

Shelter WA Report on the

Kalgoorlie Housing Forum Held in October 1998

Background:

Shelter WA had been aware for some time that the housing situation in Kalgoorlie had unique housing needs and issues.

Preliminary meetings to identify core issues were held with various community agencies in Kalgoorlie in September. The twelve meetings were a joint initiative of the Community Housing Coalition of WA and Shelter WA.

The meetings were followed in October by a consultative and information forum on public housing in Kalgoorlie. The feedback from the earlier meetings assisted in the development of the forum agenda which was coordinated by Shelter WA with the Homeswest Regional Manager, Attila Menscshelyi participating in the policy information process.

Representation at the forum included Family & Children's Services, ATSIC, Kalgoorlie City Council, Disability Services Commission, various community agencies including church groups, youth and women's services, Bega Garnbirrigu the Aboriginal Medical Service, and local parliamentarians.

The forum was facilitated by Camille Inifer, Policy, Development & Admin Officer, Shelter WA.

The forum provided information and invited discussion on the following topics:

- Estates Improvements in Kalgoorlie - the Adeline experience
- Homeswest's eligibility, priority housing, domestic violence and debt moratorium policies
- Aboriginal housing programs in Kalgoorlie
- Centrelink Direct Deduction
- Joint Venture

An overview of public housing in Kalgoorlie:

- approximately 10% of housing stock in Kalgoorlie is public housing;
- there is an extensive waiting list for 2/3 bedroom housing;
- the average wait time is 18 months to 2 years;
- 56% of the housing in Adeline (Radburn design) was public housing when the redevelopment commenced 3 years ago;
- stock which is being sold off is offered to tenants under the GoodStart program and if not taken up is offered to the broad community. The sale price of the stock has doubled since the redevelopment commenced;
- the public housing stock is relatively new in comparison to the rest of the State with most of the building occurring in the 1970's;
- a concept plan is currently being developed with Homeswest, the local Council, DOLA, the Education Dept and others involved in the process.

- Homeswest are keen to consider proposals for joint venture with community agencies;
- demand for 3 and 4 bedroom stock is high and people are being encouraged to move into alternative accommodation eg private rental or public housing in areas outside of Kalgoorlie. However 4 bedroom housing is currently under construction. There are 20 families on the waiting list for 4 bedroom housing;
- Homeswest rental for a 3 bedroom house in Kalgoorlie is \$183.50 per week.

Participants raised concerns about increasing housing poverty in Kalgoorlie with a 50% increase in the cost of rent in the private rental market in 12 months. Trends are that people are having to move to areas out of town (2,000 plus was quoted).

Women and Children

Regarding domestic violence, the women's refuge is not always appropriate. There is a large demand for transitional housing for women and children.

Homeswest agreed to consider the provision of transitional housing adjacent to the new women's refuge.

Homeswest have commenced negotiation with the women's refuge under a joint venture arrangement with a land swap, to build a new facility. This is being progressed through Homeswest Community Housing in Perth. It is anticipated the refuge will be completed in the next 12 months. The existing site is being considered by Homeswest for exit point housing.

Family & Children's Service have made a commitment to provide short term housing (3-4 bedroom) in O'Connor for DV cases.

Debt Moratorium

Regarding the debt moratorium policy it was clear than participants had no knowledge of the existence of the policy and were keen to be provided with further information.

What was identified in the Forum was that many agencies providing advocacy and support with housing had not seen a Homeswest Policy Manual or that it was available to agencies.

The Forum acknowledged that whilst some agencies had developed a direct relationship with the Homeswest office many had not. Also, whilst some individual community workers may have been represented on several committees and information dissemination occurred at that level, there was an apparent lack of information sharing and networking between agencies and/or government departments.

Regarding protocols between government departments, discussion was held on damage to property and police intervention. A comment was made that

there is an expectation by each department that the other will report damage to the police.

It was recommended that inter agency coordination be explored to further assist an understanding and knowledge of decision making processes and protocols between departments and the resultant impact to the community.

The Goldfields Regional Development Committee have developed protocols in relation to domestic violence.

It was recommended that in exploring protocols, existing protocols between agencies and departments be identified.

Aboriginal Housing

The Aboriginal housing situation was clearly identified in the Forum as a major issue in Kalgoorlie.

The Forum was informed there is a high Aboriginal housing presence in the region. Of Homeswest's mainstream housing stock, Aboriginal tenancies make up 28% in Kalgoorlie/Boulder, 90% in Coolgardie and 60% - 75% in Laverton.

There is a large fringedweller population and whilst comprising families coming in from remote communities, there is an increasing number of homeless people from Kalgoorlie.

There is a lack of appropriate Aboriginal housing stock to need and an apparent lack of commitment by government, local and State departments, to work with the problem. The Aboriginal extended family requires larger sized housing. Another factor is the location of the stock. To be considered is the fact that there are four distinct groups in the Aboriginal community.

Homeswest have entered in joint venture partnerships with communities such as the Ninga Mia village who have programs to assist unemployed youth through their maintenance programs as well as revegetation programs in Kalgoorlie. These programs have been successful.

The forum was informed that many Aboriginal people who have worked in the region on farms are now unemployed and this has compounded the fringedweller problem.

The Regional Manager is involved in identifying land in outlying areas for fund 6 camps for the fringedweller population. The Aboriginal Affairs Dept will provide ablution blocks for these camps, however the Kalgoorlie Council has made no commitment to dealing with the needs of the fringedweller situation.

The need for skills development of both Aboriginal tenants and Homeswest officers was identified as the core to resolving many of the problems.

The Forum recommended (1) ongoing cultural training for Homeswest officers; and (2) initiatives to link Aboriginal tenancies into Financial Counselling and SHAP support programs at the beginning of the tenancy.

ATSIC also manage housing for Aboriginal people. With the increasing financial restraints they are finding it very difficult to provide support to tenants in assisting them in their tenancies. Another problem for ATSIC is whilst subsidies are provided for remote communities to assist with the management of the stock, town stock is proving cost prohibitive as the financial resources are not there to assist in, for example, maintenance and ongoing maintenance.

Direct Deduction

There is a 75% tenant participation in the Direct Deduction Scheme. Homeswest raised the issue of people withdrawing from the Scheme after signing up.

Participants highlighted the serious impact on tenants when mistakes are made and recommended the focus be on assisting tenants to develop their budgetary skills through financial counselling.

Joint Venture

There are several joint venture agreements in Kalgoorlie. For example, Masonic Homes, Goldfields Aged Pensioner Welfare Assoc, Anglican Homes.

Participants raised the issue of the recent closing of the Youth Hostel in Kalgoorlie due to the inability to find people to sit on the management committee. The problem of finding people to sit on committees is being compounded with the trend towards flying the mining workers in from Perth thus the working population is more transient and people are less able to make commitments to participate on committees for 12 months or longer.

Homeswest were asked if there was any proposal for a drug rehabilitation accommodation service under a joint venture program. The Forum was advised that Homeswest will consider any formal application for joint venture, and whilst there have been queries, few progress through the formal process.

A representative from Bega Garnbirringu arranged to meet with the Regional Manager to discuss housing options in particular joint venture.

Affordability

The affordability of housing was a key issue at the Forum. People who do not meet the criteria for eligibility with Homeswest are in housing crisis due to the disproportionately high rents. People who are unable to access housing in Kalgoorlie are being forced to move to Coolgardie and Kambalda and to travel to Kalgoorlie for work.

Public transport is virtually non-existent in these towns and people on lower incomes are required to provide their own transport. This is a particular issue for women escaping domestic violence.

There is a major problem of the haves (eg mining company employees) and have-nots (eg retail employees such as supermarkets).

CONCLUSION:

Shelter WA has a role in working with what came from the Kalgoorlie meetings and forums in that it will produce a full report identifying strategies identified. The final report will be distributed to participants and the issues incorporated into Shelter's policy work.

General Outcomes of the Forum:

The Kalgoorlie Regional Office of Homeswest agreed at the forum to look at and work with issues raised at the forum. Some positive initiatives were agreed to whereby the Kalgoorlie Homeswest office invited local community agencies to consider follow-up meetings to work through some of the points raised.

Actions from the forum included:

1. The Regional Manager, in raising concerns that the Golden Mile Youth Service had closed indicated a commitment to work towards getting the agency re-opened.
2. Homeswest to further consider the need for 4 bedroom accommodation in Kalgoorlie.
3. Homeswest to continue negotiations with the Women's Refuge in Kalgoorlie and made a commitment to expediate the process where possible.
4. Homeswest to further look at the crisis accommodation situation in the region and to look at exit point options.??
5. Homeswest and the Kalgoorlie Aboriginal Medical Service to talk about joint venture options.

Shelter WA and the Community Housing Coalition have produced a report from the field trip in September. Attached to that report is a summary of the Housing Forum.

That report has been tabled with the Housing Advisory Committee.

Participants in the forum and others who have expressed interest will, through Shelter WA, receive updates on any new policy or procedural initiatives and/or specific programs which relate to issues raised at the forum.