



# HOUSING UPDATE

Newsletter of the Community Housing Coalition of WA

December 2003

## Department Seeks Early Identification of Key Providers

**The Department of Housing and Works (DHW) are keen to start the process for selecting Key Providers in the metro area. At a forum on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, (on the DHW Community Housing Strategic Plan), Jeff Mould (Manager, Community Housing) said that the DHW hoped to be able to advertise in February 2004.**

The 40 participants who attended the forum looked at the definition and process for selecting Key Providers and defining compliant providers and non-compliant providers.

It was clear that the process for selecting Key Providers needed to be an open and transparent, staged process. It was also stated that regional housing associations shouldn't assume they would automatically become Key Providers. One unresolved issue was whether a Key Provider should have geographic boundaries. Jeff Mould stated a preference for them to be able to operate across the metropolitan area to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. However, a number of participants articulated the view that a Key Provider needed to be able to identify with a geographic community of interest.

In his presentation on the definitions, Jeff Mould said that the Department was not wedded to having three Key Providers in the metro area – a position in line with CHCWA's view that the number should reflect the diversity of the sector.

There seems to be broad agreement that Key Providers need to have at least the following characteristics:

- they should not specialise, but broadly address housing needs;
- they should work cooperatively with compliant providers, possibly under a federating model. This may also include providing resources to compliant and

non-compliant providers; and

- they should operate at a high level administratively, financially and in tenant participation practices.

There was also general agreement the Department needed to be clear on what it was offering to the Key Providers, prior to commencing the selection process.

Forum participants saw compliant providers as those having clear policies and procedures, being aligned with the principles of the WA Community Housing Code of Practice, maintaining very high tenant participation policies and processes and being financially viable. Financial viability was seen as being problematic for some specialist providers, and this needs to be taken into account. In addition, there was consensus that compliant providers should, where possible, capture Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA).

The general view was that the process for determining compliance should be one of self-evaluation with some form of validation. Compliance was not seen as being a one off process but one that

requires ongoing assessment.

As for non-compliant providers, the forum participants felt that they would demonstrate a lack of clear policies and procedures, have poor management practices and limited viability options. It became clear that there needed to be a series of benchmarks, and groups that did not meet these would be deemed to be non-compliant. The forum did acknowledge the need for an appeals mechanism, to allow groups to challenge their non-compliant status. It was suggested that non-compliant groups should be offered a positive training and support framework to become compliant.

The outcomes from the forum showed that, whilst there is engagement with the implementation, there is a lot of thinking yet to be done.



## Events Calendar

**Merry Christmas and a Safe and Happy New Year from all of us at CHCWA!**

**24<sup>th</sup> December to 5<sup>th</sup> January 2004 - CHCWA office closed.**

**January 5<sup>th</sup> 2004 – final day for membership renewals.**

**February 13<sup>th</sup> 2004 – DHW Joint Venture and CAP submissions due.**

**Please ring CHCWA on 9221 7933 for further information**

### Narrogin Cottage Homes

**If you think that regional areas of the state have no decent community housing, take a look at the facilities at Narrogin Cottage Homes and think again!**

Narrogin Cottage Homes (NCH) began just over 40 years ago when the community started to look for affordable housing for seniors that was independent of councils and other regulatory bodies which might have a negative impact on decision-making. The Country Women's Association donated some money, the local council donated some land, various service organisations donated some time and the first 25 units were built. A 16-bed hostel (Karinya) was also built on the site at that time. Over the following 20 years, more units were built using community funding.

With a population of around 6,000, Narrogin is a thriving commercial and administrative centre of the central southern region of WA and is at the heart of the state's richest farming land.

The historic trend for farmers and others from inland rural areas to retire to the seaside has changed and they now mostly stay close to the support of family and friends. Along with a generally ageing population, this has increased the demand for seniors' housing in regional agricultural areas.

"There's less of a leakage out of rural towns now than there was 20 years ago," says CEO Julie Christensen.

NCH offers a variety of housing options, including 40 rental units and 14 resident-funded community housing units. The latter are 2-bedroom duplex style, available on a Contract of Ownership. The incoming fee is \$90,000 and includes a unit which has been upgraded to 'as new condition' prior to allocation. Residents have a carport with large storage cupboard, a small private rear courtyard with clothesline, gas heating, phone connection, TV antenna and a choice of window treatments and soft furnishings. A monthly maintenance fee applies to

cover insurance, water and sewerage, upkeep of the grounds, repairs and administration.

In the past 10 years Homeswest has become a joint-venture partner in some of the units. Now, seniors who meet the

Having worked for 12 years in nursing, then in health service management and finance for 4 years, Julie came to NCH 18 months ago.

"My vision for aged care in this area is... I very much believe that somebody in rural



Joint venture units in spring

Homeswest criteria can live on the NCH property, which covers half a block in the town.

The whole facility is for low-care residents and NCH works in tandem with the local privately owned nursing home, where seniors who require 24-hour care may be accommodated. At Karinya there's mid-level care of the sort suitable for dementia patients who don't wander, but no secure facility.

The staff consist of three full-time – the CEO, the Deputy CEO, and a Day Supervisor, who is also the senior Carer - and there are 21 other staff, all employed on a permanent part-time basis to allow flexibility, as well as two casual staff.

(areas) has to drive education, training and other support networks because metro becomes very insular and often information doesn't get out to the country," she says.

Julie believes that Narrogin now caters very well for its seniors, because of the vision of community leaders 40 years ago. A local senior may now go from home – where they are encouraged to stay as long as possible with support from Silver Chain and Homecare – to an independent unit at NCH, then perhaps to Karinya and finally to the nursing home. Nevertheless, there is still a waiting list of around 45 people.

Narrogin and its surrounding districts are well serviced by eight general practitioners and a regional hospital. Residents usually

continued next page...

## **Narrogin Cottage Homes continued...**

keep seeing their own doctor once they move to the facility, offering good continuity of care.

Social activities are coordinated for all NCH residents, including those in the self-funded units. For example, all of the residents (35 in the hostel and almost 70 in independent accommodation) are invited to attend a Christmas Eve party.

The Board of NCH consists of at least one member from the Town council and one from the Shire, which aids the relationship and communication between the organisation and local government.

"If we know that in five years time we'd like to look at purchasing or building something, they may be able to mention (it) to their committee," Julie explains.

Acquiring land for the expansion of NCH is always a challenge.

"If I won Lotto, I would buy the rest of the block," she jokes.

"Because we are not-for-profit, if we manage to make a bit of a surplus, we do look around and take advantage of opportunities."

In the long term she expects that extensions will be mainly for more independent living units because that is the type of accommodation with the most demand.

The other 12 members of the Board are from the local community.

Julie explains that any surplus funds are ploughed back into the facility.

"Everything we do stays within the town," she says.

NCH hopes to re-build the oldest units so that the land will accommodate more. On 300m<sup>2</sup> there are currently five units that could be re-built to house eight or nine people with no loss of amenity – in fact the new units would be bigger and more comfortable.

"Those are the things we'd like to work with Homeswest to do – increase our capacity per square metre, still maintain a pleasant comfortable environment and provide people's perception of their requirements," says Julie.

## **Campaign Launch**

**Every week hundreds of women, children and men desperately seeking temporary shelter are turned away from services, owing to the lack of resources available to homeless West Australians.**

The Australian Services Union (ASU), along with the Women's Refuge Group (WRG), the Community Housing Coalition of WA (CHCWA) and the Youth Affairs Council (YACWA), launched a campaign in early December to get the message out: crisis accommodation services need all the help they can get if we are serious about eliminating homelessness.

A recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) report study found that on census night in 2001 there were 11,697 homeless people in WA – the third highest rate of homelessness in Australia.

Another recently released report by the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW) shows that at least 7,500 people Australia-wide are accommodated every day under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). However, around 315 people under 18, presenting independently of a parent or guardian, and 200 accompanying children – all of whom were requiring immediate accommodation – were turned away. This means that in Australia the chance of getting immediate accommodation in a crisis centre is less than fifty per cent.

Speaking at the launch, Father Brian Morrison (founder of Father Brian Crisis Care Centre) said the situation was the worst he'd seen and commented that workers are being stretched beyond their limits. The campaign, he said, aims to 'restore human dignity'.

Also speaking at the launch, Meredith Hammat (Assistant Branch Secretary, Australian Services Union) said she believes that up to half the crisis accommodation services in Western Australia will be forced to shut within the next couple of years.

Other speakers included Mike Newbiggin (CEO of CHCWA), 'Ned' a client of St. Bartholomew's House and Donna Littlefair, a Support Worker at Wyn Carr Women's Refuge.

The campaign will continue over the next 12 months and if you are interested in being actively involved in the campaign, please contact Kym Edwin at the ASU on 9427 7777 or 0400 080 194.

## **CHCWA working with WALGA to negotiate on rates**

**Rather than participating in adversarial litigation over rates exemptions, CHCWA has been working with the WA Local Government Association (WALGA) to create the 'Template for Negotiations'. This template is designed to assist community housing providers and local government authorities to develop partnerships that will benefit the whole community.**

At present the template has been distributed to local government for feedback, with responses required by the end of December.

CHCWA has also prepared a paper on the benefits of community housing to local government. The paper is available on the CHCWA website: [www.communityhousing.com.au](http://www.communityhousing.com.au)

We are in the initial stages of planning to hold a joint forum with WALGA early in 2004 to further develop the template.

These types of negotiations between local government authorities and the community housing sector are also happening in other parts of Australia. As a result, innovative partnerships between local government authorities and community housing organisations are providing cleverly-designed, affordable housing that is contributing to the sustainability of communities. For an example of this, see the Port Phillip website [www.portphillip.vic.gov.au-community\\_housing](http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au-community_housing)

## Fees Introduced for the Code of Practice

**At the 2003 CHCWA AGM in September a decision was taken to charge fees for the WA Community Housing Code of Practice and for a scale of fees to be proposed to the December CHCWA Council meeting.**

The rationale for introducing fees related to the costs involved in both administering and developing the Code. From 2004, registered organisations will be able to attend four meetings per year. These meetings – held over lunch – will provide organisations with the opportunity to hear from guest speakers and showcase their own examples of best practice.

The early stage of planning for an annual dinner featuring awards for examples of best practice is under way. CHCWA is also planning to produce a book showcasing inspirational stories and examples of best practice within community housing in WA.

At the Council meeting in December it was decided to set the following fees:

### Application Fees

From the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004 all organisations in the process of registration or re-registration are required to pay an application fee. (All fees quoted do not include GST.)

Organisations managing up to 30 tenancy rental units are charged an application fee of \$250.

Organisations managing over 30 tenancy rental units are charged an application fee of \$500.

The application fee entitles the organisation to three hours support from the CHCWA resource officer. This may include a visit to its offices, assessment of its application and a certificate presentation visit. Additional support is charged at an hourly rate (to be determined).

Registered organisations are obliged, upon registration, to provide a minimum number of hours of peer support to other organisations seeking registration:

- up to 4 hours for organisations managing less than 30 tenancy rental units, and
- up to 8 hours for organisations managing more than 30 tenancy rental units.

### Annual Fees

From the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004 all registered organisations are required to pay an annual fee of \$150 covering the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December.

For organisations with less than 30 tenancy rental units, the annual fee includes CHCWA membership.

For organisations with more than 30 tenancy rental units, members of CHCWA will be entitled to a 10% discount on the Code of Practice annual fees.

The West Australian Community Housing Code of Practice is a public statement about the way in which community housing organisations manage their affairs and provide services. The purpose of the Code is to establish a set of standards that can be used by community housing organisations, employees, tenants and prospective tenants, local communities and funding agencies to assess the practices of housing organisations. Compliance with the code and regular reviews will lead to an improvement in quality of the services provided<sup>1</sup>.

Next year will see the Community Housing Code of Practice become more significant as the Department of Housing and Works puts pressure on organisations to be registered.

CHCWA recognises the importance of providing proper resources for the Code and showcasing registered organisations.

1. Western Australian Community Housing Code of Practice booklet (2002), page 1.

## Accredited Training Within Reach

**After one year of negotiations with various stakeholders, including representatives from the Department of Housing and Works, the Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Directorate, and the Centre for Leadership and Community Development, it looks likely that accredited training in Certificate IV in Social Housing will be available from the beginning of 2004.**

Over this past year CHCWA has had regular meetings with Donna White and the staff at the Centre for Leadership to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which will enable the successful delivery of Social Housing Qualifications. Areas covered in the MOU include supplying resources for curriculum development, development of assessment tools, and delivering workplace training and assessment.

To ensure the development of a broadly supported strategy, CHCWA has also been working with a range of experts including the consultant from Cross Agency Strategic Planning and Operations Aboriginal Education Training Services Directorate and Community Services Education and Health Industry Training Advisory Board (ITAB), to create a training matrix for 2004 and to establish Traineeships.

CHCWA has also attended implementation workshops for the revised Community Services Training Package run by both the State and National ITABs, the National Vocational Education and Training (VET) strategic planning workshop, and has participated in the development of Model Training Programs.

Within the MOU, CHCWA has committed to promoting the availability of the training, assisting in identifying suitable trainers and encouraging community sector workers to enrol. Once the MOU is signed off, and when we have some firm dates, Diane Niyati will be in contact with all community housing providers with further details.

## Support and Advocacy Service for People in Private Rental Accommodation (SAS)

**When you have clients experiencing problems maintaining their private rental tenancy, the Support and Advocacy Service for people in Private Rental Accommodation (SAS) is available in the northern and eastern corridors of Perth.**

The SAS is a State Government initiative resulting from the State Homeless Taskforce recommendations in January 2002, which recognised the need to provide support and advocacy to help people keep their private rental homes and avoid homelessness.

This service aims to:

- assist families and individuals to maintain their tenancies
- assist families and individuals to develop links with community resources and other services
- assist families and individuals in increasing their knowledge and skills to maintain stable accommodation.

Case workers will work with people experiencing difficulty in maintaining their tenancy, with the aim of addressing issues that are unmanageable and may lead to eviction. They will also work with people who have been homeless and may need support to maintain new accommodation and avoid further episodes of homelessness.

Caseworkers will provide clients with:

- one on one in-home practical assistance and support
- information and referral to other relevant services
- coordination and linking to community resources
- advocacy and negotiation with real estate agents and/or landlords.

Centrecare SAS will accept referrals from real estate agents or landlords, potential clients and any other relevant agency in the following areas:

Northern Corridor -

Ashfield, Balga, Bayswater, Bedford, Beechboro, Caversham, Dianella, Eden Hill, Embleton, Inglewood, Kiara, Lockridge, Malaga, Maylands, Mirrabooka, Morley, Nollamara, Noranda and Westminster.

Eastern Corridor -

Bellevue, Guildford, Middle Swan, Midland, Midvale, Stratton, Swan View and Woodbridge.

For further information and referrals, please contact CENTRECARE Mirrabooka on 9440 0400.

## AGM Wrap

**The Annual General Meeting of CHCWA was held at the end of September and a half Board election washeld.**

The following Board members were appointed for two years:

Robert Chown (South City Housing)

Tony Grearly (Saint Patrick's Community Support Centre)

Roma Lewi (Melville Mews)

Lynne Evans (St Bartholomew's House), nominated by Ernie Hansen (Outcare)

Chairperson: Leanne Strommen (Centrecare)

Secretary: Mick O'Loughlen (First Fremantle Housing Cooperative)

Treasurer: Hans Gerritsen (City Housing)

The other Board member is Kathleen Gregory (Eastern Metropolitan Community Housing Association).

Thanks to the outgoing Board members Glen Sweeney (Salvation Army's Tandra Lodge) and Geoff King (Noongar Mia Mia)

A full list of the representatives on committees is available in the members-only section of the CHCWA web site [www.communityhousing.com.au](http://www.communityhousing.com.au)

## Tenant Participation

**Tenant participation is one of the features, the sector proudly boasts, that distinguishes community housing from other forms of rental housing. It was a major tenet underlying the development of the Community Housing Program, as it was anticipated that smaller localised agencies would be better placed to develop tenant participation strategies than large bureaucratic state housing authorities. But has tenant participation developed in the way that was hoped for, or has it perhaps 'slid down the agenda' as providers struggle to meet the more immediate needs of their clients and the requirements of their funding bodies?**

There are many barriers to tenant participation that would challenge the most experienced community development worker. It can take a long time to foster and develop, and it is extremely difficult to ensure that it is inclusive. Tenants may be sceptical of participation, having experienced 'tokenism' in other areas of their life, where although they may have been consulted about a decision, they have been given little or no power to affect it.

Much of what has been written about tenant participation relates to overseas experience, where large numbers of tenants live in close proximity and already know each other. In this situation, it is easier to encourage participation – especially if there are high levels of dissatisfaction! In WA, community housing tenants are generally spread across wide geographic areas, making it much more difficult to bring them together. The very high level of customer satisfaction in community housing can work against participation.

Where tenants do live in 'clusters', they are likely to have special needs and will require more innovative strategies to encourage and sustain their involvement. A really great example of putting tenants

continued next page...

## Tenant Participation continued...

in touch with each other has been developed by Milligan Housing Association, which has helped its tenants to develop computer skills and to get on-line to create an e-mail network.

So, given that it can be so difficult, is tenant participation worth the effort? YES! Tenant participation can benefit tenants, housing providers, and the broader community. Feedback from tenants can help to uncover waste and inefficiencies, and to develop more responsive services. Sharing information with tenants, especially in relation to service constraints, helps to reduce conflict, and a fact that is often overlooked is that tenants have a strong voice and can become a powerful lobby group. Through participation, tenants gain skills and confidence and can be encouraged to take an active role in the community. If housing is a right, then participation can be considered a responsibility!

Providers sometimes protect tenants from information that they judge may 'worry' them, which, while being understandable, could also be a little paternalistic. Tenants must be provided with information, because without it they cannot participate in meaningful ways. There is a whole continuum of possibilities for tenant participation, ranging from the sharing of information to tenant management of organisations. Providers and tenants must work together to decide what strategies are likely to be mutually beneficial.

The coming year will see some major changes in the management of community housing in WA and hopefully tenants will be offered the opportunity to have their say in the decisions that will affect their homes.



## Association Liability Insurance

(This article has been produced by Community Sector Services)

**The insurance liability risks faced by any association in Australia, including non-profit and charitable associations, have increased significantly in recent years. In addition to claims against an association as a whole, members of an association's board of management or management committee carry personal responsibility for their actions and, in certain circumstances, where they fail to act. Such liability is known as Association Liability.**

In our increasingly litigious society, many associations are beginning to realise that they can incur legal liability through the services they provide to their members or to members of the public. Appropriate insurance provides an association with protection against the legal liability it may incur through the conduct of its activities or the provision of services. Association Liability insurance is designed to cover the individual committee members, officers and Association for claims made against any of the named parties alleging wrongful acts in the carrying out of their duties for the Association. Wrongful acts include actions such as breach of trust, breach of duty, neglect, error or omission, misstatements or misleading statements.

Such insurance can provide cover for settlements, compensation and/or damages awarded against an insured party, as well as offering cover for the legal costs and other expenses associated with defending legal actions.

The *Associations Incorporation Act 1987* allows for the creation of a legal entity that is separate from the individual members and protects an individual member from being sued for the action

of another association member. However, the Act does not protect a member of an association from being sued for his or her own actions, such as negligence or wrongful acts.

In the face of the growing concern in Australia over the rapidly rising costs associated with all forms of liability insurance, as well as the belief that as a nation we are becoming too litigious and that individuals need to take greater responsibility for their own actions, Commonwealth, State and Territory ministers have undertaken a series of meetings to discuss these issues. The most recent (the sixth such meeting) was held in Adelaide on 6 August 2003.

Western Australia proclaimed the *Civil Liability Act 2002* on 1 January 2003. This Act offers a number of protective measures, including placing a cap on economic loss at the date of the damages award. The *Civil Liability Amendment Bill 2003* was introduced into Parliament on 20 March 2003, with the intention to both contain the current insurance crisis and help change social and legal attitudes towards the assumption of and liability for risk. It addresses a number of issues including the general principles for liability for negligence, contributory negligence, proportionate liability for economic loss and voluntary assumption of risk.

In seeking appropriate cover, organisations should discuss Association Liability insurance with their insurance broker to ensure that the cover suits the individual requirements of the association and its activities. Areas of concern may include cover for civil proceedings, Occupational Health and Safety actions, fraud and dishonesty and employee actions, as well as trusteeships and outside directorships.

### *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.*