

JOINT COMMUNITY SECTOR REPORT

GAPS IN HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR HUMANITARIAN ENTRANTS

HOUSING CRISIS COMMITTEE FOR CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

CONSULTATION FORUM RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abbreviations

CaLD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CRIO	Community Relations Integration Officer
CSSS	Community Service Scheme program
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
HCCCaLD	Housing Crisis Committee for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities
HREOC	Human Rights Equal Opportunity Commission
ICESCR	International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IEC	Intensive English Centres
IHSS	Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy
ISC	Integrated Services Centre
OMI	Office of Multicultural Interests
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme
SHP	Special Humanitarian Program
SPG	Special Grants Program

Executive Summary

The Housing Crisis Committee for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (HCCCaLD) was formed in October 2006 in response to increasing reports of problems in accessing and maintaining housing faced by humanitarian communities in the metropolitan area of Perth, Western Australia. The Committee resolved to initiate conversations with those at the grassroots level and in turn develop an evidence based report on the issue including proposed recommendations.

The HCCCaLD consists of a diverse group of community and government service providers who are interested in raising awareness and advocating for improved response to the housing and support needs of humanitarian communities. In January 2008 the HCCCaLD resolved to hold a Consultation Forum for non-government community service providers working with the humanitarian community to identify gaps in services and propose solutions to the problems identified.

The HCCCaLD Consultation Forum was run on February 4th 2008 with a wide range of participants working in CaLD services. It was shown that the difficulties for CaLD community members and particularly recently arrived humanitarian community members in accessing and maintaining housing is increasing with time and is exacerbated by the current high demand for rental housing, related low vacancy rates and increasing rents.

Thirty-four (34) participants from twenty-eight (28) agencies participated in the consultation forum. In addition 9 observers, moderators and guest speakers were present.

The high cost of private rents in WA combined with a scarcity of affordable public and community housing is impacting low-income earners who are increasingly at risk of homelessness. For people from CaLD backgrounds and those newly arriving to Western Australia from war-torn countries with personal experiences of torture and trauma, stress and uncertainty in securing and maintaining appropriate and affordable housing can be particularly detrimental to mental health and wellbeing.

Participants from the Consultation Forum stressed that the current housing crisis is greatly affecting CaLD clients. The key issues that arose from the Consultation forum were the preparation of humanitarian clients before arriving to and the initial settlement programs and issues of access to housing and maintaining a tenancy were of high importance to the participants. HCCCaLD recommends an increase in tenancy education programmes and extra support in housing and finance.

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¹ This report can be used by other organisations with the same concerns and issues, and could be adapted to other geographical regions. The scope of the report was only able to capture those services in the Metropolitan Area of Perth, Western Australia. However for further research and evidence based purposes a further exploration in other geographical regions of wider Western Australia may be explored.

Recommendations

- 1. Regional Network meetings for government and non-government workers servicing humanitarian communities.**
- 2. Provide more comprehensive education on tenancy matters that are appropriate and relevant to humanitarian communities. This should include the development of tenancy education materials using low literacy learning and teaching resources, multi-media DVD and kits for workers to deliver to groups or individuals.**
- 3. Increased education and training in tenancy law, housing support services and tenancy issues for community settlement workers, bi-lingual workers, community leaders and volunteers.**
- 4. Bring back dedicated multi-housing sites for new arrivals to live in as a community until adequately orientated and ready to enter the private housing market.**
- 5. Extra support by providing one month free rent and fully subsidised utility connections and costs in the first month of arrival for humanitarian community individuals or households.**
- 6. Development of a Tenancy Support program for humanitarian communities to receive practical assistance to find a suitable property, apply for, accept an offered tenancy, move in and maintain their accommodation.**
- 7. The IHSS program, be extended up to 12 months for those families who need additional time to settle in.**
- 8. Access to free Telephone Interpreter Service for Real Estate Agents and Landlords managing properties with CaLD tenants**
- 9. Implement the proposed EOC investigation into race based discrimination in the private rental market**
- 10. Improved data collection and reporting of housing, housing related advocacy and tenancy support services provided by humanitarian community workers**
- 11. Public housing and Community housing stock to be significantly increased overall and to increase the proportion of 5+ bedroom dwellings suitable for larger families.**
- 12. Expand and extend the pilot Integrated Education Centres, currently established in Koondoola (north metro) and Parkwood (south metro). These programs are**

well received and successful and need to extend to other locations where there are newly emerging communities.

13. Provide new short-term emergency and crisis accommodation for CaLD families with a particular need identified for Muslim women with children and Muslim women escaping family violence².

Implementation Plan

14. That a Round Table of responsible government agencies and decision makers identify sources of funding and develop implementation plans for actioning the above recommendations.

² Aly, A. and Gaba, G. 'No Place to Go: Report on the Needs Analysis for Crisis Accommodation for CaLD Background People of Islamic Faith' Dar Al Shifar (Islamic) Inc. 2007

Background

About HCCCaLD

The Housing Crisis Committee for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (hereafter to be referred to as HCCCaLD) was formed in 2006 by a group of service providers and support agencies, (i.e. settlement specific and mainstream services) to address the growing concerns of housing issues affecting Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) clients. It soon became apparent to HCCCaLD that the most hidden and vulnerable CaLD clients were refugees and humanitarian entrants (humanitarian communities). Humanitarian communities and their housing issues have since become HCCCaLD's main focus.

The decision to form HCCCaLD arose as a result of the Mirrabooka Interagency Network Meeting held in June 2006, where the overwhelming concern discussed at that meeting was housing issues for CaLD clients. It was acknowledged at that meeting that the housing problems were not likely to be unique to Mirrabooka and that the solutions needed to be addressed across the whole of Perth metropolitan area. It was therefore decided that a group should be formed to focus solely on CaLD housing issues. To this end a housing committee, later named HCCCaLD was formed and invitations to attend were extended to other agencies around Perth. Nineteen people attended the first meeting on the 27th October, 2006. Attendance at subsequent meetings has been strong, with membership growing to almost thirty agencies from the government and non-government sector.

In the past eighteen months of HCCCaLD's existence, the Committee has been very active in raising awareness of housing issues affecting humanitarian communities. The most recent focus has been on discrimination issues in the private rental market. Partly as a result of HCCCaLD's actions, the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) has now agreed to investigate discrimination in the private rental market using the powers of S80 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*.

HCCCaLD is an unfunded informal network, under the auspice of the Edmond Rice Centre, Mirrabooka (ERCM). The Convenor and founder of this group is Nihal Iscel (formerly Community Settlement Officer at ERCM). Membership of HCCCaLD primarily consists of those attending the Consultation Forum.³

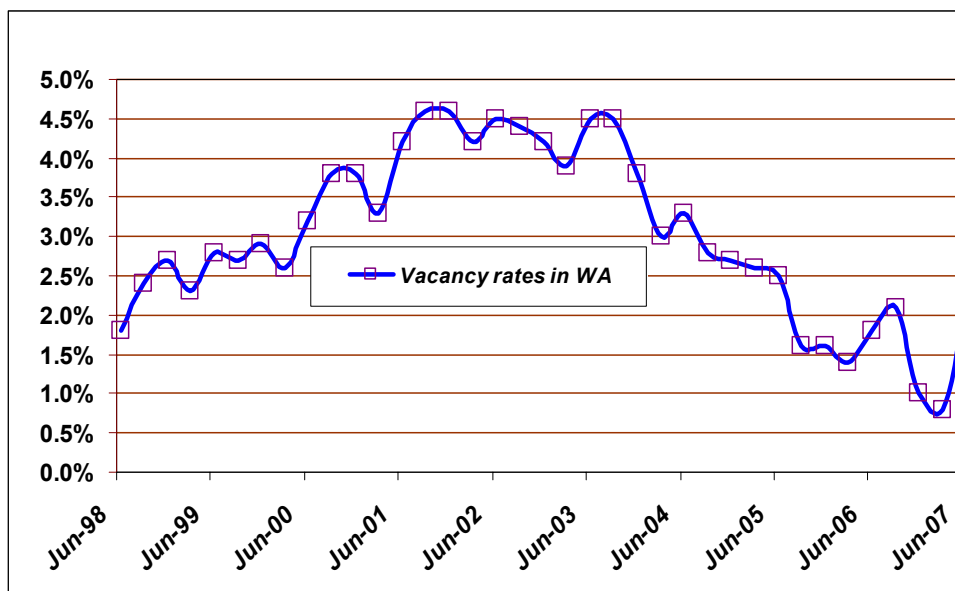
Housing Crisis

The WA housing crisis is affecting all West Australians, particularly those on low incomes and those who are otherwise disadvantaged. Rental vacancy rates have decreased, at only 1.6% as of December 2007⁴. The low rental vacancy rates have created a shortage of available properties, particularly at the lower end of the market and competition is extremely high. The average number of people attending a property inspection to apply for a rental is often between 30 – 50 people, though there have been occasions where as many as 100

³ See Appendices for Forum Participant List.

⁴ REIWA, Property Market Indicators, December 2007. Retrieved 14th April 2008, accessed from <http://reiwa.com/res/res-marketindicators-display.cfm>

people have been know to view a property .⁵ It is also not uncommon to hear that those who can afford it, offer higher rent or pay rent three months in advance, to ensure they are successful in applying for the rental property.⁶ The below graph shows the rental vacancy rates in W.A, from June 1998 to June 2007 representing the decline in vacancy rates during this time.



High house prices have discouraged potential new home buyers and rent prices have experienced unprecedented inflation, with the median rent at \$320 per week, which has seen a 23.1% increase in the last 12 months⁷. Further private investors have moved to other investment sectors with many turning to the share market or attracted by improved incentives for superannuation⁸. These factors, coupled with a lack of diversity in housing types in WA, with very low proportions of both 5+ bedroom dwellings and single and two bedroom properties in comparison to other States and as a reflection of the proportions of single person and large families household occupancy data compound the problem.

The combination of a shortage of properties and high demand has resulted in greatly increased rental costs.⁹ In the Perth metropolitan area, between June 2001 and September 2006, the cost of renting increased by over 60 per cent. Rent increased by a further 20.8% from June 2006 and June 2007¹⁰ and has steadily increased since then. Analysts are

⁵ ABC Radio- Australia Talks "Having Trouble with the Rent", 10 April 2008.

⁶ Tenants Advice Service, anecdotal information.

⁷ REIWA, Property Market Indicators, December 2007. Retrieved 14th April 2008, accessed from <http://reiwa.com/res/res-marketindicators-display.cfm>

⁸ Business Day, "'Rent Stress' on the Rise", The Sydney Morning Herald, July 20, 2007. Accessed from <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2007/07/20/1184560018727.html>

⁹ Western Australian Department of Treasury and Finance, *Housing Stress in Western Australia*, March 2007

¹⁰ Real Estate Institute of Western Australia, Property Market

predicting that the hike in rental prices will not abate for some time, with some suggesting it is going to increase by another 50% in the next four years.¹¹

Unfortunately renters' income is not likely to match the growing increase in rental costs and as a result, more and more renters will experience 'housing stress'. Shelter WA defines housing stress as paying more than 30% of gross income on rent, extreme housing stress is defined as paying more than 50% of gross income on rent.

In 2007, it was estimated that up to 35 per cent of low income people were experiencing housing stress with an estimated 10 per cent of those experiencing extreme housing stress.¹² If people cannot afford to purchase a home, they may be able to afford to rent. However, if they can't afford to rent in the private rental market, there are not a lot of options available. It is just not possible for households to sustain extreme housing stress for long periods of time. Eventually, as a result of the high cost of keeping a roof over their head, more and more people are getting into greater debt or find themselves homeless.

The options of being housed outside the unaffordable private rental market are limited. Public Housing is available to assist those in most need and who are unable to find adequate and affordable accommodation in the private market. However the supply of public housing stock has been severely depleted in the past 15 years as a result of reduced government funding and is now woefully inadequate to meet existing demand.¹³ In Western Australia public housing stock has been reduced by 1,5000 dwellings in the last 8 years,¹⁴ whilst the waiting list increased to over 12 500 households by 2005.¹⁵ The need for public housing has in the past three years increased substantially. Non-profit and community housing accounts for only about .05 per cent of Australia's total housing stock.¹⁶ The result of a shortage of public and community housing stock means that there has been a tightening of eligibility criteria, leaving this as a housing option only available to those on extremely low incomes and for those with high needs. Low income earners not meeting tighter eligibility criteria are struggling in the private rental market or are homeless.

The high cost of private rents in WA combined with a scarcity of affordable public and community housing is impacting low-income earners who are increasingly at risk of homelessness. For people from CaLD backgrounds and those newly arriving to Western Australia from war-torn countries with personal experiences of torture and trauma, stress and uncertainty in securing and maintaining appropriate and affordable housing can be particularly detrimental to mental health and wellbeing.

¹¹ ABC Radio National – Australia Talks Back: “Having Trouble with the Rent?”

¹² Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *A hand Up Not a Hand Out: Renewing the Fight Against Poverty (2004)* 123-4.

¹³ National Affordable Housing Summit, *Improving Housing Affordability. A Call to Action*, June 2007 (coalition of ACOSS, HIA Ltd., Australian Council of Trade Unions, National Shelter, Community Housing Federation of Australia.)

¹⁴ Tenants Advice Service (WA), *Why Won't Tenants Enforce Their Rights* (2006), p 4

¹⁵ Western Australian Department of Treasury and Finance, *Housing Stress in Western Australia*, March 2007

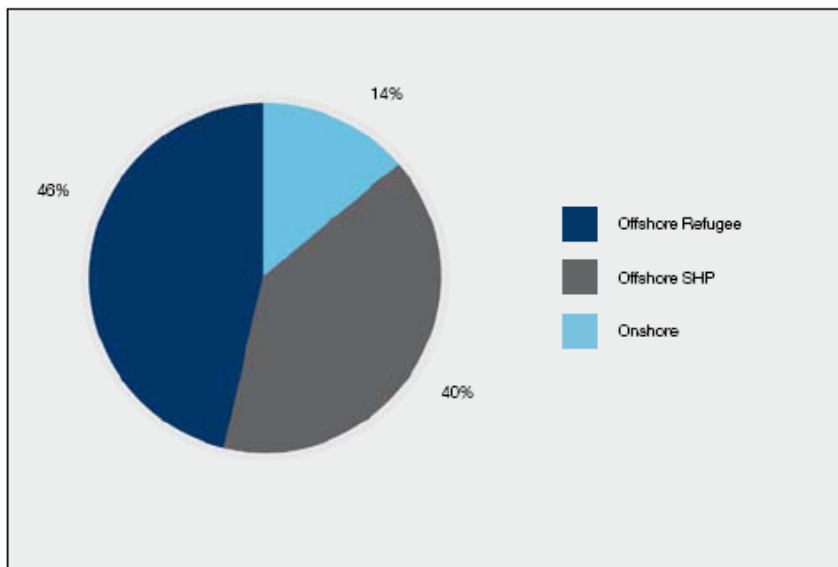
¹⁶ Julian Disney, University of New South Wales, *Election 2007: Affordable rental housing*, September 2007, www.australianreview.net

Humanitarian Communities

Australia has been a long standing signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocols, forming part of the international community's efforts to address world wide refugee problems. These strategies include protection of refugees and those requiring humanitarian assistance through the Australia's Humanitarian Program.

Australia's Humanitarian Program is separate to the Migration Program which is aimed at immigration for the purpose of filling unmet skill needs within Australia or reunification of families. The Humanitarian Program involves providing permanent and temporary protection of refugees in Australia through asylum, or resettlement. Asylum seekers are those who come to Australian shores to seek protection (on-shore) and resettlement involves selecting people from overseas (off-shore). Most humanitarian entrants in Australia enter the country as a result of resettlement.

Figure 9: Humanitarian Programme visa grants



Humanitarian Programme Visa Grants, Sourced from Dept of Immigration & Citizenship, Annual Report, 2006-07

Those that are eligible for protection under the Humanitarian Program are assessed under numerous categories, the two main categories being Refugee or Special Humanitarian Program (SHP). Refugees are defined under the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees as: "people who are outside of their country of nationality and are unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."¹⁷

Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) category entrants are defined as people who are subject to substantial discrimination amounting to gross violation to their human rights in their home country, are living outside their home country and have links with Australia. Substantial discrimination includes individuals and/or communities who are deprived of their

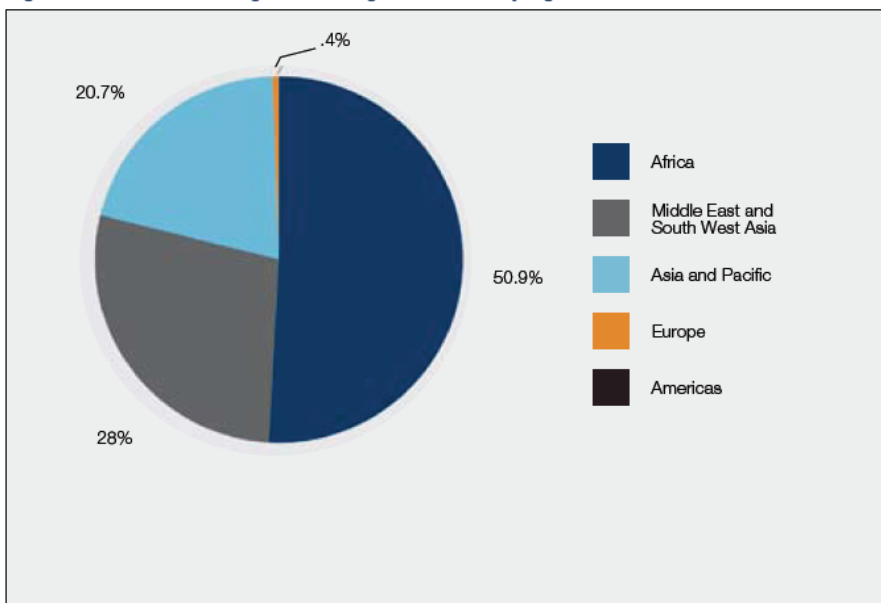
¹⁷ Refugee & Humanitarian Issues, Australia's Response, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 2005, p 4.

basic human rights such as access to education, employment, freedom of speech and freedom to practice one's religion on a discriminatory basis. Applicants for SHP visas must be supported by an Australian citizen or permanent resident over 18 years, or an organisation operating in Australia. This person or organisation is called a proposer. The proposer undertakes to help the SHP to travel to Australia and assists with accommodation and initial orientation.¹⁸

If applicants are eligible to enter Australia under the Special Humanitarian Program they may be given a temporary or permanent visa, and the type of visa and category in which they enter is called a subclass visa. For instance SHP are subclass visa 202, refugee (offshore) is subclass visa 200. Other subclasses include emergency rescue and women at risk.

The largest proportion of people under the Humanitarian Program currently arrive from Africa at present, though this varies according to a number of factors including changes in global politics.

Figure 13: Humanitarian Programme visa grants offshore by region



Humanitarian Programme visa grants offshore by region, sourced from Dept of Immigration & Citizenship, Annual Report, 2006-07

Those who come to Australia as a permanent humanitarian entrant as refugee, SHP and other permanent protection visas can receive most services other Australians can (depending on the visa subclass) including: Centrelink, rent assistance, Medicare, Health card and employment services. To assist in resettlement they also have access to free Adult Migrant English Classes and a range of Translator Services for some situations. In particular, in the first six months when need is greatest, humanitarian entrants receive six months of the Intensive Humanitarian Support Service (IHSS) upon arriving in Australia.

The IHSS includes the following services:

¹⁸ Refugee & Humanitarian Issues, Australia's Response, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 2005, p 31.

- case coordination, information and referrals – includes a case coordination plan based on initial needs assessment, information about, and referral to, other service providers and mainstream agencies and help for proposers (for SHP entrants) to fulfil their role of assisting.
- on arrival reception and assistance – includes meeting eligible entrants on arrival, taking them to suitable accommodation and providing initial orientation and meeting any emergency needs for medical attention, clothing or footwear.
- accommodation services – helps entrants to find appropriate and affordable accommodation and provides them with basic household goods to start establishing their own household in Australia.
- short term torture and trauma counselling services – provides an assessment of needs and a case plan and referral for torture and trauma counselling and raises awareness among other health care providers of health issues arising from torture and trauma counselling.

After receiving the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) program, humanitarian entrants can access less intensive specialist settlement services for a further four years, through the Special Grants Program (SPG) and the Community Service Scheme program (CSSS).

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) completed numerous reviews of the IHSS and other settlement services in December 2006 and in May 2007, looking at evidence of compliance to the program objectives by funded agencies and at the level of client satisfaction. Whilst these DIAC reviews state that compliance was effective and client satisfaction is high, it is the view of the Consultation Forum (which included workers from IHSS, SGP, CSSS and a range of mainstream agencies servicing humanitarian communities) that there are some considerable gaps in the IHSS program and settlement programs in adequately meeting the critical housing needs of refugees and humanitarian entrants. These gaps are highlighted in the recommendations of this Report.

The focus of this Report is on the humanitarian communities who have permanent visas to live in Australia. Whilst there are housing issues affecting those humanitarian communities on temporary visas they are not the focus of this report.

Migration to Australia

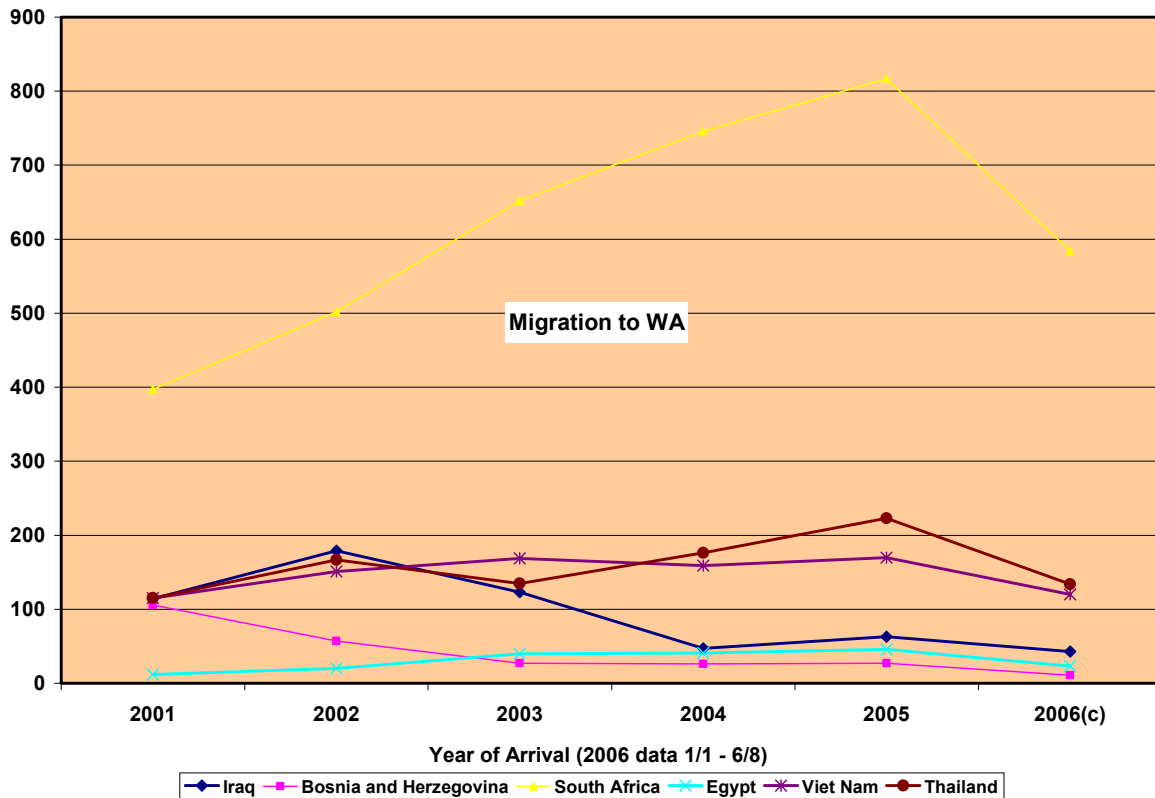
In response the Australian Government decides on the number of Humanitarian Programme places each year from 80 000 applications received annually. 13 400 people were accepted for resettlement in Australia In 2006. Approximately 10% of these arrive in Western Australia annually, including 900 refugees and 600 Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP) entrants.

The below map indicates the locations of the refugee camps around the world.



Derived from DIAC
HCCCaLD
Consultation Forum
Presentation

The graph below displays migration from various locations to Western Australia. There is an opportunity for Federal Government commitment to humanitarian issues, however there is also a need for State recognition of need for increased social housing provision.



Batrouney found that members of African communities in Australia encountered significant difficulty in the housing market. Particular issues included:

- major problems relating to extremely long delays in obtaining public housing;
- problems gaining access to bridging accommodation, such as transit flats;
- problems finding suitable accommodation for large families; and problems obtaining references and raising bond money as tenants.¹⁹

The Human Rights Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Report, *Face the Facts*, explain that “migrants contribute to the economic development of Australia in many ways, such as: filling skill shortages; investing in the Australian economy; and fostering international trade through knowledge of overseas markets, business networks, cultural practices and languages other than English. Migration also raises average incomes and increases the scale of the economy generating wealth and employment for all Australians.”²⁰

Migrants must wait two years before they can access most social security payments, including unemployment assistance, sickness benefits or student allowances. This waiting period however does not apply to refugees and other humanitarian entrants on Permanent Protection Visas.²¹

The problem of a lack of sufficient affordable housing in Australia has been noted by the United Nations. On a recent visit to Australia, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Housing recommended that Australian governments need to ensure the availability of adequate housing stock suitable for people with diverse housing needs, including culturally appropriate housing to accommodate communities with different cultural housing needs and disabilities. The Special Rapporteur made particular note that the lack of adequate stock of particular types of suitable housing creates discrimination and barriers to the social participation of all people.²²

This Report clearly highlights that whilst the settlement services available to humanitarian communities are valuable, they are not adequate or able to meet the housing needs of humanitarian communities in the midst of the growing crisis in the housing market place where there is a severe shortage of affordable housing. Unless the housing issues for humanitarian communities as outlined in this Report are specifically addressed, the successful settlement of humanitarian communities within Australia will be greatly compromised; with possible devastating consequences.

The New Country, New Stories 1999 Report revealed that poverty is a serious issue for many from small and emerging communities. The poverty experienced among these communities

¹⁹ Batrouney, T., *Selected African Communities in Melbourne*, AGPS, Canberra.n2 at 61, 1992

²⁰ HREOC, *Face the Facts*, 2005, Retrieved 29th April 2008, accessed from

http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/face_facts/migrants.html#endnote1

²¹ Centrelink, *Have you recently moved to Australia to settle?*, Last Modified: 16/04/2008, Retrieved 29th April 2008, accessed from http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/settle_index.htm

²² Kothari, M, ‘Mission to Australia: 31 July – 15 August 2006, Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living’, Human Rights Council, Fourth Session, 11 May 2007

is linked not only to high unemployment but also to very low income levels.²³ The impact of racism and discrimination is also a common theme of the literature. The National Inquiry into Racist Violence found that racism was more likely to be directed at migrants who could be identified as visibly different from other Australians.²⁴

Other reports have documented the difficulties encountered due to racial discrimination in a variety of areas of public life.²⁵ Much of the discrimination reported relates to skin colour.²⁶ Many of the black immigrant communities in Australia are small and emerging communities, suggesting that the experience of discrimination on the grounds of colour may be more significant within these communities.

Adjusting to a new culture and community is neither quick nor easy. This is particularly the case for individuals who do not speak the local language or have been forced to leave their countries of origin due to social or political unrest. Settlement is also a time at which the human rights of migrants and refugees can be at risk. The pressures of arrival and resettlement are such that not all people fully enjoy fundamental human rights including rights to equality.²⁷

The International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ratified by Australia on the 10 March 1976, states, Article 11(1) *The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.*²⁸ The Convention requires nations which agree to be bound by its terms to take steps to protect and promote the rights listed. The ICESCR recognises that individuals must also have rights in other areas of life to enjoy and participate fully in civil society.

The Integrated Services Centre Pilot Project and Community Relations Integration Officer (CRIO) Grants Program

The Integrated Services Centre Pilot Project, funded by the Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI) aims to address a range of issues affecting service delivery for humanitarian entrants in Western Australia. Presenting at the Consultation Forum, OMI reported that the Working Party identified the need for a more coordinated service delivery for these clients and recommended a whole-of government approach to address the needs of humanitarian entrants. The model of an Integrated Services Centre (ISC) is based on the findings and on

²³ The New Country, New Stories: Discrimination and disadvantage experienced by people in small and emerging communities, A report by the Race Discrimination Commissioner, September 1999, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

²⁴ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1991) National Inquiry into Racist Violence AGPS, Canberra at 138.

²⁵ Ethnic Minorities Action Group (1996) Emerging Communities Emerging Needs Sydney

²⁶ cf Ryan, L., (1998) Racism and Quality of Life Among Horn of Africa Communities in Sydney unpublished research in partial completion of a B. Soc Welf (Hons) UNSW.

²⁷ opcit., HREOC, The New Country, New Stories

²⁸ International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Retrieved 29th April 2008, accessed from http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_cescr.htm

the concept of using 'schools as hubs' by locating the ISCs with Intensive English Centres (IECs). Two pilot sites currently exist at Koondoola and Parkwood Primary Schools.

The Community Relations Integration Officer (CRIO) Grants Program was developed in response to issues raised in consultations with new and emerging communities, and non-government organisations which indicated that many members of new and emerging communities in Western Australia are experiencing barriers to accessing, or are unaware of, the range of services and programs available to them.

Consultation Forum Process

Development of Consultation Forum

A Consultation Forum was proposed to provide sound evidence on the experiences of service providers and their clients surrounding this issue. The Consultation Forum was seen as an opportunity to bring together non-government service providers to document the issues and develop perceived solutions.

The idea for a Consultation Forum was developed by HCCCald and organised by a working party driven by Nihal Iscel through the Edmund Rice Centre Mirrabooka, and developed by Michelle Burgermeister from Tenants Advice Service. The Forum was moderated by Michelle Burgermeister and Bronwyn Kitching from Shelter WA.

The consultation forum project was based on a suggestion at the HCCCald meeting convened by Nihal Iscel on the 10th January 2008, to discuss the possibility of organising a housing summit. It was decided at this meeting to organise a consultation forum, inviting support workers who assist humanitarian clients in the community.

Consultation Forum Purpose and Objectives:

The purpose of the Consultation Forum was to bring together people working in non-government organisations that provide services directly to humanitarian communities and to incorporate their knowledge of the impact of the housing crisis on these communities into a Joint Community Sector Report. Its aim was to capture the issues and possible solutions and use the Joint Community Sector Report to raise awareness of the housing needs of humanitarian clients.

The objectives of the Forum were to:

1. Identify the reality and impact the housing crisis is having on humanitarian communities;
2. Describe what is missing and what is working within existing services; and
3. Make recommendations on solutions – short and long term.

It was established that the Joint Community Sector Report would outline the agreed upon issues and recommendations as perceived by the community sector working with humanitarian clients.

Participants and attendance:

Invitations were sent to non-government organisations working directly with humanitarian clients and those with considerable knowledge of the area and issues. Identified agencies and specific individuals were invited, with a representative from each relevant program within an agency were encouraged to attend.

In result thirty-four (34) participants from twenty-eight (28) agencies participated in the consultation forum. In addition 9 observers and guest speakers were present.

Funding:

There was only a small amount of funding received for the HCCCaLD Consultation Forum. Office of Multicultural Interests provided catering for the forum. The venue was sourced for free at the Lotteries House in West Perth, through WACOSS. Moderator & facilitators and report writers were amongst HCCCaLD key members.

Approach:

The Consultation Forum was established to record the issues and recommendations from non-government service providers. The Consultation Forum had guest speakers from key government departments commencing the proceedings with an overview.

Guest speakers delivered relevant information and gave context for the Forum. Government representatives from HCCCaLD were invited to ensure that departments were informed and involved in the process, and also to ensure ahead of time, that a report would be more likely to be favourably received for consideration by departmental heads.

Consultation with participants involved a small group process and a 'nominal' method of group consultation. The optimal approach to collate details and priorities is from small groups. It is incredibly valuable to the report to use small groups with an unbiased facilitator. It was recommended and decided that the consultation forum would use the nominal technique to discuss and determine priorities and recommendations. This technique structures the group in such a way that everyone has equal say, and puts substantial energy into providing a space for each participant to have a say. The Nominal method is a useful method to identify the issues, explore solutions and establish priorities. The nominal small group method also enables better data collection as every ones' views are recorded, giving strength to the final report.



Consultation Forum 4th February 2008 Participants

Round One of the small group discussions were based on the evidence, impact and problems, and Round Two dealt with solutions and recommendations.

The final part of the day was dedicated to identifying key recommendations from each group, and prioritising and agreeing upon preferred responses.

The Joint Community Sector Report was developed from these proceedings and other statistical and qualitative research. Participants were recorded anonymously in this report to preserve respondents' privacy. Records of contributions can be viewed in the Appendix under Discussion Evidence.



Consultation Forum 4th February 2008 Participants

Key Group Question

Round 1 – Stated and prioritised

1. What evidence is there of housing crisis specifically for humanitarian clients
2. What is the impact on humanitarian clients
3. What are the key problems – causes and issues

Round 2 – Stated and prioritised

4. What is missing – in terms of services, policy
5. What is working – what is effective in making a difference
6. What could be some solutions or recommendations

Facilitators

Facilitators were selected based on their experience in facilitation and their distance from the issue. This reasoning was underpinned by the directive that facilitators were not to actively participate and therefore to compile unbiased data from small group members. Facilitators were given the group questions and tips to follow in using the nominal small group technique before the consultation, see Facilitators Instructions in Appendix.

Moderator

It was expressed in Consultation Forum planning that the moderator must be able “hold” the whole day together and facilitate the whole large group discussions where agreement on priorities and recommendations was sought. It was concluded that this person should be experienced in facilitation and as a large group moderator. Bronwyn Kitching from Shelter WA, with a wide range of extensive experience in the housing sector and facilitation was chosen to be the moderator for the Consultation Forum.

Proceedings

The Consultation Forum ran on the 4th February, from 9:30 to 3:15 at the City West Lotteries House, Conference Room.

The Consultation Forum commenced with guest speakers from relevant State Government Departments. The presenters were:

Krys Spriggs - Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Terry Daly and Marque Raymond- Department of Housing and Works

Renee McMerrin - Office of Multicultural Interests.

Anne Aly - Equal Opportunity Commission,

Krys Spriggs from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship stated that approx 10% of people were accepted for resettlement in Australia arrives in Western Australia annually.

Ms McMerrin from the Office of Multicultural Interests stated that IHSS service providers, housing advocates and community groups have advised that housing stress is causing difficulties in securing affordable housing for humanitarian entrants on arrival and post IHSS. Ms McMerrin stated the following issues for humanitarian entrants in the housing sector; Poor English language skills; Direct and indirect discrimination if they are on Centrelink benefits, Lack of references, Discrimination due to being visibly different, Large families that require larger houses, Lack of familiarity with transport systems and suburbs to identify suitable properties and attend home opens or/and Option Fees prohibit multiple housing applications.



Consultation Forum 4th February 2008 Participants

The forum then involved small group discussions using a 'nominal' group work approach to discussing and collating the views of participants. Forum participants were divided into 4 groups with an appointed facilitator and scribe. There were 5 to 8 people in each group. There were two rounds of discussions; the first round looked at the issues and impacts. The second round looked at possible solutions. In each round each participant was asked to speak to the question without interruption from fellow participants and to state what they thought even if it had been stated before. This was recorded by the groups scribe.

The end of the day included a plenary session where key recommendations from each group were prioritised and agreed upon.

Effectiveness of methodology and process

The feedback from the use of this methodology was very positive. The evaluation forms recorded the level of satisfaction participants had with the process of the day, which recorded their views on a scale of 1 to 5. (1 being least satisfied and 5 being very satisfied). The scores were as follows for the following questions:

- How satisfied are you with the consultation forum?
- To what extent do you think the objectives of the forum were met?
- How satisfied were you with for the format and facilitation of the day?

Comments included:

Best consultation I have ever been to.
Felt like I was able to contribute
Speeches went on for too long
I learnt a lot today – things I should have known. More meetings like this please.
Catering was appreciated. Great food
This kind of meeting has been long over due.
Hope something changes for the (humanitarian) communities – it is breaking my heart



Consultation Forum 4th February 2008 Participants

See Discussion Evidence in the Appendix for the raw material of the discussion recorded.

Findings and Key Issues

Key issues were established from participants through the following questions;

1. What evidence is there of housing crisis specifically for humanitarian clients
2. What is the impact on humanitarian clients
3. What are the key problems – causes and issues

It was reiterated by all workers participating that the access to housing by humanitarian clients has become critical. Several participants expressed they have worked in the field for more than 10 years and have never seen it so difficult for humanitarian clients in the housing sector.

Most organizations working with CaLD and humanitarian clients declared that across all programs and services (including non-humanitarian specific programs) housing was the number one issue presented.

A number of participants identified that approximately 80% of agency clients receiving counselling, education programs and suchlike were raising housing as their most pressing issue.

General consensus was that the impact of the shortage of adequate housing meant that settlement and adjustment into Australia for humanitarian clients was increasingly difficult in the current market. It was expressed that this would be likely to turn into greater problematic social issues if not addressed.

“1st thing we see on our end is physiological issues, which have massively increased in stress and associated problems, which then leads to family disintegration and increases stress, which leads to serious mental health issues and makes it worse.”

(Participant 4, Group 1)

The key issues emerging from the consultation forum were around themes of;

- The preparation of Humanitarian clients before arriving to Australia and initial programs when arriving in Australia
- Access to housing in the current market
- Maintaining a tenancy

Preparation of Humanitarian clients and Initial settlement programs

It was expressed that many humanitarian clients were not well prepared in the form of orientation, (before arriving in country) in regards to the situation and context they were going to be arriving and living in. It was stated that some orientations were better at providing this assistance than others, and that some humanitarian clients did have an idea of the Australian context of housing, however others, it was reported, had none.

“Clients coming in [to Western Australia] and are being told in the Orientation that they will get Homeswest housing, this results in disillusion and expectations.”

(Participant 2, Group 1)

It was reported that many humanitarian clients are suffering high amounts of stress related to relocation, separation from loved ones, settling in, learning a new language and culture, suffering Post traumatic stress, and trying to cope with pressures of finding accommodation.

Too much information is required of humanitarian clients to comprehend in the first six (6) months. The expectation that humanitarian clients will have absorbed everything in these six (6) months is unrealistic given the circumstances. Many workers stated that information about housing in Australia needs to be advised repeatedly and throughout all the stages of settlement. The “once –all–done” approach to education is unrealistic.

“People are living in cars and inadequate housing who have just exited from IHSS programs. They are asked to leave at 6 months when the lease is finished, and their belongings are thrown on the front doorstep.”

(Participant 1, Group 1)

IHSS needs to be 12 months if required not 6 months [as] 12 months would increase options around leaving the secure [IHSS] tenancy

(Participant 1, Group 3)

The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) program which provides housing and intensive support for the first (six) 6 months of arriving is useful; however it is just too short for many humanitarian clients. Having to find their own housing after just six (6) months is bewildering for many who still don't have the language skills and don't yet understand what is yet involved in acquiring housing in the Australian context. Many humanitarian clients have never had to rent or look for housing before, let alone in an Australian context. Essentially, many humanitarian clients are not prepared for this process. This issue was commonly expressed by participants.

“They come through IHSS houses, given to them for 6 months, and with no experience in finding a rental. Expectations are unknown on how to get into housing and it's just a shock, and they get completely stressed out of their brains.”

(Participant 2, Group 1)

Issues of Access to Housing

Housing crisis is critical at present for all in WA, with average rental prices being extremely expensive and competition tough.

The widening affordability gap leaves potential first home buyers limited home purchase opportunities, which in turn is increasing demand in rental sector. As discussed vacancy rates are at an all time low, and vacancy rates are actually higher at the top end of the market. This has become more difficult for low income households to access affordable accommodation. Median rents continue to rise, with 23.1% increase in the past 12 months, from \$260 per week in December 2006 to \$320 per week in December 2007.²⁹ Growing numbers of low income groups experiencing housing stress. The supply of housing stock for low income single households is particularly scarce. Governments could have been better prepared if they had taken heed of affordability gap and supply problems in 2002/03. The affordability gap indicates that a growing number of households will struggle to attain home ownership and in addition the private market is not supplying enough low cost private rental properties.

Huge amounts of people apply for the same property for rent. Many offer more than the asked rent or offer to pay three (3) months rent in advance in an attempt to be selected above others. Humanitarian clients are not in the position to be competitive on such basis.

Many people from humanitarian backgrounds are shocked with how involved and difficult getting into a rental is.

“So they come and they think they can get a house easily but they can’t, the market has changed.”

(Participant 2, Group 1)

Many need intensive support in learning where to look for rental properties, how to prepare and how to present themselves for a premise. Most workers stated that humanitarian clients had difficulty getting to see properties with transport being a major obstacle. Public transport is usually not always easy and timely. Getting quickly from place to another, which is needed in looking at different rental properties in different locations, is difficult by public transport. If humanitarian clients have vehicles, they often do not have a license to drive, which puts them at risk in looking for a place.

Most workers find that their work contract does not allow them to drive or accompany the humanitarian clients to prospective properties. This is problematic, as many reported that when they do the humanitarian clients chances of finding a property is increased and there is less problems when moving in. Many workers do it outside their work contract because their clients are so desperate. Workers expressed that when they do this, drive clients to the home opens, real estate agents and help with the application they are more successful, however this is out of their job description.

²⁹ REIWA Property Market Indicators December 2007 <http://reiwa.com/res/res-marketindicators-display.cfm>

Gaps in services. For example – assistance for client in finding available rental properties on internet etc but then SGP cannot take client to view property due to boundaries eg restricted work policies/restraints due to inadequate funding/bureaucracy Passion/empathy workers have in assisting clients

(Participant 2, Group 2)

Other difficulty is that many people from Humanitarian backgrounds do not have the language skills to deal with real estate agents and the application process. Asking questions, reading documents and signing contracts is very difficult when literacy is low.

Barriers of getting into a property are great due to the expenses involved. The 'option fee' where one weeks rent is placed with application for a property, is standard practice with real estate agents. As there is a risk that they may forfeit deposit if offered the place and they turn it down, applying for multiple properties is risky and expensive.

Possible solution suggested - 'abolish option fees'.

(Contributor 8, Group 4, Round 2)

"The Option Fee is really bad. You can't be applying for other houses until you get the money back, which may take a week. And if you can't apply for another, by this time you have to leave, so they move in with friends, which leads to overcrowding."

(Participant 5, Group 1)

"Refugees can't apply for one house at a time because they have to put a deposit eg \$300 and they can't afford to put more than 1 deposit down at a time"

(Participant 4, Group 3)

It was reported that the costs of renting is so expensive that many humanitarian people are paying more than 50% of their income on rent, just so they get a place to stay in. If they do not do this they are "couch surfing" and creating overcrowded housing situation for their hosts. There was one report that one house had 21 people living in it. Another report was that the "host" family was evicted because of the overcrowding. Many humanitarian clients are forced to accept and live in substandard housing.

"Cost of rental accommodation forces many CaLD tenants to accept substandard accommodation."

(Participant 5, Group 2)

Where the humanitarian people are located is important, as they want to be close to their community and services that are needed. However, because of the cost of housing they are forced to move away from the infrastructure, support and amenities, which as a result increase stress levels. Other families find solutions by dividing up families into two households, just so they have somewhere to live.

“Availability of affordable accommodation in outer suburbs – affects families’ access to services”

(Summary of Issues, Group 2)

Many people mentioned with fondness the “Balga flats”. This co-location of new arrivals allowed workers to coordinate service assistance, reduced wasted time travelling between clients as several households were in the same location, and offered clients a ready-made semi-structured but informal social support network to reduce isolation. Clients were also able to access services easily and quickly and seek advice and assistance from others with similar experiences.

“Location of housing VERY important”

(Participant 5, Group 4)

Since not having a place is all consuming, many humanitarian people are skipping English classes to look for work or housing. This is causing a vicious cycle, where their low literacy compromises their situation in housing and work and ultimately leaves them worse off.

“People are leaving English classes to get work, and a low skill job. This is trapping them in that [the low skilled jobs] which then creates a low stereotype of people and creates discrimination in the long run. It creates this perception that refugees are unskilled and not intelligent.”

(Participant 4, Group 1)

Many humanitarian clients are discriminated against because they have a) many children 4 – 9; b) are on low incomes c) discrimination is based on race and discriminatory perceptions that they will be poor tenants.

“The biggest issue is discrimination, hugely

The other day a colleague rang up a real estate agent, she said [to the real estate agent] she was “ringing regarding a property for a client of mine”, the agent asked “when you say client, do you mean mentally ill person?”, “no” she replied, “a refugee”, ‘newly arrived’ asked the agent, “yes”, she said. The real estate agent said she would check the system, and replied “no sorry, that property is not available.”

My colleague thought that she [the real estate agent] was lying and I rang up asking about the property for myself, and I was told that the viewing was the next day.

People [CaLD clients] have been turned away at the application process, when handing over the application they are told that they wont get it and [this also happens at] Home Opens.”

(Participant 2, Group 1)

“Somali population, especially single mothers with up to 9 children have great difficulty finding affordable/suitable housing, experience discrimination re housing – often told advertised housing no longer available.”

(Participant 4, Group 2)

Many people from humanitarian backgrounds find it very distressing that they can not find a place. Many find the stress of not having anywhere to live and the tough competition too much. Many workers mentioned the growing mental health issues clients were experiencing and how housing stress was clearly contributing to this.

Humanitarian clients, as all 16,900 people on the Homeswest waiting list, are experiencing long waits for public housing. It was also expressed that it is quite hard to register humanitarian clients on the Homeswest priority list.

“To get a Homeswest house in Mirrabooka it takes 5-7 years, and on the Priority list it takes 12 months, however Non-English speaking backgrounds, high rental rejection and no driving skills are not priority issues [for the Homes West priority list].”

(Participant 5, Group 1)

It is also harder for families with a more than 5 dependant children to find public or community housing as there are very few 5 or more bedroom houses available. The UN Special Rapporteur on Housing reported that “culturally appropriate housing that diverges from European-style housing to accommodate communities with different cultural housing needs”³⁰ is needed.

Maintaining a tenancy

Some humanitarian people do not understand the expectations of living and maintaining a house in an Australian context. This may leave them causing expensive damage to property they can not afford to pay and that could have been prevented. There are little support services that teach house cleaning and expectations as part of their job or program. Workers are often completing this task on top of a heavy work load, outside their contract. There seems to be only one program that had workers do the housework for them when they first move in, to demonstrate to them what is involved. These workers would come around to the

³⁰ op cit, Kothari

house to provide any other support and training as needed. This was reported to work very well.

There is a need for more appropriate, low literacy tenancy education about what is involved in tenancy for support workers to provide. Some translated pamphlets are available, which have been well received, however, more in depth and on-going education program is also required.

The other problem is that many humanitarian tenants do not come to the attention of support services until they are in difficulty, most commonly when they have received an eviction order.

“Many humanitarian people do not understand their lease or the letters from Real Estate Agents they get and so often ignore them which becomes a detriment to their housing.

Some clients come [to ORGANISATION] at crisis point. They get an eviction notice for 60 days to vacate, or one client received notice for less than 60 days and come to us.”

(Participant 2, Group 1)

Quite a number of workers spoke about the increasing numbers of Humanitarian Entrant families being evicted. One spoke about having 27 receiving eviction notices (without grounds for periodic tenancy) in past month.

Some workers reported that humanitarian families were still staying in the house after receiving an eviction order because they just could not find another place to live.

Real estate agents often have a stereotype of humanitarian people and so do not accept humanitarian clients. However, many workers found that when they developed a relationship with local real estate agents, they often got positive results and would place humanitarian families in housing. However, many workers do not have this kind of role in their job description.

It is often assumed that humanitarian people are not able to maintain a property, however, many workers reported that many families looked after places very well, particularly after they were shown how.

“a large Somalian family [in transitional house] and has never seen the house cleaner”

(Participant 1, Group 1)

As humanitarian families are more vulnerable than other tenants, often repairs and maintenance (not caused by tenancy) by owner is not done, leaving humanitarian families living in unacceptable standards.

“Access to swift repairs – failure to provide maintenance by Real Estate Agents – delays meant access to amenities were affected eg ability to cook, leaking gas, danger of fire, pest infestation.

(Participant 5, Group 2)

Humanitarian clients are also vulnerable to not getting their bond money back, even when there is no justified damage.

Rent increases are causing great stress, as some increases are very high. There is no capping on the amount of rent can be increased by. As a result this often leaves humanitarian clients in position to stay in a house that is too expensive or risk leaving and not finding another place that is not suitable.

Single mothers with children were particularly identified as being a vulnerable group.

Advocacy for humanitarian tenants is limited. Many of the current workers have not been trained in tenancy rights. They also do not have the time to do so.

Additional

A number of workers noted that as humanitarian parents could not provide for their family basic needs such as housing, they began to have more problems with their teenage children who tend to lose hope and respect for their parents and situation. This just adds to the complexity of the humanitarian clients' settlement.

It was noted that many of the workers at the Consultation forum had never heard of other service providers or meet the representatives from other services. This makes appropriate referral difficult and increases isolation of workers. The reasons for such are not clear but many stated their work load was high and networking was not included in their job description.

The consultation forum was also pleasantly well received, with a number of participants commenting on its usefulness and relief in expressing their views and concerns. This has led to the theory that additional research is needed in this area and also regular meetings with all IHSS workers would be constructive.

Suggested Solutions

These solutions were suggested at the consultation forum by the participants, addressed in the second half of the day

Participants were asked;

4. What is missing – in terms of services, policy
5. What is working – what is effective in making a difference
6. What could be some solutions or recommendations

The key issues emerging from the consultation forum were around the themes of;

- Preparation of Humanitarian clients before arriving to Australia and adequacy of initial programs when arriving in Australia
- Access to housing in the current market
- Maintaining a tenancy

It was viewed by many participants that there is a need for more transitional housing options with support. Specific crisis housing for humanitarian people was also suggested in order to address homelessness amongst the CaLD community. Already we are seeing a lack of crisis beds available and lack of end points. Specific crisis housing for humanitarian people was suggested. It was also suggested that Community housing could be used to target humanitarian tenants. It was expressed that here needed to be a longer IHSS program for clients who needed more time and assistance in settling. Public Housing to address issues of humanitarian clients was raised.

Specifically allocated housing or units/campus for humanitarian clients was discussed to be utilized by humanitarian entrants to use until they are reasonably settled and ready to move out on their own.

“Development and provision of more concentrated housing areas so their services can be more easily accessible.”

(Participant 3, Group 2)

Program or workers were needed that were able to assist humanitarian clients to look at rental houses, who could develop relationships with real estate agents and could support humanitarian family get into a house.

Other workers also thought the support in getting humanitarian clients into rental properties should be extended into intensive tenancy support once in a house, using a case management approach that included teaching skills for Australian context. This would involve providing what ever support was required to assist humanitarian family be able to have a successful tenancy over a limited agreed upon time.

“What is missing is someone who is funded to transport clients to Home Opens and assist with the process of applying [for housing]

It really makes a difference when sneak outside roles to do this, including in terms of providing references.”

(Participant 5, Group 1)

There was an expressed need for greater access to tenancy advocacy for people from humanitarian backgrounds, and also for workers working with humanitarian tenants in difficult situations.

It was suggested that there be more tenancy education for humanitarian clients available that is low literacy based and appropriate for their needs.

It was suggested the introduction of Consumer protection laws that meant “option fees” were abolished, protection from excessive rent increases.

Of course the general alleviation of the short supply of housing was expressed in relation to the current housing market.

Concluding Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the consultation forum data and discussions with HCCCaLD members in response to the findings.

HCCCaLD recommends:

1. Regional Network meetings for government and non-government workers servicing humanitarian communities.

It is apparent that there are many workers in the field, IHSS, SGP, CCCS and other advocacy services, housing workers and government departments that are working in isolation. The network meetings should be for grass root workers as well as decision makers. The purpose of the meetings could be to share knowledge, improve referral, reduce service duplication and help identify trends, issues and solutions in the region. Job descriptions and service agreements should be changed to allow workers to participate in these networks

2. Provide more comprehensive education on tenancy matters that are appropriate and relevant to humanitarian communities. This should include the development of tenancy education materials using low literacy learning and teaching resources, multi-media DVD and kits for workers to deliver to groups or individuals.

The tenancy education program should involve development of specific resources targeted to CaLD and humanitarian communities at different stages of their settlement in Australia. The materials would include what is involved in establishing a tenancy, tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities, how to maintain a property, how to exit a tenancy and what to do when things go wrong

Tenancy education needs to be given greater emphasis, since it is central to humanitarian communities' integration to Australian culture, establishing security, settling in to employment or education and connecting to other agencies and organisations. Since many recently arrived humanitarian communities are often experiencing 'information overload', it is important the information is given in a timely and culturally appropriate way.

3. Increased education and training in tenancy law, housing support services and tenancy issues for community settlement workers, bi-lingual workers, community leaders and volunteers.

As housing is such a critical issue for most humanitarian clients, most community workers are dealing with or supporting clients in tenancy matters. However, many have limited knowledge of the area, and often have learned from experience. This means that humanitarian clients may not always be getting the most effective support and the work is frustrating and stressful for service providers

It is important that training be developed specifically for those working with humanitarian clients in the area of tenancy law, dealing with property managers and real estate agents, the role and availability of public housing and the complexity of the housing market.

4. Bring back dedicated multi-housing sites for new arrivals to live in as a community until adequately orientated and ready to enter the private housing market.

A multi-housing site, dedicated for use by recently arrived members of humanitarian communities is seen as a viable way of addressing the housing crisis and allowing new arrivals to orientate themselves to Australian systems, make connections with others in a similar situation, and have the option to receive some education and support services they need in the early stages of their settlement in groups. This model was operating in WA until 2001 and the buildings were demolished in 2004 as part of the New Living programs. Numerous workers reported that this model worked well, reduced isolation for new arrivals and improved the transition by allowing naturally occurring informal social networks to be fostered.

Putting humanitarian communities into the current housing market in such early stages of their settlement is too stressful and is not working. This is impacting on families' success settling. Dedicated housing would take the pressure off, give people time, and offer an efficient way to provide tenancy education in a timely manner to a greater number of people.

5. Extra support by providing one month free rent and fully subsidised utility connections and costs in the first month of arrival for humanitarian community individuals or households.

It is understood that this suggestion is being implemented by DIAC and HCCCaLD strongly supports this. As the cost of housing and living is so great at present, this additional financial assistance will go a long way to support people to provide for other basic establishment needs. It will also ensure families do not fall into arrears in the initial period whilst they wait for Centrelink payments or other regular and reliable income to commence.

This program should include those on subclass visas of 200, 201, 202, 203, 204 and on-shore visa 866.

6. Development of a Tenancy Support program for humanitarian communities to receive practical assistance to find a suitable property, apply for, accept an offered tenancy, move in and maintain their accommodation.

There is an overwhelming need for some humanitarian clients to receive practical support to access a tenancy and to establish and maintain a successful tenancy. Not all clients would need the full range of services however, the need for a dedicated practical program for this is well established. Currently such a program does not exist for this target group and the current services are struggling to meet this growing need.

The Tenancy Support Programme needs to include the ability to escort and transport families to properties, assist them through the application process, and liaise with real estate agents on the families behalf when needed. Such support would greatly increase humanitarian

clients' chances of being allocated a property and also reduce confusion with tenancies as a result of misunderstandings, unclear expectations and responsibilities.

It is interesting to note that Curtin University provides a housing service to newly arrived international students that include assistance to find a place and settle in. Curtin University International Student Housing Services staff report that the program is very successful in reducing problems for students in rental housing and improving students' success in their studies.³¹

Other families may also need to be shown how to use common cleaning equipment and products to clean and maintain an Australian property in a way that is expected by landlords and housing providers, to get on-going support to manage a tenancy, and in liaising with real estate agents. Tenancy support programs like this currently exist, for families who are at risk of losing their tenancy. A similar model may be appropriate for some humanitarian clients until they are skilled, knowledgeable, confident and better settled.

7. The IHSS program, be extended up to 12 months for those families who need additional time to settle in.

The current IHSS program is an excellent program. However, some families need this support for longer than the current 6 months, due to the range, complexity and volume of circumstances and issues they are dealing with. Without this kind of support for some success in maintaining or accessing housing is significantly diminished and families face ongoing and compounding crisis

8. Access to free Telephone Interpreter Service for Real Estate Agents and Landlords managing properties with CaLD tenants

A program similar to the free Telephone Interpreter Service used by General Practitioners, hospital and other medical services to provide explanation of care and treatment and to gain informed consent from CaLD people with limited proficiency in the English Language would be beneficial if it was also extended to Real Estate Agents and landlords who manage properties with CaLD tenants.

9. Implement the proposed EOC investigation into race based discrimination in the private rental market

It was found throughout the consultation that a high number of workers reported discrimination in the private rental market, HCCCaLD therefore supports the proposed EOC investigation into race based discrimination in the private rental market.

10. Improved data collection and reporting of housing, housing related advocacy and tenancy support services provided by humanitarian community workers

It is apparent that the current data collected by agencies working with humanitarian communities does not fully capture the housing issues and the kinds of services community workers are delivering, in addition and beyond their formal job duties to meet their clients' urgent housing needs. These services, the time taken in attending to them and outcomes

³¹ Personal communication, Sue Elliot, Manager Student Housing Services, Curtin University, 14th April 2008.

needs to be captured. Often no other work can be effectively performed until housing is secured, so this becomes a priority for the worker but is not part of their formal job description of reporting.

11. Public housing and Community housing stock to be significantly increased overall and to increase the proportion of 5+ bedroom dwellings suitable for larger families.

Public Housing needs to be restored to level at least 6% of overall housing stock and the housing needs of larger families in both Humanitarian Communities and Indigenous households must be met by prioritising the development of adequate numbers of new stock of with 5 or more bedrooms.

12. Expand and extend the pilot Integrated Education Centres, currently established in Koondoola (north metro) and Parkwood (south metro). These programs are well received and successful and need to extend to other locations where there are newly emerging communities.

13. Provide new short-term emergency and crisis accommodation for CaLD families with a particular need identified for Muslim women with children and Muslim women escaping family violence³².

A full analysis of this issue was undertaken in 2007 and resulted in the Report 'No Place to Go: Report on the Needs Analysis for Crisis Accommodation for CaLD Background People of Islamic Faith'.

SAAP service providers report that they feel unable to offer suitable and culturally appropriate services to people from CaLD backgrounds that also have English language difficulties. Similarly, from the perspective of people from CaLD backgrounds, many service providers identify that these people are unaware or unwilling to access these services and therefore remain in unsafe situations or are forced to use other avenues that may not meet their needs.

A specialist facility needs to be established, either within current services, or as a specialist stand alone agency to respond to this need.

Implementation Plan

14. That a Round Table of responsible government agencies and decision makers identify sources of funding and develop implementation plans for actioning the above recommendations.

³² Aly, A. and Gaba, G. 'No Place to Go: Report on the Needs Analysis for Crisis Accommodation for CaLD Background People of Islamic Faith' Dar Al Shifar (Islamic) Inc. 2007

APPENDIX
HCCCaLD Consultation Forum

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Registration Form

**REGISTRATION FORM
HCCCALD CONSULTATION FORUM February 4, 2008**

Name: _____

Position Title: _____

Program: _____

Organisation: _____

Address: _____ Postcode: _____

Contact Phone Numbers: 1. _____ 2. _____

Email address: _____

OPTIONAL INFORMATION:

Country of Birth: _____

Length of time in current position: (years/months) _____

Length of time in community service work: (years/months) _____

Length of time involved in working with/on humanitarian clients issues: _____

Do you wish to become a member of HCCCALD & receive emails and updates?

YES

NO

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Proceedings

Time	Segment	Details	Who
From 9:30 am	Registration	Registration Tea & coffee	
10:00 10 min	Introduction	Welcome – house keeping General Introductions	HCCCALD
5 min		Background to HCCCALD what it is; who is involved; history & achievement; background to this consultation session	HCCCALD
2 min		House Keeping Toilets, breaks etc	
3 min	Outline of day	Purpose, objectives, format.	
10 min	Context	Context of housing and humanitarian clients – overall state perspective	OMI Renee McMerrin
10 min		Context of housing and humanitarian clients – overall federal perspective	DIAC Krys Spriggs
10 min		Discrimination and Housing	EOC Anne Aly
10 min		Context of housing and humanitarian clients - public housing and planning perspective	DHW Terry Daly
11:00	Break		
11:15 70 min	Round 1 Small Groups Consultations	In small groups answer key questions and record discussions using pre-determined questions.	facilitators
20 min	Report back to Large group	Feedback key themes from each group. Agree on priorities.	moderator
12:30	Lunch		
1:15pm 70 min	Round 2 Small Groups Consultation	In small groups answer key questions and record discussions using pre-determined questions.	facilitators
20 min	Report back to Large group	Feedback key themes from each group. Agree on priorities.	moderator
2:45 20 min	Plenary	In large group decide on 1. final recommendations for report 2. possible next steps/strategy	moderator
	Close	Feedback on session – evaluation sheet Thank you to participants and organizers	HCCCALD
3:15	Finish		

Facilitator Notes

HCCCALD CONSULTATION – 4 FEB 08

Facilitators Notes:

BACKGROUND TO APPROACH

The purpose of the consultation forum is to capture the issues and possible solutions. It is using a qualitative research methodology combining “nominal” and focus group methodology.

The process of the group session is designed to ensure everyone has a say and their views are “captured”

In this way the final report of the consultation forum will accurately reflect the views of everyone (and not just those who are most articulate and/or extravert.) This is particularly important when involving people whose English may not be their native language.

PROCESS

There are 6 questions that are being asked in 2 separate rounds or sittings.

The process will allow one person at a time to speak and answer the questions. Someone scribes. When every person has had a turn, additional points can be added in open discussion. Once the comments have been the group agree upon main themes.

Round 1 – Issues & Impact

1. What evidence is there of housing crisis specifically for humanitarian entrants
2. What is the impact on humanitarian entrants
3. What are the key problems – causes and issues

Round 2 – Suggested Solutions

4. What is missing – in terms of services, policy
5. What is working – what is effective in making a difference
6. What could be some solutions or recommendations

Procedure

The following are the steps involved in round 1 & round 2:

	1. Introductions	<p>Welcome them.</p> <p>Introduce self (name, job, why involved).</p> <p>Ask people to go around and introduce themselves, their job title and organisation they come from and in one sentence why they came.</p>	<p>Keep it brief. If people begin to speak more than one sentence, they are likely to be talking about the issues. Remind them they will have an opportunity to within the process.</p>
	2. Introduce Format	<p>Set up the group to feel a respectful space.</p> <p>Explain purpose of session/round 1 and the discussion will follow a set process to ensure everyone has a say. That is each person will have a turn to answer the 3 questions and can speak for 5 minutes.</p>	<p>Process is designed to ensure everyone's opinions are captured.</p> <p>Everyone will have a turn at speaking that is timed. People will not be able to add to the conversation until all have had a turn.</p> <p>Let people know that everyone's opinion is valid.</p> <p>If people feel concerned they will forget a point, suggest they write a note to themselves down.</p>
	Question 1, 2 & 3 round robin.	<p>Ask for someone to volunteer to go first.</p> <p>Let them speak un-interrupted by others.</p> <p>Assign a scribe – instruct the scribe to write down in point form what the person says. Don't miss points. Include examples.</p> <p>Ensure everyone has a turn.</p> <p>If people want to speak outside their turn,</p>	<p>Gate keep - ensure people do not talk for too long by asking them to be succinct.</p> <p>Estimate time available for each person – with give or take (note first few people will often speak longer).</p> <p>SCRIBING Scribing is an important process in recording stuff. This is what will make up the final report.</p> <p>Scribing – you may have one person who loves doing this and is good at “capturing” comments.</p> <p>If there are others who also don't mind scribing you could swap them around. Make sure the person who scribe gets each point.</p>

		<p>remind them they have an opportunity later in the session.</p> <p>Note: if a person repeats the same point as the previous person, the scribe can just keep it brief. But they should still include in scribing.</p>	<p>If necessary slow the speaker down until each comment is written.</p>
	Additional comments	<p>When all have had a turn you can invite people to add additional details.</p> <p>Make sure you allow people to add anything that has not already been said.</p>	<p>When it is open discussion, make sure one person speaks at a time.</p> <p>Hold off others until that person has finished what they have said and their points are finished.</p> <p>Then let another speak.</p> <p>Invite people to speak only if there are things that have not been said or stated.</p>
	Summarise groups' views	<p>Have participants clump/group issues under each question. This can be open discussion.</p> <p>Check that everyone is satisfied with the categories of issues.</p> <p>If there are points of contention, note that down – there does not have to be a debate or consensus reached.</p>	<p>With open discussion, be sure to provide space for those quieter ones to have a say.</p> <p>Make sure scribe checks with people what they have written reflects everyone's views.</p>
	Consensus	<p>Read out Summarised Sheets.</p> <p>Close discussion.</p> <p>Have each person state whether they agree on the list.</p>	<p>If there are points people don't quite agree with note which ones by tally.</p> <p>Add their comments.</p>
	Close	<p>Thank people for contributing.</p>	<p>Ensure everyone feels valued.</p>

Discussion Evidence

GROUP ONE

Round 1 - Issues and Impact

1. What evidence is there of housing crisis specifically for humanitarian clients
2. What is the impact on humanitarian clients
3. What are the key problems – causes and issues

Participant 1

I deal with both migrants and refugees, anyone with a CaLD background

I see it [housing crisis] on a day to day basis, I take care of six transitional homes that are always full, they stay in these for 6 months. Previously [the length of time] was not an issue, now families are staying longer than 6 months.

For example, a large Somalian family has been in the transitional house for 15 months, since November 2006 and has been on the Homes West priority list since this time as well.

There is a backlog of families in crisis housing and a number of families on the waiting list for crisis housing

People are living in cars and inadequate housing who have just exited from IHSS programs. They are asked to leave at 6 months when lease is finished, and their belongings are on front doorstep.

I am dealing with Non English speaking, non-driving families and who are trying to become familiar with the local area.

I have resorted to driving families around and is the most practical and most successful way. I take them to real estate agents and home opens so that they are able to get a rental.

However, in saying that I feel I'm doing a disservice [in doing the above] in getting them into private rental market as they are now in a situation paying \$200-220 a week which is all of their income, so sometimes can be the worst option, but because priority waiting list is too long...

Dealing with significant pre-arrival torture and trauma, want to place them in an environment to settle, to learn, to place kids in school, but being put into an environment without stable housing exacerbates the issues, then in 2 years still having to deal with the issues, like the death of family members, death of a child, torture etc

There are single mums that have multiple children, but are not their own. The costs, their income and the impact on stability of family structure from this, leads to the destruction of family structure, as older boys won't listen to women, which makes for difficult stable housing. Then having to find five to six crisis accommodation due to unstable family structure which is due to trauma from pre-arrival.

Participant 2

I work with refugees to help find housing

The biggest issue is discrimination, hugely

The other day a colleague rang up a real estate agent, she said [to the real estate agent] she was “ringing regarding a property for a client of mine”, the agent asked “when you say client, do you mean mentally ill person?”, “no” she replied, “a refugee”, ‘newly arrived’ asked the agent, “yes”, she said. The real estate agent said she would check the system, and replied “no sorry, that property is not available.”

My colleague thought that she [the real estate agent] was lying and I rang up asking about the property for myself, and I was told that the viewing was the next day.

People [CaLD clients] have been turned away at the application process, when handing over the application they are told that they wont get it and at Home Opens.

There are issues with Transport and Employment. In not being able to get to places, with no English, no car, and history of torture and trauma. And we are not funded to drive to houses. [Driving clients to houses for home opens etc]

Employment and Schooling is an issue, [clients say] “have to go to English, don’t have enough time to look for a home”

There are huge families and lack of affordable 4x2 homes and lack of more than 5 bedroom homes that are affordable and appropriate.

Clients are applying for rental houses for five to six months. These are issues that could lead to crisis point.

Some clients come [to ORGANISATION] at crisis point. They get an eviction notice for 60 days to vacate, or one client received notice for less than 60 days and come to us.

So they come and they think they can get a house easily but they can’t, the market has changed.

They come through IHSS houses, given to them for 6 months, and with no experience in finding a rental. Expectations are unknown on how to get into housing and it’s just a shock, and they get completely stressed out of their brains.

This leads to secondary trauma, and they feel more fearful, scared, lack of confidence, completely helpless, angry, multiple feelings from secondary trauma

In terms of people getting life skills, if you say life skills in the Australian context, I like to call it orientation, these people have good life skills, but just not in an Australian context

Participant 3

One problem with housing is families get split up. The father is on the couch with friends and the rest of the family in another house, because the house is either too small or can't afford a home.

One family I was able to get a house for, I went to the real estate agent personally. I spoke to the real estate agent and she explained the only way she could give the house to the family is because the owner was away and she has the authorization to accept tenants herself, but she said 'when the owner gets back he is not going to be happy'

I am overstepping my role in doing this, I can't take them to the real estate agent, or home opens

Not sure why this [discrimination] exists, houses are not well cared for? Real estate agent said that the tenant was not looking after the house?

Participant 4 – Not the case in my experience

Participant 1 – Also not the case in my experience, have a large Somalian family [in transitional house] and has never seen the house cleaner

Participant 5 – Larger family sizes may have an impact on greater wear and tear

The house that they [clients] have now is not in a good state, I worry that they will be blamed for it at the end of the lease

There is just not the availability to take them to real estate agencies, Homes West and Home Opens.

Participant 4

1st thing we see on our end is physiological issues, which have massively increased in stress and associated problems, which then leads to family disintegration and increases stress, which leads to serious mental health issues and makes it worse.

We are seeing an increase in food insecurity. Food insecurity is the sense that you are not going to have enough money, rice or trouble accessing food relief programs. So you see people hoarding food, low food consumption, spreading out food and food rationing.

I was visiting a family and they would eat for days and days until they were full, and then not eat for the rest of the week, this is not consistent way of eating.

Because rent is so high, they don't have money so this has lead to food insecurity.

I had a girl who was experiencing this and would go to sleep with food in her hands, like a holding a carrot or an egg when she was sleeping.

People are leaving English classes to get work, and a low skill job. This is trapping them in that [the low skilled jobs] which then creates a low stereotype of people and creates discrimination in the long run. It creates this perception that refugees are unskilled and not intelligent.

Homelessness has increased in people under 17 years, and they are staying with others so it is this 'disguised homelessness'.

There is high physiological distress. They have already lived in an insecure environment and now it doesn't feel different from before, some would rather go back.
Some people have said 'why did they bring us here if the don't look after us'.

This leads to resentment, [they think] nowhere is ok, and it really is a perpetual struggle

There are increased cases so you are constantly dealing with current stress, because you have to deal with what is current, and then it is hard to get to the previous stress and is also hard to assess.

Single people are hard to place and families are finding it difficult.

Some service providers don't understand cultural needs, for example I had a boy, who had been tortured in his own country, and they [the service provider] placed him with same group [cultural group] that tortured him.

The general attitude that refugees should be happy with what they get because its better than what they had is really infuriating. Everyone has the same human rights as everyone else.

IHSS accommodation is good but it's expensive.

There was a family placed in a 4x2 but they all slept in the same room, maybe a smaller house would be better for them?

They are [IHSS accommodation] is medium priced, not flash, not new, and some don't have hot water for the first couple of weeks... in winter!!

Participant 5

Being in Mirrabooka, where most are based housing is almost impossible. Especially for single people who get \$400 from Centerlink, and pay \$200 in rent so half their income.

I tell them to pay their rent, don't worry about food we will help with finding food. Then Saint Vincent's scolded me because they had so many people coming for food assistance.

The Balga flats were great, now [everyone] live[s] so far away service delivery is so hard.

The 60 day notice to leave or increase the rent at end of lease is hard. If person is able to pay the increase, I encourage them to pay and stay because they wont find cheaper.
Income is low.

If they are evicted and have to leave at the Home Open's three are fifteen people there and person on mines, who is getting the big money, who doesn't even live there half the time gets it.

The Option Fee is really bad. You can't be apply for other houses until you get the money back, which may take a week. And if you can't apply for another, by this time you have to leave, so they move in with friends, which leads to overcrowding.

To get a Homes West house in Mirrabooka it takes 5-7 years, and on the Priority list it takes 12 months, however Non-English speaking backgrounds, high rental rejection and no driving skills are not priority issues [for the Homes West priority list].

A different address every 6 months impacts on the kids and their schools, jobs, unsettlement, issues go on and on and on. We look after a client for 5 years, people just keep coming back. I say to them, but I just saw you 6 months ago!"

[They have a] lack of references for private rentals because they are new to the country, but with no references landlords don't want to give you the property.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Participant 2

Clients coming in [to Australia] and are being told in the Orientation that they will get Homes West housing, this results in disillusion and expectations.

Some of the orientation packs in refugee camps are good and some are not, could be different for different states.

Participant 1

I know of 21 people living in a 3 bedroom house

Participant 4

You can come across some really good real estate agents

Participant 1

I often encourage my clients to take to court if they have experienced discrimination in the private rental process and regularly send 'Without Prejudice' letters to send to landlords, and that really works.

Had a Somalian family with eleven (11) people in a 4x2 and never seen the house so clean.

Participant 5

Transport is a big service gap, there is no practical advocacy for transport. Insurance is and issue Participant 4 and in some organizations – ORGANISATION – only volunteers can do it.

Participant 2

No program for mentoring and to look at houses with

Participant 4

Tenancy skills as a whole are needed. IHSS has tenancy skill classes, but they are not retaining [the information] because they are not presented in their language. The classes are in charades, and the workers do a great job, but this is not sufficient to understand the complex tenancy market.

People are so spread out, and there are only a few people that can provide services to so many people.

Participant 1

Repetition, repetition, repetition. But using interpreters is time consuming from a service provider point of view everything that takes half an hour, takes an hour and a half [when using an interpreter]

Participant 4

Bi-lingual workers don't get looked after, get no counselling and are paid very little. They are doing it for the love of their community and because they were in the same situation.

One bi-lingual worker was asked to do something by a service provider because he 'owed' them for helping out him previously. This is not fair to put that amount of pressure on these workers.

Round 2 – Suggested Solutions

4. What is missing – in terms of services, policy
5. What is working – what is effective in making a difference
6. What could be some solutions or recommendations

Participant 1

With DHW there is a resource issue – there are no houses.

Also within DHW, in large families you could decrease expectation about the number of bedrooms large families need / use. DHW to bend the Occur Health and Safety policy so that large families can have a three to four bedroom house rather than waiting for a five to six bedroom house [which would take so much longer]. That kind of flexibility can potentially help house larger families.

Change the IHS model of resettlement. Develop big blocks of flats, with a language intensive centre, all together, the initial service delivery in one area, [there will be] information overload and [therefore] retaining is easier.

Housing expectation from a service provider point of view, you can get low rental prices in Perth, [have to look]

Would like funding for transport and practical advocacy, like on the spot advocacy from service providers.

Participant 5

What is missing is someone who is funded to transport clients to Home Opens and assist with the process of applying [for housing]

It really makes a difference when sneak outside roles to do this, including in terms of providing references.

Company policy is not to be references for people, but because of the housing crisis have to be [a reference], it is the difference between homeless and not homeless.

Participant 2

Put more money into housing!

“Appropriate funding into appropriate programmes with proper consultation with grassroots service providers.”

Orientation needs to be more coordinated and efficient approach to orientation. It needs to be done; in groups, that is facilitated and is on-going.

Equal Opportunities need to be looked at.

There needs to be more collaboration of government departments to reduce replication of services.

There needs to be support services for more training for volunteers to work with refugees to look for housing.

There needs to be ‘responsible media’ also [in terms of discrimination]

Participant 3

There needs to be education for Real estate agents, like sending a flyer in the first week and raising awareness, then an on-going weekly campaign.

Other states have a bigger quota of refugees.

Participant 4

Rent assistance should be relevant to specific regions of WA. [According to the region affordability]

Decrease reliance on bi-cultural workers and volunteers. There is too much pressure on them and this is not appropriate. Increase number of workers instead.

Homes West need to prioritize. It should not be a life time in state housing, but [state housing] used as a stepping stone. There could be two streams, one for stepping stone, and one for long term, that do stay for a long time, but because of certain reasons, disability, mental illness and the like.

Relocate services to outer suburbs and make services available to other suburbs. People have to rent close to services, but the services are located in non affordable areas.

Make services accessible to lower-cost suburbs.

Specific groups are suffering a lot, like single mums with children under 5 years old, are on a tight budget and lack mobility. One of my clients locks the children in the house to go shopping.

Financial stress from housing is ricocheting off onto everything.

There needs to be braver politicians, with more innovation and innovative techniques.
We want more housing stock, increase wages and increase Centerlink Allowance.

How come there is New Start allowance, youth allowance, study allowance, why cant there be a 'Settlement allowance' for newly arrived entrants?

What's working? Some real estate agents are nice, volunteers are working well, transport is working well – but we are not supposed to be doing that.

Participant 5

Increase [Commonwealth] Rent Assistance
[Develop] Immigration flats, and then keep them there until learn how to maintain leases.

Homes West should include in their housing contracts that in any situation their [person in the Homes West house] circumstances change they should move on.

What's wrong with moving an older couple from a large house to a one bedroom place?

Government department to make funding for an agency to do transport.

Government to cap rental increases that occur at the end of leases on private rentals.

GROUP TWO

Round 1 - Issues and Impact

1. What evidence is there of housing crisis specifically for humanitarian clients
2. What is the impact on humanitarian clients
3. What are the key problems – causes and issues

Participant 1

Evidence: January 08 – 27 new clients with 60 days notice of eviction. Families with 3 – 5 children.
Problems: English, low life skills, transport to view houses

Impact: Time taken looking for house, break in access to schools, time out of work/preparing for work.
Stresses re parenting/life skills exacerbated – discrimination results, reading/writing skills affect ability to look for accommodation/understand contracts

Participant 2

Evidence: 80-95% of SGP clients, 90% housing issues. Sometimes 75% of income used for rent – emergency support. 85% of problems attaining/finding suitable accommodation. 5% of problems maintenance issues. Unemployment/low income (relying on Centrelink benefits) creates problems re perceived ability to pay rent – discrimination? Low life skills discriminatory label rather different life skills. Social education required for survival in Australia

Participant 3

Accommodation is new in Joondalup and predominantly for high income tenants, therefore not many new arrivals can afford rent. More affordable prices further south in Wanneroo etc. Need for alternative styles of accommodation in Joondalup area. Example given of high rise, or more condensed housing OS.

Participant 4

- Somali population, especially single mothers with up to 9 children have great difficulty finding affordable/suitable housing, experience discrimination re housing – often told advertised housing no longer available.
- Competition for available housing (up to 9 applicants). Employed applicants given priority.
- Low life skills perception of real estate agents a big problem.
- Inability to understand communication letters from RE agents.

Participant 5

- Extended time frame required for finding accommodation
- Then emergency accommodation required
- Court process/court order to vacate
- Cost of accommodation causes rent stress. Single mothers particularly stressed – exacerbates PTSD issues and ability to cope.
- Cost of rental accommodation forces many CALD tenants to accept substandard accommodation
- Safety issues, security issues
- Access to swift repairs – failure to provide maintenance by RE agents – delays continued access to amenities affected eg ability to cook, leaking gas, danger of fire, pest infestation.

Participant 6

Family sizes – split family – different accommodation
Emergency relief – to assist with emergency food due to costs
Single mothers – housing problems affects ability to cope and settlement issues
Family issues affected by pressures – domestic violence

Difficulty for proposers in finding accommodation – DIAC may upgrade to full suite of our arrival services increasing

Outcomes re Problems and accommodation

Overstaying – court order – family splits up to stay with others – overcrowded accommodation
Bonds are often withheld – Participant 4 – exploitation

Summary of Issues

Discrimination affecting ability to secure accommodation
Social living education skills required re maintaining property
Parenting skills to shape children's wear and tear of homes
Exploitation – failure to understand written communication, property reports not done/not understood, misunderstanding of conditions/what's been signed, withholding of bond, failure to/or delay in repairs by agents – substandard conditions
Low incomes/high rents – budgeting issues – Emergency Assist
Lack of/poor transport affects ability to view rental properties and punctuality
Availability of affordable accommodation in outer suburbs – affects families' access to services etc
Difficulty in finding alternative accommodation leads to overstaying – to court appearance – court order to vacate – bad record for further renting purposes – families splitting up to stay with friends/relations – overcrowding issues and problems

Round 2 – Suggested Solutions

4. What is missing – in terms of services, policy
5. What is working – what is effective in making a difference
6. What could be some solutions or recommendations

Participant 1

1. There is no crisis accommodation for homeless families
2. No support for people (1) looking for accommodation with regarding searching for homes, going to home opens (2) with low literacy re understanding/signing of contracts (3) single mothers have no/limited support services
3. Training provided for refugees in social living education skills re Western culture, living standards
- Integrated team/holistic approach works. Solutions as above

Participant 2

- Gaps in services. For example – assistance for client in find available rental properties on internet etc but then SGP cannot take client to view property due to boundaries eg restricted work policies/restraints due to inadequate funding/bureaucracy
- Passion/empathy workers have in assisting clients
- More partnership/negotiation/collaboration required re responsibility, “ownership”, legal procedures, competition put aside
- Refugee settlement issues are dynamic rather than static. Many issues are interrelated
- Creating a system for crisis accommodation – each refugee service has resources to provide for crisis accommodation
- Funding for services assisting migrants to deal holistically with range of issues as well as accommodation.

Participant 3

- Lack of accommodation – actual buildings – less/few affect supply and demand and costs
- Development and provision of more concentrated housing areas so their services can be more easily accessible
- Need to change attitudes re Australian dream (4x2 on ¼ acre)
- Govt initiatives re denser housing developments
- Rent only goes up with CPI and/or Govt rent assistance increases realistically to match rent increases
- Cap rent

Participant 4

- Remove some of the restrictions on service providers such as the freedom to take a client to view a rental property
- More support from real estate agents and greater education/funding for real estate agents in understanding CALD clients
- Translation of documents
- More affordable rent
- Increase rent assistance
- More houses built by Homeswest
- More flats as were in Medina Place, Balga for transition period for refugees
- Service to take refugees to real estate agencies and view properties
- Service to research/follow up why clients are refused accommodation and to follow up with real estate agents
- “Arrow” in brain or backside – which would you take out first? The one in your behind because you have to be able to sit and settle, in order to attend to settlement process and issues eg find housing

Participant 5

- More multicultural housing services – increase funding
- Refugee service to provide advice/advocacy/information about housing issues/documents for clients lacking information/low literacy

- Translation by Tenancy Advice Service or other appropriate services, tenancy documents/contracts/conditions
- Assistance for post IHSS (exited after 6 months) clients such as illiterate, low education, single mothers to obtain comprehensive support in finding accommodation including assisted visits to view properties
- DIAC supported social education/household maintenance training in addition to IHSS initiatives
- DIAC to fund communities to prepare brochures in social education/household management in local languages
- Funding for new arrivals to assist with maintenance problems for those that can't manage eg single mothers
- TAS involve key stakeholders eg community service providers, Homeswest, real estate agencies, IHSS to talk about addressing the identified housing issues
- More promotion of "First Home Buyers" Program and "Shared Equity" by Govt to new arrivals
- More time allowed for migrants to find alternate accommodation from time of notice to vacate to accommodate difficulty in finding housing in current environment
- Extension option to increase lease from 6 to 12 months
- More liaison with councils for leasing land

GROUP THREE

Round 1 - Issues and Impact

1. What evidence is there of housing crisis specifically for humanitarian clients
2. What is the impact on humanitarian clients
3. What are the key problems – causes and issues

Participant 1

- Participant 1 actually finds houses for the refugees
- Refugees have no life skills – eg learn how to use a washing machine, that Australia is surrounded by water. When Participant 1 drives Burmese from one suburb to another they ask "Are we still in Australia?" on the way to look at a house. This is difficult when she has to "sell" the refugee family to a landlord/real estate agent as good risk rental candidates. The orientation should be better. Life skills should be addressed such as weeding a garden, looking after the house.
- The amount of money for rentals is too little for smaller 2 or 3 person families
- Affordable houses near to Beaconsfield (IEC), Parkwood (IEC) and Melville (IEC) are very few.
- Participant 1 does not find that there is any discrimination against refugees in finding them accommodation

Participant 2

- Education – how to look after a house properly, keep it clean, do the garden
- Hard to find properties in locations they want
- Secondary trauma comes up when refugees find they are "homeless" again

- Not many refugees in crisis care – good.
- Group homelessness comes up when they all overcrowd and get evicted
- Refugees have rental accommodation but then don't eat because they can't afford to after rent
- Suggest 6 months in accommodation then let refugees go to other accommodation then check how they're going as not everyone is the same. Some can manage, some can't

Participant 3

- Rental increases are an issue with no cap on it. Mostly over last 6-12 months
- Want to live close to friends and family
- Very few referrals from IHSS on refugees – A BIG ISSUE – Participant 3 wants there referrals. The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Services (IHSS) should be in more touch with the Settlement Grants Purpose (SGP) worker to avoid below scenario:
- A lady came in, single Mum, 4 children
- Bullied by 3-4 kids in the area
- Wanted to leave, not be there at night
- Reignites any trauma
- Lost mobile phone
- IMPORTANT – The IHSS and SGP workers should be in more contact and hand over.

Participant 4

- She is part of a State Govt pilot program
- Participant 4 actually does the housework in the refugee houses and shows them – cleans toilets, does garden for families who are having trouble maintaining a tenancy
- She always checks the toilet on house visits. Takes families to supermarket and buys cheapest cleaner. How to use an ATM.
- Trauma, starvation, fear means that much of the integration lessons go over their head
- Participant 4 is there at the house when the properties are inspected with an interpreter to give a translation on whether the report is good or bad.
- Participant 4 sees a big problem with discrimination of refugees for tenancy
- Refugees can't apply for one house at a time because they have to put a deposit eg \$300 and they can't afford to put more than 1 deposit down at a time
- A big issue is big families of children it is hard to keep the house pristine
- When a tenancy is finished/not renewed parents have to find somewhere else to live and can't so teenagers lose respect and issues like that

Participant 5

- Lack of outreach work is very significant
- ORGANISATION SGP is working on the premises
- Participant 5 can't access clients who are very isolated and victims of abuse

- The appropriacy of housing is way off eg African man with 4 or 5 children, the rent went up hugely and he was spending all his money on carpet shampoo for white carpet. Why were they rented a house with white carpet?
- The insecurity of the housing situation means the adults miss their 520 hours English lessons – some of the lessons. So their English education is broken
- Insecurity of housing can result in violence in the family, loss of respect for parents by kids, stress on family, insecurity, people wish they hadn't come to Australia

Participant 6

- Intensive English centres (IECs) aren't able to pinpoint the clumping areas of where IECs should set up to meet the needs of the refugees
- The Dept of Education and Training is finding it hard to know where to set up IECs as migrants can't find accommodation, they are much more fragmented

Round 2 – Suggested Solutions

4. What is missing – in terms of services, policy
5. What is working – what is effective in making a difference
6. What could be some solutions or recommendations

Participant 4

- Outreach workers – there is a need
- Each org has a (?) brief. Workers going into people homes to provide support and maintaining tenancy
- Public housing affordability

Participant 1

- IHSS needs to be 12 months not 6 months
- 12 months would increase options around tenancy leaving if required
- IEC offered in areas where low cost rents
- Building rapport with real estate agents
- Increase in rent assistant
- Education of families regard to their expectation of the type of housing they can afford
- Good advocacy for refugees

Participant 2

- Funding is missing in the system

- (?) may need to limit the numbers until the system is able to cope
- Overlap of agencies – co-case managing clients
- Networking of organisations to ensure sharing of information
- Case studies
- Funding, funding, funding

Participant 6

- 2 more IEC – Armadale, Rockingham
- Affordable public housing
- Workers debriefing
- More consultations with representative agencies
- Preferred provider status – ensuring funding past 12 months, recurrent funding.

GROUP FOUR

Round 1 - Issues and Impact

1. What evidence is there of housing crisis specifically for humanitarian clients
2. What is the impact on humanitarian clients
3. What are the key problems – causes and issues

Participant 1

- Situations where families are getting into housing that they can't afford
- Situations where families lack life skills to look after housing
- Homeswest waiting lists too long

Participant 2

- Accommodation main issue for clients
- Stress on family budget
- Locating, securing accommodation
- "Orientation" skills/transport to look at housing
- Lack of appropriate referrals

Participant 3

- Problem with leases only 6 months – meaning families moving around
- Problems re language – speaking to real estate agents
- Problems with number of children

- Lack of support (tenancy)

Participant 4

- Cost of housing for single parent/1 and 2 children
- Language problems
- Inadequate support mechanism (IHSS 6 month period too short)
- Lack of cultural awareness by mainstream

Participant 5

- Of six current families, 5%-15% disabled people
- Homeswest priority listing – problem for people with mental health issues
- Problem re people with mental health issues maintaining housing
- Problems re Homeswest maintenance and provision of adequate housing
- Location of housing VERY important
- Crisis creating inability to accommodation, education, health etc

Participant 6

- Rise in no. clients needing help in housing issues
- Increase in evictions through court cases – because families cannot move out because they have no other accommodation
- Intergeneration conflict due to added responsibility for families
- Increasing levels of stress especially for clients who are already suffering post trauma
- Lack of transport to seek rental properties
- “Couch surfing” – living with friends due to homelessness

Participant 7

- Increase in no. clients coming to get assistance to get on the priority list (for DHW) – evidence for need is shown
- Transport and navigation problems to find rental properties
- One case where client had travelled long distance to view property only to be told “she will not get it” – denied access to house
- Mental health problems leading to decrease in parenting abilities etc affecting the whole family
- Boom and lack of housing seen as a cause for increasing rents etc

Participant 8

- Been working for over 10 years in sector and it has never been this bad
- Lack of support for new arrivals especially in terms of shelter – Govt issue
- Overcrowding due to “couch surfing” leading to eviction for host
- Impact on finance and family budget – money that is not there
- Centrelink
- Not getting rental property when applying for it
- DHW houses – needing maintenance
- “Govt abuse” – comment

Round 2 – Suggested Solutions

4. What is missing – in terms of services, policy
5. What is working – what is effective in making a difference
6. What could be some solutions or recommendations

Participant 1

- Missing – life skills
- Solutions – put refugees in ‘camp style’ environment to learn life skills

Participant 3

- Missing – lack of knowledge of where to go and what to do – the process of trying to keep up and maintain accepted standard in private rental causes pressure
- Solution – education for real estate agencies

Participant 2

- Missing – service providers limitations re taking clients
- Solutions – more needed from government levels
- Working – ability for one on one working with clients
- Solutions – guaranteed accommodation for new arrivals 2 years

Participant 4

- Missing – simple approach to capacity building with clients – inadequate mechanisms, IHSS etc, needs to be more intensive
- Solutions – cash concessions/rebates for clients to use taxis to view properties
- Working – what we have is working but not well enough. More needed.

Participant 5

- Missing – not learning from previous experiences – cooperation and unity between services – planning in policy (plan before bringing refugees) and providing for them in a acceptable standard of mainstream – (?) closely accommodated to own community
- Some advocacy to build suitable houses that meet specific needs
- Provide community housing (groups of flats)
- Build more houses!!

Participant 6

- Policies that prevent discrimination (missing)
- Affordable accommodation (missing)
- Credit to services that go beyond job description to assist clients (working)
- Outreach style of services delivery – that goes to client
- One-on-one support to clients

Participant 7

- Enforcement of law – clue to ??
- 1 on 1 advocacy is working, but slow
- \$ and resources missing
- Cultural awareness and acceptance missing
- Look beyond what is available now (not enough)
- More conversations on issues and solutions in forums
- Focus on home purchase – Govt loans (interest free)
- Involve local councils who need take some responsibility
- Inspect house before family moves in
- Interest free loans for 5 years to buy property

Participant 8

- Proving discrimination is difficult. Enforceable mechanisms of discrimination laws
- CALD community workers needing to work extra due to lack of language etc
- Mass housing – Govt (issues of land release etc) – abolish option fees
- An alternative to legal action (eg with discrimination)
- Increasing number of clients
- Lack of accountability of agents to tenants needs to be addressed
- Take applications, assess it and explain why it was rejected (if that is the case).

Participants

Name	Position Title	Program
Maureen Burnett	Counsellor	Adult Migrant Education Services
Gary Kleyn	Policy Officer	CHCWA
Pam May		
Heidi Stewart	Research Manager	Shelter WA
	Multicultural Community	Integrated Services Centre, Koondoola
Chris Ward	Liaison Worker	IEC
	Settlement Grant	
Ruth Sims	Officer/Social Worker	SGP - Settlement Grant Program
	Co-Coordinator, IHSS, Short	
Jennifer Frizell	Term Counselling	Program ASeTTS
Annie Huggett	Social Worker	Older People's Rights Service
Mandy Whitton	Connections Officer (CRIO)	Mission Australia -
		Short Term Crisis Accommodation
Alison Lawrie	Crisis Accommodation Officer	Program for Migrants and Refugees
Anne Aly	Manager	Community Education and Training
Ben Harvey	Manager Policy	
		Northern Suburbs Community Legal
Sue Chadwick	Tenant Advocate	Centre
Paul Price	Pastor	
		Dept of Education and Training English
Dianne Quickenden	ESL/ESD Consultant	as a Second Language Program
Wajma Padshal	Settlement Program Manager	SGP
	General Manager -	
Coralie Flatters	Community Services	
Fadhila Veal	Iraq Family Resource Worker	CRIO
	Systemic Advocacy Project	
Zel Ischel	Officer	
	Multicultural Housing	
Carmen Harrison	Advocacy	
Joel Richards	Co-ordinator	Newly Arrived Youth Support Service
Udani Abeysinghe	SGP Officer	Settlement Grants Programme
Debra Guiney	Accommodation Officer	IHSS
Claudja Abel	Community Liaison Officer	SGP
	Community Development	
Daniel Noriega	Officer	Access and Inclusion
Maryan Ibrahim	Somali SGP Worker	
Wayne Press	Accommodations Coordinator	SAAP
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Mary Crogan	Psychologist and Counsellor	AMES AMEP

Observers

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IHSS -
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DHW - Public Housing

