

Role of Shelter WA

Shelter (WA) is an independent, community based organisation committed to the principle of accessible, affordable, appropriate and secure housing for every person.

Our role is to give an informed voice on housing policy issues based on sound research and close collaboration and consultation with housing consumers and community based organisations working in the housing field.

Report from the Chairperson

I would like to start by saying that I was honoured to be approached to take up the role of Chairperson after only a year as a Committee Member. For me, as a novice Chairperson, it has been a challenging though rewarding year to be involved with Shelter and to work with the high calibre staff and dedicated Committee members.

Shelter was fortunate to retain several Committee members from the previous year – we welcomed back Leanne Barron, Tim Garrett, Mike Newbigin and Pauline Logan. Shelter was also fortunate to have inducted Catriona Cameron following the resignation of Camille Inifer in early 1999 and to have Erin Gauntlett continue in the position of Senior Policy Officer. Glynis Menezes also continued in her role as Administrative Officer providing never to be under-estimated administrative support.

Over the 1999/2000 year, Shelter WA experienced both highs and lows. Unlike the previous year, funding pressures were not as evident and Shelter enjoyed a period of relative financial security. Ministry of Housing has further solidified this security with commitment to an agreement in principle for a three-year funding period. The Ministry itself underwent a significant internal restructure and has emerged as a more rationally and effectively administered Government agency. Shelter has benefited from the new organisation of the Ministry of Housing in its work to represent the views of low income housing consumers and particularly looks forward to working with the newly

established Office of Policy. Shelter also prepared itself for the implementation of the GST and Y2K did not eventuate as a cause for concern.

Some of the other high points over the past year include Shelter's presentation of *Creative Approaches to Urban Renewal – A Conference on the Redevelopment of Public Housing*. The one day Conference was a resounding success, thanks to the work of Catriona. The standard of presentation and participation was exemplary and the feedback that Shelter received from all that participated was very positive. Thanks must also go to the Lotteries Commission for their support.

Shelter also broadened its role as a peak body contributing to public debate about housing policy and practice by participating in a number of research projects. The first of these was a piece of housing research undertaken for the WACOSS Poverty Taskforce. The project was completed by Catriona and culminated in the report *Housing for a Sustainable Community: The State of Housing in Western Australia*. In addition to this, Curtin University contracted Shelter to undertake a literature review for research commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. Erin worked on this project which culminated in the report *A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Community-Based Prevention and Early Intervention Action*.

Shelter has also participated in the newly established Australian Housing and Urban

Research Institute node in Western Australia and will be involved in a future research project on housing and sustainable communities. By extending Shelter into research activities the Management Committee hoped to become a more pro-active advocate for our stakeholders and the quality of the research produced is a testament to this.

Shelter continued to review its internal policies and processes, which began last year when six key recommendations were identified over a two-stage consultation process. Ken Marston built on previous work and facilitated the Management Committee in the preparation of documents to guide the organisation. A succinct Strategic Plan for 2000 – 2005 was produced. Clear objectives and strategies were developed to underpin the goals which were identified for Shelter in this strategic planning process.

These goals are;

- To be an effective voice on housing issues.
- To inform members of the community sector about social housing issues.
- To further develop Shelter WA's research capacity.
- To support members of the community sector to work together to achieve positive outcomes for low income housing consumers.
- To take a lead role in the development of social housing policy positions which reflect

and are informed by Shelters constituency.

- To manage Shelter WA Inc effectively, efficiently and appropriately for the benefit of the community.

The Strategic Plan is a useful tool to provide a framework for the ongoing development of Shelter as a relevant, forward thinking organization.

Over the past year Shelter completed a review of the current staffing arrangements including Job Descriptions, Duty Statements and salary classification, and the Committee is now confident that these structures are appropriate.

Finally, I believe 1999/2000 has been a very full year and Shelter has achieved remarkable success. It has been a great pleasure to work with all who have contributed and to enjoy the high points. I express my sincere appreciation to the staff of Shelter who coped with my "noviceness", and to the other members of the Management Committee who provided their support and energy to the work at hand over the year and who achieved a great deal to be proud of.

Bronwyn Kitching
Chairperson

Agency Report

KEY ISSUES FOR HOUSING

The beginning of the year brought some stability to the social housing system through the implementation of the Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and the signing of the fourth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) agreement. Yet at the same time, the sector braced itself for the implementation of the new tax system and was then faced with the announcement by the Minister for Family and Community Services that the Government intended to review the Australian welfare system.

In terms of research, this year also saw the restructuring of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), the source of the majority of housing research funds in Australia.

Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement

The year began with implementation of another Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement (CSHA) thereby securing Commonwealth involvement in the provision of direct housing assistance for another four years. Yet at the same time, there is increasing uncertainty about the future of housing assistance beyond 2003 and the implications for low-income people and those who are otherwise disadvantaged by the housing system. This is further complicated by the implementation of taxation reform and the possibility of the Commonwealth withdrawing from Specific Purpose Payments like the CSHA.

The continuation of the CSHA is crucial for two main reasons. Firstly, it is an important mechanism

for providing coordinated housing assistance across Australia where there are a range of Commonwealth and State government policies that impact on housing including:

- employment;
- interest rates;
- income support;
- taxation;
- land use; and
- building requirements and tenancy legislation.

Secondly, while the private market has increasingly become a tenure of last resort for people who are unable to access public housing, it continues to fail low income renters in a number of ways. To this end, there is significant research detailing that low-income private renters are the most disadvantaged group in the rental market with some of the major issues being: a lack of supply of low-income stock; lack of affordability; evidence of discrimination; a lack of legislative protection against unfair rent increases; and a lack of minimum housing standards.

Given that negotiations for post 2003 housing commence in mid 2001, one of the main challenges for the sector will be securing the Commonwealth's continued involvement in the provision of direct housing assistance through funding for 'bricks and mortar'.

Welfare Reform

In September 1999 the Minister for Family and Community Services announced the government's intention to review the Australian Welfare system.

A reference group was formed and subsequently released an Interim Report with an invitation for organisations and individuals to respond. Many in the housing sector were disappointed at the narrow scope of the review and the fact that housing did not feature as a significant consideration in the debate.

In particular, the report did not draw a connection between the stated goal of welfare reform (to maximise people's opportunities for employment and to use their income support as efficiently as possible) and the fact that access to affordable, appropriate and secure housing is critical to a person's capacity to access life opportunities such as education and employment. In addition, a two-way relationship exists between people's ability to access good housing outcomes and a range of income support and employment policies. Yet the report paid scant attention to issues such as: the need to include housing costs when calculating basic social security benefits; how housing cost and tenure correlate with life cycle needs; the impact of locational disadvantage on people's employment prospects; and employment disincentives arising out of housing policy.

With the final report due later in the year, this will remain a critical issue for social housing over the next year.

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI)

The news that the restructuring of AHURI would result in research nodes being established for all

States and Territories was certainly welcomed in Western Australia where there has been a perception that the research agenda has been dominated by the eastern seaboard. In Western Australia a joint bid by Murdoch University and Curtin University to establish a node was successful. The research agenda was released and the various nodes around Australia subsequently developed bids for the first round tender process. The Western Australian node was awarded three research projects including: Strengthening Communities – the contribution of housing policy and planning; Transforming Communities – responding to regional disadvantage; and a third piece of research focussing on the non-shelter outcomes of home ownership programs. This represents an excellent opportunity for the community sector to develop partnerships with the Western Australian node and influence the housing research agenda.

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;
- Information - Information Strategies; and
- Review of the Homeswest Appeals Mechanism.

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Housing Advisory Committee (HAC)

The committee continued to review its Terms of Reference and operating structures in light of the formation of the Ministry of Housing and in particular, the Office of Policy. This resulted in a planning day to *establish the Committee's views on its desired future role and purpose, and to identify the strategies which would need to be implemented to move the Committee from how it currently operates to how it wants to operate in the future.*

New Terms of Reference were subsequently developed and are now as follows:

1. To advise the Minister for Housing and Managing Director, Ministry of Housing on State Government housing policy and other related matters.
2. To participate in the development of Ministry of Housing policy and program initiatives.
3. To advise on or recommend research and the development of new policies and guidelines in areas of perceived need.
4. To assist in identifying housing needs in the community.

It has also been agreed that the Committee will have three standing committees to deal with the following areas:

- Rental Sector;
- Finance and Home Ownership; and
- Community Housing.

At the end of the year, final details regarding communication processes and membership of the committee were still being finalised.

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

- Developing a submission on the Ministry of Housing's Privacy and Confidentiality Policy – coordinated by Shelter WA
- Finalising the formation of the Rental Services Policy Sub-Committee – coordinated by Shelter WA
- Initiating and responding to a range of operational policy issues through the Rental Services Policy Sub-Committee including: review of the maintenance policy; waiting list management; bond accrual; bond assistance; bankruptcy; direct debit; and the domestic violence policy – resourced and coordinated through Shelter WA
- Initiating and responding to issues related to community housing through the Community Housing Advisory Sub-Committee – 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.

Community Consultation and Information Forums

Shelter WA held two Housing Forum consultations during the year. The first was held with culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities in the Perth metropolitan region between September 1999

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and March 2000. The second Forum was held in the Albany region in May and June 2000.

The aims of the Forums were to:

- Provide an opportunity for discussion and exchange of information on issues such as rental policy, tenancy issues and access to affordable and appropriate housing
- Identify and prioritise housing issues, and develop strategies to respond to issues
- Establish ongoing links between Shelter WA, local community organisations and their workers, government departments and local government.

The Housing Forums involved a number of stages. The first stage set the scene for the Forum and involved a review of literature and a survey of community organisations and workers to identify priority housing issues. The Preliminary Discussion Paper was then used to inform the agenda of the consultations. A Final Report was produced outlining the issues and strategies identified, with Shelter progressing the strategies through various forums including the Ministry of Housing and the Housing Advisory Committee.

The Forums identified a range of issues including:

- Limited research has been undertaken regarding the housing needs of newly arrived migrants and refugees in Perth and, similarly, for housing consumers in the Albany region
- There is need for an integrated approach to planning affordable and appropriate housing taking into consideration issues including

employment, transport and service needs

- There is an ongoing need for appropriate and accessible information for tenants in the rental sector, including information in community languages.

Customer Input into Homeswest Policy and Practice

During the year Shelter WA undertook a survey in relation to a number of specific issues regarding the Direct Debit Scheme. The survey was designed in response to specific concerns raised by tenant advocate workers and other organisations representing public housing consumers.

The survey focused on the following key issues identified by workers:

- Information and communication regarding the scheme
- Direct debit rates and changes
- Direct debit deduction errors.

The results of the survey and recommendations were compiled into a Final Report and forwarded to the Ministry of Housing and the Housing Advisory Committee. At the end of the year Shelter WA was progressing the findings in these forums.

Publications

Three newsletters were produced with topics including:

- The Geraldton Housing Forum;
- The Australian Social and Economic Rights Project;

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- Y2K Information;
- Housing Advisory Committee updates;
- National Shelter updates;
- Outcomes from the ACOSS Social Housing Workshops;
- The National Housing Conference;
- The Australian Labor Party's Issues Forum;
- The New Tenancy Services Funding Program Model;
- Library Additions;
- Redevelopment Conference;
- Women's Refuge Group Housing Committee;
- Stronger Communities – the role of intervention;
- Preventing Homelessness for Women Experiencing Domestic Violence Research Project; and
- GST.

In addition, three information sheets were produced and three information forums were coordinated.

The titles of the information sheets were as follows:

- Tax Reform;
- Home Loan Schemes – how are they performing for borrowers?
- Housing in the New Millennium – a summary of the 2000/2001 Federal and State budgets.

Forums held were in relation to the following:

- The Australian Social and Economic Rights Project;
- The National Shelter project on the links between housing, employment and income support;

- The development of the Australian Labor Party's housing policy.

Review of the Homeswest Appeals Mechanism

The project brief identified the Ministry of Housing's desire to find ways to *fine-tune and improve its current appeals mechanism*. The aim of the review was to *gauge the effectiveness of the current appeals process and the extent to which the ideals identified by both Carrivick and Colin Kent, where accepted, have been effectively implemented or adhered to*. While the project brief did not specify which of these principles are accepted, the following parameters for the review were articulated:

- The current structure of the Appeals Mechanism structure is to remain; there is no scope for amending or altering any of the principles of the three tier mechanism.
- The current set of policies within which the Ministry operates is set, thus not subject to debate.

The review was overseen by a Reference Group with the following representatives:

- Dianne Annear - Chairperson Public Housing Review Panel
- Wendy Cranfield – Appeals Coordinator, Ministry of Housing
- Dave Scott/Shane Edmonds - State Manager Rental Services, Ministry of Housing
- Joanne Walsh – Tenants Advice Service

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A final report was produced with a range of recommendations regarding: ongoing monitoring and evaluation; provision of information; the administration of the appeals system; and education and training. While the Ministry of Housing has commented broadly stating they support the overall thrust of the recommendations, at the end of the year they were in the process of developing a more detailed response.

SEMINARS ATTENDED

Last year we reported that the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) received funding to host a series of one-day national housing workshops. Shelter WA was represented at an additional four workshops held which covered the following topics:

- The Australian housing research agenda;
- The links between housing, employment and income support;
- Welfare reform;
- The Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement;
- Homelessness;
- Indigenous Housing;
- Housing Beyond 2003.

Other participants included representatives from the federal Government, the community sector and academic institutions.

Shelter also attended a national housing conference that explored the theme of *Reform and Renewal in Social Housing – responding to social exclusion*. Speakers attended from Australia, Ireland, Britain and the United States providing a

range of perspectives. The changing social and economic profile of communities and the role of social housing and social policy in responding to the changing needs of communities were central themes of the conference. The importance of developing strong and supportive partnerships between tenants, communities and service providers was consistently highlighted throughout the two days.

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. The project commenced last year regarding the links between housing, employment and income support was able to be extended through an additional grant from the Cavill Foundation. The project has not only enabled National Shelter to further develop its profile but it has also been timely in terms of major policy debates including welfare reform.

Shelter WA was elected to the position of Treasurer and participated in phone hook-ups as well as face-to-face meetings of the Executive as well as attending Council meetings. Our involvement is

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critical to us maintaining a national perspective on housing policy.

OTHER WORK

WACOSS Poverty Commission Housing Research Project

Shelter WA was contracted to undertake the first phase of the WACOSS Poverty Commission Housing Research Project, which culminated in the paper *Housing for a Sustainable Community: The State of Housing in Western Australia*.

The objectives of the project were:

- to 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.

The paper assesses the current housing situation in Western Australia and identifies issues, trends and future directions. Shelter will be involved in developing the second phase of the research project in the forthcoming year.

Creative Approaches to Urban Renewal Conference

Shelter WA presented a Conference on urban renewal and the redevelopment of public housing in June with funding support from the Lotteries Commission. The catalyst for the Conference came through Shelter's coordination of the Redevelopment Working Group which was established following a Forum on the New Living Program in 1998 jointly coordinated by WACOSS, Shelter and the Community Housing Coalition.

The Conference was attended by nearly 100 delegates and provided an opportunity to hear about approaches to redevelopment that integrate physical, economic and social strategies.

Conference speakers included:

- Professor Bill Randolph, Director, Urban Frontiers Program, University of Western Sydney
- Ross Woodward, Regional Director, South Western Sydney Region, NSW Department of Housing
- Trish Hensley, Sector Development Officer, Shelter SA
- Pilar Kasat, Cultural Planning Program Manager, Community Arts Network WA
- Phillida Rooksby, Senior Projects Officer, City of Stirling
- Alison Day, Alison Day & Associates
- Keith Merrit, Balga Action Group
- Joyce Wilkins, Karawara Community Project.

Australian Social and Economics Rights Project

Shelter coordinated several forums in July on the Australian Social and Economics Rights Project. The Project was established by the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions to inform community and non-government sectors on Australia's responsibilities as signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The project coincided with the review of the Australian government by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The *Community Organisations Report on Housing in Western Australia: The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, edited by John Ballard and Paul Whelligan, was a coordinated effort by 25 non-government organisations in Western Australia on how the Australian government is meeting its obligations to the right to adequate housing. Shelter was involved in contributing to the report to the UN Committee.

Curtin University Research Project

Shelter WA was contracted by Curtin University to undertake research regarding early intervention and prevention strategies aimed at building stronger communities. Shelter WA was contacted following Curtin University being contracted by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services to complete a meta-analysis on early intervention and prevention strategies aimed at building stronger communities.

Specifically, the overall project brief was to

- Review relevant national and international literature on community-based approaches to responding to family and community problems
- Report on the financial implications of prevention and early intervention approaches with reference to the five Stronger Communities indicators identified by the Department of Family and Community Services, namely: knowledge and skills including volunteering; networks and partnerships in communities; leadership in communities; local solutions to local problems; and community capacity to use best practice; and
- Where appropriate, extrapolate the benefits of particular local projects to estimate what the costs and benefits would be if that approach, or a similar one, were to be applied nationwide.

The project was lead by Professor Peter Kenyon from the Institute for Research into International Competitiveness and Professor Richard Hugman from the School of Social Work and Social Policy. Shelter also contracted the Tenants Advice Service to work on the Project and a report was produced and subsequently submitted to the Department of Family and Community Services.

Report from the Treasurer

CORE FUNDING

In 1999/2000 Shelter WA received core funding of \$118,500 from the Ministry of Housing and additional funding of \$3,772 to undertake the Secretariat role of the newly established Rental Services Policy Standing Committee. The funding is project specific and enables Shelter to perform a significant part of its work as a peak housing organisation. Details of the funded Work Plan project areas are provided elsewhere in this Report. The balance of funding came from alternative sources.

At the close of the 1999/2000 financial year, Shelter has maintained its sound financial position. During the year Shelter made a provision of \$37,086 to undertake a number of specific projects from accumulated funds. These projects include Library Systems Development & Acquisitions (\$10,000), Pre-State Election Project (\$6,000), GST Impact on Rents Project (\$5,000), Information Systems Project (\$4,500), Redevelopment Project (\$3,586.00), Research Infrastructure Project (\$5,000) and Sector Development Project (\$3,000). The full provision for these projects has been set aside under current liabilities.

The balance of the deficit of \$45,563 is made up of staff provisions, redundancy and long service leave (\$5,357). These provisions are fully costed within Shelter's Balance Sheet although the Ministry of Housing makes no allowance for these items

through funding. The balance of the deficit consists of unpaid office expenses of \$2,772 relating to the 1999/2000 Workplan. This leaves a general operating shortfall for Shelter of \$1,350.

As in other small community based organisations, Shelter WA's salary costs represent a large proportion of its core operating costs. In 1999/2000 Shelter's employment costs represented 81% of core funding, an increase from 77% in the previous year.

SHELTER PROJECTS

Research Projects

Shelter received funding in 1999/2000 to undertake two specific research projects: Phase 1 of the WACOSS Poverty Commission Project on Housing and Sustainable Communities (\$3,509); and a literature search on early intervention strategies for Curtin University (\$10,000). Both projects were important for bringing additional resources into Shelter and for assisting the organisation to further develop its expertise in the housing and related arenas. I feel sure that Shelter looks forward to further similar collaborations.

Urban Renewal Conference

Funding was also received from the Lotteries Commission (\$3,000) to assist Shelter in presenting the Creative Approaches to Urban Renewal Conference in June 2000. The funds were used

specifically to assist representatives of tenant and community organisations to attend and participate in the Conference. Shelter acknowledges the important contribution of the Lotteries Commission to the success of this important Conference.

Finally, as outgoing Treasurer, I wish to give thanks to Mike Newbigin for the significant contribution he has made to Shelter WA through the many years of his involvement as both Treasurer and Management Committee member. Mike has played an important role in facilitating the financial management of the organisation, and continued to provide this support and assistance during my term as a novice Treasurer.

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

Leanne Barron
Hon. Treasurer

SHELTER WA (INC)

HOMESWEST

SPECIAL PURPOSE FINANCIAL REPORTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2000

AUDITORS CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

SHELTER WA (INC)

SHELTER WA (INC)

Homeswest Statement of Income & Expenditure
for the Year ended 30 June 2000

SHELTERWA (INC)
Homeswest Statement of Income & Expenditure
for the Year ended 30 June 2000

SHELTER WA (INC)

MEMBERSHIP FUNDS

SPECIAL PURPOSE FINANCIAL REPORTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2000

AUDITORS CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

SHELTER WA (INC)

SHELTER WA (INC)
MEMBERSHIP FUNDS
Statement of Income & Expenditure
for the Year ended 30 June 2000

SHELTER WA (INC)

SPECIAL PURPOSE FINANCIAL REPORTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2000

INDEPENDENT AUDITORS REPORT

SHELTER WA (INC)
Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2000

SHELTER WA (INC)

SHELTER WA
Statement of Income & Expenditure
For the year ended 30 June 2000

SHELTER WA
Statement of Income & Expenditure
For the year ended 30 June 2000

SHELTER WA (INC)

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2000

Shelter WA Management Committee

Office Bearers

CHAIRPERSON
Bronwyn Kitching
Anglicare

VICE CHAIRPERSON
Pauline Logan
Tenants Advice Service

SECRETARY
Tim Garrett
Individual

TREASURER
Leanne Barron
Individual

Committee Members

John Ballard
Community Aid Abroad South West Indigenous Projects

Juanita Barron
Warrawee Women's Refuge
(organisation resigned March 2000)

Karen Grove (to March 2000)
Stephen Hall (from March 2000)
Sussex Street Community Legal Centre

Mike Newbigin (to May 2000)
Karel Eringa (from June 2000)
Community Housing Coalition of WA

Ian Main
Individual

Mike Newbigin
Individual (from June 2000)

Anna Paris
Fremantle Community Youth Service (from June 2000)

Erin Gauntlett
Shelter WA