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Shelter WA Housing News: 20 December 2004

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1. Report: No Place Like Home: Homelessness in Western Australia

No Place Like Home is the outcome of a three year project investigating the causes and consequences of homelessness in Western Australia. Combining data from the project with information from a range of other sources, the report demonstrates that a significant proportion of the state's population is denied the basic human right of housing.

No Place Like Home contains an overview of statistical and other information on homelessness in Western Australia presented in a number of recent reports and projects. However, the core of the project is information gathered in five surveys of agencies dealing with homeless people, which Shelter WA conducted between June 2001 and March 2004. These surveys provided information about a total of 412 homeless households and demonstrated that single income households are most at risk of homelessness. Children and young people make about half the homeless population, and most are Indigenous.

In addition to the surveys, the report also presents the views of homelessness agencies and the people accessing these agencies. A series of interviews highlight the responses from the homelessness agencies to the problem of addressing homelessness and compares this to the experiences of those people who are homeless and in contact with these agencies.

Finally, the report makes three key recommendations based on the findings of the report. These recommendations focus on increasing both the supply of affordable housing and the availability of support options.

Go to www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm to download the report.

2. Shelter WA / WACOSS Pre-election Housing Forum

Shelter WA and WACOSS are hosting a pre election forum on housing on Tuesday 18 January 2005. The Minister for Housing (the Hon Nick Griffiths MLC), the Opposition spokesperson for housing (the Hon Ray Halligan MLC), the WA Greens spokesperson for housing (the Hon Giz Watson MLC) and representatives from the Democrats and Family First have agreed to attend the forum. Each speaker will explain their party's housing platform and respond to a questionnaire.

Shelter WA and WACOSS previously held a pre election forum in October 2000. A report on that forum is still available from www.shelterwa.org.au (publications). Issues of interest to all speakers at the October, 2000

forum included support for maintenance of public housing to current levels, increasing community housing and working towards resolving the homelessness problems in WA. This time around housing affordability and falling levels of home ownership are also at the top of the housing agenda.

The forum will be held at the City West Lotteries House Conference Room, from 9.30am-12.30pm on Tuesday 18 January 2005. To register your interest in the forum, or for any further questions, please contact either Serena Williams or Karel Eringa by email (serena@shelterwa.org.au / karel@shelterwa.org.au) or telephone (08 9325 6660).

Go to http://www.shelterwa.org.au/housing_news.htm to download a flyer with more information.

3. Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into Public Housing for Aboriginal People

The Equal Opportunity Commission has released the final report of its inquiry into public housing for Aboriginal people, Finding A Place. The report identifies a number of shortcomings of public housing for Aboriginal people, including poor maintenance, poor training of officers and a lack of stock. Much of the report confirms findings published by Shelter WA over the last few years in a number of reports, and Shelter WA supports many of the report's recommendations.

Regrettably, however, the report misses the single most important point, namely that public housing in Western Australia and across the country is under-resourced to cope with the demands that are placed on it. Consecutive funding cuts and an increased focus on those who are 'most in need' have resulted in falling income for our State Housing Authority, forcing it to reduce costs in order to prevent shortfalls.

In order to achieve this, Homeswest has cut corners. Its expenditure on maintenance is at a questionably low level. It pays its accommodation managers at a junior rate, but requires them to deal with people who have increasingly complex needs after giving them minimal training. Accommodation managers are expected to manage up to 400 tenancies, compared to an average of 75-100 in the private sector. They are assessed on the extent to which they collect rent and limit vacancies, not on how well they deal with tenants with complex needs.

Many of the recommendations made in Finding a Place are laudable and need to be implemented. However, the Report fails to recognise that increasing public housing stock, better maintenance and better training for Homeswest officers all cost money. Homeswest needs to be properly funded if it is to adequately house some of the most disadvantaged people in our society.

The report is available from the Commission's website, www.equalopportunity.wa.gov.au.

4. Christmas Break

The Shelter WA office will close on Friday 24 December and reopen on Tuesday 4 January. The next edition of SWA Update is scheduled for Wednesday 12 January 2005. Shelter WA wishes you a happy Christmas and New Year.

SWA Update is Shelter WA's housing email list. SWA Update is available to associate and full members of Shelter WA and appears roughly fortnightly. By continuing membership of this list you confirm that you are either a full member of Shelter WA or an associate member (free of charge). Go to www.shelterwa.org.au/membership.htm to view a full list of membership options and benefits.

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