

Rental Crisis Gets Worse

By Gary Wilson

The Advertiser on Sept 29th trumpeted “Bidding wars for homes to rent”, saying people were offering more than the advertised rent to secure a home. It also seems to take people a long time to find a place to rent, and they often “compromise a bit on properties they would not have seen as ideal” – in other words homes in pretty poor condition. Real estate agents say the rental market is as tight as they have ever seen it, and is unlikely to improve in the near future.

The Housing Industry Association said on Sept 25th that “the shortage of new housing stock in Australia is set to get worse, meaning very tight rental market conditions will persist for some time. A shortfall of 45,000 (new) dwellings this year alone is showing up in significant financial distress for lower income renters.”

According to *The Advertiser*, median weekly rent for houses in metropolitan Adelaide has risen by 10% in the past year to \$275, and for units, it has gone up by more than 15% to \$225.

Figures released by the SA Office of Consumer and Business Affairs for the quarter to Sept 30th show that 12,838 rental bonds were lodged in the 3 month period.

Of all properties:

- Only 3,558 properties (28% of the total) rented for under \$200/week.
- 62% of all properties rented in the \$200-299/week range.

57% of the properties leased for less than \$212/week were houses. In total, 8,370 houses were rented, with **99%** costing more than \$230/week.

Of the 4,468 flats/units/apartments rented, only 39% cost less than \$200/week.

Most houses rented for \$231 to \$283/week.

Most units rented for \$235 to \$329/week.

To rent any of the majority of houses or flats/units/apartments, you need a MINIMUM household income of \$40,000/year, and then AT LEAST \$49,000/year for the rest of the common flats/units/apartments and \$57,000/year for the rest of the most common houses being let.

The reality is that the average household income in Adelaide is about \$50,000/year, and 30% of households rely on government benefits as their sole source of income, while 21% exist on less than \$400/week or \$20,864/year. They can afford \$120/week rent, but only 985 properties (8%) of those let in the last 3 months were at that rent. Where are people on low incomes supposed to find an affordable place to live?

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Reminder:

Shelter SA's Annual General Meeting

will be held on

October 28

1.30—4 pm

The Sebel Playford Hotel,

**120 North Tce
Adelaide**

Guest Speaker:

**Hon Tanya Plibersek
MP,**

**Federal Minister for
Housing**





Rental Crisis Gets Worse (cont.)

It used to be that public housing provided the safety net for people on low incomes, but turnovers/ vacancies in Housing SA properties are at an all-time low. Over 8,000 households applied for Housing SA properties last year, but only 2,975 were housed – that left a total of 26,000 on the waiting lists, and they are all probably paying an exorbitant percentage of their incomes on private rental. ALL community housing organisations have long waiting lists. Again, where are people on low incomes supposed to find an affordable place to live?

And we still have 8,000 South Australians homeless, and 2,590 of those are children!

I was recently in a group discussion, which came up with the following priorities:

1. STOP the sale of Housing SA homes, unless older homes are replaced with new ones.
2. Stimulate the growth of publicly-funded and non-profit housing stock by building 1,000 new homes per year in the Adelaide metro area and 500 new homes per year in regional areas where there are employment prospects. (The lack of housing in some country areas is holding back the State's economic development.)
3. Build 25 new crisis accommodation homes per year to meet the emergency needs of women, children and families.
4. Fund appropriate supports to ensure people with disabilities, mental illness issues and other social disadvantages can find and maintain tenancies.
5. Fund an independent review of eligibility for Housing SA and allocations of housing.
6. Investigate models where victims of domestic violence (usually women and children) are able to stay in the family home and the perpetrator is removed and barred from disturbing them again. (This ensures children are protected and their education is not disrupted.)
7. Implement the changes suggested in the 2003 Review of the Residential Tenancies Act and consider:
 - a. Putting a cap on the amount landlords can raise rents each year
 - b. Increasing the regulation of landlords who own 10 or more properties.

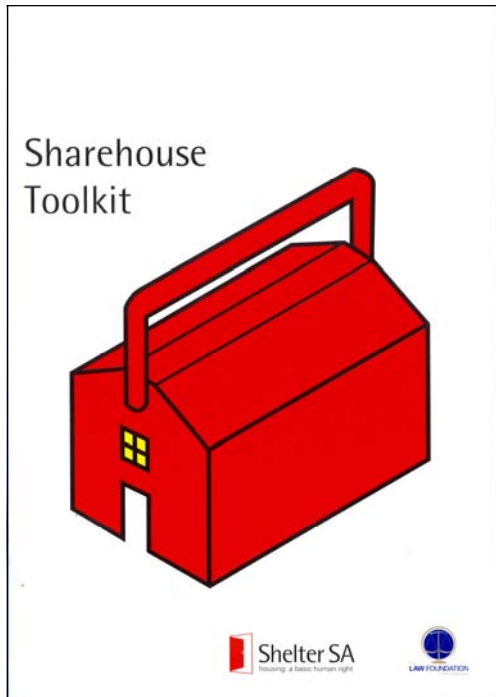
These recommendations are in line with the National Rental housing Advocacy Day held in Canberra on Sept. 24th. National Shelter, ACOSS and other groups called for:

1. A Growth Target should be established involving an increase in the stock of public and non-profit housing by **30,000** additional dwellings by **2012**.
2. An Affordable Housing Growth Fund should be established with funding of **\$7.5 billion over 4 years** strictly ear-marked for expanding the stock of public and non-profit housing, contributed on a proportional matching basis by the Commonwealth and the States/Territories.
3. An Operating Subsidy Program should be established, with funding of **\$3.5 billion over four years provided by the Commonwealth**.
4. These funding arrangements will require approximately **\$5 billion** above funding currently provided by the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments through the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA).
5. New stock should meet standards relating to dwelling quality, disability accessibility and energy efficiency.
6. Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) should be reviewed to ensure that it best meets the needs of all low income renters. As a first step, the maximum rate of CRA should be increased by **30%** for low income households currently receiving the highest rate of CRA at a cost of **\$500 million per annum**.

Australia suffers from an undersupply of housing, particularly for people on low incomes. Regardless of how it happens, Australia needs more houses and it needs them NOW. And that won't happen without Government assistance. Put the pressure on your state and federal politicians, by writing to them about this situation.



Launch of the Sharehouse Toolkit



The Sharehouse Toolkit was launched on October 7 2008, for International Tenants Day. Using a fun and lighthearted approach, it was well attended by people from across the sector. Shelter SA Executive Director, Gary Wilson gave a speech which highlighted the previous lack of information available to those living in sharehouse arrangements and how the Toolkit came into existence. Those attending then took the opportunity to discuss a number of issues involved in sharehousing.

Information in the Toolkit walks potential tenants through the process of renting in the private rental market and includes topics such as: working out what you can afford, where to look for properties, where to look for flatmates, where to get references, tenancy databases and black listings, leases explained, how to apply for bond assistance, how to claim concessions for utilities, help with setting up a home (furniture, white goods, etc), finance, templates for rosters of household chores, flatmate agreements, how to report maintenance issues, maintenance of property, inspections, ending a tenancy, evictions and getting a reference. There is also a trouble-shooter section covering issues such as resolving conflict in the house or with your neighbours, where to get help with tenancy

issues, Residential Tenancy Tribunal information and much more. Many of these templates will soon be available for download from the Shelter SA website.

The ABS estimates there are approximately 19,000 people living in group households in South Australia. Until now, there has been very little awareness among tenants of the types of services available that can assist them to find and maintain successful shared tenancies. Shelter SA anticipates that in light of the current housing crisis, greater attention will need to be given to this form of tenure.

We expect the Toolkit to be of value to all tenants, especially as a preventative/educative tool and will also help those agencies teaching independent living skills and others working in the housing and tenancy support area.



The toolkit is free and available now.

If you would like to order copies of the please contact Margo on 8221 6488 or by email at margo.johnson@sheltersa.asn.au

Hurry—Limited copies are available!



Still Grieving Over Stolen Lands

by Cate Jones

Since initiating the Aboriginal Homelessness and Housing Support Branch I have been surprised at the powerful emotional reactions of Aboriginal people to issues connected with Aboriginal housing and homelessness. I have worked with Aboriginal people for over seventeen years, mainly in the university health and research sectors, but did not fully grasp how much grief and suffering surrounds housing issues. Aboriginal people in South Australia who are homeless, or struggling with housing issues, continue to experience discrimination and injustice on their own lands, the lands they were once custodians of. To explore these concerns it's worth looking at the history of settlement in South Australia to gain an understanding of why responses to housing and homelessness might be so emotional.

In 1834 the British Parliament passed South Australia's Foundation Act. This act made no mention, nor did it acknowledge the fact that Aboriginal people had inhabited and occupied South Australian lands for centuries. Aboriginal lands were essentially re-possessed by the British Government and the management of them handed over to colonial authorities. From 1834, within the British Government there was a growing revision in thinking caused by anti-slavery campaigners who were concerned that there had been no formal recognition of Aboriginal land ownership and that there had been significant colonial violence directed at Aboriginal people. Settlers hunted Aboriginal people off their lands, burnt their 'wurlies' and shot their dogs. While massacres were routine in other States of Australia, in South Australia, settled ostensibly on more humane terms, it seems more likely that settlers murdered Aboriginal people in twos or threes rather than large scale killings. These murders were supposedly based on competition for resources. Aboriginal people hunted off their customary lands and deprived of food and water, retaliated by slaughtering settlers livestock for food.

Matthew Moorhouse became the first official Protector of Aboriginal people in 1839 and while he encouraged the government to set up designated tracts of land for Aboriginal people, he did not agree that they should have title or tenure to land until they could prove that they were prepared to use the land 'gainfully' for farming and until that occurred, the crown would hold title to the properties. Over the next fifty years missions were established and some allotments handed over to Aboriginal people for farming but it was always emphasised that this was a privilege, certainly not a right.

From the late 1850's and onwards government policy was strongly influenced by Social Darwinist theories that supported the notion that the Aboriginal population were a dying race and that there was little government could do except provide them with a little material and physical comfort. But, with the increase of children born with mixed descent, notions that 'racial purity' should be preserved also emerged and ultimately became the basis for what is now known as the Stolen Generation. The forced removal of children was seriously pursued from the early 1900's onwards and some may argue that it continues today, as currently Aboriginal children are five to eight times more likely to be removed from their families than non-Aboriginal children.

In South Australia the State took over the running of missions from 1915, and the superintendents who managed them were given powers that allowed them to subjugate and punish residents who were deemed 'unchristian', disorderly, dirty or disrespectful. As you can imagine, these powers were individually interpreted by each superintendent and, in some cases, led to considerable abuse. The historical subordination of Indigenous people is epitomized by the Stolen Generation and embodies how racist government policy justified removing children from their families. The consequences of this particular policy continue to inform contemporary Indigenous social reality in terms of the ongoing impacts of its legacy. All Aboriginal families trans-generationally have been, and most continue to be profoundly traumatised, or at least significantly damaged by removal policies. In 1939 the Aborigines Act was passed that extended the categorisation of Aboriginality to include people of Aboriginal descent and granted exemptions to particular Aboriginal people considered to be of 'good character'. These people were encouraged to live as non-Aboriginal people and to a very limited extent, given the same rights. Many of these exemptions, known as 'dog tags', were conditional and if breached were withdrawn. Aboriginal people were strongly advised that associating with family or extended family could lead to a breach of the exemption. It also became illegal for a non-Aboriginal



Still Grieving Over Stolen Lands (cont.)

man to 'frequent the company' of an Aboriginal woman unless they were lawfully married. Over the remainder of the century oppressive government policies began to relax and Aboriginal people became more active in promoting their concerns. Assimilationist policies were challenged, and the 1967 referendum was the forefront for other policy changes, with Aboriginal affairs shifting toward the Federal agenda rather than solely managed by state governments.

What we have to remember when considering the history of Australia since invasion, as stated by Darlene McKenzie, Aboriginal film-maker and writer, is that:

"Before the British invasion of 1788 there was no 'Aboriginality'. Instead the creation of Aboriginality has originated from our histories in confrontation with the white invaders who did not differentiate between our various languages and cultures, but treated all of us simply as 'natives'. They were not aware of the differences; on the contrary they violently and systematically worked to break down our original social structures. In other words, Aboriginality has arisen from and is continually shaped by the very nature of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal race relations which have always been characterized by the subordination of the latter." (McKenzie, 1994:179)

Looking at the last sentence in McKenzie's quote brings us closer to understanding 'moral exclusion' and the processes of racism. Rhetoric that justifies the exclusion of a particular group is familiar to most of us. Pauline Hanson's maiden speech in parliament used populist rhetoric to describe how immigrants and Indigenous people are receiving 'handouts' and government benefits that the average Australian is denied. Not only did she present these vulnerable groups as creating problems for mainstream Australians, she indicated that many of these people misuse funds provided by the government and refuse to assimilate into 'our' society. Pauline Hanson constructed in her speech the divisive mythology that perpetuates concepts of worthiness and unworthiness.

A relatively new area of study to come out of critical race studies is 'whiteness' theory. Whiteness theory examines the processes of 'exclusion' and analyses how a privileged group maintains dominance over another by reinforcing the 'others' inferiority. Academic theories concerning the issue of whiteness engage with issues of privilege, power and the normalizing of whiteness, or its invisibility as a racial position. It is also discussed in terms of racial domination because whiteness continues to bestow race privilege. Richard Dyer in his book *White* emphasizes this issue stating that:

"The sense of whites as non-raced is most evident in the absence of reference to whiteness in the habitual speech and writing of white people in the West. We (whites) will speak of, say, the blackness or Chineseness of friends, neighbors, colleagues, customers or clients,....., but we don't mention the whiteness of the white people we know. At the level of racial representation, whites are not of a certain race; they're just the human race." (Dyer, 1997: 2)

When we apply whiteness theory to race relations in Australia, Aboriginal people have been severely marginalized by social and economic policy that has historically reinforced white objectives. Canadian researchers, St. Denis and Hampton, in their work on racism in education, use the words of an older group of Indigenous research participants to describe how it feels to be constantly subjected to racial domination. The experience of humiliation and subordination is explained in these terms, "your whole life has been based on one of forced inferiority" and "it was shameful to be Native because we were part of a weak, defective race unworthy of a distinguished place in society". (St. Denis & Hampton, 2002: 11)

If we look closely at the methods colonial rule has used to displace, dispossess and exclude Aboriginal people from participating in the cultural, economic and political development of South Australian society, it is clear that white race privilege continues to endow Aboriginal people with inferior qualities that maintain and reinforce white racial dominance. This is clearly proven when we examine the statistics relating to health, levels of unemployment, homelessness, and sub-standard housing in comparison with the non-Indigenous population, Aboriginal people conspicuously



Still Grieving Over Stolen Lands (cont.)

constitute the underprivileged, under-resourced community of Australia. These social factors indicate that the prospects, life choices and opportunities for Indigenous people are not just considerably reduced in comparison with the non-Indigenous population; they also articulate the uncontested nature of white race privilege. (Moreton-Robinson, 2000:159)

While social factors clearly illustrate disadvantage, from an Aboriginal perspective the heart of that disadvantage lies in the fact that traditional lands were stolen from them. Their lands were simply taken without any form of compensation, recognition or acknowledgment that Aboriginal people had occupied lands, had customary custodial responsibilities to lands, and finally, had powerful ancestral relationships with those lands.

I genuinely hope that this article offers some kind of insight into why Aboriginal responses to housing and homelessness issues might be emotional.

References:

Dyer, Richard. (1997) *White*. London, Routledge

McKenzie, McKenzie. (1994) Looking at them looking at us in *Racism, Representation and Photography* Sydney, Inner Education Centre.

Moreton-Robinson, A. (2004) *Whitening Race*. Aboriginal Studies Press. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies,

St. Denis, Dr. Verna & Hampton, Dr. Eber (2002) Paper prepared for the Minister's National Working Group on Education, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Ottawa, Ontario

2008 Annual Hawke Lecture

The Greatest Injustice – Why we have failed to improve the health of Aboriginal people

To be delivered by Professor Fiona Stanley AC

Thursday 6 November 2008, 5.15pm for 5.30pm start

Adelaide Town Hall, 128 King William Street, Adelaide

“The frustrating and anguishing thing is that we have known what we need to do for 20 years yet have failed to implement any policies to significantly improve the health and wellbeing of our Indigenous people. Other countries with Indigenous colonised populations have similar problems but are doing much better than Australia – what can we learn from them?”

“We can and must collectively tackle this major human rights issue in Australia. It will take long and medium term strategies with a focus on prevention rather than only the crisis end of the scale.

“It will require acknowledgement and healing of the Stolen Generations. It demands the development of an effective Aboriginal workforce.

“We can close the gap and reduce suicides, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence and substance abuse – but only with a very different approach, attitude and commitment.”

RSVP's essential via the Hawke Centre Website: - <http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkecentre> or by phone on 8302 0215



Anti Poverty Week Events

Each year, in the lead up to the Homelessness, Health & Housing Expo, Shelter SA holds a community forum to raise awareness of the Expo and to promote health and housing issues among the broader community. This year in collaboration with the Hep C Council, Shelter SA held two 'Living Well on a Low Income' Fun days at two metropolitan Community Centres.

These sessions showcased some of the services involved in the Homelessness, Health & Housing Expo and was a great way to introduce these services directly to local communities in need and personally invite them to come along to the Expo on November the 11th.



Special thanks must go to Anna Kemp and Eve who taught participants how to make home made toiletries, Cate and Cheryl for the cooking demonstration and lunch and both The Bowden Brompton Community Centre and The Burton Community Centre.

The fun days were held in conjunction with Anti Poverty Week.

Homelessness SA Annual General Meeting and Public Forum

The causes of homelessness are diverse and unpredictable, including job loss, family breakdown, poor physical and mental health, domestic violence, substance abuse and many others. Addressing the breadth of these issues is integral to resolving homelessness.

You are invited to the free public forum to listen to some of the programs that work to empower and equip those who have experienced homelessness into employment, greater community connection and give people a sense of belonging.

Speakers include:

Michael Arbon, *Work Bank and West Works*,
Rille Walshe: *Innovation with Community Centres*,
Jo Wickes: *'Making Work Fit'*

5th November 2008, 2—4.30pm
Education Development Centre,
Milner Street Hindmarsh.



Upcoming Events

Shelter SA Annual General Meeting

October 28 2008, 1.30pm—4pm

Sebel Playford 120 North Terrace Adelaide

Guest Speaker: Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Federal Minister for Housing

Homelessness prevention, prioritization and allocations: strategies and initiatives in UK, Ireland and Canada- What can we learn for Australia?

30 October 2008, 11.30am—2pm

Mercure Grosvenor Hotel, 125 North Terrace Adelaide

Guest Speakers: Lynden Esdaile, Executive Chairperson Housing Appeals Committee and Sean Lappin, Mission Australia's National Advisor on Homelessness, National Support Unit. Cost is AHI Members—\$55, Non-Members—\$75, including lunch. To register visit: www.housinginstitute.org and follow the link to the Events page.

Homelessness SA Annual General Meeting & Free Public Forum

November 5 2008, 2-4.30pm

Education Development Centre, Milner Street, Hindmarsh

Homelessness, Health & Housing Expo

November 11 2008, 10am-2pm

Princess Elizabeth Playground, South Terrace, Adelaide

Registrations to participate in the event will continue to be accepted until the 3rd of November.

SACOSS Annual General Meeting

November 11 2008, 3pm

Marjorie Black House, 47 King William Road, Unley

White Ribbon Breakfast—“Not Violent, Not Silent”

November 25 2008, 7 - 9 am

Banquet Room, Adelaide Festival Centre

This event is one of the many events that will be held around Australia to celebrate the "International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women". The event will be supported by SA's official White Ribbon Ambassadors, co-hosted by Peter Goers and Leigh McClusky and features Guest Speaker Derrick McManus. \$45 per person includes a Delicious Hot Breakfast!

RSVPs with payment by 7 November 2008. Enquiries to Evonne 8296 1582 or Felicity 0411 655 104

The White Ribbon Breakfast 2008 is brought to you by the members of Project Five-O in South Australia.



Shelter SA

Housing: a basic human right

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Shelter SA is a peak housing organisation representing housing consumers' views to Government, the housing industry and the community. It is primarily concerned with the availability and adequacy of low cost housing, and that people on low incomes have access to secure, affordable and appropriate housing.

Please contact Shelter SA if you are interested in becoming a member, or would like further information.

Secretariat

Executive Director: Gary Wilson

Sector Development Officer: Margo Johnson

Project Officer: Cate Jones

Clerical Officer: Cheryl Shepley