



HOUSING UPDATE

Newsletter of the Community Housing Coalition of WA

December 2002

COMMUNITY HOUSING SECTOR MUST GROW: INNOVATE SAYS MINISTER

Viability, housing Indigenous people, waiting lists, accountability and sustainability are the key areas the community housing sector needs to improve according to the Minister for Housing and Works, the Honourable Tom Stephens MLC who was the Keynote Speaker at CHCWA's recent Annual General Meeting.

While acknowledging that community housing is a "vibrant affordable housing option" which provides "an affordable choice with more security than the private rental market and more attention to individual needs than public housing" the Minister cautioned housing providers that the sector is at a crossroads with representatives of the sector, including CHCWA and the Department of Housing and Works (DHW) working to develop a Strategic Plan for community housing for 2003 - 2007 .

"Growth of community housing is important to both the sector and the Department. In particular, it is important for it to achieve viability, that is, to grow to a level where it becomes independent, generates its own funding and becomes a major housing provider in Western Australia," he said.

Minister Stephens pointed to the recent successful negotiations with the Commonwealth Government which resulted in the CPI indexation of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement from 2003/04 onwards. This he said signaled a promising future for community housing.

The Minister stated that work needs to continue in the areas of alternative financing methods for the generation of capital funding to help grow community housing. He highlighted City Housing's work in East Perth and the Eastern

Metropolitan Community Housing Association's (EMCHA) project in Bullsbrook as examples of the innovation needed in the sector.

The Minister identified rationalising the management of housing stock as another way of improving the opportunities for agencies to grow. He pointed out that taking advantage of economies of scale is difficult when two thirds of agencies manage 10 or fewer properties.

Developing strategies to encourage agencies to merge their operations or joint venture operations to their areas of specialty was also identified as a way to expand the sector. The Minister singled out two CHCWA members undertaking successful joint ventures; Northside Housing Association with Joondalup Youth Support Services and EMCHA with the Belmont Housing Collective.

The implementation of the preferred provider strategy for the approval of new projects is another way of rationalising and assisting those agencies committed to the continued growth of the sector and the principles of good management practices.

The development of a joint community housing waiting list or an integration of lists with the public housing waiting lists is an area needing urgent attention according to the Minister. He commented on the difficulty of accepting that a potential community housing client has to lodge applications with several agencies if they wish to be considered for housing in several suburbs, when they only apply for public housing once. "What if this applicant obtains work at the other side of the city?" said the Minister. "At the moment they would have to reapply with another housing agency and start the waiting process again." He suggested a joint community housing waiting list; or the integration of a joint list with the public housing waiting list.

The Minister's comments have been broadly welcomed by CHCWA. They do however point to the need for an ongoing dialogue between the Department, community housing providers and Government to commit to sustainable strategies with the aim of making community housing in Western Australia "a major housing provider".

Events Calendar

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| 19 December 2002 | Professor Duncan MacLennan , McTaggart Professor, University of Glasgow, 10am - 12pm, Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service, 156 Wittenoom Street, East Perth |
| 20 December 2002 | CHCWA Members Only - Christmas Drinks from 4pm at The Grosvenor Hotel, corner Hill and Hay Streets, East Perth |
| 24 December 2002 | 12pm CHCWA office closes for Christmas |
| 2 January 2003 | CHCWA office re-opens |

Please ring CHCWA on 9221 7933 for further information

CHCWA MEMBER PROFILE

WONGATHA WONGANARRA ABORIGINAL CORP.

Wongatha Wonganarra Aboriginal Corporation (WWAC) was formed in 1974 with the objective of facilitating the social and economic development of Aboriginal people in the Laverton region.

In 1991 the body was incorporated under the Federal Aboriginal Corporations Registrar.

WWAC provides services for a resident population of approximately three hundred and a transient population of up to fifteen hundred Aboriginal people. Membership of the organization is open to all adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people resident in the Laverton shire.

Approximately 180 people are housed by WWAC. Their stock includes 15 houses at the Wongatha Village and two in Laverton which the Corporation owns. An additional 13 houses in Laverton are leased from the Department of Housing and Works (DHW) and are currently undergoing major capital upgrades as part of WWAC's construction training program.

As part of its commitment to housing aboriginal people, WWAC provides the municipal service and management of the Wongatha Village as well as the provision, maintenance and administration of town housing and emergency relief services.

WWAC Manager, Jan Douglas identifies semi-supported housing or hostel accommodation as the most pressing need in the community. This is particularly important in addressing the specific needs of the regular influx of visitors from other communities who travel through Laverton on their way to remote Aboriginal communities.

But perhaps the biggest issue for WWAC is the ability to attract



qualified staff in the long term. While this is an issue for most remote centers, WWAC have a particular concern that their funding is not adequate to attract people to the positions for an extended period. They believe this could be countered if there were appropriate training formats in place that could be blocked into a qualification and therefore assist in the development of the community's skills base.

In response to this need, Diane Niyati, CHCWA's Development Officer, delivered workplace training and assessments to WWAC in 2001 which resulted in 4 employees receiving the Certificate III in Community Housing while another 3 staff achieved statements of attainment in the Certificate III in Community Housing.

WWAC also provide training opportunities in a number of areas including clerical, management and construction work via DHW's Management Support Program, (MSP) for Community members.

The Management Support Program (MSP) aims to assist Aboriginal community organisations address issues of management, repairs and maintenance of their housing stock.

The MSP consists of two components, the development of skills in repairs and maintenance; and the development of appropriate systems and skills to enable the community to manage their houses effectively.

But will housing is WWAC's core business, it is just one aspect of the services

provided to the Laverton community. They also operate the Aboriginal Environmental Health program, the Centrelink agency, administer and staff the Stay at School lunch program, run cross cultural activities including workshops for visiting university staff and students, coordinate cultural maintenance projects, as well as art, craft, sport and recreation activities

WWAC also manages to be a local outpost of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program as part of the wider regional network which includes placement and training across their corporate operations.

As well WWAC places importance on the establishment and maintenance of networks, partnerships and contacts with other organizations and individuals to enhance community goals and access to information sharing. They undertake advocacy and representative activities on behalf of membership and service clients and have appeared before Parliamentary Committees arguing the case for better service delivery in remote communities.

They are therefore a valued and central participant in the wider Laverton community and are involved in a number of activities and projects including the operation of the WWAC Warden's / Patrol as a component of ongoing justice and substance misuse initiatives. They are currently seeking to expand the scheme and work toward having by-laws in some of their residential areas. As well, WWAC is represented on the working group for a safe house in Laverton.

Work on these projects will continue 2003 but a focus on setting up a work/training place childcare facility at their office and addressing some substance abuse issues will gain momentum next year.

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

DHW STRATEGIC PLAN SHORT ON DETAIL SAY PROVIDERS



As the peak body for community housing providers, CHCWA recently ran a series of consultative meetings to gather the sector's views on the Department of Housing and Works (DHW) draft Community Housing Strategic Plan for 2003 - 2007.

This was an opportunity for providers, tenants and other stakeholders to provide input into the draft plan prior to it going to the Board of Commissioners of Homeswest.

CHCWA undertook consultations with members and the broader sector in Perth and four major regional centres.

Fifty-five different providers and stakeholders attended the meetings to hear about the Department's vision for the future of the sector and have their say.

The Plan includes a number of strategies aimed at the growth of the sector as well as foreshadowing a new environment for doing business with the Department.

The main features are the introduction of the concept of the 'key provider,' a move towards consolidation of the number of providers and increased accountability and accessibility measures for the sector.

While the overall direction of the Strategic Plan was generally supported, particularly in regards to growth, concerns were expressed about maintaining the diversity and responsiveness of the sector.

This particularly related to the targeting of growth to 'key providers' only, and a lack of detail about the processes and consequences in determining 'key providers' and 'ineffective providers.' Clarification is also needed about how the DHW's 'key providers' might fit with preferred provider status from the Department of Community Development, the Mental Health Division of the Health Department and the Disability Services Commission, as these relate to the support for a variety of housing programs.

The Steering Committee for the Strategic Plan has met again to discuss the outcomes of the consultations and undertake further work on areas of concern to the sector. It

was thought that the draft would be submitted to the Board of Commissioners in December, this now appears to be unlikely.

It now appears that further work will be undertaken to 'unpack' a number of areas to allow for a clearer understanding of how certain aspects of the plan may unfold, such as 'key providers'.

From the Department's point of view, the cost of the plan needs to be worked out.

CHCWA understands that the Board has not reached a consensus position on the plan, particularly around further CSHA funding being made available and stock transfers. This would effectively remove the major growth strategy.

However, if all that is left is the current growth and increased pressure on providers and infrastructure the plan seems likely to be in trouble.

Without the growth, the plan risks becoming a 'steady as she goes' strategy and will result in another opportunity missed for the potential of community housing to be realised.

At the end of the day, it may come down to a political decision in which case community housing providers will have to embrace the concerns of both the Department and the Minister to get the growth it needs.

What the process of developing the draft Strategic Plan has achieved is to bring into clearer focus the key issues.

Mike Newbigin

Professor Duncan Maclennan in Perth

Duncan Maclennan is visiting Perth for two days only and will be speaking on Thursday 19th December from 10am-12pm at Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service, 156 Wittenoom St. East Perth.

Duncan Maclennan is the McTaggart Professor of Land Economics and Finance, at the University of Glasgow, as well as the Director ESRC 'Cities' Programme, and Chairman of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Area Regeneration Programme. He has held a variety of academic posts in Applied Economics, Urban Studies and Housing and Urban Research at the Universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow and a broad range of consulting roles.

Professor Maclennan is currently on secondment as Adviser to the First Minister of Scotland and was largely responsible for designing and driving forward the large project to transfer Glasgow's municipal housing to the not-for-profit sector as well as developing the framework for Scotland's first Annual Report on Social Justice.

Professor Maclennan is an internationally respected authority on urban planning having advised a number of foreign governments, the OECD, USAID, World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Duncan Maclennan is an inspirational speaker with a passion for the importance of Place, Neighbourhood and Community. He will be speaking on the development of affordable housing in inner city areas and the development of housing associations in the U.K.

For more information contact Diane Niyati at CHCWA



Merry Christmas

**FROM THE BOARD AND STAFF
OF THE
COMMUNITY HOUSING COALITION
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

CENTRELINK SERVICES FOR HOUSING PROVIDERS

Recent queries from housing providers about their status when it comes to accessing the Rent Assistance paid to their tenants has prompted Centrelink to clarify a number of issues for CHCWA members.

Rent Assistance is a supplementary payment available to eligible Centrelink customers to assist them with renting accommodation in the private rental market. Rent Assistance is not intended to cover the full cost of an individual's rent. Part of each customer's payment from Centrelink includes a component for housing costs. People receiving payments from Centrelink are expected to use part of their payment to meet these costs.

Rent Assistance is paid to eligible customers when they have a liability to pay rent - it is not linked to whether the rent has actually been paid and Centrelink cannot withhold Rent Assistance while the customer has an ongoing rent liability. As Rent Assistance is a social security payment, by law, Centrelink cannot pay Rent Assistance to a third party, including landlords, without the customer's consent.

Centrelink have explored various options for verifying rent payments on a more regular basis. If Centrelink were to verify all rental payments with landlords on a

fortnightly basis, it would make the payment system hugely expensive to administer and unduly intrusive in the private lives of many people. However, Centrelink operates data matching systems to review selected customers and detect overpayments. In addition, Centrelink investigates all tip-offs of possible fraudulent activity received from members of the public.

To assist in the payment of rent in the private rental market, Centrelink operates a facility called Centrepay to assist landlords and tenants. Centrepay allows Centrelink customers to have automatic deductions taken from their Centrelink payments, generally fortnightly, for various purposes, such as payment of rent, household utilities, education fees etc.

Once a particular service provider has been registered with Centrepay, their customers who are in receipt of a Centrelink payment can nominate to use the deduction service. This service is seen to give Centrelink customers the same choice for income management as the rest of the community and service providers see major advantages in receiving payments on a regular and timely basis.

Service providers interested in using



Centrepay must sign a standard government agreement. If a service provider is not currently registered, they should contact Centrelink and arrange to complete an agreement. If the service provider satisfies Centrelink's criteria for registration, the agreement will be countersigned by a Centrelink delegate and arrangements can then be made for Centrelink customers to commence deductions to the service provider.

Once registered, service providers do pay an administrative fee for each deduction transaction processed. Further details, including fee structures, can be obtained by contacting the Centrepay Administration Team. The terms and conditions under which a service provider registers with Centrelink require them to agree that they will not pass the transaction fee on to the customer.

For further information about Centrepay please contact, Trevor Whitmore, Centrepay Account Manager for WA on;

Phone; 08 92345274

Fax; 08 92345299

Mobile; 0421379837

Alternatively call 1800 044 063 or e-mail at centrepay.west.w@centrelink.gov.au.

NEW CHCWA WEBSITE!

CHCWA's new website is up and running!

It is full of vital information for housing providers including information on hot issues, training opportunities, the Code of Practice as well as back copies of the Housing Update and other papers and reports.

There is a dedicated Members Page which provides CHCWA members with advance notice of upcoming events and training opportunities as well as access to a selection of internal documents, submissions and opportunities to have an input into policy. To get your User Name and Password to access the Members Page, please call CHCWA on 9221 7933.

www.communityhousing.com.au

(Editors note: under the Social Security Act 1991, Module D, Section 1068AD1, a person qualifies for rent assistance if:

- (a) "the person is not an ineligible homeowner; and*
- (b) the person is not an aged care resident; and*
- (c) the person pays, or is liable to pay, rent (other than Government rent);"*

Government rent is defined under Section 13, 13, (1) which says "Government rent means rent payable to any of the following authorities...

(f) the State Housing Commission established by a law of Western Australia")

EMERGING CO-OPS - WHERE TO NOW?

CHCWA and FOHCOL recently hosted a forum for groups wishing to establish new housing Co-ops.

The forum was convened by FOHCOL's Robyn Williams and attended by the three main emerging Co-ops; Curedale, First City and Challis, with the goal of determining the next step in the development of their projects. CHCWA discussed the current political environment for emerging Co-ops and encouraged members to assess their current and future training needs to ensure success for their Co-op.

Jeff Mould, DHW's Manager of Community Housing, provided advice on the realities of dealing with the Department and suggested emerging Co-ops think about the following points when planning their next move:

- o The need to look at potential for partnerships with preferred providers like Regional Housing Associations.
- o The importance of attracting outside capital with 100% grants no longer a certainty.
- o The need to include departmental target groups (indigenous, aged, disabled) in their plans to ensure a healthy share of departmental funding.

Perhaps the most valuable aspects of the forum was the exchange of ideas among emerging Co-ops and the sense of connection each Co-op now has with each other.

Cooperation Amongst Co-ops: Conference 2002

by Robyn Williams*

On 15-17 November, members and supporters of the housing cooperative sector in Western Australia gathered at Fairbridge Farm to share information and experiences.

The theme of Cooperation Amongst Coops kicked off with a training session on Cooperation and Social Capital, presented by Circle Speak facilitators over from Sydney. After the opening celebration on Saturday morning, Queensland guest, Margi O'Connell, recounted her experiences at the Cooperative Housing Colloquium in Turkey last May.

The next session included the discussion of options for the expansion stage of the Coop Maintenance Trust. The Trust, initiated by CHCWA's Mike Newbigin when he was FOHCOL's co-ordinator, enables the small groups to attract higher interest rates through consolidating their long-term maintenance funds, while ensuring access by each client group. In

another group, Di Niyati from CHCWA clarified the requirements of the Code of Practice while Margi explored the formation of a national network.

After lunch, Persistence of Vision facilitator, Robyn Williams, introduced Open Space Technology, from which the afternoons' agenda items arose. These included a Community Housing Strategic Plan consultation, rental policy, co-op management issues, self-care, Salsa and more. Open Space enables the passion of participants to be expressed within a simple and flexible structure. The children joined the adults for cooperative games and the day ended with dinner under the stars.

After the FOHCOL AGM and action planning for the sector on Sunday, the conference attendees gathered for the closing ritual where the children had a jolly time bursting balloons.

**Robyn Williams is the FOHCOL proxy on the CHSC and a CHSC representative on the Community Housing Steering Committee.*

Community Housing Standing Committee - gone!

A restructure of the standing committees of the Housing Advisory Committee has seen the disappearance of the CHSC.

The decision at the Housing Advisory Committee (HAC) meeting on the 11th of December sees the disappearance of the three existing standing committees and the creation of two new ones.

Gone are the Rental Sector Standing Committee (RSSC), the CHSC and the Finance and Home Ownership Standing Committee (FHOSC).

Created are the Affordable Housing Standing Committee (AHSC) and the Access and Equity Standing Committee

(AESC). In addition there is the creation of a Homeswest Operational Standing Committee (HOSC).

The CHSC had stated its desire to remain a separate Standing Committee.

Of most interest to the community housing sector is the new Affordable Housing Standing Committee (AHSC).

Under the draft terms of reference, the new AHSC has a general role to provide advice to the Minister and the Department on affordable housing policy and program initiatives.

It also has some specific tasks in relation to community housing.

Most notably to develop and monitor the implementation of the Community

Housing Strategic Plan and to establish alternative funding sources for community housing.

In meeting expectations, the Committee will face a number of challenges, including how to deal with such a broad agenda and a potential membership of some fourteen organisations.

There will be a number of implementation and membership issues to resolve (also learning the new acronyms) prior to the February HAC meeting and CHCWA has the role of Secretariat. It looks like January isn't shaping up to be much of a break.

Mike Newbigin

MEMBERSHIPS ARE NOW DUE!!

If you have not renewed your membership of CHCWA now is the time to do so to ensure you continue to benefit from being part of the community housing sector's key peak body.

Membership of CHCWA is an important way of ensuring your organisation has a say in shaping the political and social landscape in ways that best serve the needs of providers and tenants.

CHCWA speaks with a strong voice for the sector, as well as providing a platform for discussing policy direction and best practice

Membership also offers:

Automatic access to **CSS**, the Community Sector Services common insurance arrangement.

Regular **Council** meetings, to enable members to offer input into CHCWA policy positions.

Members-only **social functions**, giving you the opportunity to meet other providers in a social setting.

Workshops and forums, providing opportunities to discuss technical, business and political matters relating to the sector.

Discounts on **training** workshops.

Research and statistical information.

Members' section on the **web site**, where you will find detailed information on current events, training opportunities and invitations to members-only functions.

Opportunity for **free advertising** on our website.

Free **publications**, including:

Housing Update – a quarterly newsletter of current issues, activities and initiatives

The CHC Pen – a members only weekly e-bulletin on specific activities undertaken by CHCWA as well as advance notice of training, events and forums.

AGM WRAP UP

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

The following Board members were appointed for 2 years:

Chairperson: Leanne Strommen (*Centrecare*)

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

Treasurer: Hans Gerritsen, (*City Housing*)

Board: Kathleen Gregory, (*Eastern Metropolitan Community Housing Association*).

The remaining Board members terms expire in 2003. They are Lynne Evans (*St Bartholomew's House*), Roma Lewi (*Melville Mews*), Ernie Hanson (*Outcare*), Geoff King (*Noongar Mia Mia*) and Glen Sweeney, (*Tanderra Lodge*).

Representatives were also appointed to the following positions at the AGM:

National Community Housing Forum-
Hans Gerritsen (*City Housing*) Proxy - Kaz Sternberg (*Fremantle Housing Association*)

Community Housing Federation of Australia - Diane Niyati (*CHCWA Sector Development Officer*)

Community Sector Services - Mike Newbiggin (*CHCWA Executive Officer*)

SAAP Training Committee - Lynne Evans (*St Bartholomew's House*)

ILP Providers Meeting - Marie Noble (*Wesley Housing*)

YES, I would like more information about becoming a member of the COMMUNITY HOUSING COALITION OF WA.

Organisation Name:

Contact Person:

Address:

..... Postcode:

Send to: CHCWA, 33 Moore Street, East Perth, WA, 6004 or fax: 9221 7944