

MAY 2009



Newsletter



This issue:

Focus on Indigenous Issues



Homelessness Australia

Creating a framework for ending homelessness

Homelessness Australia

PO Box 603 Dickson ACT 2602

T 02 6247 7744 **F** 02 6247 1649

E info@homelessnessaustralia.org.au

W www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au

In This Edition

- 3 The Board Shares
- 4 Executive Officer & Team
- 7 Homelessness in the Northern Territory
- 8 HA and Indigenous Australians
- 9 HA and Rural and Remote
- 10 HA and Women
- 12 Member's Corner
- 13 HA and Youth
- 14 HA and NESB
- 15 Book-Film-Theatre-DVD-Website

FEATURES

- 5 A New Approach to Homelessness
- Travis Gilbert
- 11 Nowhere Else to Go
- William Tilmouth



“The Board shares”

TRISH BRAMBLE

TREASURER AND ACTING CHAIRPERSON
HOMELESSNESS AUSTRALIA

As people in the sector may have heard by now, Pam Foster our Chairperson who was elected at our November AGM last year, resigned recently. Due to an unplanned and serious family event, Pam decided that she was unable to give the role the attention and commitment that it needs at this time. The Board extends their warm gratitude for Pam's valuable contribution with HA and wishes her and her family well.

We have commenced the process for selecting our new independent Chairperson, with the position advertised in April. We are hoping that the new Chair will be in place by the time of our May face to face Board meeting in Alice Springs.

Preparations for our face to face on May 18-21 in Alice are well underway. Our meeting will involve some 70 people from across the homelessness sector in Australia. It will mark a number of 'firsts' – it's the first time that we've held our face to face in the Northern

Territory, and will also be the first time HA will convene our Indigenous reference group.

When we're in Alice Springs we'll be doing a number of things to increase our understanding of what makes homelessness distinctive in the Northern Territory. We'll be hosting a gathering for NT services to network with our Councils and reference groups. As part of the gathering, we're inviting key note speakers from across the NT, several of whom will talk with us about the impact of the intervention.

Councils and reference groups will also be visiting homeless services based in Alice Springs during the week to learn about service delivery issues when working in remote areas.

The Board is also planning on visiting an Aboriginal community outside of Alice. It will give us an important first hand perspective on conditions in remote communities and challenge a lot of the stereotypes we see in the media.



Executive Officer & Team

SIMON SMITH

The Australians for Ending Homelessness campaign is up and running again. This was launched in the lead up to the release of the White Paper last year. The initial group of organisations who worked on the campaign are keen to keep homelessness in the news in the lead up to the Federal Budget. Thanks to those agencies that have already completed our on-line campaign questionnaire. We'll be using the results to give us the chance to highlight in the media some of the pressures on services especially in the current economic climate.

Like most we've eagerly awaited more information on the roll out of the White Paper. State/Territory implementation plans were due to be submitted to the Federal Government on 1 April.

HA issued a policy survey to our members asking them to identify their most important issues with the roll out of the White Paper. We got more than 100 responses back. Issues identified as 'very important' by members were:

- creating strong housing options across the across the continuum (90%),
- ensuring that new funding is effectively distributed (86%), and
- successfully implementing the no exits policy under the White Paper (80%).

A full set of these results from this survey will be available as a report shortly. A summary of our annual member's survey results is found on page 12.

Meanwhile, we've been discussing the roll out of the White Paper with the sector and what it means for them. I spoke recently the NSW Women's Refuge Movement Child Support Workers' Conference and the Victorian Indigenous Statewide Homelessness Network Conference.

HA team member Aileen Solowiej spoke at the Network of Immigrant and Refugee Women Australian (NIRWA) Forum in Sydney in March on housing and homelessness (see NIRWA pictures on back cover). In addition, HA Policy Officer Travis Gilbert attended the Mercy Foundation housing forum in Sydney. Then he and Aileen attended the ACOSS National Conference. It was a great opportunity to network with key people across the community sector.

We've been active in the media as well. We issued a media release for Youth Homelessness Matters Day on 1 April. Halving overall homelessness by 2020 will depend on how successfully we can stop children and young people who are homeless today from going on to experience homelessness as adults.

We also did a media release and a range of interviews for International Women's Day back in March. This was a really important moment to acknowledge the number of women who are homeless in Australia, many of whom experience domestic and family violence.

For more information on what the team has been up to, please visit www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au

A New Approach To Homelessness

and A New Policy And Research Officer

TRAVIS GILBERT POLICY AND RESEARCH OFFICER

Greetings all my name is Travis and I have recently migrated to the ACT from South Australia to take on the role of Policy and Research Officer at Homelessness Australia. I previously worked for Housing SA in the Office for Homelessness and High Needs Housing and before that I worked as a Community Campaigner on the Your Rights at Work Campaign. I have also worked as a Youth Worker in a SAAP service.

It is both an exciting and uncertain time to be working in the field of homelessness. For the first time ever we appear to have elected a federal government that appears to be genuinely committed to addressing homelessness and moving beyond reactive, short-term crisis responses to longer term strategies aligned to targets such as those outlined in the White Paper. Policies are however but one part of the equation, putting them into practice is more challenging, which brings me to the state and territory implementation plans.



FROM RHETORIC TO REALITY: THE STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

Under the terms of agreement signed off on in the National Affordable Housing Agreement, State and Territory implementation plans were due to be submitted to FaHCSIA by 31 March 2009. As far as we are aware this was not achievable for some states because of the tragic bushfires in Victoria and early elections. All states and territories should have submitted their plans by the time this goes to print and in the interests of open government, we will advocate for the details to be placed on the public record. In all likelihood, the plans will contain initiatives that align to the four core outcomes and outputs specified in the National Partnership on Homelessness. They are:

OUTCOMES:

- Fewer people will become homeless and fewer of these will sleep rough
- Fewer people will become homeless more than once
- People at risk of or experiencing homelessness will maintain or improve connections with their families and communities and maintain or improve their education, training and employment participation, and
- People at risk of or experiencing homelessness will be supported by quality services, with improved access to sustainable housing¹.

OUTPUTS:

- Implementation of A Place to Call Home Initiative
- Street to Home initiatives for chronic homeless people (rough sleepers)
- Support for private and public tenants to help sustain their tenancies, including through tenancy support, advocacy, case management, financial counselling and referral services
- Assistance for people leaving child protection services, correctional and health facilities, to access and maintain stable, affordable housing².

The White Paper focused heavily on “rough sleepers” and there is the potential that state and territory implementation plans will be strongly targeted towards those experiencing primary homelessness.

While this is a positive step, there are also risks, for example, few women are identified in “rough sleeper” counts and young people are also underrepresented in primary homelessness statistics. The assumption

seems to be that if you’re not sleeping rough, you’re not chronically homeless or you’re somehow inherently better off. We know from experience that this is not necessarily the case and that women and young people in particular can still place themselves at great risk when “couch surfing” or in boarding houses.

Another feature of state and territory implementation plans is likely to be the expansion of existing programs aimed at supporting “at risk” tenancies and intervening early to prevent young people becoming homeless. These programs (such as supported tenancies programs and Re-Connect) have proven effective but will need to be well resourced. If states and territories can successfully re-align their program funding to focus on early intervention and prevention this should yield positive results in the medium term.

SAAP NDCA DATA 2007/08: INDEXATION FAILS TO KEEP PACE WITH DEMAND

The release of the 2007/08 SAAP Data has once again demonstrated that demand for SAAP services is increasing and the annual increase in funding of 1%³ is insufficient to enable service providers to meet that demand as effectively as they would like to. That said, the report found that SAAP agencies were able to meet the needs of their clients and accompanying children in the majority of cases.

Table 1.1: Clients and Accompanying Children Provided with Support through SAAP 2006/07 & 2007/08

Category	2006/07 (n)	2007/08 (n)	Change (n)	Change (%)
Clients	118 800	125 600	+6800	+5.7
Accompanying Children	69 100	76 900	+7800	+11.2
Total	187 900	202 500	+14 600	+7.8

As table 1.1 illustrates both the number of clients and the number of accompanying children presenting to SAAP services in 2007/08 was significantly higher than in 2006/07. Of major concern, the increase in the number of accompanying children was almost twice as high as the number of clients who sought assistance. 1 in every 39 Australian children aged 0-4 years presented to a SAAP agency with one or both parents in 2007/08 up from 1 in every 42 in 2006/07.

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS & YOUNG WOMEN CONTINUE TO BE OVERREPRESENTED

The 2007/08 data showed that those identifying as either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were again the most overrepresented client group supported by the SAAP. 18% of all SAAP clients identified as either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander compared with just over 2% of the Australian population while 26% of accompanying children aged 0-4 identified as Indigenous compared with just under 5% of the Australian population⁴. There was an increase in the number of young women aged 15-19 years from 1 in every 51 in that age bracket to 1 in 49. A significant increase in the number of young women aged 20-24 years was also recorded and these two demographics continue to account for highest proportion of clients in SAAP relative to their proportion of the general population⁵.

NO PLACE TO CALL HOME? CHILDREN PRESENTING AS CLIENTS

The number of persons aged under 15 years presenting unaccompanied and therefore counted as clients in the dataset increased substantially from 3200 in 2006/07 to 3900 an increase of over 20%. Again, the majority of clients (2500 of the 3900 or 64.1%)⁶ in this age group were female, suggesting that services formerly known as SAAP will continue to be the primary port of call for young women who are forced to leave the family home in the future. The substantial increase confirms what many in the youth SAAP sector have been reporting for some time, they are being expected to accommodate an increasing number of clients under the school leaving age even though this is outside of the legislative parameters of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act.

IN FOCUS: CLOSING THE GAP? THE INDIGENOUS HOUSING PACKAGE

The Australian government has endorsed the Oxfam campaign to “close the gap” between the health, life expectancy and educational attainment outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians⁷. It notes that improved housing outcomes are a critical component of working towards meeting the Closing the Gap targets and has committed an additional \$1.94 billion over 10 years to reducing overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and severe housing shortages.

The agreement is one of five National Partnerships (NPs) sitting under the umbrella of the National Affordable

Housing Agreement (NAHA). A joint implementation plan will be agreed between the Commonwealth and the states/territories with the Commonwealth responsible for the provision of funding and the states/territories responsible for delivering the reform package, including the provision of housing and associated reforms to tenancy management⁸. Overcrowded housing has been a significant detrimental factor to the health and well-being of Indigenous Australians in remote and very remote communities for many years now and the 10 year strategy is aimed at addressing this issue. The NP specifies 3 objectives and an over-arching outcome of the strategy:

OBJECTIVES:

- Significantly reducing overcrowding in remote Indigenous communities
- Increasing the supply of new houses and improving the condition of existing houses in remote Indigenous communities
- Ensuring that rental houses are well maintained in remote Indigenous communities

OUTCOMES:

The agreement will contribute to the following outcome in the National Affordable Housing Agreement: *Indigenous people will have improved amenity and reduced overcrowding, particularly in remote and discrete communities.*

Over 10 years the Agreement will deliver:

- Construction of up to 4200 new houses to address severe overcrowding and homelessness
- Significant upgrades and repairs of around 4800 houses in remote Indigenous communities across Australia which are currently in an appalling state of disrepair or are uninhabitable.
- Improved tenancy management services
- Economic development opportunities through increased local employment and training opportunities in construction and housing management providing up to 2000 local jobs
- Upgrades to housing related infrastructure in remote communities, including town camps
- Access to affordable housing options in regional centres to support employment, education, training opportunities and access to support services in regional areas of high employment

The States/Territories and the Commonwealth will work towards clearer roles and responsibilities and funding with respect to municipal services and ongoing maintenance and infrastructure and essential services in remote areas.

The significant financial commitment to construct 4200 new dwellings and upgrade/repair 4800 existing houses in remote Indigenous communities is no doubt very welcome. Homelessness Australia has long advocated for increased resources for

Indigenous housing. There are well established links between living in overcrowded and substandard housing and detrimental health outcomes such as disproportionately high rates of anti-biotic resistant respiratory and skin infections⁹.

WHY FOCUS ON REMOTE HOUSING?

Only 1 in 4 Indigenous Australians live in remote areas¹⁰, so why has the government targeted its package specifically at remote communities? Using ABS data on Community Housing and Infrastructure needs, the government has determined that it is in remote communities that the greatest need for new housing and significant upgrades to existing housing stock exists. According to the ABS Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey 2006, the average occupancy rate per dwelling in remote and very remote areas is 8.8 persons compared with 2.6 persons per dwelling for the Australian population in general¹¹. In addition, the ABS survey found that between 2001 and 2006 the percentage of houses requiring repairs in remote Australia increased from 19% to 23%, one in four of these properties are currently uninhabitable¹². The government believes the housing of Indigenous people in urban and regional centres can be targeted through the NAHA. The government has indicated that it believes Indigenous Community Housing providers will need to provide robust tenancy management to meet new standards being determined. For its part the government will need to fund them adequately enough to enable them to do this.

1 National Partnership on Homelessness, page 4

2 National Partnership on Homelessness, page 5

3 NDCA 2007/08 Homeless People in SAAP report p.3

4 NDCA 2007/08 Homeless People in SAAP report p.20

5 NDCA 2007/08 Homeless People in SAAP report p.21

6 NDCA 2007/08 Homeless People in SAAP report p.23

7 COAG Fact Sheet National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, p.1

8 COAG Fact Sheet National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, p.1

9 www.antar.org.au/housing

10 www.abs.gov.au/censusdata2006/populationcharacteristics

11 www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Chapter9202008

12 www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Chapter9202008

Homelessness in the Northern Territory: a chance to see, learn and respond

BY SIMON SMITH

Homelessness Australia is very excited to be holding our May face to face meeting in Alice Springs. This will be the first time that Homelessness Australia has visited the Northern Territory. The gathering will bring together more than 70 people from the homelessness sector across Australia to meet, discuss and guide homelessness Australia's policy and advocacy priorities. Attendees include members of Homelessness Australia's Board, our founding Councils (the Women's Services Network, the National Youth Coalition for Housing and the Council to Homeless Persons Australia) and our Reference Groups for Indigenous, Multicultural and Rural/Remote homelessness, as well as our Canberra-based staff team.

While we're in Alice, we'll be learning more about the distinctive aspects of homelessness in the Territory. Two national sources of information paint a picture of homelessness in the Northern Territory: the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Counting the Homeless 2006 report; and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW's) national data collection for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

On Census night 2006, 4,785 people were counted as homeless in the NT. This is the highest rate of homelessness per head of population of any state or territory. About 250 people in every 10,000 are homeless in the Northern Territory. Nationally, the figure is closer to 50.

Approximately one in three people who were homeless on the night of the Census were sleeping rough in the NT. By comparison, about one in six people who were homeless nationally on Census night were experiencing primary homelessness.

Indigenous Australians are over-represented among the homeless population in the Northern Territory, as is also the case nationally. This reflects the greater rates of poverty, dispossession and poor housing experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Many readers may be aware of the situation of people sleeping rough in the long grass outside of Darwin, and of the challenges for people living in improvised dwellings in town camps

outside of Alice Springs.

Nationally, 16,375 people were counted as experiencing primary homeless on Census night in 2006. One in six (16%) was Indigenous. Given this situation, the White Paper's rough sleeping commitments must have a clear focus on providing culturally appropriate and relevant responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing primary homelessness, many of whom are in the NT.

Culturally appropriate definitions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness emphasise the multi-dimensional nature of Indigenous homelessness and incorporate the concept of spiritual homelessness¹, which refers to separation from traditional land or from family². For this reason it is important to interpret statistics carefully.

PEOPLE USING SAAP IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

According to the AIHW, there were 39 SAAP funded agencies in the NT in 2007-08. The major target groups for these services are similar to other states and territories. Around a quarter of services target young people, another quarter target women escaping domestic violence, and a further (approximate) quarter of services are cross target/generalist.

What's distinctive about NT services is the high level of demand for services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Close to two-thirds of all clients are Indigenous. The proportion is far higher for women than men three quarters of women clients were Indigenous Australians compared to one-third of all men accessing SAAP.

This is much higher than in other states and territories. In Western Australia, about 40% of clients are Indigenous. The next highest state after that is Queensland with just under 22%.

The reasons why people access SAAP support in the NT are illustrative of the issues that contribute to homelessness, including some distinctive aspects of homelessness in the NT.²

For young men under 25, the main reasons for seeking support are similar to the reasons nationally for this demographic. These are financial difficulty (19.4%), relationship/family breakdown (15.5%) emergency/previous accommodation ended and interpersonal conflict (both 12.9%). The fourth most common reason for accessing support in the NT for men under 25 is that they are recent arrivals to the area with no means of support (11.1%). This last point is distinctive of the Territory.

Men over 25 reported distinctive issues, quite different to the reasons why men in this age group seek support nationally. The two major reasons for seeking support were emergency/previous accommodation ended (21.1%) and recent arrival to the area with no means of support/itinerant (20.7%). The next most common reason, financial difficulty (18.6%), is similar to other men over 25 nationally,

For women, domestic violence was the most significant reason for seeking support. Single women over 25 cited domestic violence as the main reason for seeking assistance in just under half (49.8%) of cases. Women with accompanying children cited domestic as the primary reason for seeking assistance in 45.4% of cases.³

As part of our visit to the Territory, Homelessness Australia is organising a gathering of NT homeless services to explore these and other issues for the homelessness response in the Territory. Homelessness Australia plans to release a publication after the gathering, drawing together our Board's, Councils' and Reference Groups' and staff team's experiences of their time in Alice. This is an exciting opportunity to learn about homelessness in the NT, including and in particular the issues facing Indigenous communities in the Territory.

1 Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, [http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/VIA/indig_homelessness/\\$File/Indigenous_Homelessness_within_Australia.pdf](http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/VIA/indig_homelessness/$File/Indigenous_Homelessness_within_Australia.pdf).

2 Indigenous Homelessness in Australia May 2006.

3 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare SAAP NDCA Data Collection Annual Report 2006-07 Northern Territory



REGULAR FEATURE

indigenous

HA and Indigenous Australians

BY DAN LAWS, INDIGENOUS COORDINATOR AND HA BOARD MEMBER

Hello all

My name is Dan Laws and I am the newly appointed Indigenous representative board member of Homelessness Australia. I am someone who can help bring the issues around homelessness occurring amongst our people to the attention of Homelessness Australia.

My current role is, the State-wide Indigenous Network Co-Coordinator for Victoria, based at Ngwala Willumbong Cooperative Limited. I have been in this role for two years. Prior to this I was working in the Homelessness sector as a support worker for Indigenous communities around metropolitan Melbourne. I have been in the Indigenous Homelessness sector for approximately 8 years.

As a Network Co-Coordinator it is my role to disseminate the relevant information to all members of the Victorian Indigenous

State-wide Homeless Network (VISHN). Our membership is around 40 people. It is my role to bring together all these members to attend quarterly conferences where we discuss any issues and put into place action plans where need be. Guest speakers are also invited along to talk about relevant issues that affect them in their day to day duties. It is a role that is very demanding but one that I love, not only for the Network members around the state but helping those look at and try and resolves some of the issues that arise for the Indigenous workers and organisations they work for.

As a board member for HA, one of my duties and responsibilities is to form an Indigenous network of representatives from each state and territory of Australia, with the aim to meet and discuss the issues facing our Indigenous communities at a national level. The first one being in Alice Springs in May this year. It will be from

this two day meeting that will give each representative an opportunity to discuss and talk about the issues or concerns that they encounter around indigenous Homelessness. We will also have the opportunity to information share, network and to have a good and creative discussion on the White Paper which the Government released around Christmas last year.

It is also envisaged that a visit to a local Indigenous Community will be on the agenda. This visit will give those Indigenous people, from Metropolitan areas a chance to visit for the first time an Indigenous community in a rural area. Hopefully there will be an Indigenous cultural exchange and those from the city will experience a great cultural significance just as those who are first time visitors to the centre of our great country.

Many Thanks





The Road Home

A super highway out of homelessness for rural and remote Australia?

BY JAX ROAN

I like many people who are working to address homelessness in Australia welcomed the arrival of the federal governments' white paper on homelessness last December like a long awaited Christmas present. However, as someone who works and lives in rural Australia it seemed that my Christmas present was still in the mail.

Whilst I applauded the \$1.9 billion to be spent on Indigenous housing in remote Australia a part of me was very disheartened by the response to rural and remote homelessness. I can recognize the difficulties facing all levels of government in determining where scarce resources should be directed but wonder what mechanisms might be developed to aid their decision making.

As stated in the white paper indigenous Australians make up 21% of the homeless client group in regional Australia and 71%¹ of remote homeless clients. These groups along with the remainder of rural and remote people who are homeless will now have to wait whilst

“The Australian Government will work with the states and territories to review the current distribution of specialist homelessness services against the geographic distribution of people who are homeless, particularly those sleeping rough.”²

Rural Australia has long received funding on a per capita basis from all tiers of government. This method of funding has not recognized the very factors that reinforce housing instability and are causal

of homelessness. Services responding to homelessness in rural and remote communities have long been stretched to provide those services.

We now know that 62% of rough sleepers are in rural and remote Australia with a further 12 % in regional centres³. In total 74% of rough sleepers are outside our capital cities my question would be what proportion of funding to this one specific group will make it to rural and remote Australia?

1 The Road Home p.6

2 The Road Home, Addressing Homelessness in rural and remote areas, p41.

3 The Road Home, Table 1 Rough Sleepers by state and region, p4.



The Links between Domestic/Family Violence and Homelessness for Women and Children.

BY PAULINE WOODBRIDGE AND JULIE OBERIN,
WESNET (WOMEN'S SERVICES NETWORK)

This is an extract from a presentation given to the Network of Immigrant and Refugee Women Australia (NIRWA) Forum on housing and homelessness in March 2009. For a full copy including references, go to www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au

When we talk about family homelessness in Australia, the data and research tells us that we are primarily talking about women and children fleeing domestic or family violence. The most common face of family homelessness is a sole woman, usually accompanied by children, who has to leave her home because it is no longer safe for her to be there. She doesn't usually leave the first time she is abused. She doesn't want the relationship to end; she wants the violence to stop. She tries everything she can to stop or alleviate the violence. The impact on her of years of systemic ongoing abuse, fear and degradation has been likened by some professionals as being like a prisoner of war. Women's services end up with women physically and emotionally damaged from years of torture, who lack healthy self-esteem, suffer poor physical and mental health and in many cases have turned to alcohol or other drugs to help alleviate their distress.

We must continue to overcome stereotypical images of homelessness as lone men on park benches. Over 40% of Australia's homeless adults are women. Most homelessness for women in Australia is either directly or indirectly caused by domestic or family violence. This is supported by data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Previous ABS research shows that nearly half of homeless young women left the family home because of sexual abuse and 37% because of physical abuse.

Women experience homelessness differently from men. Women are less likely to 'sleep rough' than men – particularly if they have accompanying children. Women will often stay in violent and abusive houses simply to keep a roof over their head. Women with children face the pressure of 'keeping families together'

and where they do separate, often commit themselves to a lower standard of living, the stigma of being a sole parent and continue to suffer the ongoing burden of post-separation abuse and danger due to continued contact with violent fathers.

Women from immigrant and non-English speaking backgrounds are less likely to report domestic violence and experience added barriers to accessing appropriate services including crisis accommodation services. Women from immigrant and non-English speaking backgrounds face language and cultural barriers, along with racism as they negotiate their way through alien systems with very limited appropriate interpreting and cultural support services to help them.

According to a recent Commonwealth report issues identified by women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds included the following:

- ▶ The "cultural position of women in some migrant groups" is a risk factor;
- ▶ Limited or no knowledge about the Australian system of law and about domestic violence, (studies show that in many communities domestic violence is still seen as a private issue to be dealt with by families).
- ▶ Fear of losing their children and/or community supports if they access services; Increase in newly arrived women as part of 457 Visas. Women are highly reluctant to seek help as they fear they will get deported or lose their children;
- ▶ Increases in the number of women on temporary visas (women who have applied for a spouse visa – a visa granted because they married an Australian citizen or permanent resident), again fearful of reporting in case they are deported. Despite the fact that the perpetrator is legally bound to financially provide for her for those two years, women are reluctant to approach him due to fear. Many of these women are turned away from services due to lack of resources.

- ▶ Inconsistency in availability and quality of interpreter and translation services. Skills in understanding the nature of domestic violence and accessing various services such as protection orders, courts and shelters are needed;
- ▶ Many services are not culturally appropriate environments for many women, for example, a lack of discreet food preparation areas, prayer facilities or gender segregation of women and male children of certain ages;
- ▶ High levels of discrimination in the private rental market due to racial discrimination, lack of rental histories and prejudice against sole mothers;
- ▶ Inconsistent availability of appropriate services for immigrant women across many areas.

Many recently arrived immigrant women who seek assistance from services report that they married Australian men who they thought they loved, and loved them and who would provide a good life for them and their children. When they arrive in Australia they find they are subjected to physical and psychological torment, denied basic resources and rights, and treated as slaves. They report that they are at their wits end to protect their daughters from becoming sex slaves to him. When they finally seek help because the abuse is so severe they are often met with contemptuous attitudes. Our Government punishes them by denying them income for 2 years or deporting them, sometimes back to dangerous or unsupported and isolated situations.

With the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children exposing issues at every level, including the prevalence and costs to women in particular, and society in general, the Australian government has shown a commitment to protecting women from harm. We must work together to ensure this issue is treated as seriously as other priorities of the State. This is another opportunity to ensure we do not fail in our obligations to women as citizens, and no longer tolerate the abuse.



Town Camps and Homelessness in Alice Springs

BY WILLIAM TILMOUTH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TANGENTYERE COUNCIL



Homelessness in Alice Springs is at crisis point.

The Northern Territory has the highest rate of homelessness in the country at 248 persons per 10,000 compared to the national average of 53 persons per 10,000¹. The rate is higher again for Indigenous people.

Homelessness in Alice Springs takes a number of forms. There is the sort of homelessness, or sleeping rough, that people usually think of as homelessness which often means people, mostly Indigenous people, sleeping in the Todd river bed. There are also people in emergency or short term accommodation, who are mostly but not entirely, Indigenous people. Less frequently recognised are those people, often from remote communities, who stay with family in Town Camp communities or in public housing, sometimes for long periods, because there is nowhere else to go.

Even less recognised is the type of homelessness resulting from chronic overcrowding in Town Camp communities for long term residents who are members of the Town Camp housing associations.

The 19 Town Camp communities in Alice Springs are home to approximately 1900 residents in total, with the turnover of visitors from remote communities resulting in an overall service population as high as 3,300². They have 204 houses and 70 tin sheds, which means that overcrowding is chronic. Tangentyere Council is the major service provider for these communities, with their Housing Associations forming the membership of the Council.

People living on remote communities

need to come to town to access health and other services, shop for goods that are unavailable in remote communities, and to visit family. A great many of these visitors end up staying on Town Camp communities as the limited short term accommodation in Alice Springs is almost always full, or unaffordable.

The situation is especially critical for the growing number of people needing renal dialysis. Approximately 40 renal dialysis patients live on Town Camp communities, often with inadequate accommodation and support (this is about 25% of renal dialysis patients in Alice Springs). The majority of renal patients originally come from remote communities.

Tangentyere Council is not resourced adequately to service the level of need that exists just amongst current Housing Associations' members on Town Camp communities. Visitors add to the stress of stretching resources even further. This makes people's lives less safe and less healthy, and makes it less likely that children will be unharmed, go to school and keep out of the justice system.

Overcrowding on Town Camp communities pushes the real levels of homelessness of Indigenous people in Alice Springs out of the public gaze.

There are no short term solutions to this homelessness. There has been long term underfunding of the town camp housing stock and infrastructure. There is insufficient short term affordable housing for visitors. For those exiting emergency accommodation, it is difficult to find accommodation that provides an alternative to the situation they are escaping from. The public housing stock

has decreased, with current waiting times of one year for priority people (those on renal dialysis and those escaping from domestic violence) to four years for a three bedroom house and up to seven years for a four bedroom house. The current proposal for NT Housing to run town camp housing concerns a lot of people on Town Camp communities, who wonder where people will go who do not meet NT Housing requirements.

Not only is there a daunting need for a substantial increase in permanent accommodation in Town Camp communities, more public housing and more short term accommodation, there is also a need for more services on remote communities. The Western Desert dialysis program estimated that it served 32 patients in its first two years of operation, who no longer had to live in Alice Springs to receive treatment³. This meant that they and their families were not joining the queue to find some sort of accommodation in Alice Springs.

The cost of proper resourcing may be high, but the long term personal and financial cost of homelessness, poor health, unemployment, poor levels of education, domestic violence and incarceration is much higher.

1 *Counting the Homeless 2006*, Australian Census Analytic Program, C.Chamberlain & D.MacKenzie., Swinburne University and RMIT University 2008, in NT Shelter Submission to the Territory 2030 Steering Committee, February 2009.

2 Foster D, Mitchell J, Ulrik J, & Williams R. *Population and Mobility in the Town Camps of Alice Springs*. A report prepared by Tangentyere Council Research Unit. Alice Springs: Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre, 2005.

3 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2006/11/11/1786229.htm>

Nowhere Else To Go

Member's Corner

Homelessness Australia Member's Survey Summary of Results

Earlier this year Homelessness Australia undertook a survey of our members' satisfaction with the services we offer. All our members had the opportunity to respond, and nearly a quarter did so – a good response rate from a very busy sector!

Members – who are you?

Participating services were from all states and territories, and represented a mix of urban, suburban, regional, rural and remote services. 44 per cent of respondents worked in homelessness support services located in regional, rural or remote areas.

A mix of service types responded. Generalist services, and services working with a range of population groups, made up 41 per cent of respondents. Services for women and children escaping from domestic violence comprised 20 per cent of respondents. Seventeen per cent of responses were from services for young people; and responses were also received from services working with families, providing support to tenants, and working specifically with people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Member satisfaction

Homelessness Australia is pleased and proud to hear that members report that they are satisfied with the services we provide. Respondents' knowledge of Homelessness Australia services to members (such as the quarterly newsletter HANews, the weekly inform e-news bulletin, our website, and public events) was high, as was the level of satisfaction with the frequency and quality of these services. For instance, more than 80 per cent of respondents use www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au to engage with our work, and 42 per cent do so regularly.

Developing member services

Respondents gave us a range of insights into ways Homelessness Australia can

further improve our services to members. For example close to 90 per cent of respondents would like to have greater input into Homelessness Australia's submissions to government. As a result of this feedback, Homelessness Australia will consider ways to invite greater member input into our advocacy and policy work at our May gathering of Councils and Reference Groups in Alice Springs.

Priority challenges for services

Respondents told us the main challenges for services continue to be the shortfall of appropriate long-term and supported housing options for clients, rapidly rising demand for services, funding shortfalls and low pay for staff, and uncertainty about the White Paper reform process.

Services identified the need for a less fragmented policy and service response to homelessness, an immediate and significant increase in sustainable housing for people leaving homelessness (both social and rental housing), and the resolution of long-standing funding and workforce issues.

This feedback has confirmed Homelessness Australia's existing policy and advocacy priorities, and formed the basis for a more comprehensive policy survey of members, the results of which are currently being analysed – watch this space!!

You've told us that you are "Happy – great work on the White Paper!", and Homelessness Australia is pleased our members also feel that the organisation has "increased its profile with members over recent years". As you've urged in your responses to the survey, Homelessness Australia will endeavour to "Just keep on getting homelessness in the media... and informing political debates" and to "Keep... [our] profile high... so [members]... remember [we] are there and use [us] as much as possible."

To read a full summary of the Member Survey visit www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au



"No Joke"

Youth Homelessness Matters Day 2009

BY GEORGE MUDFORD, OPERATIONS MANAGER,
YOUTH ACCOMMODATION ASSOCIATION (YAA).

Youth Homelessness Matters Day (YHMD) was held across Australia on April 1 this year, coinciding with April's fools Day the theme for 2009 was "No Joke".

YHMD began in 2005 as a grass-roots initiative of youth workers from Youth Accommodation Services in the Nepean Region of Western Sydney.

YHMD had lots of potential as a broader public campaign. The YAA was quick to endorse and offer support to the initiative and eventually the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH - who are also one of the 3 councils with Homelessness Australia) endorsed the campaign on a national scale.

Since the first somewhat humble affair, which consisted of a BBQ in a central part of Penrith where people were given a free sausage sandwich and a flyer with some youth homelessness statistics on it and a link to a website, the campaign has grown each year to become a nationally recognised campaign with a broadening interest group. YAA and the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) are aiming to reach even greater mainstream awareness for the campaign over the next few years, similar to the profile of the Red Nose Campaign.

After a very successful campaign in 2008, when Youth Homelessness Matters Day was at the centre of the media storm and public interest stemming from the screening of the "Oasis Movie" on ABC television, and the release of Australia's Homeless Youth Report by the National Youth Commission, 2009 built upon this traction, and the ongoing interest in homelessness as a key political/policy issue.

This year there were over 20 events held in a range of locations including, Devonport, Perth, Gold Coast, Rockhampton, Mount Isa, Brisbane, Canberra, Albury, Cooma, Byron Bay, Tweed Heads, Port Macquarie, Wollongong and Sydney to name a few.

The aim for YHM is now to set up a Youth Homelessness Matters Fund, and potentially raise money and donations and interest from the business/philanthropic sector to reach new heights with the campaign and provide a number of opportunities for young people experiencing homelessness

We hope to see you involved in 2010. Please check out our new website www.youthhomelessnessmatters.net

International Women's Day Conference - Auckland 2009

BY STEPHANIE ANNE

I recently attended an International Women's Day Conference in Auckland, New Zealand on the 7th, and 8th of March 2009. This event was organised by Shakti Community Council Inc and Project Women Against Violence (WAV) and enabled services to come together to identify ways in which we could work collaboratively to address issues for immigrant and refugee women in Australia and New Zealand.

Australian delegates included the Immigrant Women's Speakout Association (NSW), Victorian Immigrant & Refugee Women's Coalition (VIC), Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (VIC), and the Immigrant Women's Support Service (QLD). Two founding members of Shakti Community Council Inc who are now based in Australia also attended this historic event.

The first day was a highly successful open forum with over 75 attendees. The day featured guest speakers from New Zealand and presentations from the Australian delegates. Workshops were also held to address the following topics:

- ▶ Violence against women from non-English speaking background (NESB);
- ▶ Trafficking of women into the sex and labour industries;
- ▶ Women on temporary partner visas and their experience of domestic violence;
- ▶ Housing crisis and its impact on women from NESB;
- ▶ Health and mental health issues experienced by women in culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities;
- ▶ Employment and education; and
- ▶ Women from NESB in leadership and governance.

The second day was a closed session for delegates from Australia to meet with workers from Shakti Community Council Inc and Project WAV.

This day focused on developing collaborative strategies to address issues for immigrant and refugee women through the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its implementation. As Australia prepares

to provide a non-Government Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee it is critical that the voices and experiences of women from NESB are heard. We are now gathering support for the development of an independent Shadow Report from immigrant and refugee women in Australia.

The International Women's Day Conference was a memorable, inspiring and incredibly moving experience. Staff at Shakti Community Council Inc were incredibly welcoming to delegates from Australia and organised a highly successful and important event. We now look forward to future collaborative action and solidarity across the Tasman Sea.

Stephanie Anne
Coordinator, Immigrant Women's Support Service,
Queensland



National Homelessness Information Clearinghouse

Welcome to the National Homelessness Information Clearinghouse, a website providing information and good practice solutions for people experiencing homelessness in Australia.

If you are applying for the SA Homelessness Assistance Program, we invite you to be a part of this community. To get involved please visit:

- See how we work
- Contribute our articles
- Read our news
- Join our online forums



- Home
- Homelessness Programs
- Client Issues
- Service Delivery
- Agency Management
- Research and Data

Subscribe to our E-news

Get timely updates into your Email.

Subscribe

About the Clearinghouse

How to use the site

Make a suggestion

About Homelessness in Australia

News

Events

Communities of Practice

Document Library

Forums

Links

Username

Password

New In the Site

Gimme Shelter - Resource for Homelessness Amongst Ex-Prisoners

Friday, 25 May 2012 10:12

Gimme Shelter was created by the Community Reintegrative Centre (CRC), to shed light on the issues of homelessness, particularly amongst ex-prisoners, and to help government agencies and health care providers find effective solutions.

[Read more...](#)

Child Protection Framework Supports Long-term Return

Friday, 25 May 2012 10:12

Homelessness Australia welcomes the draft of the Australian Government's announcement of a National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, saying that the coordinated national approach is a direct result of the Framework's framework for child protection in Australia.

[Read more...](#)

Compare with Young Australians - School's Fairer World

Search

Go

The Road Home: A national approach to reducing homelessness

Homelessness White Paper section UPDATED: Sector Information presentation

Housing When? Forum

Speaker presentations, audio and summaries

New - Your User Menu

Our new site function lets you add content pages!

Post in the Site Feed

Upcoming Events

01.06.2012 - 01.06.2012
Learning connections, services, development stories

04.06.2012 - 07.06.2012
Homeless People's Home! Build a community

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over seven times more likely than non-Indigenous people to access the services of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), Australia's primary service delivery response to homelessness. The total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SAAP clients for 2002/03 was 16,465 people. These clients comprised 11 per cent of SAAP clients in urban areas; 22 per cent in rural areas; and 68 per cent in remote areas.

The National Homelessness Information Clearinghouse contains an extensive amount of information, research and resources relating to Indigenous homelessness and co-factors of Indigenous homelessness. For example, the site holds material on housing, justice and legal issues, mental health issues, drug and alcohol, gambling and family violence, and on effective responses to these.

The Clearinghouse site statistics show that resources relating to the Indigenous housing are always popular and widely read. As with other material on the site, the articles often give brief summaries of material held elsewhere and provides links to that material.

Some good resources on the site or linked to from the site are:

- ▶ Indigenous Homelessness within Australia – a 2006 paper from of a national consultation conducted by the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness (CACH). The paper brings together academic research, factual information and the views and opinions of Indigenous Australians touched by homelessness.
- ▶ Ways Forward. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Policy.
- ▶ Catherine Booth House – a good practice model for indigenous women facing experiencing domestic violence.
- ▶ Pressing Problems. Gambling Issues and Responses for NSW Aboriginal Communities.
- ▶ Myths about Indigenous Australian drinking history dispelled.

The National Homelessness Information Clearinghouse is an evolving resource. The sites success depends on the sharing of resources, information and good practice examples throughout the sector. If you or your organisation has material that relates to the important and complex issue of Indigenous homelessness and housing please share it with the sector through the site. Resources can either be e-mailed to staff at paul@homelessnessinfo.net.au, or you can upload information directly to the site by registering and following site instructions.

