

THE FINAL REPORT OF  
THE MIGRANT ACCESS PROJECT

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# Migrant Access Project of Shelter WA

## Final Report

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In 1991 Shelter WA received funding from the Migrant Access Projects Scheme (MAPS), administered by the (then) Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs, to carry out a two year project on migrant housing issues.

The aim of the project was to identify and remedy the problems experienced by recently arrived migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) in obtaining culturally appropriate, safe, secure and affordable housing in the public, private and community sectors. The main project target groups were refugees, women, young people and low income householders.

A discussion paper, "Securing Shelter: Migrant Housing Issues", was released in March 1992, after six months of research and consultation. One hundred and forty-eight agencies and individuals were consulted, including mainstream accommodation workers, ethnic welfare workers and NESB migrants in Perth, Bunbury, Geraldton, Hedland, Karratha, Paraburdoo, Broome and Derby.

The project's main report, "Securing Shelter - Strategies for Migrant Housing", (herein referred to as "Securing Shelter") was launched by the Minister for Housing in August 1993. It contained recommendations for housing service providers based on the MAPS worker's ongoing research and consultation.

The Executive Summary of that report follows.

The second year of the project was primarily concerned with the implementation of the recommendations of "Securing Shelter". Achievements during this period are summarised in the second part of this report.

## "Securing Shelter - Strategies for Migrant Housing"

### Executive Summary

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"Securing Shelter - Strategies for Migrant Housing" investigates the problems faced by recently arrived migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) in finding culturally appropriate, safe, secure<sup>1</sup> and affordable shelter. It recommends strategies designed to improve access and equity, with particular focus on refugees, women, young people and low income householders. This paper covers the public, private and community housing sectors.

#### General Issues

The main barriers in housing provision result from the fact that housing agencies have been established and are run largely by Anglo-Australians in a manner which, often unintentionally, excludes NESB migrants.

All housing providers need to ensure that Access and Equity Policies for NESB migrants are implemented effectively, with endorsement by and monitoring at the senior management level. Such policies should include:

- a Language Policy<sup>2</sup> incorporating the appropriate and efficient use of the Translating and Interpreting Service - networking and consultation with ethnic communities in Metropolitan and rural locations
- comprehensive and ethical ethnic data collection

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<sup>1</sup> that is, secure in tenure

<sup>2</sup> Such a policy ensures that communication with NESB migrants is carried out in the appropriate languages and medium (eg written, verbal, pictorial). It also includes strategies for the effective dissemination of information.

- cross cultural skills and/or anti-racist training<sup>3</sup>
- identified positions for bilingual/bicultural staff

Staff often lack the expertise and/or willingness to communicate competently with NESB migrants. The limited multilingual materials that do exist are not usually disseminated effectively through ethnic media and community networks.

### Homeswest

Homeswest has recently begun to make substantial improvements in its work with migrants, with the onsite interpreter service, the translation of essential documentation and ethnic monitoring of applicants for housing assistance. However, an Ethnic Affairs Section is needed to raise the profile of migrant concerns within the department and to deal with policy and programme delivery issues affecting NESB clients.

Racial harassment is one issue which needs to be recognised and dealt with promptly by Homeswest staff. More variety in housing sizes (including four and five bedroom dwellings), design and locations is required to meet the diverse needs of our multicultural society. The optional clustering of migrants of shared ethnicity should be piloted in consultation with ethnic communities.

### Private Real Estate

The Ministry of Consumer Affairs aims to promote a fair and equitable private rental environment. However, the Ministry has no policy for the servicing of NESB migrants. It has no translated materials and makes virtually no use of TIS.

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<sup>3</sup> Cross-cultural skills training gives participants the skills required to communicate and work effectively with NESB migrants. Anti-racist training consists of cross-cultural skills as well as strategies to effect structural changes so that migrants receive an accessible and equitable service.

The Real Estate Institute of Western Australia (REIWA) and private real estate agents in general do not feel any responsibility towards ensuring that migrants receive an equitable service and understand their rights. Many cases of exploitation were cited during project consultations. The current Review of the Residential Tenancies Act recommends the establishment of a specialist Tribunal for tenancy disputes and standard property condition reports. These changes would assist NESB migrants in this competitive and confusing housing sector.

The Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs (DILGEA):

DILGEA needs to provide potential and newly arrived migrants with current, timely, accessible information about accommodation options. DILGEA encourages State government departments to take responsibility for assisting recently arrived migrants. However, the workloads of Grant in Aid (ethnic welfare) workers indicate that departments such as Homeswest, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and the Department for Community Services are not meeting ethnic needs. DILGEA should liaise closely with housing service providers regarding the needs of specific groups of migrants.

DILGEA should provide subsidised on-arrival accommodation, with relevant information and language training services, for all migrants (except Business Skills Migrants) in the DILGEA flats.

DILGEA's Community Refugee Settlement Scheme, which consists of voluntary groups who assist newly arrived refugees with accommodation and other issues, should be adequately and appropriately resourced. In addition, DILGEA needs to review the Translation and Interpreting Service's (TIS) user pays system, which has met with criticism in all housing sectors.

Community Housing:

Community housing agencies need to do outreach work with NESB migrants to ensure that they are offering a culturally appropriate, viable housing option.

### Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP):

The Women's Refuges Multicultural Service provides crucial support for NESB women in women's refuges. Adequately resourced ethnic support worker pools are also required for youth and generalist SAAP agencies.

Multilingual publicity and information on accommodation options should be disseminated through the appropriate medium, such as word of mouth, audio-cassettes, radio or comics, for each target group.

Some migrants, particularly young women, may prefer externally supported accommodation, especially where the alternative is a predominantly Anglo-Australian mixed gender refuge. Ethnic SAAP agencies should be established to provide specialist services and models of multicultural practice for mainstream agencies.

## The Project's Second Year

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During the project's second year the MAPS worker facilitated the implementation of the recommendations contained in "Securing Shelter".

Progress was made in the following areas:

- The MAPS worker developed and delivered Cultural Diversity training for housing workers in the public, private and community sectors (see Recommendation 3.2).
- The State Government produced its Language Services Strategy which encouraged State agencies to adopt its policy statements (see R. 3.5).
- The MAPS project piloted a housing information dissemination project (see R. 3.6).
- Homeswest staff were made aware of the rationale for ethnic data collection, so that they could effectively encourage NESB applicants to answer the optional ethnic monitoring questions on the Homeswest application form (see R. 4.4).
- Homeswest is now able to extract data on the number of NESB applicants who have applied for and been given rental housing (see R. 4.5).
- Homeswest organised training on the use of TIS (see R. 4.6).
- A Farsi/Dari interpreter was added to the Homeswest onsite interpreter service (see R. 4.7).
- Homeswest's bilingual counter officer position was extended until September 1993 (see R. 4.9).

- There was an increase of 37% from 1991/2 to 1992/3 in the Homeswest construction of 4,5 and 6 bedroom houses (see R. 4.12).
- Homeswest placed doors in the adjoining walls of some duplexes in order to accommodate large extended families (see R. 4.13).
- "Racial harassment" was specified as a possible grounds for priority transfer for Homeswest rental (see R. 4.15).
- Homeswest produced and disseminated a booklet on domestic violence in ten languages (see R. 4.22).
- The MAPS worker developed and delivered Cultural Diversity workshops for property managers from LJ Hooker and the Professionals real estate companies. The Equal Opportunity Commissioner presented information on the Equal Opportunity Act to property managers at REIWA (see R. 5.1).
- The Ministry of Consumer Affairs produced a multilingual brochure publicising its services (see R. 5.2).
- The Lotteries Commission funded the Tenants Advice Service to produce and disseminate tenancy information booklets in eleven languages (see R. 5.3).
- The Real Estate Institute of WA endorsed REIA's Equal Housing Opportunity's Code of Conduct (see R. 5.7).
- The MAPS worker co-ordinated a housing training workshop for Grant in Aid workers (see R. 6.4).
- A standardised procedure exists whereby Homeswest approves Bond Assistance applications and provides the conditional approval letter before the arrival of Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS) entrants (see R. 6.14).
- DIEA is currently reviewing the training provided for Community Refugee Settlement Scheme groups (see R. 6.17).

- The Federation of Housing Collectives is currently supporting a group of Salvadoreans who are considering the establishment of a housing co-operative. This is the first ethnospecific group who are actively working towards this option (see R. 7.4).
- The MAPS worker developed and delivered Cultural Diversity workshops for youth crisis accommodation and women's refuge workers in SAAP (see R. 8.1).
- Homeswest is keen to accommodate more young people with external support from SAAP workers. A decision will be made on the expansion of this programme, based on the current State budgetary process (see R. 8.11).

Of all the housing service providers in WA, Homeswest implemented the most strategies to assist NESB migrants during the MAPS project. The department initiated ethnic data collection, the onsite interpreter service and a temporary identified position for a bilingual officer in the first year of the project. The onsite interpreters have translated several pieces of Homeswest material into four community languages. In the second year, progress was made on nine of the recommendations made in "Securing Shelter".

The Tenants Advice Service continued to work effectively with a range of NESB tenants. On their fourth attempt they managed to attract funding to translate and disseminate a housing information booklet in eleven languages.

DIEA made little progress in meeting the housing needs of migrants during the MAPS project. The on-arrival accommodation, previously for all migrants, was restricted to refugees in 1987. Since then, the onsite social workers and bilingual information officers have been removed from the flats. DIEA has been trying to get State government agencies to take over the responsibility of providing services for NESB migrants.

Another problem that non-English speaking migrants face is that DIEA is trying to make State government agencies pay for access to the

Telephone Interpreter Service. Some State bodies have been resistant to providing funding for interpreters, so migrants do not necessarily get the interpreting support that they are entitled to.

*Other key achievements of the MAPS project in its second year:*

- the launch of "Securing Shelter" by the Minister for Housing with 55 people in attendance
- coverage of the "Securing Shelter" launch and contents by the West Australian, six local newspapers, 6WF, 6PMFM, 6PR, 100FM, RTRFM, 6NR, 6EBA (twice) and the Youth Sector Training Council's journal
- national distribution of 300 copies of "Securing Shelter"
- written and verbal submissions to the (then) Department for Community Services regarding its restructuring
- written and verbal submissions to the national SAAP evaluation
- written and verbal submissions to the Industry Commission's Inquiry into Public Housing
- organisation and facilitation of "The Victorian Experience" forum which included a report of migrant housing initiatives in Melbourne and opportunities for housing and migrant workers to analyse migrant housing case studies together
- facilitation of two migrant housing workshops and the final plenary session at Shelter Victoria's conference
- presentation of a paper and co-facilitation of a workshop at United in Care's "Housing and Support" seminar
- presentation on migrant housing issues at the Perth Inner City Youth Service's "Young Women's Forum"

- nine migrant housing agency visits in Melbourne
- article on migrant housing in REIWA's property management newsletter
- participation on an interim Steering Committee for the establishment of the SAAP Ethnic Workers' Pool which unfortunately did not attract funding
- participation on the Steering Committee of the Tenants Advice Service's project to write, produce and disseminate a tenancy information booklet in eleven languages
- production and dissemination by the MAPS project of the above tenancy information booklet in Arabic and Chinese
- co-authoring of a script for three five minutes segments on tenancy information for a weekly Cambodian radio programme on 6EBA
- clarification of the effect of equal opportunity legislation on migrant-specific housing co-operatives <sup>4</sup>
- visits to Karratha, Hedland, Broome, Derby and Kununurra to present housing information sessions to NESB migrants
- ongoing participation in a variety of forums in the multicultural and mainstream housing arenas.

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<sup>4</sup> The funding bodies were concerned that migrant-specific co-operatives may contravene the Equal Opportunity Act. It was found, however, that such co-operatives were actively encouraged by the Act, provided that it could be demonstrated that such groups had restricted opportunity in accessing other housing options.

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The *Information Dissemination Project* was a major initiative in the second year of the project. The project targeted the Vietnamese (Perth and Geraldton), Salvadorean, Afghan, Ethiopian and Ugandan communities, as well as five towns in the Pilbara and Kimberley. Community information workers were chosen to be trained on basic housing information and then facilitated information sessions with a range of groups.

The MAPS worker wrote and organised the translation into six languages of a booklet which was distributed at these sessions.

*A detailed report on the Information Dissemination Project is available from Shelter WA.*

## Recommendations for the Future

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Migrant housing initiatives which should be continued after the completion of the MAPS project include:

- ☞ community information sessions with other ethnic communities, following the pilot of the Information Dissemination Project with six communities
- ☞ production of housing information radio scripts in community languages for use on ethnic programmes, following the style of the scripts that were produced for the Cambodian radio programme
- ☞ further Cultural Diversity training for public, private and community housing workers
- ☞ monitoring of the effect of proposed policy changes on recently arrived NESB migrants with appropriate lobbying to maximise access and equity for this group.

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Migrant Access Worker

## Acknowledgements

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We must also acknowledge the efforts of other Steering Committee members: Wendy Rose (Ethnic Communities Council WA); Lesley Elliott (North Perth Migrant Resource Centre), Silvana Abbruzzese (Fremantle Migrant Resource Centre) and the various Shelter WA reps.

Particularly Shelter WA congratulates the Project Worker Annie Goldflam for her outstanding efforts over the course of the Project. The volume and diversity of the project achievements, listed in the body of this report, demonstrate the quality of Annie's work over the life of the project.

Shelter WA is committed to continuing the work of the Migrant Access Project, in the development of strategies to address the gaps and concerns raised in this report. Our 1993/94 workplan identifies the pursuit of the objectives outlined in this report as a major area of Shelter's work during the first half of 1994.