

Shelter WA (Inc)

1998/99
Annual Report



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Role of Shelter WA

Shelter WA is a peak community managed housing organisation established in 1979, which seeks to represent the views of consumers and community groups on major housing issues. Shelter WA aims to ensure that every person has access to affordable, appropriate, secure and safe housing that is free from discrimination.

It does this through:

- coordinating and representing community sector views to government;
- developing and responding to policy;
- providing education and information; and
- promoting alternative housing models.

Report from the Chairperson

Shelter WA, like many community organisations, struggles with the changes to funding arrangements and relationships with Government since the shift from grant based funding to a purchaser-provider model. The new funding model impacts most directly on the ability of community organisations to identify and respond to need in the communities they serve. This impacts on all agencies, but has a particular impact on peak organisations such as Shelter WA which seek to represent the views and interests of a particular constituency. A balance needs to be struck between the priorities which are funded by Government and the broader Agenda of the housing sector.

It is these kinds of tensions which resulted in Shelter WA embarking on a project in 1998/99 to look at the role and work of the organisation and its relevance to members and other stakeholders. The project was funded by membership funds and provided an all-too-rare opportunity for Shelter to reflect on these issues in a focused manner.

The first phase of the project was undertaken in 1988/99. A project worker, Catherine O'Loughlin, was employed to gain information from a range of sources about the current functioning of Shelter WA and how this might be improved. Information was collected via Shelter documents, a workshop of Management Committee members, a survey and face-to-face interviews. Our thanks go to all who gave their time to participate in this process. On the basis of this information six key areas were

identified to be addressed by Shelter WA, and the Management Committee will work to progress these in 1999/2000. The areas are:

- to engage in longer term strategic planning which both encompasses and is broader than the annual work plan negotiated with Homeswest;
- to improve engagement with members to ensure clarity about Shelter's role, structure and function, and to facilitate two way communication between Shelter members and its various structures;
- to ensure ongoing feed-back to members and others who provide information, assistance and support to Shelter in the development of policy and in other areas of work;
- to maximise opportunities for members to contribute to Shelter's work;
- to investigate alternative funding sources to increase Shelter's funding base;
- to clarify and make accessible Shelter's internal and external policies and policy making processes.

In addition to this process of self-reflection, Shelter has seen a number of staffing changes in 1998/99 which are always significant in the life of an organisation.

Camille Inifer left Shelter in March 1999 after many years of faithful service to the organisation. This represented a real loss to Shelter and to the

housing sector as a whole. During her employment Camille's work encompassed both administrative and policy roles and she carried an amazing sense of the corporate history of the organisation. Her departure reinforced the need for Shelter to attempt to formalise that information in some way. We anticipate that this will be done as part of the process outlined above.

In many ways Camille's position of Policy, Development and Administrative Officer had developed in response to her rather unique combination of skills. Following her resignation a decision was made to split the position into its separate administration and policy functions and these roles have been filled as followed:

- Glynis Menezes has taken up the position of Administrative Officer; and
- Catriona Cameron has taken up the position of Community Development and Policy Officer.

Both new workers bring excellent skills and experience to the organisation.

Erin Gauntlett has continued in her role as Senior Policy Officer. Erin provides Shelter with clarity and focus and is a highly professional worker. On behalf of the Management Committee I want to thank her for her energy and commitment. Finally, I want to also acknowledge the work of the Management Committee and particularly the 'stayers' on the Committee who have played a

significant role in maintaining and developing Shelter WA during 1998/99: Mike Newbigin, Pauline Logan, Cathcart Weatherly, Bronwyn Kitching and Tim Garrett. Thanks too to their respective organisations (and for myself, thanks to WACOSS) for allowing them to participate in Shelter as a component of their work. This represents a significant way in which Shelter's membership supports the organisation.

Overall, I think 1998/99 has been a very fruitful year for Shelter WA. Funding from Homeswest has enabled us to undertake important and necessary work which has a direct bearing on housing outcomes for low income consumers; the feed-back from members and other stakeholders reinforces that Shelter is on track with much of what we do; and we have commenced a process of clarifying and enhancing future directions for the organisation. All in all, a substantial effort for a labour force of two full-time equivalent workers and a team of voluntary management committee members.

Again, my thanks to all who have contributed to the work of Shelter WA in 1998/99.

Leanne Barron
Chairperson

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KEY ISSUES FOR HOUSING

In the last year there have been a number of issues at both the Commonwealth and State level that have significant implications for low income housing, including: the introduction of the GST; the signing of a four year Commonwealth State Housing Agreement; national and state reviews of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP); and the formation of the Ministry of Housing in WA.

Taxation Reform

The introduction of the GST has serious implications for the provision of low income housing, both in the private rental sector and through Homeswest. Shelter WA and the Tenants Advice Service (TAS) presented a joint submission and subsequently gave evidence to the Community Affairs Reference Committee on a New Tax System highlighting a number of concerns.

One of the major issues relates to the fact that while a GST will not be charged on rent, properties will be inputs taxed with the ATO collecting any GST paid on inputs by the landlord. This means that the landlord's costs for items such as maintenance and management of the property will increase. It is widely recognised that landlords are likely to pass on these costs by way of a rent increase, albeit that it may not occur in a rational way. With AHURI figures showing that housing cost burden already affects up to 70% of low income renters (ie. pay in excess of 30% of their income on rent) increases to benefit payments and Rent Assistance will not adequately compensate low income renters,

especially when the impact of increases to other goods and services is taken into account (eg. food and essential services). Regional factors such as towns that experience boom and bust cycles will also result in increased barriers to low income people accessing the private rental market.

While the final tax package ensures that public housing tenants will not suffer an increase in rent as a result of the increase in benefits arising from the compensation package, it is unclear as to whether this will be sustained over a period of time. In addition, it remains to be seen whether the additional funds allocated to State Housing Authorities will adequately compensate for increased costs associated with the GST and whether this will have a flow on effect for public housing tenants.

Finally, under new tax arrangements there has been no guarantee that the CSHA will continue beyond 30 June 2003. If States and Territories did assume sole responsibility for generating public housing funds, there is a fear that the untying of housing dollars will result in a 'leakage' of housing money into other areas of government spending.

Commonwealth State Housing Agreement

The uncertainty around the continuation of the CSHA was finally resolved with the signing of a new agreement for the four year period 1999-2003. While it was of enormous relief to have the Commonwealth commit to another CSHA, the agreement does not incorporate any indexation and once again, applies an efficiency dividend which will

result in funding of \$957.609m in 1999/2000, reducing to \$929.17m in 2002/2003.

Supported Accommodation Assisted Program

A national and state evaluation of the SAAP Program (III) was undertaken during the year with a number of recommendations identifying the importance of the provision of long term viable housing options. While the Commonwealth has committed to another SAAP agreement, disappointingly the recommendation for growth funding has not been adopted.

The Ministry of Housing

The Ministry of Housing was launched on 16 June 1999 bringing together a range of housing related services including: home ownership programs; land development; Homeswest; Aboriginal Housing; the Country Housing Authority; Government Employees Housing Authority; and the formation of an Office of Policy. The need for the development and implementation of housing policy and programs across all tenures has been an ongoing issue in Western Australia and Shelter WA supports reforms aimed at achieving this objective. At the end of the financial year little progress had been made on the implementation of the Ministry so it is too early to comment on whether there are any benefits for low income housing consumers. We will be particularly interested in the implementation of the Office of Policy which will hopefully result in whole-of-sector policy development informed by research into housing need and the complex relationship between the various tenures.

WORK FOR THE PAST YEAR

Once again our funding was based on project specific funding and the projects undertaken this year were:

- The Housing Advisory Committee (HAC);
- Community Consultation and Information Forums;
- Customer Input into Homeswest Policy and Practice;
- Information – Newsletters and Information Sheets;
- Homeswest Domestic Violence Policy; and
- Training on Homeswest Legal Recovery Procedures.

Housing Advisory Committee

The Terms of Reference of the HAC are to advise the Minister for Housing and the Executive Director of Homeswest on policy and program issues as well as identifying housing needs in the community.

The committee responds to a variety of issues including those arising out of the Rental Operations Division and those relating to broad strategic directions of social housing. Last year we reported that the committee had begun to look at how it could best fulfil its mandate given that operational matters were dominating the agenda. The formation of the Ministry of Housing was subsequently announced and HAC broadened its discussions to include consideration of the implications of the Ministry for the Committee. The committee developed a submission to the Ministry of Housing Taskforce and recommended the

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formation of a Rental Operations Policy Sub-Committee to progress all operational policy matters. The proposal has been endorsed by the Minister and the Ministry of Housing and the Sub-Committee is currently being established.

Major issues that the Committee has responded to this year include:

- Developing a submission to the Ministry of Housing Taskforce – coordinated by Shelter WA;
- Developing a proposal for the Rental Operations Policy Sub-Committee – coordinated by Shelter WA;
- A review of the Rental Operations Policy Manual – coordinated by Shelter WA;
- The formation of the Community Housing Advisory Sub-Committee to develop the strategic direction of Community Housing in WA; identify and recommend research to be undertaken; and advise (through HAC) on Community Housing policy and program initiatives – Chaired by Shelter WA;
- Initiating and responding to issues related to home purchase programs through the Home Finance Advisory Committee – Chaired by Shelter WA;
- Initiating and responding to customer service related issues through the Homeswest Customer Service Executive Council – HAC is represented by Shelter WA;
- Responding to a range of proposed changes to rental operations policy matters including: the priority pamphlet; bond assistance; maintenance policy manual; revised allocation

zones; and waiting list management.

Community Consultation and Information Forums

There is little doubt that face to face meetings with community members and representatives provide an effective means by which information can be exchanged in a two way process, including the dissemination of particular information. Importantly, a relationship can be established which promotes shared understandings and a solid basis for good quality follow-up information. During this year, forums were held in Kalgoorlie and Geraldton to:

- allow dialogue on local housing issues by inviting community members to ask questions and get direct responses from representatives of Homeswest;
- provide information and allow feedback on Homeswest policy; and
- facilitate the process of community members identifying housing needs in their community in such a way that they can act to have those needs met.

Following the forums, reports were written and distributed to all participants and issues were followed up through a variety mechanisms including the Housing Advisory Committee.

Customer Input into Homeswest Policy and Practice

Homeswest clients will, from time to time, experience difficulties with the operational practice or outcomes of Homeswest policy. One of the ways they make their concerns known is to seek

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assistance from a community advocate. The concerns reflect either, gaps in information, unintended consequences of policy or intended consequences of policy considered unfair by the clients and advocates. Once again Shelter conducted broad surveys and topic specific surveys of community advocates seeking information on concerns of the effects of Homeswest policies. Feedback was received from a range of organisations including; financial counsellors, community legal centres, women's refuges and Aboriginal, disability, migrant, youth and aged services. The information was analysed and forwarded to Homeswest for comment and their response used as a basis for ongoing discussions on the need for relevant policy changes.

Publications and Submissions

Three newsletters were produced covering topics such as:

- The Kalgoorlie Housing Forum;
- Tax reform;
- The Homeswest New Living Program;
- HAC updates;
- The Centrelink Direct Deduction scheme;
- Poverty in WA;
- The Ministry of Housing;
- Social Housing Policy in WA;
- National Shelter updates;
- ACOSS Congress;
- Building sustainable communities;
- The Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement;
- Housing Dimensions of Citizenship and Social

Exclusion.

Six information sheets were produced on the following topics:

- Letting Fees;
- Housing and Tax Reform;
- The Homeswest Property Condition Report;
- Homeswest's New Living Program;
- The Federal and State budgets;
- The Homeswest Domestic Violence Policy.

Submissions – in addition to HAC submissions that were coordinated and/or contributed to by Shelter, three other submissions were produced this year:

- A joint submission with the Tenants Advice Service (TAS) to the Community Affairs Reference Committee on a New Tax System followed by oral evidence to the committee;
- Submission to the Ministry of Housing Taskforce; and
- Endorsement for the Tenants Advice Service' submission on the National Competition Policy Review of the Real Estate and Business Agents Act, 1978.

Training of Homeswest Officers and Community Workers in the Legal Recoveries Procedures.

Rob Spinks and Assoc. were contracted by Shelter to deliver the remaining 17 training sessions which were attended by Homeswest officers and community representatives across various regions in the State. Evaluations of the training were collated and a final report was prepared and sent to

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Homeswest.

Homeswest Domestic Violence Policy

A group of community agencies and individuals came together in the last financial year to look at Homeswest's Domestic Violence Policy and practices. Shelter was represented on the Domestic Violence Working Group (DVWG) which prepared a submission that was subsequently endorsed by the Housing Advisory Committee. Following a number of meetings between the DVWG and Homeswest, Shelter WA entered into an agreement to coordinate the re-writing of the Domestic Violence Policy which was completed in May this year.

SEMINARS ATTENDED

Shelter was funded by the Minister of Housing to attend the WA Planning Commission Annual Seminar titled Housing Market Trends – Facts, Figures and Fallacies. During this one day conference there were a range of presentations that explored the changes in demographics, housing choice and trends in residential development.

The Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) received funding to host a series of one-day national housing workshops. Shelter WA was represented at both of the workshops held during the year, the first was titled "Future Directions in Federal Government Policy on Social Housing" and the second "Future Directions for Social Housing Research". Other participants included representatives from the federal Government, the community sector and academic institutions.

Shelter also attended the second national homelessness conference hosted by Council to Homeless Persons Victoria titled "There's No Place Like Home". Issues explored in the conference included: sustainable communities; early intervention; and support and accommodation – from crisis to transition.

NATIONAL SHELTER

Shelter WA is a member of the Council of National Shelter, a federation of State peak bodies that represents the views of over 700 community and consumer organisations.

While National Shelter has not employed a worker since being defunded in June 1997, funding from the Cavill Foundation enabled it to continue to produce its journal *National Housing Action*, maintain basic national administrative operations, and meet the costs associated with unfunded State Shelters attending Council meetings. In addition, this year National Shelter received another grant from the Cavill Foundation and employed a project worker to look at the relationship between housing, health, social security and employment and how these factors impact on developing/maintaining sustainable communities. Following a literature search it was agreed that the project would focus on the links between the labour market and housing and the implications for housing policy. Following consultations in all capital cities, a policy paper will be developed drawing on information from both the literature search and the consultations and identifying gaps for further research.

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We attended three Council meetings during the year which continues to be a mechanism for maintaining a national perspective on housing policy.

EQUIPMENT UPGRADE

After struggling with outdated equipment, Shelter WA received a capital upgrade grant from the Lotteries Commission. This has enabled us to upgrade computing equipment and software, our fax and printer. This has made an enormous difference to our work and we finally feel like we've entered the age of technology.

TENANCY ACTION COALITION (TAC)

Shelter continues to be a member of the coalition which meets on an as-needs basis to respond to evictions and other related issues.

WACOSS POVERTY COMMISSION

During the year, the Poverty Commission was formed in response to growing concerns about the impact of poverty on the lives of individuals and families in WA. The Commission is a committee of the Board of the WA Council of Social Services and brings together workers in the front line as well as policy makers to develop strategies to eradicate poverty in WA.

Shelter WA sits on the Commission along with representatives from the major welfare organisations, the Churches, community based organisations including the Emergency Relief Forum, the Financial Counsellors Association,

Community Legal Centres, Welfare Rights Centres, Aboriginal, Ethnic, and Youth Organisations.

The Commission was officially launched in October with the following terms of reference:

- To ensure action is taken in the International Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006) to address poverty in our community.
- To monitor the progress of the implementation of the recommendations of the report of the Poverty Taskforce 'Community Choices - individual lives'.
- To assess the impact of policy and legislative changes by Government on individuals and families in need, particularly in the areas of: employment; taxation; income security; health; housing; access to justice; emergency financial assistance provision; concessions; public transport; education; and access to services.
- To assess the impact of policies and practices of financial institutions, utility providers and other service providers on low income people, and to monitor the effectiveness of community service obligations.
- To raise community awareness of the economic and social implications of poverty.
- To raise community awareness of the needs of the most disadvantaged groups in the community and to dispel the myths which contribute to these groups being marginalised and stigmatised.
- To develop short term and long term strategies to respond to poverty.

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HOUSING RESEARCH PROJECT

During the year Shelter WA coordinated a public meeting to discuss increasing levels of homelessness and the lack of consideration for the whole of government implications of social housing.

After considerable discussion it was agreed:

- to undertake a research project that focuses on social housing as the fundamental component to building sustainable/healthy communities;
- to seek funding from the Lotteries Commission (or similar body) with match funding to be provided from within the non government sector; and
- that rather than establish another forum, the project be proposed to the Poverty Commission (auspiced by WACOSS) as a key area of work for the Commission with management to be undertaken by a sub-committee comprising Commission members and other interested parties.

The Poverty Commission subsequently agreed to take on the project, a reference group was formed and a project brief was developed which identified the following aims:

- build a better picture of what is happening with housing in WA; in particular to provide an overview of housing issues, the current changes and driving forces behind these, and the ways in which government policies in a range of areas interconnect;
- to highlight the role of social housing as a fundamental component of sustainable/healthy communities;

- use the notion of the interconnectedness of housing and broader social issues to highlight the need for whole of government coordination of social policy.

Following financial contributions from a number of community organisations the reference group is able to proceed with phase 1 of the project which is concerned with building the picture of what is happening with housing, primarily in relation to WA, but also having regard to national and international trends. At the end of the financial year, the reference group was in the process of employing a project worker to undertake phase 1.

REDEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP

In response to increasing number of concerns expressed by individuals, tenant interest groups and local service providers about Homeswest's Estate's Improvement Program, WACOSS, Shelter WA and the Community Housing Coalition of WA hosted a public forum to provide information, share experiences, identify issues and develop strategies to address matters of concern. Following the forum a working group was formed to:

- encourage knowledge and understanding across regions of what the program will mean for individuals and the community;
- ensure that there is information exchange and dissemination at all levels; and
- ensure that there is a collective voice comprised of individuals and organisations.

Shelter WA is represented on the working group which has continued to meet and initiate and respond to issues regarding the New Living Program.

CARTOONING PROJECT

During the year the Community Housing Coalition of WA transferred a project to Shelter WA which had been funded by Arts WA in conjunction with the Lotteries Commission and through the Community Arts Network. A series of workshops will be held with skilled cartoonist Rona Chadwick to both develop cartooning skills in the sector and to produce a resource kit which will be distributed to organisations for use in publications such as newsletters, fliers and annual reports.

FORUMS

In addition to other forums held, Shelter WA and the Curtin University School of Social Work presented a seminar by Robina Goodlad, Professor of Housing and Urban Studies at the University of Glasgow, on *Housing Dimensions of Citizenship and Social Exclusion*.

Report from the Treasurer

Once again, I find myself writing this report in a year of considerable change. Towards December, Shelter's budget was looking pretty tight as predicted and reported in the 1997/98 Annual Report. This, as expected, was due to the failure of Homeswest to adjust the budget to account for higher employment costs. The base Homeswest grant rose by only 2.6% from 1998 to 1999. Shelter WA's employment costs rose 10% in the 1996/97 and 1997/98 financial years this does not include the provisions.

This added burden to the budget, was, by December 1998, making things extremely tight for the remainder of the financial year. So much so, that Shelter could no longer carry the costs of the Homeswest quarterly payments arriving late, without having to dip into our membership funds. Tight monitoring of the budget and further cuts into the already diminishing operating costs were shaping up as the only options.

Whilst Camille's resignation in March was accepted with much sadness in Shelter and throughout the housing sector, it got Shelter out of a tight budget. In April, Erin also needed to take leave. For a period Shelters' office was staffed on a part-time basis only.

This certainly helped the budget get back on track. The Employment costs (not including provisions) were \$82,000 in 1997/98 but only \$80,000 for 1998/99.

The restructuring of the staff positions and

reworking the Job Descriptions will have an impact on the budget for the year. On the plus side work that was previously contracted out is now being done internally again due to an increase in staff time. On the negative side the ongoing cost component is now 23% of total operating costs, down from 30% for the 1997/98 financial year. The Shelter Management Committee is confident that this budget can be achieved, but careful monitoring will be required during the year.

Over the past year Shelter embarked upon an equipment upgrade program with funding through the Lotteries Commission. The purchase of new computers and an upgrade in the accounting software resulted in a simplification of the accounts. Erin has to take the credit for this transformation of the organisations understanding of its financial situation after years of benign neglect.

Through this simplification process Shelter has been able to identify what resources it has at its disposal to undertake work beyond its Homeswest funding. This process commenced with the now infamous Shelter Project, 'Taking Stock' and is set to continue as the organisation repositions itself with a new confidence and awareness.

The audited financial statements for the 1998/99 financial year are attached and to the best of my knowledge represent a true and accurate picture of the organisations financial position.

Mike Newbiggin
Hon. Treasurer

SHELTER WA (INC)

HOMESWEST

SPECIAL PURPOSE FINANCIAL REPORTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 1999

AUDITORS CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

SHELTER WA (INC)

SHELTER WA (INC)
Homeswest Statement of Income & Expenditure
for the Year ended 30 June 1999

SHELTERWA (INC)
Homeswest Statement of Income & Expenditure
for the Year ended 30 June 1999

SHELTER WA (INC)

MEMBERSHIP FUNDS

SPECIAL PURPOSE FINANCIAL REPORTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 1999

AUDITORS CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

SHELTER WA (INC)

SHELTER WA (INC)
MEMBERSHIP FUNDS
Statement of Income & Expenditure
for the Year ended 30 June 1999

SHELTER WA (INC)

SPECIAL PURPOSE FINANCIAL REPORTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 1999

INDEPENDENT AUDITORS REPORT

SHELTER WA (INC)
Balance Sheet as at 30 June 1999

SHELTER WA (INC)

SHELTER WA
Statement of Income & Expenditure
For the year ended 30 June 1999

SHELTERWA
Statement of Income & Expenditure
For the year ended 30 June 1999

SHELTER WA (INC)

NOTES TO FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 1999

Shelter WA Management Committee

Office Bearers

CHAIRPERSON
Leanne Barron
Individual

VICE CHAIRPERSON
Pauline Logan
Tenants Advice Service

SECRETARY
Tim Garrett
Individual

TREASURER
Mike Newbiggin
Federation of Housing Collectives

Committee Members

Cathcart Weatherly
Community Housing Coalition of WA

Bronwyn Kitching
Council to Homeless Persons

Kath Mallot
Individual

Josephin Williams
Warrawee Women's Refuge

Jane Evans
Centrecare Marriage & Family
Service (organisation resigned June 1999)

Kym Gabriel
Fremantle Housing Association (organisation
resigned January 1999)

Simon London (resigned February 1999)
Evan Hillman
Fremantle Community Youth Service

Erin Gauntlett
Shelter WA