

The South Australian Womens Housing Caucus

Convenor's Report 2005-2006

This has been the first full year of activity for the South Australian Women's Housing Caucus, formed after a recommendation of Shelter SA's *Sexcluded* Report (2004: <http://www.sheltersa.asn.au/Info/Womens%20Housing%20Caucus/sexcluded.pdf>). The Caucus was formally established at a meeting on 17 October 2005 and subsequently took shape as a branch of Shelter SA. We received two seeding grants in December last year, each of \$3000.00 from Minister Key, then Minister for the Status of Women and Minister Weatherill, Minister for Housing. We have had a busy first year, full of activities and planning for more activities.

PEOPLE

We now have a 'Correspondence List' of more than 400 individuals and we also circulate our Newsletters and announcements to a range of electronic networks in South Australia and beyond. We have an active Supporter group of about 80; 40 formal Members and a Planning Group currently of seven (but now replenished to 10 for 2006/7). For most of the year the Planning Group has been 11 strong and Caucus activities have reflected their energy, enthusiasm and foresight. We have also been very fortunate in having had the regular assistance of Cheryl Shepley, Shelter SA's Administrator. Cheryl established our web page, designed our 'house style', including our posters and has helped in the running of all Caucus public events in numerous essential ways. Our web page is at <http://www.sheltersa.asn.au/womeshousingcaucus.htm>

EVENTS

Forum: The formation of the Caucus took place at a meeting that followed our first public event, a Forum for Anti-Poverty Week 2005 co-hosted with Shelter SA entitled *Homes for our Children*. An audience of over 70 heard presentations on the future of indigenous housing in South Australia from Associate Professor David Roberts, UniSA; Gary Storkey, CEO of Homestart Finance; Nerida Saunder, then General Manager of the Aboriginal Housing Authority and Tania Axleby-Blake, then at the Office for Women, who reported on the State's Indigenous Women's Gathering.

Forum: We celebrated International Women's Day 2006 early, on 6 March, with our true inaugural meeting, the lunchtime forum *Victims or Villains?* at the State Library. Again, more than 70 people booked to enjoy a light lunch and hear from two high profile British researchers, Caroline Hunter and Judy Nixon from Sheffield Hallam University. Caroline and Judy presented a paper based on their recent work examining the multiple and complex links between domestic violence, social isolation and anti-social behaviour (ASB). Encouragingly, their major evaluative study supported the use of intensive early intervention programmes in response to ASB. The UK programmes they examined were remarkably similar in design to programmes adopted here in South Australia. A synopsis of Caroline and Judy's work is at http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/795/230AntisocialBehaviour/IntensiveFamilySupportProjectsAnevaluationofsixpioneerings_id1503795.pdf

Forum: In May an audience of 60 people attended our second lunchtime forum *Discrimination: Problems, Strategies and Structures*, to update progress on discrimination in the rental market since the publication of *Sexcluded* in 2004. Speakers included Linda



Matthews, Commissioner for Equal Opportunities; Elspeth McInness from UniSA; Emma Slape of the Real Estate Institute; and Lynn Young from the South Australian Housing Trust. While the tight rental market in South Australia, rising rents and the decline of public housing meant that discrimination is still evident, especially in respect of single parents, there was some good news to report from a Round Table discussion initiated before the forum by the Women's Housing Caucus.

Round table: The *Discrimination* forum was preceded by a private round table meeting, initiated and facilitated by the Caucus, between the Commissioner for Equal Opportunities, the Landlords Association, the Real Estate Institute and the Office for Women. We understand from the SA Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) that *'as a result, the EOC and REISA have started a dialogue about how to prevent discrimination in the private rental market. An article was included in the Real Estate Magazine about the EOC. This article included tips for real estate agents about how to select tenants fairly and how to deal with discriminatory requests from landlords. This resulted in several telephone enquiries to the Commission from real estate agents seeking more information. In addition, the Equal Opportunity Commissioner was on the panel of judges choosing winners for the 2006 Real Estate Institute Awards for Salesperson of the Year. In coming months the EOC will work with the Landlords' Association to provide information about discrimination to people renting out investment property for the first time.'*

Now that a Tenants Advice and Information Service for private renters as well as public and community renters has been announced and will begin operation in January 2007 we hope that strategic monitoring of discrimination in the market may be more practicable. Such a service has long been advocated by Shelter SA and the *Sexcluded* Report also urged its establishment, bringing the capacity for more structural analysis of tenancy issues. Current policy settings promote the private rental market but it remains the least affordable, least secure and least appropriate tenure for many households now obliged to use it.

UN Special Rapporteur: On August 9/10 the Caucus was the lead agency in hosting South Australia's **community consultation** for the **UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Adequate Housing, Mr Miloon Kothari** during his mission to Australia. We hosted a dinner for Mr Kothari on his arrival in Adelaide that provided him with an opportunity for extended conversations with a range of specialists from agencies and academia whom he would not otherwise have heard from directly.

The following day, in conjunction with the YWCA of Adelaide, Shelter SA and Homelessness SA, the Caucus facilitated a public meeting to inform Mr Kothari's investigations. In the morning an expert panel made presentations. The panel members were Professor Andrew Beer from Flinders University/ AHURI Southern Research Centre; Dr Donna Chung from UniSA; Geoff Harris, CEO of the Mental Health Coalition of South Australia; Professor Hugh Stretton and Jo Wickes, Manager of the Magdalene Centre and Chair of Homelessness SA. Their presentations were videoed and a copy of the film was given to Mr Kothari for his later reference. In the afternoon a range of people shared their housing stories directly with Mr Kothari in a plenary session and he was also able to meet privately with the indigenous community. Information by written submission was solicited for a South Australian Community Report, to be compiled by the YWCA and forwarded to the Special Rapporteur. Over 40 people attended during the public meeting and a further 25 individuals provided written submissions for the Report. Mr Kothari's initial highly critical findings from his mission to Australia received considerable media publicity. His Final Report is due in early 2007 but his Preliminary Observations can be found at http://www.iut.nu/Tillfalliga_artiklar/Australia/UN_Kothari%20report_Aug.pdf

Forum: the last public event for this reporting period was a forum linking housing and education interest groups: *Shoring Up the Foundations: SA Innovations*. Three excellent presentations



described the experience of schools working with homeless students and students whose families were obliged to move frequently and linked this with the work of *Talking Realities*, giving insights into the reality of teenage pregnancy and *Streetlink*, with insights into the 'invisible children': children of homeless or at risk families who can fall through all the cracks in early life only to emerge at seven or so without any formal identity or schooling. Yannoula Michael from the Association of Women Educators South Australian branch; Nicoline Kovatseff with Nicola and Carly from *Talking Realities* and Andrew Drummond from *Streetlink* were inspiring presenters. The session established useful links between participants and a determination to ensure that the education-housing network would continue to be developed. This forum was preceded by an informal AGM where three members volunteered to fill vacancies on the Planning Group for 2007: a most encouraging and affirming outcome.

LINKS

During the year the Caucus has also been involved with a range of less public events. We ran a workshop around the *Trivial Guide to Housing*, an educational game devised by Janet Adkins, the Caucus Secretary, with the YWCA of Adelaide. On April 4 the Women's Housing Caucus were invited meet with the **Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commissioners** John Von Doussa, Pru Goward, Tom Calma and Graeme Innes. Representatives from the Caucus provided input into the **State Strategic Plan** consultations. The Caucus also made a submission on the reform of the **Supported Residential Facilities legislation**. Caucus has also established very positive relations with a broad spectrum of agencies, individuals and networks across the housing sector in the community, industry and government.

NEWSLETTERS

There have been 4 Caucus newsletters during this first year, written, produced and e-mailed by Janet Adkins, Caucus' completely invaluable Secretary. They have kept our 'community' abreast of developments and have often included some great photos of events and speakers. Extracts can be found on our web page.

PLANS FOR 2007

Research: the Caucus, in partnership with the Seniors Information Service, is planning to undertake research on the housing issues experienced by **older women** in South Australia. This research is to be funded by the Office for the Ageing and will be completed in the first part of 2007.

The Caucus is also working to secure funding for a **predictive report** on Australian women's housing options, issues and opportunities in 2016 and 2026. AHURI Southern Research Centre and the Centre for Work and Life at UniSA have agreed to undertake this valuable work, which would provide a unique gendered view of housing futures and would be of enormous assistance to all those of us involved with women's housing issues, whether as service providers, advocates, rental industry participants or policy makers..

Conference: at the Caucus Planning Day 2006 it was decided to explore the possibility of holding a national Women's Housing conference in Adelaide in May 2007, 20 years after the last national Women's Housing conference, in Sydney in 1987. After discussions with the Office for Women and the Department for Families and Communities a strong consultative group was formed. Considerable debate and discussion lead us to decide that that the conference would benefit from a longer lead-time and should be held in 2008.

Very recently, the Caucus has been approached by women interstate who were independently planning a national meeting on women's housing issues for late 2007. It seems to be an idea whose time has come and the Caucus is investigating how best a collaboration should be progressed.



Forums: the first forum for 2007 will be held on Monday 5 March to mark International Women's Day/Week. The working title for this session at present is 'My Gran's Van and other tales of older women's housing'. This will be a lunchtime forum at the State Library of South Australia.

We are also planning a forum on Women's Safety and Housing for May next year and a breakfast meeting on the theme of Women, Children, Housing and Health in August.

Links: 2007 will see a continuing effort at extending and deepening our networks in South Australia and across State boundaries, with the Conference as a clear focus of common interest.

FUNDING

We continue to explore ways of ensuring the Caucus can continue and thrive. As Caucus is not likely to obtain charitable status, many of the 'usual' grant aid sources are not open to us. This is a continuing challenge.

FUTURE ISSUES TO PONDER

- How to make 25 hours in a day and 8 days in a week.
- How to find more women who already have more than enough to do and do more anyway.
- Where to find a money tree, or preferably a whole forest of them.

PRESENT REASONS TO BE GRATEFUL

The first year of any organisation is likely to be, variously, exciting, tiring, frustrating and satisfying for those involved. The Caucus' experience was no exception. Having reached the 12 month mark and completed this survey of a busy and productive year, however, the inescapable feeling is of gratitude: 'thank you' to everyone who's put in energy, hope, talent, time or money to make it happen! As Convenor I would like to thank the members of the Planning Group through 2005/6 for their generous contributions of time, energy and inspiration; Ann Marie Hayes who brilliantly facilitated our strategic planning day; Shelter SA for the security of our base there; Sandy Pitcher and her colleagues at the Office for Women for their regular help and encouragement; Sue Vardon and Liz Wilson for their wise advice and all our speakers, contributors and guests for sharing their experiences with us, and through us with the wider community. Above all, however, I'd like to thank Janet Adkins our Secretary for her unstinting quiet, consistent determination to keep the Caucus show on the road. Thank you all!

*MICHELE SLATTER, CONVENOR
November 2006*