



Inaugural year of the Best Practice Unit shows need in the sector

The Best Practice Unit has now been operational for nearly twelve months, and to say it has been a busy year would be somewhat of an understatement. The unit does not have a large staff at the present time, and endeavors to meet a number of objectives in relation to the development and delivery of training, professional development, and the WA Community Housing Code of Practice.

A high priority this year has been the implementation of the recommendations of the review of the code, which was completed in May 2005. This has involved substantial development of the administrative protocols that underpin the operation of the code, and work to 'remodel' the code.

This work would not be possible without the commitment of the Code of Practice Monitoring Committee (COPMC) and the National Standards Working Group (NSWG). Whilst the NSWG was formed to consider the relationship of the WA Code to the National Community Housing Standards, members have given invaluable feedback on how the code could be modified to facilitate a process of articulation between the code and the standards. The 'new look' code should also assist organisations that have to address a number of other standards, for

example, the non-government mental health and disability standards, to streamline their policy development rather than creating multiple documents.

It has been suggested that registration with the code could be viewed as a 'first step' towards accreditation for those organisations that aspire to full accreditation against the national



CHCWA Senior Policy Officer Tina Merry with the CHCWA Code of Practice Register.

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What's on?

CHCWA Council Meeting Wednesday, 5th July 2006, 10am to 12.30pm

Continue the discussion from the Regulation Options Roundtable or ask questions about Code of Practice issues.

NSW Community Housing Conference 16th - 17th August 2006

"Vibrant Communities now and into the future" – will be held at the Newcastle City Hall. For more info see www.hotelnetwork.com.au

Beyond the Boundaries: Families and Professionals Working Together Symposium 21st - 22nd September 2006

Organised by Palmerston Association Inc and the Drug and Alcohol Office with contributing agencies including the WA Network of Drug and Alcohol Agencies (WANADA), South East Metropolitan Community Drug Service Team, WA family representatives of the Local Drug Action Group and VOICE. Exploring 'Beyond the Boundaries' when considering current issues, research and treatment options and trying to gain a better understanding of service delivery. Phone (08) 9328 7355 or e-mail mail@palmerston.org.au

The Youth Affairs Council of WA 2006 Conference: Resilience: Build it 2nd - 3rd November 2006 at Hotel Grand Chancellor, Perth

Has youth work subtly changed from an enabling practice to a helper model? Do we serve to build young people's resilience and coping skills or do we serve to just help them?

These questions and more will be debated during the youth sector's most significant and important professional development opportunity.

Call YACWA on 9485 2750 or e-mail karyn@yacwa.org.au

Inaugural year of the Best Practice Unit shows need in the sector CONTINUED

standards. The NSWG plan to release a report of their activities early in 2007 when their recommendations, and a 'revised code' will be available for broader consultation with the sector.

At a time when the whole sector is debating how the Western Australian community housing sector should be regulated, it has been imperative to consider the future of the code, to strengthen it, and to position it well in anticipation of any developments in the regulatory debate. Although research undertaken by the NSWG suggests that the code is significantly under resourced compared to accreditation units interstate, the code is functioning well and the systems which sit behind it are well developed.

In order to help organisations seeking to register with the code, the BPU has delivered registration forums in both regional and metro locations. As is always the case, one of the major benefits of these sessions to participating groups is the opportunity they offer to network and learn from each other. At the Baldivis forum, there were representatives from local government, the co-ops, the crisis sector, and an emerging community housing provider. The debate was lively, and I am sure that everyone went away with a new perspective on how they might do business in the future.

Another aspect to this work is developing appropriate resources – both to support

the delivery of training, but also to possibly develop simple templates that may be used by other organisations.

A number of organisations are to be congratulated on their registration, or re registration with the code in the past twelve months. The process of registration, whilst fairly intense, certainly seems to focus organisations, and build their commitment to continuous improvement. This is evident by the number of staff from registered and organisations working towards registration that regularly attend training and professional development offered by the BPU.

Work continues to develop and streamline the registration process, particularly how to respond to the diversity of the sector, without any loss of consistency in the assessment process. The NSWG continues to explore the best way to develop and train a number of 'peer evaluators' who could potentially play an important role in the registration process.

The work of the BPU has also been recognised and continues to be supported by the Department of Housing and Works. The DHW have acknowledged the value of the CHCWA consultation and BPU training around the introduction of the new CDHP Lease Agreement, especially the benefit of forums which involved both departmental and community sector staff. There

appears to be real potential to work with the department in the future to maximize opportunities for training and professional development for all staff working in the social housing sector.

The most recent activity of the BPU was the 'No More Monkey Business' asset management forum which took place at Perth Zoo on 9th of May 2006. The session was very well attended (in fact, all places were filled) and participants, in addition to presentations from BPU staff, enjoyed presentations from Housepect and Global IQ. It is important that we don't fall behind the private sector, and these presentations allowed providers to consider the usefulness of products developed in the private sector in assisting them to meet their maintenance and asset management responsibilities.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved with the BPU for their support and encouragement during this first twelve months of operation, and sincerely hope that, over time, the unit will be able to expand its activities to meet the ever increasing demands of the sector as well as balancing the response to increasing Governmental expectations.

Tina Merry
Senior Policy Officer

Swan Emergency Accommodation gains Code of Practice registration



Swan Emergency Accommodation Executive Officer Don Tunnicliffe and Program Manager Kay Hlaing at the SEA Administration Centre and Youth Hostel also called the Snow Bennett Youth Service.

After helping people who experience homelessness in the Midland area since 1979, Swan Emergency Accommodation (SEA) gained registration with the WA Community Housing Code of Practice in March 2006 after a process lasting over 12 months.

Don Tunnicliffe, Executive Officer of SEA, said the Code of Practice registration did not change the way that SEA conducted its business but only required a few modifications to its operations to meet registration requirements. He said registration was a measure of how the service was conducted and it would help ensure SEA could continue operating in the future.

SEA is divided into three distinct physical areas of operation in the Swan region. The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

(SAAP) funded service currently manages 14 crisis/transitional units and a youth hostel for up to 10 young people.

The SEA Youth Hostel, or the Snow Bennett Youth Service, comprises a 10 bed hostel for crisis accommodation and two medium-term supported accommodation units. The SEA Administration Centre is located in the Youth Service building just out of central Midland.

The Youth Service includes in-service counselling, assessment and referral, Outreach and recreation.

The SEA Family Centre, also called the Transea Family Centre, comprises five crisis accommodation units and four medium-term community based housing units and is based a ten minute drive from the central SEA office. The centre provides assessment and referral, Outreach, mediation, in-

service counselling, advocacy, a client child-minding facility and brokerage.

The third specific location is the SEA Aboriginal Services, also known as the Karnany Aboriginal Centre, comprising crisis accommodation, housing and advocacy, information, emergency relief, a drop-in centre, information/referrals and an agent for NILS (low cost loans for purchase of white goods).

In terms of support, there is SEADEP, the Swan Emergency Accommodation Drug Education Program, which provides group education sessions, one on one assessment and follow-up, on-going practical support, Outreach to former clients, recreational activities and art activities.

Since its establishment, SEA has successfully forged links with several community organisations to help their tenants develop skills and resources

that will protect them from future incidences of homelessness.

This informal network, according to Don Tunnicliffe, is an important part of how the SEA goes about its business.

He says the network provides support in a range of different areas, from "sourcing enough blankets in the winter, to legal advice, to providing advice on filling in necessary application forms for rental accommodation".

Those who use the service are shown how to do such tasks but are encouraged to do the jobs themselves and not rely on staff to do the work for them. This helps SEA to achieve its aim of equipping those people with the necessary skills to help them when they have to 'go it alone.'

Mr Tunnicliffe said many people who sought the support of SEA had difficulty facing 'institutions' like CentreLink, health service providers, legal advice providers and others.

It is a goal of the Karnary Aboriginal Centre to have representatives of such organisations available for about a day a week to give advice to those people in a non-pressured environment so that the required outcomes can be achieved.

Karnary in one month alone received more than 383 enquiries from local families for support of all types, a figure which Mr Tunnicliffe said was conservative. He said there was an equal number, if not more, of enquiries in the Family Centre and the Snow Bennett Youth Service.

Mr Tunnicliffe also made the observation that housing has become more restricted due to recent redevelopment work in the Midland area removing a lot of low cost rental accommodation.

SEA is a 'forward looking' organisation with a commitment to the development of their Board and staff to ensure their continued response to the needs of their tenants and

local community. Their Code of Practice registration will assist this commitment.

The COP is administered according to Administrative Protocols set by the Code of Practice Monitoring Committee (COPMC). The committee is chaired by an Officer of CHCWA and it is made up of representatives of housing providers and tenants as well as an independent legal representative.

The Code of Practice protocols provide mechanisms for:

- Housing providers to become registered as compliant with the Code
- Taking complaints against registered organisations
- Determining eligibility of complaints
- Hearing complaints
- Taking actions where complaints are considered justified
- Reviewing the Code at regular intervals.

AHURI Homelessness Research project involves a number of CHCWA members

One of the most far-reaching and innovative research projects Australia has seen in the homelessness field started in WA this April.

The study, led by Paul Flatau of Murdoch University (Senior Lecturer in Economics), is examining the issue of the cost effectiveness of homelessness prevention and support programs operating in WA. The cost-effectiveness of a homelessness prevention or support program refers to the outcomes achieved by clients relative to the costs of providing support. The latter takes into account the fact that many homelessness prevention and support programs actually save the community money elsewhere such as in the health, justice and income support fields. The project involves close collaboration between the research team and community service organisations many of whom are members of CHCWA.

This study attempts to measure the outcomes and costs of homelessness prevention and support services operating in Perth, the South-West and the Southern regions of Western Australia. In so doing it represents the first major attempt at a comprehensive economic evaluation of homelessness prevention and support services in Australia. The study is gathering primary research evidence on client outcomes and costs using a retrospective-

prospective methodology. In this approach, data is captured on the position and history of the client as they enter a service.

For case-managed clients, progress through the support period and beyond is assessed at discrete intervals over a 12-month period. In addition to gathering and analysing primary research data, the study will also utilise existing administrative data sources to examine client outcomes and levels of service utilisation. The study will attempt to estimate the differences that services make to the lives of those who receive support taking into account their needs, background and forms of support.

The study's research design recognises that a quantitative analysis of service outcomes cannot fully capture all forms of outcomes achieved by clients nor impart the varied ways life histories, life circumstances and life events intervene to affect client outcomes. A quantitative analysis also does not readily highlight the dynamics surrounding the role of agencies and agency staff in affecting change. The qualitative interviews with service providers and clients of homelessness prevention and support programs will provide the project with data on sensitive and complex issues that are not easily obtained through structured questionnaires or existing data sources.

After a long period trialing survey forms with agencies, the project is now in the field. Information on the experiences of clients prior to receiving support and in the immediate period after they receive assistance from agencies is now being collected across a wide variety of programs and agencies. Only clients who provide informed consent are being interviewed as part of the research project.

The key sectors that the project is covering include the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) and a range of homelessness prevention programs in Western Australia funded by the Western Australian Government. The latter comprise the Community Transitional Accommodation and Support Service (TASS) and the Re-entry Link program designed to assist prisoners re-enter into the community on release; and the Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP) and Private Rental Support and Advocacy Program, designed to assist public and private tenants maintain their tenancies. The project is also collecting data in Community Day Centres.

Results from the first wave of surveys will be available in August.

Certificate IV in Social Housing Graduation brings key players together

“Despite having been Outcare’s Accommodation Manager for 14 years and a board member of CHCWA, I still gained valuable insight into the importance of social housing” – graduate Ernie Hansen.



Kathy Gosper and Ernie Hansen from Outcare celebrate receiving their Graduation Certificates from the Minister for Housing and Works, Michelle Roberts.

The first round of graduates were congratulated by the new Minister for Housing and Works, Michelle Roberts, at a graduation at the Heathcote Centre for Leadership and Community Development in March 2006.

The Minister presented certificates to those students who were able to attend, from both the community housing sector and the Department of Housing and Works.

The presentation ceremony was conducted to celebrate the TAFE graduation of the first students to qualify in the Certificate IV in Social Housing course – many of whom completed their course some time

ago. Those who were unable to attend the graduation ceremony were sent their certificates in the mail and all future graduates will receive their certificates in this way.

Ernie Hansen, Accommodation Manager at Outcare, who completed the course last year, said, “Increased knowledge and understanding was good enough reason for me to undertake the Certificate IV in Social Housing. That heightened awareness has enabled me to be more effective in the day to day running of Outcare’s accommodation service and in the support we provide to our tenants”. He encourages all those involved in social housing to enrol saying they will certainly benefit from the course.

Even though the Industry Reference Group and other key players were very pleased to see the first graduates honoured with a formal graduation, they also acknowledge there have been some emerging issues around delivery. This is to be expected in the bedding down of the course from the initial impetus of simply getting the course up and running. The IRG are presently closely involved in both monitoring the course and looking at improvements where appropriate. As flagged previously CHCWA is working in the longer term on

making further availability for regional and remotely based community housing sector based workers, as there has been interest expressed by workers in these areas.

The Certificate IV in Social Housing Qualification covers workers who are engaged in delivering social housing services to tenants and the community and would be suitable for policy workers in both government and non-government sector. Graduates at this level need to have an understanding of Indigenous culture and history and are required to work with local communities in the provision of services.

Mariyon Slany

Executive Officer, CHCWA



The new DHW Director General, Bob Mitchell, CHCWA’s Chairperson Lynne Evans and Executive Officer Mariyon Slany at the Graduation Ceremony.

Key Providers in the metropolitan area working hard since consolidation joined the agenda

The consolidation of community housing providers in WA (in the metropolitan area) is a key component of the current Department of Housing and Works Community Housing Strategic Plan and is based on the Key Provider strategy from 2004. The process has been going on for some time as City Housing, EMCHA and Northside lodged a submission for Key Housing Provider status with DHW in late November 2004 with Key Housing Provider status being awarded to Foundation Housing as the merged entity in July, 2005.

Meanwhile to cover the entire south metropolitan area Milligan, South City Housing and the Fremantle Housing Association officially merged (on May 1st 06) to become **Access Housing Association (AHA)** with branch offices in Gosnells, Mandurah and Fremantle and a total property portfolio of 480 units.

One of the key issues has been around smaller providers affected by these two mergers. The Regional Community Housing Provider Network is developing a set of criteria to assist with this process. However

AHA are presently working with DHW to clarify processes around Key Providers taking on management of properties from smaller funded (primarily support providers) as to date the process has been very ad hoc. As an example AHA were approached to take on management of a property with one week’s notice. There had been no contact from either DHW or the support agency prior to that point with the view to developing a relationship, and subsequently a Memorandum of Understanding. Foundation Housing has also had similar experiences.



Members of the Access Housing Association team (left to right) Leo Abbs, Receptionist, Kaz Sternberg, General Manager and Housing Manager Pauline Howrie.

AHA's three organisations are described by General Manager Kaz Sternberg as "generic housing providers in terms of client groups" with the only difference being that Milligan runs a support service for the Independent Living Program clients and provides psycho-social and independent living support along with benevolent landlord support.

In case you are wondering how a merger is actually carried out, these are some of the steps followed by AHA. An MoU was set up and it was coordinated by a Working Party made up of one Board member from the three organisations and the three managers. Fundamental principles were set up to guide the process which included:

- Preservation of the existence and integrity of the regional office's identities;
- Transparent and consultative processes;
- The three merging organisations as equal players with the new Board having equal representation from the three separate organisations;
- The organisation will not seek to develop outside of the agreed boundaries of operation;
- Maintain quality of service to tenants, affordability, tenant participation and feedback;
- Centralisation of wait list and data collection;
- Sustainability and innovation.

The complexities of choosing the appropriate vehicle to run AHA have resulted in remaining as an incorporated association after extensively examining company compliance and liability issues. Fremantle Housing Association became the legal entity remaining (with a name change to Access Housing Association) and Milligan Foundation and South City Housing transferred assets over and are now in the process of winding up.

Tom Bourke House in Newcastle Street, Northbridge, one of the 15 lodging houses run by Foundation Housing.

There is an unfathomable amount of work being carried out on a number of fronts in a merger process, including - moving to a generic set of accounts in MYOB; developing a new web based database for property and tenancy management (including statistics, tenant payments, maintenance, assets); centralising payroll; putting a new AWA in place for all employees; reviewing salaries and job descriptions; employing new staff where relevant; and development of appropriate procedures. Access Housing specifically received a Lotterywest grant allowing a complete IT upgrade and putting in place an intranet system to run MYOB Enterprise and the database across all offices.

AHA's priority at the moment is organisationally focused and working towards future efficiency, centralisation of some administrative functions, managing the many small problems that occur on a daily basis, adapting to working in a much larger organisation with the associated changes that are inevitable and hopefully ending up with the capacity to provide a more responsive and timely service to our client groups.

The broader challenge is to be able to increase housing provision within a broader, more innovative and sustainable framework. AHA's Kaz Sternberg says, "we have a fantastic staff team to thank for managing the day to day challenges. Without their commitment, patience and willingness to change and adapt practices, the merger would have not have been a success".



Foundation Housing merged Perth Inner City Housing Association, Eastern Metropolitan Community Housing Association and Northside Housing Association. Foundation Housing Ltd chose to set up as a not for profit community housing company that provides affordable rental housing for people on low to moderate incomes in the north and eastern metropolitan regions of Perth.

The company started in January, 2006, when the three regional housing associations merged. Since their formation each of the three separate organisations had built an excellent reputation in their own right. But it was believed that the bigger and stronger company formed when the associations joined forces, could create new opportunities for existing tenants as well as those who were waiting for housing assistance.

City Housing was located in Northbridge and managed almost 300 rental properties. Their traditional focus was on city living, particularly in the management of lodging houses and smaller apartments. Their role has since expanded to include a wider geographic and household focus.

EMCHA was based in Midland and managed close to 100 rental properties. The organisation developed a reputation for successfully housing people with high levels of need, particularly those who needed ongoing support services.

The Northside Housing Association was based in Joondalup and operated in the northern metropolitan area. Its properties were generally single detached dwellings with a smaller number of medium density developments.

Foundation's central office is now in Northbridge and the other organisations maintain offices in Joondalup and Midland.

For further information please telephone Foundation Housing on 9227 7709 and Access Housing on 9430 0900.



Foundation Housing's Chief Executive Officer Kathleen Gregory.

CHCWA's submission to The WA Department of Housing and Works HOUSING STRATEGY WA DISCUSSION DRAFT

The Western Australian State Government formally launched the Housing Strategy WA Discussion Draft on the 14th of September 2005 and invited stakeholders in the housing sector to provide feedback before finalisation of the Strategy later in 2006. The Housing Strategy was part of the present Government's commitment with around 95 submissions received from both individuals and a range of public bodies at the end of March. At this stage the Department of Housing and Works is discussing the submissions with the Minister, Michelle Roberts.

The report that was submitted presented the position of the Community Housing Coalition of Western Australia (CHCWA) on initiatives in the Strategy pertinent to the provision of community housing. The report was compiled through extensive consultation with community housing providers in Western Australia at Community Housing Provider Forums held in December 2005 and February 2006 and the following represents the introduction and excerpts from that report.

CHCWA would like to acknowledge and thank all of the participants who attended the forums and provided feedback for this report as well as those who contributed via email and telephone and particularly the work of Michelle Beresford.

The Need for a Housing Strategy

CHCWA considers the provision of appropriate, stable, secure, affordable

housing a basic human right. All members of the community should be able to access housing that meets their needs and underpins the sustainability of their future.

In recent years it has become increasingly apparent that the Australian government is progressively withdrawing from the provision of social housing and appears to lack the political will to support the development of a significant 'affordable' housing sector. This is evidenced by the fact that Australia has been without a Housing Minister for over ten years, and by the Commonwealth's failure to harness the potential of the tax system as a robust instrument of housing policy.

In light of this lack of federal leadership, housing practitioners nationwide are working predominantly within what could aptly be described as a 'policy void', to deliver suitable housing outcomes to a growing number of Australians in housing stress.

The social housing sector in Australia is in a state of flux. It is undergoing transformation from a sector primarily geared towards traditional models to a more diversified system of housing provision. It is required not only to respond to those in the community who are most vulnerable, but also to those on low to moderate incomes for whom home ownership is becoming increasingly a fading dream.

CHCWA is encouraged by the creation of a coordinated strategic response to address Western Australia's changing housing needs from our state government. We acknowledge that this is the first time that such a document, one that endeavors to address housing needs across various levels of government, has been created and endorse its attempts at cross Government responsibility.

However, it must be noted that the community housing sector, hereafter referred to as the sector, is disappointed in the lack of concrete legislative and financial commitment within the Housing Strategy WA to enable the creation of a stronger, more viable, sustainable and equitable housing system for Western Australians, which also needs to deal with the current and medium term shortage of public or community housing.

Furthermore, it must be noted with frustration that timelines are included for only 12 strategies out of 66, and there is very little development of an operational framework to facilitate the stated strategies.

It is with these flaws of the Strategy in mind that the sector recommends the following additions to the draft. We may hold off congratulating state government until substantial funding, and an operational framework is guaranteed to enable the Housing Strategy WA's realisation.

Selected excerpts from CHCWA's Housing Strategy WA submission.

Strategic Area 1.

Guiding the System Objective 2

Regulatory instruments that can enable the delivery of appropriate housing

The basis of this objective is sound however, the initiative contains no course of action to operationalise this objective.

The sector would like to see a concrete commitment that is legislatively supported from state government stating that all developments in urban areas must contain a minimum of 15% inclusion of affordable housing, and that this inclusion may be in

the form of land, infrastructure or financial contribution.

The sector would also like to see a consistent approach, reinforced by legislation, to the provision of social and affordable housing across all levels of government and collaboratively between government departments.

This would include:

- Local Government's introduction of voluntary schemes in zoning bylaws to enable developers to build additional units in return for affordable housing (density bonuses);
- review of restrictive covenants placed on many blocks of land in urban areas that restrict land use;
- the introduction of tax incentives for both developers and large and small scale investors to contribute to the supply of affordable housing;
- provision of financial incentives for businesses to provide key worker housing in rural and regional areas; and
- the removal of stamp duty for housing developed for the purpose of 'affordable'.

Strategy 1.16

Development of a State Affordable Housing Policy

The inclusion of a 12 month timeframe for the completion of a State Affordable Housing Policy is one of the few timeframes for achievement given throughout the Discussion Draft, this is a major positive of this initiative. It is also encouraging to note the commitment given to the use of planning incentives to deliver increased sustainable and appropriate housing stock.

Less heartening is the use of ambiguous language to identify policy elements that 'may' be given specific consideration. CHCWA believes that all of the six identified priorities should receive firmer commitment from state government. The sector has highlighted all of these six priority areas as being in need of urgent attention and CHCWA would like to see them pursued with more vigor.

Strategic Area 4

Government Supported Housing

Concern was expressed by the sector over the phrase 'providing a strong safety net' in relation to this strategic area. It was felt that this implied that the provision of public housing could no longer be perceived as a viable option for those Western Australians who chose not to, or could not afford to, pursue private rental or home ownership.

This strategic area should acknowledge more explicitly that government supported housing was traditionally, and would continue to be, a viable housing option for some Western Australians.

Strategy 4.5

Reform of the community housing sector

The sector identified a number of initiatives that needed to be undertaken in the expansion of this strategy.

1. Increased emphasis of the relationship between housing and support functions in the provision of social housing.

The sector indicated that there was insufficient recognition given to the need for housing and support to be regarded as a dual function. This is evidenced by the commonly occurring situation where houses are remaining vacant as there is not sufficient support funding available to enable organisations to successfully tenant them. CHCWA believes that this lack of

program and funding coordination between the DHW, the Department of Community Development, the Health Department and the Disability Services Commission needs urgent attention as a strategy priority.

2. Regulation of the community housing sector.

In December 2005 CHCWA held a sector consultation forum specifically addressing regulation of the community housing sector with the objective of gaining a sector position. While the sector is still a way off developing an agreed framework in which regulation of the sector could be implemented, several key non-negotiables were identified. These are included in an attachment.

3. Accreditory framework for the Community Housing Sector

The Discussion Draft indicates that 'over the next two years the state government will introduce accreditation of community housing providers'. This statement fails to recognize the industry developed, DHW supported, Code of Practice that is currently in operation within the Best Practice Unit of CHCWA. Many years of consultation and development have led to the creation of this state specific best practice accreditation tool and it should form the basis of any accreditatory framework being explored by state government. Currently a National Standards Working Party is exploring the feasibility of expanding this tool to enable a tiered system of accreditation from Code of Practice to National Standards. It is initiatives such as this that have the full support of the sector and should be financially sponsored by state government as community housing providers cannot fund it themselves.

4. Reform of the community housing crisis sector

An inadequately funded area of pressing need in the social housing sector is the provision of crisis and transitional housing to our states' most vulnerable people. The provision of crisis housing is only addressed once in the Discussion Draft in Strategy 5.9 and is given no commitment of direct action.

The sector would like to see a number of reforms taking place in this area including:

- Exploration of the potential for increased numbers of community housing providers to take responsibility for crisis clients if organisations have the skills

and capacity to do so. A sector shared responsibility for clients experiencing crisis may allow earlier intervention and result in reduced need for ongoing crisis accommodation;

- Crisis accommodation should be diversified to use existing services more effectively;
 - The development of crisis housing from client focused models rather than the current determinant which is the organisation's funding contract; and
 - Increased flexibility of crisis accommodation models to allow organisations to develop innovative programs and 'think outside the square'.
5. Consolidation

The increasing push from state government to consolidate community housing organisations has a number of adverse implications that need to be addressed.

- The sector has a concern that forced consolidation of the sector has the potential to create competitiveness and divisiveness between well funded larger organisations and smaller organisations who have not been identified as growth providers. Currently, the community housing sector is a robust sector that functions effectively due to its cohesiveness and strong inter-organisational working relationships.
- The community housing sector currently consists of a large number of diverse organisations of varying sizes. These organisations provide a vast array of programs and services to a number of different target groups. A consolidation agenda must not be pursued without adequate investigation of the costs and benefits of the sector's current level of diversity.
- The sector believes that the place of social housing within the Department of Housing and Works should be reviewed. CHCWA recommends that the responsibility for social housing be moved to a 'created' Department of Housing. In most other Australian states social housing sits under this umbrella. The sector believes that in its current position within Housing and Works there is competition within the Department over government priorities resulting in necessary attention not being given to the role of the sector with its unique co-joining of housing and support roles.



Homelessness can happen to anyone at anytime!

– a personal story

My name is Doug Amos (name changed to protect privacy) and I am the manager of a guest house. I am also manager of a housing association. I have also worked in a Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) funded crisis accommodation unit.

Even after working with homeless men for many years and having come to know the ‘tell-tale’ signs that lead men down that path, I too became a victim. I failed to recognise those signs in myself and I suddenly became homeless as a result of a marriage breakdown.

I have no formal qualifications other than what I learned through my own experience of being homeless as well as working with single and homeless men. I have been a shoulder to cry on, an advocate, a mentor, at times a referee and have been called a few other names I cannot mention and some I have not even heard of.

The dilemma of homelessness is not exclusive of race, age, sex, religion or culture, income, class or any other social category. The 2001 census showed about 11,700 homeless people in this State that we know of. No-one knows how many do not receive welfare payments or do not access services.

My own brief experience of homelessness was after my marriage ended in the late 90's and I needed help. Lots of it! I had nowhere to stay, no shoulder to cry on (and believe me I did cry a lot), I had nowhere to go and I had no idea who to contact.

Part of that was my own stubborn male pride, the ‘she’ll be right mate, I can handle this on my own’ mentality that I had grown up around. But it wasn’t going to be alright. I had no idea where to go or who to turn to so I spent about six to eight weeks sleeping in my work vehicle. I still went to work and I used public showers. I called on family so that I could have a decent meal once in a while as well as a bed for the night. I pretended I was okay and that everything was fine. I could have won an Oscar for that performance.

And, as I found out, support networks for men are sadly almost non-existent. And, even now to a degree, options that men have are still limited. That is not a sexist or ill-informed remark but a cold, hard fact.

I felt I was isolated. I faced uncertainty and fear and I lost my self worth. In other words, I lost me. Some might say how can that happen in such a short time when people have been alone and homeless for years?

In my experience, it fell to me very quickly and, unless you have been there, it can be hard to understand. And it is a downfall that is difficult to overcome.

Sadly, the after-effects do linger for a long time. I lost a subsequent relationship that was very special to me because I ignored the signs I used to see in people whilst doing my job. I failed to recognise them in myself. In my personal experience, getting a roof isn’t the end result but getting longer-term support is what is needed.

I finally felt enough was enough and I decided to do something about it. I rang the crisis helpline from a pay-phone one night and poured it all out. I was given some helpful advice and told some places to go and contact. I ended up on a friend’s doorstep one afternoon and I told her everything including that I needed help. I was given a room for as long as I needed it and I started to get my life back on track. I got a manager’s job, again working with homeless men, and I felt like I had found some purpose. Even though the job has at times been difficult and frustrating, it has also been rewarding.

I now have a small idea of what some people have been through and I do believe that somehow we can make a difference to homelessness. The general public seems to take little or no interest, believing it could never happen to them. Homelessness is something no one likes to think about until it does happen.

There is also some positive stuff. A tenant I’ll call Peter used to come into the office sometimes and we would chat. He had been a tenant for about two or three months and he was a chronic binge drinker. He lost his job due to drink, had a relationship breakdown and had lived on the streets for about six years. When he came here, the guest house gave him some stability, the first he had experienced in those six years.

I used to have a picture frame hanging on the office wall and in the frame was part of an interview with Stevie Ray Vaughan, the blues guitarist. He tells how he beat his addiction to cocaine and Old Crow whiskey. The bottom line as Stevie Ray put it was: “I was fighting a losing battle you know, and I had to give up to win.” Peter used to stand and stare at those words in the frame and suddenly he left and that was it.

Being transient is a big part of some homeless people’s lives and I gave it no more thought other than he wanted to move on. About two months before I left the job at the guest house, he called in to see if I was still

there. Peter told me he never forgot those words on the wall. He said he had been in touch with AA, did the 12 steps, was as scared as hell and had now been dry for a year. He said he had a job, a unit, a lady who helped him through some pretty dark times and now his life was good. Sometimes it just takes the smallest thing to make a difference.

At the opposite end of the scale, I have also dealt with men who choose to be homeless for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it is through marriage or a relationship failing and they just live on the street until they patch things up and move back in. Sometimes it is domestic violence (yes it does happen to men as well), substance abuse, victims of sexual abuse, alcohol, mental health, gambling issues or even, as one tenant said, it was his: “God-given right to be homeless. I only look for a room in winter.”

The bottom line is there are no quick cures and we rely on what the client/tenant tells us which isn’t always the truth as they will say anything to survive. And let’s face it, they are survivors!

We battle with a lack of funding and limited support networks and at times I feel some of those in the public service choose to ignore the fact that there are men, women and children who are homeless every night. But we know the reality because we see and deal with it daily. Ignoring it will not make it go away and neither will throwing huge chunks of cash into half-baked plans and schemes.

I have no idea what to suggest to help alleviate homelessness. But making more and more people aware of it and lobbying hard for funding for support services and accommodation would be a good start. The old days of job and income security are gone so, without a guaranteed income, a person can suddenly become homeless at any time.

Resources to house, clothe and feed people should be available where and when there is a genuine need and there should be more emergency, transitional and long-term, secure housing for those who have a genuine need.

We must also try to make homeless people aware that it is okay to ask for help.

The views expressed in this story are personal and not necessarily representative of CHCWA’s view. Names have been changed to protect privacy.

Boarding and Lodging Houses not seen as a viable financial proposition – but what are the alternatives?



The Ocean View Lodge in Hampton Road, Fremantle. (Picture courtesy Shelter WA)

As the last point of de-institutionalisation, those people who need Lodging and Boarders houses accommodation may find that they have to resort to the streets. A city such as Perth will not continue to maintain its present good living standards and high equity returns if it gains a reputation as a 'box' city for homeless people who are not being provided for in terms of Boarders and Lodgers Housing. Rising land prices and increasing costs have made operating boarding houses an increasingly unviable operation. The number of boarding and lodging houses has dwindled: roughly two thirds of the sector has been lost over the last two decades. An immediate injection of funds is needed to counteract the decline in current bed numbers. It is the responsibility of government to assist vulnerable members of the community such as people on low incomes with psychiatric illness and/ or drug addiction.

Some of the issues that were brought to light in the DHW commissioned CHCWA research (available on the www.dhw.wa.gov.au site) on this issue (with thanks to Janet Allen's work) were as follows:

- The private market currently provides 438 beds (56% of general lodging house beds). This supply of beds in the private sector is dominated by the presence of one large lodge that accounts for just over half of the private bed supply.

The CHCWA study predicted that 242 beds in the private sector will be lost within the next 2 years and a further 51 beds will go when lodge owners retire.

- Many current owners are in their late 60s or 70s. There needs to be a plan for when ownership changes.
- The profit margin tends to be relatively slim.
- Access to amenities, services and employment opportunities is one important consideration in the location of lodges as the benefits for lodgers as well as 2) affordability and 3) the company of others.
- Changes to planning could include an integrated response from local/state government so as to enable town planning restrictions to be eased and request that redevelopment authorities set aside areas for boarders and lodgers housing as part of new developments.
- Current Boarding and Lodgers Houses need funds to redress marked deterioration.
- There are problems with a number of unregistered Boarding and Lodgers Houses, where tenants pay exorbitant rates.

The ability of the lodging house sector to act as a pressure valve on the demand for crisis accommodation (or the alternative of sleeping rough or squatting) is diminishing. Boarding and Lodging Houses are ideal for people to move from living on the streets or in an institution where support is provided to moving into a private rental situation.

The Residential Tenancies Act needs to be amended to include some protection for these residents. This needs to be balanced by the awareness of not making the proprietor's life more difficult and thus encourage them to sell their asset more quickly thus reducing supply.

Current working group

The Department of Housing and Works formed a working group in April this year to address some of these issues and in response to the CHCWA, TAS and Shelter WA research reports. Stakeholders include,

amongst others, a local government representative, CHCWA, Shelter WA, WAAMH, TAS, DOCEP, Foundation Housing and a representative from the private sector.

The draft terms of reference are as follows

The working group will:

1. Investigate and develop short term and long term strategies to sustain, increase and diversify lodging house accommodation, including
 - improving the maintenance of current boarding and lodging houses to meet health, fire and safety standards.
 - retaining and supporting existing investment and encouraging new investment, particularly in the private sector; and
 - intervention strategies across all levels of government
2. Review regulation and legislative controls of boarding houses to provide appropriate consumer protection measures for boarders and lodgers.
3. Review linkages across government to better deliver appropriate services to residents, such as health and guardianship.
4. Develop a best practice model for new construction of boarding and lodging houses in Western Australia.
5. Deliver a strategy report before January 2007.

This is good news as it indicates that the Department is taking the issue seriously but much work also needs to be done in terms of community integration. The wider community can be brought on side by developing units that aim towards looking as attractive as possible whilst ensuring the need for proximity to urban city facilities is maintained. Planning and community consultation is vital for future developments.

Mariyon Slany
Executive Officer
CHCWA



“CHCWA attempts to map the breadth of the Community Housing Sector”

The Community Housing Coalition of WA carried out its first mapping and diversity survey earlier this year in order to assess what people mean when they refer to the diversity of the sector. Because this was the first attempt by the WA peak body, despite government statistical compilations, care was needed to determine both the appropriate survey questions and the methodology. In the event, the work carried out by CHCWA staff was preliminary and the survey instrument now provides a pilot model for future information gathering. However it is something that will need to be carried out on a more regular basis – both to gather information to assess what work is being carried out in community housing in WA, but also to ensure that practices are put in place to ensure that diversity is not lost.

Community housing organisations in WA provide housing for a diverse range of tenants in areas ranging from the inner-city to remote communities. The Mapping Survey of the Community Housing Sector in WA (April 2006) has shown there are different ways to achieve the goals of community housing.

Many organisations (72 per cent) manage up to 25 tenancies but consolidation of Regional Housing Associations in the Perth metropolitan area will result in tenancies of more than 500.

The dwellings are usually localised within the one area, with 80 per cent of organisations managing tenancies in no more than two postcode areas. Nevertheless, in the Perth metropolitan area, 15 organisations have dwellings dispersed over a large area.

The study highlights the significance of community housing providers in regional WA, who accounted for 62 per cent of providers in the total sample population.

Local Government authorities have taken on a role in providing affordable housing, primarily for the aged, in their communities. Whether this is a preferred option for Local Governments could be further investigated. Only 22 per cent rated housing as core or important to their organisation’s activities.

Community housing is often defined as providing long-term accommodation. The goal may be to achieve stable long-term housing for tenants (either within or beyond the organisation) but this may be achieved in several steps.

Thirty per cent of organisations provided more than one type of tenure (crisis, transitional or long-term), suggesting a pathway by which tenants can move between tenure types within the one organisation.

RHAs and community agencies have the greatest diversity of title arrangements for the dwellings they manage. Local Governments were most likely to hold title to their properties and slightly more than 50 per cent of community agencies lease all their properties. The study did not assess which organisations were interested in expanding their housing stock and how they anticipate they could achieve this.

Whether equity in the housing stock is a necessary condition for expansion could be further investigated.

Further financial pressure may be on organisations that lease properties, as a change in head-leasing arrangements with DHW in 2006 has resulted in organisations taking more responsibility for maintenance.

A component of the ‘consolidation agenda’ is the expectation that small organisations will form partnerships with key providers for tenancy and/or property management to ‘improve management effectiveness.’

The study has provided a baseline to assess the effect this policy will have on the overall number and size of community housing organisations in the sector in the future.

Community housing providers have skills and expertise that are shared in the broader community with 29 per cent of organisations reporting they are involved in mentoring and governance. Organisations were shown in the study to have multiple links with a diverse range of organisations and volunteers within the community.

In conclusion, one thing the CHCWA Mapping survey did find and that is that community housing is more than just tenancies. Among the diverse organisations, communities and management arrangements, there is a common understanding that stable and appropriate housing has benefits for people beyond merely meeting their accommodation needs. The diversity among organisations means there is a possibility within the sector that flexible and innovative solutions may arise that will allow providers to meet the needs of people seeking, and living in, community housing.

CHCWA Staffing Changes

Since Mike Newbigin’s departure last November, there have been other staffing changes at CHCWA. Jackie Newbigin has moved on from her Administration role to a new position at WACOSS. Michelle Beresford was in the Policy Officer position as a result of Diane Niyati continuing to be on unpaid leave and Michelle has now moved onto the Disability Services Commission. Diane has decided not to return to CHCWA and continues to work at the Department of Community Development. We

also welcome a new Marketing and Membership Officer, Tony Whitbread, who has a background in writing and has edited a number of WA country newspapers as well as presently producing the Chattering Times. He also worked with the WA Bushfires Board encouraging their volunteer group to engage more pro-actively with media organisations. It is hoped this newly formed position will help with promoting the good work of providers within the sector and enable the community housing ‘voice’ to be heard more by the general public.

Dynamic period in the sector

As most of you would now be aware there has been further change in the overall sector. That is apart from the Key Providers in the metropolitan area merging what were six organisations! We also have a new Housing Minister in Michelle Roberts. Another significant change is the appointment of Bob Mitchell as the new Director General at the Department of Housing and Works. Mr Mitchell was an appointment of the new Housing and Works Minister, Michelle Roberts, in February 2006. As part of his new remit he has instituted a number of changes in the Department of Housing and Works which he

hopes will encourage ideas and innovations. This has meant that staff members have on occasion moved into a variety of 'acting' positions and there is a degree of uncertainty about consistency in positions. DHW is also undergoing a functional review and it is hoped that processes and lines of management will become clearer. We understand that part of Mr Mitchell's brief is to give senior management more decision making power, but at the same time levels of executive within DHW have decreased. Additionally Mr Mitchell is encouraging decisions being made at the lowest appropriate level in the organisation

within the 3 designated priorities of 'more people in houses', 'improving aboriginal communities' and 'improving building and infrastructure'. He says there are 'some very difficult issues to deal with that will require inventiveness and creativity' but that the key focus of DHW staff needs to be on the clients. Hopefully this spirit of change within DHW will inspire the support of innovation that Community Housing providers, are, in many ways, already demonstrating.



WA's new Minister for Housing and Works the Honourable Michelle Roberts MLA

"The challenge we share is not just to build more houses but to build stronger and better communities," Ms Roberts said after her appointment in February 2006 as Minister for Housing and Works; Consumer Protection; Heritage and Land Information.

As Minister for Housing, Ms Roberts has said she will focus on boosting levels of public and affordable housing and providing improved housing outcomes for indigenous communities.

"There's more we can do and more we will do. We're looking at a mixture of more public housing, continuing to improve the housing stock we have and innovative partnerships and approaches to affordable housing," she said.

Her appointment coincided with media exposure on emerging issues in some remote indigenous communities.

This highlighted the overlapping issues of community safety and sustainability and provision of housing. It is hoped that her decision to change the format of the Housing Advisory Committee does not mean a lessening of community input into the complex issues surrounding housing needs in WA that were evidenced in the media coverage of communities like Halls Creek.

Ms Roberts was elected to State Parliament in 1994 and represents the Midland electorate. She is an experienced Minister with past responsibility for Police and Emergency Services, Local Government, Assisting the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Justice and Community Safety since the election of the State Labor Government in 2001.

Michelle Roberts, appointed Minister for Housing and Works, Consumer Protection, Heritage and Land Information in February, 2006.

Changes to the CDHP Lease Agreement

The new Community Disability Housing Program lease came into operation on 27 February 2006. The introduction of the new lease came after a lengthy period of negotiation between the Department and the sector, and whilst some providers remain a little anxious about their new responsibilities, the changeover seems to have gone reasonably smoothly. The Department has acknowledged the value of both the CHCWA consultations, and the forum developed by the Best Practice Unit in familiarizing both departmental and sector staff with the new arrangements.

The DHW were keen to put the new arrangements in place, as previously there had been some confusion arising from the multiple leases that were in operation, with particular challenges for their computerized management systems. It is hoped that changes to the system will limit the amount of 'notices' etc that providers managing multiple properties receive.

The new arrangements appear very clear: the housing provider pays local government rates and water service charges; they now also bear the cost of all maintenance other than structural. The Department continues to insure the properties (public liability

and workers compensation remain the responsibility of the provider) and will pay all strata fees.

The lease fee, paid by the provider to the Department has been set at \$5 per household per week (I am aware that there has been some lively debate around the definition of a 'household'). If surplus funds remain after all operational expenditures have been accounted for, including the provision of long term or cyclical maintenance funds, the use of these funds should be negotiated with the DHW.

There were a number of important issues raised at the Forum in February, and I have followed up on these with the Department. Perhaps the strongest message from providers was the need to encourage consistency between DHW managers in their dealing with CDHP properties. There are a number of areas that allow for discretionary decisions, and providers reported that, depending on who they are dealing with, they may experience very different outcomes. The Department has undertaken to work on these issues and has not ruled out the possibility of introducing 'dedicated' CDHP managers at some time in the future.

For providers who have not previously been responsible for the payment of rates, it is important to pursue rates concessions from local government. At the present time, it is hard to predict the response you will receive, as whilst community housing would assert that they have charitable status, the interpretation of 'land used exclusively for charitable purpose' for the purpose of determining whether it is non-rateable under section 6.26. (2) (g) of the Local Government Act 1995 is inconsistently applied by local government. CHCWA have developed a Template for Negotiation that can assist providers in their negotiations with local government.

Obtaining 'charitable status' with the Water Corporation is generally far less problematic and results in huge savings in service charges. Unfortunately, there is a small complication, once a provider attains this status with the Water Corporation, their tenants may pay a little more in consumption charges. However, the savings in service charges are so great, that providers then have the capacity to compensate their tenants – and still save money!

Tina Merry
Senior Policy Officer



CHCWA

Who We Are, What We Do



The Community Housing Coalition of WA is the peak representative and service body for organisations delivering non-government social housing in Western Australia.

CHCWA'S ROLE IS TO >

Represent the interests of local government and non-government social housing providers in WA.

We make representations on behalf of the community housing sector to state and federal governments and also through our membership of relevant state and national committees including the National Community Housing Forum, The Community Housing Federation of Australia, the WA Housing Advisory Committee.

Promote and expand local government and non-government social housing in WA.

CHCWA is closely involved in the ongoing promotion and expansion of community housing. This includes working with national, state and local governments to increase their commitments to community housing.

Improve the delivery of local government and non-government social housing in WA.

CHCWA also works at a grassroots level to improve the delivery of community housing through advice, resourcing and training. CHCWA is the agency responsible for administering the Code of Practice for the community housing sector in Western Australia.

Identify unmet social housing needs

Since merging with the Council to Homeless persons in 1999, CHCWA has become increasingly involved in homeless issues and now works to clearly identify unmet social housing need.

BECOMING A MEMBER >

Community housing providers are a diverse group of organisations, but there are issues that affect the whole sector and which require a united voice. Membership of CHCWA ensures that individual providers can make a difference, 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.

Full membership of CHCWA is open to:

- Incorporated non-government, not-for-profit organisations that have the provision of community housing as their main objective.
- Incorporated organisations that manage or sponsor community housing projects as part of their operations.
- Unincorporated organisations that have the provision of community housing as their main objective.

Other organisations and individuals are most welcome to join as Associated Members.

MEMBERSHIP FEES (please note fees are being revised as of June 2006) >

Full membership fees are based on the number of dwellings managed by the applicant as follows:

0 - 10 = \$33

11 - 50 = \$88

51 - 100 = \$165

over 101 = \$220 (GST included)

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP FEES >

Individual = \$22

Organisation = \$66

If you are interested in becoming a member, or would like further information please contact us.

(You can apply for membership through our website.)

1st Floor, Claisebrook Lotteries House,
33 Moore Street, East Perth WA 6004
T: 08 9221 7933 F: 08 9221 7944
Freecall: 1800 357 933
E: reception@communityhousing.com.au
www.communityhousing.com.au



CHCWA Board Members Lynne Evans and Ernie Hansen and Diane Niyati (who was one of the original motivators for setting up the Certificate IV in Social Housing) enjoy the graduation.