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# SECURING SHELTER: STRATEGIES FOR MIGRANT HOUSING



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**August 1992**

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Affairs

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## SHELTER WA

Shelter WA implements programmes, develops policy and provides education directed towards the elimination of homelessness and housing related poverty by:

- participating in the development of national, state and local government housing policies to promote an increase in the supply of secure, affordable housing, and in particular an expanded and improved public housing sector which is accessible to all.
- promoting involvement of tenants and other groups facing housing difficulties in the formulation and development of national and state housing policies, and developing networks which facilitate this process.
- supporting and promoting initiatives which improve income security, the adequate provision and co-ordination of support services, and other factors which affect the capacity of individuals and groups to attain secure, appropriate housing of their choice.
- providing education to housing workers, consumers and the general public on housing and housing related issues, and in particular the promotion of the publication and circulation of reports, periodicals and other documents.

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## **KEY TO ILLUSTRATIONS**

The illustrations were drawn by newly arrived migrant children attending the Beaconsfield, Graylands and Warwick Intensive Language Centres.

Their cultural diversity is indicated by the range of drawings they produced of the homes that they have left behind and their new homes in Australia. Some felt more comfortable drawing in black and white because art lessons in their country of origin consist of copying pictures with a pencil and rubber. Others preferred to use bright colours. Their style varies from realistic to morphological art, that is the representation of aspects of nature within the design of the homes.

The artists are:

a 9 year old student from Vietnam	front cover
a year 7 student from Portugal	back cover
a year 7 student from Vietnam	3
a year 7 student from Afghanistan	14
a year 2 student from Tonga	23
a 6 year old student from Afghanistan	29
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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"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 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
- 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

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<sup>1</sup> that is, small 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.

<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.

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 for 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.

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 for 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 (CRSS), 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 TIS's user pays system, which has met with criticism in all housing sectors.

### **Community Housing:**

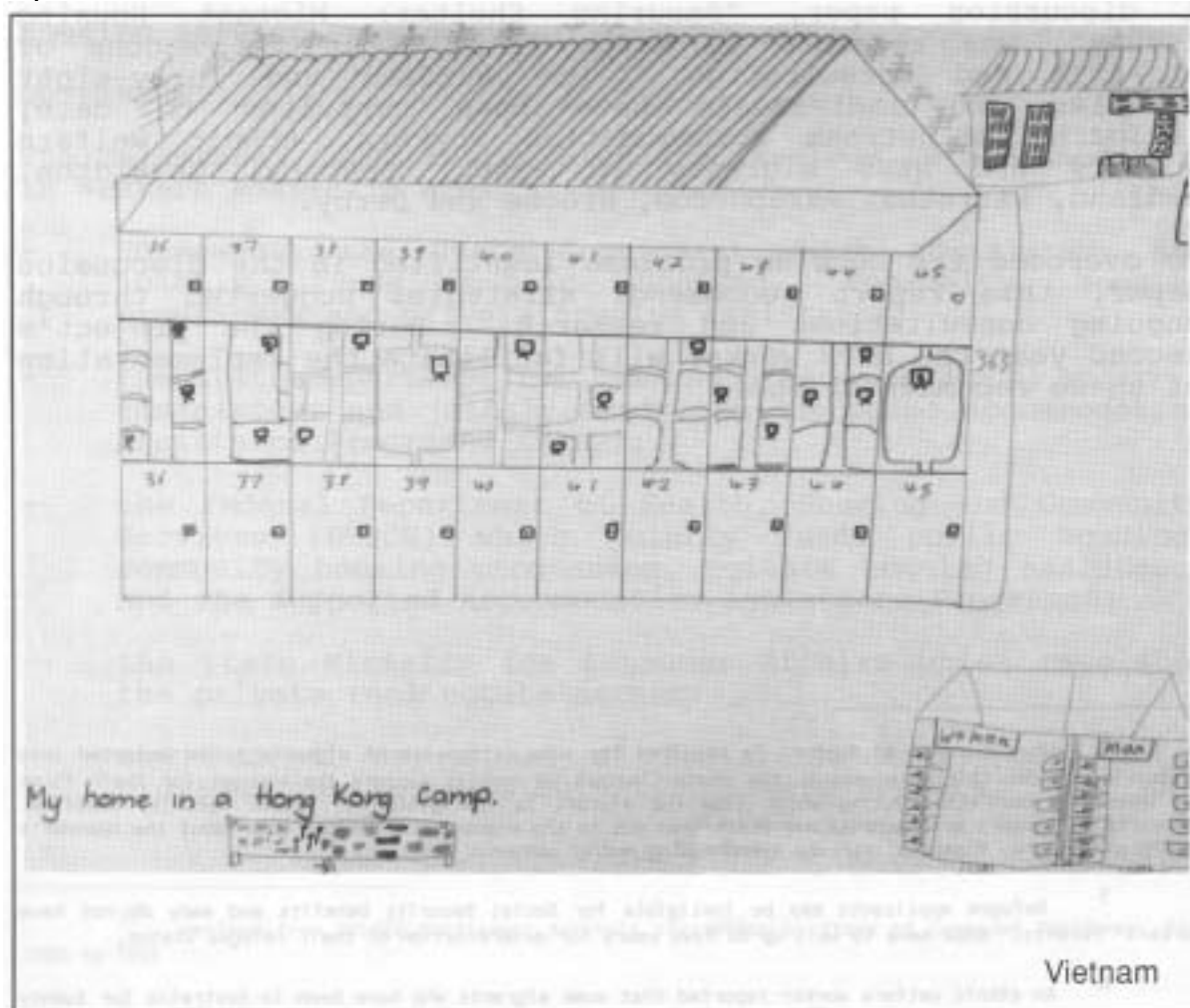
Community housing agencies need to do outreach work with NESB migrants to ensure that they are offering a culturally appropriate, viable housing option.

### **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.



## 2. PROJECT OUTLINE

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

The project aims 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 accommodation in the public, private and community housing sectors. The main project target groups are refugees, women, young people and low income householders. Other people, including aged migrants (especially those who have been dislodged from their family homes due to breakdowns in Assurance of Support arrangements),<sup>4</sup> migrants with disabilities, refugee applicants awaiting determination of their status,<sup>5</sup> and migrants who have been in Australia for more than five years,<sup>6</sup> also face serious accommodation problems. However, these groups are not dealt with in detail in this project.

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 have been consulted to date, including mainstream accommodation workers, ethnic welfare workers and NESB migrants in Perth, Bunbury, Geraldton, Hedland, Karratha, Paraburdoo, Broome and Derby.

To overcome the housing problems identified in the discussion paper, this report recommends strategies suggested through ongoing consultations and research. During the project's second year the MAPS worker will facilitate the implementation of these recommendations.

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<sup>4</sup> An Assurance of Support is required for some categories of migrants to be accepted into Australia. Under this arrangement, the sponsor agrees to totally support the migrant for their first two years in Australia, during which time the migrant is ineligible for Social Security benefits. Assurance of Support arrangements may break down due to the migrant's misconceptions about the sponsor's living conditions, financial stress, overcrowding and/or personal conflict.

<sup>5</sup> Refugee applicants may be ineligible for Social Security benefits and many do not have Workers' Permits. Some have to wait up to five years for determination of their refugee status.

<sup>6</sup> An ethnic welfare worker reported that some migrants who have been in Australia for twenty years have still not overcome settlement problems with respect to their accommodation.

### 3. GENERAL ISSUES

There are approximately 90 000 migrants from NESB in Western Australia who have been in Australia for less than five years.<sup>7</sup> Compared to the rest of the country, Western Australia receives a disproportionately high number of migrants.<sup>8</sup>

Eileen Pittaway (1991) researched the needs and concerns of 204 refugee women during the first two years of their settlement in Sydney. Although accommodation was perceived by them as the second most important issue they faced, migrant accommodation issues have received scant attention nationally and in this state. The paucity of research and ethnospecific data is reflected in the low level of awareness by policy makers and service providers in the public, private and community housing sectors. Furthermore, groups, such as migrant women and young migrants, are doubly ignored. This is illustrated by the fact that the National Housing Strategy is releasing papers focusing on women and on migrants, but neither covers migrant women's housing issues.

#### ***Housing Service Providers:***

##### **GOVERNMENT:**

The mainstream departments which are involved in accommodation in Western Australia are:

- Homeswest, the State department which administers and jointly funds public housing, community housing programmes and private housing assistance;
- the State Department for Community Services (DCS) which administers and jointly funds the Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP);
- the Federal Department of Health, Housing and Community Services (DHHCS) which jointly funds public housing, community housing programmes, private housing assistance and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme;
- the State Ministry for Consumer Affairs which regulates the private real estate market;
- the Federal Department of Social Security (DSS) which provides rental assistance for private tenants.

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<sup>7</sup> derived from DILGEA Settlement Arrivals statistics by State of Intended Residence, from 1986 to 1991

<sup>8</sup> 1989/1990 data from DILGEA's "At a Glance", Canberra, p 20

The Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs (DILGEA) provides short-term, subsidised accommodation to some newly arrived refugees.

#### **COMMUNITY:**

Some key mainstream community based accommodation agencies are:

- Shelter WA which integrates the views of and represents community groups and consumers on major housing issues;
- the Tenants Advice Service (TAS) which provides information and support for private tenants;
- the Federation of Housing Collectives which supports the establishment and effective operation of housing collectives;
- the Women's Refuge Group, the Youth Accommodation Coalition and the Council to Homeless Persons, which are the peak Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP) agencies.

#### **PRIVATE:**

The Real Estate Institute of WA (REIWA) is the umbrella body of private real estate agents.

Government, community and private services need to recognise and cater for the needs of recently arrived migrants. John Sommerlad (1988) stated that:

Equity requires that policies, programs and services take account of the range of needs and circumstances arising from immigration and cultural and linguistic diversity. This means that all members of the community should be entitled to the same standard of service though the actual service might be delivered in different ways.

There are no ethnic affairs sections in any mainstream accommodation organisations except DSS. In the absence of a coherent policy framework including ethnic data collection, service delivery to NESB clients is ad hoc and subsequently often inappropriate and inadequate.

Widespread ignorance within these organisations of NESB migrants' needs became evident during project consultations. As a result, the special needs of NESB clients are usually only addressed by marginalised ethnic agencies.

Effective mainstreaming of housing services for migrants will not occur unless ethnic and mainstream organisations consult with each other on a regular basis.

**RECOMMENDATION 3.1:**

**That mainstream and ethnic housing providers communicate effectively with each other and with representatives of ethnic communities in Metropolitan and rural locations.**

Cross-cultural skills and anti-racist training is urgently needed throughout the field. Reports were made during this research of staff who shouted at non-English speaking clients and were disrespectful of cultural differences. If staff were trained in correct professional practices, they could be entrusted with more discretionary powers, which would allow for increased flexibility in individual cases. Many refugees have been subjected to trauma and/or torture<sup>9</sup>, and have good reason to be suspicious of government officials. They may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of insensitive treatment by staff in large bureaucracies.

DHHCS contracted Shelter WA to run six one-day training sessions for its staff. Participants in this training generated Action Plans designed to ensure that NESB migrants receive sufficient appropriate services. Homeswest has also made a commitment to run cross-cultural skills training in 1993. Some other departments, such as DCS and DILGEA, have run some cross-cultural awareness training. Cross-cultural training should not reinforce stereotypes about members of ethnic communities. It should, however, result in structural changes designed to overcome inequities within the agency.

**RECOMMENDATION 3.2:**

**That all housing service providers and policy makers participate in cross-cultural skills and/or anti-racist training. Such training should be held regularly for new and experienced staff.**

Mainstream accommodation related organisations in Western Australia have largely Anglo-Australian workforces. DSS is the only such organisation that currently employs people in permanent positions identified for bilingual and/or bicultural staff.

**RECOMMENDATION 3.3:**

**That accommodation service providers include bilingual and/or cross-cultural skills in the selection criteria for identified service delivery and policy positions. They should also identify and utilise the language skills already contained within their agencies.**

During consultations, many service providers reported that they were reluctant to use the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), largely due to its recently introduced "user pays"

<sup>9</sup> In Pittaway's survey 73% of refugee women reported that they had experienced medium to high levels of torture and/or trauma.

policy.

The provision of interpreters is a basic right to which all NESB people are entitled. Unfortunately, the onus is usually on non-English speaking clients to request professional interpreting support. Depending on their background, migrants may be unaware of this service or they may believe that it is discourteous to ask government officials for such support.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 3.4:**

**That, ideally, the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) revert to its policy of not charging for the use of telephone and onsite interpreters. Alternatively, all housing service providers and funding sources should assign specific funds for the use of TIS and proactively offer this service to clients who are obviously not fluent in English.**

Many service providers are ignorant of how to use interpreters effectively. Crown Law advises that clients can sue agencies if they are disadvantaged due to the agencies' failure to use professional interpreters where necessary.

Clients are often expected to bring voluntary interpreters with them when dealing with mainstream housing organisations.<sup>10</sup> Unlike TIS interpreters, voluntary interpreters are not accredited for their interpreting skills and they do not work under a professional code of accuracy, confidentiality and impartiality. Children often find the role of interpreting particularly difficult. They may be put into a culturally inappropriate situation, where they have to relay orders and reprimands, make decisions, ask personal questions or discuss taboo topics, such as financial matters. Furthermore, although they may be fluent in general conversation, they may lack the skills to accurately interpret complex housing issues. Children should not be exploited in this way.

There is also a critical lack of publicity and documentation in languages other than English. It is not enough to produce general brochures in major community languages. Lila Kirilik (1992) surveyed 700 NESB migrants in the Canterbury-Bankstown area of Sydney. She found that none of these migrants had used the multilingual brochures produced by a variety of agencies. These brochures need to be disseminated through ethnic networks (eg religious groups, ethnic schools, community leaders, migrant resource centres, Grant in Aid workers, radio programmes and newsletters). Migrants may lack literacy skills in their first language or be unaccustomed to receiving

<sup>10</sup> Chhea and Ebert (1991) found that 86% of the Cambodians they surveyed requested the assistance of ethnospecific workers, friends or relatives when dealing with Homeswest. A great number of the respondents reported that if they did not bring a bilingual person with them, they were instructed to come back with one. This survey was carried out before Homeswest initiated the onsite interpreting service specifically for Cambodians.

information in the form of brochures. At a large government display at the Mirrabooka shopping centre this year, virtually no brochures in other languages were picked up by the large numbers of NESB migrants who passed by. It may be more appropriate to disseminate information by word of mouth, multilingual audio cassettes or subtitled videos.

**RECOMMENDATION 3.5:**

**That all housing service providers develop Language Policies, that include effective means of information dissemination through ethnic media and community networks.**

**RECOMMENDATION 3.6:**

**That Shelter WA's MAPS project pilot an information dissemination project for migrants from six targeted communities. Bilingual community members would be employed on a casual basis. They would be instructed about housing issues and would then disseminate this information through religious gatherings, sporting and social events, local shops and other points of contact. If the pilot were successful, an appropriate agency would be identified to continue this project.**

Local Government also plays a role in migrant housing, as it regulates housing construction and additions. Council planners have a history of catering to the needs of Anglo-Australian property owners. They have strict building codes, some of which may not be essential to the wellbeing of local residents. An example cited during the consultations was of a migrant family who did not want to use a glass window because they wanted to prevent light from entering a room. They were penalised for using a coloured plastic sheet in place of the glass.

With a few notable exceptions, local councils are inflexible in their dealings with migrants. As Paul Johnston (1991), the President of the South Australian Local Government Planners Association commented at a conference:

I wonder how well the planning system could cope with an application for a form of communal living such as an Indonesian long house.

**RECOMMENDATION 3.7:**

**That the Local Government Industry Training Council provide cross-cultural skills training for planning authorities.**

Migrant housing issues need to be studied further so that the findings can be used to provide more appropriate housing for migrants.

**RECOMMENDATION 3.8:**

**That nationwide quantitative research, from a social justice**

perspective, be undertaken to ascertain and address the situation of migrants who experience "housing stress".

#### RECOMMENDATION 3.9:

That Shelter WA's MAPS project compile a comprehensive information kit on housing issues affecting recently arrived migrants, for use by ethnic welfare workers and mainstream housing workers. This kit should be regularly updated by Shelter WA.

#### *Migrant Needs:*

Migrants from different backgrounds have widely differing housing design requirements. The following points need to be recognised by housing providers:

- Migrants from countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Ethiopia and Afghanistan may well need housing which is big enough to accommodate their extended families.<sup>11</sup> The lack of large, affordable dwellings often results in overcrowding, which can cause problems with real estate agents, Homeswest officers, health inspectors and community nurses.
- Cambodians from rural backgrounds are accustomed to using one room as an all-purpose room.<sup>12</sup>
- Some Italian women want a large kitchen/dining area for socialising. They would not be so concerned about the size of the "living" room.<sup>13</sup>
- A Korean woman said she needed tiled floors with a central drain in her bathroom/laundry, so that she could scrub clothes against the tiles and the water would drain away.<sup>14</sup>
- An Asian woman disliked carpet because it gathered dust and masked the sound of approaching footsteps.<sup>15</sup>
- Some Indian and Afghan women prefer detached kitchens so that cooking smells do not permeate living areas.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> project consultations

<sup>12</sup> project consultations

<sup>13</sup> Speaking of Housing... (p 200)

<sup>14</sup> ibid (p 200)

<sup>15</sup> ibid (p 200)

<sup>16</sup> project consultations

- A Vietnamese man preferred high ceilings, in order to keep the house cool.<sup>17</sup>
- Observant Moslems require a room with a wall facing Mecca and a water tap.<sup>18</sup> They also need to have guest bedrooms in a separate area from women's bedrooms.<sup>19</sup>
- An elderly Salvadorean woman stressed the need for an ensuite bathroom, although some younger women from El Salvador did not perceive this as an issue.<sup>20</sup>

The last example illustrates the importance of avoiding cultural stereotyping. The above comments have been made by individual members of ethnic communities. One would hardly expect all Anglo-Australians to agree with one individual's vision of an ideal dwelling. Variables such as class, gender, religion, age, family structure, education level, recency of arrival in Australia, disability and personal taste can also affect housing preferences.

Service providers often tend to consider **all** migrants as a homogenous group. It is important to realise that, although all migrants have been born outside Australia and face settlement issues here, they have come from a diverse range of sociopolitical settings around the world.

As a 32 year old Chilean refugee said in Pittaway's (1991) survey:

We are not all the same. People have to be treated as individuals. Just because we are refugees should not mean that we lose our sense of self - we lose everything else.

Migrants may be loathe to criticise Australian government services. Thirty-eight per cent of the refugee women that Pittaway (1991) surveyed were unsure of their residential status and afraid that, if they complained, they would be extradited. Survivors of torture and trauma may also be concerned about the safety of family members who are still living in their country of origin or refugee camps.

### ***Case Studies:***

The following case studies are from the project consultations.

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<sup>17</sup> project consultations

<sup>18</sup> Seitz

<sup>19</sup> project consultations

<sup>20</sup> project consultations

They illustrate some of the recurring problems that migrants face in seeking accommodation. The migrants in the case studies were referred to the author by welfare workers. Migrants who are unaware of the existence of welfare services could well be experiencing worse problems with housing.

\*\*\*\*\*

A Middle Eastern family came to Australia as Independent Migrants. They arrived with three small children arrived in Australia on the Saturday before a public holiday. The children became ill due to the sudden change in food and climate. No support services were open during the weekend, so they slept at the airport on the first night and, on the advice of a stranger, stayed two nights in an expensive hotel nearby. So the family spent \$400 of their limited savings on accommodation and meals in their first three days in the country.

On the Tuesday, a migrant crisis accommodation worker assisted the family to access a DILGEO flat for ten days at commercial rates. They then moved to a unit managed by the accommodation worker. They are currently seeking private rental, so that they can live closer to other members of their community.

\*\*\*\*\*

A Polish family spent the first two weeks in Australia in their sister's house.

Then they moved to a dilapidated Homeswest flat in a noisy, violent highrise block on the urban fringe. Their two primary aged sons were attacked on the only two occasions that they ventured outside unsupervised. Their teacher noticed the boys' distress and, after assessing the situation, eventually managed to achieve priority transfer status for the family, with the support of a local politician.

The family is now living in a nearby asbestos duplex adjoining another Polish family. Apart from problems with theft, they feel much more secure.

The couple has experienced problems in dealing with Homeswest staff. Despite repeated requests, the local manager has refused to talk to them. On one occasion a counter officer rang TIS at the couple's request, but hung up when he realised that he had to wait for an interpreter.

The family is on the Homeswest waiting list to purchase a house near their sister in another outer suburb. They have been told they will have to wait five to six years.

\*\*\*\*\*

A French family with two children spent their first two nights in Australia in a hotel.

Before they left France, they sent money for a friend to arrange private rental. They moved into a two bedroom flat, unaware of the fact that it was located in an exclusive suburb. They were not aware of Homeswest bond support until they were informed of it, through an interpreter, at a Department of Social Security office.

After five months the family moved to a privately rented three bedroom house, which was in poor condition. It was very cold, flea infested, with water running down the walls, no hot water in the kitchen and smelly drains. The real estate agent refused to assist with these problems, despite letters and visits to his office. When the family decided to move after seven months, they had difficulty in retrieving their bond. When the woman went to the Ministry for Consumer Affairs for assistance the counter officer refused to provide professional interpreting assistance because the woman's bilingual daughter was with her. The family only succeeded in reducing the amount owing on the bond from \$225 to \$210.

The family now privately rents a nearby three bedroom unit, which is much more satisfactory.

\*\*\*\*\*

An aged Vietnamese woman is experiencing conflict, living with her daughter's family. Her grandchildren stay out late and play loud music. She needs an independent living arrangement, but is concerned that Homeswest will not give her mortgage assistance, due to the limited time she has left to repay the mortgage.

\*\*\*\*\*

A recently arrived Chinese migrant is sharing a two bedroom Homeswest dwelling in the Kimberley region with his brother, sister-law and their two children. Private rental accommodation is very scarce and expensive. He is on the Homeswest waiting list and has been informed that he will have to wait about eighteen months for accommodation. As this man's English is very limited, he takes a bilingual friend to help him deal with Homeswest. The local Homeswest office reported that they have not used TIS for at least the last two years.

\*\*\*\*\*

A non-English speaking woman was referred by a Department for Community Services worker in the Pilbara to a women's refuge in another town. She was wrongly informed that the refuge had private facilities and was shocked and angered on her arrival. It can be particularly difficult for women from other cultures to share facilities as they may be inconvenienced or embarrassed by the fact that their cooking, eating, cleaning, washing and childrearing practices may differ from the Anglo-Australian norm.

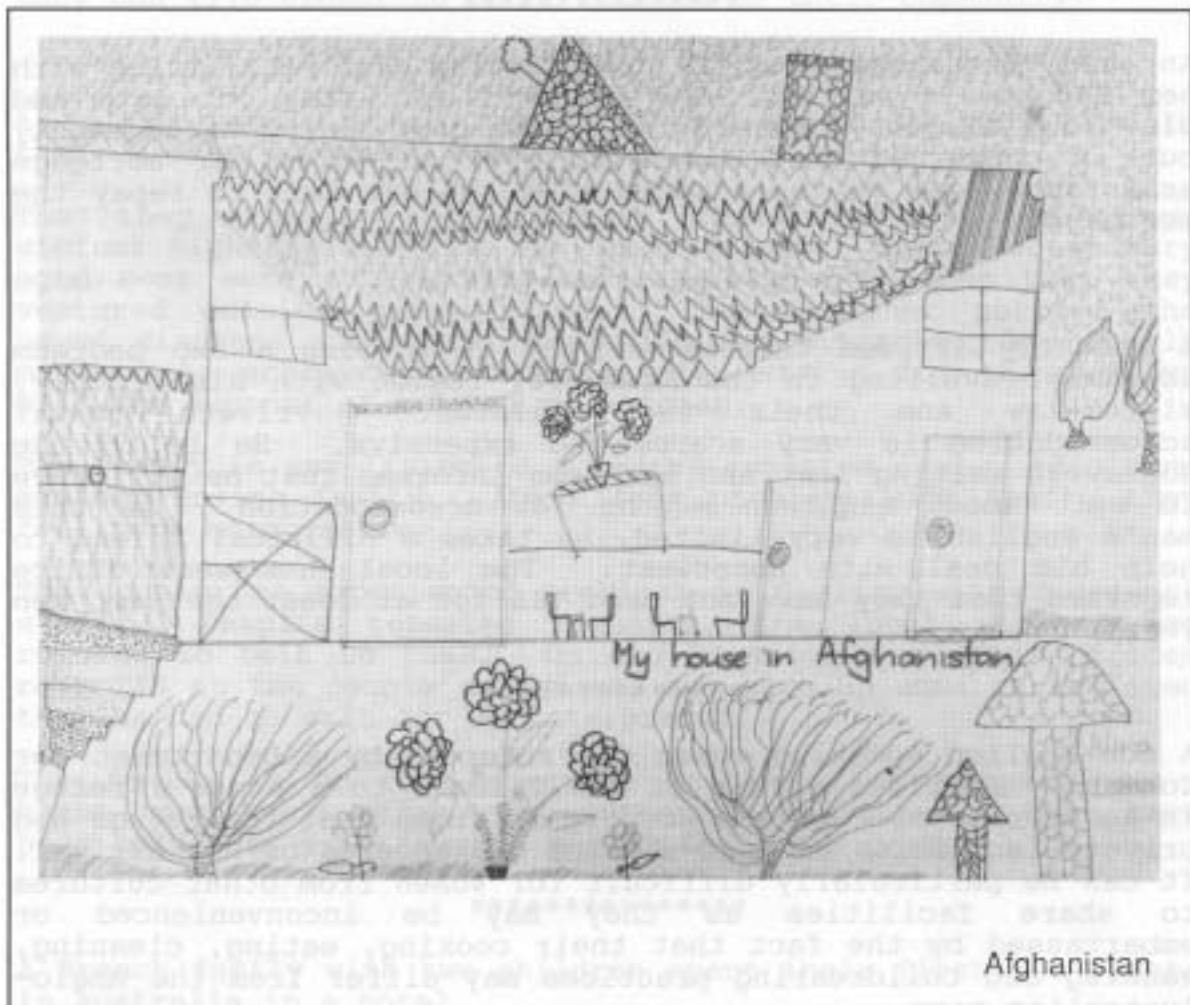
\*\*\*\*\*

An Eastern European woman has been rejected by her community, because she took her three children, all under six years old, and left her violent husband.

After a stay in a women's refuge she moved into Homeswest Emergency Housing. On leaving this accommodation, she appealed against a tenant liability claim of \$300, whereupon the claim was reduced to \$75.

She was then moved into a highrise Homeswest flat in an outer suburb. She requested priority relocation because she and her children were being harassed by men constantly knocking on her door and domestic violence occurring in an adjacent flat. Her children were frightened and experiencing nightmares.

Homeswest would not grant priority relocation because the woman had just bought a block on which she plans to build a house. In the meantime, she is forced to stay in a threatening situation which is having an ongoing detrimental effect on her and her children.



## **4. HOMESWEST**

Homeswest is the State government department which provides public rental accommodation for low income tenants. It also administers community housing programmes (see Section 7), provides bond assistance to private tenants (see Section 5) and financial support to private purchasers (see Section 5).

### **Targeted Strategies**

Homeswest has recently improved its services to NESB migrants, by implementing the following strategies:

- The new application form for rental accommodation and home loan assistance contains non-compulsory questions to allow for ethnic monitoring. Applicants (ie one individual in each household) are asked to specify their country of birth and their preferred language for interviews.
- The above application form contains information about TIS in sixteen languages.
- Homeswest has produced information about TIS in sixteen languages to print on the back of its letterhead.
- A card requesting that clients attend an interview has been translated into sixteen languages.
- The Homeswest brochures, "What Homeswest Can Do For You", "Renting - The Homeswest Choices" and "Housing Choices For Seniors", and information on domestic violence are available in seven languages.
- A sessional onsite interpreter service is available in Vietnamese, Spanish (for Latin American and Spanish clients) and Khmer (for Cambodians) at three Metropolitan Homeswest offices. The need for onsite interpreting for Iranian and Afghani clients is currently being investigated. Homeswest was presented with an award for being the highest user of TIS in the last statistical period.<sup>21</sup>
- A half-time Counter Service Officer with interpreting and translating skills has been appointed, initially for a three month period.
- The Homeswest tenancy agreement has been translated into

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<sup>21</sup> This is an especially commendable result in view of the fact that in 1991 the Ministerial Community Housing Advisory Committee identified the use of interpreters as an issue that Homeswest needed to address.

Vietnamese, Polish, Khmer and Spanish.

- An onsite (rather than telephone) interpreter is now provided if a professional advocate for a NESB client recommends that this service is necessary.
- Two NESB migrants sit on the Homeswest Independent Appeals Tribunal.
- The Tribunal brochure, which is written in "plain" English, has been translated into four languages. Translations in four more languages will be produced during the current financial year.
- Clients who approach the Homeswest Independent Appeals Tribunal are asked whether they would like the support of an interpreter.

## **Gaps and Inequities**

### ***General:***

The Commonwealth State Housing Agreement refers specifically to "accessibility to and suitability of rental accommodation for people with disabilities, Aboriginals, youth and the elderly". This agreement is made between DHHCS, as the Federal funding provider and Homeswest, as the State service provider of public housing. DHHCS has the power to reallocate or retain specific purpose grants if Homeswest is found to be discriminating against particular groups. However, as NESB migrants are not mentioned in the Agreement, Homeswest is not bound by the agreement to service their needs equitably.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4.1:**

**That, in the long-term, Homeswest and DHHCS alter the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement to specifically include NESB migrants in the list of targeted groups. In the interim, annual Housing Assistance Plans, which are based on the Agreement, should pay specific attention to the needs of NESB migrants.**

This exclusion is reflected in Homeswest's lack of a coherent policy with targeted strategies for servicing NESB clients. Without co-ordination of ethnic affairs at the policy and programme level, ad hoc, inconsistent service delivery is inevitable. The imminent establishment of a Policy Officer (Equity Issues) position will assist in the servicing of migrants, but that officer will be required to deal with all groups who lack equity in the public housing system. Migrant issues alone require the employment of at least one full-time officer.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.2:**

That Homeswest establish an Ethnic Affairs Section, to administer its onsite interpreter service and deal with the policy and programme delivery issues affecting NESB migrant clients.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.3:**

That Homeswest develop and implement an Access and Equity Policy for NESB migrants which includes:

- a Language Policy 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
- ongoing cross cultural skills and/or anti-racist training
- identified positions for bilingual/bicultural staff

A Working Party has been set up, representing the Ministerial Community Housing Advisory Committee, to monitor the development of a Language Policy for Homeswest. The Language Policy is crucial, but work also needs to be done to ensure that Homeswest provides culturally appropriate client services and accommodation for NESB migrants.

An effective Access and Equity Policy can only be formulated on the basis of data. With the recently introduced application forms, Homeswest has begun to monitor the number of NESB migrants who apply for rental accommodation or loan assistance, but the department have made no commitment to monitor the number of people who actually obtain these services. This information would cost money to extract from the data base, so it depends on the priority management places on the effective servicing of NESB clients. If, through such monitoring, Homeswest were to find that a disproportionate number of NESB people had failed to access services, they would be able to investigate the reasons for this mismatch and rectify it. It would also be easier to check whether sufficient resources were being devoted to the effective servicing of migrants.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.4:**

That Homeswest collect and use gendered ethnicity data in an ethical fashion and ensure confidentiality of individual data. Counter staff should be made aware of the rationale for ethnic data collection, so that they can encourage applicants to complete the ethnic monitoring questions.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.5:**

That Homeswest carry out annual surveys of the number of NESB clients who have both applied for and been allocated housing. It could well be that large numbers of NESB people have not understood Homeswest communications. If they do not recognise

and reply to correspondence, they are deleted from the waiting list. The recently introduced information about TIS on the back of all Homeswest letters will help to rectify this problem.

People can also be cancelled from the waiting list if their names or dates of birth are recorded incorrectly. This can occur through a lack of awareness of different cultural groups' naming and dating systems. As DSS's naming classification poster has recently been distributed to Homeswest offices, this problem should be lessened.

During consultations, reports were made of Homeswest staff who were rude, loud and impatient with NESB clients and Grant in Aid (ethnic welfare) workers. The ignorance of some staff is indicated by a comment made by a Homeswest officer who had been working in an ethnically diverse community for eleven years. He informed the researcher that he had never come across migrants in his Homeswest work - only in the Chinese restaurant down the road. Another officer stated that the migrants in her region caused no trouble because they had no problems. That office had not used TIS for at least two years. When consulted, the migrants in that region cited several problems that they were experiencing with Homeswest, but said that they did not approach the staff because they could not communicate with them.

Counter staff often lack the proficiency and confidence necessary for using TIS. While staff should be offering interpreting support where appropriate, the onus usually falls on clients to request this support. Reluctance to use TIS can result in unnecessary confusion for both parties and hardship for the client. As telephones with dual handsets are not provided on the front counters in Homeswest offices, non-English speaking clients face a barrier in getting past the counter and into the interview rooms, where facilities are available for using TIS. Staff need to be aware that some refugees may be frightened by the prospect of a closed interview room due to their experiences of interrogation and torture. Care should be taken to leave the interview room door partly open and to arrange the furniture so that the clients can see outside the room.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4.6:**

**That Homeswest provide training on using TIS for service delivery staff, as was recommended in the department's last Policy Review.**

The onsite interpreter service, currently being offered on a sessional basis in three languages at three Metropolitan Homeswest offices, requires careful monitoring and sufficient resourcing. Publicity through ethnic community groups and media is essential to the success of this service.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4.7:**

**That Homeswest continue to monitor the need for extra languages and office locations in the onsite interpreter service.**

**RECOMMENDATION 4.8:**

**That Homeswest staff ensure that, whilst clients with particular language needs must be informed about the regular onsite interpreter service, they should not be forced to wait until the day that the interpreters are in attendance or to visit the Homeswest office where they are located.**

A half-time Counter Services Officer with interpreting and translating skills has been employed for three months initially, to work with the onsite interpreters, as well as carrying out mainstream counter duties. This is a commendable move, as it is the first time that Homeswest has employed a staff member specifically for their bilingual skills.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.9:**

**That Homeswest identify a permanent Counter Services Officer position requiring interpreting and cross-cultural skills. Extra counter services positions could then be assigned to staff with interpreting and cross-cultural skills, depending on demand.**

Homeswest has no effective information dissemination process for communicating and consulting with members of ethnic communities. Some offices fail to display Homeswest's multilingual brochures. When the researcher phoned the Public Affairs Branch to order copies of these brochures she was initially informed that Homeswest had no multilingual brochures.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.10:**

**That Homeswest regularly inform Grant in Aid and other migrant welfare workers of policy and programme changes, particularly those which specifically affect NESB clients. The department should also consult with these specialist workers about the effects of planned policy changes on migrants.**

Migrants require information about rental, purchasing and appeals in their own languages. All written information should be in plain English and, preferably, in other languages. Homeswest officers need to be informed about existing translated materials, such as tenancy agreements, and how to use them.

***Public Rental Accommodation:***

General problems which affect all Homeswest tenants include the long waiting period (up to five years); the lack of physical

security, particularly for women and aged tenants; dilapidated housing; difficulty in getting maintenance done; the poor condition of Emergency Housing; and the social ramifications of living in large blocks of flats on the urban fringes. In desperation or through ignorance of the Homeswest system, migrants may accept substandard accommodation in under-resourced locations and then find it very difficult to secure alternative accommodation.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.11:**

**That Homeswest continue to implement its Apartment Strategy of demolishing large blocks of substandard flats and replacing them with medium density housing.**

NESB migrants are frequently housed in a culturally inappropriate fashion as Homeswest housing is generally built in an Anglo-Australian style. Kirilik (1992) found that 65% of migrants in her Sydney survey had at least five dependents. There is a lack of housing stock with sufficient bedrooms and storage space for extended families. Project consultees reported that clients are sometimes persuaded to split large families when applying for rental accommodation.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.12:**

**That Homeswest commence immediate construction of more four and five bedroom houses. Homeswest should liaise regularly with DILGEA regarding the projected family sizes of intending migrants.**

**RECOMMENDATION 4.13:**

**That Homeswest investigate innovative options for housing large families, such as placing a door in the adjoining wall of some duplexes to allow flexibility in the size of housing stock.**

It is also essential to consider housing location. Many migrants wish to be near other members of their community, with specialist shops, places of worship, English classes for adults and children, childcare facilities, employment opportunities and ethnic welfare services within easy reach. For people who have not yet learnt English, travelling by public transport can be a harrowing experience, particularly if they have to take young children with them. Homeswest stock is often located on urban fringes, where public transport facilities are inadequate. Women may be particularly housebound and isolated.

The low quantity of inner suburban Homeswest accommodation, where ethnic services are clustered, often forces migrants into the more expensive and less secure private rental market. Homeswest's increased spot-purchasing and building of stock in established locations is to be commended.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.14:**

**That Homeswest increase the building and spot-purchasing of housing in a variety of sizes, designs and locations.**

In contrast to the situation in this state, the New South Wales Department of Housing has a formal policy of urgently moving migrants who are being harassed by racist neighbours. The West Australian Residential Tenancies Act states that the owner (Homeswest in this case) cannot "permit any interference with the reasonable peace, comfort or privacy of the tenant in the use by the tenant of the premises".<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the Equal Opportunity Act states that racial discrimination is illegal in the area of accommodation. It appears that Homeswest would be in breach of both Acts if it refused to respond to legitimate complaints of racial harassment, several of which were reported during project consultations.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.15:**

**That the Homeswest Policy Manual specify racial harassment as a ground for assigning priority status for relocation.**

**RECOMMENDATION 4.16:**

**That Homeswest applicants should not be penalised for rejecting an offer of accommodation if they can demonstrate that there is a likelihood of racial harassment.**

A project consultee reported that some public housing authorities in London require prospective tenants to sign an agreement stating that they will not racially harass other tenants. Some London Boroughs have installed portable alarm systems in areas where racial violence is likely to occur.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.17:**

**That Homeswest tenants' agreements contain a clause stating that tenants must refrain from harassing other tenants on the grounds of their race, descent, national or ethnic origin.**

The New South Wales department's housing allocation system is also flexible, allowing for clusters of people from the same background. Homeswest's waitlisting policy does not permit the strategic placing of people who prefer to live close to other members of their communities.

Migrants may prefer to live near other members of their ethnic community so that they can have access to ethnospecific services and maintain networks with people who share their language, culture and settlement experiences.

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<sup>22</sup> Section 44(1)(b), Residential Tenancies Act 1987

**RECOMMENDATION 4.18:**

**That Homeswest pilot the optional clustering of migrants of shared ethnicity in consultation with ethnic communities.**

Homeswest officers have discretionary powers in deciding whether clients are given priority status in housing allocation. Homeswest policy states that priority should be given where "an applicant due to ... language difficulties could not reasonably be expected to search for accommodation" (Section 151). However, project consultees questioned whether this policy applies in practice, as so many migrants have been refused priority status on this ground. Priority status should also be given in the case of "a medical condition being caused or aggravated by the lack or adequacy of the existing housing" (Section 138). Homeswest staff need to be aware of the psychological and physical effects that torture and/or trauma can have on refugees. Lack of cross-cultural sensitivity can result in officers interpreting the above priority status criteria inconsistently.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.19:**

**That Homeswest staff be made aware, through training, of the problems faced by refugees who have experienced torture and/or trauma. Those who are suffering physically or psychologically as a result of such experiences should be given priority status for housing assistance.**

DILGEA has maintained some form of bond or guarantee system for some categories of migrants since 1901. This system has required permanent Australian residents to pay a bond or sign a guarantee of support agreement for some categories of potential migrants. However, with the introduction in 1991 of the Bond for certain Family Migrants, including aged parents, Homeswest has altered its policy. Sponsoring families will no longer be allocated extra bedrooms for aged parents, who are now considered to be dependent on their families. This practice is inequitable as children are allocated bedrooms, despite their dependent status. NESB migrants find this particularly difficult to accept if they are from cultures where aged people are attributed higher status than children. This new policy forces families to live in overcrowded conditions, which may contribute to intergenerational conflict and problems with authorities.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.20:**

**That Homeswest revert to its previous policy of allocating a bedroom to each member of the family, irrespective of whether the family is involved in an Assurance of Support arrangement.**

### ***Support for Private Rental:***

Rental assistance is provided for some private tenants who are ineligible for Social Security benefits. Homeswest also provides bond assistance. Kirilik (1992) found that 90% of the NESB migrants in her New South Wales study were unaware of this sort of support.

### ***Support for Private Purchase:***

Funding support for the purchase of private accommodation is provided by Keystart, a programme for households with earnings of between \$300 and \$800 gross per week.

As Keystart is based on the assumption that recipients' earning capacities will increase, the repayments increase over time. For migrants who are long-term unemployed, their inability to repay increased amounts causes severe financial stress, particularly during the current recession. There are no statistics available to the community sector on the rate of mortgage defaults occurring through Keystart. It is therefore impossible to know how well this scheme is working.

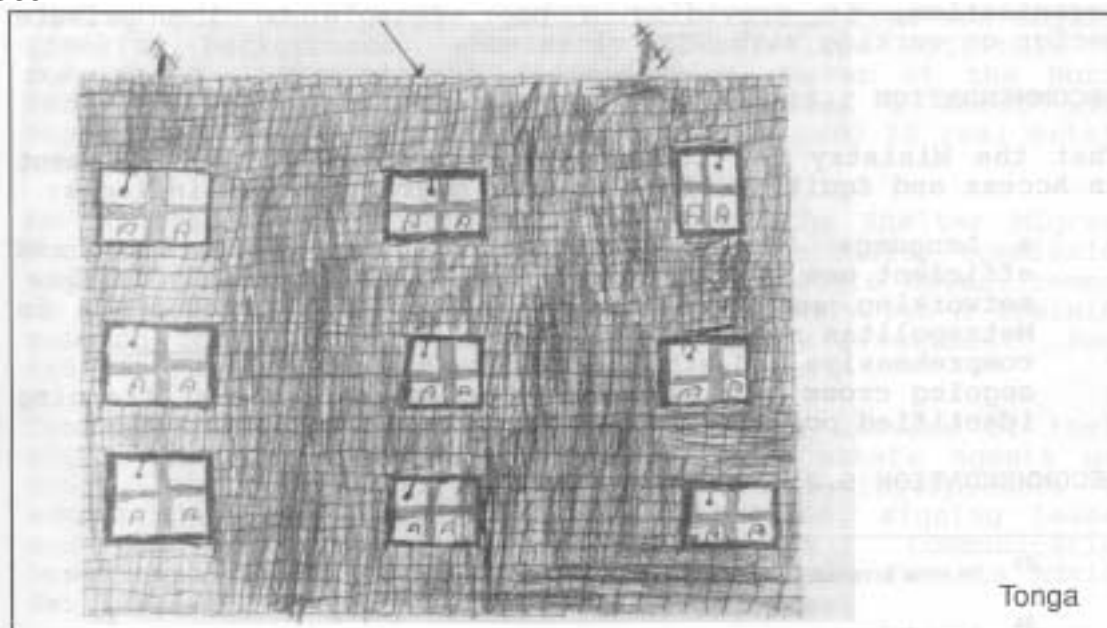
#### **RECOMMENDATION 4.21:**

**That Homeswest make data available on the rate of mortgage defaults occurring through Keystart.**

During the consultations, most migrants reported that they were unaware of the existence of this programme.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4.22:**

**That Homeswest translate and disseminate information about the support it offers tenants and purchasers in the private housing sector.**



## 5. PRIVATE REAL ESTATE

The private real estate market consists of the rental and sale of housing in a free enterprise setting. The National Housing Strategy has identified private rental as the tenure most likely to result in housing poverty, with 10% of tenants paying over 50% of their income in rent.<sup>23</sup> Due to the lack of viable alternatives, two thirds of new arrivals are forced into private rental, despite high costs and lack of security.<sup>24</sup> They are often compelled to sign six or twelve month leases without understanding how the private real estate market operates.

### ***The Ministry for Consumer Affairs:***

The Ministry for Consumer Affairs aims to promote a fair and equitable private rental environment, through the Residential Tenancies Act, industry control, the provision of services and education.

The Ministry has no translated information. The support of professional interpreters is essential for staff to be able to explain the numerous complex Acts that it controls to non-English speaking clients. Yet the entire Ministry only used TIS three times in the quarter from July to September 1991. During project consultations, migrants reported that Ministry staff told them to bring voluntary interpreters with them for interviews. The Ministry has no Language Policy and the only commitment they have made is to include multilingual information about TIS in their printed material.

The Ministry for Consumer Affairs, a major public sector organisation, is providing a poor example to the private sector on working with NESB clients.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5.1:**

**That the Ministry for Consumer Affairs develop and implement an Access and Equity Policy for NESB migrants which includes:**

- a Language Policy 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
- ongoing cross cultural skills and/or anti-racist training
- identified positions for bilingual/bicultural staff

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<sup>23</sup> in "The Affordability of Australian Housing" (p 20)

<sup>24</sup> Sommerlad

**RECOMMENDATION 5.2:**

**That the Ministry, in conjunction with the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia, translate and disseminate information on tenants' rights and duties, standardised property condition reports and lease agreements.**

***Tenants Advice Service:***

The Tenants Advice Service (TAS) is a community based organisation which advocates on behalf of tenants from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Because of TAS's limited resources, much of their work is done by telephone. However, due to communication problems by NESB tenants, staff often have to interview them face-to-face. TAS has translated some information into Spanish. A funding submission, which sought to run workshops, produce and disseminate information on private rental in twelve languages, was recently rejected by the Public Purposes Trust. TAS plans to run a one-day training workshop on tenancy issues for ethnic welfare workers.

**RECOMMENDATION 5.3:**

**That the Ministry for Consumer Affairs and the Office of Legal Aid and Family Services Community Legal Centres Programme (Tenants Advice Service's funding sources), provide funds for TAS to translate and disseminate tenancy information and to use TIS interpreters when required.**

***Real Estate Agents:***

The real estate industry does not appear to have produced any translated material. The English in rental advertisements is confusing to many people, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds, who find abbreviations difficult to comprehend. The migrant accommodation worker at the North Perth Migrant Resource Centre has produced a sheet with explanations of the abbreviations commonly used in real estate advertisements.

As the result of a complaint lodged by the Shelter Migrant Access Projects Scheme with the Equal Opportunity Commission regarding a racially discriminatory real estate advertisement in The West Australian, the newspaper recently ran a training session for its staff on equal opportunity practices. Such training should be provided on a regular basis.

Tenants who lack English skills are often unaware of their rights and obligations, as very few real estate agents use TIS. Migrants cannot access free onsite interpreters to assist them in inspecting rental properties, signing leases and completing property condition reports. Communication breakdowns may necessitate intervention by the Tenants Advice Service (TAS) or

crisis accommodation services.

**RECOMMENDATION 5.4:**

**That the Real Estate Institute of WA (REIWA) develop and implement an Access and Equity Policy for NESB migrants which includes:**

- a Language Policy incorporating the appropriate and efficient use of the Translating and Interpreting Service by REIWA and real estate agents
- active networks within ethnic communities in Metropolitan and rural locations
- ongoing cross cultural skills and/or anti-racist training for policy makers and real estate agents
- identified positions for bilingual/bicultural staff in REIWA and real estate agencies, particularly in areas with the potential for more non-English speaking clients

Many real estate agencies require referees from previous property managers or private owners. This presents a barrier for newly arrived migrants who have no record of renting property in Australia.

**RECOMMENDATION 5.5:**

**That DILGEA provide a letter of reference for refugees who have stayed in the DILGEA flats.**

REIWA does not provide any training for agents with respect to dealing with NESB clients.

**RECOMMENDATION 5.6:**

**That REIWA's Property Management Chapter provide ongoing cross-cultural skills training for rental property managers.**

During the project consultations, many reports were made of ignorant and/or racist real estate agents. Excessive rental may be charged to newly arrived migrants, who are especially vulnerable and often ignorant of current market values. Cases were cited of agents who refused to accommodate refugees, large families, Social Security recipients or people with Homeswest bond assistance. Although discrimination regarding access to accommodation is illegal under the Equal Opportunity Act, many NESB migrants are unaware, afraid or unsure of the process for using the Act's complaint mechanisms.

**RECOMMENDATION 5.7:**

**That REIWA endorse the National Code of Practice for the private rental market and the accompanying State Guidelines, being developed by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Equal Opportunity Commission, respectively.**

**RECOMMENDATION 5.8:**

**That real estate agents delete questions on ethnicity, recency of arrival in Australia and citizenship from rental application forms, as these questions could be used to illegally discriminate against tenants.**

**RECOMMENDATION 5.9:**

**That the SAAP funded migrant accommodation workers maintain a register of real estate agents who are known to be non-discriminatory.**

Due to ignorance of Australian systems, migrants can be particularly vulnerable to exploitation by agents and private owners. It may be especially difficult for migrants who have come from places such as rural Cambodia and Vietnam, where private rental is rare or non-existent.

Examples of illegal practices include:

- charging of four weeks rent in advance instead of two
- private owners not informing tenants of the existence of leases or coercing them not to sign them
- private owners charging a letting fee
- lack of bond and rent receipts
- non-disclosure of hidden costs such as letting fee, stamp duty and penalties
- overcharging for utilities in large blocks of flats
- onerous clauses in leases
- problems with getting maintenance done
- invasion of privacy, such as through frequent property inspections
- leases broken unfairly by agents
- unfair withholding of bond<sup>25</sup>

Migrants who are unaware of support services tend to move to other rental accommodation when problems arise. One example cited in the consultations was of a family who moved secretly when the stove malfunctioned in their rented dwelling. They did not realise that the property owner was responsible for maintenance or that they were entitled to the return of bond money. A very expensive and traumatic cycle of constant relocation can result from migrants being uninformed about their rights.

Even if they are aware of the legal processes involved, NESB migrants are often loathe to challenge illegal practices. They may be intimidated by having to appear at Local Courts, which are usually situated adjacent to police stations. The courts operate on formal lines without the provision of interpreters.

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<sup>25</sup> In such a situation tenants would be in debt to Homeswest if they had been given bond assistance. Until debt was cleared they would be ineligible for any Homeswest assistance. This would exacerbate their state of housing poverty.

There is no right of appeal and insufficient opportunity to negotiate, particularly for migrants who lack English fluency.

**RECOMMENDATION 5.10:**

**That the Minister for Consumer Affairs establish a specialist Tribunal for tenancy disputes, with interpreting support, to replace the Local Court system, as has been recommended in the current review of the Residential Tenancies Act.**

In order to safeguard their rights, NESB tenants need to be informed of the importance of understanding all documentation, particularly the lease and Property Condition Report. Many do not realise that these documents exist or they are unaware of the link between an accurate Property Condition Report and the return of the bond at the completion of their tenancy.

**RECOMMENDATION 5.11:**

**That the Minister for Consumer Affairs make standardised property condition reports compulsory, as has been recommended in the current review of the Residential Tenancies Act.**

Kirilik (1992) found that migrants move an average of three times during their first year in Australia. Constant relocation exacerbates the financial and emotional stress incurred through migration and can have detrimental effects on health, employment and education (especially the acquisition of English).

With notable exceptions, private real estate agents are unwilling to acknowledge and rectify the above problems.

As was stated at the National Women's Housing Conference in 1985:

An informal survey of estate agents in an area of high migrant density found that not one of the agents felt any responsibility towards ensuring that the migrant tenants understood the terms of their leases, nor did they feel it was their job to explain issues such as the conditions report or insurance. A few agents thought that it was the government's responsibility to provide this information.<sup>26</sup>

***Private Ownership:***

Although the average level of home ownership is higher for migrants than for the general population, NESB women, young people, refugees and low income householders who have arrived in Australia in the last five years (ie the target groups of

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<sup>26</sup> Jamieson et al

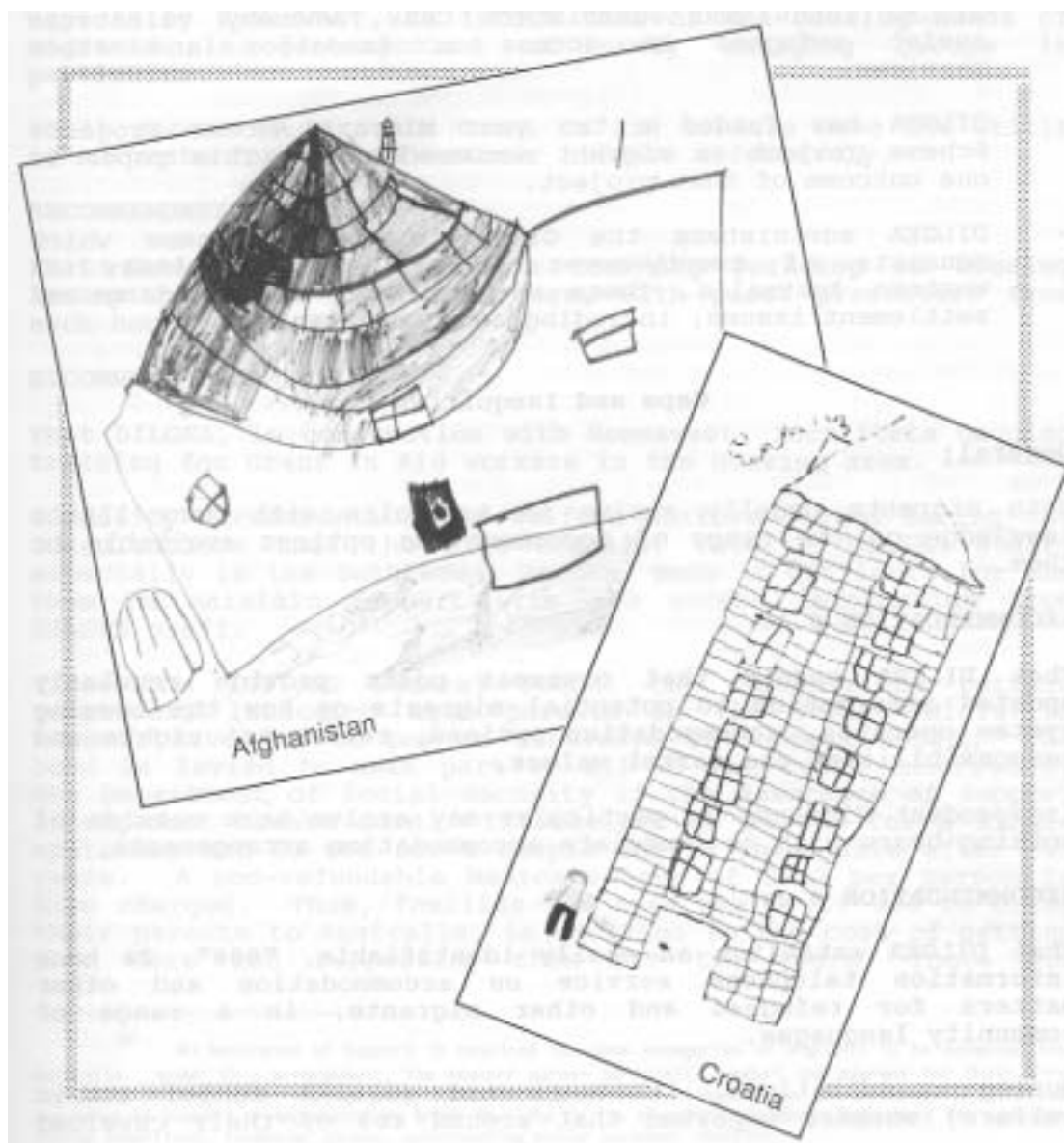
this project) would not usually be able to afford to purchase private accommodation.

Migrants may be forced into purchasing dwellings due to discrimination and the limited tenure of the rental market. Those who manage to become purchasers face several of the problems outlined in the private rental section above, such as ignorance of the system, the lack of translations and interpreters and exploitation by agents and owners.

Moreover, in the current economic climate, cases have been reported of migrants whose homes have been repossessed, due to their inability to meet mortgage obligations.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5.12:**

**That real estate agents ensure that NESB purchasers clearly understand their financial rights and responsibilities, with interpreting assistance where necessary.**



## **6. DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ETHNIC AFFAIRS (DILGEA)**

DILGEA's Settlement Branch provides settlement services to migrants, with priority given to those who have been in Australia for less than five years.

### **Targeted Strategies**

- DILGEA provides short-term subsidised on-arrival accommodation for refugees who are not assisted by the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS).
- DILGEA funds and administers CRSS, whereby volunteers assist refugees to access accommodation and other services.
- DILGEA has funded a two year Migrant Access Projects Scheme project on migrant accommodation. This paper is one outcome of that project.
- DILGEA administers the Grant in Aid programme which consists of twenty-seven social welfare workers in Western Australia. These workers deal with a range of settlement issues, including accommodation.

### **Gaps and Inequities**

#### ***General:***

NESB migrants usually arrive in Australia with very little knowledge of the range of accommodation options available to them.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6.1:**

**That DILGEA ensure that overseas posts provide regularly updated information to potential migrants on how the housing system operates, accommodation options, residents' rights and responsibilities and market values.**

Independent Migrants in particular may arrive here outside of working hours with no immediate accommodation arrangements.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6.2:**

**That DILGEA establish an easily identifiable, "008", 24 hour information telephone service on accommodation and other matters for refugees and other migrants, in a range of community languages.**

During consultations, Grant in Aid (DILGEA funded ethnic

welfare) workers reported that around 40% of their caseload was accommodation related. NESB migrants who are inexperienced in dealing with Australian bureaucracies tend to seek the support of Grant in Aid workers, rather than attempting to deal alone with mainstream organisations who do not meet their linguistic or cultural needs.

DILGEA aims for the effective mainstreaming of migrant housing. For this to occur, it is necessary to regularly inform housing service providers of migrants' needs in general (eg for larger dwellings) and for specific influxes of migrants (eg for particular language services).

**RECOMMENDATION 6.3:**

**That DILGEA regularly consult with housing service providers, especially Homeswest, to inform them of the housing needs of migrants in general and of newly emerging groups in particular.**

It is essential that the Grant in Aid workers have the skills to advocate for and refer their clients effectively.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.4:**

**That Shelter WA facilitate a training workshop on housing issues for Grant in Aid workers, with guest presenters from each housing sector.**

**RECOMMENDATION 6.5:**

**That DILGEA, in conjunction with Homeswest, facilitate ongoing training for Grant in Aid workers in the housing area.**

Community accommodation and welfare workers stated during the consultations that the high transfer rate of DILGEA staff, especially in the Settlement Branch, made it difficult for them to maintain rapport with and access information from DILGEA staff.

Since the 1991/92 Federal Budget the families of certain relatives, including aged parents in the Family Migration scheme, have had to pay an Assurance of Support Bond.<sup>27</sup> The bond is levied to meet part or all of the costs incurred by the Department of Social Security if the Assurance of Support arrangement breaks down. It consists of \$3 500 for a single applicant and \$5 000 for a couple and is refundable after two years. A non-refundable Medicare levy of \$822 per person is

<sup>27</sup> An Assurance of Support is required for some categories of migrants to be accepted into Australia. Under this arrangement, the sponsor agrees to totally support the migrant for their first two years in Australia, during which time the migrant is ineligible for Social Security benefits. Assurance of Support arrangements may break down due to the migrant's misconceptions about the sponsor's living conditions, financial stress, overcrowding and/or personal conflict.

also charged. Thus, families now need nearly \$7 000 to bring their parents to Australia, in addition to the cost of getting them here and supporting them for two years. These new measures impose an additional financial barrier on families who are seeking appropriate accommodation for their relatives.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.6:**

**That, ideally, DILGEA, in co-operation with the Department of Social Security, cancel the Assurance of Support Bond system.**

***On-Arrival Accommodation:***

Until 1987, when the Graylands Hostel was closed, all migrants were offered subsidised on-arrival accommodation. However, the hostel had the drawback of being a large institution. Residents objected to the inappropriate and expensive food; lack of privacy; the limited size of accommodation units; and isolation from the rest of the Australian community. Nevertheless, the hostel provided a focal point for migrants in a multicultural environment with English classes, childcare, social workers and a range of support staff onsite. It gave migrants the space to recover from cultural shock in a centre which was visible to the wider community. Forty-eight per cent of the refugee women in Pittaway's (1991) survey expressed the need for a safe place to stay on arrival in Australia with orientation, information, cooking facilities and social workers.

DILGEA currently provides up to thirteen weeks of subsidised, furnished accommodation for newly arrived refugees, except for those in the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (see page 35).

The department owns fifty-six flats in three blocks: Padbury Court in Beaconsfield; Hann Court in Osborne Park and Robertson Court in Tuart Hill. The flats are underutilised, with the occupancy rate having fallen from 73% in January 1990 to 34% in June 1992. The low occupancy rate is an expensive problem for DILGEA, as the department pays management fees to a private agent, irrespective of whether the flats are occupied. This issue is currently being investigated at the Ministerial level.

Many refugees lack adequate finances when they arrive in Australia and it is rare for them to be able to find employment readily. Some come here with very little money, due to tight restrictions on the amount they are allowed to take out of their country of origin. Settlement costs can be exorbitant, with the situation being exacerbated by the recession.

Voluntary Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS) groups support approximately one third of Humanitarian arrivals.<sup>28</sup> CRSS supported refugees do not have access to the flats unless

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<sup>28</sup> that is, migrants who have been assessed as having had to flee their country of origin and are being relocated for humanitarian reasons

there is a crisis, in which case they are charged commercial rent. Non-refugee migrants, who are occasionally housed in the flats due to crisis, are also charged commercial rates. This exacerbates the situation for people who are already facing a financial emergency.

An anomaly caused by the current low real estate market is that the so-called "subsidised" rental of \$110 (linked to the Consumer Price Index), for a three bedroom DILGEA flat in Hann Court or Robertson Court, is higher than the \$100 commercial rate.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6.7:**

**That DILGEA grant all migrants (except Business Skills Migrants) access to substantively subsidised accommodation in DILGEA flats for up to thirteen weeks, to allow them time to overcome cultural shock and make an informed choice about their long term housing.**

Social workers and bilingual information officers previously with settlement workers at the flats. However, the social workers and bilingual information officers were removed due to the concern that they were duplicating mainstream services. Despite DILGEA's withdrawal of services from the flats, mainstream agencies are still not providing an equitable, accessible service for refugees, many of whom have experienced torture and/or trauma. Without adequate support in their first crucial weeks in Australia refugees are more likely to require ongoing intensive government and community support in housing and other areas.

Refugees and other migrants in the flats need support during their stay and whilst they are settling into alternative accommodation. As settlement officers do not necessarily have the language skills required to assist refugees, bilingual information officers are still required.

As was stated in the Client Attitude Survey of DILGEA Services (1988):

The provision of a bilingual information officer must be regarded as one of the most successful schemes for newcomers. Generally, groups discussants spoke very warmly of the bilingual officers.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6.8:**

**That DILGEA reinstate the two permanent positions for bilingual information officers at the flats.**

The settlement officers do not necessarily have the counselling skills required to enable them to assess whether refugees need to be referred to professional therapy.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.9:**

**That, ideally, DILGEA employ social welfare workers who are aware of cross-cultural and settlement issues to provide counselling at the flats. Alternatively, DILGEA should facilitate the provision of such a service, possibly in a cost-sharing arrangement with the Department for Community Services.**

Information sessions at the flats are presented at a time when many refugees are experiencing cultural shock and the grief of irrevocable loss - of family, friends, homeland and lifestyle. The formal talks are about issues that are often not yet relevant or comprehensible to the refugees. This is evident by the large number of refugees who later consult Grant in Aid workers about basic accommodation issues.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.10:**

**That DILGEA ensure that the information sessions at the flats are presented by workers who are aware of cross-cultural and settlement issues. Ideally, bilingual information officers should be in attendance at these sessions as a backup resource for refugees to access information which is relevant for them at the time.**

It is ironic that there are so many homeless migrants whilst DILGEA owns so many unoccupied flats.<sup>29</sup> DILGEA is negotiating with community agencies to encourage them to sub-lease some flats, but the agencies may not consider it a practical option to lease these flats from DILGEA at commercial rates. They would have more choice of design, size, location and lease conditions in the private rental market.

***Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS):***

The main problem with TIS, as with so many services for migrants, is lack of funds. This service now relies on cost recovery, with a minimum charge of \$65 for the use of an onsite interpreter. These charges, introduced in 1991, are a major reason why accommodation service providers are often reluctant to use TIS. Other problems include the waiting time involved in accessing interpreters; concerns about breaches of confidentiality and impartiality;<sup>30</sup> the lack of suitably qualified interpreters in rural areas;<sup>30</sup> ignorance of the service by non-English speaking people and service providers;<sup>31</sup> and

<sup>29</sup> Comprehensive statistics are not available, but one ethnic service alone dealt with 395 migrants who were experiencing housing crisis in the 1991/1992 financial year.

<sup>30</sup> During the consultations, one migrant reported that a TIS interpreter had told him, during an interview with a housing worker, that he should not be seeking such assistance with his accommodation crisis.

apprehension about or inexperience with using interpreters.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.11:**

**That, ideally, the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) cancel its charges for the use of interpreters. Alternatively, it should grant automatic fee exemption to all community based agencies, irrespective of their funding arrangements.**

***Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS):***

CRSS consists of a large number of voluntary community based groups, formed by religious groups, ethnic communities, charitable organisations or interested individuals. DILGEA has recruited these groups to support refugee and Special Humanitarian Program arrivals for their first six months in Australia. Through CRSS, DILGEA has shifted one third of its responsibility for newly arrived refugees onto unpaid workers.

These volunteers do much work in supporting refugees. A crucial part of the support that CRSS groups offer is in securing accommodation. They have to organise private rental accommodation, often with very short notice, before the refugees arrive and then ensure that they are placed immediately on Homeswest's waiting list. Some groups reported that they would appreciate remuneration for this work.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.12:**

**That DILGEA provide remuneration for the co-ordinator of each CRSS group.**

Groups reported that they often had difficulty in securing appropriate accommodation in time, particularly as they generally receive very little notice of imminent arrivals, some of whom consist of large families. The lack of information they receive about refugees can make it difficult for them to make decisions about suitable accommodation. For example, refugees who have been imprisoned may find a small flat intolerable and religiously observant refugees would need easy access to a place of worship.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.13:**

**That DILGEA streamline processes so that CRSS groups receive earlier notice and more relevant information about imminent refugee arrivals.**

Homeswest bond assistance is sometimes provided before the refugees arrive. In instances where Homeswest staff do not co-

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<sup>31</sup> In Kirilik's survey 90% of NESB migrants were unaware of TIS's existence.

operate, real estate agents may decide not to accommodate refugees, due to the waiting time involved.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.14:**

**That Homeswest develop a standardised process whereby CRSS refugees' bond assistance can be made available before they arrive in Australia.**

Real estate agencies require leases to be signed in advance and many insist on sighting the tenants at that stage. DILGEA's advice to CRSS groups not to sign leases creates a real obstacle. DILGEA does offer, however, to act as an advocate with real estate agencies on behalf of CRSS refugees, where necessary.

Because the CRSS groups' value systems, life styles and tastes may be at variance with those of the refugees, CRSS volunteers should have the opportunity to choose housing in consultation with the refugees they are supporting. Reports were made during the consultations of CRSS groups who organised sharing accommodation for refugees from incompatible ethnic groups, housed refugees in isolated locations or purchased culturally inappropriate household equipment.

No CRSS refugees have input into the design, location or cost of the accommodation that is organised for them before they arrive in Australia. CRSS groups usually have to agree to six or twelve month leases in the private rental market. These leases are expensive and disruptive for the refugees to break if the accommodation proves to be unsuitable.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.15:**

**That DILGEA provide short-term, subsidised accommodation for CRSS refugees in the DILGEA flats so that they have the opportunity to participate in the selection of their future accommodation.**

Some groups manage to build up a relationship of trust with co-operative real estate agencies. However, many cases were cited during the consultations of ignorance and racism by agents. There were reports of fears that refugees would burn down the house because they did not know about electricity and concerns that cooking smells would "go through the paint". Many agents simply refuse to accommodate refugees. DILGEA is willing to intervene in such cases to point out the agents' legal obligations to treat migrants equitably. However, care should be taken to ensure that such intervention does not result in agents being coerced into renting properties to migrants and then harassing them.

CRSS refugees allocated to rural locations face special problems. Affordable housing may only be located in outer areas with little or no public transport facilities. Due to the limited size of these communities, there is generally a

lack of employment opportunities, English classes, childcare facilities, places of worship, affordable ethnic foodstuffs and social networks. During the consultation, one CRSS group reported that they had picked up a family three days after their arrival in Australia and had driven them for several hours through rural terrain, all in silence due to the lack of a common language. This can be a very intimidating experience for people who know nothing of rural Australia. This is illustrated by the instance of a group of young Vietnamese people who would not go on a picnic in the Perth hills because they were scared of "land mines and tigers".

Cities provide an essential infrastructure for newly arrived migrants. It would be more practical to give CRSS refugees the choice of moving to the country after they have had the opportunity to settle in Perth.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.16:**

**That DILGEA confine the CRSS in Western Australia to Perth.**

The Department provides orientation and bimonthly information talks for CRSS groups. However, during consultations, CRSS volunteers repeatedly stated that they do not receive sufficient relevant training or support. One CRSS member said that, when he encountered serious problems of potential (and actual) violence with weapons, DILGEA was reluctant to mediate in the conflict.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.17:**

**That DILGEA provide more interactive and practical training for CRSS volunteers, facilitated by professional trainers who are aware of cross-cultural and settlement issues for refugees. The sessions should include opportunities for CRSS workers to discuss and provide feedback about accommodation services.**

**RECOMMENDATION 6.18:**

**That DILGEA provide facilities for CRSS refugees to attend the information sessions at the flats.**

**RECOMMENDATION 6.19:**

**That DILGEA assign a Contact Officer to each CRSS group. As well as supporting the group, the Contact Officer should visit each refugee within a month of their arrival in Australia.**

CRSS groups are sometimes asked by DILGEA to support more than one family at a time. This places extra strain on voluntary groups who have to deal with the complex settlement issues that refugees often face.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.20:**

**That DILGEA limit its requests for CRSS groups to support**

### **refugees, according to the groups' capacity to do so.**

During the early stages of this project, CRSS groups repeatedly reported on the deficiency of the grants for the settlement of refugees. These grants go towards rent in advance and letting fees, as well as kitchen utensils, furniture, appliances, clothing and personal items. With charitable groups' resources severely stretched in the current recession, it is increasingly difficult for CRSS groups to provide essential items for refugees. Recently, DILGEA increased these grants by around 50%,<sup>32</sup> thereby making it easier for refugees to be able to afford basic necessities.

CRSS groups consist of interested members of the community who do not necessarily have the skills needed to deal effectively with cross-cultural interactions and settlement difficulties, or the knowledge of accommodation networks, services and systems. The large number of CRSS refugees presenting to ethnic crisis housing agencies indicates the lack of information and support they have received with respect to their housing needs.

Many CRSS volunteers are doing outstanding work, considering the lack of resources they have. However, problems with dependency, control, racism, ignorance of support services, confusion of motives and conflicts of interest were noted during the consultations. DILGEA needs to acknowledge and address these problems to ensure the effective settlement of CRSS refugees, many of whom have been assessed by overseas posts as being in particular need.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6.21:**

**That DILGEA develop and implement a selection and induction process to ensure that CRSS group co-ordinators have the appropriate skills and attitudes to support refugees.**

#### ***Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP):***

Lack of English is perceived as the biggest barrier that NESB migrants face in securing accommodation. Over 350 000 migrants in Australia speak poor or no English.<sup>33</sup> Yet the shrinking of resources available for English classes<sup>33</sup> has resulted in fewer migrants being able to learn this essential skill. Some migrants in Western Australia have to wait twelve months for "on arrival" tuition.

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<sup>32</sup> The grant has been increased from \$1 000 to \$1 400 for families and from \$400 to \$600 for single individuals.

<sup>33</sup> 1986 Census data

Priority is now shared by Newstart recipients<sup>34</sup>, who require English tuition. As AMEP's resources are so limited, this means that recently arrived migrants may be forced to wait even longer for "on arrival" classes.

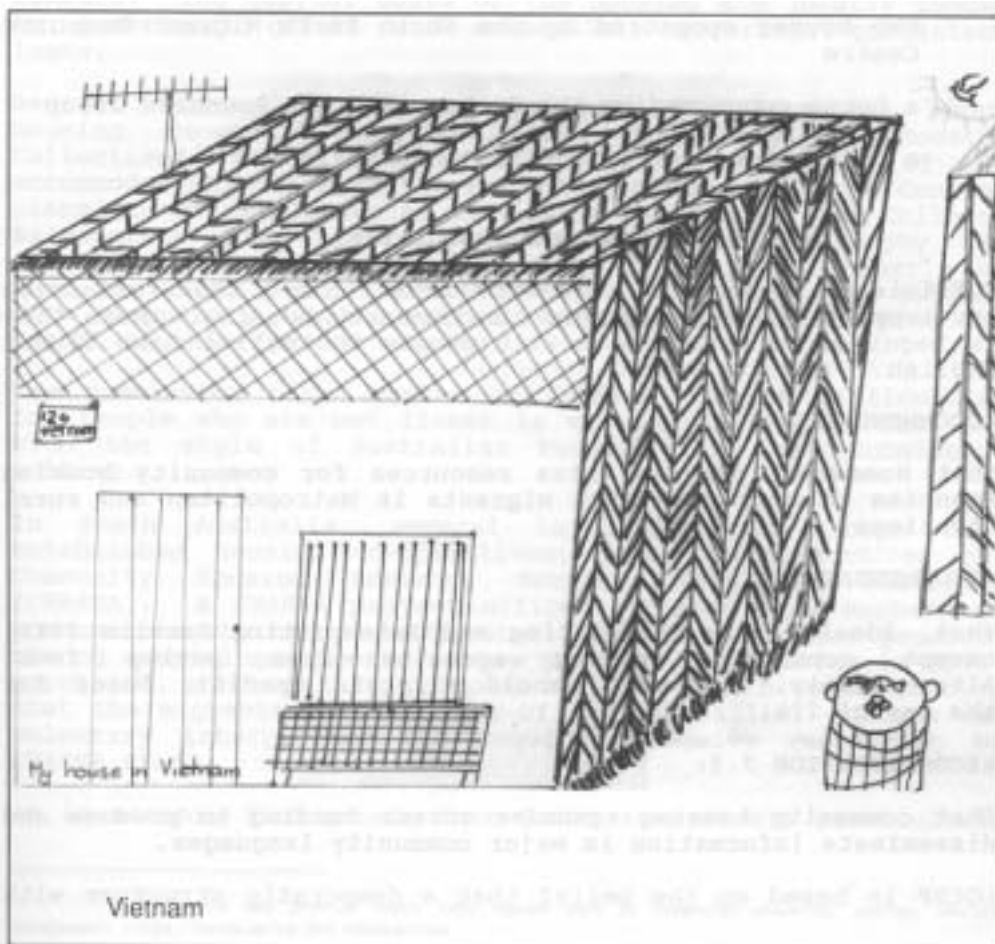
Resources spent in providing English tuition allow migrants to become self-reliant more quickly, thereby saving accommodation and support resources in the long-term.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.22:**

**That DILGEA ensure the provision of immediate, free "on arrival" English classes to all migrants, irrespective of their recency of arrival, their age and whether they are Newstart recipients.**

**RECOMMENDATION 6.23:**

**That the Adult Migrant Education Scheme give the voluntary tutors in the Home Tutor Scheme more comprehensive training and support and that this service be extended to rural areas.**



<sup>34</sup> that is, recipients of unemployment benefits who have signed contracts with the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) to complete vocationally oriented training

## 7. COMMUNITY HOUSING

The Local Government and Community Housing Program (LGCHP) is administered by Homeswest. It resources co-operatives, housing associations, other community groups and local councils to provide independent accommodation for people on low incomes.

Other community housing models include Joint Ventures, whereby community organisations or local councils jointly resource housing with Homeswest, and the Community Residential Tenancy Programme, in which community agencies lease Homeswest accommodation in order to house and support young people and people with disabilities.

### **Targeted Strategies**

LGCHP has funded three ethnic projects:

- two houses sponsored by the North Perth Migrant Resource Centre
- a house sponsored by the Bunbury Migrant Resource Group
- a house sponsored by the East Fremantle Council

### **Gaps and Inequities**

Sufficient resources are required for the effective involvement of NESB migrants in community housing. More time is required to communicate with people who do not have fluent English.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7.1:**

**That Homeswest provide extra resources for community housing agencies to work with NESB migrants in Metropolitan and rural locations.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7.2:**

**That, ideally, the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) exempt community housing agencies from paying fees. Alternatively, Homeswest should allocate specific funds for the use of TIS.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7.3:**

**That community housing agencies access funding to produce and disseminate information in major community languages.**

LGCHP is based on the belief that a democratic structure with

tenant participation<sup>35</sup> is an ideal model for managing housing. Migrants, depending on their cultural and class backgrounds, may reject this philosophy. People who lack viable accommodation may become involved in LGCHP projects simply because of their need for secure, affordable housing. Sponsoring agencies need to find culturally appropriate ways of working with such tenants.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7.4:**

**That the Community Housing programme encourage housing design, tenant participation and management models which are culturally appropriate to the needs of particular groups of NESB migrants.**

### ***Housing Co-operatives:***

Common equity co-operatives are non-profit, member-managed associations that provide secure, quality housing for their members. The capital costs of the housing are jointly funded by government grants and commercial, government-guaranteed loans.

Several migrant groups have requested information about housing co-operatives from the Federation of Housing Collectives (FOHCOL). FOHCOL, with the assistance of the accommodation worker at the Fremantle Migrant Resource Centre, plans to do developmental work with members of the Chilean, Salvadorean and Iranian communities. The philosophy and operation of co-operatives needs to be explained clearly so that migrants, particularly those who have come from regimes with compulsory "worker collectives", do not misinterpret the intent of this form of housing.

The submission based system of funding creates difficulties for people who are not fluent in written English or familiar with the style of Australian bureaucracies and submission writing.

In South Australia, several Latin American groups have established housing co-operatives, with the support of the Community Housing Advisory Service of South Australia (CHASSA).

A CHASSA project officer reported that members of communities who had already established co-operatives provided strong auspicing support for new groups. The housing is spot-purchased, rather than purpose built. The biggest problem that the migrants face is lack of English skills. Groups use voluntary interpreters and require intensive resourcing by CHASSA staff.

It is notable that people from Latin America are particularly interested in co-operatives in South Australia. The concept of

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<sup>35</sup> Tenants may provide input into issues such as financial planning, policy, design, management, rules, landscaping and renovations.

living collectively obviously appeals politically and culturally to some migrants. Such an arrangement allows them to live relatively autonomously and amongst their own people, in secure, affordable housing that they have chosen.

### ***Community Groups:***

Community groups may choose to form a housing association. Housing associations are similar to housing co-operatives, with the main difference being that the people managing the accommodation are not all tenants. This model may be more effective for newly arrived NESB migrants who could choose the level of tenant participation that suited them.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7.5:**

**That community organisations allow scope for migrants to participate more actively in the management of their housing as they become more settled in Australia.**

Housing associations receive LGCHP funding for capital costs, but they have to fund operating costs through rentals. It is therefore very difficult for them to accommodate migrants who cannot afford to pay rent. If individual LGCHP projects were larger, it would be more feasible to cross-subsidise tenants.

### ***Local Government Councils:***

Several councils have used LGCHP funding to provide housing for aged tenants, including an Aboriginal-specific complex in the Shire of Boddington. During the consultations, a group of aged Spanish speaking women expressed the need for a block of two-bedroom flats specifically for them. They wanted secure, affordable accommodation where they could live in the company of their peers.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7.6:**

**That local councils assess and meet the need for independent ethnospecific aged accommodation, through LGCHP funding.**

## **8. SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME**

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP), administered by the Department for Community Services, funds community based agencies and local councils to provide accommodation and support services for people who are homeless and in crisis.

### **Targeted Strategies**

SAAP funds the following migrant-specific services:

- The Women's Refuges Multicultural Service is an information and support service which assists NESB women and their children who are experiencing and/or escaping domestic violence. The service has a pool of seventeen casual and three part-time ethnic support workers, who speak a total of thirty-two languages and dialects.
- Crisis accommodation workers at the North Perth and Fremantle Migrant Resource Centres assist migrants in crisis, irrespective of the recency of their arrival in Australia. These projects manage limited housing stock and generally act as advocates in referring clients to other accommodation agencies.
- The Perth Asian Centre provides crisis accommodation for Asian migrants in three inner city locations.
- An accommodation agency for members of the Jewish community also receives SAAP funding.

### **Gaps and Inequities**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 8.1:**

**That SAAP and its funded agencies develop and implement Access and Equity Policies for NESB migrants which include:**

- a Language Policy incorporating the appropriate and efficient use of the Translating and Interpreting Service
- networking and consultation with ethnic communities in Metropolitan and rural locations
- ongoing cross cultural skills and/or anti-racist training
- identified positions for bilingual/bicultural staff

SAAP funds three categories of crisis accommodation: women's, youth and generalist. These agencies face the common problem of underfunding. They operate on project subsidisation rather than full cost funding and are seriously under-resourced. Consequently, SAAP agencies cannot generally afford to

accommodate people without incomes, such as onshore applicants for refugee status and migrants whose Assurance of Support arrangements have broken down.<sup>36</sup>

The Women's Refuges Multicultural Service receives insufficient funds to carry out its crucial role. The limit on the ethnic support workers' paid hours means that they cannot always be in attendance when migrant women and children arrive at refuges. The Women's Refuge Multicultural Service reports that NESB women who have no contact with ethnic support workers tend to leave refuges before they have had the opportunity to be resourced adequately.

**RECOMMENDATION 8.2:**

**That SAAP increase the funding to the Women's Refuges Multicultural Service, so that the pool of ethnic support workers is more available to women.**

Ethnic support workers are totally absent in youth and generalist agencies.

**RECOMMENDATION 8.3:**

**That SAAP funds the establishment of an adequately resourced pool of ethnic support workers for youth and generalist agencies.**

The two crisis accommodation officers at the North Perth and Fremantle migrant resource centres are responsible for the crisis accommodation of migrants in the northern and southern Metropolitan area respectively. These projects are severely under-resourced, particularly as much of their work requires intensive ongoing casework.

**RECOMMENDATION 8.4:**

**That SAAP, DILGEA and Homeswest negotiate a funding package whereby the two ethnic crisis accommodation projects can increase their staffing levels to meet the current housing demand. Their increased workload could include the production of a monthly housing news-sheet for Grant in Aid workers and other relevant information designed to prevent accommodation crises from occurring.**

The \$65 minimum fee for onsite interpreters is prohibitive for SAAP agencies.

**RECOMMENDATION 8.5:**

**That, ideally, the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) exempt SAAP agencies from paying fees for onsite interpreters**

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<sup>36</sup> One ethnic crisis accommodation worker reported that 49% of the migrants accommodated by her service were in receipt of no income.

**and translations of clients' legal documents. Alternatively, SAAP should allocate funds for these agencies to use TIS.**

Awareness of crisis accommodation options is particularly low in ethnic communities. Apart from some multilingual brochures and posters in the women's refuge area, no material is disseminated in languages other than English.

**RECOMMENDATION 8.6:**

**That the Youth Accommodation Coalition (YACOMM) access funding to produce and disseminate multilingual information about youth crisis accommodation. The most appropriate format for this information may be in comic, audio or video cassette.**

**RECOMMENDATION 8.7:**

**That the Council to Homeless Persons access funding to produce and disseminate multilingual information about generalist crisis accommodation. The most appropriate format for this information may be in audio or video cassette.**

Crisis accommodation agencies have a negative reputation in some ethnic communities. Women's refuges may be perceived as interfering with and destroying the family unit, whereas youth refuges may be regarded as places of low moral fibre. Anecdotal evidence exists of young Southern European and Middle Eastern women being disowned by their families after staying in mixed-sex refuges.<sup>37</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 8.8:**

**That the Women's Refuges Multicultural Service access funding to run a publicity campaign in ethnic communities to raise awareness of their services and explain the role of women's refuges.**

**RECOMMENDATION 8.9:**

**That youth crisis accommodation agencies publicise the support they can give to NESB young people who are in crisis but not able to leave home.**

**RECOMMENDATION 8.10:**

**That SAAP fund youth crisis accommodation agencies exclusively for women who are at risk.**

Externally supported accommodation may be more appropriate, particularly for young NESB women. The Fremantle Region Externally Supported Housing (FRESH) programme, whereby Homeswest assigns housing stock to young people who are externally supported by SAAP funded staff, is working well with

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<sup>37</sup> Coopers et al

NESB women, aged fifteen years and over. Such programmes only work effectively, however, when the client:staff ratio does not exceed 10:1.

**RECOMMENDATION 8.11:**

**That Homeswest allocate more stock for tenants under eighteen years of age and that SAAP fund workers to give adequate external support.**

**RECOMMENDATION 8.12:**

**That Homeswest allocate stock for women (and their children) who are leaving refuges, in a model similar to the FRESH programme, and that SAAP fund workers to give adequate external support.**

**RECOMMENDATION 8.13:**

**That SAAP fund more externally supported accommodation for single people, sole parent families and couples.**

SAAP agencies are generally run in an Anglo-Australian style. NESB people are often excluded because their needs are not recognised or catered for. NESB migrants may be concerned about privacy, location, design and standards in SAAP agencies.

Culturally inappropriate factors may include: unfamiliar cooking facilities and food; mixed bathrooms and/or toilets in youth refuges; lack of facilities for extended family members; and child rearing practices in women's refuges. Conflicting cultural and religious values can further exacerbate tensions.

Ethnospecific crisis accommodation agencies are working well in Victoria. Such agencies are needed in Western Australia so that migrants have the choice of a mainstream or ethnic service. They could provide specialist services for NESB migrants and act as models of multicultural practice for mainstream agencies.

**RECOMMENDATION 8.14:**

**That SAAP fund ethnic crisis accommodation agencies in each of the three SAAP categories, with resources provided to support torture and/or trauma survivors where necessary. These agencies would perform different functions from ethnic support worker pools and, as such, should not detract from the funding of those pools.**

Although SAAP funding agreements require agencies to provide support as well as accommodation, they may lack the resources or expertise to do so effectively. Staff and residents may be ignorant of cross-cultural issues and, in some cases, overtly racist towards NESB people. Cross-cultural counselling can be counter-productive if the counsellor lacks the relevant skills. Workers need to be trained to be aware, for example, of the

ways that people from different cultures may express emotions and deal with crises. They should also be informed about suitable referral agencies for professional counselling.

In rural areas, migrants in need of crisis accommodation face extra problems. In the Pilbara, many women have migrated to Australia to marry men working in mining towns. They are usually totally dependent on their husbands, who receive housing as part of their employment conditions. In case of crisis, the women may be unaware of the few, if any, accommodation options that are open to them.

Women who are escaping domestic violence are often encouraged to move to a refuge in Perth, so that their location is not known to their ex-partners and they can start life afresh. Women who have migrated directly from their country of origin to a rural community may be intimidated by the prospect of moving to a city, particularly if they are from a rural background, know no-one in Perth and lack English skills. Despite assurances by local workers, they may also fear that no-one will meet them at the airport.

Another problem reported by rural women's refuges is that some migrant women are reluctant to be interviewed with the assistance of local onsite interpreters, due to the smallness of their local ethnic community. They are concerned that the interpreter would be pressured to disclose personal information to their ex-partner and other members of the community. It is difficult, however, to counsel non-english speaking domestic violence survivors and communicate with them on a daily basis with the use of phone interpreters.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 8.15:**

**That the Women's Refuges Multicultural Service access funding to produce and disseminate multilingual audio cassettes, with essential information for women experiencing and/or escaping domestic violence.**

There are many reasons why migrant women return to violent domestic situations. They may be under a formal financial obligation if their husband has signed an agreement to send regular payments to the women's family. In socially and physically isolated situations (especially if they have not had the opportunity to learn English), they may be totally dependent, emotionally and financially, on their partner. They may be illiterate in their first language and have no experience in business or financial matters. Furthermore, it may be culturally inappropriate for them to seek employment in the public arena. Particularly if they have children, they may decide that any alternative to their current situation is intolerable.

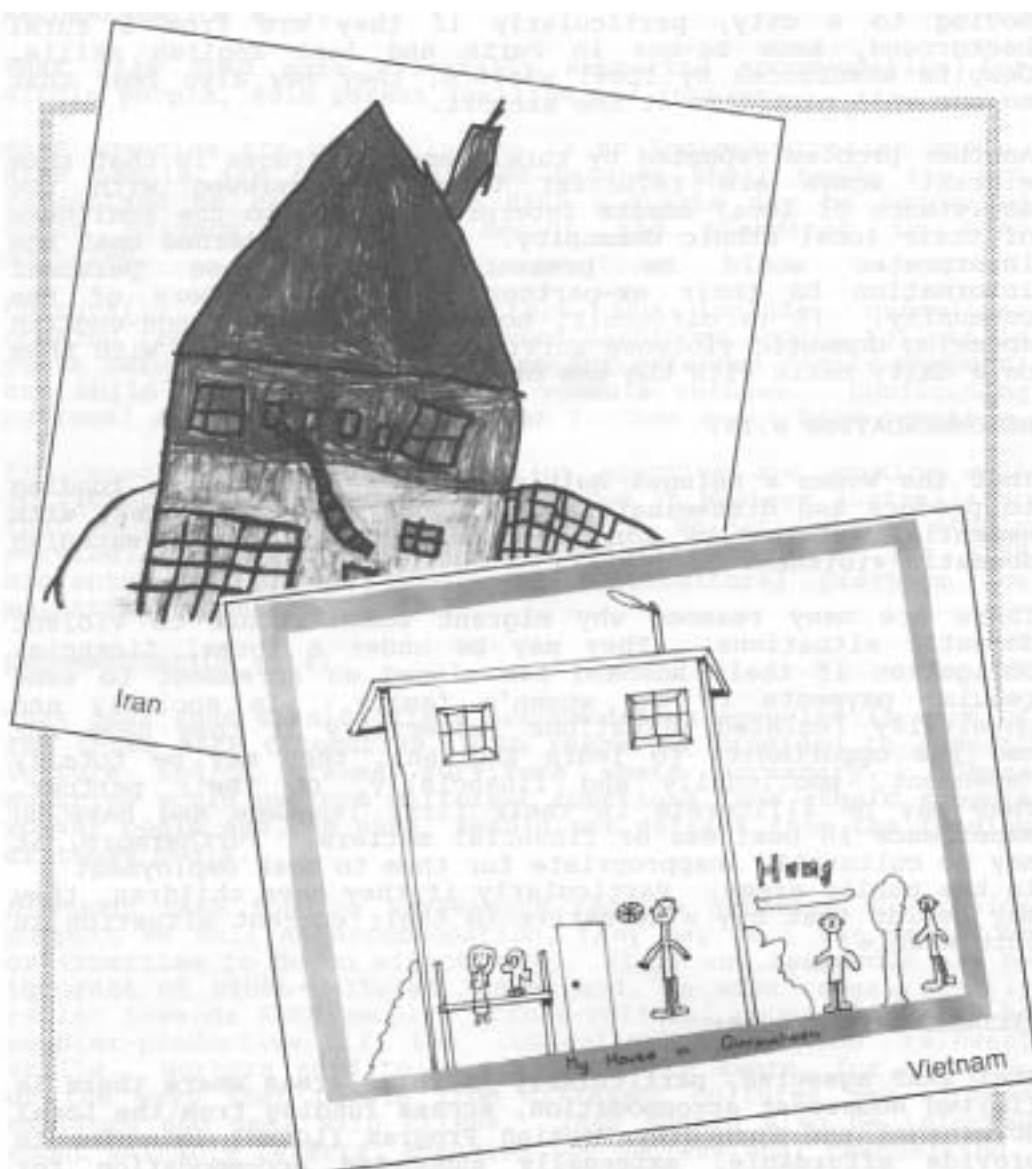
**RECOMMENDATION 8.16:**

That SAAP agencies, particularly in rural areas where there is limited Homestay accommodation, access funding from the Local Government and Community Housing Program (LGCHP) in order to provide affordable, externally supported accommodation for people who are leaving SAAP accommodation. Extra SAAP funds would be required to provide adequate external support.

The limited ethnic monitoring that does occur in SAAP agencies is not standardised throughout the programme and, in some cases, not administered appropriately. Workers need to be informed about what data should be collected and how it should be used to ensure that their service is operating equitably.

**RECOMMENDATION 8.17:**

That SAAP include country of birth and first language data in its twice yearly one night census and annual two week census.

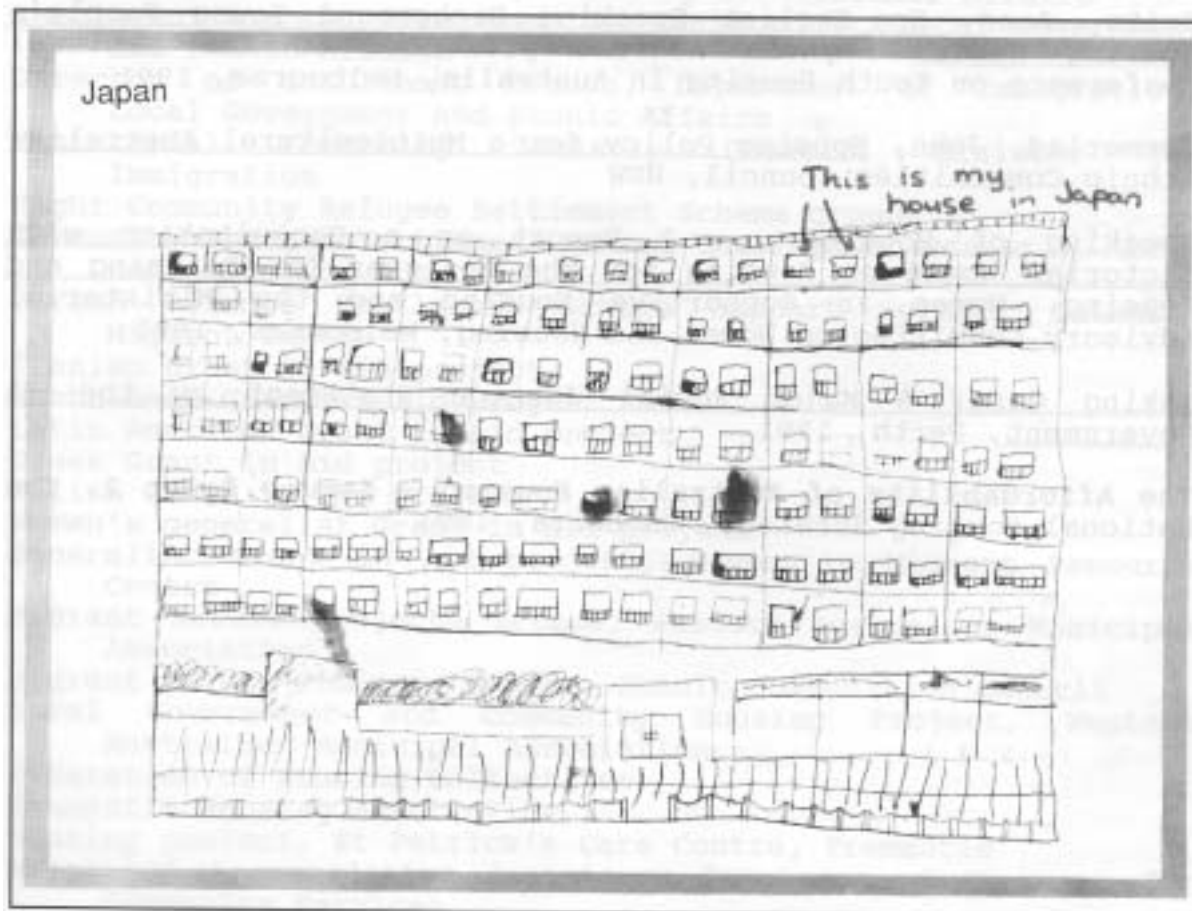


## 9. CONCLUSION

Quite clearly NESB migrants are not securing equitable access to shelter. They are forced to compete for the limited secure, affordable accommodation available in an Anglo-oriented arena. Essential strategies for achieving access and equity include the appropriate use of interpreters and translators; effective consultation and communication with members of ethnic communities; ethnic data collection; cross-cultural training; and identified positions for bilingual/ bicultural workers.

The Western Australian government has acknowledged that social justice is not only a policy imperative for periods of economic prosperity. Particularly in difficult times, outdated and inadequate services need to be replaced and resources redirected to the areas of greatest need.<sup>38</sup>

Some community and government agencies are piloting constructive strategies to meet this group's special needs. However most housing services in this state are still far from providing real access and equity for NESB migrants. They need to acknowledge the issues in this report and implement its recommendations in order to redress past and current inequities.



<sup>38</sup> Taking Care: A Major Social Justice Statement by the WA Government

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## **APPENDIX 1: CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS**

### **METROPOLITAN:**

Shelter WA field meeting  
 Executive Director, Homeswest  
 Director of Policy and Planning, Homeswest  
 Director of Housing, Homeswest  
 Policy and Information section, Homeswest  
 Operations Section, Homeswest  
 Training Section, Homeswest  
 Homeswest office, Karawara  
 Homeswest Independent Appeals Tribunal  
 Multicultural Information Strategy, Department of Health,  
 Housing and Community Services  
 Executive Officer, Commonwealth State Housing Agreement,  
 Department of Health, Housing and Community Services  
 Office of the Minister for Housing and Construction  
 Ministerial Community Housing Advisory Council, Minister for  
 Housing and Construction  
 Property Management Chapter, Real Estate Institute of Western  
 Australia  
 Tenants Advice Service  
 Consumer Education Section, Ministry for Consumer Affairs  
 Settlement Branch, Department of Immigration, Local Government  
 and Ethnic Affairs  
 Director of Settlement Branch, Department of Immigration, Local  
 Government and Ethnic Affairs  
 Ministerial Community Advisory Council, Minister for  
 Immigration  
 Eight Community Refugee Settlement Scheme groups  
 Community Refugee Settlement Scheme development worker,  
 Conference of Churches  
 Parish Refugee Settlement Scheme support worker, Catholic  
 Migrant Centre  
 Iranian Grant in Aid project  
 Vietnamese Grant in Aid project  
 Latin American Grant in Aid project  
 Greek Grant in Aid project  
 Polish Grant in Aid project  
 Women's generalist Grant in Aid project  
 Generalist Grant in Aid project, Fremantle Migrant Resource  
 Centre  
 Migrant Access Projects Scheme, Western Australian Municipal  
 Association  
 Migrant Access Projects Scheme, Ethnic Communities Council  
 Local Government and Community Housing Project, Western  
 Australian Municipal Association  
 Federation of Housing Collectives  
 Fremantle Housing Association  
 Housing project, St Patrick's Care Centre, Fremantle  
 Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme, Department for  
 Community Services  
 Council for Homeless Persons member agencies

Women's Refuge Group member agencies  
 Women's Refuges Multicultural Service  
 Crisis accommodation project, North Perth Migrant Resource Centre  
 Crisis accommodation project, Fremantle Migrant Resource Centre  
 Crisis accommodation project, Fremantle Youth Centre  
 Crisis accommodation project, Perth Asian Centre  
 Crisis accommodation project, Jewish Welfare Society  
 West Australian Council for Social Services  
 Family Commission, Office of the Family  
 Women's Policy Section, Department for Community Services  
 Community Relations project, Western Australian Municipal Association  
 Social Justice Unit, Department of Cabinet  
 Migrant Services Section, Department of Social Security  
 Program Manager, Department of Social Security  
 Campaign Against Racial Exploitation  
 Vietnamese Buddhist Temples, Northbridge and Marangaroo  
 Catholic Vietnamese group  
 Lockridge Health Centre aged Vietnamese support group  
 Spanish speaking women's support group  
 Afghani women at Women For One World picnic  
 Multicultural Women's Health Centre fair  
 Women's International Zionist Organisation  
 Twelve independent migrants (individual interviews)

#### **RURAL:**

Housing service agencies, Bunbury  
 Homeswest office, Bunbury  
 Grant in Aid project, Bunbury  
 Housing service agencies, Geraldton  
 Grant in Aid project, Geraldton  
 Department for Community Services, Paraburdoo  
 Multicultural Women's Group, Paraburdoo  
 Department for Community Services, Tom Price  
 Homeswest office, Derby  
 North West Women's Association  
 Family Support Programme, Derby  
 Department of Health, Housing and Community Services, Broome  
 Marnja Jarndu Women's Refuge, Broome  
 Homeswest office, Broome  
 East Pilbara Youth Service accommodation agency, Hedland  
 Homeswest office, Hedland  
 Department for Community Services, Hedland  
 Grant in Aid project, Hedland  
 Hedland Women's Refuge  
 Multicultural Women's Luncheon, Karratha  
 Grant in Aid project, Karratha  
 Salvation Army Women's Refuge, Karratha  
 Karratha Youth Housing Services  
 Community Refugee Settlement Scheme group  
 Forty-five migrants in Bunbury, Geraldton, Paraburdoo, Derby, Broome, Hedland and Karratha

## **APPENDIX 2: PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE**

Lesley Elliott  
Migrant Women's Interest Committee

Silvana Abbruzzese  
Multicultural Social Services Council

Wendy Rose  
Ethnic Communities Council

Nawdy Roussety  
Women's Refuges Multicultural Service

Dawn Potter  
Homeswest Board

Glenda Blake/Malcolm West  
Shelter WA management

Leanne Barron/Karen Beard  
Shelter WA staff

Rosita D'Adamo (ex officio)  
Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs

