

## EDITORIAL: Housing Affordability in Regional WA

by Karel Eringa

Housing affordability is traditionally seen as a problem affecting mainly metropolitan areas. However, an adequate supply of high quality and affordable housing is a crucial factor underlying the economic potential and social well being of regional areas. One indication that housing affordability is starting to affect regional areas of the State is that last year, house prices in Perth increased by 12.5%, compared to an average increase of 17.8% in regional WA over the same period.

Appropriate housing is particularly important in the broader context of the social and economic changes currently changing many communities in rural and regional Western Australia. In many areas of Western Australia traditional economic drivers such as mining and logging are declining in importance with new, service based industries such as tourism emerging. However, this transition requires the appropriate and affordable housing to accommodate workers.

The problem of housing affordability in regional areas cannot be ignored. According to the recent Regional Indicators Report, "Regional Western Australia encompasses over 90 per cent of Western Australia's land area, and supports a population of more than 500,000, being 27 per cent of the State's population. The regions provide 20 per cent of the Nation's and 83 per cent of the State's exports, most of this originating from primary and resource industries."

Over the last six months, Shelter WA has produced three reports that highlight housing issues in several regional areas of Western Australia. While the three projects looked at different issues in different regions using different methodologies, all highlighted housing affordability as a bottleneck outside the metropolitan area.

The first project was a study into youth housing needs in the Shire of Broome, based on extensive community consultations and statistical analysis this project identified the needs, issues and barriers to accessing housing faced by young people in the Shire of Broome.

The study concluded that housing stock would need to be expanded by around 10% in order to address the problems of overcrowding, homelessness and resulting poor health, education and employment outcomes for young people. In addition, the report recommended a number of measures to address housing issues for disadvantaged groups of young people, including a range of support options as well as hostel and crisis accommodation.

The second report is Shelter WA's fourth survey on homelessness in Western Australia. This project aims to identify changes in the composition of homeless households in WA over time, and to measure the impact of the Government's response to the recent Report of the State Homelessness Taskforce.

While this report does not directly investigate the difference between the composition of the homeless population across regional Western Australia, the proportion of responses from regional areas has grown substantially since Shelter WA

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# Youth Housing Needs in Broome

by Karel Eringa

Shelter WA has recently completed a project undertaking a study into youth housing needs in the Shire of Broome. The project was initiated by a collection of community and Government agencies called the Broome Youth Housing Working Party and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. It aimed to undertake extensive community consultation to identify

the needs, issues and barriers to accessing housing faced by the target group of 12 to 24 year old, mostly Indigenous, young people in the Shire of Broome. The project consisted of two stages.

The first stage combined statistical information, consultations with young people and organisations throughout the Shire of Broome, and an investigation of a range of existing housing models operating throughout Northern Australia. The Stage 1 Report identified a shortage of at least 363 units of affordable housing as a key causal factor in overcrowding, homelessness and resulting poor health, education and employment outcomes for young people. In addition, the Stage 1 Report identified a lack of options in a number of areas, including:

- ⊙ Crisis accommodation for people affected by domestic violence and other issues,
- ⊙ Hostel style accommodation for students and other young people,
- ⊙ Support for disadvantaged young people, and

- ⊙ Short term accommodation for new young mothers from outlying communities going to hospital in Broome.

Since no model was identified anywhere in Northern Australia that could be transplanted directly to the Broome situation, three models were developed



that combined aspects from models operating elsewhere. One of these models was eventually selected by the project working party as most appropriate for the needs of young people in the Shire of Broome.

The preferred model explicitly recognised that each young person is in unique circumstances, with a unique background and with a unique set of needs. This implies that the best support will achieve very little if there are no long term housing options available, and all the housing in the world will not result in successful outcomes for young people who have issues with substance abuse or who lack basic living skills. The main features of the preferred model can be summarised as follows:

- 1 Two crisis refuges with six beds each, staffed 24 hours per day and 7 days per week.
- 2 12 one and two bedroom units with Medium Term Support during working hours.
- 3 48 long term supported units provided on a rolling basis by Homeswest and community housing providers.

- 4 Two hostels with a total capacity of 25-30 beds to provide an avenue out of overcrowded situations for those young people who have no or minimal support needs, but who are unable or unwilling to access mainstream long term housing.

5 A minimum 363 units of long term affordable housing to relieve the existing overcrowding in 569 households in the Shire of Broome. An additional 20 units of affordable

housing per year would then be required to prevent future overcrowding. This is to be achieved through a combination of more public and community housing, and measures aimed at increasing home ownership and access to private rental.

- 6 A Resource and Information Centre to provide information to young people about existing housing and support services in the Shire of Broome, and map changes in needs and services on an ongoing basis to identify any gaps.
- 7 A Brokerage Service to assist young people to access appropriate and affordable housing and support them to move out of homelessness.

The second stage of the project costed the implementation of the preferred model, and made recommendations regarding the implementation process. The Stage 2 Report concluded that the implementation of the preferred model was likely to cost several millions of dollars per year over an extended period of time. The bulk of these funds were required to increase

## Youth Housing Needs in Broome (cont'd)

affordable housing stock in the Shire, although the support components by themselves were projected to cost in excess of \$1.5 million per year in real terms.

The Final Draft of the report was presented and discussed at a community forum held in Broome on 15 May 2003. Three major issues regarding the full implementation of the model were identified at this Forum. Firstly, the cost of the housing component of the model was regarded as very high. Nevertheless, there was general agreement that this component was essential to the success of the model and that the community should work towards increasing the amount of

affordable housing stock to as great an extent as practicable. The forum supported a joint meeting of all relevant parties to start a collaborative implementation process.

Secondly, the forum expressed a need for a driving force to ensure that all of the components of the model are implemented as fully as possible. In particular, it was agreed that the community would benefit greatly from a funded project officer to identify and secure funding for the various components of the model. Such a position could also form the nucleus of a Resource and Information Centre and / or a Brokerage Service.

Finally, the forum recognised that the timing and availability of funding will, in practical terms, be a major deciding factor as to how and to what extent the model can be implemented. However, participants strongly expressed the view that where there a shortage of funds exists, the implementation should prioritise young people in immediate crisis. Nevertheless, it was also recognised that it would be necessary to pursue the more structural and long term measures proposed within the model, since otherwise there would be a grave risk of the community pursuing a series of progressively more expensive and less effective 'band aid' solutions.

## Editorial (cont'd)

commenced the current series of surveys two years ago. This suggests that homelessness and its key causal factor, housing affordability, is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon outside of the metropolitan area. Shelter WA will investigate the issue of homelessness in regional areas in a more substantial report on homelessness scheduled for completion in September.

The third and final report, scheduled for completion early in July, will highlight housing issues in Busselton and Margaret River.

While housing appears to be a common issue in many regions, in a state as large and diverse as WA it is not surprising that there are also significant differences between regions. For instance, in Albany and Mandurah, median house prices increased by more than 20% over the year. The median house price in Broome reached \$295,292, up 31.2% over the year. However, in Geraldton

house prices increased by only 6.7% to \$117,750 over the same period. Finally, in Kalgoorlie-Boulder the median house price has seesawed over the last five years. Over the last 12 months prices have risen by 4.4% to \$150,917, but this is only 0.5% higher than the median house price five years ago.

However, Shelter WA research has revealed that the differences between regions go beyond prices. Since 1998, Shelter WA has conducted housing forums aimed at ensuring that housing consumers in regional areas have a chance to have their say throughout Western Australia:

Bunbury	1998
Kalgoorlie	1998
Geraldton	1999
Albany	2000
Broome / Derby	2001
Midland	2002
Busselton / Margaret River	2003

These forums have revealed some major differences in

housing needs between the six regions. For instance, overcrowding was the most important issue in the West Kimberley, but was not mentioned as an issue in Geraldton. Severe seasonal fluctuations in housing affordability were a major issue in Margaret River and Busselton, but were not an issue in Albany.

While it is clear that housing solutions will be different for each of these areas, Shelter WA is concerned that its current level of resourcing does not allow it to monitor changes and proactively identify emerging issues in different regional areas on an ongoing basis. At present, Shelter WA is investigating options to establish a more permanent presence in various centres outside the metropolitan area. This would allow us to combine regular regional housing forums, which produce extremely useful snapshots of housing issues in a particular region at a particular time, with constant monitoring of emerging issues.

# Homeswest Page

*In June 2001, the Rental Sector Standing Committee (RSSC) of the Housing Advisory Committee to the Minister for Housing established a working group including Shelter WA, Tenants Advice Service, two financial councillors and the Department of Housing and Works to review Homeswest's debt policies. The review culminated in a report written by Shelter WA in March 2002.*

*The Debt Report considered the impact of all Homeswest policies related to debt management. The report's 72 recommendations were aimed at removing inconsistencies and ensuring that Homeswest's debt policies meet the organisation's objectives without unnecessarily disadvantaging tenants or applicants. After all parties reached consensus on the final document, the Report was submitted to the Department's Board and the Minister for final endorsement.*

*Information Sheet #21 gives an overview of the policy changes resulting from the Report and is available from [www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au) (papers & reports). Below are some policy changes that have been implemented subsequent to the Debt Review.*

## **Absentee Tenant Minimum Rent**

12. Tenants required to enter specific supported accommodation will have their rent reduced to the minimum rent of \$10.00 per week for a period of three months.

12.1. This is applicable to tenants who are entering into a specific rehabilitation program, respite, nursing home and outpatient treatment where they are required to pay rent or lodgings to another organisation.

12.2. Tenants who are escaping Family and Domestic Violence and are residing in a Women's Refuge will have their application for Absentee Tenant Minimum Rent policy considered after a minimum of seven (7) days in a Women's Refuge. The tenant must provide documentation to verify that they are residing in a refuge and unable to return to their tenancy. Verification may include letter from the women's refuge, copy of current violent restraining orders, support letter from the Police Domestic Violence Resource and Referral Centre. The letter must advise the reason why they are unable to return to their property. (Refer to Family & Domestic Violence policy).

12.3. Public housing tenants are eligible for Centrelink rent assistance when in supported accommodation.

12.4. Tenant file to be placed in "bring up" for review at the end of three months. Minimum rent can be cancelled at any time during the three-month period.

12.5. If there are other household members the subsidy is reassessed on their income only and no details are entered for the tenant.

12.6. Tenants are to provide supporting documentation verifying that they are entering into a specific program to be entitled to the Absentee Tenant Minimum Rent policy. Should they not remain in the program or are absent from the property for a period that is less than three months Homeswest is to be advised immediately they return to the tenancy and a new subsidy form is to be completed and submitted to Homeswest.

12.7. Homeswest is to be advised of relevant contact address and telephone number/s and who will be taking care of the property for the duration of the absence. Homeswest will enter into negotiations with the

tenant or nominated person in regard to who will be taking care of the property during the tenant's absence from the property.

## **Tenancy Management**

### **Policy 6**

Definition - Internal of the property free from rubbish, walls and doors undamaged with no holes, premises and fixtures clean. Yards - grass cut, garden maintained and free of rubbish.

## **Maintenance - Pests**

1 Homeswest is responsible for the eradication of:

- Termites
- Singapore ants
- Bees
- Wasps
- Cockroaches, fleas and vermin control in apartments, duplexes, townhouses and pensioner complexes

# Bunbury Housing Association

by Renate Dehaan

During 1993/94 a number of government, non-government local government and interested parties met to address the looming housing crisis in the South West / Greater Bunbury Region. A needs study confirmed the lack of affordable, secure, good standard housing, a submission followed and thus the Bunbury Housing Association (BHA) was born.

The Executive Housing Officer Renate Dehaan was there from the very beginning, and this Community Housing Association is now in its sixth year of operation. That is not to say that it was easy as it took a full year before the first 4 houses came on board and by then the exasperated EHO was beginning to feel this was a "phantom housing association". In hindsight she recognises these difficulties as the birth pangs of all new beginnings.

The challenges of establishing an organization in a regional area are compounded by distance, isolation, lack of resources, established, entrenched, suspicious attitudes etc. At this point in time we can say that BHA is making a significant contribution to the South West Region. It houses 170+ adults and children and it is obvious that there is the potential for the BHA to develop into a major provider for the region over time.

There is little difference regarding issues faced by low income earners in Bunbury to those in the metropolitan area but they are compounded by the high costs and limited resources available to regional areas

Bunbury is the largest regional city in WA and the hub of the South West, the fastest growing region in WA. Private rentals are therefore at a premium and that means high upfront costs and increased discriminatory practices. In reality this means less availability of rental properties that are affordable.

BHA's housing stock currently consists of 43 houses/units plus one boarding house for single men (capacity 18). This includes 7 houses in Busselton, 12 Community Disability Houses and 3 houses for Youth between the ages of 18 - 25 yrs. The BHA has a well established network of support agencies such as: Learning About Mental Problems (LAMP); Pathways. South West Mental Health; South West Aboriginal Medical Service, Disability Services Commission, and Citizens Advocacy.

Approximately 30% of BHA clients are on a disability pension and between 20 -25% are of aboriginal descent. Around 65% are on parenting pensions and Newstart Allowances. Three years ago, BHA took on the boarding house (Yanget). It was in a dilapidated state to say the least. The Department of Housing and Works have since replaced the leaking roof and BHA has undertaken a complete refurbishment of the building, thanks to a \$30,000 grant from the Lotteries Commission.

There are currently 16 tenants between the ages of 24 - 78 yrs. Of these, 3 suffer from serious illness, 4 are registered with Mental Health Services, 80% are severely affected by chronic alcoholism. This of course presents its own set of

challenges and needless to say there is never a dull moment. A Caretaker is employed and lives on the premises.

Currently BHA is trialling a concept whereby suitably skilled tenants perform some of the cleaning and caretaking tasks for appropriate wages. A constant source of frustration is the long, ever-growing waiting list (currently 120) for accommodation and despite the increased need and BHA's numerous attempts to obtain more properties, the housing stock has remained the same over the past 2½ years.

Over the past 8 months BHA has embarked on a Joint Venture Project with a local Housing Cooperative, so far all relevant support has been given but all is dependent on DHW official approval. This project would be unique and would entail 2 sets of principles working side by side providing multi levels of choices to prospective tenants. The City of Bunbury has been very supportive to date and through its "People's Plan" acknowledges the need to have a social housing policy and they express a commitment to identifying community housing options, in particular for singles and low income families.

Regional Housing Associations, particularly those operating in non-metropolitan areas are an important part of the community housing network. They play a vital role in alleviating housing related poverty and thus contribute to the harmony and overall well-being of not just the individual but the entire community.

## Shelter WA Papers and Reports 2002-03

Below is a list of papers and reports produced by Shelter WA in the last financial year, listed in reverse chronological order. All of these publications can be downloaded from Shelter WA's website, [www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au) (papers and reports) or ordered from Shelter WA using the enclosed publications order form.

### June 2003

- ⊙ Final Report on Shelter WA's Housing Forums in Busselton and Margaret River (coming soon)
- ⊙ Meeting Youth Housing Needs in Broome Through Collaborative Practice: Consultants Final Report
- ⊙ A Profile of Households Experiencing Homelessness in WA: Fourth Survey
- ⊙ Shelter WA Information Sheet #21: Homeswest Debt Policy Changes
- ⊙ Shelter WA Newsletter June 2003: Regional Housing

### May 2003

- ⊙ Shelter WA Submission to the Equal Opportunity Commission Investigation into the Provision of Public Housing to Aboriginal People in WA

### April 2003

- ⊙ Critique of the Brisbane Housing Company Model (with CHCWA and TAS)
- ⊙ National Shelter Policy Platform 2003
- ⊙ National Shelter Policy

Platform 2003: Background Paper

- ⊙ Shelter WA Occasional Paper 2003-1: New Options for Affordable Housing?
- ⊙ Shelter WA Newsletter April 2003: New Options for Affordable Housing

### March 2003

- ⊙ Shelter WA Information Sheet #20: The Housing Advisory Committee

### February 2003

- ⊙ Shelter WA Newsletter February 2003: Youth Housing

### January 2003

- ⊙ Shelter WA Preliminary Comments on DHW Rent Amalgamation Consultation Paper

### December 2002

- ⊙ A Balanced Act 2: Shelter WA's Submission to the Second Stage of the Statutory Review of the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 (WA)

### November 2002

- ⊙ Options Paper: Review of the Standing Committee Structure of the Housing Advisory Committee
- ⊙ Shelter WA Information Sheet #19: Renting in WA
- ⊙ Shelter WA Newsletter Nov 2002: Indigenous Housing

### October 2002

- ⊙ A Profile of Households Experiencing Homelessness in WA: Third Surveys
- ⊙ Report on the Shelter WA / TAS Forum on the Review of the Residential Tenancies Act
- ⊙ Shelter WA Annual Report 2001/2002

### August 2002

- ⊙ Shelter WA Occasional Paper 2002-2: The State of Affordable Housing in WA
- ⊙ Shelter WA Information Sheet #18: The State of Affordable Housing in WA

### July 2002

- ⊙ A Profile of Households Experiencing Homelessness in WA: Second survey

## Late News: Change of Minister

Due to a Cabinet reshuffle, Tom Stephens MLC is no longer the Minister for Housing and Works. Over the last two years, Shelter WA has come to know Tom Stephens as a tireless advocate for public and community housing within Government. In the view of Shelter WA, his main achievements in the portfolio were:

- ⊙ securing a new, five year Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) for the State,
- ⊙ initiating a State Housing Strategy, and
- ⊙ fostering collaboration between various levels of Government, ATSIC and community agencies in the area of Indigenous housing.

Shelter WA wishes Tom well in his new role as the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, Heritage, and the Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne and Goldfields-Esperance regions.

The new Minister for Housing and Works is Nick Griffiths MLC, who also continues in the portfolios of Racing and Gaming, Government Enterprises and

# South West Housing Forums

by Paul Pendergast

Shelter WA has responded to requests from individuals and organisations in the South West Cape region of WA to undertake research into local housing needs by making this area the focus of our 2002/03 Regional Housing Forum. To facilitate community input to the development of local housing policy we have conducted focus groups and follow up housing plan development workshops both in Margaret River and in Busselton.

Through this process Shelter WA has developed a picture of the issues impacting on low-income housing consumers in Busselton and Augusta - Margaret River. Some of these include:

## **Busselton:**

- ⊙ lack of access to affordable rental housing, especially for young people and small families;
- ⊙ while the number of Homeswest dwelling has increased over the past ten years, this has not happened at the same rate as other tenures and as a result its proportional presence is declining;
- ⊙ there is a growing number of homeless people and no provision of crisis accommodation. In addition, ASWA's Partnership in Housing Program is having some success in assisting

young people into and maintaining private rental but many landlords are reluctant to house tenants they perceive as having had a poor tenancy record;

- ⊙ overcrowding is also a serious problem, especially for households living in 1 and 2 bedroom units; and
- ⊙ there is a shortage of affordable 1 and 2 bedroom dwellings and the local R codes are predominantly R15, which acts against the development of small units.

## **Augusta / Margaret River:**

- ⊙ lack of affordable rental housing especially for young people and families. Young people and single parent families also experience difficulty gaining access to private rental;
- ⊙ the provision of Homeswest housing is proportionately at less than half the average for WA and there is a waiting list for some dwelling types despite appropriately sized dwellings not being available;
- ⊙ there is a growing number of homeless young people and like in Busselton, ASWA offers services but is not able to respond adequately to demand without access to crisis/short-term housing; and
- ⊙ seasonal influxes of tourists are good for local businesses

but contribute to the seriousness of the housing crisis facing local people. This is about to be exacerbated by the establishment of The Centre for Wine Excellence, a joint venture between Curtin, ECU, TAFE and UWA. The Centre is expected to attract hundreds of students to Margaret River and plans to date do not include the provision of housing.

The Focus Groups in conjunction with Shelter WA have developed local Housing Action Plans. Key directions addressed within the Plans include:

- ⊙ increasing the supply of social housing and encouraging the development of affordable rental;
- ⊙ improving access to existing services and provision of support to tenants; and
- ⊙ increasing the supply of crisis and short-term housing for homeless people.

The final report on the Busselton and Augusta / Margaret River Forums will be released in late July 2003. To receive email notification, subscribe to SWA Update by sending a blank email with subject: subscribe to [listserv@shelterwa.org.au](mailto:listserv@shelterwa.org.au). For further information please contact Paul Pendergast on 08 9325 6660 or email: [paul@shelterwa.org.au](mailto:paul@shelterwa.org.au).

## Late News: Change of Minister (Cont'd)

Land Information. Nick Griffiths graduated from the University of Western Australia with an LLB in May 1974 and was admitted as a barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Western Australia in 1975. Two years later he founded a legal firm which operated in Midland until June 1993, when he was elected

to the Legislative Council.

The new Minister comes to the portfolio at a critical time. His first challenge will be to finalise the negotiations with the Commonwealth on the Bilateral Agreement of the CSHA. In addition, the State Housing Strategy, Community Housing Strategic Plan and the emerging

collaboration between ATSI and the State and Commonwealth Governments regarding Indigenous housing all require urgent attention. Shelter WA wishes Nick Griffiths well in addressing these challenges, and hopes to establish a good working relationship.

## It's time to renew your membership



### Membership Application / Renewal

NAME: .....

ORGANISATION: .....

ADDRESS: .....

..... POSTCODE: .....

EMAIL: .....

PHONE: ..... FAX: .....

I enclose a cheque for \$ .00, made out to **Shelter WA**. See reverse for membership details. Fill-out, stamp and mail today!

#### Annual Membership Fees (All membership fees include GST)

- Individuals.....\$10.00
- Concession/Students.....\$5.00
- Organisations with budgets under \$100,000.....\$15.00
- Organisations with budgets between \$100,000 & \$200,000.....\$35.00
- Organisations with budgets over \$200,000.....\$50.00

## Role of Shelter WA

Shelter WA is the State's peak independent housing organisation. Shelter WA is community managed and represents the views of consumers and community groups on major housing issues. Shelter WA aims to ensure that every person has access to affordable, appropriate, secure and safe housing that is free from discrimination.

*We do this through:*

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

#### Shelter WA Staff

Policy Manager	Paul Pendergast	email: paul@shelterwa.org.au
Development Manager	Karel Eringa	email: karel@shelterwa.org.au
Administrative Officer	Glynis Menezes	email: glynis@shelterwa.org.au

#### Newsletter Production

Publisher	Shelter WA
Editor	Karel Eringa
Contributors	Karel Eringa, Paul Pendergast, Renate Dehaan, Department of Housing and Works

*The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of Shelter WA. If you have any queries or comments regarding the articles in this newsletter, or if you would like to contribute to future Shelter WA newsletters, please contact Karel Eringa by email: karel@shelterwa.org.au or by phone (08) 9325 6660.*