money was available for new projects under the old Crisis Approvals funding and a new Social Housing Investment Program. The department were trying to get as many NGO’s as possible to build social housing.

I had the letter approving 17.3 million dollars and we then had to become a Preferred Provider with the Department of Housing. In 2008 we negotiated the final figure of 22.3 million dollars and some additional units.

In 2008 the new Liberal government honoured the promises of support from the previous government and we then started the long protracted negotiations with the Department of Housing to get an agreement. We had to increase the number of units to 1048 and by this time the cost of building had increased because of rising steel and labour costs.

I had also applied and received approval from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing for a capital grant of 7.3 million dollars. That grant would increase our low care aged care residential beds from 20 to 40. It would also give each person their own room.

The delays in the commencement of the building meant we had to seek numerous variations to our Commonwealth capital grant and occupancy agreements.
The Last Piece of the Puzzle

Mr Troy Buswell, the new WA Housing Minister was a strong supporter of NGO’s being able to drive their own business. I explained to him the difficulties we were having getting a contract signed with the Department of Housing. The Minister had appointed a new Director General and between the two they were able to get things moving. The contract with the Department of Housing was signed in November 2010. We then obtained a Building Licence from the City of Perth. The tender to build was let and the builder took over the site in December 2010.

Partnerships

As CEO of St Bart’s I have always believed that to be successful you need strong relationships. The Lime Street development was no exception. I had established respectful relationships with the Commonwealth and State Governments and St Bart’s was known for its ability to continually review and improve its service delivery. Building the strength and cohesiveness of the management team had been a priority for me as I had planned to retire when the Lime Street building was completed.

We were all feeling our way but I always believed we would achieve our goal. All this had to be achieved while continuing to provide services in three core areas of aged care, homeless and transitional and mental health accommodation. This would not have been possible without the strong flexible and innovative management team and their commitment to succeed.

The strong relationships that were formed allowed us to continue to discuss and negotiate any difficulties.

We were fortunate to have great support from the Department for Child Protection (DCP) that funds Specialist Homelessness Services in Western Australia. They were acutely aware of the shortage of affordable housing and rentals in Western Australia and knew that St Bart’s programs were focussed on preventing people returning to homelessness and rebuilding lives.

The Challenge for Changed Service Delivery

The move to Lime Street would involve a great deal of change in a multitude of ways.

We had to change the way we think about service delivery, we were changing the environment, the layout, the facilities and had to change the way we communicated within our teams. Lime Street would provide us with a canvas to explore the possibility of approaching homelessness accommodation services in a more innovative way.

There were two aspects to the transition plan – the physical changes in moving to a new building and new ways of thinking which fell in the following areas:

Restorative Practice

Restorative practice is a tool used in a number of countries to support those experiencing homelessness. The Stockholm City Mission in Sweden has proven successful in using restorative practice to encourage clients to be socially responsible and accountable for their actions. We have looked to incorporate aspects of the practice and make them relevant to the service that we have here in Perth.

Using Consequence and Awareness

Consequences and Awareness Agreements with clients who are on the verge of eviction or starting to head down a dark path we are now intervening at a critical point to prevent the person losing their way. The idea of looking at Consequences and Awareness with a resident is to increase the individual’s accountability for their own actions, encouraging them to look not just how the decisions they make have impacted on themselves, and on their community. This is something we have been able to bring in to the programs in the Homeless and Transitional Service.

Another focus is looking at how we can create a more individualised support approach. The crisis rooms we now are in close proximity to support staff to enable us to provide high levels of support to those in need. Residents who are in crisis are then offered the option of residing in the transitional accommodation which provides a higher level of independence and privacy, as well as an individualised case management program to take the next step in the journey to independence.

We aim to provide assistance over a five month period but are looking to take into account the progress of the resident and identify what value may be added by extending the stay whilst maintaining their awareness that this is a stepping stone and avoiding dependency.

Exit strategies have always played a key role in preparing residents for moving on to the community, accessing mainstream services and ensuring they are informed of any changes to minimise panic and fear that can sometimes occur when support is looking to be withdrawn.

The transitional program looks to increase the level of responsibilities related to staying in the accommodation to therefore empower the residents, allowing them to contribute to their environment. These increased responsibilities also up-skill the residents to make the transition to lone living in the community easier.

We also identified the need to break down the stereotype of the homeless service and to incorporate some mainstream aspects to the service. We have looked to take on a security officer or concierge to work the night shifts in place of a support worker from Major Security Services. The role of the security officer is to monitor to whole building and ensure the safety of all residents on site. We are excited by this new partnership and look to learn along the way around the positives and negatives of using this approach but have been fortunate to find a security service that are keen to come on the journey with us.

We anticipate there will be occasions when there is a need for a support worker to remain overnight in cases of crisis for individual residents and these will be assisted on a case by case basis. The removal of the support worker has removed the desire for some residents to stay up all hours to talk and encourages regular sleeping patterns. With bringing in the mainstream aspects to the service we hope to begin to break down the stigma associated with a "homeless hostel". With the same focus we also aim to utilise facilities in the building to create a space for residents to attend cooking classes and computer sessions, and the hope is to open this up to be used by local community groups and run informative workshops for residents.

Here in Perth we have also established a collaborative network of service providers in the Specialist Homelessness Services and we are looking to share resources spaces and events that can be held at Lime Street to benefit the whole homeless community.
Police and Registry Week
Perth, WA 2012

Senior Sergeant Dave Hooper
Perth Police Station, WA

People sleeping rough and police officers are intrinsically linked in WA. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Police officers are one of the few government employee groups that work outside normal business hours and through the night 365 days a year. Police officers and people sleeping rough share the streets when most of society is asleep. As such we come into regular contact with each other.
- People sleeping rough are more likely to be victims of violence than the rest of society.
- A percentage of people sleeping rough commit unlawful acts that are consequence of the living conditions associated with homelessness.

As a police officer I do not step back from the fact that my job is to enforce the law fairly and with equality. The statue of justice that is often found in front of court houses wears a blindfold for a reason; we police behaviour, not people.

The fact that police officers enforce the law equally does not mean we are blind to the plight of rough sleepers. But the truth is that a person sleeping rough is difficult to refer to agencies that can help with housing, mental health and physical health at 3:00 am. As a police officer of 30 years’ experience I have often despaired at the lack of after-hours support to which my officers can refer rough sleepers.

I read the May 2012 edition of Parity, entitled Policing Homelessness. I was not surprised by the negative police stories published. It is indicative of the distrust and adversarial attitude that often exists between police officers and advocates of people sleeping rough. My experience is that many of the attitudes held by both police officers and advocates are not based on personal experience but on pre-conceptions and other people’s stories, and are therefore ripe to be challenged.

I challenge those pre-conceptions with other people’s stories, and are therefore ripe to be challenged.

As the planning progressed, the professional relationships between police and the other agencies on the planning committee strengthened and trust was established. The enthusiasm of my officers to be involved in the project and our willingness to commit resources such as communications and transport was the final nail in the coffin of distrust.

In August this year we progressed to the training stage for volunteers, outreach workers, health professionals and police officers, who would be conducting the surveys in the field. The same prejudices, to various degrees, were present again; police suspicious of agency workers, agency workers suspicious of police. But my experience with this project has been that as these various people worked toward a common purpose it became very difficult to sustain those pre-conceived prejudices. Registry Week in WA was a great success and resulted in a number of positive outcomes. These included:

- A number of high vulnerability rough sleepers were identified who have commenced receiving help from a combined team of housing and health professionals.
- An ongoing commitment from the participating agencies to work collaboratively to continue adding to the register of vulnerable rough sleepers and to continue to offer services. This included a continuing commitment from WA Police to locate and refer people sleeping rough to the combined services.

I challenge the nay sayers of the world to walk in other people’s shoes and experience interaction with people sleeping rough at 3am. You will soon discover that those people do not care whether the survey taker is a volunteer, an outreach worker or a police officer. They are just happy that someone is taking the time to ask them about their problems.
Introduction

The cost of living has continued to climb for WA working families and new financial obstacles rise every day. Rent takes a draining toll. A review conducted in April 2012 revealed that more than 99 per cent of rental properties in WA are beyond affordable levels for low income households. Many families are being forced to pay rent that they cannot sustain or make serious sacrifices to meet their payments. There have been steady increases to the cost of groceries, utilities and transportation. Staying out of debt has become an increasingly difficult task. It only takes a small setback for families to find their budget under stress. An unexpected injury or accident is sufficient to send a family into a downward spiral.

Anglicare WA is determined to assist these families through the tough times. Our housing team continues to be one of the State’s most trusted and utilised resources by people in need.

Making Ends Meet

Anglicare WA’s Making Ends Meet service provides financial assistance, support and education to working families in Mandurah, Rockingham and the Kwinana region. Through the service we provide our clients with direct grants to help pay bills, and offer training in financial literacy and budgeting. We also provide advocacy and education around private tenancy leasing so that clients have the capacity to ensure their own future stability. We will support our clients until their financial situation and housing has stabilised.

Families who utilise Making Ends Meet are partnered with one of our professional support workers. The support worker will manage their case personally and take special consideration of the unique needs of each individual client.

The funding for Making Ends Meet is generously provided by a private donor. The service is evidence of how charitable philanthropists and community service organisations can work together to effect change in the community.

Through Making Ends Meet we arm Western Australian families with the tools they need to weather the bumps and bruises of our unforgiving economy.

Case Study

Presenting Client

The presenting client is the mother of a three year old child who works part time and her partner is an apprentice electrician working full time. While their budget is sustainable they found themselves with rent arrears of $790 due to client’s partner becoming ill and receiving a reduced wage. This lack of wages also meant they were unable to maintain mobile phone and car payments and owe $332 and $1000 respectively. She was also concerned that they had not received a Synergy account in the five months they had been in their rental property.

Client Goals

• to stabilise housing
• to pay car payment arrears
• manage budget more efficiently
• contact Synergy to establish why she had not received an account.

Identified Needs

To reduce rent arrears and ensure the client’s partner retains his motor vehicle by paying arrears and ensuring that Synergy account was correctly established.

Action Plan

• assist client with rent arrears and pay two weeks in advance
• pay finance company arrears to prevent car being repossessed
• Vodaphone debt to be managed by the client.

Outcome

Once rent arrears and finance company arrears were paid the client’s budget was then more than adequate to meet ongoing needs as their income had improved when the client’s partner returned to work from sick leave. The client contacted Synergy and was informed she would receive a fairly large outstanding account for payment. Anglicare Housing Support Worker advised her about the Hardship Utility Grants Scheme (HUGS) and also to consider Centrepay option. The client advised Housing Support Worker that she was more than happy to continue managing her budget and was thankful for the assistance provided.

Collaborative Working

While working with this client we were assisted by Professional Real Estate, Capital Finance and Synergy credit control.
What Does the Future Hold?

Peta Nordberg
Acting Operations Manager,
Mission Australia,
Western Australia

Homelessness is a current concern here in WA with rising rental prices, wait lists for public housing increasing and the ever present question from the Community Sector ‘will the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) programs be continued post June 2013?’ You cannot help but hear this discussion, whether it be on radio where families with one or both adults working and no underlying issues call in to outline the impossibility of gaining stable affordable housing; or in the pages of the press which happily announces headlines such as: ‘homeless man charged with assault’ to ‘my mission was to get off the streets’.

Now imagine you do not have the stabilising factors of employment, a supportive family environment and are dealing with a violent relationship, substance misuse or mental health issues. These issues make it less likely for you to be able to obtain stable housing. For many vulnerable West Australians the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) brought hope and outcomes. All the research tells us that to be a productive, high functioning member of society we need three things; connection to community, safe living environment and a sense of meaning. None of these are achievable without one of our most basic needs being met and that is a roof over head, a place to call home.

Here is Joy’s story, one of many successes that have come about as a result of the NPAH programs.

Joy had been on the NPAH program since September 2010. By the end of her time on the program Mission Australia staff were assisting her family, consisting of her partner Paul, son Rory and daughter Page. Joy was a victim of severe domestic violence and a heavy amphetamine user with mental health issues.

When Joy entered the program in September 2010 she was referred by a youth accommodation agency along with her son Rory. In January 2011 Joy had her son removed from her care due to high risk behaviour involving drug use. During the support period Joy participated with the Department for Child Protection working towards reunification. There were many occasions where Joy was supported, as well as accompanied to the Perth children’s court to gain access to her son. Joy linked in with another organisation to begin working on her reunification process. This was at times a very stressfully relationship as Joy felt that their approach was not understanding of Aboriginal children and the way they would react to different situations. Joy often fought with the workers from this program. Joy was undeniably eager to be reunited with her son, doing all that was asked to have her son back home on a full time basis.

At the time Joy was also expecting her second child. She was very concerned of the impact having another child at home would have on her son when he had to leave to return to foster care. This caused her heightened anxiety. Rory was returned to his mother’s care around Christmas time in 2011, their relationship has since grown and they are working well creating a loving family unit.

Joy was offered a property early on in her support and moved into that house in February 2011 brokerage was used to pay for her bond for the home allowing her to use money she had been saving on fitting out her first home. Joy used a grant that is offered by Transition into Independent Living Allowance (TILA) to spend $1500.00 on furniture for her new home, buying items for her son’s bedroom to make it a happy and
comfortable place to stay. Unfortunately her ex-partner’s family moved in across from her unit. Due to safety concerns, she had to move house. There was a lot of Mission Australia support provided to help Joy find a new property. This took over six months. However, the result was the provision of a three bedroom stand-alone house in April 2012. During the time up until housing was secured Joy and Paul where provided support and information on personal safety to prepare Joy and her family in the event that that contact was made by her ex-partner.

During the 18 months of support the family faced several challenges. Joy found employment in March 2011. However, because of the reunification process, Joy needed to be home on particular days to have visitation with her son. This caused issues in the work place and in the end Joy had to resign from her position. This made Joy frustrated as she enjoyed contributing as well as earning her own money. Joy experienced significant impact to her mental health whilst on the program. During her pregnancy she was advised to cease two of the prescribed medications that assisted in controlling her anxiety in order to protect the unborn baby. Staff supported her with attending Bentley Mental Health, providing her informal counselling and encouraging alternative techniques in dealing with her anxiety. Joy was able to stay off her medication for the duration of her pregnancy and went on limited medication once she gave birth to Page.

Joy has come a long way since starting on the Mission Australia Housing Support program funded by the National Partnerships Agreement on Homelessness. She has achieved many of the goals she set. Joy has been able to sustain and maintain her housing and is now housed in a safe neighbourhood. She has benefited greatly by reuniting with her son, creating a home for her family and enrolling to study youth work. Now Joy has enrolled in youth work as a way to contribute to the community and instil her valuable knowledge and life experience with other struggling young people. Joy’s transformation has occurred as a result of an 18 month journey, starting as a lost young person who was dealing with drug addiction, homelessness, having her child removed, low self-esteem and also afraid for her safety due to domestic violence. Today Joy is a young woman who is a proud mother of two and a reliable tenant who has created a safe home for her family. She is also more confident, head strong and has developed an incredible amount of self-esteem.

Although faced with adversity and complex challenges Joy has persevered to change the life of her family for the better. Mission Australia has approached state and federal governments asking for a firm commitment to fund the NPAH beyond next year, when it expires in June 2013. After waiting several weeks for a response on the issue from the State Government, Mission Australia WA Director, Melissa Perry, met with the State Government in September to raise her concerns.

Ms. Perry said that if the funding program did not continue beyond 2013, Mission Australia would have to halve the services it provided in WA. ‘That means a decrease in accommodation and support services for people experiencing homelessness,’ she said.

Joy, now at the age of 22, agreed that state and federal government funding for services such as Mission Australia was a must if homelessness was to be properly addressed, adding the help she received had ultimately saved her life.

‘They must continue with the funding because if they don’t then the whole situation is going to get worse,’ Joy said.

‘If I didn’t have that support and guidance when I was homeless, I would be in jail, no doubt.’

‘Living on the streets is certainly not a nice place. It is not somewhere that you want to be because you find yourself getting into crime just to get food.’

Joy said one of her goals in life was to help young people who were homeless.

‘I really want to help the youth of today who find themselves at risk,’ she said.

‘I’ve had that life experience, living on the streets, and I can relate to them.’

The question now for the sector and the community is: when will we know? The Commonwealth Government’s commitment to halve homelessness by 2020 may have seemed ambitious. However, without ongoing commitment from all areas of government the positive outcomes we have seen as a result of the NPAH programs will slowly fade into obscurity. Not-for-profit organisations will yet again be faced with overwhelming calls for support without the resources to do so.

David was known to a lot of homeless services in Perth. That is to say known by face and name but nobody seemed to know much about David other than he was forty three years old and was originally from Iraq. David was initially referred to the Housing Support worker by the Street to Home, Assertive Outreach Team. Prior to this he had been sleeping in parks across the Metropolitan area, moving from one place to another.

Concerns were raised about David’s health by an Assertive Outreach Worker who made the referral to 55 Central. David had chronic bronchitis, precipitated largely by sleeping outdoors in the cold weather. His ailing health was the impetus for him to seek assistance. His lack of knowledge of accommodation services was the main reason he had not accessed crisis accommodation in the past. He was admitted into 55 Central’s Crisis Accommodation service after he was assessed by the Housing Support worker.

Concerned about his own health he agreed to see the visiting nurse who in turn made an appointment for him to see a GP to receive antibiotics for his severe bronchitis.

Through most of his stay within the Crisis Accommodation Service David was very quiet keeping to himself. At the time it was very hard for the Housing Support worker to make an appointment for a one to one key work session with David. Although very polite to staff and other clients, David would communicate as little as possible. Over time however, the Housing Support worker was able to build trust with David by showing a genuine interest in him and speaking to David as an equal. It took a long time for David to tell his story. David had been a refugee and arrived in Australia in 1994 after leaving Iraq as a young man living under extreme and harsh conditions. His family was middle class Assyrian Christians who had lived a normal and fulfilling life until the military destroyed their home, killing his father and only brother. David had also been tortured. David had no contacts or support networks in Australia and somehow he had fallen between the gaps over the last five years.

Even though he was aware that he needed help, he neither knew how to communicate this nor where to look. It later became apparent that David was suffering from acute post traumatic stress disorder like many other refugees escaping situations that have endangered their lives and their psychological health.

Part of the help which the Housing Support worker provided to David was a bridge to seeking professional support. In this respect, his relationship with the Housing Support worker became a catalyst to forming other professional relationships with appropriate mental health practitioners.

With encouragement from the Housing Support worker, David visited a psychiatrist who referred him to a psychologist to receive treatment for his post traumatic stress disorder. In February 2012 he was housed by the Department of Housing and is now doing voluntary work for a refugee support group as a translator. Eventually he wants to study to become a Social Worker and his long-term goal is to support other refugees.
Registry Week Volunteer Perspective

Compiled by Ros Mulley
Executive Manager, Ruah Community Services

As a regular person from the suburbs, leaving a warm bed and sleeping household to go into the city at 3.00 am is unusual and a little bit adventurous. It is without doubt the best time to cycle, with no traffic but the odd taxi, no need to follow the road rules and the chance to see the city with different eyes. It is Registry Week in Perth where people who are homeless and sleeping rough in the city are spoken to about their health and their situation in order to advocate to government on their behalf and to actively to find them a home. It is the first time this has been done in Perth and about 80 volunteers thought this good cause was worth getting up for to be in the city for 3.30 am over three mornings.

It was moving to see the Ruah Centre full of people on the Monday evening for the Registry Week training. The folk from the eastern states who have seen this done elsewhere said our set up was the best they had seen. The organisers had the benefit of the experiences in other states and cities around the world and seemed to have everything covered, with tight planning, warm hoodies for everyone and a strong sense of purpose.

The methodology was explained as not being just a head count of people experiencing homelessness and a data collection exercise, but a genuine and practical approach to finding homes for people who do not have them. This required us to look for the people who ‘sleep rough’ in the city, take their names, photos and histories through a Vulnerability Index questionnaire and use this information immediately for the people in the worst health and greatest need.

I volunteered for the first and third mornings but some tough cookies were there for all three mornings and of course the organisers were backing up right through to the presentation of the data to the politicians and others on the final day. It was an admirable effort from a huge array of individuals and groups and as volunteers we were well looked after.

Our group headed off with some nervous excitement to look for people sleeping rough in the area we were assigned. It had been said that people sleeping out in the city often have to move along from place to place and it was easy to see why. Even in the earliest hours, the city is bathed in light and there is absolutely nowhere that I could imagine sleeping in the peaceful way that I know about sleep, I will never look at another bundle of humanity and blankets and personal effects in a doorway in the same way after being a Registry Week volunteer.

The two people we found to speak to on our first morning were long-time homeless men, with five decades spent on the streets between them. Both were willing to talk, despite being woken by us. Again, the rationale for doing this in the early hours, in winter, was that this is how you find the most vulnerable people who have absolutely nowhere else to go. When we explained what we were doing, the men were both willing to share their personal stories and trust us to respect these and genuinely use this information well. It was a lot to ask of them but both men were dignified, respectful and still held some hope that there may be an alternative to their difficult situations.

‘Ashley’ had a spot that was his and known to be his, secure from the weather and with great sight lines in all directions. When he said that he had been homeless from age ten, for 30 years, it was incomprehensible to me. How, how, how? was all that I could think. What circumstances consign a child to homelessness into their adult life? The light of the torch was not great for reading, although direct eye contact is good and polite, it would also have felt intrusive. It was clear there was a surface toughness about Ashley in his appearance but a definite gentleness in his dealings with us.

Through good fortune or canny self-care, Ashley reported no significant health problems. He said that he had never been assaulted in his life in the streets because ‘look at the size of me’ but that also implies a need to be on constant alert. To the question of what would you need to feel safe and well, he didn’t miss a beat in replying ‘a home’.

‘Stephen’ is a decade older than Ashley and had known a productive working life before a range of problems led to his homelessness over the past 20 years. Some of the problems arose from accidents and injuries and the legacies of these were not just homelessness but the suffering from pain and impairment, compounded by ‘living rough’. Stephen wanted to talk, in that way of a person who wants you to know that this is not who they are and who they see themselves to be. He was very clear in saying that he did not choose or want to live on the streets, that it is hard and he had made great efforts to find his own place but circumstances always worked against him. When he listed the reasons, they described the tough competitive housing market and the impossible chasm between a person with no address and the prospect of a place to call home. Stephen’s answer to the safe and well question was ‘somewhere to live’.

Both of the men we met reported no next of kin or people close to them. This is too sad for many of us to imagine. What our brief contacts showed very clearly is that these men are not lost to themselves, just lost to society. With help, respect and perseverance from us all they will find a home and re-join community life.
The Mobile Clinical Outreach Team: Assertive Mental Health Outreach on the Street

Russell Oliver
Mental Health Nurse Practitioner, Mobile Clinical Outreach Team, Street to Home Program

The Mobile Clinical Outreach Team (MCOT) is an assertive Mental Health Outreach service that is street present and provides Specialist Mental Health Services through Clinical Assessment, Community triage, Treatment and Engagement for ‘Rough Sleepers’ who have serious mental illness and/or co-occurring substance misuse issues, as a part of the Street to Home Program (S2H) in Perth, WA. This component of S2H is not clinic based and has a strong presence on the street and at the Drop In/Community Centres in inner city Perth and Fremantle. MCOT engages with the client at a location that is most appropriate for the client.

MCOT is a small team comprised of a part time Consultant Psychiatrist and three Clinical Nurse Specialists that at the moment cover a Monday to Friday service between 7.00 am and 6.00 pm. MCOT provides case management for S2H clients and offers a consultation liaison service to all S2H service providers in WA. MCOT facilitates an integrated approach between Specialist Homeless Services, mainstream mental health services, drug and alcohol services and primary care services through a Care Coordination Model.

Once a client has been activated all relevant information is uploaded onto the S2H shared data base Infoxchange. All S2H service providers (Assertive Outreach Workers and Housing Support Workers), specifically those that are working directly with the client, have access to this data base to record and share detailed client information to develop joint case management and formulate individualised care packages and plans. MCOT meets regularly with S2H providers to address the client’s issues and support each other through informal appropriate education and training, assessment and care planning resources, there is also a formal monthly meeting for S2H providers and each agency hosts the meeting on a three monthly rotation.

MCOT is under the governance of the WA Department of Health and has additional reporting obligations. All clients that are activated have an open file online within the Mental Health Information System (PSOLIS), MCOT documents all relevant information including, activation details, case management plans, functional assessments and up to date notes that can be viewed by mainstream mental health services, as a good percentage of S2H clients have had contact with mainstream services or are active with those services in one way or another.

MCOT provides regular six monthly reports to the Department for Child Protection and the Mental Health Commission (the S2H funding bodies in WA). Below are some trends that have been highlighted during the report period for January 2012 to July 2012.

Overview
Average age: 37
Percentage male/female: 40 per cent male, 60 per cent female
Ethnicity: 73 per cent Caucasian, 19 per cent Aboriginal, 8 per cent other/unknown
Axis: 36 of the 42 clients (86 per cent) accepted to the service had a primary mental health diagnosis, the most common of which was paranoid schizophrenia (14 per cent).
Drug and Alcohol: 37 of 42 clients (88 per cent) accepted to the service had substance abuse issues.
General Health: 10 of 42 clients (23 per cent) accepted to the service had general health problems.
Responding to Homelessness in Western Australia

John’s Bench

MCOT remains vigorously involved in service development through activity based projects. MCOT along with Ruah Community Services had a pivotal role in Perth’s first Registry Week Survey conducted in August 2012. The information that was captured is now a part of the national homelessness data base and all clients identified through the Vulnerability Index Tool (the main data collection questionnaire) are in the process of being assisted by S2H.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2011 was held in Perth between the 28 and 30 October. A homelessness strategy during this period was devised by the Department for Child Protection and Street to Home service providers. MCOT again played a valuable role along with the Mental Health Emergency Response Line (MHERL) in mental health service delivery for ‘rough sleepers’ during CHOGM. Some areas of the city were sectioned off and this had a potential impact on those sleeping rough within those zones.

Along with Uniting Care West Tranby Drop In Centre MCOT and MHERL provided access to specialist staff over the weekend for those clients that required mental health assistance and if needed a referral to appropriate services for ongoing supports.

MCOT has also been negotiating with Specialist Aboriginal Mental Health Services to have an indigenous worker as part of MCOT to provide culturally aware service delivery.

Case Study

A male 54 years old living rough in an inner city suburb was referred to MCOT. He was sleeping on a bench behind a shop in centre for five years with a serious mental illness and chronic alcohol dependence. He was activated as a S2H client and accommodated in a nearby hostel. The supervisor had concerns regarding his ongoing drinking though with regular visits from MCOT and the Assertive Outreach Workers from Ruah he was maintained in the building for several months. Unfortunately due to some medical issues he was asked to leave the hostel. He was admitted to hospital with MCOT’s assistance and investigations were undertaken as an inpatient. He was kept in hospital for several weeks due to MCOT having regular contact with the Medical and Nursing teams. His medical conditions are being addressed and he is now residing in another hostel in the outer suburbs and is coping well with appropriate supports in place.

The Street to Home Program has developed into an example of collaboration between government and non-government agencies in service provision. This approach is at the coalface of a new and exciting paradigm in delivering resources to those most at risk and disconnected from mainstream services. It has fostered a growing awareness of homelessness in Australia and how the dedicated Street to Home staff work.

Homelessness Status:
- on referral: 42 of 42 clients (100 per cent) accepted to the service were either primary or secondary homeless.
- on discharge: Of the 29 clients currently discharged from the service, 20 have been successfully assisted to find long term housing (69 per cent).

42 of 42 clients (69 per cent).

■ on referral:

- 20 (100 per cent) accepted to the service were primary homeless.
- 9 (45 per cent) accepted to the service were secondary homeless.

■ on discharge:

- 20 (100 per cent) accepted to the service were primary homeless.
- 9 (45 per cent) accepted to the service were secondary homeless.

Crystal came to Swan Emergency Accommodation’s National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) program in June 2011 from a residential rehabilitation facility. From the first assessment meeting, NPAH workers immediately recognised her high level of motivation to change and absolute commitment to overcoming her addiction.

Crystal, a mother to four children (aged nine to 14 years) who were all in care, has a long history of drug use. Crystal’s first attempt at rehabilitation and reunification with her children did not succeed due to lack of preparation for parenting and lack of ongoing support.

This time around though, we were ready — Crystal had the knowledge of what did not work the first time around and used the support on offer through NPAH to build connections; a safety net.

NPAH workers visited Crystal while she was in rehabilitation — building rapport and identifying goals. Workers established a solid relationship and opened lines of communication with Crystal’s DCP case workers. Workers then advocated for Crystal to be allocated a four bedroom, transitional joint Swan Emergency Accommodation, Department for Child Protection, Department of Housing property. Advocating for Crystal to be housed in this four bedroom property (in spite the fact that she is a single person with the financial capacity to pay only minimal rent) was crucial to the progression of the reunification process. Crystal’s children could visit and stay overnight, thus allowing the reunification plan to progress.

NPAH workers have attended all DCP case management meetings and provided feedback and support to Crystal’s DCP caseworker. Support has been provided for Crystal to link to parenting support services, medical services, alcohol and other drug (AOD) counselling, financial services and counselling services for her children. She has also received financial assistance to help her deal with historical debt from previous unsuccessful tenancies. Education around managing a tenancy agreement, maintaining a property and budgeting has been an important part of the process.

Crystal has remained clean and sober for almost two years now. She has completed Certificate 3 and 4 in Community Services. She has commenced paid work as an AOD counsellor and devotes any spare moment to supporting others on the path to recovery from addiction. She has attended specialised child counselling sessions and gradually built up contact time with her children.

Crystal was supported to move in to her Department of Housing property in early June 12 and this tenancy is progressing without a hitch. She was proud to hand her transitional property over clean and undamaged with her rent fully paid. With a long history of unsuccessful tenancies, this was the first time she had ever done so.

She has fully reunited with her oldest daughter and her 3 younger children will be moving in when school finished — just in time for Christmas!
Collaboration for Positive Health Outcomes

Julie Fereday
Learning Portfolio Manager Health, Central Institute of Technology, Mt Lawley Campus

In July 2012 the Reach team commenced a partnership with St Bartholomew’s (St Bart’s) House and James Watson Hostel in East Perth to provide basic health care services and emotional and social wellbeing support to residents in these facilities.

Reach (Roaming Education and Community Health) is a partnership between Central Institute of Technology, Curtin University and the Department of Health, Nursing and Midwifery Office. This project was possible due to funds provided through Health Workforce Australia, an Australian Government initiative.

The project has been developed to provide a vital and much needed service to the above organisations and develop and expand upon clinical training opportunities for nursing students.

Once a week the Reach Wellness Nurse conducts wellness sessions where residents are able to pop in if they have any medical concerns or questions about their health. A key to the success of this has been the excellent relationship that has been developed with residents in both settings. Some residents come for weekly monitoring of their health and to have a chat, while others just attend the clinic when they need to. The Reach Wellness Nurse is able to spend time with the residents and provide support and education across a range of different areas. Students work closely with the Reach Wellness Nurse and develop vital skills in understanding and delivering care to clients from a range of different cultural groups and backgrounds.

A very strong partnership has been formed between St Bart’s, James Watson, Reach and the Mobile GP service. Residents are referred or followed up a lot more smoothly than previously and this has alleviated the need for some of the residents to seek care at the local Emergency Department. The Reach Wellness Nurse plays an important role in liaising with Case Workers to follow up residents when needed and undertake further care.

In 2013 the model of care provided by Reach will continue to expand with the integration of Nurse Practitioner services to support the current delivery of services by both the Reach Wellness Nurse and the Mobile GP. This will allow further service provision and much needed care to other homeless and underserved groups within the community.

The services provided by Reach have filled a much needed gap identified by St Bart’s and James Watson in supporting the health care of their residents. Resident involvement has been the key to the success with many taking the opportunity to have an initial conversation about their health in a setting where they feel secure and supported. The service has given our nursing students a valuable clinical experience and has fostered the development of skills in areas such as listening, communicating and interacting with clients. These will be integral in their future roles as nurses, both in the community and hospital setting.

The outcomes of this new partnership can be clearly seen with residents being more informed on their medications and a greater understanding of what alternatives are available to them. There has been diagnosis of diabetes for some residents and follow up support provided through individual health education. Discussions have been instigated around various health issues and the residents now feel comfortable to talk with the Reach nurse about these.

Since July 2012 when Reach commenced the service at St Bart’s and James Watson Hostel, 48 crisis and transitional residents have been provided with health or medical support and 40 referrals have been made for health issues. The value added through this project is also not just of benefit to the resident but also provides support for staff to promote a healthy work-life balance. Having this partnership has provided the opportunity to build capacity within St Bart’s and enhanced the depth of support given to clients.

If you would like further information on this initiative please contact Julie Fereday on Julie.Fereday@central.wa.edu.au
At Vincentcare No Situation is Hopeless

Lucinda Ardagh
Manager, Public Relations and Fundraising, St Vincent de Paul Society (WA) Inc.

Early intervention is the key to a positive consumer outcome for most people experiencing homelessness with a mental illness who pass through Vincentcare, a special work of the St Vincent de Paul Society located at Woodbridge WA.

Different consumer groups with severe or persistent mental illness access the 28 high dependency single bed units for different reasons, but they share the commonality of being homeless with nowhere else to go. Many have been in hospital for months on end or they are incapable of living alone because they are a possible harm to themselves and the community. Others have been sleeping rough for years. At Vincentcare in the last three years, the United Kingdom developed program called Outcome Star is successfully being used by staff to work with consumers (persons with a lived experience of homelessness and mental illness) to reach their recovery goals.

The consumer driven process includes a different approach to case management for both homelessness and mental health recovery. Case managers become facilitators; and each consumer decides what will make their life meaningful and worthwhile. Consumers decide what they need out of their lives and a case manager’s expertise is crucial for guiding and supporting programs tailored for each person around their goals and independence.

In keeping with the Outcome Star, Vincentcare staff receive essential training in mental health first aid, social inclusion and motivational interviewing techniques. If the consumer wants to look at particular areas of their life they have the ability to do so with their case manager. The result is high consumer motivation and enthusiasm and a faster recovery rate.

Manager Yvonne Pallier says many young men who come in with first episode psychosis, usually drug induced, respond well to the intensive recovery program and launch straight back into independent living. Others are on a slower track because perhaps they have had a number of mental health episodes and they lack confidence, but Vincentcare understands this and allows them to travel at their own pace.

‘Our aim is to assist people with a mental illness find a way to build a life alongside that mental illness,’ said Yvonne.

‘When a consumer is ready for more independent living, they are offered accommodation at Vincentcare’s group and share houses, town houses or units in well located Perth suburbs. These homes are staffed during the working week with a 24 hour a day emergency call service and their recovery treatment continues. There are also some transitional houses for men and families in Albany.’

‘Decades of experience help us to understand where people are at and when they are ready to move into the community with partial support or full independence. If they become unwell they can always move back into a greater support environment because mental health does not have a smooth end.’

St Vincent de Paul’s mission to care for the most vulnerable groups in society extends their compassion to the next most susceptible group in the community, that of youth between 12 and 25 years. All are homeless and many come from homes with trauma; some have had a bad experience with drugs that has left them with drug induced psychosis.

Niall Rhatigan manages Passages Resource Centre in Northbridge, a joint venture between the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Rotary Club of Perth. The service assists homeless youth including support for young mothers with newborns who are vulnerable to homelessness. Most sleep rough because of family abuse and family breakdown.

He says the longer young people stay on the street the harder it is to get them back on track as they get better at surviving and compared to their home (if they had one) they think it is not so bad.

‘Passages aim is to draw the young people to the centre by meeting their basic needs, such as breakfast, hot showers, laundry internet and friendly non-judgemental support from youth workers. They can also receive mail, have access to specific youth services like DAYS and Youthlink, youth workers, street doctors and Centrelink community team,’ Niall said.

‘While we have them at Passages we try to engage them at other levels, such as looking after themselves by eating healthy food and giving them support in their areas of need at the time.

This was particularly the case for a few homeless young mothers with newborns who came to Passages to access core services. These young women still needed support but because of the arrival of their baby, it may have been difficult for them to access services that had supported them previously.

He and the Passages team ran a very successful young mum’s group for the women to get together with their babies and share experiences. Youth workers provided perspective and help them to reflect on where they were at and to think about their future. They also put the young women in touch with other agencies that could provide accommodation and appropriate services for mother and child.
Homelessness Hub: Integrating Services at UnitingCare West’s Inner City Centre

Jodie Smyth
Manager Accommodation and Support Services, UnitingCare West

In late 2008, UnitingCare West’s (UCW) Inner City Centre opened as a purpose-built facility, developed to accommodate the well-established Tranby Day Centre and a number of other homelessness services. The location for this hub was carefully considered, with East Perth seen as a suitable site due to its close proximity to a range of other services and transport options.

The establishment of this service site, and the co-location of a range of services, positions UCW’s homelessness services in a way that ensures they interact, providing a coordinated response to people most in need. This improved coordination aligned UCW’s response to homelessness with the directions outlined in the Commonwealth Government’s homelessness White Paper, The Road Home.

In order to meet the needs of individuals and families accessing homelessness services at UCW, a service delivery model that allows for the effective assessment of both risk and need has been implemented. The identification of risk and need strengthens outcomes for clients as supports can be provided across a range of areas.

The model encompasses several aspects including:
• proactive outreach to rough sleepers through Street to Home
• a safe and supportive environment for people experiencing primary homelessness through Tranby Day Centre
• holistic assessment of all families and individuals accessing services through the use of a specialist assessment officer and common assessment tool
• access to supported accommodation options
• formal and informal linkages and partnerships with a range of other services.

The model uses a client centred approach with staff focusing on building trusting relationships with clients and works with other service providers to “break the cycle” of homelessness. Staff also work with clients to access and broker services to meet their individual need.

Intensive case management is provided to a significant number of clients, with the service experiencing increasing demand. Like many other services, the co-morbidity issues experienced by many clients add to the complexity of delivering services.

A number of UCW services form part of the homelessness response including:
• Tranby Day Centre
• Street to Home
• Homeless Accommodation North and South
• Credit Care (Financial Counselling and Emergency Relief)
• Private Tenancy Support
• Personal Helpers and Mentors Program
• Assessment Officer
• Independent Living Program
• Wyn Carr House
• Indigenous Family Violence.

**Tranby Day Centre**

**Client group** — adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

**Services** — breakfast, showers, phone calls, postal address, advocacy, Street Legal, Mobile GP, Community Centrelink.

**Street to Home**

**Client group** — rough sleepers in the inner city.

**Services** — engagement, street outreach, relationship building.

**Homelessness Accommodation**

**Client group** — single men and families who are homeless.

**Services** — Transitional Accommodation, intensive case management, life skills, support and assistance to gain employment, training, counselling and any other services required.

**Credit Care**

**Client group** — people experiencing financial hardship.

**Services** — Financial Counselling — financial crisis support, budgeting and some assistance with bills.

**Emergency Relief** — assistance is generally in the form of food cards or part payment of outstanding utility bills or other accounts. The service is an important gateway to other services and supports programs that may help with more complex issues.

**Private Tenancy Support**

**Client group** — adults at risk of homelessness and residing in a private rental in the inner city centre of Perth.

**Services** — assists and supports individuals or families at the earliest opportunity before debts or tenancy issues become unmanageable, placing the tenancy at risk. The service works with everyone involved to ensure both tenants and property managers receive positive outcomes from the service.

**Personal Helpers and Mentors Program**

**Client group** — people with severe and persistent mental illness.

**Services** — may involve assistance with better managing their daily activities and improving access to relevant support services. The program also employs Peer Support Workers who have experience of mental illness.

**Independent Living Program**

**Client group** — adults with severe and persistent mental illness.

**Services** — supported landlord service, long term housing and accommodation options.

**Assessment Officer**

**Client group** — people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness — by appointment or walk in.

**Services** — referral, advice, food cards, support letters, assistance with transport, work uniforms, tools.

**Wynn Carr House**

**Client group** — women over 18 unaccompanied by children seeking refuge from domestic or family violence or who are experiencing homelessness.

**Services** — Wynn Carr House applies a strengths based approach in supporting women to remain safe and work towards their identified needs. It also assists in accessing other services, including those associated with physical and mental health.

**Indigenous Family Violence**

**Client group** — Aboriginal people at risk of or experiencing family violence.

In meeting the needs of people who are homeless, key partner agencies provide direct service delivery support to those people accessing Tranby Day Centre. This is achieved through maintaining good working relationships with these agencies. The role that these agencies play in providing support to these clients is invaluable. Service providers that come into Tranby Day Centre on a regular basis include:

- Community Centrelink Team
- Street Legal
- Mobile GP
- UCW Disability Advocacy.

Additionally, service linkages and coordination occurs with a range of other areas including:

- alcohol and other drug services
- multicultural centres
- mental health clinics
- community justice services
- employment services
- recreational services
- charity Link and Good Sammy’s
- crisis accommodation
- community housing providers.

As many of the services are co-located, there is increased opportunity to coordinate services. Factors that have supported better coordination include:

- use of a common assessment tool
- streamlined internal referral process
- increased staff awareness of the services available
- local leadership
- the establishment of an assessment officer.

The delivery and coordination of these services is reviewed and evaluated regularly to ensure good practice. There are always improvements to be made as staff, clients and the operating environment shifts and changes.

Although much has been achieved to improve the coordination and integration of services, there remain many challenges. These include:

- staff continuity and turn over
- finding the balance between the right amount of overlap versus duplication
- the need for ongoing simplification of referral processes
- lack of funding to broker more flexible responses
- the increasing complexity of client issues
- the ability to adapt quickly to changes in client needs
- service demand and capacity issues.

Where clients make contact with a particular service and that service is not assessed as the most suitable, clients will be actively supported to access other more appropriate services. No client is ever turned away as it is still the right door at UCW.

Services ensure the person is referred onto the most appropriate internal service. From there, an individual may access a number of services in order to have their needs met. The benefit of this to the client is they do not have to relay their personal story multiple times. This often reduces the stress and anxiety many of our clients face when seeking assistance. The ability to offer wrap around services through the option of ten programs within the service site ultimately means the navigation process for clients in need is made much easier.

In the event that a client requires additional services to those offered by UCW, a referral to an external service is made. Due to a number of external service providers running services from Tranby Day Centre, strong relationships with these providers have been established.

Continuing collaboration with key agencies to build relationships that benefit the delivery of services to people experiencing homelessness is an important focus. Supporting people who are homeless to build stability, safety and opportunity in their lives remains an important commitment of UCW.
The Uniting Care West Homeless Response During the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

Sue Ash  
CEO, Uniting Care West

On 27 April 2011, representatives from eight agencies, providing the Street to Home Service, along with the Department for Child Protection, gathered to discuss the impact of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) on rough sleepers in the inner city. Due to security zones that would be in place in the inner city over the three days of CHOGM a number of rough sleepers were identified as vulnerable to displacement during this time.

The group identified principles to guide the development of the response. Homeless and vulnerable people in the CBD should be impacted as little as possible by CHOGM. People needing additional support would be referred to existing services; additional services will be funded to offer options for those rough sleepers who are not able or eligible to access existing services, and, if possible, the most vulnerable people in Perth should experience some short and long term benefit from the CHOGM.

The UnitingCare West (UCW) Inner City Centre is centrally located in East Perth and was identified as an ideal facility where people could be supported. The UCW Inner City Centre includes the Tranby Day service, a well known and valued service providing coordinated services including breakfast to people who are homeless. The Tranby Centre became the centre of the CHOGM Homelessness response with UCW as the lead agency. A coordinator was appointed, budgets developed and a detailed plan developed.

UCW Tranby provided additional services and hours of operation outside normal parameters to provide:

- a 24 hour central safe and supportive environment
- meals, and an area where people could sleep safely
- rostered experienced staff from the eight agencies who had been pivotal in the planning stage, with specialist drug and alcohol and mental health expertise from the Street to Home Mobile Clinical Outreach Team
- storage for personal belongings
- arrange necessary security measures in the Tranby vicinity.

Brokerage funds also enabled the purchase of other services including transport and food cards. Additional assistance included clothing, advocacy, referral, phone calls, legal services, sleeping bags, food parcels, showers and recreational activities.

This was seen as an opportunity to provide direct support and also collect improved data about people sleeping rough in the metropolitan area to assist in better understanding their needs.
Data

The CHOGM Homelessness Response occurred over the four days of the main Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings. The program of meetings related to CHOGM ran for ten days from 20 October to 30 October. However, the four days, 27–30 October, were chosen as the specific days for the additional service because of the expected impact of various security arrangements with more than 50 Heads of Government based in the CBD on those days.

The additional service commenced at 5pm on Thursday 27 October. The Tranby Service usually finishes at 12 noon on Friday, so the weekend service was a significant increase in options for vulnerable homeless people in Perth.

Clients Views on the CHOGM Homeless Response

People who attended the centre at any time during the CHOGM response were surveyed and the following responses outline the benefit experienced by participants.

- People valued a safe place to sleep; Sleep deprivation has a huge impact on an individual’s wellbeing — mentally and physically. Female clients in particular stated that they felt great benefit from the service, particularly over the weekend when they feel most vulnerable on the streets. They queried why the service could not be ongoing.
- The mental health model of engagement and building of trust with individuals was seen as hugely beneficial to clients by both the rostered staff and the Mental Health Team
- Clients accessing the service requested an ongoing service provision, stating that it was the best sleep they’ve had, feeling safe and secure. This was because they valued the fact that staff members were available in the same room, ‘looking out for them’. They also expressed concerns regarding the fact that the Government could find the money to provide the service for the CHOGM weekend but not ongoing.
- Overwhelmingly the response highlighted the complexity of issues faced by a core group of rough sleepers who for reasons mostly associated with substance misuse and anti social behaviour, were not suitable for referral to any crisis accommodation options (or alternative accommodation options.

For this particular group, day centres appear to be the only support option available. In particular, Aboriginal and other females are extremely vulnerable).

- The success of the service provision was made possible due to considered planning and the generous spirit of everyone involved from the eight services.

Ongoing Benefit for People Experiencing Homelessness

Since CHOGM, Tranby has seen a significant rise in the number of individuals accessing support. Client numbers have increased from between 80 -90 to 150 - 160 per day. The demand for this service has added significant pressure to the services delivered from the Tranby Centre. The UnitingCare West Board approved additional funding from agency resources for six months while negotiations occurred with government funders.

Additional service outcomes that were developed for the CHOGM response and continue more than six months after the end of the service are:

- Mental Health Emergency Response (MERHL) staff continue to access the Tranby Day Centre on a weekly basis to engage clients with mental health issues
- established relationship with Food Rescue Service. They now deliver fresh fruit, vegetables, rolls and cakes to the centre twice daily, 3 to 4 days per week
- relationships with many external providers and the police have continued to improve
- greater representation of Aboriginal clients accessing the centre
- improved response from clients as to the services provided at Tranby and ICC at large. “There is security here and it makes me feel safe”.

Summary

Service Providers came together six months prior to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings in Perth in order to develop a response that would enable the most vulnerable people to be least impacted by CHOGM; and if possible, to receive some short and long term benefit. For all service providers, there was the challenge of commencing additional services where it was clearly not going to be possible to continue post CHOGM. The conclusion at the end of the Homelessness Response was that it was important to work proactively to support vulnerable people during a major civil society event; to trial new forms of service delivery and use the learning from those services for future advocacy; and as much as possible, to work towards long term benefits as well as the short term service.
Tom Fisher House: Can Architecture be Responsive to Homeless Service Delivery?

Stephen Hicks
Architect, CODA Architecture and Urban Design

The Tom Fisher House is a new acute homeless night shelter in the inner city suburb of Mount Lawley, WA. The 10-bed shelter, designed by CODA in collaboration with the client group (Department of Housing, Department of Child Protection, Vincent Care), will provide chronically homeless people with safe and supervised overnight accommodation. Located behind a new commercial development on the same site, and nestled between existing residential buildings, the building will be an unobtrusive, referral-only centre in which consumers can access accommodation, support and resources, ablation and kitchen facilities, and basic first aid.

The centre is planned around a flexible communal space with courtyards at its northern and southern ends. All bedrooms open directly into the communal area, with staff and service areas grouped independently. The saw-tooth roof allows light to permeate through the internal spaces, creating a bright and uplifting environment. The use of exposed natural materials such as plywood further enhances the mood and brings an element of unexpected warmth to the centre. The building can be zoned flexibly, with the communal area split into two independent areas (with associated bedrooms) if required.

The centre has been designed with two primary focuses:
- safety, for both consumers and staff, through rigorous planning developed over a prolonged period; and
- high-quality communal and private spaces in which natural light is abundant (brought in through high-level northern glazing) and external landscaped areas are visible from all rooms.

Tom Fisher House exemplifies CODA’s commitment to providing community-based projects in which people feel safe and welcome, and that are both dignified and optimistic.
Chapter 3: Key Themes in the Response to Homelessness in Western Australia

A: Responding to Domestic and Family Violence

Having the Violence Leave: A Choice or a Right?

Angela Hartwig
Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services
and Donna Chung
University of Western Australia

Introduction

This paper reviews the impetus for the Safe at Home (SAH) program developments that have emerged and presents findings from Angela Hartwig’s post-graduate research about the WA SAH programs which commenced in 2010. In examining the rationale for the programs and the research findings the implications for policy and program developments are considered.

Impetus for Safe at Home Programs

In WA it was not until 1986, that the ‘Break the Silence’ report squarely placed domestic and family violence on the state government’s policy agenda. The report with over one hundred recommendations, called for swift and immediate action in the area of legal reform and greater levels of support to women and children as victims of domestic and family violence.

It was a time when advocates were calling for recognition that so called ‘private violence’ that was occurring for women and children in their own homes at the hands of violent partners (behind closed doors) was indeed of public concern. Since this time research and data collections clearly show that thousands of women and children are seeking homelessness services as a result of having to flee their homes each year (Homelessness Australia 4 July 2012); and many of these women also face losing their employment if the perpetrator continues to stalk and harass them at their workplace (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse 2011), indicating the ongoing impact of men’s violence following separation.

Historically, the only option available to women and children experiencing domestic and family violence at the hands of their partners was to flee their homes. The majority of these women and children continue to have difficulty in finding alternative accommodation which is affordable, appropriate and safe. It is typically of a lower standard to their previous housing and they often have insecure tenure.

This forced homelessness and transience has significant social and economic costs for a woman and her children which includes difficulty in maintaining employment and education and isolation from full participation in the wider community. There are also long-term intergenerational impacts of homelessness with children who experience homelessness at an increased risk of long-term poverty, unemployment, chronic ill-health, and other forms of disadvantage and social exclusion (Culter, Faulkner et al. 2008).

In response to this continuing injustice, advocates from the early 1990s until the present day have maintained that women should have the right to stay in their own homes following domestic and family violence and that perpetrators should be the ones to leave (Chung, Kennedy et al. 2000; Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre 2002; McFerran 2007). It was always recognised that women’s right to remain in their homes was not a universal option, for a number of women this not a safe option, some women do not wish to remain in a place where such violence and abuse took place and other women were not in a financial position to remain in the home.

Calls for the right to remain were heard and over the last decade, a number of SAH models have been introduced across Australian states and territories. Since 2010 six SAH and six Domestic Violence Outreach (DVO) programs have been operating in Western Australia, as part of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2008). These innovative programs are framed around early intervention and prevention and aimed at breaking the cycle of homelessness for women and children escaping domestic and family violence; and connecting victims and perpetrators with services providing ongoing support, counselling, advocacy and assistance (Department for Child Protection 2010).

SAH not only challenge men’s entitlement to the family home but begs the question ‘why doesn’t the violence leave?’ According to McFerran, police and courts, have ‘shown deep reluctance over the years to remove a man from his Home’ and Chung highlights that ‘responses to family violence have typically constructed women as victims who need protection and seclusion rather than citizens with rights which can be enforced’ (Murray and Powell 2011). Edwards’ (2003) research also highlighted that when courts were considering orders for excluding male perpetrators from the home a key consideration was often whether they had alternative accommodation, not renowned as a consideration given to women and children seeking safety. This highlights the paradox where the community often asks, ‘Why do women stay if the men are violent’?
However, there is little concern about where they might go, nor is the question asked; ‘Why are men able to continue to use violence against women?’

The very real or impending lack of financial security can and does influence a woman’s decision to return to a violent partner or ex-partner. It is therefore vital that the provision of SAH programs are not only embraced but become part of the necessary policy framework that continues to be part of an integrated and multi-agency response to ensuring women and children can remain safely in their own homes, as both a choice and as a right. SAH initiatives must therefore always be more than just the provision of hardware — changing of locks etc. — as whilst this is critical, without the integrated community responses the safety of women and children is compromised and opportunities to stop further violence negligible.

Having the violence leave is a relatively new shift in thinking over the last decade and can only be made possible by ensuring that this response is entrenched within policy and practices of police, courts and other agencies and be driven by a legislative framework that supports women and children to live free of violent and controlling partners. This requires policy and decision-makers to have a clear understanding of what constitutes domestic and family violence in its various forms, which includes physical violence and the range of controlling and coercive behaviours used by perpetrators to violate, intimidate and harass their partners or ex-partners.

For example, Tasmania legislation which forms part of the SAH strategy includes offences of economic and emotional abuse which can incur fines of up to $5,200 or imprisonment of not more than two years. The offences formally recognise the gendered understanding of domestic violence as an ongoing power imbalance that is not just about physical violence or threats (which are already crimes), but include patterns of controlling behaviour in other areas of life. The economic abuse has particular relevance when examining how we can prevent domestic violence related homelessness for many women and children. This requires a massive shift in beliefs, values and violence-supportive attitudes about women’s status, particularly in relation to gender inequality and social disadvantage compared with their male counterparts.

Supporting victims of violence to remain in their own homes and removing the perpetrator requires the implementation of systemic mechanisms such as a strong ‘no tolerance’ approach to domestic and family violence; one which prioritises the safety of victims and holds perpetrators accountable for the violence. The SAH program provides ‘wrap around’ intensive case management and support for up to twelve months, through working collaboratively with a range of agencies to assist women and children to maintain stable housing and make a fresh start free from violence (Department for Child Protection, 2010).

The SAH program now provides a real option for some women and children to remain in their own homes where it is safe to do so. Research to date has found that there is far less disruption to women’s lives and they are far more likely to maintain their housing, employment, children’s schooling and social supports within their community (McFerran 2007). Women and children who have to leave their homes as result of domestic and family violence further exacerbates feelings of dislocation from their communities and disadvantages them both financially and socially.

Whilst making a total fresh start away from their community may be the safest and preferred option for some women and children; the decision to remain in their homes and have the violence leave is often a choice that women wish to explore and programs such as SAH have been developed to enable women to have this option. The growing policy interest in the rights of women and children to remain has led both nationally and internationally to the development of service responses designed to prevent their homelessness (Blandy and Spinney 2011).

The uniqueness of the WA SAH models is that they are all auspiced by Women’s Refuge services and this has proven to be invaluable in terms of the ability to provide specialist seamless services to the women and children who become SAH clients. During the service design phase it was identified that a key benefit of attaching a SAH site to a refuge services was the recognition that women often face ongoing risks from the perpetrator, which may change from ‘low’ to ‘high’ very quickly, therefore the opportunity for women to access additional crisis support and accommodation through the refuge system would be streamlined and continuous.

**Safe at Home: Research Findings**

There are six WA SAH sites, the program commenced in July 2010. From this time until 30 June 2012, there have been a total of 3,230 referrals of women to the program with 63 per cent from Police; 19 per cent from Women’s Refuges; six per cent from Victim Support Services; five per cent from the Department of Child Protection and the remaining from other agencies such as the Department of Housing and Community Legal Services. A total of 1,640 men have also been referred through to Communicare’s Breathing Space who provide a range of information and support services to perpetrators who may be seeking help with information, referral and/or counselling support for their use of violence.

In relation to expenditure, SAH models are attractive, annual funding to these programs in 2010–11 was $200,000 for metropolitan services and $210,000 for rural sites for two full-time employees and operational costs. An additional $25,000 per site was provided to assist with security up-grades. It was anticipated that each site would support 50 clients and their children per annum. In contrast to the high government cost and personal cost to women of having to flee to a refuge and subsequently search for new accommodation.

**Women’s Experiences of Safe at Home**

Sixteen face-to-face interviews were conducted with women about their experiences and perceptions of the SAH program. Preliminary findings indicate the contributing factors that assisted keeping women and children safe were:

- Police referral to DV Outreach for follow up within 48 hours.
- Security up-grades based on joint risk and safety assessment with the woman and SAH staff.
- Availability of brokerage funds through the SAH program to assist with security up-grades and/or essential areas of need.
- Provision of emotional and practical support to women as part of twelve months case management support,
particularly with obtaining a VRO and/or breaches of a VRO.

- Intensive case management support for up to twelve months.
- Skills and expertise of the SAH workers to facilitate referral and assistance mainstream agencies such as police, housing, legal, education and counselling.
- Child-focused responses in relation to referral to schooling, counselling and/or ongoing safety concerns for children and young people re: contact arrangements with perpetrator.
- Employer support when the perpetrator is harassing victims at the workplace.

- Being able to remain in their own home and have the violence leave combined with continued support if they remained or if women decided they wanted to relocate when risks were too high or too many bad memories and wanting a fresh start.

Women reported that remaining safe at home was compromised by the following:

- further acts of violence
- breaches of Violence Restraining Orders
- property damage
- vexatious emails to employer at victim’s workplace
- perpetrator texting multiple times a day
- children experiencing further emotional/psychological abuse and torment during contact visits with abusive parent
- psychological abuse
- contacting victim asking them to pay for gifts that were given when in the relationship
- ringing the Post Office and local business around town to get information on the victim.

Areas identified for improved outcomes by women included:

- a greater level of awareness about SAH services within the community
- more SAH sites in regions that have higher levels of reporting to the Police
- rights for tenants spelt out clearly when joint tenancy or mortgage with housing, in terms of sole occupancy given to victims
- challenges to provide SAH in rural locations given the time to travel to women in towns that may be hundreds of miles away.

**Conclusion**

There has been considerable progress from the early 1970s when women and children had to escape to squats and sub-standard housing to escape violence. However, demand for housing still far outstrips supply; the SAH provides an important option for some groups of women. The women’s responses are indicating the WA SAH initiatives are a valuable contribution to the response system. The outcomes achieved from the SAH programs in WA, include reaching a wide number of families and changing women’s lives.

This cannot be underestimated if we are a state and nation committed to bringing about the changes required to stopping domestic and family violence, homelessness and the social disadvantage of women. Programs such as SAH must be embraced not only as a choice but as a right, so women and children can be provided with the targeted support to enable them to stay in their homes, their places of employment and their communities, all of which can be achieved by having the violence leave.

**Footnote**

1. Thirteen women had a current VRO against their ex-partners whilst in the program, one had an Interim Order, one had withdrawn the VRO; and one had no legal protection as she was informed by Police she did not have enough evidence to apply for a VRO, as the violence was ‘not physical.’ There were however, numerous other forms of abuse and harassment such as abusive text messages towards one of the women such as psychological and emotional abuse; and property damage (kicking down of a back gate). The woman took her own steps with the support of the SAH program and had a ‘safe room’ installed within her home.

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Media Release 4 July 2012, Still no end of road in sight, Homelessness Australia, Canberra.


**Women’s Perceptions of Their Safety**

Women’s perceptions about how safe they felt before and after being part of the program and how the SAH program has changed their lives is presented. When asked to compare how safe women felt prior to and following SAH involvement, there was a notable difference described by women.

Women also described important changes in their lives and those of their children. Women reported no longer using anti-depressants, the importance of stability, calmness and feeling safe. They also described improved behaviour amongst their children and better responses to schooling. Underpinning many of their comments was the feeling of freedom often taken for granted by those living in safe and stable environments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-SAH</th>
<th>Post-SAH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I wasn’t sleeping at all, I was really scared. He threatened to come around and have me killed, raped in front of my children.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Oh it just feels good to be able to know you’re not going to, you know, have someone come bashing through your door or, it’s just good to not have to worry so much and to stress all the time.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I didn’t feel safe in my own home, cause I constantly felt on edge and having to check out the windows all the time and stuff because I was aware he was sitting outside house in car on a night and climbing over the back fence into the garden and stuff&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;When we got the alarm put in that gave me a bit of reassurance, we have since moved to a new property, but always aware of the risk of somebody dropping our address and phone number as he had been charged with breaching a VRO 42 times.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;He knew I was disabled and I couldn’t protect myself from the size of him. I was scared to close my eyes, I was just worried I was not going to wake up.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;With SAH workers guidance and that, and since I got advice what to do, it made me stronger and know what to look for in a man.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Safe at Home Program: Keeping Women and Children Safely Housed

Stacey Collins
Manager, Non-Governor Funding — Homelessness, Department for Child Protection WA

The Safe at Home (SAH) Program was funded through the joint Commonwealth/State National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). The development of the SAH initiative was undertaken as a partnership between the Department for Child Protection (the Department), the Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA), and the WA Police.

In 2009, extensive consultation was undertaken with the non-government community service sector agencies that would deliver the services, the Department, Family and Domestic Violence Unit, the WA Police, Department of Housing, Women’s Legal Service, Tenants Advice Service, and other Domestic and Family Violence Services. To develop the service specifications and program guidelines. The relevant mainstream agencies continue to be closely involved in the establishment and ongoing operation of these services, with WA Police a key partner.

Domestic and family violence is the principal cause of homelessness among women. Fifty-five per cent of women with children and 37 per cent of young single women who seek assistance from specialist homelessness services do so to escape violence (AIHW, 2008).

The SAH Program aims to intervene early to keep the victims of domestic and family violence, primarily women and children, in the family home and remove the perpetrators of violence, providing it is safe to do so. This provides women with an option to stay housed as an alternative to entering the traditional homelessness service system. SAH consists of four metropolitan-based and two country regional services and are co-located with existing domestic violence accommodation and support services to maximise service integration and program outcomes.

Objectives

- All women referred to SAH services receive information and support to enable them to make choices to enhance their safety and wellbeing.
- Women, with or without children, are supported to remain in their homes where it is safe to do so.
- Women, including children and young people, are individually assessed for risk and safety.
- Women and children receive support, security upgrades and safety planning to ensure confidence and safety.
- Partnerships are made with a wide range of mainstream services, including legal services, that will assist women and their children to maintain stable accommodation.
- Women and children are linked to services that address their expressed needs.

The SAH Program provides risk and safety assessments, outreach, information, case management, active referrals and support to women and any accompanying children who are escaping domestic and family violence. The delivery of the program is to be client-focused and respectful of the needs and requirements of women using the service. Safety for women and children is of primary concern. Risk assessments and safety planning are discussed at all stages of contact with women including children. The thoughts and decisions of women who use the service in relation to their safety is respected at all times and used to inform safety plans and the management of risk.

Close links and partnerships with external agencies including WA Police and legal support services are essential to ensure women and children are able to retain and maintain their residence in the family home. The SAH Program provides another option for women escaping domestic and family violence and is by no means the only option. Women referred to SAH services are provided with information on their options and assisted to access support relevant to their needs should they choose not to remain in their homes. The SAH Program has been shown to work where women and any accompanying children have a strong connection to the home and wish to remain there. The purposeful co-location of SAH with domestic violence crisis accommodation and support services has also increased the opportunity for seamless referral pathways, should refuge access be required.

A significant development of the program is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the WA Police and the Department’s non-government service providers. This is an important component that ensures service providers have the full picture of the incident before they make contact with victims or perpetrators and embeds the program into WA Police procedures. Of note is the collaborative role and information the WA Police are willing to provide to non-government service providers.

The MOU enables the WA Police to be the primary referral pathway for women and children accessing the SAH Program, however they may also access SAH through a multitude of other pathways including:

- women’s refuges
- other domestic and family violence services
- legal services
- victims support service/Family Violence Court
- counselling services and/or
- women’s health services.

The SAH Program also includes a state-wide Perpetrator Response service, with a non-government community service sector organisation offering telephone and face to face support to the violent perpetrator of clients accessing the SAH Program and will offer crisis counselling and support to address the perpetrators behaviour.

Rebecca West House — part of the Patricia Giles Centre.
Ruah Safe at Home Program: Staying Housed and Safe

Clare Brady
Senior Manager, Ruah Community Services

‘I dream of a life without violence, but I don’t want to be a woman with no home.’

(M. Ponti and R. Edwards, 2003, Send Violence Packing)

Introduction

The Ruah Safe at Home (SAH) program is one of six SAH programs in Western Australia (WA) funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). The program was established in 2010 and reflects the essential principles of WA’s Best Practice Model for programs for victims of domestic violence, in that it is based on securing safety for victims of violence and placing responsibility with the perpetrators.

The model differs from the refuge model of support by placing the onus not on the victim to leave their situation, but on the perpetrator to leave the family home. The women and children to remain in a familiar, comfortable environment where they have access to their existing support networks. Ruah Safe at Home works with families and children in the South East corridor of the Perth Metro area.

In WA, 13,391 Western Australians are homeless every night (Homelessness Implementation Plan, Department for Child Protection, 2009) with many being women and children fleeing their homes as a result of violence and abuse by their partners. Although Women’s Refuge services and Safe Houses in WA can accommodate up to 500 women and children on any given night, many more are turned away due to the lack of available beds (WCDFVS Statement, 2012). WA has been experiencing the largest rise in housing costs in the country, a chronic and on-going problem that the State faces in relation to housing affordability (Community Housing Coalition of WA, 2012). With all of this in mind, keeping women and their dependants ‘Safe at Home’ is even more important.

Acts of family and domestic violence can take many forms and are often endured by victims and their children over long periods of time before they seek help. Last financial year, WA Police attended more than 42,000 incidents of family and domestic violence across the State. (Response to Four Corners from Western Australia Police, 2012). According to WA Police figures, in the first six months of 2012, there have been 11 deaths in WA linked to family and domestic violence.

The Program

Referrals for SAH come from a variety of sources: counselling services, multicultural services, refuges and government departments amongst others. However, the majority of SAH referrals come from the Police through Incident Reports (IR).

Attending officers complete an IR every time police are called to an instance of family and domestic violence (FDV). Following consent from the victim the IR is forwarded to SAH, where trained and experienced staff contacts the victim, within 48 hours. (Another Program, Breathing Space contacts the perpetrators). In the last six month reporting period, Ruah SAH alone has received 1,416 IRs.

Initially clients are offered crisis counselling over the phone and following an initial assessment they are either accepted to SAH or referred to other relevant services. Many will be sent information packs when it is safe for this to occur. Safety planning is undertaken with as many of these clients as possible to increase their chances of safety in the event of reoccurrence.

Relationships with police are a vital element contributing to the success of the SAH program. Program staff work closely with dedicated police FDV officers and strong partnerships are essential for positive outcomes. This is especially important for high risk clients, as it allows staff to engage with clients at an earlier stage. Likewise, police are able to refer clients to SAH allowing access to services unaffiliated with the police, which may be less intimidating for them.

Ruah SAH is contracted to case manage 50 women per year. This process involves regular home visits and intensive support for (on average) a three to six month period around a range of issues. This process always begins with the completion of comprehensive security and safety assessments. In the majority of cases, a security upgrade to the client home will then be completed with the assistance of brokerage money supplied through the program.

For a woman to become a client of the Program, they need to fulfil certain criteria:

1. They wish to remain in their own home following an incident of FDV.

2. A Violence Restraining Order (VRO) needs to be in place (or other measures requiring the perpetrator to remain away from the property, such as police orders, court orders or imprisonment).

3. The client has to be financially able to remain in the property and willing to engage in a three to six month case management process.

During the last six month period, Ruah SAH has provided case management to 65 Women with 135 children and provided 600 women with phone support. With Women’s Refuge consistently at capacity, the Safe at Home program has assisted women to remain within their communities and support networks staying safe and preventing homelessness.
The brokerage money is integral in assisting clients to remain 'Safe at Home'. While this is primarily used on home security upgrades, it also has the flexibility to be used for other purposes aimed at preventing homelessness, for example, helping clients access TAFE courses enabling them to obtain work and be self-sufficient reducing the likelihood of entering into further abusive relationships. There is some evidence that women who have lived with a violent partner are more likely than other women to have low levels of education. (Women’s Health Australia, 2005) ABS data indicates that unemployed women were more likely to experience both current and previous partner violence over their lifetime than those who were employed or not in the labour force. Women reliant on government pensions and allowances as their main source of household income were also at increased risk of violence by a previous partner over their lifetime. (ABS, Personal safety survey Australia, 2005.)

Case management of SAH clients address family and domestic violence issues, but the caseworkers also assist with securing finances, attending court hearings, arranging for counselling support for the family, supporting education, employment etc.

Some SAH clients have never accessed a human services agency before. An International ‘Violence Against Women’ Survey found that experience of current intimate partner violence during the previous 12 months varied little according to education, labour force status or household income. (Women’s Experience of Male Violence, 2004). The SAH client group spans all ages, cultural and socio-economic groups and provides an ‘early intervention’ service to these women. It seeks to empower the women and is proving to be a cost effective move away from the refuge model being the primary means of support for victims of domestic violence.

Education and information provision are key tools used by workers, who frequently spend many hours on the phone with clients (a fact not captured within the data reported) and send hundreds of information packs out for this purpose. Trained and experienced staff reflect with clients on building healthy relationships and advice on identifying and creating appropriate boundaries in continuing or future relationships.

Diversity

Within the South East Corridor, there is a large Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) population accessing Ruah’s SAH Program. Drawing conclusions regarding the nature and extent of domestic violence in CaLD communities is difficult as studies and surveys have produced mixed findings (Morgan and Chadwick 2011). Immigrant and refugee populations are diverse and cultural values and immigration status increase the complexities normally involved in domestic violence. (Pease and Rees, 2008). Working with such clients within the SAH environment brings new complexities and challenges. In the six month reporting period, January to June 2012, 21 per cent of clients identified as coming from a CaLD background.

Within the same time period, 13 per cent of clients identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Indigenous women are reported to be far more likely to experience violent victimisation and suffer more serious violence, than non-Indigenous women. (Domestic Violence in Australia — An overview of the issues, 2011) Given this, it may be surprising that just 13 per cent of Safe at Home clients (in the last reporting period) identify as Indigenous. However, a high proportion of violent victimisation is not disclosed to police and rates of non-disclosure are higher in Indigenous than non-Indigenous communities. (M. Willis, 2011). In addition to more general reasons for non-disclosure (shame, embarrassment etc.) which is shared with the wider community, there are further reasons specific to Indigenous communities:

- fear of repercussions and consequences, as it is difficult to maintain anonymity
- fear and distrust of police, the justice system and other government agencies
- cultural considerations and coercion—rules and obligations, shame and responsibility for maintaining families may lead to Indigenous women internalising their suffering
- a lack of awareness of or access to support services. (Ibid p 4-8)

Conclusion

Domestic violence is a long standing and complex issue. It is positive that government is adopting diverse programs to tackle the issue, while trying to achieve best outcomes for clients. When women are supported to remain in their homes and communities, they are better able to maintain social support networks, employment and educational opportunities and stability of care for their children, all of which support them in their recovery. (NCRVWC, Time for action, 2011).

Case Study

Amanda was in a relationship with James for two and a half years and they had two children. Throughout the relationship he was continually violent and possessive. He had isolated Amanda and estranged her from her family and friends. Although she had wanted to run her own business, James’ controlling behaviour made this impossible.

As the relationship continued, the violence and possessiveness increased, which led Amanda to leave the relationship and seek a VRO in order to keep her and her children safe. Although a VRO was served, James continued to contact Amanda via the telephone. Amanda no longer felt safe within her home and requested support from a domestic violence service. She felt that her life was in turmoil and she was struggling to adapt to life as a single parent and maintaining the house. (James had refused to support the family financially since being served the VRO).

Safe at Home, following an assessment, undertook a security upgrade at the family home, to help Amanda and her children feel safe at home. James contested the VRO and Safe at Home linked Amanda with Legal Aid in order to have representation in court and to pursue James for financial support of the children.

Safe at Home worked with Amanda and linked her to mainstream services such as counselling and education. She was assisted to enrol in a TAFE course and learn cake decorating. She was also supported to reconnect with her family and friends and rebuild her support networks. The program also assisted Amanda to obtain childcare rebates, which enabled her to study, knowing the children were well cared for.

Amanda reported that she was able to make positive change due to the intervention and support she received from Safe at Home and other main stream services. She is now looking forward to commencing with her new business venture. ■

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Mouzos, J and Makats, T 2004, Women’s experiences of male violence: findings from the Australian component of the international violence against women survey, Research and Public Policy Series no. 55, pp. 57, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

Morgan A and Chadwick H 2011, Key issues in domestic violence, p. 5.


Mitchell L 2011 ‘Domestic Violence in Australia — An overview of the issues’ Social Policy, Department of Parliamentary Services, pp 4–8 and page 12.


In Leisi Mitchell, ‘Domestic Violence in Australia — An overview of the issues’ Social Policy, Department of Parliamentary Services 2011p12.

In 2009, through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) the Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services WA known as the Women’s Council worked in partnership with the Department for Child Protection to develop the Safe at Home and Domestic Violence Outreach Programs. The partnership with the Women’s Council was instrumental in the successful development and implementation of the programs and demonstrated the strength of working together to achieve good outcomes.

The partnership approach with the Women’s Council recognises the expertise of the existing domestic violence sector in working with women and children following domestic violence. The new services are being provided by existing domestic violence refuges and this ensures an integrated response for women experiencing domestic violence.

There is a continuum of domestic violence service responses across Western Australia from the intense outreach support of Safe at Home, the Domestic Violence Outreach program, women’s accommodation and support services and child support programs. In addition, within the refuge system there is a range of service models including 24 hour accessible services and services working on call at night. It was also vital to monitor the interface between other support services to ensure an appropriate response and a seamless referral process for women and children.

During 2011–12 the Women’s Council undertook additional mapping and scoping of the domestic violence sector, including women’s refuges to fully understand the diversity and specialties of individual services. A series of workshops will now explore a variety of flexible service responses to women and children to ensure the broadest possible target group can access services. This includes women with older sons, larger families and women affected by drug and alcohol use and mental illness.

Ongoing reform will focus from a service systems perspective with an emphasis on building a comprehensive response to domestic violence to allow ease of access between services. This approach has the benefit of placing the client within the broader service framework and therefore offering the most comprehensive service system with the best mix of services for women and children’s access and safety.
Introduction

The Nest is the response to a noticeable gap in service provision for homeless young women in the later stages of pregnancy or with young parents in the northern suburbs of Perth. Innovative in its approach and delivery, the Nest focuses on providing stable accommodation for young parents, coupled with intensive case management to strengthen independence and parenting skills. Under the management of Youth Futures WA the Nest has demonstrated a growing demand for suitable accommodation for young parents and has responded by expanding the program considerably in the four years since its inception.

Nest clients are supported by Youth Support Development Workers to identify and develop the necessary tools to assist them in accessing and maintaining suitable long-term accommodation. Service provision within the program is limited to the amount of available funding. Relying exclusively on donations and grants, the Nest’s existence is assessed yearly with each funding application. While successful in receiving funding to expand the program in the past year, referrals have continually increased. This demonstrates the growing need for affordable and suitable accommodation in the Perth metropolitan area. Suitable accommodation options for young parents exiting Nest Accommodation is a poignant and concerning issue.

The NEST: A Safe Place to Start

Youth Futures WA has a history built on striving to identify and address gaps in service provision affecting young people who are at risk of homelessness. After identifying a substantial need for crisis youth accommodation for young people in the northern suburbs of Perth, funding was sourced for crisis accommodation to house young people aged 15 to 19 years and TINOGA, a crisis accommodation shelter, was opened in 1988.

While successful in providing crisis accommodation to a significant number of young people it was also identified that some young people were unable to be accommodated as they did not meet the eligibility criteria. It was observed that many young women attempting to access crisis accommodation were also young mothers or pregnant. A serious concern raised was; without safe and stable accommodation many of these young mothers were at risk of having their children taken into care of the State. Youth Futures WA implemented a unique program called “The Nest” to address the lack of accommodation options for young women experiencing homelessness who were in late pregnancy, who have just given birth or have an infant less than 18 months old. The lack of accommodation options for this particular target group of homeless young people was not isolated to referrals made to Youth Futures WA; other community services in the area were experiencing a similar lack of options. This demand was substantiated through Youth Futures WA own research into other agencies identifying the need for a specific medium term accommodation service for this unique target group.

The NEST Program

The Nest program enables young parents to be accommodated and supported for a period of up to 18 months to develop the life and parenting skills required to maintain stable accommodation and to foster on-going healthy relationships, focusing primarily on the parent and child. Young parents in the Nest program are required to engage in intensive case management support which encourages opportunities to develop independent living skills such as budgeting, household maintenance, nutrition and healthcare, as well as linkages to parenting support services and mainstream government and community groups and services. Service provision to Nest clients also includes practical support such as transport to doctors’ appointments, food shopping, and support to find long term sustainable accommodation.

The Nest program initially commenced in September 2008 with two adjoining houses allocated from the regional community housing provider. For the initial two positions there were 13 suitable referrals which provided a challenge in itself. Referrals are accepted from Youth Futures WA internal programs, external service providers including the Department for Child Protection and from the young people themselves.

In its initial year, only five per cent of referrals to the Nest were able to be accommodated. Subsequent years have demonstrated a continual increase in demand with the 2011/12 financial year producing a 75 per cent increase in referrals from the initial year of operation. Due to the increasing number of referrals for the program and the success of the initial clients, funding was sought to increase the level of support provided to the participants and to provide an additional property. A third property was added in 2010 and an additional two more in 2012. Despite the increase in accommodation options in the Nest program, the amount of referrals able to be accommodated remains around the two to three per cent (as at 2011/12).

Housing in Western Australia

Western Australia is riding on the ‘mining boom’ and enjoying the economic wealth being produced within the state. Average weekly ages have risen above $1500 making prospect of living in WA appear very attractive (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The increase in wages has fuelled the increase in the cost of living across the board, with median rental house prices rising to $430 per week (June Quarter 2012). Parenting Payments for single parents are approximately $663.70 per fortnight with additional assistance provided by Family Tax Benefit A; max: $169.68 per child aged 0 to 12 years and Family Tax Benefit B; max rate: $144.34 per child under five years (Department of Human Services, 2012). Using WACOSS’ estimation on single parent families expenditures (single family being made up as parent and two children) as a guide to illustrate how single parents are expected to spread their payments the author also includes the maximum rent assistance payment available through Centrelink and rental expenditures of a typical (but scarce) low priced rental.

### Income per week

<table>
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<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Payment</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Tax Benefit A</td>
<td>$84.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Tax Benefit B</td>
<td>$72.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rent Assistance</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$559.80</strong></td>
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</table>

*Please note these figures are based on information taken from Centrelink’s Human Services website and may be affected by various formulations used by Centrelink when assessing peoples payments (Australian Government, 2012).*

### Expenditures per week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>$333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gas</td>
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<td>Water</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$575.64</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Difference $ -15.84

(Beverage based on WACOSS estimation for single parent family (WACOSS, 2012).

“It is important to note that the above tables do not take into consideration the cost of transportation, health and medical, clothing, entertainment or other reasonable daily living expenses.*
Young parents attempting to access suitable accommodation options in the time leading to the end of their supported accommodation period have consistently been met with a significant lack, if not, non-existent affordable private rental options. While support is being received by young parents in the program to increase independent living skills and parental skills to enhance the young person’s capabilities to maintain accommodation, private rentals remain difficult to access in the first instance. Public and Community Housing waitlists are excessive and other supported accommodation options for young parents are limited. Appropriate options for young parents to exit to after their time in the Nest, is becoming an increasingly difficult obstacle to overcome.

**Conclusion**

In the context of the strong economic climate in WA, low income single parents are struggling to find suitable accommodation options. Young parents that fall within the eligibility requirement of the Nest are perhaps one of the most disadvantaged groups. The Nest continues to work alongside young single parents between 16 – 19 years, who are at risk of homelessness to identify and address their various needs. Significant case management is dedicated to increasing independent living skills and parenting skills, whilst also linking young parents into mainstream community services to provide on-going foundations for community engagement.

The fundamental contributing factor that causes the greatest disadvantage to the positive move forward for Nest clients is the significant lack of appropriate accommodation exit options available upon the completion of their support period in the Nest. These young parents are able to demonstrate a learnt capacity to form healthy bonds with their children and maintain a safe and clean environment for their families while in Nest accommodation. However, the next step to use the tools learnt in the Nest to live independently is becoming increasingly difficult due to the lack of affordable suitable accommodation options available in Perth.

**References**


Stepping Through the Door: First Steps Towards a Fully Integrated Homelessness Response in Western Australia

Karoline Jamieson  
Operations Manager  
Family Services,  
Communicare Inc.

Communicare has been operating in WA since 1977 and has always had a strong focus on the impact of family and domestic violence on children and families and the well documented relationship between family and domestic violence and homelessness (Chung et al 2000). Communicare has developed and provides a range of services across the family and domestic violence spectrum aimed at early intervention, integrated service systems and breaking the cycle of homelessness for families impacted by family and domestic violence. Communicare therefore welcomed and embraced the NAHA and NPAH initiatives and the vision, principles and key actions of the Western Australian Homelessness State Plan 2010–2013: Opening Doors to Address Homelessness.

Communicare services and initiatives include:

- Communicare Breathing Space (NAHA funded)
- Domestic Violence Outreach: Perpetrator Response (NPAH funded)
- Partnerships for Family Safety (NPAH funded)
- Families without Fear, Indigenous Family Violence
- Co-Morbid AOD/DV Prevention and Intervention Program
- Participation in the Coordinated Family Dispute Resolution Pilot.

As a member of the Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA) and the sole provider in WA of residential therapeutic services to perpetrators of family and domestic violence, we have long advocated for governmental commitment to a real and sustained reduction in the levels of domestic and family violence and the associated homelessness risks for this client group. The implementation of the State Plan to Address Homelessness ‘Opening Doors’ has started to address this issue.

Communicare believes that domestic and family violence is a complex and still often underreported issue that requires a response that is a whole-of-community responsibility and, that government agencies are stakeholders in, together with business, non-government agencies and individuals. There are roles for each to play in order for women and children to be protected and given every opportunity to be provided with support and means to increase their safety and that of their children. Furthermore, any response also needs to ensure perpetrators of family and domestic violence are provided with accommodation and interventions that may act as a vehicle to them taking responsibility for their use of violence and subsequently changing their future behaviours, while enhancing the safety of the victims of the violence.

In March 2012, WA Labor issued a discussion paper Violence in Our Homes: Protecting the Vulnerable which stated that ‘in some circumstances, it is easier and less burdensome for a single man to find accommodation than it is for a woman and the children. Accordingly, men’s shelters should be established to provide accommodation to abusive men. These shelters would effect a cooling off period and could be equipped with counselling services and resources for abusive men’ (p.17).

Communicare has, in fact, already established a supported accommodation service, Communicare Breathing Space (CBS), which is funded by NAHA and is currently the only residential behaviour change program/therapeutic community for domestic violence perpetrators within Australia. As such, it is able to reach men who are at risk of offending, re-offending or victimising their partners and families.

Communicare Breathing Space has operated as a homeless accommodation and support service since 2003 providing a specialist service to men who have been violent in the family environment but wish to change their lives. The service provides a crisis response to domestic violence, supported case-management and a three month family and domestic violence program in a residential, therapeutic setting. Client referrals are accepted from throughout Western Australia and although most referrals are received from the metro area, the program receives an increasing number of referrals from rural and remote areas of the state.

Communicare Breathing Space (CBS) works directly with male perpetrators of domestic violence and those men who feel they are at risk of using violence within their intimate relationships.

Through the therapeutic and behavioural change elements of the CBS residential program, participants are encouraged to recognise their warning signs and triggers earlier and to seek assistance before an incident occurs, rather than after. The program has lasting impacts. We see positive results from past clients when on-going contact occurs after they have exited the program. This learned skill enables safety planning and risk management to take place and works to prevent violence reoccurring or taking place.

CBS is a residential facility where men complete a three month program of individual counselling and group work to address domestic violence behaviours within a therapeutic community. CBS also offers a nine month after care program, crisis accommodation and an out-reach service. The over-arching principle of the program is to prioritise the safety of women and children as the victims of family violence with the long term goal of enhancing family safety and reducing the risk of homelessness.

CBS provides 24-hour direct support for men, providing supported case...
management to address homelessness and other key issues, within a specialist domestic violence program which aims to reduce the incidence of violence within the family. Clients often present to the program with multiple and complex issues. The service provides a holistic or multi-systemic approach to its service provision and assessment. This allows for a multiplicity of supports and clinical interventions aimed at alleviating the crisis, assisting in promoting safety and addressing the violence or abuse. While the program clearly attends to the personal issues and factors within each client’s situation, its initial focus is on assessing the safety of the family members and implementing actions to best assist with the provision of safety. This is in accordance with the Best Practice Model for the provision of programs for perpetrators of domestic violence in WA.

The CBS program includes both individual counselling and group work. Upon entry, each client is assigned a counsellor and receives a formal assessment within the first seven days of their stay. This assessment underpins the counselling process of which men will receive ten individual sessions throughout their stay. Issues addressed, include, but are not limited to, an exploration of their current life circumstances, safety and security, gender issues, family of origin and exploring what the men can do differently to change their circumstances and behaviours in the future. A formal completion report is provided at the conclusion of the program.

Our 12 bed capacity means that we can accommodate up to 12 men who have been violent within the family. Support is tailored to the client on a case-by-case basis thus ensuring the best possible service for each individual. The therapeutic community at CBS bases its foundation around a non-threatening environment of safety, mutual respect, fairness, responsibility, accountability and diversity where equality is the key feature. Breathing Space provided support to 48 residential clients during 2011, and while engagement in the program does not guarantee that violence will not reoccur within the clients future relationships, it does provide perpetrators with resources and a support network to access should they feel at high risk of re-offending.

The program encourages an overriding attitude of responsibility and accountability for ones actions and behaviours. While it is difficult to measure the extent to which this attitude is adopted and its longevity with each client, it is possible to observe the relationships formed with clients that enable them to ask for help before an incident occurs and the opportunities provided to develop skills and strategies in order to manage unsafe situations. Residents who have completed the CBS program are encouraged to participate in the Aftercare program and are offered counselling, case management and support planning towards safe, independent living for a further period of nine months. Since CBS commenced, more than 25,000 nights of accommodation have been provided to men who have been violent or abusive in their intimate relationships, this equates to more than 68 years of time where women and children who are victims of family and domestic violence were able to remain in their homes and access support and plan for their safety whilst the men were accommodated at CBS.

CBS includes the Partnerships for Family Safety (PFS) program which supports the families of our residents in collaboration with three women's specialist services. Communicare developed and initially piloted the PFS project in order to ensure that a network of direct and indirect supports were available to the victims of the violence perpetrated by the participants in our programs.

The project is now a central component of our family and domestic violence services and provides a broad range of supports and referral for women and children affected by family and domestic violence. Through PFS there is the potential and aim to reach partners who may be particularly isolated or at risk of experiencing domestic violence. PFS enables women who have experienced violence or are at risk of doing so to access resources and build relationships with women’s services. This aims to equip women, and those affected by violence, with choices and avenues for support during times of high risk, in the event of a crisis and support with the ongoing effects of trauma and abuse.

CBS also provides the Domestic Violence Outreach Service perpetrator response for Western Australia funded by NPAH, offering access to crisis accommodation for men made homeless due to the use of domestic violence or those issued with Police Orders. When Police respond to an incident involving Domestic Violence, the perpetrator can be issued with a 24 or 72 hour Police Order. CBS is often the first port of call for the local police in order to provide the perpetrator with crisis accommodation and support; allowing time and opportunity for their partner and children to seek alternative accommodation or to seek assistance to remain in the home with the support of our PFS workers.

The service aims to support perpetrators in remaining away from the family home, and to receive the intervention required to keep their families safe. Our Partnerships for Family Safety (PFS) service makes contact with partners or family members affected by the abuse or violence enacted by perpetrators engaged with Communicare Domestic and Family Violence Services. The integrated approach between our specialist homelessness services and mainstream agencies including Western Australia Police, Department of Corrective Services, Drug and Alcohol Office and the Mental Health Commission has been integral to the success of this service response. Both CBS and DV Outreach receive referrals from throughout the state of Western Australia including regional and remote communities.

In conclusion, Communicare embraces the vision, principles and key actions developed in the Western Australian Homelessness State Plan that built on the NAHA and NPAH, and believes that the initiatives implemented have been an effective first step through the door to creating a more integrated service system, intervening earlier in preventing homelessness and breaking the cycle of homelessness. With an on-going focus on achieving these outcomes and building on the strengths of existing services, WA will continue to progress forward towards a fully integrated homelessness response that achieves lasting reductions in homelessness and family and domestic violence.

References


Safe at Home: Working to Prevent Homelessness

Anne Moore
Executive Officer, The Lucy Saw Centre Association Inc,
The Centre for the Prevention and Intervention of Domestic and Family Violence

With over a 160 referrals a month to our Safe at Home (SAH) program it is clear there is a demand for homelessness initiatives in Western Australia. Since the introduction of National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) funding we have seen the SAH program flourish into a service delivery area that has surpassed our expectations in meeting the demand of these vulnerable clients and their children.

This program has not only enhanced the lives of women and their children experiencing domestic and family violence it has also supported them in retaining their housing and therefore preventing homelessness. With refuge accommodation being in high demand it is often the reality that women cannot be accommodated when a crisis occurs.

The basic criteria for a SAH client is that she is a woman who is a victim of domestic/family violence and who wishes to live in her own home without the perpetrator of the violence. Having secure tenure in the home and a violence restraining order are significant but not essential criteria. However, each case is assessed on an individual basis taking into account the specific circumstances of the client. Staff safety must also be taken into consideration as home visits and safety evaluations are conducted by SAH staff.

Safe at Home South West Metro encourages clients to access mainstream support services where possible as this encourages the client to become independent in the wider community. Clients have reported that they have felt supported and were generally happy with the service provided.

Through the SAH program we have seen improved relationships with government agencies and other NGOs. Staff actively case manage 50 plus clients per year and also provide a triage service to the 160 plus domestic violence intervention (DVI) referrals from police each month. With the 50 case managed clients two staff members make an initial home visit and do a risk assessment and assess security of the home and make recommendations around improving security.

The close partnerships that have been formed with the WA Police and especially the Family Protection Unit (FPU), the Department for Child Protection (DCP) and other government agencies has certainly increased safety for victims. It has also served has a forum for updating non-specific family and domestic violence (FDV) services with emerging issues and trends that informs them better about risk and safety planning.

With brokerage funding also available families have been given much needed financial support to secure their homes by changing locks or installing security lights; brokerage is also used for clients to make repairs to damaged property and perhaps pay a one off rent bill to ensure housing is maintained.

Staff actively case manage 50 plus clients per year and also provide a triage service to the 160 plus domestic violence intervention (DVI) referrals from police each month. With the 50 case managed clients two staff members make an initial home visit and do a risk assessment and assess security of the home and make recommendations around improving security.

Safe at Home at a glance Police Referral in the past six month report (POP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of referrals:</th>
<th>854 women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of accompanying children:</td>
<td>1142 children</td>
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Overview of the Program

The target group in the Safe at Home program: Police referrals are the victims of FDV who have received police intervention during a FDV incident. These clients are then referred through by email to the SAH program by the FPUs for this area. The catchment area is from Singleton (Rockingham) through to the Fremantle area comprising both Peel and South Metropolitan regions. Of the 854 referrals, 840 were female and 14 were male (same sex attracted abuse or male to male family abuse). There were 1,142 accompanying children.
The number of referrals has increased over the last four reporting periods:

**Figure 1: Police referrals for families over four reporting periods**

- **200**
- **276**
- **669**
- **835**
- **854**

Our referred clients included 115 (13.46 per cent) who were culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) and 56 (6.55 per cent) identified as Indigenous. The remaining 693 (81.14 per cent) clients identified as Anglo-Australians or from an English speaking background.

The age range of female clients was reasonably spread throughout the age groups but with a greater concentration of clients fitting into the 20 to 44 years age group. The majority of clients (75.77 per cent) were victims of intimate partner violence, with 224 (26.22 per cent) families affected by family violence which was perpetrated by other family members.

Of the 14 males referred, 13 were the target of family violence and only one male referral was the subject of intimate partner violence.

**Changes Since the Last Reporting Period**

Safe at Home continues to receive high quality referrals full of vital information through the new referral process which began at the beginning of 2011. Provision of appropriate information gives SAH staff a better chance of making contact with and appropriately assisting the referred client.

Communication with both Peel FPU and South Metro FPU is improved by having an Advocate working in both the Rockingham and Fremantle police stations alongside the FPU.

**Services Provided**

SAH Advocates provide a supportive telephone call, crisis phone counselling, safety planning and referral to each client contacted as needed on a case by case basis.

Staff made a total of 1,933 direct calls to clients, an average of 522 calls per month, or 2.26 calls per person, although many clients are phoned and assisted with a single call. There were 352 (41.21 per cent) women who agreed to information packs being sent out as well as phone contact. Feedback for every client is sent to both FPUs with details of the contact, support, information provided and referrals made, as well as any safety concerns held by staff. Clients who are not contactable are referred back so the FPU can conduct welfare checks if appropriate.

Consent has already been obtained by the referring police officers so most clients are willing to take advantage of the support offered by SAH. However, clients have the right to withdraw consent and decline our services. On initial contact, there may be discussion of the incident that led to the referral, and information given to the client about restraining orders, victim support, counselling options and legal services. Staff request permission from the client to send an information pack to a safe address.

Our information packs comprise resource materials and contact details for government agencies, DV support and legal services. Counselling options, Family Violence Service (victim support) and other brochures are included depending on the needs of the individual client.

**Figure 2: Support provided to clients in this reporting period**

**Referral Pathways**

Women and children can be directly referred for specialist domestic violence counselling, children’s counselling and alcohol and other drug (AOD) counselling. All of which is available through the Lucy Saw Centre and South Coastal Women’s Health Service (SCWHS) and Serenity Lodge with an memorandum of understanding in place to support the process. Clients are also referred to other support, outreach and counselling services in the Rockingham and Fremantle areas.

Internal referrals can be made to the Lucy Saw Centre’s Outreach program, Safe at Home program (long term clients), and the Case Management Coordination Service (CMCS) and the refuge if it is unsafe for clients to remain in the home.

The Lucy Saw Centre provides the Safe at Home program for managed risk in this longer term DV support. High risk, recidivist cases can be referred to the Case Management Coordination Service (CMCS) which is also part of the Lucy Saw Centre. SAH advocates endeavour to contact the victim in a timely manner and return the referral promptly if unable to contact them. If a (24- or 72-hour) police order is in place, a well-timed intervention allows staff to take the best advantage of the situation and increases the safety of women and children affected by domestic violence.

Referrals can be made to multiple police referrals and repeated incidents leading to multiple police referrals and express their concerns to FPU and any relevant agency such as DPC.

**Raising DV awareness**

As an early intervention process, the Police Order project aims to deal with the immediate crisis of DV but is also the first step in raising the clients’ awareness of DV and increasing their knowledge and skills to prevent future abuse and reducing the harmful effects of DV.

The Safe at Home program: Police referrals’ aim is to provide crisis intervention for each family contacted. This includes safety planning to avoid further abuse; and dissemination of information and referral options to increase awareness of family and domestic violence for every client. Due to the cyclical nature of domestic violence, the most successful option for making long-term changes for the client is through education and awareness.
**The Changing Face of Homelessness in Perth, Western Australia**

**Michael Beard**  
Community Housing Coalition of WA (CHCWA)

WA is experiencing strong economic growth, driven by the booming mining and resources sector. However, the fruit of this rapid growth in the State’s economy has been distributed unevenly and has come with significant social costs — especially for low and moderate income households. Ground zero is Perth’s private rental market. Escalating rents and extremely low vacancy rates bear testament to a private rental market that has been swamped with demand not least due to the high levels of migration into the State. It is low and moderate income households, that have traditionally found long term housing tenure in the private rental market, that are bearing the brunt of this market failure. Such households are, with increasingly regularity, the new face of homelessness in WA.

**The Failure of Perth’s Private Rental Market**

During the last year CHCWA has drawn attention to the failure of the private rental market in Perth on numerous occasions. The deleterious impact of the market failure has increased over the last 12 months with significant hikes in the median rent and a tightening vacancy rate (Community Housing Coalition of WA, 2012).

WA’s high rate of migration has been a key driver of demand for rentals. Approximately 1200 overseas and interstate migrants are coming to live in WA each week to share the prosperity being generated by the state’s strong economy with many choosing to live in the Perth metropolitan area. Migrants rely heavily on the private rental market for accommodation (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010, p.4). Evidence from the Real Estate Institute of WA (REIWA) also suggests that at the same time that demand for rentals has increased supply has fallen with baby boomers selling their investment properties as they enter retirement.

Figure 1 shows the relationship between Perth median rent and the rental vacancy rate over the last decade. Over the last year alone rents have increased by 14 per cent to $450 per week and the vacancy rate has plunged well below the point of market equilibrium of three per cent. The Housing Industry Forecasting Group (2012, p.20) predicts Perth’s rental market will remain tight through to at least 2014 when new housing supply is expected to catch up with demand.

High house prices and increasing rents have inevitably lead to higher demand for social housing. Figure 2 shows the number of applicants on the Public Housing Waitlist has increased significantly as house prices have remained high and rents have increased — particularly in the wake of the global financial crisis. Community need for social housing remains at all-time highs despite tighter income eligibility requirements for public housing and greater waitlist monitoring by the WA Department of Housing (DoH).

**The Changing Face of Homelessness**

The perfect storm of rising rents and tightening supply in the rental market, low levels of public and community housing, an inundated State social housing list and crisis and transitional homelessness services operating at capacity has created a situation where some individuals and families in Perth are unable to access any accommodation at all, let alone affordable long-term accommodation. Research undertaken by CHCWA in March found that approximately half of one per cent of private rentals, based on the 30/40 rule, was affordable to an individual or household on the WA adult minimum wage. The rentals that were...
available were almost exclusively shared accommodation (Community Housing Coalition of WA, 2012, p.19).

Consequently, crisis and transitional housing providers are seeing an increasing frequency of working families seeking assistance because they were unable to find accommodation. These groups are at risk of becoming homeless and are being forced to live in their cars, caravan parks and tents, or are staying with friends and family which creates situations of overcrowding. Of particular concern is that these families do not necessarily require assistance in relation to issues generally associated with a period of homelessness. Rather, they are simply unable to access or maintain accommodation that they can afford on their incomes.

Anglicare WA’s General Manager of Social Inclusion, Andrew Hall, observed that many people, even those fully employed, are having greater difficulty keeping up with the expense of the private rental market:

*We have people who are working families, who are going to work, who are on an income who can’t afford the rental house that they were in before.*

St. Patrick’s Community Support Centre, located in Fremantle, in Perth’s southern suburbs is similarly dealing with an increasing number of people who do not fit the traditional image homelessness. St Pat’s Director Homelessness and Housing Services, Victor Crevatin, noted that:

*The face of homelessness is changing rather dramatically, long gone are the days of the*
stereotypical homeless person being the image of an old man swinging a wine bottle in a paper bag. It’s not like that anymore. It would blow you away in terms of who you’d see on the street in Fremantle who doesn’t look homeless, who are trying to hold down a job, who are sending their kids to school after sleeping in their car all night. It is madness out there, absolute madness.

Figure 3 shows increases in Perth’s median rent compared to average incomes and the WA adult minimum wage. Between June 2003 and June 2012 median rent in Perth surged 174 per cent. This compares with the WA average weekly income which increased by 71 per cent and the WA adult minimum wage which increased by just 40 per cent. As a result, increasing rents are affecting not just those who are reliant on Centrelink benefits but pushing those on higher incomes into housing stress and homelessness.

Figure 4 compares Perth median rent to affordable rent for people on the WA average weekly earnings (all persons) and the WA adult minimum wage. In September 2012 an individual or family on the average wage, renting at the median price, would have had to pay 37 per cent of its income on rent. In June 2003 the median rent required just 25 per cent of the average weekly earnings. Individuals and families solely reliant on the minimum wage are much worse off. In September 2012, a household earning the minimum wage would have had to pay 72 per cent of its income on rent. As such, they would be in severe rental stress paying more than 50 per cent of their income on housing. In June 2003 the same household would have been paying 35 per cent of its income on rent — half the proportion that is currently needed.

Implications of Failure of Perth’s Private Rental Market

Worryingly, homeless sector experts such as Alison Lawrie, Manager of the Accommodation Program at Fremantle Multicultural Centre and Victor Crevatin from St Pat’s warn that while many of the traditional causal factors of homelessness are absent from these individuals or families at the time of entrance into homelessness, any period of homelessness can have devastating impacts on a family or individual’s wellbeing. It is extremely difficult to maintain employment, healthy family relationships and self-esteem in a state of homelessness. This pressure can lead to increased occurrence of family breakdown, domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse.

This new cohort entering the homelessness service system has an inevitable flow on effect to the ability of organisations to deliver services to those who require more intensive assistance. Situations are now arising in which services at capacity are being forced to turn away people who may have serious issues contributing to their state of homelessness and vulnerability due to an influx of those presenting who are part of the ‘new face of homelessness’.

CHCWA’s interviews with housing providers provide a damning critique of the notion of an ‘affordable housing continuum’. The continuum seeks to progress people’s housing careers, through crisis and transitional accommodation, social housing, private rental to home ownership. The continuum, however, can only be effective if there are accessible transition points along the continuum. Andrew Hall of Anglicare WA noted the lack of housing stock as a serious barrier to the ability of homelessness services’ to transition people into more independent accommodation:

If I think of the Perth Metropolitan area, I think there’s a large need for some housing stock to be made available for families who are experiencing homelessness….There are few providers in the Metro area…and because of the market people can’t move through or move into anything else or can’t afford anywhere else, so those models become blocked up. So there’s some interplay between having a very expensive housing market and a very tight rental market and then how people who are experiencing difficulties or who are unable to afford the marketplace, if they come or gain assistance from any agency they may well not have the ability to re-enter the marketplace.

In other cases, the perceptions or prejudices of rental professionals can also work to exclude families or individuals from the private rental market. Swan Emergency Accommodation Executive Officer, Don Tunnicliffe, has observed this exclusion over a period of several years:

Most of our clients aren’t well received by the private rental market, so it turns out that most of our people end up going on the Department of Housing priority listing. Community housing is starting to take up some accommodation needs, but private rental is down the list because of access for our client group. It’s gone from difficult to just about impossible.

This has had a direct impact on the services Swan Emergency Accommodation is able to deliver and the number of clients they are able to assist. Don reported that a lack of housing supply forces people to stay in transitional accommodation for much longer than necessary, despite being in a position where they are otherwise willing and able to progress their accommodation situation.

Conclusions: Tackling the Problem

Unfortunately there are no easy solutions to failure of Perth’s rental market and the changing face of homelessness in WA. So long as demand side pressures outstrip supply of affordable rental accommodation, these issues will persist. What this underscores, however, is the need for all levels of government to invest in increasing the stock of social housing.

References


This article is based on a larger research paper by the Community Housing Coalition of WA (CHCWA) on The changing face of homelessness in Perth, Western Australia. This paper will be available on the CHCWA website later this year www.communityhousing.com.au.
Anglicare WA’s Tenancy Support Program (TSP) works with Department of Housing (DoH) tenants who are in danger of eviction. The aim of the program is to sustain current and newly allocated tenancies and reduce instances of eviction — thus lowering homelessness levels.

The program operates across much of WA, including metropolitan and rural and remote regions. Current locations are: Halls Creek, Fremantle, Kwinana, Rockingham, Mandurah, Peel, Bunbury, Busselton, Manjimup, Collie, Narrogin, Katanning and Albany. As a preference, Anglicare WA seeks to employ suitably qualified local staff throughout the regions.

Early intervention is an effective strategy for sustaining tenancies and providing clients with positive outcomes in the long term. High levels of complexity, entrenched behaviours, and extreme financial situations are sometimes impossible to rectify successfully. Anglicare WA works collaboratively with the DoH on a regular basis, to identify and facilitate early intervention referrals for the program.

Although tenants, and prospective tenants, are referred to the program directly by the DoH, referrals from other services and organisations and the tenants themselves are also encouraged.

The program regularly receives communication from the DoH, highlighting tenancy concerns they may have for individuals, couples or families they may be working with.

The program encourages referrals as part of a collaborative, direct, multi-support approach to tenancy preservation.

A comprehensive assessment is conducted within seven days of a referral, commencing initially with an introductory visit to the home of the tenant, where the reasons for the referral are discussed. The client’s personal and family details are confirmed, support mechanisms both formal and informal are identified, along with other agency and service interactions. Tenancy history and any relevant associated information are also discussed.

The Tenancy Support Workers visit the client once per week for three weeks. During these visits, the client and worker build rapport, and an active work plan is devised and agreed upon. Agreement to work together and a document authorising TSP to act on the client’s behalf are also signed.

Workers commence regular, scheduled home visits, to encourage the completion of the agreed tasks. These tasks are broken down into small achievable incremental actions, tailored to match the client’s level of capability and need. During these visits, clients will be given an opportunity to learn how to best manage their tenancies. Clients are provided with cleaning tips, financial information and instruction on how to ‘quietly enjoy the property’.

Case plans may be broad ranging and directly reflect the tenancy preservation needs and take into account the clients abilities. The program is arranged to fit the needs of the clients. Case plans may focus on stabilising income issues: such as the creation of Centrelink Centrepay, arrangements for rent, tenant liability, water, vacated debt or previous bond payment debts.

Financial plans are not limited to DoH payments. Clients are often supported,
assisted and encouraged to address power bills, gas bills, fines, and other outstanding debts through appointments with Financial Counselling. Clients are assisted with power payment support mechanisms such as Power Assist and the Hardship Utility Grants Scheme (HUGS). The return of power to the property enhances the likelihood of improved cleaning regimes.

The range of issues facing DoH tenants varies greatly and includes personal problems, family disputes, health or mental health complications, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and financial burdens. The worker identifies many of these issues during the assessment period and where appropriate refers the client to external agencies and services.

Anglicare WA Housing Support Workers are highly trained individuals. They are drawn from a variety of backgrounds and many have areas of expertise and interests such as drug and alcohol or domestic/family violence. Anglicare WA is a registered training organisation and is committed to providing ongoing core training to new staff and refresher courses to existing staff to ensure clients receive the best service possible. A small amount of Brokerage Funding is allocated to each client. Case workers match the use of this money against the client’s willingness to interact with the program, and are often used as an incentive to achieve optimum outcomes.

The program utilises a variety of charts, tracking records and mapping devices to depict clients’ progress. These charts and maps are discussed with the client on a weekly basis to ensure they are on track with the agreed tasks contained in the case plans. Progress is monitored during the two weekly supervision sessions which take place between the Housing Support Worker and the Coordinator/Team Leader. Alternative approaches to solving problems are also discussed and encouraged.

In addition to this Housing Support Workers, the Program Coordinator, and the DoH meet on a regular four weekly basis to discuss client progress and identify emerging issues or other developments.

Joint home visits from the DoH and Anglicare WA Housing Support Workers can be arranged if deemed necessary or supportive to the client’s success. Anglicare WA operates within a case management approach to all client work.

Housing Support Workers work collectively with the Disruptive Behaviour Management Unit (DBMU), a sub group of the DoH, whose role it is to investigate anti-social complaints which may have been received against the tenant. These complaints can lead to the tenant receiving a strike against their tenancy. DoH has three major ‘substantiated strikes’ and you are out policy. The ‘out’, refers to eviction. The Housing Support Workers work closely with both the Disruptive Behaviour Management Unit and the client to improve understanding from both sides preserve tenancy.

Referrals to the program are graded into three support categories, low, medium and high. Clients anticipated to require low level intervention are expected to need up to three months support, medium level clients receive six months support, and high level clients up to 12 months support. Worker caseloads comprise a mixture of all three up to a maximum of 15 active cases across a six month period. This system encourages early intervention, that is, the case is identified prior to the development of enmeshed issues requiring more complex and lengthy support. Low intervention cases can be moved through the program with successful outcomes allowing another referral to be allocated a support worker.

A facet of the assessment period is the identification of exit indicators (when a client is ready to exit program). Readiness for exit is discussed at a four weekly Department of Housing/Tenancy Support Program meeting. The Housing Support Worker and client review meeting occurs when all three parties are confident the tenancy is secure and no longer at risk. Once identified, exit is discussed with the client and the Exit Support Plan is reviewed.

The Exit Support Plan — referred to as After Care — provides the potential for three months additional client contact and support on a monthly basis.

After care can take the form of worker home visits or can be determined by the client. Should the client need further positive reinforcement to sustain their tenancy, the worker is at hand to provide that support. It is anticipated, that once reaching the Aftercare stage, clients are able to manage all facets of their tenancy.

Client feedback is an integral function in mapping program delivery and success. All client feedback is disseminated and used to improve service delivery. Clients are encouraged to provide information about their experiences of the program, the effectiveness of the program for them, service delivery, and the appropriateness of the program for their needs.

Key success factors of the TSP:

- prompt referrals
- comprehensive assessment
- home visits one to one service delivery
- a wrap-around program
- defined outcomes
- working in a case management setting
- review, with the flexibility to modify case plans
- an agreed exit with up to three months additional individual support.
Disruptive Behaviour Management Strategy

Scott Campbell
Manager, Housing Policy, Department of Housing WA

The Disruptive Behaviour Management Strategy (DBMS) operates on the premise that while the majority of public housing tenants are considerate of neighbours and respect the community in which they live, the behaviour of a small number of tenants does disturb the peace and safety of their neighbourhood. After a spate of anti-social activity in public housing tenancies in 2009 the Western Australian Government decided to develop a tenancy management policy that would hold public housing tenants to greater account when their ‘antisocial behaviour’ disturbed neighbours.

In October 2009 the Disruptive Behaviour Management Strategy (DBMS) was endorsed by the Cabinet with its primary focus on a strikes-based policy applying sanctions based on the severity and frequency of proven complaints about tenants’ behaviour. In May 2011, the policy was revised to apply strict sanctions on disruptive tenants as a stronger deterrent to unacceptable behaviour. At the same time the Department of Housing (DoH) established a Disruptive Behaviour Management Unit in the metropolitan area as a specialist response to disruptive tenancies.

The DBMS approach is consistent with previous approaches to public housing tenancy management in Western Australia — managing disruptive behaviour is about achieving a balance between the rights of public housing tenants to a fair go, noting that in many cases tenants are disadvantaged in some way, and the rights of neighbours to quiet enjoyment of their homes. Put simply, the government of the day decides where this line is drawn. In this instance the government determined that more emphasis on the obligations of tenants was needed to achieve a fair balance.

Balancing Rights with Obligations
Balancing rights and obligations, recognises the provision of taxpayer-subsidised housing is conditional. The right to the opportunity of public housing, and the right to an equitable and reasonable service comes on condition that the tenant meets their responsibilities to pay rent, look after the property, and respect their neighbours. Persistent failure in meeting responsibilities will lead to withdrawal of the opportunity.

A firm approach to dealing with breaches of the tenancy agreement is consistent with the principles of sustaining tenancies. Ignoring disruptive behaviour and tenant responsibilities sends the wrong message. The absence of consequences compounds the issue and denies the opportunity to tenants to address the disruptive behaviour that is causing concern to their neighbours.

Policy
The Disruptive Behaviour Management Policy (DBMP) defines three levels of disruptive behaviour: Dangerous Behaviour, Serious Disruptive Behaviour and Minor Disruptive Behaviour. The Department responds in a fair and reasonable manner to all complaints by its timely investigation of complaints while observing due process. If the Department is satisfied the incident occurred it will take appropriate action.

Applications to the court are made under the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 (RTA). The onus of proof is on the landlord and the ‘balance of probability’ is the civil standard of proof that applies.

Under Section 62 of the RTA a breach notice must be issued after any proven incident. It was this provision, that social housing landlords had relied on in the past, that lapsed after 14 days and in some cases allowed behaviour to continue for unreasonably long periods. This prompted the DoH to rely on Section 64, which provides for terminations ‘without grounds’, which had effectively limited the scope of the court’s discretion.

A new section of the RTA 75A, commenced on 30 July 2012 whereby the Magistrates court can determine: ‘Has nuisance or interference been established?’ and ‘Does the behaviour justify termination of the tenancy agreement?’ This change allows the court to focus on the primary issue, which is a shift from the legal mechanisms previously applied. The determinants of a case involve the severity and frequency of disruptions and the strength of the case, based on the evidence presented to the court.

Responsive Regulation
The DBMS is a form of responsive regulation1 that enables a hierarchy of responses starting from a base of self — regulation, then enforced self-regulation, followed by command regulation with discretionary punishment, and finally command regulation with non-discretionary punishment.

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<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOUR</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dangerous</td>
<td>Dangerous behaviour is characterised by activities that pose a demonstrable risk to the safety or security of residents or property; or have resulted in injury to a person in the immediate vicinity and led to subsequent Police charges or conviction.</td>
<td>Immediate proceedings will be taken under Section 73 of the Residential Tenancies Act 1987, or other relevant section where this cannot be applied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Disruptive</td>
<td>Serious disruptive behaviour is defined as activities that intentionally or recklessly cause disturbance to persons in the immediate vicinity, or which could reasonably be expected to cause concern for the safety or security of a person or their property.</td>
<td>A strike will be issued following an incident the Department is satisfied has occurred. Legal action will proceed if another subsequent incident (of similar severity) occurs within a period of 12 months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Disruptive</td>
<td>Minor disruptive behaviour is defined as activities that cause a nuisance, or unreasonably interfere with the peace, privacy or comfort, of persons in the immediate vicinity.</td>
<td>A strike will be issued for each incident the Department is satisfied occurred. Legal action will proceed if three strikes are issued within a period of 12 months.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responsive regulation as pragmatic rather than ideological — that is, what works. Responsive regulation is about recognising that a range of approaches are needed including both coercive and voluntary compliance models.

By using a hierarchy of warnings/strikes and sanctions the DBMS encourages disruptive tenants to exercise self-control early. It works well without depending heavily on the coercive end of the continuum. The Victorian report states that regulators should be able to vary their stances as they deal with different people and issues. We need a range of intermediate responses between the two extremes — to be able to select from this repertoire depending on the circumstances and to have a range of graduated responses to non-compliance.

The DBMS provides strategies that encourage self-regulation early by using a hierarchy of warnings/strikes and sanctions. It does not rely heavily on the coercive end of the continuum.

Outcomes

It is noted that only 12 per cent of all complaints logged resulted in a strike being issued, which reflects that a substantial volume of frivolous and unfounded complaints are received. However, as the onus of proof rests with the Department, strikes cannot be issued without due process being applied. This protects tenants with sound investigative process underpinned by the principles of procedural fairness.

Outcomes May 2011 to April 2012

The deterrent effect of DBMS is clear in the strike statistics and the number of tenancies terminated is still well under one per cent of all public housing tenancies.

The strikes issued in the period 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012 were as follows:

First Strikes: 906
Second Strikes: 382 (42 per cent of tenants who received a First Strike)
Third Strikes: 110 (29 per cent of tenants who received a Second Strike)

Outcomes — Complaints vs Strikes, May 2011 – April 2012

Footnotes

2. ibid.
Housing Co-operatives: An Affordable Option

Gary Robins
Co-ordinator, Federation of Housing Collectives WA (FOHCOL)

Beyond short term temporary and crisis accommodation for the homeless, one option deserving of consideration is the housing co-operative model. This article seeks to highlight what this model is about in Western Australia and the benefits it brings to those who become part of it. While it is acknowledged that it does not address the immediate needs of the homeless, it is a concept that with engagement from local government, state government departments, not-for-profit groups and interested people, has the potential to bring the homeless into a strong vibrant community housing context with security of tenure.

FOHCOL
The Federation of Housing Collectives WA (FOHCOL) is the peak body for housing co-operatives in Western Australia. It is a not-for-profit organisation established in 1987 fully self-funded by membership fees which are set at four per cent of member housing co-operative rental income. Housing co-operatives have a long history around the world and the housing co-operatives sector in WA is part of that broader movement.

Housing Co-operatives
A housing co-operative, is a not-for-profit organisation owned and run by its members. They are about self-help, democracy, social responsibility and caring for one another. It is formed when people join with each other on a democratic basis to control the housing in which they live.

Types of Housing Co-operatives
Housing Co-operatives can be classified into three groups on the basis of the amount of equity the members contribute to the venture.

One of these is the ‘Common Equity (Non-equity) Rental Housing Co-operative Model’ which looks very similar to renting. The public housing authority vests housing into the housing cooperative via mechanisms such as head leases or deeds of trust. Members are usually from low income backgrounds and rentals are capped at a percentage of gross income, usually 25 per cent. The basis of the housing cooperative is security of tenure and self-management. As the housing cooperative does not own any real estate, it does not build any equity. This model involves a direct relationship with the public housing sector. Tenants are able to also claim Commonwealth Rental Assistance.

In Western Australia, most of the housing co-operatives fall into the non-equity model and are funded by the Department of Housing. This type of housing cooperative is a strand of the community (also referred to as social or affordable) housing sector and the primary focus is to provide affordable rental housing to people on low to moderate incomes. Prospective tenants must meet community housing eligibility criteria.

Benefits of Housing Co-operatives
There are many benefits of co-op housing, both for individual members and for the broader community. For the individual, some of the benefits include:

- long term security of tenure in quality housing
- affordable housing
- being part of a supportive and friendly community
- the opportunity to choose where they wish to live and to contribute to the design of their home; including the provision of innovative design and construction
- the opportunity to benefit from education and training aimed at helping members effectively run the co-op and gain confidence in their abilities and skills
- escaping from the dependency on ‘others’ by running things for themselves;
- being part of a democratic and consensus-based organisation which values all members and their contributions.

Waiting for a House
This is always the most difficult question to answer. Some people may wish to join an existing co-op and may be able to move into a house quite soon (although the small number of co-ops means this is unlikely). On the other hand, people may wish to set up a new co-op. This can be frustratingly long, but ultimately a rewarding process. ‘Co-operation Housing’ was set up in WA in 2010 with the ‘... principal object of ... owning or leasing of residential properties to provide housing assistance for low to medium income households who chose to live in co-operative housing communities, with the flow on benefits this housing option provides.’ (Co-operation Housing Strategic Plan 2011–2013).

In Conclusion
‘When dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contribution to the design, construction or management of their housing, both the process and the environment produced stimulate individual and social well-being.

When people have neither control over, nor responsibility for key decisions in the housing process, on the other hand, dwelling environments may instead become a barrier to personal fulfilment and a burden on the economy’

(from ‘Freedom to Build’ by John F.C. Turner 1972)
Precarious Housing for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and Aboriginal Households

Dr. Shae Garwood
Shelter WA

The Housing Crisis Committee for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (HCCCaLD) was formed in October 2006 in response to increasing reports of difficulties faced by humanitarian communities in the metropolitan area of Perth in accessing and maintaining accommodation. As a member of HCCCaLD, Shelter WA recently released a briefing paper on Housing Affordability for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) and Aboriginal households. The following is a summary of that briefing.

The high cost of housing in Perth has made it difficult for people on low to moderate incomes to secure safe, affordable accommodation for themselves and their families. In addition to the shortage of available affordable accommodation, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal people and other disadvantaged groups may face additional barriers in accessing suitable accommodation in Perth. These barriers can include a shortage of housing to accommodate larger families, an inability to secure accommodation close to transport and other services, and discrimination in the housing market.

One in four of Australia’s 22 million people were born outside of Australia (DIAC 2012). Between June 2011 and July 2012, 157,460 people from 200 countries settled in Australia. Most were born in one of the following four countries: New Zealand (20.2 per cent), China (11.5 per cent), United Kingdom (8.6 per cent) and India (8.3 per cent). Humanitarian entrants make up a small portion of migrants to Australia. In 2010–2011 a total of 13,799 visas were granted under the Department of Immigration and Citizenship’s Humanitarian Program, of which 8,971 visas were granted under the offshore component and 4,828 visas were granted under the onshore component.

The reasons for migrants’ relocation, their education and skill level, and the circumstances surrounding their arrival, influence the type of accommodation they require. Initially, overseas immigrants often require accommodation in the private rental market. Economic migrants, in contrast to humanitarian migrants, will often move quickly into home ownership once they have settled in to their new region. For humanitarian migrants from non-English speaking countries, their housing options will be influenced by whether or not they have a social network of friends and family, their employment prospects, and what type of support they are eligible to receive.

Aboriginal households in WA face particular challenges in exercising their rights to appropriate and affordable housing. Poverty, lack of economic opportunities, language, literacy, cultural practices, inadequate housing histories and discrimination all contribute to inadequate housing options for some Aboriginal people in WA. In 2011, there were 69,665 people in WA who identified as being of Aboriginal origin in the Census, representing 3.1 per cent of the total population of the state (ABS 2012). The 2011 Census reported that 63 per cent of Aboriginal households rent their homes (30 per cent from the Department of Housing, six per cent from a community housing provider and 26 per cent in the private rental market); 32 per cent are home owners or are purchasing their homes.

CaLD and Aboriginal households experience housing stress at disproportionate rates. In 2006, over 8,000 Aboriginal households in Australia were in housing stress (paying...
more than 30 per cent of their gross income on housing costs). In WA, 55.6 per cent of Aboriginal people not in receipt of Commonwealth Rent Assistance were in housing stress; 20 per cent were paying over 50 per cent of their income on housing costs resulting in extreme housing stress. Migrant households from non-English speaking countries experience housing stress at higher rates (20 per cent) than non-migrant households (14 per cent) (ABS 2008). High rates of housing stress can have a detrimental effect on the health and well-being of individuals, families and surrounding communities.

As of 30 June 2012, there were 23,411 households on the waiting list for public housing in WA. Even with priority status, many of these households will have to wait years to secure accommodation. Those without priority status may eventually secure accommodation in public housing. However, most will have to obtain alternative housing to avoid homelessness. Therefore, programs are needed to assist people in securing alternative accommodation, to prevent homelessness and minimise overwhelming homelessness services, which already operate at capacity. A major challenge for CaLD and Aboriginal families is that they may not be able to secure social housing, either due to the long waiting list or because they are over the income limits. Conversely, they may not earn enough to access appropriate housing in the private rental market or to purchase a home. Some Aboriginal and CaLD households face discrimination in accessing or maintaining their housing. It is unlawful under the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 for an owner or agent to discriminate against someone seeking private rental accommodation because of their race, religious or political conviction, impairment, age, sex, pregnancy, marital status, gender history or sexual orientation.

Although racial discrimination is illegal, private landlords are not prohibited from discriminating against people based on income (that is, Centrelink recipients) and household composition. The WA Equal Opportunity Commission received 70 complaints in 2010–2011 alleging housing discrimination among CaLD and Aboriginal people related to accommodation (EOC 2011). It is well known that most people do not report discrimination, so it is reasonable to assume that this number does not adequately represent the extent of discrimination in the housing market, particularly in a tight rental market with low vacancy rates.

Aboriginal people experience homelessness at higher rates than the non-Aboriginal population (1.9 per cent of the Aboriginal population compared to 0.5 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population). At the time of the 2006 Census, over 9,000 Aboriginal people were experiencing homelessness in Australia, which included 1,496 people in WA. The majority of the Aboriginal homeless population in WA (57 per cent) were considered to be experiencing ‘secondary homelessness’, which includes people living in temporary shelters or living with others because they do not have adequate housing of their own.2

AIHW (2012) reported that the top three countries of overseas-born people seeking homelessness assistance in the December quarter of 2011 (Australia wide) included 1,036 people born in Sudan, 1,517 born in New Zealand and 802 born in the UK. Of these, most had arrived in Australia between 2002 and 2007.

Many people in need of emergency accommodation are unable to access the services they require. On any given night, 48.6 per cent of those seeking services from government-funded homelessness services are turned away (AIHW 2011). Of those turned away from government-funded homelessness services, 13.7 per cent were from a non-English speaking background. Fifty-three per cent (53 per cent) of those turned away were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin (AIHW 2011). The Shelter WA briefing paper includes recommendations to address the housing challenges that CaLD and Aboriginal households experience in Perth. Shelter WA’s recommendations include ways to increase the supply of affordable housing, improve housing affordability, make key reforms to social housing, address discrimination in housing, provide assistance to home buyers, extend tenancy legislation to people in marginal tenures, and make changes to the delivery of homelessness services and the settlement grants program. The full report, including detailed recommendations, can be downloaded from the Shelter WA website at www.shelterwa.org.au.
Helping Clients to get a Private Rental: The Challenges and Pitfalls

Steve Thrussell
and Tania Hennah
MercyCare

It is a well-known fact that WA has undergone a housing boom that has caused significant issues for people to secure a property in the private housing market. MercyCare operates a number of services for people experiencing homelessness in both National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) and we work primarily with homeless and at risk young people who find it particularly difficult to obtain housing in the private rental market.

It would be prudent to list briefly the reasons that make getting a private rental so difficult for our clients:

- **Affordability** — The prices of rentals have increased dramatically while government payments haven’t. Rents from September 2011 to September 2012 rose 15.4 per cent for house and 11.4 per cent for units which was almost 10 times the inflation rate. The medium weekly rent for a unit in Perth is $390. It is almost impossible for a single person to afford a rental and so we work mostly with couples, single mothers and families in acquiring accommodation.

- **Prejudice — age, race, family status** — Young people, Indigenous and Culturally or Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) people and single mothers are all generally discriminated against.

- **Lack of rental history** — Rental references are like gold and this makes it hard, particularly for young people, if they have never rented before and hard for people who have rented but do not have a great history.

- **Access to internet** — Most vacancies are advertised on the internet and our target group don’t always have ready access to computers and the internet.

- **Competition** — Many rental home opens attract significant numbers of people and the high numbers and competitive nature makes it even more difficult if any of the above issues are also in play.

However, despite the doom and gloom all is not lost and MercyCare’s Youth Services staff has been working hard developing strategies that assist clients to secure private rentals. We have assisted 16 clients in the last financial year obtain private rentals.

While we cannot do anything to bring the cost of rents down, we can assist young people to prepare and present well for the rental market. Firstly we need to be very clear with our clients that in order for them to afford rent, their budget will be extremely tight, corners will need to be cut and they will need to stick to their budget if they are to obtain and maintain a rental.

MercyCare promotes three strategies to securing that rental. The first is the ‘sell’. We have to support our clients and give them the tools to sell themselves to the agent or landlord as the best person for that rental. The second strategy relates to researching the rental market. The third strategy is support to sustain the rental.

A major part of the ‘sell’ is the rental resume. We all use a resume when looking for work, to put ourselves forward in the best light and to show off our knowledge and skills. Using a rental resume in the same way at a home open and with an application has proven very successful for our clients.

Before applying for a rental we prepare our client as much as we can. Through weekly meetings, of about two hours duration, we provide tenancy training and ready rental certificates. The Youth Affairs Council of WA has a training program for clients under 25, called *Roofs for Youths*, which is endorsed by the Real Estate Industry of WA. It covers all areas of tenancy, from finding a home, applying, what a client is responsible for, what the landlord is responsible for, cleaning, resolving conflict, strata issues, to the eviction process and court. On completion of this course a certificate is then issued. These certificates are an excellent addition to a rental resume.

Often our clients don’t have a rental history or more accurately don’t have rental references. While they have housing history and gained a wealth of experience, they haven’t had their name on a lease. A letter attached to an application, or in a rental resume, filling in the blanks can be very useful. The letter can introduce the client and provide an explanation about their past experience including, periods of housing instability, staying with friends, or sharing and not having their name on a lease. It can also highlight that the client is now in a better position to take up the rental and is completely committed to being a fantastic tenant and that their number one priority is to pay the rent on time, always. The letter
can also indicate that they know:

- how to clean the inside of an oven and extractor fan
- how to pull out weeds and kill ants, etc.
- if the lease says four people can live at the property then only four will as this demonstrates maturity and a good understanding of their responsibilities.

It is also useful to mention that the client has nowhere permanent to live and if not successful with this property, would like to be considered for any other rentals in the price range that they may have. This letter forms the first page of the resume.

Other documents that should be in the resume include, a cover page with name and contact details, agency certificate stating tenancy training completed, written reference from support worker, a copy of identification and a proof of income statement or wage slips.

The second strategy in the preparation of clients is to actually find out what properties are on the market. Most of the vacancies are now advertised on the web, to which our clients often have no access. To overcome this, MercyCare staff have created accounts with realestate.com, reiwa.com etc. and have set up alerts for properties. As soon as a new property matching the alert comes up it is emailed to the worker who can then call or text the client the relevant details. We also support clients by supporting them to create their own adverts if looking for rentals, or house sharers etc and submit these online on relevant sites. We role model and practice the phone process a number of times with clients. We make an extensive list of all house and garden needs and then work out what needs to be done daily, weekly, monthly, as necessary, for inspection etc. and introduce the idea of a roster, to assist client get into a routine. To assist with this we give our clients a garden tool kit, gloves and a bucket, a tool kit ($12 from IKEA) and help them purchase cleaning products when they get a place.

Other information we give our clients is on household cleaning needs and products. Some of our clients may not have lived in an environment where rental inspection ‘standards of cleaning’ was role modelled. We make an extensive list of all house and garden needs and then work out what needs to be done daily, weekly, monthly, as necessary, for inspection etc. and introduce the idea of a roster, to assist client get into a routine. To assist with this we give our clients a garden tool kit, gloves and a bucket, a tool kit ($12 from IKEA) and help them purchase cleaning products when they get a place.

Other tenancy training includes information provision and role modelling on conflict resolution, useful for negotiating with neighbours, agents, and partners or children (which can be helpful if domestic disputes are causing your neighbours to complain!)

Securing a place is only half the battle! Once housed, we now need to support our clients to maintain their accommodation and move to a level of independence over the coming months.

At MercyCare this means, we do actual cleaning and gardening demonstrations. The previous workshops provided information and ideas but now they have a private rental, showing and teaching the client is important. Demonstrating how to clean the oven, extractor fans, window tracks, making a cheap casserole in the slow cooker, making baby food and toys are some things undertaken. Signing up for Centrepay where possible will help the client have more funds for rent. Assisting client’s to feel part of the community, linking in with local doctors, check out the local shops, schools, day care, doctors, parks and library etc. help clients towards independence. Finding support services (for example, financial counsellors, mental health support groups) to help stay on track are valuable and when the client is stable, support to get into work or training.

With perseverance and determination from both MercyCare staff and clients gaining a private rental has been possible with some clients who are now living within the community and enjoying their independence.

Footnote
1. Wright S. ‘Housing Shortage, Perth rents soar on rising population’ The West Australian 11th October 2012.
Affordable Housing for Life: A New Beginning for Vulnerable Youth in Our Community

Frank Strever
Manager of Affordable Housing, MercyCare

The Affordable Housing For Life Program in Western Australia (AHFL) is an exciting new Joint Venture Partnership between MercyCare and Marist Youth Care that is designed to improve social and employment outcomes for at-risk young people by fast-tracking them into vocational training, open employment and secure accommodation via the construction of social and affordable housing. The program’s focus is on:

- Providing nationally accredited vocational training and skills development.
- Engaging young people in sustainable employment — carefully matched to a young person’s aptitude, skills and abilities.
- Providing tailored individualised support — to help young people overcome barriers to training and employment.
- Constructing affordable housing and an opportunity for some at risk young people to live in the house they build.

The program was originally established in 2009 by Marist Youth Care, as a direct response to crippling unemployment and homelessness experienced by youth in the Western Suburbs of Sydney. Its success dramatically changed the lives of some of young people involved in the program, improving the quality of their relationships, expanding their social networks and giving them the confidence to work through day-to-day challenges in the workplace. The program’s success attracted national interest; from the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, Federal Ministers, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation to name a few.

The Western Australian Context

Homelessness in Perth and regional WA is an issue that workers at MercyCare are all-too-familiar with. They see a growing number of young people at risk of homelessness and grapple to deal with the demand for their medium term youth accommodation. WA is leading the mining boom, and the two-tiered economy it has created has seen rental prices soar, resulting in many more young people living on the streets. New solutions to homelessness are desperately needed.

In WA, the AHFL program will provide affordable and social housing in the Perth metropolitan area to address homelessness and the shortage in affordable housing identified by the WA State Government. The AHFL program in WA will bring together individuals, groups and businesses with differing skills and knowledge, to form working partnerships to supply goods, services and/or opportunities which assist disadvantaged and unemployed young people on an individual or group basis. In partnership with other service providers and businesses, the AHFL will provide employment opportunities, accredited training, skill developments and individualised personal support for very vulnerable young people in our community. Youth eligible for support will include those experiencing homelessness or unemployment, as well as young people in foster care or those who are newly-arrived CalD refugees. Crucial to success of the AHFL in WA will be the support provided to help disadvantaged young people engage in full time employment and training.

MercyCare is a leading not for profit provider of health, aged, family and community services and has a well-established system to support people in need. MercyCare can provide participants with access to a range of Community Support programs including, financial counselling, accommodation support, addictions support and assistance to gain employment. Furthermore, MercyCare’s experienced case managers are able to access other support services to assist young participants with health services, psychological services, mental health services and behaviour and conflict management services should they be needed.

Program Partners

The individuals, groups and businesses that are involved in the AHFL program come from a variety of backgrounds. These include:

Training and Skill Providers such as:
- Job Services Australia Agencies
- Group Training Australia Organisations
- Registered Training Organisations
- Trade Colleges
- Apprenticeship Centres
- TAFE Centres

Land Owners

The AHFL will encompass a forward works program planned for over the next ten years in WA. MercyCare is seeking access to freehold land for use by the program for the construction of social and affordable housing.

Land and Property Developers and Builders

The AHFL program will seek to involve medium to large property developers and builders who have targets to include social and affordable housing in their developments. These parties will design and develop the land sourced for the AHFL program and then construct appropriate housing on the land, utilising the assistance of the young trainees involved in the Program and the building products of supply partners.

Invitation to Participate

The Joint Venture partners are seeking the involvement of other interested parties to participate in the Affordable Housing For Life program. Anyone with an interest in aiding and supporting disadvantaged and unemployed youth so they can grow, develop independence and participate with the community, is welcome to get involved.

Please contact Frank Strever, MercyCare’s Manager of Affordable Housing for further information.
From Renting to Homelessness: Challenges in the Western Australian Rental Market and the Risk of Homelessness

Stephanie Bachman
Shelter WA

Introduction
Shelter WA held a series of tenant information forums in May 2012 to provide an opportunity for tenants to voice their concerns about housing in Perth. The forums also provided tenants with information about affordable housing options and support services available. The forums were free and open to the general public and were held in various metropolitan locations including Perth city, Rockingham, Armadale and Clarkson. Over 70 participants attended the four forums and included tenants in social housing and private rentals, home owners, people experiencing homelessness, non-government sector workers and government representatives. These forums were developed and presented as part of Shelter WA’s Community Consultation and Engagement Strategy and were open to anyone with an interest in the rental housing situation in Perth.

Context
Rents in the private rental market in WA have increased steadily over the past year. As of August 2012, median rent for a house in Perth was $450 and median rent for a unit was $430. This is an 18.4 per cent increase since June 2011. Such high rental prices present difficulties for low and moderate income households to keep up with other household expenses and save for emergencies.

Many low income renters in WA experience housing stress and are at risk of homelessness. Housing stress exists when a household in the bottom two quintiles of income distribution pays more than 30 per cent of its gross income on housing. In 2009–2010, 35.8 per cent of low income renters were in housing stress compared to 28.9 per cent the previous year (Report on Government Services 2012a). High levels of housing stress can have a detrimental impact on the health and vitality of households and communities, and means that households are at risk of homelessness.

As of March 2012, the vacancy rate in the Perth metro area was 1.9 per cent, the lowest in the preceding five years. By August 2012, it had dropped to 1.8 per cent. The competitive nature of this low vacancy rate in the rental market leads to increases in rents, and bidding by prospective tenants, which makes it particularly difficult for low income households to secure affordable housing. There is greater competition for those rental properties available, with at times in excess of 70 or 80 people attending a home open. Many people are finding it problematic to secure and maintain housing that meets their needs.

The existence of affordable properties does not always mean they are available to low and moderate income households. The National Housing Supply Council (2012) found that in 2009-2010 a total of 1,256,000 private rental properties were affordable for the 857,000 private renter households in Australia on a very low or low income. Of these, 957,000 properties were occupied by households with a higher income. This results in a change from an “apparent surplus” of 399,000 affordable properties to a shortfall of 539,000 affordable and available properties. In other words, over 60 per cent of all private rental properties affordable to low income households are not available to those households because they are occupied by people in higher income brackets.

Some low income households are eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), which is available for renters in the private rental market and in community housing (but not in public housing). CRA is crucial for many households to secure affordable housing; however a study by the Tenants Union of Victoria (2010) found that CRA has not kept pace with increasing housing costs. They found that, in all capital cities and for all categories of CRA recipients, CRA covered a smaller proportion of rent in 2009 as compared with 1995. Furthermore, of households receiving CRA, 41.4 per cent still experienced housing stress even after receipt of CRA (Report on Government Services 2012b).

Key Issues
Shelter WA’s tenant forums provided an opportunity for people across all types of housing tenures to discuss their concerns with Shelter WA staff. The forums were interactive and provided information on affordable housing options and an opportunity for community members to discuss the issues they are experiencing as tenants, or in trying to access affordable housing. Participants at the forums identified the following key concerns:

- **Lack of affordable private rentals:** The main issue of concern for many participants was the shortage of affordable rentals in WA. They cited the lack of choice, which leads to people taking inappropriate housing to avoid homelessness. They identified numerous barriers to securing affordable housing including tenants lacking the necessary references, language barriers for tenants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and particular concerns for seniors in accessing and maintaining appropriate housing. Participants were concerned about how the lack of affordable housing impacts on health and wellbeing and leads to social isolation.

- **Social housing:** Many participants were concerned about the long
waiting lists (sometimes up to eight years) in order to secure accommodation in social housing. They also identified the restrictions on the location of social housing as people wanted to be located close to services, amenities, public transport and their social networks. Forum participants suggested that there needed to be greater education for tenants and the general community about the Department of Housing’s policies, such as the Disruptive Behaviour Management Strategy.

- **Crisis accommodation services are at capacity:** Some of the service providers noted that they are seeing a ‘changing face of homelessness’ in terms of the types of people in need of their services including many families and seniors. Once someone is able to receive assistance from a specialist homelessness service provider they are often unable to transition into alternative accommodation because there are no available affordable exit points.

- **Tenants’ rights:** Many participants were concerned about discrimination in housing and expressed confusion about tenants’ rights. They shared their experiences of conflict with property managers, continuous rent increases and a fear of being evicted if they complained about the increasing rents or lack of maintenance and repairs. Participants also discussed cases of exploitation where agents were charging a viewing fee ($120) to look at a property to rent.

- **Marginal tenures:** There are many people who are not covered under the Residential Tenancies Act (1987) making them particularly vulnerable and at risk of homelessness. Boarders and lodgers have inadequate legal protections. Participants were concerned about issues for caravan park residents, the costs of remaining in a caravan park, and the lack of legal protections for caravan park residents.

### Recommendations

Forum participants discussed a variety of recommendations to improve conditions for tenants in WA, particularly those at risk of homelessness. These included changes to how affordable housing is financed, increases to Commonwealth Rent Assistance to alleviate housing stress, increasing the number of tenant advocates, and providing education of the Residential Tenancies Act to tenants and real estate agents. Some people suggested rent capping regulations to minimise rent increases. Others offered innovative suggestions about encouraging school leavers to undertake building industry apprenticeships with TAFE to perform maintenance for the Department of Housing or for skilled people out of work to perform maintenance in exchange for rent.

Some of the issues cited by participants, such as excessive option fees, will be addressed in new regulations to the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) Amendment Act. The WA Parliament passed the RTA Amendment Act in 2011. Changes to the Act’s regulations are being made and most of the new regulations are expected to be in place by early 2013. Nevertheless, much work remains to be done to ensure that tenants can secure and maintain appropriate, affordable accommodation in social housing and the private rental market, and in order to ensure that more people are not at risk of homelessness.

Shelter WA has prepared reports and submissions to the WA State Government, including recommendations for change in various areas which impact on housing affordability. This includes proposals for new strategies to address the housing crisis in Western Australia, particularly that within the private rental market.

**Footnote**

1. The joint waiting list was created in 2010 to enable applicants listed for Department of Housing, Foundation Housing, Access Housing and Great Southern Community Housing Corporation to be listed in a joint waiting list held by the Department of Housing. Applicants may be offered a property when they reach their turn on the waiting list by any of these agencies.

**References**


C: Responding to Indigenous Homelessness

Perth Metropolitan
Homeless Response Workshop:
Developing a Coordinated Approach
Among Local Governments, Law Enforcement,
Government Agencies and Service Providers

Dr. Shae Garwood
Shelter WA

The Parks People Project Working Group (PPPWG) was developed in response to the difficulties associated with supporting Aboriginal people and others presenting with homelessness issues in Perth parks. It aims to facilitate collaboration between government (including local government) and non-government agencies working with this group and to investigate and develop options to address identified needs. The PPPWG was adopted as a project by the Central Regional Managers Human Services Forum (CRMHSF). The CRMHSF is one of six interagency collaborative forums in the Metropolitan area aimed at developing effective interagency coordination between human service agencies providing health, education, training, housing, child protection and family support, disability services, police and corrective services.

Current members of the PPPWG include the City of Vincent, City of Perth, WA Police, Department for Indigenous Affairs, Department for Child Protection (DCP), Department of Corrective Services, Department of Housing, Nyoongar Patrol,1 Ruah Community Services and Shelter WA.

The PPPWG coordinated the Perth Metropolitan Homeless Response Workshop in August 2011, which was attended by over 100 representatives from government agencies, non-government organisations and other key stakeholders, and facilitated by Shelter WA. The purpose of the workshop was to encourage collaboration amongst key stakeholders towards delivering appropriate support and accommodation outcomes for Aboriginal people and others who are experiencing primary homelessness (rough sleeping) in parks and inner city areas of the City of Perth and the City of Vincent.

Participants discussed options to address the long term homelessness of people frequenting the parks and homelessness among people who move to the city from remote locations. Funding to coordinate the workshop, develop background materials and prepare the final report was provided by the City of Perth, City of Vincent and the Department of Indigenous Affairs.

Workshop participants acknowledged that addressing homelessness in Perth and Vincent required the joint commitment of local governments, relevant State and Federal government agencies, service providers, advocacy non-government organisations (NGOs), and people experiencing homelessness to work together to determine the best way. The following recommendations were identified:

**Urgent Need for a Night Shelter**

Many of the attendees articulated an urgent need for a night shelter. It was recognised that a night shelter is a necessary part of a broader system to address homelessness in the cities of Perth and Vincent, alongside assertive outreach, preventative programs, transitional housing and longer-term solutions. Participants suggested that the shelter be:

- centrally located
- low-barrier entry, including access for people who are intoxicated, have been banned from other services
- Aboriginal staff and/or culturally competent staff trained to work with Aboriginal clients
- integrated with the Nyoongar Patrol
- owned and managed by an Aboriginal corporation — building on lessons from Kalgoorlie night shelter
- provide accommodation for men, women, and families.

**Recommendations**

- Seek funding for a 35 bed facility or several smaller facilities to accommodate diverse needs of target population.
- Seek support from local governments for the development of a night shelter through their planning processes.
- Seek funding for a feasibility study to determine the need for a night shelter to provide accommodation for homeless women with or without children, that is not restricted to women experiencing domestic violence.

In the 2011–12 budget the State Government provided $5.4 million over four years to build and operate a 10 bed overnight shelter for the most vulnerable rough sleepers. The DCP is working with St Vincent de Paul Society to develop the shelter.

**Develop a Directory of Services**

Many participants voiced concern over the lack of an easily accessible, comprehensive directory of available services. This posed a challenge for service providers and the clients they support. Participants said that a directory would facilitate information sharing, networking and referrals. Participants identified several options for a directory either as a centrally-held, professionally maintained directory or as an on-line wiki, where service providers could update their own information as needed.
Recommendations
- The City of Perth to continue providing the Homeless Services in the Inner City directory and update information as it becomes available.
- Homelessness service providers to give information to the City of Perth, as requested, in order to provide accurate and up-to-date information about their services.

Since the workshop, the DCP has produced an on-line state-wide directory of all DCP-funded services including accommodation and support services, available on the DCP website.

Better Coordination Among Services
A common concern amongst participants was the need for improved communication and coordination among service providers (including Street to Home Services, Nyoongar Patrol, etc.) and Police, the Department for Child Protection, Department of Corrective Services and the Department of Health.

Recommendations
- City of Perth and City of Vincent to continue to facilitate roundtable discussions for organisations to share information about programs available and develop ways to work together.
- The CRMHSF and Parks People Working Group to liaise with Health Department Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS) to ensure people discharged from hospitals, and their carers, have safe accommodation and/or are assisted to return to country.
- The CRMHSF and PPPWG to continue to promote and support coordination and collaboration among agencies.

Expand Assertive Outreach Services
Workshop participants suggested expanding assertive outreach teams, particularly with a focus on engaging people experiencing homelessness who have complex needs and/or do not typically access services. In particular, there is a need for an Aboriginal outreach team to work with Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness.

Recommendations
- Existing assertive outreach teams to work with the Nyoongar Patrol to build trust with Aboriginal people sleeping rough and deliver culturally appropriate services.
- Seek funding to support additional assertive outreach services, particularly focused on chronic homelessness among Aboriginal people sleeping rough in public spaces.
- Maximising existing assertive outreach service responses and capacity to respond to at risk and hard to engage Aboriginal people experiencing primary homelessness.

Develop Visitor (short term) Accommodation
Some of the people experiencing homelessness in Perth and Vincent are transient, visiting from remote Aboriginal communities and unable to secure short term affordable accommodation appropriate to their needs. Workshop participants cited the need for visitor accommodation in Perth specifically designed to accommodate people from remote communities coming to Perth for medical appointments and procedures, to attend funerals, and for various other reasons. Some participants articulated a need for a cultural centre and other safe spaces for Aboriginal people in the Perth central district, including for those visiting from remote communities.

Recommendations
- Expand hostels to cater to Aboriginal and other visitors.
- Liaise with the Department of Health’s Patient Assistance Travel Scheme to determine the extent of need.

The Perth Homeless Response Workshop was successful in identifying the issues and developing dialogue among key stakeholders to address homelessness in the City of Perth and City of Vincent. The workshop provided a foundation for communication and coordination amongst agencies, united in the common goal of providing accommodation and support services to Aboriginal people and others experiencing primary homelessness.

Since the workshop, the PPPWG has continued to progress the recommendations to develop greater collaboration amongst stakeholders and develop a coordinated approach to respond to primary homelessness in public parks in Perth and Vincent. In addition, the report from the Perth Metropolitan Homeless Response Workshop was adopted as the Perth area Regional Homelessness Plan.

Footnote
1. The Nyoongar people are the traditional custodians of the land in the Perth metropolitan area and southwest of WA. The purpose of the Nyoongar Patrol is to provide early street level interventions to local and remote Indigenous people frequenting public spaces in nominated locations. The target groups are people at risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system due to various social and welfare issues.
Responding to Homelessness
Kimberley Style

Michael King
Manager, Centacare Kimberley

Homelessness is a phenomena experienced by people throughout Australia in many similar ways. Not having a place to call home, or somewhere to put your own bed, or for that matter, having a safe environment that allows you to escape the gaze of others, is a problem faced by many Australians. What does vary across Australia, are the reasons why people find themselves homeless and the responses that regions have developed over time to meet those varying needs.

The Kimberley region of Western Australia is a case in point. The Kimberley is a huge remote region of Australia broken up into the West and East Kimberley. It offers people a range of homelessness and allied services that are delivered from major population centres of Broome, Kununurra, Derby, Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing. Homelessness in the Kimberley region is predominately an Indigenous issue, with over 85 per cent of people presenting as homeless, being of Indigenous descent.

The Indigenous population in the far northwest of Australia is extremely mobile. There is a constant movement of people to and from communities dotted throughout the Kimberley, mainly to major regional centres like Kununurra and Broome. This movement of people is in part due to health, family, employment, education and cultural reasons, but is also amplified by large numbers of people moving from communities and town centres to avoid alcohol restrictions and bans. These are people with low or non-existent English literacy levels who largely communicate using traditional languages.

This means that people living in communities located across the Dampier Peninsula, Tanami Desert, Fitzroy Valley, and Mitchell Plateau regions can, and will travel up to 1200 kilometres to stay in places like Broome. Once in Broome they have two options, they can sleep rough and camp out where ever they can find a quiet spot, or they can go and stay with family or friends who have a house. This places a huge pressure on town communities and puts a lot of tenancies at risk, due to overcrowding, violence, anti-social behaviour, property damage, and extreme substance use.

So you have a twofold affect, one, where a large transient homeless population is placing demand pressures on limited town housing stock, whilst at the same time being a cause of town homelessness, as people lose tenancies due to having met a cultural obligation associated with sharing with family and other members of language and skin groups. Supporting a community to address this issue means that many homelessness services in the Kimberley region can spend a lot of time assisting clients to get family and friends, who are not on a lease, to leave properties to help clients sustain the tenancy.

Working to prevent people from becoming homeless is one of a number of strategies that are employed by homeless services in the Kimberley region. Because there is a constrained capacity to support people into short and long term housing there is a very strong focus on the physical and social health and wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness. As an example a free breakfast is provided at Centacare’s Homeless Drop-In Centre in Broome three days a week. This service, while providing a nutritionally balanced meal also acts as a conduit used by a range of support services to maintain contact with a large number of people experiencing homelessness.

Working from the Homeless Drop-in Centre the Broome Regional Aboriginal Medical Service’s Health Mob conduct full health checks every Monday. On Friday Centrelink attend the centre to help people with payment issues, while the Money Management Mob from Broome Circle House talk to people about better managing money. To assist people to access housing, Centacare’s National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) Homeless Outreach team attend the breakfast everyday day to ensure that people’s needs are being met and to engage in case managed support with a core group of rough sleepers.

To build on this health and wellbeing focus Centacare’s Breakfast Program is working closely with the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service on developing a more nutritionally balanced and culturally appropriate menu, and, on delivering workshops on healthy choices and lifestyles. Given that people in public housing tenancies can also find themselves in financial hardship they also benefit from the breakfast, so Centacare’s NPAH Public Tenancy Support Service attends to provide support, information and advice to people who feel they may be at risk of losing a public housing tenancy.

Working in a joined up manner is pivotal to the success of homeless services in the Kimberley region. A significant number of people experiencing homelessness have never managed a tenancy, which is quite unique given that the average age of Centacare Kimberley’s homeless client group is well over 35 years of age. While supporting people to get a tenancy, or a place to call home can present some particular challenges, once they are housed the main game becomes supporting and assisting them to maintain and sustain that home. This means case planning will involve a lot of life and living skill development that has to occur both before and after people get a place to call home.

What you have read is a snapshot written to shine a light on a small part of the Kimberley’s overall response to homelessness.

Across this vast but beautiful region there are dedicated homelessness services like Marnja Jarndu working with women and children escaping domestic and family violence, while organisations such as Nurrumbuk Indigenous Corporation and Burdekin have tailored service responses for youth. Despite having quite distinct client groups with unique reasons for accessing homelessness support all service face the same type of challenge being once a client has got a home how do support them to keep it.
Short stay accommodation in Western Australian regional centres to cater for Aboriginal people from remote communities accessing a ‘service centre’ on a periodic basis is much needed. Aboriginal people visit major regional towns and large cities for many and varied reasons — to access health services for themselves and their children, do their shopping, visit relations and friends and attend Native Title meetings, sport carnivals, social functions, celebrations and funerals. This regular and significant movement to regional centres can increase a town population’s dramatically impacting on permanent residents and the visitors alike.

Across the State there are increasing needs for short stay facilities due to regional service centre’s increasing populations. The Australian Bureau of Statistics census data indicate that up to ten per cent of Indigenous populations in regional centres are made up of temporary residents from discrete remote communities. In addition, it is estimated that the Indigenous population will increase in population share from 38 per cent to 42 per cent across the wet tropics area (Cape York to the Kimberley) by 2016.

Now let’s take a moment to take a walk in another person’s shoes…

You may be a:

- young pregnant woman with children
- middle aged person and in need of health care
- young person seeking employment or training
- school aged child seeking a high school or university course
- single person looking for a partner.

Where would you stay in a town or city? With family? In a hotel or backpackers?

How would you pay for it? Could you afford to pay for accommodation on top of paying rent at home in community? Could you get a subsidy? Where would you get it from?

Would you feel comfortable, accepted and at ease?

Would you sleep rough?

With limited alternatives, people from remote Aboriginal communities do stay with family members and some ‘doss down’ or camp on public open space or vacant land. This has been the practice for many years.

Looking at the South Australian Experience

WA has modelled its facilities on the Ceduna and Port Augusta Indigenous Visitors Accommodation Centres which include unit and camping accommodation. These facilities are well used and cost approximately $1 million per annum to manage. The two centres are open to Aboriginal people needing support and provide accommodation for approximately 70 people at any one time. The centres cater for families and individuals, are supervised twenty four hours, seven days a week by staff with local knowledge and language skills.

Accommodation units and tents are available for short to medium term stays. The centres have a ‘no tolerance’ approach to violence, alcohol and other drug use. People are encouraged to utilise pathways to improved health and wellbeing by linking them to appropriate local government and non-government service agencies. When the time comes, help to return to community is also available.
Kalgoorlie Visitors’ Centre

Kalgoorlie is the closest large regional town to the Spinifex Lands and offers a wide range of services. It is important that Indigenous visitors to the town are provided with affordable and culturally appropriate accommodation during their stay.

In June 2008, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs released $2 million to the Department of Housing to construct a short stay visitors’ accommodation facility in Kalgoorlie–Boulder. An additional $1 million in funding was secured from the Department of Regional Development and Lands through the Royalties for Regions program. The Department for Child Protection manages a service level agreement with the Australian Red Cross to manage the Kalgoorlie–Boulder facility.

The Kalgoorlie Visitors’ Accommodation Centre opened was by the Minister for Housing, Terry Redman, in September 2012. It provides safe and comfortable short term accommodation and ancillary support services for up to 41 visitors from Indigenous communities who come to town for family, health, business or cultural purposes.

The Kalgoorlie Indigenous Visitors’ Hostel is the first of its kind in Western Australia. Consultation with the Spinifex people (the key user group) has been an important success factor for this project. Consultation with stakeholders and users of this facility will continue regarding the service model.

The resolution of the homelessness issue in Kalgoorlie is consistent with governmental priorities addressing Aboriginal disadvantage. This initiative is a terrific example of Commonwealth, State and Local Governments working together to address periodic and longer term homelessness for Aboriginal people in WA.

What do we Know?

Lessons learned from other jurisdictions indicate the following factors are critical to success:

- Planning and funding for Indigenous Visitors’ Centres in regional towns need to include an appropriate level of integrated service provision.
- Indigenous Visitor Centres need to provide a safe, managed environment and offer affordable and varied accommodation options.
- Planning and ongoing review of the service delivery model needs to include appropriate and regular consultation with relevant stakeholders from the outset.
- Strategic regional planning is required (in tandem with Indigenous Visitors’ Centres) to address the continuum of housing needs.
- ABS census data is required to provide robust Indigenous population and mobility information to inform planning for future housing.

Footnote

Aboriginal Women Released from Prison to Homelessness

Kathy Mokaraka and Sally Scott
Women’s Support Service, Ruah Community Services

Introduction

The representation of Aboriginal women in WA prison populations fluctuates between 48 per cent and 52 per cent. ‘They are currently the fastest growing prison population and are severely overrepresented’ (ATISISJC 2008: 304), as stated on the Australian Institute of Criminology website (2010). In addition, ‘Indigenous women serve shorter sentences than their non-Indigenous counterparts’ and ‘the shorter sentence length suggests that Indigenous women are being imprisoned for more trivial offences, especially public order offences (ATISISJC 2002)’.

Indigenous Australians are also over represented among Australia’s homeless population. While they comprise 2.4 per cent of the population, they represent ten per cent of homelessness. Rates of homelessness are much higher in remote areas, where Indigenous people are 69 per cent of service users and in remote areas, 88 per cent of service users (Homelessness Australia, 2006).

Indigenous Australians are over represented in every category of homelessness.

Indigenous homelessness is due to various reasons and according to a report by Homelessness Australia (2006) domestic violence is at the forefront of the primary causes of homelessness for Indigenous Australians.

Complex Needs of Aboriginal Women in Prison in WA

Aboriginal women’s ongoing needs on entering the justice system and the effect of chronic homelessness are inter-related and interconnected with recidivism.

Many Aboriginal women in prison, who have children in the care of the Department for Child Protection, were in care themselves as children. During their assessment prior to release from prison, many Aboriginal women state within their ‘goals and dreams’; ‘having my children back and a home’. Unfortunately, it is a common theme that Aboriginal women who are in domestic violence relationships and who have a long history of trauma and abuse (sometimes from birth), turn to drugs to cope. They may be coerced into this behavior by a violent partner, but their actions ultimately lead to receiving criminal convictions and incarceration. The loss of their children is a turning point where the women completely self-destruct. Research into addictions and self-medicating indicate that it is an incredibly complex issue; even without perspectives of trans-generational trauma and a history of oppression and ongoing grief and loss for Aboriginal women.

In prison, many women detox from their drug of choice while others cannot give up their drugs. This is a reality; but for those that attend programs, detox completely from the addictive drugs and start education programs, there is a realisation and a form of healing that commences. They begin to have motivation for change and it is in this crucial time where much work is achieved by those providing services to the women in prisons. Given that many Aboriginal women have progressed from juvenile detention to adult prison, it is fair to say that there is a gap in service provision to this population.

If we look at what happens in prison for this motivational change, it is not hard to see that there is a feeling of safety whilst incarcerated. While women may have been spiraling further into despair in the community, prison appears to have ceased the spiraling. Women’s lives appear to respond to routine and structure (albeit enforced) and a form of ‘care’ given by other inmates, workers, or prison officers. However, we also hear many complaints against other prisoners and guards and about the general living standards; but for many, this is preferable to an unsafe life in an unsafe community.

One of the biggest changes for women whilst in prison relates to the services that are offered, with women taking up services and programs to ‘fill in time’. In comparison, life in the community may have been too chaotic for women to detach from the needs of family, partners and children to access any program which may have been of benefit.

Given all of the above, providing a safe place (house/home) for women exiting prison and who are ready for change is paramount. Unfortunately, the reality is very different. Many women arrive in prison homeless and are released to homelessness; and the cycle continues.

Housing

The Department of Housing (DoH) is the major service provider for housing in Western Australia. Community Housing from Access Housing and Foundation Housing are also known as housing providers for this client group. In Perth, there is a major crisis due to the lack of housing even for the mainstream population. In previous years, it was common for people to remain on the Department of Housing’s priority waiting list for six months to one year. Workers in the area now report a waiting time of three or more years. The basic requirement of affordable accommodation has become a luxury monitored closely by property managers.

The crisis appears to have filtered through all sections of housing provision with long waiting lists, maintenance issues and other ongoing complex issues with tenants, who often are not linked in a timely manner to adequate support services, which could assist them to maintain their tenancy. The pressure on staff and property managers appears chronic, which in turn can lead housing agencies to become the “gatekeeper” for individual properties. Community based service providers assist clients to access housing agencies; with counselors, caseworkers and managers under pressure to advocate for housing on behalf of their clients.

The situation in housing and the fact that Aboriginal women exiting from prison have complex needs, cultural issues and...
obligations means that the chronic housing crisis is magnified. Frequently, Aboriginal clients have a negative history with housing agencies, large debts that need to be recovered, large families that are also homeless and obligations to families to provide a ‘room’ that risks their own already delicate tenancy arrangements. Specific programs of support are required to accommodate all of these issues for this particular group.

There are various forms of accommodation offered through community based services. These are in the form of hostels, women’s refuges, and the like. However, they are usually only for individuals and not families. Those that do accommodate families rarely have vacancies and when they do have vacancies, they are filled immediately. There is also private rental accommodation, but this is not a viable option for most Aboriginal women being released from prison, for many reasons; including the cost of private rentals as well as agent’s preferences for particular tenant profiles.

Service providers who work with this particular group are scrambling to keep up with the demands, knowing that providing a home will be the client’s first step towards changing their lives. Many clients are falling by the wayside and slipping through the gaps. What happens to these people, where do they end up?

The Department of Housing in Western Australia has a Transitional Accommodation Support Services program (TASS) for all prisoners to access. Prisoners can submit an application for this program, which allows case management from an organisation to engage with prisoners one month pre-release, to support their application and assist with furniture and other things, to establish a temporary six month property tenancy.

There is a long list of inadequacies that roll out of the TASS program for Aboriginal women clients. The most common is the limited stock (properties) and the issue of clients maintaining the property to a level that is satisfactory to the Department of Housing. It should be noted that accessing a TASS property is entirely dependent on vacant properties at the time and leading up to the client’s release. As with most programs related to housing, TASS cannot keep up with demand for houses. Ruah’s Women’s Support Service, coordinates the TASS program for women in metropolitan Perth and have an allocation of nine properties at any one time. There are over 350 women incarcerated in the Perth area who are eligible to apply for this program prior to their release.

Caseworkers assist the client to maintain the property and represent and advocate for them with the Department of Housing. Frequently, properties through TASS are not allocated until a day or two pre-release; or on occasions, following release. With only six month tenancies being offered, the issue of obtaining a permanent tenancy puts an additional stress on the clients early in their tenancy; as they have to seek further accommodation options, on top of the myriad of other issues they are addressing in the post release period.

Due to the limited stock available, staff and clients are often under pressure to accept the first property offered. At times there may be factors around the allocated house that are not in the best interest of the client; but the house is accepted, as it is a better option than homelessness.

Staff working with Aboriginal women in prison state every client is requesting housing via TASS due to homelessness. It was confirmed that in the last six months, May–October 2012, there have been 72 nominations to the TASS co-coordinator at Department of Corrective Services of which 47 are referred to TASS (Ruah) for assessments with only nine tenancies available in this period (Department of Corrective Services personal communication: October 31, 2012). Sometimes there are less than nine tenancies available because we just cannot get houses allocated to the program from the Department of Housing.

**Case Study**

A 33 year old Aboriginal woman [Mary] has served two years in prison. She has three children and transferred to minimum security to keep her youngest child. She has a broken relationship with her 13 year old daughter who is with family members and her ten year old son, who lives with another family member.

Mary engaged well at the low security prison, accepting counselling for a history of violence and trauma and this continued on her release. She was allocated a TASS property for herself and her children. Maintenance needs for the property were not completed prior to moving in. However, she moved in on release with her youngest child, making plans for other children to join her later. Not long after moving in, her homeless cousin started to live with her. Being a single mother, lonely and only just reentering the community; she thought this would help her with additional money, companionship and support with food. Soon after, there was a disturbance instigated by the cousin and an official complaint was made resulting in a ‘first strike’ being issued by the Department of Housing. Although not the primary instigator, Mary understood that under the Tenancy Agreement, she was responsible and she was sorry for the disturbance to her neighbours.

Mary often missed appointments due to family obligations, as she would return to her family in the country and grieve with family over the death of her mother.

A few weeks later, there was another disturbance at the house involving another family member. The Department of Housing investigated, decided to issue a second strike notice and announced clearly at a meeting with workers, that under ‘anti-social behavior’ and ‘zero tolerance’, she would be asked to leave the property once her six months tenancy had expired. They would not consider keeping her in the property or transferring to another property.

These are the type of issues and the reality that Aboriginal clients deal with daily, where their tenancy obligations conflict with their family obligations.

‘The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them’ — Ralph G. Nichols

**References**


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My Tenancy My Home: A Collaborative Approach to Managing Tenancies in Western Australia’s Remote Aboriginal Communities

Monique Berkhout
Manager, Aboriginal Housing Policy, Department of Housing WA

Background
In 2008 the Commonwealth and State Governments signed the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) which made significant new funding available for housing in remote Aboriginal communities. To secure funding, the State Government was required to deliver robust and standardised tenancy management of all remote Indigenous housing that ensures rent collection, asset protection and governance arrangements are consistent with public housing standards.

Western Australia achieved this by passing the Aboriginal Housing Legislation Amendment Act 2010 — which allowed the Department of Housing to negotiate Housing Management Agreements (HMAs) with remote Aboriginal communities. HMAs are voluntary and negotiated with Aboriginal entities with the power to lease land for a period of 40 years. Once in place the Department, or its authorised agent, can start managing housing on Aboriginal land on behalf of an Aboriginal entity or community.

Importantly, a HMA has no impact on land tenure and does not create an interest in the land. Rather it is the mechanism by which the Department of Housing (DoH) or its authorised agent, and tenants take on the rights and responsibilities under the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) 1987 over a 40 year period.

Tenancy management in Aboriginal communities with a HMA are provided by Housing Officers employed by the Department or the Department’s authorised agent, for example a Regional Service Provider (RSP). Their work with tenants is guided by a new tenancy management support system known as My Tenancy My Home.

My Tenancy My Home
My Tenancy My Home is a management tool designed to support change. It guides a collaborative conversation between housing officers and tenants regarding their respective tenancy rights and responsibilities as defined by the RTA (1987).

It is an informative, educational and preventative approach to property and tenancy management and supports the themes of pride in home, change and early intervention.

The Tenancy Management Support System kit includes:
- a Tenant Matrix
- Housing Officer Matrices x six
- a Household Map Template — to determine who lives in the house on a permanent basis and the amount of rent to be paid
- an Action Plan Template — used to intervene early or when an issue has the potential to compromise a tenancy

All matrices are used as a ‘storyboard’ to describe the nature of a tenancy; to explain the expectations of both the tenant and the Department or its agent; and describe how the tenancy can be supported if issues arise.

All the materials are designed to be visually appealing, easy to understand and encourage conversation about the various aspects and stages of a tenancy.

The Tenant Matrix is guided by the following principles:
- Culturally relevant — Aboriginal cultural rights and values are respected and taken into account to ensure that tenancy management is effective for Aboriginal people. Policies and practices recognise that parts of Aboriginal culture may differ from region to region and/or community to community.
- Collaborative — Documents are designed as ‘storyboards’ to promote discussion and agreement to help a tenant reach and maintain a successful tenancy.
- Consistent — Everyone uses the same set of documents when discussing a tenancy — the tenant, Housing Officer, Aboriginal Community Council and, if relevant, a tenant support service.
- Strengths based — The Tenant Matrix educates tenants about their rights and responsibilities under the RTA to enable them to reach and maintain successful tenancies and ultimately become self-sufficient. Everyone works on the assumption that any issues can be resolved through negotiated agreement.
- Transparent — The matrices provide a transparent approach that encourages mutual trust and open communication.

The Department of Housing officer, Maureen O’Meara, consults tenants at Woolah Community about the Tenant Matrix, the Household Map and the Action Plan during its development phase.
enhances relationships between stakeholders by defining mutual goals and key responsibilities. A written record of the conversation and any subsequent actions is provided to tenants at the end of each visit.

A picture paints a thousand words...

With every new tenancy, the Tenant Matrix is placed between the tenant and the Housing Officer and guides the conversation about Rent, Going Away, Home, Yard, Household and Tenants and Visitors.

The Tenant Matrix has a six stage continuum from the ideal ‘I am Deadly’ stage (at the top) to the worst ‘No House’ stage (at the bottom). Each stage gives a brief description of what a tenant needs to do to remain ‘Deadly’ in each domain or move up the continuum towards ‘Deadly’ and what may happen if they fail to take action.

The Tenant Matrix is designed to be used collaboratively with tenants — as a storyboard — to promote discussion about the Department’s and tenant’s rights and responsibilities under the RTA. It encourages the use of story-type examples to highlight how issues can arise and/or be resolved and how your tenant can achieve and/or maintain a ‘Deadly’ tenancy.

It is used with ingoing tenants, at the annual property inspection and each time a Housing Officer needs to discuss tenancy issues relating to one or more of the domains. For example, at the beginning of a tenancy, the parties look at the Tenant Matrix together and discuss where the tenant is placed on the six stage continuum for each domain to establish a baseline score.

This exercise is repeated over time, providing a score on each occasion. Results are recorded and entered into a simple purpose built data base. Each tenant is given a copy of the agreed outcomes and negotiated actions.

This reporting allows us to evaluate the success of the Tenant Matrix on its own. It is envisaged that any trends in a community or region will identify a need (or otherwise) for additional effort in service delivery, tenancy education or support activities. We can also gauge the success of our housing management service, and any tenancy support or education interventions that are in place.

Every household is given multiple copies of the Tenant Matrix. Tenants are encouraged to use these as placemats to promote discussion with other people living in and visiting their home, about their rights and responsibilities as a tenant and what will happen, to the tenant and everyone living in the home, if tenancy issues arise and are not resolved.

The series of Housing Officer Matrices are used when there is a particular problem in relation to the tenancy such as rent arrears, maintenance issues or disruptive behaviour. It sets out the key steps that must be taken and defines the specific role of the Community Council.

An Action Plan template is used to document the specific actions to be taken by the tenant and/or the Housing Officer to resolve the issue(s) by a certain time. The process enables the Housing Officer to negotiate an individualised contract which focuses on the problem, defines a solution and negotiates a pathway to ‘get back on track’.

My Tenancy My Home is currently being trialled in the East and West Kimberley regions of WA and has been implemented via the Social Housing Practice Implementation Project with training being delivered to all front line staff. The Tenant Management Support System is to be reviewed in June/July 2013.

To date, the Tenant Management Support System kit has been well received and early responses are encouraging:

The new system is awesome — in my view, this is what I call culturally appropriate. Well done guys.
Madeleine Anderson,
Co-chair, Department of Housing Reconciliation Action Plan Working Party
(Inhouse 23 August 2011)

The Tenant Matrix is a great example of thorough consultation and an excellent step in the right direction.
James Butterworth,
(then) Director Aboriginal Housing Services
(Inhouse 23 August 2011)

For more information contact Monique.Berkhout@housing.wa.gov.au

Footnote
1. Aboriginal Housing Legislation Amendment Act 2010 is underpinned by Housing Management Agreements. As houses are brought up to Residential Tenancies Act 1987 standards over time, they will be included in a remote Aboriginal community’s HMA and tenants will be managed in a ‘mainstream-like’ fashion under the Residential Tenancies Act 1987.
Reflections on the Response to Youth Housing and Homelessness in Western Australia

Chantai Roberts
Executive Officer,
Shelter WA

Shelter WA held two workshops on young people, housing and homelessness on 14 June 2012 and 29 August 2012. The aim of the workshops was to address the barriers faced by young people in accessing safe and secure affordable housing. Shelter WA has identified youth housing and homelessness as a critical issue in the sector. The purpose of the workshops was to build upon what has been done already and to identify ways forward to deal with new and emerging issues in the sector.

Background

Children and young people make up almost half the homeless population in Western Australia, many of whom are accompanying children in supported accommodation services, including women’s refuges and medium to long-term family accommodation. Young people experiencing homelessness are often invisible and remain uncounted because of their mobility. They tend to move around from one friend or acquaintance to another, because they do not want to overstay their welcome. They may also accept ‘protection’ from others who in fact take advantage of them in various ways. They may never even attempt or dare to access mainstream services — they may not know about these services, or they may just be too frightened to approach them in case they are reported and either taken into care or into custody.

Young people are the most vulnerable and mobile group in the Australian homeless population, but they are not homogeneous. Therefore there is no single ideal accommodation type to address all their needs. Housing and support services, then, need to be responsive to the various reasons young people become homeless, whether they are part of a family group, or on their own. Their experiences will determine the type of accommodation and support they need. For example, they may have experienced abuse or racism and discrimination, or just can’t afford the escalating rents in the private sector. They may also lack the living skills that will allow them to maintain a successful tenancy, or just don’t have the history required to supply references on their housing application.

Whatever the reasons for their inability to find safe, secure affordable housing, we in this sector have a responsibility to make sure children and young people have the opportunity to enjoy the rights afforded them by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Australia is a signatory. That includes the right to safe and secure accommodation, the right to have the opportunity to enhance their health and well-being, and the right to access quality education to further their employment opportunities.

In April 2009, the Rudd government released the White Paper, The Road Home, which set a target to halve street homelessness by 2020 and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it. In order to meet that target, homelessness funding increased by 55 per cent. This represented an additional $800 million over four years.

In WA, the joint Commonwealth/State National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) is administered by the WA Department for Child Protection. The NPAH made a commitment towards the following intermediate targets by 2013:

- A decrease of 7 per cent in the number of people who are homeless
- A decrease of 3 per cent in the number of Aboriginal people who are homeless
- A decrease of 25 per cent in the number of people sleeping rough

The WA Department for Child Protection’s (DCP) At Risk Youth Strategy 2011–2014 describes the three programs funded under NPAH, which are focused on young people.

- The Oxford Foyer — a specifically designed program for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It aims to provide secure, stable, supported housing with a focus on life skills, education, training and other opportunities leading young people to independent living. A purpose built Foyer, due for completion in late 2012, will accommodate up to 98 young people.

- Support for Young People Leaving Child Protection — assists young people who have been in the child protection system to obtain their own stable, long term accommodation. The program offers intensive case management and support to develop individual living skills.

- Housing Support Workers, Corrective Services — assists young people leaving juvenile correctional facilities who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to obtain and sustain their own tenancies.

Housing Support Workers provide intensive case management; assist in the development of life skills and links to employment and training.

The At Risk Youth Strategy 2011–2014 acknowledges that the network of services for at risk young people does not have a sufficient resource base to ensure viability of all services and the capacity to target at risk young people effectively. The report states the need to support the viability and capacity of services for at risk young people, by enhancing their focus on the needs of those young people who are most at risk and by enhancing flexibility for locally based service solutions.
What’s Working?

Government initiatives to respond to homelessness in Western Australia have had a significant impact. The National Housing Agreement on Homelessness (NAHA) and associated National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness represented a much-needed boost in homelessness funding for services and programs in WA.

With these new funding arrangements, WA has made significant strides in providing accommodation and services to people experiencing homelessness, including young people. The NPAH and NAHA services provide valuable services to young people in need in WA, and have resulted in many innovative and successful programs to alleviate homelessness.

The Shelter WA workshops on Youth, Housing and Homelessness highlighted successes in reaching young people at risk of homelessness and the passion and commitment of youth sector workers was evident. The number and scope of projects in WA represents a significant investment in young people. Many programs have been particularly successful including some of the programs that offer a safe environment for young people away from family conflict and other issues that impact on their well-being. The networks that are developed by these services are invaluable in assisting young people.

While some service providers cited difficulties working with various government agencies, several people identified their relationship with the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) as a particularly positive development. The Department of Human Services has developed successful outreach mechanisms to meet with young people on the streets, through their Community Engagement program.

Homeless service providers noted that the Department of Human Services staff in that program treated clients in a positive, respectful manner that helped build trust and relationships for further engagement.

What Should We be Doing Differently?

Workshop participants made a number of suggestions to improve the provision of services to young people experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness in WA. The following are some of the comments made at the workshops:

1. Early Intervention
   - Participants noted that because issues are presenting earlier, we need more resources (participation coordinators/Reconnect) for younger children. As one person put it, ‘the more preventative we can be, the less challenging our work will be later.’
   - Services are seeing young people getting to a crisis point at 12 years. Reconnect starts at 12, which is too late for many young people.
   - Participants said that they need to start support and intervention between 10 and 12 years.
   - Service providers reported that as long as a young person (particularly if aged 12 or older) has a roof over their head and there is no sexual or physical abuse, DCP will generally not get involved, even when there is family relationship conflict and a risk of potential homelessness.

2. Crisis accommodation for families
   - There are very few crisis services or facilities for homeless families, including men with accompanying children, and couples with children. This demographic is often unable to access refuge accommodation, which is specifically for women only and predominantly for women escaping domestic or family violence, and the available shelters and crisis accommodation places are not suitable for men or couples with children. There is a significant need for more crisis facilities for homeless families, which is adequately staffed to support both parents and children, and assist families to access transitional, supported or long-term accommodation, according to their individual needs.
   - Participants expressed a desire for improvements to the crisis database on available beds. This would prevent workers from having to ring numerous places to hopefully access a bed on behalf of a client. A suggestion was made that it could be an integrated approach where a postcode is entered in the database and all the services available including bed counts are listed.

3. Flexibility in Funding
   - Participants said they require greater flexibility in funding agreements, particularly in relation to targeted ages (older or younger than the target age group).
   - In order to accommodate this flexibility, some contracts would need to be resourced differently to allow for specialist staff to be employed to work with younger children.

4. Transition points
   - Young people should be involved in planning for their exit from care, but a workshop participant reported that young people are often unaware of an exit plan or haven’t taken an active role in developing their plan.
   - Participants discussed the need for more independent living skills development for young people in high schools (including healthy relationships, sex education, maintaining a household or tenancy).

5. Changing demographics
   - Participants reported emerging social issues in relation to some families with a Fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) parent, such as conflict, inconsistent parenting, and children pushing boundaries.
   - The Department of Immigration and Citizenship has special programs for unaccompanied minors. There also needs to be an expansion of the settlement grants program to acknowledge that this group requires specialised housing support.

6. Improving how we provide services
   - Participants expressed the need to get out of the office and meet with parents in their own environment. Parents are often time-poor and may be reluctant to engage with a service on a formal basis in an office setting. We need more outreach services which also engage parents when supporting young people.
   - The Department of Housing should allocate a quota of priority housing for young people and consider shared housing options for this demographic. Programs like Yes! Housing could be expanded to acknowledge the barriers young people face in accessing housing.

Shelter WA acknowledges that addressing homelessness and housing affordability for young people in this current climate is a substantial challenge. However, it is a challenge which must continue to be met if Western Australia is to meet the demands of our increasing population vis a vis our (relative) static public housing sector. Almost 50 per cent of the homeless population is children and young people.

In addition, the cost of the housing crisis to the community may be quantified by intensification on demand for all existing housing and support services, including crisis services, emergency relief, financial counsellors, tenancy support and women’s refuges, as well as the increases in social housing waiting lists. There are also hidden costs on society, such as increased emergency department attendances in hospitals, increases in crime and offending behaviours, including family violence and interruptions to children’s education and the issues which emanate from that.

Shelter WA will continue to work with the housing and homelessness and youth services sector to monitor the response to youth housing and homelessness in WA, identify gaps in services, and develop recommendations to meet the needs of young people in WA. Shelter WA’s full report on Youth Housing and Homelessness will be released in December 2012 and available on our website, www.shelterwa.org.au.
Assisting Homeless and at Risk Young People in Broome

Sarah Sihlen
and Danielle Roberts
Burdekin Youth in Action, Broome

Burdekin Youth In Action Inc. (BYIA) is a community based, not for profit youth support service that has operated in the Shire of Broome since 1994. BYIA provides support and advocacy for young people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness. While BYIA provides support predominantly to Indigenous young people, it also however works with non-Indigenous young people.

Young people living in Broome have limited accommodation options and are often forced to live in overcrowded conditions. Unfortunately, overcrowding has been infused into young people’s lives as common practice from a small age. Subsequently, young people either don’t recognise they are experiencing homelessness, or feel hopeless in their attempts to obtain adequate, safe and suitable housing.

Countless amounts of homes where young people are residing are unsafe and unstable. Many of our young clients live with adults, or other young people, who are displaying problematic alcohol and drug use often resulting in domestic violence situations. They move between extended family and friends and do not have access to their own room, clean clothes or a safe place to leave personal belongings. The impact this has on their health, educational needs and social and emotional wellbeing is detrimental to their overall quality of life.

In addition, homelessness within Broome increases over the wet season due to flooding up on the Dampier Peninsula and inland as far as Fitzroy Crossing. Families who visit Broome during this time face the difficulty of returning back home to their communities when weather prohibits them in doing so. Subsequently, there is an increase in primary homelessness in Broome.

Within the shire of Broome there is no crisis or short-term homelessness accommodation facility available for young people (or adults). A women’s refuge accommodates women and their young children to escape from family and domestic violence situations. Broome also has a Sober-up shelter that provides overnight accommodation for those under the influence of alcohol. Unfortunately, the majority of young people within Broome do not meet the criteria to use these services to escape homelessness. Another service in Broome is the Broome Youth Accommodation Service. A Youth Housing Program that last year was given four houses to distribute to our youth at risk. In 2012 they were given six houses, an increase for sure, but still a long way from covering the tremendous demand in our community. There is a long waiting list to acquire housing from Department of Housing.

Reconnect youth workers at Burdekin Youth In Action Inc. work alongside young people on a case management level. Staff work proactively and holistically to address the barriers young people are experiencing which include homelessness. Young people are encouraged to participate with educational and employment programs that will further them into obtaining long term, stable accommodation.

The goal of BYIA is to engage with young people and their families in ways that are sustainable, build resilience and ultimately achieve lasting change in their lives. Burdekin also works closely with many other youth focussed agencies within Broome to offer support and to the address the issues young people are facing.
Experiences of Homelessness for Young Care Leavers

Katherine Browne and Amber Hall
WA CREATE Foundation

Recent publicity of the affordable housing shortage in WA has raised renewed concerns of the vulnerability of children and families. The increasing numbers of people struggling to afford housing is a national trend. It is not isolated to WA. However, as the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee (2011) report states, housing prices are outstripping disposable income and this means that rental returns need to be higher to cover mortgages. The Committee (2011) also reports that public housing funding and availability has reduced. This is not good news for young people who are leaving statutory care.

As at June 2012 there were over 3,750 children and young people in care in WA, with 480 of these young people aged between 15 and 18 (Government of Western Australia, 2012). For many young people in care, turning 18 means moving out or ‘ageing out’ of care. It means that the State no longer has legal guardianship, carers typically cease to receive funding and often young people no longer have a place to stay. Many young people leave their final placement before the age of 18 and therefore don’t ‘age out’, but they are none-the-less vulnerable to homelessness.

The WA housing crisis is a barrier for many young people attempting to access secure, affordable housing. In 2010, the rate of youth homelessness in WA was the second highest in the country (Shelter WA, 2011; Western Australian Council of Social Services, 2010). A recent survey of 158 people experiencing homelessness in Western Australia found that 23 per cent of the respondents were under the age of 25, and that half of the young people had a care experience (Ruah Community Services, n.d.). Importantly, this project does not appear to cover the entire homeless population — it identified mainly those experiencing primary homelessness and located in public places (see Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Homelessness Australia, n.d.).

A national study conducted in 2009 found that 50 per cent of young people in care had to leave their placement when they turned 18, with 40 per cent of these young people not knowing where they would be living after this time (McDowall, 2009).

Most young people face barriers and difficulties accessing housing, however these issues are often compounded for young care leavers because of reduced educational outcomes, reduced employment options and income, a general lack of independent living skills, few having the option to remain in their current living arrangement past the age of 18, a lack of familial support and not having a ‘safety net’ to fall back on once they have left their carers (Hall, 2012; Natalier and Johnson, 2012; National Youth Commission, 2008; Johnson, et al, 2010; Greener and Powers, 2007; Moslehuddin and Mendes, n.d.).

One young man, who we will call Liam (in order to protect his identity), left his final placement at age 17. He reported to CREATE Foundation that the struggle was ‘more or less finding people willing to support you, and carers can sometimes shut the door on you.’ Liam describes spending five months ‘moving from place to place....once or twice a week I could stay with a mate’ after he left his final placement. However, the rest of the time he was sleeping out on the streets. He says ‘it was pretty rough’. Liam is not alone in his experience of exiting care and entering homelessness.

The 2008 homelessness White Paper The Road Home introduced a ‘no exits into homelessness’ policy for young people leaving care (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). Despite this foundational policy, young people continue to report leaving care and experiencing homelessness. Research indicates that young people are often not involved in their leaving care planning process, or do not have a copy of their plan when exiting care (McDowall, 2011). The Department for Child Protection has recently introduced a new policy that encourages leaving care planning to begin from the age of 15.
It is essential that care planning occurs well before the young person leaves their final placement as it gives stakeholders more time to develop and implement properly thought out plans that equip young people leaving care for adult life (Government of Western Australia, n.d.). However, there needs to be a strong commitment from government, workers and other key stakeholders to actively involve young people in the development and implementation of their leaving care plan, because without this, it becomes less of a plan, and more of a reflection of bureaucratic process (Hall, 2012).

Many young people, including Liam believe that transition plans need to ‘be more one-on-one with the young person, it needs to reflect their needs for their living situation, and look at what kind of income they have or will need to support it....and try to set up a back-up if it all doesn’t go well.’ Liam also feels that the government needs to ‘help young people look for a place, rather than saying, ‘you’re 18 now, see ya.’ Young people in care and those leaving care need to have the living skills required by young adults in our society. Far too many young people leave care without knowing how to cook, how to budget and how to apply for rental accommodation and many of them do not have reliable adults they can turn to for support.

The CREATE Your Future independent living skills program, aims to provide young people with some of the basic living skills they will need upon leaving care. There are other services that provide direct case management and support to care leavers, however there is little doubt that learning basic living skills should form a part of the care regime whilst in care.

CREATE encourages the WA government to invest more significant resources into ensuring that all young people in WA transition from care with the benefit of an individualised leaving care plan and through continued commitment to those services supporting care leavers. After all, it is the post care outcomes that are the true measure of the effectiveness of the care and protection system.

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The Foyer Deal: Conditionality as Part of the Foyer Model

Jethro Sercombe
Manager, Foyer Project, Anglicare WA

The ‘Foyer Deal’ is said to be one of the defining features of a Foyer program. This ‘something for something’ agreement is designed as a motivational tool to assist young people out of homelessness and into education, work and ultimately stable independent housing. Conditional agreements in supported housing are nothing new, and equally, mutual obligation arrangements are the norm in the provision of welfare to work programs.

However, the idea that housing is a human right sits uncomfortably alongside a conditional supported housing agreement, especially at the point that the client is unable to meet its requirements. For Western Australia’s first Foyer program, Foyer Oxford, the process of making the ‘Foyer deal’ explicit, including through the use of a written contract between service and young person has allowed the re-examination of this mutual obligation style agreement. It has allowed the team to ask: If the obligation is mutual, what obligations should be placed on the young person and what obligations are the Foyer’s responsibility?

Foyer Oxford is a large scale Foyer initiative established by a consortium comprised of Anglicare WA, Foundation Housing and the Central Institute of Technology. Scheduled for completion in mid-2013, Foyer Oxford will house 98 young people in self-contained apartments, making it the largest Foyer program in the country. Since September 2011, the consortium behind Foyer Oxford has been running a small scale pilot with 14 residents as a way to trial and develop the processes needed to successfully operate the program. It is the experience of this pilot, both successes and failures that form the basis of this article.

The Foyer Deal

‘In exchange for services tailored to their needs, young people entering a Foyer are expected to actively engage in their own development and make a positive contribution to their local community... In placing young people at the heart of a flexible ‘deal’, which in the case of Foyers is expressed through a formal contract, it affords them the tools they need to take responsibility for their future and helps them to secure lasting personal and social change’

Foyer Federation UK Website, www.foyer.net

Conditionality has always been part of private rental agreements, matching obligations of a landlord with the obligations of their tenants. In supported housing models for young people, that conditionality has been even stronger with young people obligated to engage in case management, or attend particular activities for example. With the introduction of the Foyer model to Australia, in some cases an even higher expectation is placed on young people’s involvement.

Your Side of the Deal — Obligations of Clients

When implemented, the Foyer Oxford team’s initial take on the Foyer Deal was met with mixed success. The obligations that young people signed to include:

- the normal obligations of a tenancy (paying rent, maintaining cleanliness in the property, avoiding antisocial behaviour)
- following some extra Foyer community rules (particularly some minor controls on how friends access the Foyer buildings)
- participation in case management
- the requirement to participate in some form of education, training or employment.

The initial agreement was very clear on the first three of these obligations. Staff were easily able to explain to young people the behaviours that would constitute meeting the obligations of tenancy, community rules and case management. Where lines were crossed, such as not paying rent, accountability was easy to provide and behaviour rectified. As a result of the clarity, the Foyer program developed a relatively stable living environment, with very little anti-social behaviour or critical incident. The obligation to ‘participate in some form of education, training or employment’ was not so clear. It had been intentional in the service design that each young person would need their own pathway and that setting a one size fits all arrangement was not going to work. A lack of clarity, however, meant that neither young people, nor staff really understood the boundaries of the deal when it came to engagement in EET. Whilst the Foyer program had a stable community, engagement in EET was low and the community bordered on idle and apathetic. If the program saw itself as ‘as much an Employment and Training program as a housing program’, this environment would not meet those EET goals. The lack of activity was a real concern.

In response the team tightened this part of the Deal and made clear to young people the obligations they had to engage in EET. A minimum number of 15 hours engagement per week was set, based on a full time study load with the Central Institute of Technology. Staff decided to assist young people by monitoring this on a daily basis, especially through case management.

The Foyer Oxford team had spent significant time working on a strength based approach. With the introduction of day to day monitoring, the speed at which the strength based approach became punitive was amazing. Day to day monitoring of the deal very quickly became nagging, and case management relationships became oppositional. Young people devised ways to ‘work around the rules’ and developed ways to trick the program into thinking they were engaging. That opposition meant that case management could no longer do the work it needed to. A number of young people exited the program and young people who were succeeding in EET bemoaned the loss of a positive living environment.

The reflections on this were three fold:

Accountability is important, but it’s not the role of Case Managers or support staff — the solution here was not to lose accountability all together but to change the approach of staff in the monitoring of that accountability. The task of accountability was moved to service management and the Deal was monitored on a monthly rather than a daily basis. The case manager stopped being the person who ‘kept you accountable to the deal you had signed’ and instead became the person who was tasked with ‘helping you to meet your side of the deal’.

A deal must be through informed choice, and changing the rules is hard — Another reflection from this was that bringing in new expectations to the deal was always going to be problematic. Young people needed to be able to make a clear informed choice at the beginning of their engagement with the service about whether or not the ‘deal’ would work for them.

‘When Foyer changed to the 15 hour rule and started making us do stuff, it was too hard for me to change and fit in because I had got used to doing things at my own rate’

— Interim Foyer Resident, 17 years old

A deal has two sides, higher expectations need to flow both
ways — In the process of providing higher levels of accountability, we had forgotten the obligations the program had to the young people it served. The strength based approach was more than a practice method we wanted to use, it was an obligation the Foyer Oxford team had to its clients. The higher expectation placed on young people’s side of the deal needed to be matched with higher expectations of the staff and program to meet our side of the deal.

Our Side of the Deal — Obligations of the Foyer Program

Consider a mutual obligation agreement to be a set of scales, with the ‘expectation on the client on one side of the scale’, and the ‘offer provided by the service’ on the other side of the scale. If we consider the journey of the client to be easy and the expectations on them not so great, then balancing the scale requires a fairly low level offer from the provider. If, however the journey is understood to be a complex and difficult one then the offer of service must be much higher.

In using the ‘Foyer deal’ as a lever for motivating young people towards their long term goals, the offer must be something more than just housing, support and access to education and training. For the Foyer Oxford team, Foyer’s side of the deal also must include the quality of that housing, support and EET access. As Foyer Oxford develops, there is a challenge for the consortium to provision of this quality.

For the housing side, quality is in the safety, security and state of housing provided and in its ongoing maintenance, but also the speed of maintenance and the efficiency of tenancy management processes. In the development of Foyer Oxford, Foundation Housing and contracted architects have used this quality as a clear driver for the design and materials of the building. It is certainly not an easy task economically, with clear barriers surrounding the income levels of young people, and therefore low rental intake.

In Foyer Oxford, it is also clear that the requirements for effective tenancy management create a workload far beyond a standard tenancy. This is particularly challenging for smaller scale developments such as the Interim Foyer project where the program does not have the critical mass to allow for increased service.

For the employment and training side, the quality is in accessibility of options and ensuring that in the absence of other appropriate options that the Foyer is able to provide a safety net option for training particularly during periods where young people are ‘between jobs or courses’. For Foyer Oxford this is represented by the creation of ‘Jumpstart’, an accredited literacy, numeracy and independent living skills course run through the Central Institute of Technology. Jumpstart is flexible, individually focussed, project based and integrated with case management processes making it incredibly accessible.

For the support side, quality is fundamentally in the relationship between staff and young people. As the quote from the Foyer Federation above states the young person must be placed at the heart of the service. This means a highly individualised, flexible service provision, a focus on providing respect and dignity and the strength based practice needed to inspire young people towards their goals. It also means providing a youth focused, fun, non-institutional environment to live in. Outside of case management, staff in the Interim Foyer program are clearly given the responsibility of doing what they can to create a positive communal environment, but are also given the freedom and support to creatively work out how to do that. It means a clear focus on staff development and accountability.

Service accountability then is also a key agreement. First and foremost this is accountability to the young people who stay in Foyer. This includes ensuring that our side of the deal is written down and clear, that avenues for feedback and for young people’s involvement in decision making are provided, as is an open culture where young people feel they are safe to appropriately criticise the service, housing and education they receive. An outcomes focus using a Results Based Accountability framework has also proved useful in ensuring service accountability.

And yet there is still a discomfort when we weigh up a young person’s right to safe and secure housing alongside the Foyer Deal, because ultimately where a service fails to engage the young person, or the young person does not meet the requirements of the deal, the housing is forfeited.

That discomfort recognises that we are dealing fundamentally with a question of justice. If the conditions that would inspire and empower young people to thrive are able to be provided and each young person receives an offer and environment that feels valuable to them, then it is likely that the ‘Deal’ is one that is just and balanced. If that is not able to be provided then there is a question about whether a ‘mutual obligation’ style agreement like the Foyer Deal is appropriate. This discomfort has focussed the Foyer Oxford team on aspiring to provide a very high quality, persistent, focussed the Foyer Oxford team on aspiring to provide a very high quality, persistent, community based service that avenues for feedback and for young people’s involvement in decision making are provided, as is an open culture where young people feel they are safe to appropriately criticise the service, housing and education they receive. An outcomes focus using a Results Based Accountability framework has also proved useful in ensuring service accountability.

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Early Intervention to Homelessness: Reconnect, an Innovative Approach

Steve Thrussell and MercyCare Reconnect Staff

Most people working in the youth homelessness field in Australia would have either had contact with or know about the Reconnect program. MercyCare Reconnect is the largest Reconnect service provider in Western Australia having four services across the Perth metropolitan area.

MercyCare Reconnect is an outreach support service that works with young people aged 12 to 18 years and their family members who are experiencing conflict where that conflict may lead to the young person becoming homeless. The program aim is to prevent homelessness through early intervention with young people in order to improve their housing situation as well as their levels of engagement with education, training, work, family and the community. The Service provides referral, mediation, counselling, practical support, information, mentoring and brokerage. The Reconnect service operates on the Seven Good Practice Principles that underpins the approaches used by the service.

- provision of accessible services
- client driven service delivery
- holistic approaches to service delivery
- working collaboratively
- ongoing review and evaluation
- building sustainability.

While this glossy brochure blurb looks good and sounds like we do an interesting job, what makes Reconnect innovative and successful? Commencing as a pilot in 1997, under the Youth Homelessness Pilot Program, MercyCare Reconnect has evolved and combined with an innovative funding program to achieve many new things.

As one Case Worker writes, there are many strengths in the Reconnect Program and the way this program is managed gives Case Workers an amazing capacity to be creative in how we engage with each young person and their family and genuinely achieve the individual’s goals.

- We are encouraged to keep the ‘human’ and ‘service’ in human service.
- We are able to join with family, by invitation, in a short part of their life journey.
- We have the capacity to work with compassion and to give the individual the time they need.
- We have the guidance of the Good Practice Principles.
- We have the capacity to interact with clients in a way that is not power based.
- We have the capacity work with more.
- Consultation with the funding body is genuine in bringing about the development and refinement of excellent service provision.

There are a number of practices that makes Reconnect stand out.

Case Workers will meet with clients where the client feels most comfortable. While this could be at the local fast food restaurant, school or park, it is usually in the family home and often in the evening when all family members can be present. While this presents challenges there are significant benefits to meeting in the family home. The whole family can be present and the household dynamics can be observed. This means that we see their world through their eyes and how they interact in their world and are more likely to see the real person and the real issues. It also means that this meeting place takes away the feeling of a ‘clinical or office environment’ and normalises the situation for the family.

Case Workers work holistically and use a ‘toolbox’ approach to service delivery. This means that the service is flexible and is not constrained to a rigid service model. Case Workers package their support to meet the needs of each individual client and family and at the first meeting determine with the young person and/or family members what the issues are and what they want to achieve. The presenting issues are diverse and vary in severity and the Case Workers can be flexible and adaptable in their approach about how they work with the
Having the opportunity to reflect on one’s practice and having the time and ability to try new strategies and ideas has been an important part of Reconnect’s practice. Using a Participatory Action Research model staff are encouraged to think about their practice using a cyclic process of Observe, Reflect, Plan and Act. Relevant stakeholders including clients, parents and other agency staff who may share similar concerns on the identified issue, are included in this process as they can provide different perspectives and add to the collective knowledge. This means that we review our practice and attempt to address trends, weaknesses and other issues so that we can accomplish what we term ‘best practice’. The underpinning belief is that while we are using ‘best practice’, new learning’s in a constantly changing world are always available if the motivation is there to look for them and time given to explore them. Case Workers need to be constantly increasing their knowledge base, adapt their approach and have a wide range of skills, experiences, strategies and resources to draw upon to achieve the best outcomes.

Case Workers also need to work with clients in a way that builds their problem solving skills and strengthens their connections to other people in the community. This means identifying systemic issues which need to be addressed at a broader community level. Working with individual clients will assist to solve the individual’s issues, undertaking Community Capacity Building projects is an interesting part of the Reconnect’s role as it provides the opportunity to assist the community to build its capacity to solve shared social problems impacting on homelessness.

Case Workers will work with schools and other groups and run groups and activities that help address presenting issues with the aim of getting the school or the group to continue on with the activity after Reconnect’s involvement.

Staff at MercyCare Reconnect enjoy what they do. This does not mean that they are always comfortable with the situations they confront. At times they go home feeling concerned that a young person may not be safe tonight, or may be homeless, may be hungry, may be abused or may not be accessing health care or education. Despite this discomfort they continue to provide quality support and interventions. They also advocate and challenge situations of inequity and negative representations of minority groups.

A Case Worker penned this verse:

Hi my name is Rebecca, I work for MercyCare Reconnect
I can offer a range of things, you can accept or you can reject.
I like to work with young people who need to gain support
Friends, Parents, Schools, these issues we can sort,
I like to listen to your needs and help you find your way
I’ll teach you a lot of different skills to help you through your day
If you want to sing, draw or dance I can link you to a Youth Centre
They have a range of things to do all day and people who can mentor
You don’t like school? Well that’s OK, let’s find out what to do
I will come to school and advocate, so we can find what best suits you
Your parents don’t understand you and you argue all the time
I’ll come out to your family home and teach you strategies and watch arguments decline
You will hear your parents and they will then hear you
This means we have built resilience and there’s nothing left to do
I will drive off in my car, seeing the growth of my time with you
The strategies and guidance has become part of you.
From that time you will go on being the person that you are
Glimpsing back on your time with MercyCare Reconnect, knowing you have come far.

Reconnect provides practical support as well as counselling. Often to stabilise the young person’s situation, staff will drive clients to and from appointments, assist with income support, arrange links into the community and community based activities as well as arranging alternative accommodation and providing parenting support and skills for parents. By doing this it gives staff the opportunity to follow through with clients and provide a holistic service. Case Workers will also help establish the link to other supports and services that the family or young person requires and may help them in the process by taking them to the first appointment.

Brokerage is a useful tool that is available for staff to use and sometimes it is the essential needs that need to be met before other concerns are addressed, for example, purchase of toiletries for a homeless young person or stationery to be bought to facilitate re-engagement with school. Having these funds available can mean the other concerns are addressed, for example, accommodation and providing parenting support and skills for parents.

Having the opportunity to reflect on one’s practice and having the time and ability to try new strategies and ideas has been an important part of Reconnect’s practice. Using a Participatory Action Research model staff are encouraged to think about their practice using a cyclic process of Observe, Reflect, Plan and Act. Relevant stakeholders including clients, parents and other agency staff who may share similar concerns on the identified issue, are included in this process as they can provide different perspectives and add to the collective knowledge. This means that we review our practice and attempt to address trends, weaknesses and other issues so that we can accomplish what we term ‘best practice’. The underpinning belief is that while we are using ‘best practice’, new learning’s in a constantly changing world are always available if the motivation is there to look for them and time given to explore them. Case Workers need to be constantly increasing their knowledge base, adapt their approach and have a wide range of skills, experiences, strategies and resources to draw upon to achieve the best outcomes.

Case Workers also need to work with clients in a way that builds their problem solving skills and strengthens their connections to other people in the community. This means identifying systemic issues which need to be addressed at a broader community level. So while working with individual clients will assist to solve the individual’s issues, undertaking Community Capacity Building projects is an interesting part of the Reconnect’s role as it provides the opportunity to assist the community to build its capacity to solve shared social problems impacting on homelessness.

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Glimpsing back on your time with MercyCare Reconnect, knowing you have come far.
Thinking About the Problem
Rather than the Procedure:
Effectiveness of Court Fines and Infringements to Reduce Offending Conduct of the Homeless

Ann-Margaret Walsh
Principal Solicitor
and Kate Novelli
Volunteer Paralegal,
Street Law Centre

Street Law Centre is a community legal centre that provides a free outreach legal service to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The service has operated since October 2010. Street Law Centre currently attends two legal clinics per week and one legal clinic once per fortnight at homeless centres throughout the Perth CBD.

In May 2011 the Criminal Code Amendment (Infringement Notices) Act 2010 (WA) (the Act) received assent. The legislation demonstrates lawmakers’ propensity to use fines and infringements as a means of punishing offenders and curbing criminal behaviour. This article draws on experience at the Street Law Centre to outline how this measure has been ineffective for those experiencing homelessness. The options available to dispose of fines and infringements are limited. Fines and infringements fail to deter behaviour of those experiencing homelessness. Further, these measures may reinforce homelessness, creating a vicious cycle.

Proposed Changes to the Infringement Scheme in Western Australia

The Act seeks to introduce a new scheme into WA whereby Police officers are given the power to issue infringement notices for Criminal Code offences including disorderly behaviour in public (s74A), stealing goods valued less than $500 (s378) and trespass (s70B).

Disproportionate Disadvantage
Fines and infringement legislation disproportionately disadvantage the homeless. Anecdotal evidence obtained through Street Law legal clinics demonstrates that one of the most common and recurring legal issues faced by people experiencing homelessness in WA is the accumulation of significant fines and infringements. These fines and infringements range from several hundred to several thousand dollars.

For individuals experiencing homelessness most fines and infringements are usually a result of the individual’s lack of housing. Street Law has found that this is because behaviour which may not be considered unlawful were it conducted in a private
residence, is punished as a result of occurring in public. In addition, mental illness or drug addictions, which are common underlying reasons for homelessness, also contribute to the occurrence of unlawful behaviour.

The imposition of fines and infringements on the homeless does not achieve specific deterrence, as it does not discourage re-offending. The fines and infringements are a consequence of the larger struggles that individuals are already dealing with the day to day challenges of being homeless. The circumstances of the individual who is experiencing homelessness usually result in a level of disregard or misunderstanding of the law and its consequences. Most Street Law clients are unaware of the cumulative amount of their outstanding fines, and cannot recall exactly which incident the fine or infringement relates to.

Fines and infringements entrench the person’s state of homelessness and make breaking the cycle of homelessness more difficult. Under the new legislation, where a person is issued with an infringement for any offence, the person can elect to either pay the fine or have the matter heard in court. It is unlikely that an individual experiencing homelessness will be financially able to pay the infringement upfront, and they may lack the functional capacity to appeal the notice and have the matter heard in court. It is more than probable that the infringements will remain unpaid and remain a burden for the individual experiencing homelessness.

**Inadequate Options for Disposal of Fines or Infringements**

Despite the fact that people experiencing homelessness are frequent recipients of fines and infringements, the processes in place to address their inability to pay are clearly unsuitable in the circumstances. For Street Law clients, paying their infringements or court ordered fines up front is rarely a practical option. In WA, there are limited options available to dispose of a court ordered fine or infringements for those who are unable to pay the infringement or fine in full within the designated period.

If the matter relates to an infringement the person may apply to enter a Time to Pay arrangement. Infringement notices are usually given for minor offences relating to public transport, parking or other traffic offences. The Time to Pay arrangement involves the individual paying $25 per fortnight to the Fines Enforcement Registry (‘FER’). This amount is usually derived from the individuals’ Centrelink allowance. While this may not seem like a significant sum, experience has demonstrated that individuals experiencing homelessness may struggle with paying this amount.

There is an option available to negotiate a lesser deduction however to be eligible generally the individual needs to provide proof of their circumstances and inability to pay. If the individual is unable to comply with the time to pay arrangement they risk having their driver’s license suspended.

Suspension of the individuals’ driver’s licence in itself may create a barrier to obtaining employment and consequently reduce the individuals’ capacity to earn an income to pay the infringements.

The suspension on the licence is not removed until payment is made. There are no options for individuals who wish to dispose of their infringements by non-fiscal means. Furthermore, where the person has accumulated thousands of dollars of infringements, or court ordered fines, Time to Pay can be impractical and idealistic as it may represent years of commitment.

If the matter relates to a court ordered fine more options to dispose of the fine are available but the options are inadequate for those experiencing homelessness. Court ordered fines are usually for more serious offences such as disorderly behaviour. If the individual chooses not to commit to the Time to Pay arrangement they may have their property seized and sold at auction. If they do not have enough property to discharge the fine the only other alternatives are to request the fines be converted to a Work and Development or Imprisonment order. Work and Development orders are notoriously strict and often prove too difficult a commitment and are generally not a realistic option for those experiencing homelessness, who are usually not work ready, and may be suffering from a mental illness or drug addiction. Failure to comply with a Work and Development order results in either Imprisonment or an increased fine. Imprisonment orders prolong the individuals’ involvement in the criminal justice system and reduce the individuals opportunities for employment in the future further contributing to their ongoing state of homelessness.

**Advancing a Restorative Approach**

The Act was introduced for the purpose of relieving the pressure on the Courts by enabling police to issue fines and infringement notices for offences that would otherwise require Court proceedings. However, as has hopefully been demonstrated above, the absence of non-fiscal means to dispose of the fines and infringements disadvantages those who experiencing homelessness. The inclusion of other reasonable and proportionate methods of disposing of the fines may assist to reduce the cycle contributing to homelessness and at best may allow the individual to reach out to social networks and reintegrate into society. This approach would enable the social, health and welfare issues that drive the offending to be addressed and ideistically reducing future offending.

While it is recognised that the justice system has gone some way towards adopting a more restorative approach to these issues, through the establishment of court diversion programs and specialist courts, funding restrictions mean that not all those who need to access these initiatives are recevie.
Given the current rental crisis, it is of concern for Shelter WA to hear on the radio that there is still a perception that WA is an easy place to get work and housing. For example a caller originally from Queensland phoned a national radio station recently to say he thought it would have been relatively easy to get a job in the mining industry in Western Australia. Instead, he said, he had self-funded his move to Perth and spent some time applying for jobs before finally being successful and securing work in the Pilbara.

Presumably, this person had to find a place to live when he arrived in WA and, being employed from Perth, is now a fly in-fly out (fifo) worker who rents in Perth and returns to his base during his time off. This is a story we have heard frequently.

WA has experienced the highest population growth than any other state in Australia in the 12 months to June 2012, at 3.1 per cent. Population growth for Australia was 1.5 per cent for the same period. Only a small percentage of this increase is due to natural population growth and half is attributable to overseas migration. The rest of the population increase is due to an influx of people from the eastern states and New Zealand. The population in WA has grown by 14 per cent since 2006, which is exceptional for WA where the population has been increasing rather marginally until now.

Whilst this increase in the Western Australian population has been marvellous for our economy, tourism, commerce and trade generally, it has also had a major impact on housing and homelessness. The resource boom in WA has actually resulted in a multi-speed economy, with a substantial number of people experiencing housing stress and an increase in homelessness and housing-related poverty. The state has not really been geared up to house the number of people who have arrived unprecedentedly in the west and the demand for housing has quickly outstripped supply, particularly in the rental market, where there is an acute shortage of affordable housing. The scarcity of housing in relation to the population has also driven up the price of rental housing, which increased by 58 per cent between January 2006 and June 2011 to a median price of $380 per week. As at August 2012, the median rental price had risen a further 18.4 per cent to $450 per week.

In some rural areas, the population growth resulting from the resource boom has been even more acute. In the East Pilbara region, for instance, there has been a population increase of 82 per cent since the 2006 Census. This has impacted on housing availability and has driven the price of rentals...
to exorbitant levels in some regional areas, ranging from a median price of $1500 per week for one bedroom to $2750 for four bedroom dwellings. In some of these regional areas there are no vacancies at all most of the time.

The general rental vacancy rate in Perth is now down to 1.8 per cent, and even lower for affordable housing properties which only make up about 2 per cent of all properties offered for rent. The increased demand which has resulted from the population growth has also pushed the price of housing to a much higher level than would have occurred naturally in the Perth metropolitan area.

Shelter WA warned of an impending housing shortage in WA several years back and produced reports and papers to that effect. The Commonwealth Government also recognised the housing situation has been a major cause for concern in Australia for some years now, hence the overhaul of the funding arrangements to address homelessness and housing affordability. When the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) replaced the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) in 2009, SAAP services became specialist homelessness services in accordance with recommendations in the White Paper, *The Road Home*. Other initiatives were also put in place to parallel the commencement of the NAHA, including National Partnership Agreements on Homelessness (NPAH) and on other focus areas, and the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS). Much needed funds were also injected into increasing the number of social housing properties and other government infrastructure through the Nation Building — Economic Stimulus Plan.

Many new and effective housing support services have emerged as a result of the NAHA, including the continuation of NRAS, and the Department of Housing continues to build upon its successes thus far through our wealth of resources. Our government's White Paper — *The Road Home* — has also provided a renewed commitment to the development of affordable housing in WA.

Under the Economic Stimulus Plan, 2,700 new dwellings have been built by the Department of Housing, including about 2,000 which have been transferred to the community housing sector. Some transfers have also been an result of the NPAH. There has also been a result of the NPAH. There has also been an additional 604 NRAS properties completed to date in WA, with a further 5,423 to be completed by 2017.

The Department of Housing provides rental accommodation for approximately 36,749 low-income households in metropolitan and country areas of Western Australia, 60 per cent of whom are on an age or disability pension. The community housing sector in WA now also provides 7,700 rental accommodation dwellings with the recent transfers. Together, this amounts to approximately 44,500 social housing properties in WA. The recent one-off increase in the supply of social housing has provided much needed relief for the diminishing sector.

However, unless funding commitments are renewed substantially, we will see social housing continue to decrease as a proportion of overall housing supply. In the current situation, the social housing sector struggles to meet the demand now evident in WA, particularly given the inability of many low-income households to continue paying over-increasing housing costs. For people coming out of crisis or emergency accommodation, there is limited long term housing, which is affordable, safe and secure for them to transition into. The affordable housing shortage in Western Australia needs to be addressed urgently and as quickly as possible. Shelter WA supports the WA Department of Housing’s aim to provide an additional 20,000 dwellings by 2020 as part of its Affordable Housing Strategy 2010–2020: Opening Doors.

But more will need to be done in order to meet the extent of housing need. Building more affordable housing inexpensively and quickly, for crisis accommodation, transitional and supported accommodation will provide existing services with exit points for current clients and allow new clients to be supported. This housing needs to be provided through a mix of programs including the continuation of NRAS, and the continued expansion of social housing at the rate achieved as a result of the Nation Building Social Housing Initiative.

Private developers, too, must realise the urgent need to build appropriately priced dwellings for small families and singles, which are affordable and suitable to the needs of this demographic, not those of the developer. In this, local governments must reassess planning and zoning codes to allow for a sprinkling of very small lots within each suburb, to increase affordability in all areas. This has been achieved in Brisbane, Gladstone and other places in Queensland, with the very satisfactory result that small, well-designed dwellings have been built on tiny freehold lots of between 50 and 120 square metres for under $200,000. These are not units or villas, but houses on Green Title lots.

Western Australia is one of the few states to have developed an affordable housing strategy in response to the Commonwealth government’s White Paper — *The Road Home*. We are also one of the most prosperous states in Australia, thanks to our wealth of resources. Our government has shown it can be innovative in the way it has approached housing development and homelessness responses. WA needs to build upon its successes thus far through more visionary planning and imaginative building solutions to meet the needs of its growing population.