



HOUSING UPDATE

Newsletter of the Community Housing Coalition of WA

Autumn 2004

Frustration with the Plan

A number of recent forums have highlighted the sector's growing frustration with the Department's progress in implementing the Community Housing Strategic Plan.

In March, CHCWA held a forum on the Consolidation Agenda attended by representatives from 20 community housing providers. (Sector consolidation is a strategy within 'Goal 2': 'create and support effective and viable key providers'.) This forum was held in response to concerns expressed at the Department's approach to implementing the consolidation agenda.

As most agencies would be aware, the DHW is seeking to establish three categories of providers: key, compliant, and non-compliant. It has indicated a preference for three generic key providers in the metro area. However, it is widely recognised that there are currently no providers that meet the criteria.

The key provider criteria were worked on in December 2003, when Jeff Mould addressed a forum on the Strategic Plan. At that time, he indicated that the DHW would be placing an advertisement (by the end of February 2004) inviting organisations to express their interest in becoming a 'key provider'. He also indicated that more detailed information would be made available. However, the advertisement has not been placed, and recently Jeff has indicated that the Department is rethinking the key provider strategy.

The lack of information on the progress of developing the Plan is of concern to the sector. This includes information from the Departmental Steering Committee charged with implementing the Plan and developing key performance indicators. This lack of information was identified as a serious impediment to agencies wishing to pro-actively explore possible alliances within the sector.

In December, the community housing sector provided 'in principle' support for the DHW Strategic Plan. (However, there was concern about whether the objectives can be achieved with a growth rate of 40 per cent, instead of the original 75 per cent growth rate over 5 years.) The apparent lack of progress and information is now a serious issue for the sector and something needs to be done.

As a result of discussion within the sector, three recommendations were put forward, and subsequently endorsed, by the CHCWA Council.

1. That CHCWA writes to the DHW expressing concern that the steering committee within the Department charged with the task of developing the key performance indicators and the

overseeing the Plan's implementation, has failed to inform the sector of progress in these areas.

2. That the sector, the DHW and other Departments involved in the consolidation agenda form a reference committee; also that a secondment from the sector to the DHW be made, the position to involve further work to develop and implement the Plan for consolidation.

3. That CHCWA develops a 'Template for Negotiation' for agencies facing consolidation.



Events Calendar

Wednesday 19 May 2004: Code of Practice Day. Two sessions: an afternoon one from 1.30pm to 6.30pm, and an evening session from 6.00pm to 9.00pm. The afternoon session will be for organisations interested in registering with the Code and organisations already registered to meet and participate in peer support activities. The theme will be tenant handbooks and tenant participation strategies. There will then be a light supper, followed by the evening session, intended for staff and boards of organisations registered with the Code. **Venue:** *The Cambridge Conference Centre, 350 Cambridge Street, Wembley (inside the Cambridge Forum).* **Cost:** \$33 for non-registered organisations.

Thursday 20 May 2004: Community Housing Training Day, 9.30am to 4.30pm covering part two of 'Orientation to Work in Social Housing'. We will also look at networking strategies for social housing providers, and provide you with an update on current policy issues. **Venue:** *The Cambridge Conference Centre, 350 Cambridge Street, Wembley (inside the Cambridge Forum).* **Cost:** \$55 members and \$88 non-members.

Thursday 17 June 2004: CHCWA Council Meeting, 9.00am to 11.00am in the Conference Room, Claisebrook Lotteries House, 33 Moore Street East Perth.

23rd of September: CHCWA AGM, 9.30am to 12.30pm - venue to be advised.

8 December 2004: Community Housing Coalition WA Dinner, Frenchy's Cabaret Restaurant, Como.

Please RSVP to Natalie on 9221 7933, or Freecall 1800 357 933 or e-mail reception@communityhousing.com.au

CHCWA MEMBER PROFILE

Mofflyn's Accommodation Support Program

The Uniting Church care agency Mofflyn, based in Cannington, houses 20 tenants in six houses across the metropolitan area, under its Accommodation Support Program (ASP).

"All our residents are people with an intellectual disability," explains Mofflyn's Director Pat Higgins.

Whilst Mofflyn's mission does not preclude it having tenants with other types of disability, the main focus is on helping adults with intellectual disability to live as independently as possible within the wider community.

Mofflyn cares for tenants in Riverton, Mirrabooka, Greenwood, Innaloo, Ballajura and St James. It owns two of the houses (in St James and Riverton) and the other four belong to HomesWest.

"They (HomesWest) pick up major maintenance and we pick up minor maintenance," says Pat. "It's a collaborative thing and it helps them realise their mission and their quotas on disability housing – it's a real 'win-win' because you've got community integration."

Mofflyn is contracted to provide 'direct care' to its ASP tenants and the terms of that care are driven by individual needs.

"It might be assisting people with personal care in the mornings – getting up, getting going, going to work," says Pat.

It might also involve helping tenants with recreational activities and holidays. Carers are with clients for varying amounts of time, depending on the task and situation.

The Disability Services Commission funds about 90 per cent of the cost of the care and Mofflyn supplements the 10 per cent shortfall in the funding. The DSC has a highly formalised process for allocating housing and competition for its funding is strong.

Mofflyn has been operating since the 1920s and employs around 27 people in providing direct care under the ASP, but

has around 62 employees overall, involved in other social welfare programs.

"We run on about a \$3.5 million budget," Pat says.

The Accommodation Support Program requires just over \$1 million of this.

Mofflyn forms a long-term relationship with its ASP clients, often for most of their adult life. This means that places in the program are unlikely to open up on a regular basis, as moving to a nursing home or dying is the only reason the resident would leave. It is mainly for this reason that demand for the program exceeds supply.

Typically, the ageing parents of an intellectually disabled person – who have been able to care for that person well into adulthood – can suddenly find themselves in great need of assistance or alternate arrangements.

Mofflyn's support involves meeting with both the adult clients and their parents.

There are usually between two and four clients living in one house, so issues of compatibility must be properly addressed, involving discussion with all concerned.

"We've found four is a reasonable configuration. If you put too many people together it can move towards a boarding house," explains Pat.

"We have a very structured way of working, because not all of our clients can express themselves fully, so together with the resident and an advocate or family member, we devise an individual plan," he says. "There's a very clear basis for what we do and don't do."

For example, carers will not cook for someone who is capable of preparing their own meals, nor will they transport someone who can catch a bus

independently. However, there can be a need to intervene and provide support for a resident who may be in some sort of crisis; for example, going to hospital for surgery.

Apart from working very closely with guardians of its ASP tenants to meet financial needs such as

personal banking, Mofflyn also liaises with a range of organisations on behalf of its clients, from those offering recreational pursuits like dancing and bowling to those providing work placements. The organisation works with specialised employment agencies, driven by the



Tenants of Mofflyn's Riverton house

"They're looking for long-term security, a residential option, where it has all the hallmarks of community integration – it's personalised, not institutionalised," Pat explains. "The key to the program is the quality of care and the ongoing continuity of relationships."

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Mofflyn continued...

needs of individual tenants of the ASP homes.

One example of the many challenges involved in the day-to-day running of the accommodation program is ensuring that carers' vehicles are not so numerous that they cause a problem for neighbours. Staff members hold meetings at the Cannington office, rather than at the homes.

Another example is the changing needs of the tenants, over the longer term. As they age, people with intellectual disabilities tend to experience the onset of diseases of ageing (such as dementia) far earlier than others do. This obviously creates significant challenges in the care of the program's clients.

"To find facilities that are secure nursing homes or aged care facilities for, for example, a 45-year-old male with Down's Syndrome who has early onset dementia, is quite specific," Pat explains. "So part of our strategic thinking is to come up with alternative housing arrangements for these people, where they can get high level support."

As already mentioned, one of the agency's main strategic challenges is that demand far outstrips supply.

"We could grow rapidly if there was funding for direct care," says Pat. "It's really the funding that determines the pace."

Hence Mofflyn is interested in collaborating with non-government organisations that provide housing – or even private companies – as a way of expanding housing availability in what seems to be an area of growing need.



If you would like your organisation to be profiled in a future edition of the Housing Update, please contact CHCWA on 9221 7933 or Freecall 1800 35 7933 (WA only)

Homeless Services Campaign Update

December last year saw the launch of a campaign for better services for homeless people through the establishment of a partnership between the Australian Services Union (ASU), the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (formerly the Women's Refuge Group), the Youth Accommodation Committee (YACOMM) and CHCWA.

The campaign is now under the control of a broadly representative committee that is in the process of gradually implementing the campaign's aims. Now known as 'More Than Just a Bed', the campaign committee is finalising its platform prior to the next phase.

Information to support the campaign is still being gathered from agencies and recently the ASU undertook a survey on stress in the workplace with the following results:

- **81%** of respondents suffer continual tiredness sometimes or frequently
- **71%** of respondents are suffering loss of concentration
- Over **one third** of respondents have reported an increase in alcohol consumption due to stress in their workplace.

The five most stressful conditions in the workplace are:

- Increased workload
- Organisational change
- Inadequate staffing
- Inadequate resources
- Dealing with difficult clients.

Comments from survey participants include:

- 'I would not take leave for stress as feel this would make me look like I couldn't handle the job.'
- 'Help! And ASAP as I am beginning to lose my passion for this industry and is due to ... unrealistic demands and general lack of support for crisis workers.'

A further survey on bed utilisation rates and the effects of funding pressures is currently being collected.

Agencies will soon be provided with tools to assist with the campaign.



New CHCWA Publications

Over recent months CHCWA has been finalising two significant pieces of work. One of these will help inform the sector on the implications of a possible social housing waiting list and the other looks at the success of the agenda to create regional housing associations.

The papers are titled 'Common Waiting Lists' and 'The Review of the RHA Agenda'. Printed copies of these will be sent to all members for free and are available to non-members for \$10 (plus GST and postage).

Electronic copies are available under the 'Papers and Reports' section of our website at:

www.communityhousing.com.au

Bond Assistance for CAP Properties Reintroduced

As part of the Department's Community Housing Strategic Plan, it has announced the reintroduced Bond Assistance for CAP properties. Not all CAP properties have been included, as the Plan stipulates it will not be available in shared accommodation.

How hard can rent setting be?

A recent CHCWA training session focusing on 'rent setting' revealed that many organisations have developed their own 'hybrid' rent setting policies based loosely around the Homeswest Rent to Income Policy. This is not surprising, for a number of reasons. Firstly, some staff members within the Department of Housing and Works have poorly understood the Policy and advice given to providers has been somewhat inconsistent. Providers following departmental advice are likely to be losing out on rental revenue. Other providers have 'modified' the Policy to increase rental income to meet operating costs. This seems primarily to have been achieved by capturing a higher percentage of Family Tax Benefit payments, or by not allowing a 'working allowance'. Furthermore, some providers have simply found the Homeswest Policy too complex to administer and have 'simplified' it to meet their needs.

It is worth noting that 'rents' (market rents) are set in accordance with the Valuer General's Office and ATO guidelines. Providers actually set the level of subsidy or rebate when they determine the rental payment to be made by the tenant. Before continuing, let me first stress that CHCWA does not 'judge' providers and appreciates why there is a lack of consistency in policy. However, we would not be fulfilling our role if we did not encourage best practice, and advise providers of the possible consequences of not following Homeswest Policy in relation to rent setting.

Although the Community Housing Guidelines are a little 'fuzzy', in that there is no statement that organisations should calculate rents in accordance with Homeswest's Rent to Income Policy, the Department intends that providers do this, and that they maximise the tenant's entitlement to Commonwealth Rent Assistance. Failure to do this could result in a Homeswest issuing a 'breach' and the organisation being judged to be 'non-compliant'. Perhaps of greater concern

is the impact that a seemingly 'minor' adjustment to policy made by one provider might have upon the individual tenant, and on public perception of the sector as a whole.

One of the key factors in any rent setting policy is the issue of affordability. Current measures of housing affordability seem to be premised on the assumption that if a household spends 25 per cent of income on housing costs, the remaining income will be sufficient to meet other living costs. This assumption is problematic for several reasons. Of particular relevance to the rent setting debate is the argument that households of different size and composition require different levels of 'after-housing' income to maintain the same standard of living. The Henderson poverty lines estimate the amount of post-tax income required by a range of household types to obtain an equivalent (low) standard of living. Table 1 shows that larger families require a higher percentage of after-housing income to maintain a similar standard of living (Karmel, 1995).

Table 1
Poverty Lines, December quarter 1990

Income unit type	% allowed for housing costs at the poverty line	
	Head in work force	Head not in work force
C o u p l e	2 7	3 1
C o u p l e + 1	2 4	2 8
C o u p l e + 2	2 3	2 5
C o u p l e + 3	2 1	2 3
C o u p l e + 4	2 0	2 2
S i n g l e	3 3	4 0
S i n g l e + 1	2 8	3 3
S i n g l e + 2	2 5	2 9
S i n g l e + 3	2 3	2 6
S i n g l e + 4	2 2	2 4

Whilst we all, at some time or another, question the 'wisdom' of the Department, we must acknowledge that they have greater resources at their disposal to inform the complex judgements that surround how income should be assessed than any single community agency. It would appear that the Homeswest Rent to Income Policy, where Family Tax Benefit is assessed at a lower rate than other income, has been developed to address the inequity of using the same measure of affordability for large families as is used for smaller households. Where organisations 'adapt' their rent setting policies to capture 25 per cent of Family Tax payments, they may leave larger families with insufficient income after housing costs.

Another important issue to consider in rent setting is the need to maintain **Horizontal Equity**. This is demonstrated when people in the same economic circumstances are treated equally: ie people with a similar household structure and income pay the same amount of rent for comparable accommodation. Currently, there is little providers can do to address inequities that arise due to variations in the standard and location of properties offered to tenants, but they can ensure, by following the Homeswest Rent to Income Policy, that tenants are assessed consistently by all providers.

Rent setting (cont.)

Rent setting policy should also ensure that problems are not unintentionally created or exacerbated. For example, how their income is treated should not create disincentives for tenants to enter the workforce. Failure to give a 'working allowance' acts as a disincentive to workforce participation, especially when it is generally assumed that tenants paying an income-related rent will have an effective marginal tax rate (EMTR)¹ substantially higher than tenants in private rental.

The CHCWA Rental Resource Manual is available free to members.

References

Eringa, K. (2004). Workforce disincentives in Public Housing: Shelter WA Occasional Paper 2004-1. Shelter WA

Karmel, R. (1995). Welfare Division Working Paper No. 8: Measuring financial housing stress. AIHW

Footnotes:

1. The additional amount of taxation payable and income lost for an additional dollar of waged income. For instance, if your tax bill goes up by 20 cents and you lose 40 cents of Centrelink benefits when your salary increases by \$1, your EMTR would be 60% (Eringa, 2004).

Healthabitat Pty Ltd

CHCWA staff members were fortunate to recently attend a seminar on 'Housing for Health', presented by Paul Pholeros from Healthabitat Pty Ltd. Healthabitat has been developing and refining the Housing for Health approach to surveying and fixing indigenous people's houses since 1987. It has surveyed and fixed over 2,700 houses in 81 communities across four states and the Northern Territory.

The company's approach is simple, focused and highly effective:

- Its teams include a minimum of 75 per cent of people from the local

community, who are paid for their work.

- An initial survey is completed of each home in the community. At this point the survey teams who are equipped with a basic tool kit **MUST** fix something in the home – hence there is immediate benefit. Paul reported that some communities are now reluctant to be 'surveyed' by anyone who doesn't carry a tool kit!
- Data from the initial surveys is recorded on a computer and a schedule of work prepared for the various trades.
- Work is listed in order of priority, according to established health guidelines, and the budget is spent accordingly. The budget for each home can be between \$3,500 and \$7,600.
- Projects do not end with the initial repairs – Healthabitat attempts to equip indigenous community housing staff with the skills to manage the ongoing maintenance.

Paul was keen to dispel some myths about indigenous housing and reports that the following statistics have held firm for the past 19 years. It is not 'damage' that accounts for the greater part of Healthabitat's work **but a lack of routine repair and maintenance**. Work is broken up as follows: routine repair and maintenance 70%; faulty workmanship or incorrectly installed appliances 23% (some faults are life threatening); and property damage, 7%. Harsh climatic conditions, very poor water quality, and rodent damage are also important factors, and Healthabitat has initiated projects to improve the design and durability of indigenous housing. It also works with a team of environmental experts and only spends money where there is empirical evidence to prove its worth!



Anti-social Behaviour Forum

In March CHCWA hosted a Forum on Anti-social Behaviour (ASB). The forum brought together people with a range of perspectives, including:

- Inspector George Putland, WA Police Force Crime Prevention and Community Support Division
- Wendy Attenborough, Office of Crime Prevention, Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Richard Allport Recovery Officer, Department of Housing and Works Mirrabooka
- Leanne Burgess, Centrecare and
- Simon Roy, Eastern Metropolitan Community Housing Association

The forum provided an opportunity to talk about the complex and challenging issue of ASB. One thing that became clear was that it is not simply the behaviour of some tenants that causes problems for providers.

It appears that whilst community housing providers are acknowledged to have expertise in managing 'difficult' or 'vulnerable' tenancies, when 'the going gets tough' they receive criticism from all quarters of the community. Armed with years of experience *and the RTA*, specialist agencies do not need outside interference; their message is very clear "Let us manage – it is after all what we are funded to do!"

Social housing tenants have much more to lose when accused of ASB (more than tenants in any other housing do), and yet they have little redress against complaints that are malicious or racially motivated. This is an area where housing workers must be vigilant. They can deter malicious complainants by referring them to, for example, Equal Opportunities legislation. On a positive note, it was evident at the forum that stakeholders are committed to working together to develop effective, coordinated, balanced responses to ASB.

A full report on the ASB Forum will be available shortly on our website.

Yarra Yarra Village Australia Day Award

As recent recipients of the Australia Day Award for Community Group, the Yarra Yarra Village Committee is proud to have officially opened the Yarra Yarra Village, a new retirement facility in Carnamah townsite, on Friday 7th November 2003.

Guests at the opening included Mr Trevor Gregory and Mr Jeff Mould, from the Department of Housing & Works. Also present were architect Mr Colin Cochran, the Hon. Bill McNee (MLC for Moore), the Hon. Wilson Tuckey (MP for O'Connor), the Shire Presidents of Coorow and Three Springs, as well as Yarra Yarra Village residents and committee members and interested members of the public.

Mrs Al Grierson, one of the longest serving members of the Carnamah Retirement Homes Committee, officially opened the units. Mrs Grierson has served on the committee since 1987, when the idea was first discussed.



The Australia Day Award recipients

The opening was concluded with guests being invited to look through one of the units, kindly opened by its tenants, Mr & Mrs Whitlock, and then it was on to the Council Chambers for afternoon tea.

Project History

On 26th March 1987, a meeting was called in Dongara to discuss the needs of some of the communities in the

Midwest. From that meeting, Carnamah Community Committee was formed to investigate specific needs, including Senior Citizen Housing, HACC services and apprentice accommodation.

In September 1993, a further meeting formed a committee to look into Senior Citizen accommodation and four units were proposed. In 1995 the Council set aside proceeds from the sale of special 'Carnamah' series numberplates to help buy land for this accommodation. The Shire approached a landholder, but the community did not feel it was an appropriate site.

Whilst money was available to finance this project, the repayments were too high for the Committee or Shire to maintain alone. The Committee therefore approached the Department of Housing and Works (Homeswest) when, in 2000, land in Caron Street was purchased. The proposal was to build three two-bedroom

and two one-bedroom units with wheelchair access. It was not until 2002 that the Committee was advised that the units would be built.

The Committee then began to seriously fundraise, with two 'Monster Auctions', various catering events, Melbourne Cup luncheons, a Clayton's Ball, and a 'Buy-a-Brick' campaign. Local farmers also supported the venture with grain and by carting gravel.

To date, \$53,000 has been raised and with this the Committee has been able to provide many comforts for the residents. For example, each unit has window treatments, split-level reverse cycle air-conditioning, rain water tanks, electric stoves and range hoods instead of gas stoves (for safety reasons), garden landscaping, reticulation, plants and synthetic lawn, as well as a wall for the village name-plaque.

The Ministry of Housing has contributed \$460,029 to this venture, whilst

Carnamah Shire has bought the land, done the site works, surveying, landscaping, brick paving the front and footpaths as well as contributing \$86,112 to the capital costs. The Grain Pool also gave a \$25,000 'no-interest' loan over 5 years. The architect, Colin Cochran, took into consideration the suggestions put forward by the Committee and PS Chester & Sons built the units.

Training Update

Accredited Training in Social Housing

CHCWA staff members are continuing to work with the Centre for Leadership and Community Development and Challenger TAFE to finalise a Memorandum of Understanding between the TAFE and CHCWA to have accredited social housing training delivered to our sector. We have also met with senior staff at the Department of Education and Training, including the Director of Resource Allocation, to ensure there are adequate resources to develop the curriculum materials. We have had ongoing discussions with staff at the Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Directorate and Homeswest to build support for the delivery of accredited training in social housing here in WA.

We will keep you updated on this, and let you know when accredited training will commence.

CHCWA Training Days

Meantime, we are continuing the Training Days. The next one is on 20 May, when we will cover part two of "Orientation to Work in Social Housing". We will also look at networking strategies for social housing providers, and provide you with an update on current policy issues.

Disclaimer:

The opinions expressed in Housing Update maybe attributed to the Executive Officer and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of CHCWA as a Whole.