



Shelter SA
Housing: a basic human right

Private Voices Public Issues

A Discussion Paper

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Introduction

Shelter SA is the peak body for housing and homelessness in South Australia. A not-for-profit, member organisation, Shelter SA has a diverse range of stakeholders including State Government and non-government agencies and individuals with an interest in housing. The focus of Shelter SA is policy work, advocacy, research and education, with a brief to monitor government spending and performance on behalf of their constituents. The work of Shelter SA is guided by community development principles, specifically adapted for their work as a peak body, taking into consideration all those who have a stake in public housing policy and service provision, including homelessness. One of the principles of community development is to accurately identify and engage all stakeholders in order to create a sense of ownership of the systems in which they work and the role they play within them. The aim of community development activities is to achieve social change that will empower people who are living with disadvantage and this is an appropriate and ethical approach to addressing homelessness.

Homeless to Home, South Australia's Homelessness Strategy 2009 to 2013 states that "a workforce development strategy is being created" (2009:28) to augment the workforce development training activities for those working in the homelessness sector. A program of professional development is outlined in the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness Implementation Plan as follows:

South Australian Government will make a commitment to the provision of professional development opportunities relating to service provision, preferred provider systems, performance management, developing agency capacity, workforce development and integrated case management processes. The program will provide a specifically funded training and development quality assurance mechanism that will enable accreditation and service excellence for all agencies within the Specialist Homelessness Sector.

Shelter SA notes that scholarships have been made available to those working in the sector and this complements the training calendar activities currently offered by DCSI. A workforce development strategy however, requires a "dynamic approach that extends beyond simply providing education and training opportunities" (AOD report) and workforce development can be defined as:

...a multi-faceted approach which addresses the range of factors impacting on the ability of the workforce to function with maximum effectiveness in responding to alcohol and other drug related problems. Workforce development should have a systems focus. Unlike traditional approaches, this is broad and comprehensive, targeting individual, organisational and structural factors, rather than just addressing education and training of individual mainstream workers.

National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (2010:1)

Staff turnover rates and the retention of an appropriate, adequate workforce are important aspects of workforce development strategies. Levels of worker satisfaction and dissatisfaction are directly related to retaining workers in the sector. Higher levels of satisfaction are associated with a greater likelihood that workers will remain in their jobs or the sector (Martin, 2007). A 2012 Commonwealth workforce development study in the sector reveals that turnover is quite high but also that there is consistent evidence that workers find "deep intrinsic meaning in their work" (Martin et al, 2012:5).

One of the most important findings to note is that satisfaction is threatened when “workplace arrangements mean that workers spend less time directly helping clients and when service models limit their ability to “make a difference” in their clients’ lives. A widely reported frustration for workers is the “increasing impost of administrative tasks and the impact of inefficient, duplicative or changing administrative and data-collection systems on their workload” (Martin et al, 2012:56) that clearly do take them away from direct client time and therefore their capacity to improve the situation of their clients. Participants in the Martin et al study talked about the “complexity, unresponsiveness and rigidity of policies, processes and the frontline practices” (2012:54) and quotes demonstrating these ideas include the following:

Systems, frustration with the systems

You have clients saying “this system is stupid” and you’re just like, yes, I can’t argue with you about that

Information relating to homelessness policies and service provision [and also the funding for services and discretion to distribute funding] is predominantly produced and disseminated by Federal and State Governments. Using a community development approach Shelter SA has recorded perspectives on homelessness with a view to including citizen voices in public policy debate. Discussions with people working in both Government and non-government homelessness organisations were conducted during 2011 and 2012. It became apparent that privately, some individuals wished to express the difficulties in their work as they experience them and were willing to express them, if they were assured anonymity and confidentiality. Publicly however, it seems that people will either not express any opinion, or will agree with the dominant government discourse.

When workers feel dissatisfied, it is often due to a lack of engagement with other stakeholders. Participation can be thought of as occurring on a continuum with simple, one-way information-giving at one end with mutual dialogue and engagement at the other and a range of activities in between the two extremes. Moving along the continuum towards engagement, invariably means different levels of sharing power and decision-making. Newsletters and emails can be classified as being at the beginning of the continuum are one method of engaging stakeholders. If organisations are not prepared to share power with other stakeholders, communication will remain at this point on the continuum, and any implementation of change will potentially be met with resistance. For a community to exist, such as a community of workers, people must identify with other members and feel a sense of belonging – or in other words feel that they are engaged in the process. Knowledge resides within communities of practice and members of the community have the creativity and initiative to work within the constraints they practice within. Also, systems can evolve by creating a coherent identity (of the community – we are all in it together and share problems), creating connections (forming relationships between people) and sharing information. Overcoming any resistance to change is a critical rationale for better engagement.

The aim of this discussion paper is to examine how private conversations about public issues shed light on factors that should be considered in a workforce development strategy. Key to this work is the development of a shared understanding of what constitutes workforce development and identification of the influences on worker satisfaction (and therefore turnover and retention). Theoretical explanations are put forward as one way of thinking about these issues in terms of individual, organisational and structural factors that impact on the sector and to move towards

creating a constructive dialogue between Government, non-government agencies, individual workers and homeless clients.

The voice of government is dominant in the current environment, with a lesser presence of people working in the sector or a united sector voice, and a complete lack of the service recipient perspective. Without including all of the stakeholder perspectives it is difficult to understand the reasons why private and public viewpoints are so different, and why there is such a wide discrepancy between positives and negatives. Most importantly, without including all perspectives it is difficult to bring about changes that will lead to improvements for homeless clients. For some people working in the homelessness sector there are many negatives, yet when these are publicly challenged, not only are people unwilling to express their views, they will actually join collective efforts to discredit the information and publicly claim that they do not support them. For others, there are only positive experiences. The purpose of this paper is to tease out this issue and to ensure that all those with a stake in the sector are engaged in processes that will enable services (including State Government) to work together to achieve the best outcomes for clients and for alternative perspectives to inform a workforce development strategy and aims to:

- include unheard and minority voices in discourse around homelessness without privileging one perspective or knowledge base over the other;
- create a shared understanding of the positives and negatives within the sector;
- shed light on ways to improve service delivery within the homelessness sector;
- support healthy relationships between Government and non-government service providers
- create a solutions-based focus; and
- produce a range of possible solutions, emanating from the field, for consideration by State Government, individuals and groups.

Public Voices

Government

The current homelessness policy context and reporting mechanisms, according to National and State Governments, includes the following publicly available documents:

Policies

- National Affordable Housing Agreement
- COAG Homelessness National Partnerships, South Australia Implementation Plan 2009-2013
- The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness
- National Partnership on Homelessness (SA)
- Homeless to Home, SA Homelessness Strategy 2009-2013
- Street Count Survey

SA Homelessness Reporting

- SAHT Annual Report
- AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Reports (quarterly)
- COAG (annually) - only publicly available COAG report is dated 2009/10

- Productivity Commission Report on Government Services

Non-Government

By contrast, there is very little publicly available information of similar depth or scope that originates from the homelessness sector, there are five main sources as described below:

1. Independent Community-wide Homelessness Administrators Group (ICHAG) commissioned a research consultant to conduct a survey in 2011 and to produce a document reporting on the methods and results. The report was circulated to State Government but was not published.
2. Shelter SA produced a research report on the consultation they conducted in 2011 that included some information about homelessness services, that was later published on their website. The same information appeared in the 2011 Shelter SA submission to the SA Housing Strategy Green Paper which is available on Shelter SA's website and has been published on the State Government website since December 2011 (See Appendix 1).
3. Shelter SA Homelessness Worker Forum Report "Questions that Matter" – Shelter SA conducted a forum for direct client workers in the homelessness sector in March 2012. The report was circulated to participants for comment prior to being published on the Shelter SA website. Despite a positive focus, workers were only able to express negatives about H2H.
4. Media – Shelter SA has published various articles on topics including the Street County Survey, Homeless to Home (H2H) and the South Australian Housing Strategy Green Paper. InDaily ran a story about the flurry of media activity when the Homelessness Australia Report Card was released.
5. Homelessness Australia (HA) released their Report Card on the progress of the homelessness reforms in June 2012 and included information about States and Territories, gathered from their members. There was an extraordinary reaction from individuals and agencies to the release of the report that was not replicated in any other State or Territory. The HA report contained publicly available information including State Government publications, extracts from the Shelter SA Green Paper Submission and a research report commissioned by the Independent Community-wide Homelessness Administrators Group (ICHAG). One of the issues raised by agencies who complained about the authenticity of the report was the identification of a particular organisation and a negative opinion of the model used and it was unclear in the HA report whether or not the views were sector-wide views, or those of one participant in the ICHAG survey. Despite anecdotal claims of not having read the ICHAG report, some service provider groups demanded the retraction of the entire SA section in the HA report, including agencies who participate in ICHAG and who also participated in the ICHAG survey. A Shelter SA review of the survey methodology shows that it was a sound approach to the research. A story about the flurry of activity that occurred in South Australia (but no other State or Territory) appeared in InDaily, largely discrediting the HA report. Employees of agencies participating in ICHAG completed surveys, yet the agency views put forward not only reiterated Government discourse, but also acted to challenge any views that could potentially upset the status quo.

People experiencing homelessness

Unfortunately, there is no publicly reported information that accurately reports the views of South Australians who have experienced homelessness specifically about whether or not they are able to access services and if they do access services, if they obtained what they needed or the quality of outcomes, from their perspectives.

Private Voices

Shelter SA conducted three consultations within the homelessness sector during 2011 and 2012. As previously stated, an extract from the 2011 consultation appears as Appendix 1 and the Homelessness Worker Forum Report is available on the Shelter SA website. The following material comprises the results of the second 2012 consultation. Four main themes arose from twenty interviews with Government and non-government staff. The conversations were not voice recorded but were conducted and recorded in a structured, methodical way. Not every participant articulated an opinion on every theme however, collectively, there were four main ideas to emerge that reflect what participants had in common as follows:

1. Communication between Government and non-Government

Changes to the homelessness sector and service delivery began being introduced in 2009 and the SA Homeless Strategy was published two years later in 2011. The Strategy appears to be a promotional document that details Government aspirations for service delivery. Many participants felt that how the changes had been playing out before the Strategy was released and the changes it signalled were not clearly or consistently communicated to them, their agency or the sector as a whole. Participants did not seem to understand the rationale behind the changes or how they would be implemented. It was not always clear to participants who had authored the emails they received or who it had been circulated to. Government-led consultations left some participants feeling as though their voices were not heard and/or that the problems they raised were not being addressed. A small number of participants said that issues they raised directly with DCSI staff were not acted upon.

2. Private voices, public issues

Participants were willing to share their experiences and knowledge of working in the homelessness sector but when these were negative, would only do so after anonymity and confidentiality were assured. For these reasons, demographic details of those who agreed to offer their opinions via informal conversations are not detailed. Some participants suggested that if they were to speak publicly, they would fear losing their job, or that there would be negative funding repercussions for their agency. Whether this is a perception or a reality, this is an area that requires further investigation and attention as it has a divisive effect on individuals and agencies, and therefore the sector, to speak collectively and to advocate for their clients.

3. Integrated case management

The creation of H2H promised a new approach to “integrated case management”, however there is no shared understanding of what integrated case management is from the various perspectives of stakeholders including clients, direct client workers, team leaders, managers, CEOs, contract managers and DCSI staff. There is no case management manual for workers to refer to. There seems to be confusion about whether or not using particular software IS

case management because while H2H can record whether or not clients receive support, referral or accommodation, it does not capture the thinking behind the actions that are taken, the complex client situation, decision-making processes or the forming of trust and relationships that are a vital aspect of worker-client interaction. It seems that a database is driving policy rather than good quality research and that H2H is being held up as the answer to ‘the problem of homelessness’.

4. Contract management

Some participants expressed the view that it is rare for DCSI contract managers to have any practical experience of service delivery or client contact and that this interferes with communication around performance management and evaluation. Some participants talked about contract managers who lack understanding of the complexity of clients and overcoming difficulties in service provision. Some participants talked about DCSI intentions to abandon the competitive tendering process, which is extremely burdensome for agencies and is not conducive to agencies working together, but feared that H2H data alone will be used to decide how funding should be shared amongst agencies via a performance management approach that does not take into account the quality of services. H2H data is incomplete for various reasons and will, of itself, provide an inaccurate picture of the capacity of services, the cost of providing quality services or unmet need.

Individual Theories

Behaviour Change

There are a variety of behaviour change theories that assist us to predict how individuals will act during times of change and challenge. Albert Bandura (1977:191) is best known for his theory of behaviour change which hypothesises a relationship between self-efficacy and behaviour change, stating that:

...Psychological procedures, whatever their form, alter the level and strength of *self-efficacy*. It is hypothesized that expectations of personal efficacy determine whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. Persistence in activities that are subjectively threatening but are in fact relatively safe procedures, through experiences of mastery, [result in] further enhancement of self-efficacy and corresponding reductions in defensive behavior.

Self-efficacy is not a theory, but the term is important relative to other theories as it reflects how well an individual considers they will perform in a changing or challenging environment. Internal and external forces influence self-efficacy and therefore personal, environmental and behavioural elements are included in this analysis – individual thoughts affect behaviour and individual characteristics affect how people respond to their social environment. The environment also affects personal characteristics and behaviour, so there are reciprocal interactions between these factors (Bandura, 1989).

According to Bandura, when people face “obstacles and aversive experiences”, if they have a strong sense of self-efficacy they will continue to persist and cope until any defensive behaviour is

eliminated. People with a weak sense of self-efficacy will not cope in the same situations and their “self-debilitating expectations and fears” will be retained for a long time (1977:194).

People working in demanding environments (such as with homeless people) however, can only cope with certain levels of anxiety and if it gets too high, dysfunctional work practices can result. These practices serve no purpose other than to protect against anxiety and bureaucratic rules and regulations are often a symptom of this situation. People may wish to work more collaboratively and creatively, but patterns of anxiety avoidance can take precedence. These ideas are relevant to the changes that have occurred in the homelessness sector and may provide one explanation of why there appears to be two main experiences, one largely positive and one largely negative. It is difficult to manipulate self-efficacy externally, but addressing and removing barriers and obstacles from the environment in which homelessness service providers operate is important. Discordance and dissatisfaction contribute to people’s intentions to leave their current role and sometimes their current profession resulting in a loss of skills and knowledge from agencies and sectors. Enabling authentic relationships and conversations can actively break down real and perceived fear, mistrust and hierarchical control.

Systems Theories

As stated above, change must be understood within a social context because individuals do not operate in a vacuum and the phenomenon described in this paper is considered in terms of a meta-sociological argument: agency and structure.

Audit Culture

A review of the data presented for this report highlights that there is a tension between speaking privately and speaking publicly. This occurs in the context of a proliferating audit culture that further codifies the unequal power relationship between State Government departments and community sector organisations in the form of ever-expanding reporting and compliance requirements. This creates an environment in which the voices of those in the community sector are subordinated to increasing Government control—via the requirements of audit culture—of the public sphere.

It has been noted that audit culture refers to, ‘contexts in which the techniques and values of accountancy have become a central organising principle in the governance and management of human conduct—and the new kinds of relationships, habits and practices that this is creating’ (Shore, 2008:279). Reporting and compliance—including integrated case and contract management and the H2H database—are aspects of an expanding audit culture that has grown since the 1980s in response to an increasing concern about risk and trust (see Beck, Lash and Giddens, 1994). Such concerns have made way for increased managerialism, accountability and regulation. Such practices are resonant of surveillance systems that are used to guide the conduct of populations and discipline them (Foucault, 1977). The problem with the expansion of systems that characterise audit culture is that, ‘they provide virtually no room for citizens’ voices to be heard in any meaningful sense’ (Shore, 2008:280). Compliance in the form of reporting defines a singular and restrictive means of accounting for the voices, experiences and concerns of people working in the community sector. The problems and concerns that participants described are evidence of the sorts of problems that audit culture can bring to bear on voice.

Voice is not only the sound that is produced by the vocal chords. Voice also relates to being heard, to being listened to (Couldry, 2010). Couldry (ibid.) has called this 'voice as value' and says that the social valuing of voices requires the *recognition* of voice, and by extension a *listening* to voice. This does not necessarily mean that spaces are not made for people to speak, but as Tacchi (2010:14) notes: 'The encouragement and opportunity to participate is not always matched by the attention of listeners'. The opportunity to participate in a meaningful way in decisions that affect people are thus related to the recognition of their voices by listeners, and listeners are often in more powerful positions and can disregard voices that do not suit neoliberal agendas. Couldry (2010) argues that the recognition of all people (listening to them) is at the heart of democracy and that this recognition is absent in neoliberal practice and has led to a 'crisis of voice' (2009) in which neoliberal democracy is an oxymoron (Couldry, 2010).

People's voices are often relegated to defined processes that do not include a necessity of listening and lack true participation. When forums are government-led through the selection of speakers, setting of questions, controlled recording and dissemination of outcomes, it is possible that any results will closely resemble the government agenda, if particular methods are not used to collect differing perspectives. A lack of recognition of perspectives that differ from those of Government extends into the public sphere, where State processes and agendas assert their power. The concept of the public sphere has been famously described by Habermas (1974, 49) as:

First of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business nor professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions...

As Habermas notes, the public sphere is a space where citizens can discuss, deliberate, debate and form public opinion on issues that are of common concern. The public sphere is not limited to actual physical gatherings of people, but is also constituted through communication channels facilitated by the media. Forceful voices that are pro-homeless reforms have demonstrated their strength in the media – a key feature of the public sphere. In contrast, those voices that are anti-reforms are heard only in private space. It has been asserted that the public sphere is 'a critical part of the architecture of good governance' (Odugbemi, 2008:15 quoted in CommGAP, n.d.:3) and is a hallmark of functioning democracies because it enables government officials to be held accountable. Without a functioning democratic public sphere '...citizens will not be able to assert any influence over political decisions' (CommGAP, n.d.:1), which has implications for democratic governance. If people are unable to express themselves within the public sphere this indicates that the public sphere is not a free and democratic space for expression, but is under political control.

The heated discussion and debate that has occurred in the public sphere over the homelessness reforms has largely been in favour of the reforms. While there have been some alternative voices joining the debate people have remained mostly silent and have not been willing to speak in public. It is fundamentally undemocratic if the public sphere is a space that is controlled or 'owned' by

government rhetoric. If the status quo must not be questioned, it follows that private spaces are the only place where workers can exercise their agency because public spaces are scrutinised and controlled.

The relationship between individual actions and structures

Agency refers to the capacity to act (Ahearn, 2001) however, actions do not occur in a vacuum. People act within social and cultural norms and structures, which in turn guide and constrain actions. An analogy that is often used to explain this relationship is that of a sports team. Members of a sports team have some freedom to act, but their actions are constrained by the rules of the sport. What stops them from acting in any way they like, for example dribbling a football down the field or punching the opposition, is counter-action from referees in the form of penalties and bans and pressure from other players and coaches, which effectively control the actions of players (Cline, 2006). The theory of agency emerged as a way to think and talk about the relationship between people's actions and structure (Elvin et al., 2010, Ortner, 2006). Agency and structure exist in a dialectical relationship—social structures constrain and direct the actions of individuals, and the actions of individuals can produce and reproduce social structures (ibid.). Because of this relationship between agency and structure, the actions of individuals can transform structures, but can also reinforce domination by those structures (Giddens, 1984, Holland et al., 1998).¹ Structural control extends into the public sphere where people's voices are squashed, which cripples people's capacity for agency and action. The constraining of agency (voice) is expressed in a lack of engagement that many people spoke about.

Conclusion & Solutions

There appears to be a disconnection between the bodies that enforce the aspects of audit culture and the participants in Shelter SA consultations. This can be conceptualised as an interface. Long (1991:1) explains that interfaces:

Typically occur at points where different, and often conflicting, lifeworlds or social fields intersect, or more concretely, in social situations or arenas in which interactions become oriented around problems of bridging, accommodating, segregating or contesting social, evaluative and cognitive standpoints. Interface analysis aims to elucidate the types and sources of social discontinuity and linkage present in such situations and to identify the organisational and cultural means of reproducing or transforming them.

A lack of meaningful communication could be reframed by following Paulo Freire's focus on dialogue that informs what has been called the communication for social change (CFSC) model. This model posits that true change can only occur when people are put in charge of the change processes that affect them through community dialogue and collective action. It is based on the assumption that people best understand their needs and how to effect change (Figueroa et al, 2002; Gray-Felder and Deane, 1999; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte, 2006; Parks et al, 2005). This is a truly participatory model that does not seek to effect change from 'outside' assumptions of need, but allows those experiencing problems to effect their own change.

¹ Reproduced from the AHRC article.

Proposed Discussion Topics

Shelter SA would like to assist DCSI to address the key themes of this work with DCSI through the following suggested activities emanating from the field:

- Conduct an *independently led* forum to enable dialogue between DCSI and service providers (including direct client workers) about ways to overcome the difficulties they face, as described from their perspective, and demonstrate willingness to listen and note alternative points of view;
- Communicate to those who use H2H that DCSI understand user issues and how they will be addressed;
- Assist DCSI to articulate to stakeholders how the information provided will be considered in Government decision-making processes;
- Develop a shared understanding of terms including but not limited to
 - workforce development strategy
 - integrated case management
- Work with stakeholders to produce an integrated case management manual;
- Collectively address the question “how can we minimise the number of times clients have to tell their story?”
- Articulate if/how H2H data will affect funding decisions;
- Establish quality benchmarks for homelessness services that do not negatively impact on worker time spent with clients. A quality measure embedded in gateway responses and services such as asking every tenth client – did you get what you needed and was it helpful and recording this as a baseline measure could be combined with client interviews. Results Based Accountability provides a useful framework that takes population data into account rather than agency performance to show improvement in a no blame environment; and
- Identify and engage an appropriate consultant with relevant IT knowledge and experience to conduct an independent review of H2H.

Shelter SA will seek to conduct a small research project to hear directly from clients who have previously accessed homelessness services to elicit the barriers and enablers to current service delivery models.

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Appendix 1 – Extract from Shelter SA 2011 Consultation Report

During the last twelve months, Shelter has undertaken a consultation of members and non-members and spoken informally but methodically with government *and* non-government staff who work in the homelessness sector. A number of concerns and issues were raised by participants in this process that add another layer to the Shelter green paper submission issues above and common themes include the following:

- Some non-government agencies have experienced difficulties and barriers in their efforts to communicate issues and problems to government and have not been able to effect change;
- Some non-government and government workers are reluctant to speak against the dominant culture –non-government workers articulated fears that expressing opinions that do not agree with government would result in a loss of funding to their agency. Government workers talked about losing their jobs or being alienated at work;
- Some non-government workers and agencies describe feeling dis-engaged from government;
- Some NGOs talked about “not having a voice” and that there is no-one speaking on behalf of the sector;
- Some non-government worker stress levels are high due to the increased demand for services;
- There is general concern over the capacity of the NGO sector to provide services on a scale required by the growing demand in the community; and
- There are further concerns over the competitive tendering processes hampering NGO sector development and collaboration between agencies.