

Inquiry into the adequacy and future directions of social housing in WA



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Domestic and family violence continues to be the major driver of homelessness. Escaping violence is the most common reason provided by people who seek help from specialist homelessness services. 22% of people seeking help from specialist homelessness services do so because they are escaping violence. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, NDCA Report, 2008)

Domestic and family violence is the principal cause of homelessness among women. 55% of women with children and 37% of young single women who seek assistance from specialist homelessness services do so to escape violence. (FaHCSIA, 2008)

Women's Refuges in Perth, Western Australia are experiencing great difficulty in finding appropriate and affordable accommodation for women and their children escaping domestic or family violence.

Refuges accept any woman who is experiencing abuse and provide safe and supportive environments where healing and rebuilding can take place.

Refuges are crisis accommodation services; they are not medium or long term housing options. Good practice dictates that Refuges should not turn any woman away when she is in need of Refuge. Due to the high number of women that are staying at Refuges quite often over the acceptable three month period we are witnessing time and time again a negative impact on the number of rooms available for women in the greatest need.

Many service providers report that homelessness driven by domestic violence is different from other forms of homelessness. Many women who escape abusive, violent relationships return to the perpetrator numerous times and cycle in and

out of homelessness. This may be because they have no money, family support or stable housing or their partner promises to stop the violence.

Refuges are desperate for a more creative solution focussed and committed approach from the Department of Housing to accommodate women in either Department of Housing accommodation or private rental within the three month period of being in a refuge.

Women who are accommodated at Refuges are assessed and usually given Priority Housing status. Quite often this is a two year waiting period. Therefore there is an obvious imbalance of time as women should only be in crisis accommodation for no longer than three months. However because they have to wait for their Department of Housing home they often require accommodation for at least a twenty one month period. This leaves the woman and her children in a vulnerable and uncertain place. They are often desperate to move to their own homes and build a safe and secure home for themselves and their children.

The current system hinders women's progress and many return to often abusive and unacceptable living situations. Women are also often unable to access private accommodation as their benefits are not enough to meet the increasingly high costs of private rentals. Women are also very concerned that if they take a private rental house then they will lose their priority status. We strongly believe that women should remain on the priority wait list whilst appropriate department of housing accommodation is sought.

We also believe that there needs to be a Ministerial change in the amount of money women in need of Refuge currently receive. Most women's Centre-link benefits are woefully inadequate to cope with current housing market costs. The WCDFVS supports Minister Troy Buswell's plan to provide people with vouchers to put towards their rent. This system would encourage women and children who are awaiting Priority Housing to move into private rental as an interim measure.

The proposal for free grants up to \$21,000 to landlords called for by Greens Senator Scott Ludlam will assist landlords to convert empty commercial space and derelict homes into affordable housing, is also another viable initiative for providing medium to longer term options for women and children whilst awaiting Priority Housing.

### **RECOMMENDATION ONE: REFORM PUBLIC HOUSING PROVISION**

That the Department of Housing work in partnership with Women's Refuges to provide women and children to move out of crisis accommodation into appropriate, affordable medium to longer term housing whilst awaiting Priority Housing.

### **RECOMMENATION TWO: IMPROVE SUPPORT AND TRANSITION INCENTIVES**

A 'Duty of Care Package' be developed and be made available to women and children in need of Refuge. This package should include a review of their Centre link benefits with the view to provide additional financial assistance to meet the costs of private rental accommodation. If these strategies were embraced then Refuges would be able to move women out of crisis accommodation within an acceptable three month period. This would then make more beds available to women and children whose safety and protection is at greatest risk.

### **RECOMMENDATION THREE: EXPAND HOMELESSNESS ACCOMMODATION SUPPORT WORKERS MODEL FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC/FAMILY VIOLENCE**

That the Homelessness Accommodation Support Workers program funded by the joint Commonwealth/State National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness be rolled out to additional metropolitan, rural and remote locations of WA. The aim of expanding the roll out of this model would see the provision of targeted intensive support services for women and children exiting domestic and family violence homelessness services to assist with securing and maintaining stable accommodation for the longer term

#### **References:**

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Government of Western Australia, *Homelessness National Partnership Agreement, Western Australian Initiatives Information Up-date*, Department of Child Protection, 2010

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