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ASHRA Newsletter

Agencies Supporting Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

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Special points of interest:

- ASHRA officially formed!
- Housing needs of single adult males
- Call for articles

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ASHRA Branch Officially Formed!

The working title of ASHRAM has been changed to ASHRA (Agencies Supporting Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) to more accurately reflect the people with whom we work.

The formation of ASHRA is an excellent beginning to address, highlight and explore some of the very specific housing issues experienced by refugees and asylum seekers and the organisations that support them.

Membership of ASHRA is made up from individuals from a variety of organisations including ARA, Anglicare, Red Shield Housing and the Frederick Ozanam Housing Association and we are always looking for new members.

ASHRA seeks to create further networks with

anyone with an interest, or works with asylum seekers and refugees. Given the current issue of mental health issues among asylum seekers recently released from detention, it may be an advantage to develop linkages with individuals working in health and other related areas such as education.

Some of the formalities need to be addressed however, as it is a requirement in the branch formation at Shelter SA to be a current member of Shelter SA. It may be simpler to sign up as an individual (\$15 waged, \$5 unwaged) than getting your organisation to sign up (given the amount of movement staff are experiencing between and within organisations).

Benefits of this membership affords ASHRA a variety of



structural supports (such as this newsletter, meeting places and mailouts which are key to the initial development of fledgling groups such as this) and also allows opportunities to apply for funds to undertake local research or to hold a conference.

Housing Needs of Single Adult Males Released From Detention

The focus of this month's meeting was to discuss the housing needs of single adult males released from detention. An important cultural issue to be considered is the meaning of the term adult. Within many African groups, one is not considered an adult

until reaching 30 years of age. For the purpose of this newsletter, we are following the Australian concept of 'adult' as achieving 18 years of age.

The mental health issues of these men are exacerbated by their experiences in

detention as the recent media attention of Peter Qasim has highlighted. It is important to note that a separate ward was opened up at Glenside Psychiatric Hospital in late May to cater for this influx. Already traumatised by their experiences that led them

ASHRA Future Strategies

ASHRA's earlier discussions concerning the housing needs of single adult males released from detention continued. A list of ideas was presented in order to define future strategies for ASHRA. The entire group felt that attending to the lack of affordable and appropriate accommodation was the most important issue.

Ideally these properties would be head-leased through organisations such as Anglicare or Red Shield, involving clusters of properties. Head-leasing reduces many of the risks and responsibilities for property owners. Property owners are guaranteed regular and ongoing rent for long periods of time (these

leases could be taken for five to ten years). Further, this is an enormous cost saving to the case management of these individuals. Head-leasing clusters of properties, say three groups of twenty single bedroom units or six groups of ten, allows case managers to visit a number of individuals at one time. This also allows group work to occur, as is occurring informally with some case managers. Clusters of properties also enable friendships to build naturally and by choice.

To pursue this idea further, it was suggested that contact be developed with a range

of other organisations: for example, developing linkages/networks with local councils that are already interested in attracting refugees to their area. Another possible area to source housing was through social housing bodies (SAHT) and local church groups. These areas will be pursued and reported upon in our next meeting.

Another concern in housing refugees and asylum seekers was connecting housing to education. Our membership reported a number of occasions where those seeking to house refugees and asylum seekers fail to consider the interrelated

TPV's do not receive assistance from Centrelink or Medicare. Nor are they permitted to work.



Housing Needs of Single Adult Males (continued)

to this country, mandatory detention further complicates their abilities to cope.

It is not surprising then, that when released from detention they require short term, single bedroom accommodation, usually for three or four weeks (this allows them some time and space to 'get their heads together'). In the following 2-3 months many are able to reengage with their community and their accommodation preferences reflect this; they want to be close to the city (no more

than 4km). This allows individuals to feel part of the broader community while they are also able to choose when and how they wish to engage with others.

Throughout this time, it is important to remember that those with a Temporary Protection Visa) are NOT eligible for Centrelink assistance, Medicare and they do not have the right to work. Until recently, they were not able to participate in volunteer work (which was curious given the desire of the South Australian

government to increase volunteer participation to 50% of the Australian population).

Technically, TPV's are also ineligible for assistance from organisations that help with looking for accommodation and setting up the home with items such as a washing machine and refrigerator. So here are a group of individuals with no income, no access to health care, prohibited from working and often with no family.

One of the strategies that ASHRA may target is advocating for their needs to be met.

ASHRA future strategies (continued)

importance of access to ESL and housing and employment/resource opportunities.

Access to English classes is integral to the successful integration of people from non-English speaking backgrounds. A number of strategies could be implemented to ease this process of transition. An aspect of this is the reticence of newly arrived people to move to areas that currently have few or no other refugees living in the area, and no English classes for the children. It was suggested that this may be overcome

by moving groups of people (rather than individuals or single families) to a new area and ensuring access to ESL for the children.

Another way this may be addressed is through developing comprehensive information kits involving transport, access to culturally appropriate foods and activities, links to neighboring cultural groups, and so on. This may be best approached through contacting local councils that are interested in attracting refugees to their area.

The section below builds



on this theme in the production of a directory. Although each concept is separate, they may have mutually beneficial uses for the newly arrived and established communities and those who work with them.

One of the most important issues in the successful integration of families from non-English speaking backgrounds is ensuring access to English language classes for their children

ASHRA DIRECTORY

Another focus for ASHRA's future strategies is the development of a directory. The directory could contain all of the services and organisations that are currently engaged with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in South Australia. The directory could also include a bibliography of current research and research foci (from mental health issues to integration issues). The directory could also include an arts and culture focus and how

to access local performers, and current grant or funding opportunities in South Australia.

The problem with developing this type of directory (as with anything in print) is the ongoing need for it to be updated. It was suggested that this could be done every six months by the Sector Development Officer at Shelter SA.

And finally, through liaising with Mandy Cox from Queensland Shelter,

it became clear that the issues for refugees and asylum seekers in Queensland run parallel to the issues experienced in South Australia. The creation of a state-wide directory could enable further linkages to be made around the country. These networks could be further developed to enable a nation-wide campaign to highlight housing issues, develop a broader network and to learn from other projects around the country.

Special thanks

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Housing: a basic human right

Shelter SA is a member based organisation that seeks to promote and maintain the right of every person to access affordable, safe and secure housing that they identify as appropriate to their needs;

- to promote and maintain the right of every person to housing of a quality which enhances people's health, well-being, dignity and life opportunities; and
- to promote opportunities for members of the community to access housing free from discrimination as a result of factors such as age, gender, cultural background or disability.

Incorporated as a non-profit organisation in 1977, Shelter SA represents the views and interests of housing consumers to all levels of Government, the housing industry, media and the broader community. We represent consumers from a variety of tenures; home owners, public housing tenants, community housing tenants, private renters, retirement village residents and residents of the more vulnerable tenancies such as caravan/mobile home parks, boarding houses and Supported Residential Facilities.

Shelter SA seeks to voice the views and concerns related to housing of different sectors of society, such as the aged, youth, families, single adults, women escaping domestic violence, people with disabilities and indigenous people.

Next Meeting

The next ASHRA meeting will be held in the Torrens Building on the 14th of September at 1pm. If you are interested in attending, please contact Cheryl or Margo at Shelter SA on 8221 6488 or email

sheltersa@sheltersa.asn.au

Call For Articles

Do you have an interest in housing refugees and asylum seekers?

Do you wish to hear more about Circle of Friends?

Do you have a housing story that you would like to share in this newsletter?

Would you like to join ASHRA?

Do you have accommodation available for refugees to rent?

Alternately, what are the issues you feel are important concerning housing for asylum seekers and refugees?

Do you have an activity that you would like to advertise through this newsletter?

To have your say, please contact Shelter SA on 8221 6488 or email margo.johnson@sheltersa.asn.au