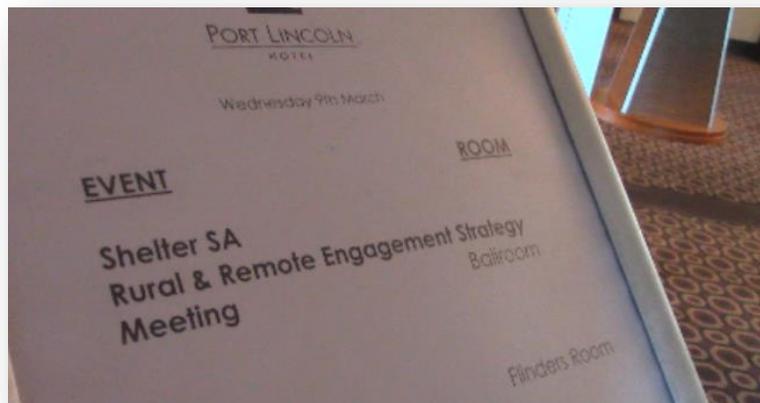




Regional Engagement Strategy Report

Port Lincoln – March 2016



Shelter SA is the peak body for housing in South Australia. Shelter SA's vision is for all South Australians to have an affordable, safe place to call home, especially those living on low incomes. Homelessness levels in South Australia are high and Shelter SA advocates for the housing, care and protection of our most vulnerable citizens. Shelter SA provides high-level advice to ministers, politicians and senior public servants about evidence-based housing policy and effective, efficient systems.

Shelter SA continues to deliver its Regional Engagement Strategy (RES) as part of its State-wide service. In March 2016, Shelter SA visited the Eyre Peninsula city of Port Lincoln and met with workers from government, local government and non-government organisations, members of parliament and councillors. At the consultation, Shelter SA discussed with participants the pressing housing and service challenges unique to the Port Lincoln region. This was the third Shelter SA RES visit for the 2015/16 year and followed consultations in the Riverland and Port Augusta.

A key RES objective is to establish collaborations and partnerships that can work towards addressing important housing issues for regions, and ensure regional voices are part of Shelter SA's policy and advocacy work. Shelter SA aims to ensure that regional voices are heard in an effort to mitigate against what many groups in the regions have stated – that government resource allocation across the State is based on a metro-centric model that does not suit country areas.

Port Lincoln participants undertook a two-part activity during the consultation and worked in small groups of mixed service providers to minimise single agency or service type responses. During the first activity, teams worked through ten key themes and brainstormed associated sector priorities that applied to their region and their work (see Appendix 1). Each table recorded their own priorities on butcher's paper and then shared them with the larger group. During the second Affinity

activity, table participants analysed their key priorities and wrote them on sticky notes. Participants placed the sticky notes under the ten themes on the wall to create a visual record. Participants reviewed the clustered priorities and voted on the most significant areas for attention as outlined below. The participant evaluation of the Shelter SA consultation verifies the success of the consultation and the information recorded in this report reflects the intensive input provided by participants.



Key Issues

The clear priorities of concern for the Port Lincoln region include the following:

- The decline of public housing accommodation and the resulting increase in demand for services ;
- A lack of affordable, appropriate accommodation for all household types;
- Inadequate levels of crisis accommodation for all ages and genders with a particular concern for the safety and well-being of children and young people; and
- The need to improve child safety through effective, multi-agency service responses.

Demographics

Participants commented on the extreme disparity between the wealthy and the poor within the region. There is a high level of affluence in Port Lincoln and participants felt that the public perceive the region as wealthy, overall. Participants said that community perceptions about wealth mean that there is little understanding of poverty or issues around housing affordability and the need for ongoing funding for vital support services.

Participants noted that all demographic groups have trouble in securing suitable housing – even people with jobs who wish to find accommodation in the region. However, discrimination in the private rental market is apparent towards Aboriginal people, and participants said that landlords and real estate agents do not favour prospective tenants who are young or single men looking to rent on

their own. Real estate agents and property owners perceive these client cohorts as high-risk tenants due to past negative experiences, and these barriers exacerbate the lack of affordable and available housing in the region.

Many service providers reported assisting clients with access to suitable housing, but said that the fluctuations in local employment can negatively affect tenancies due to high rental costs, increases in cost of living expenses and minimal housing stock across the region. Much of the employment available to people living in Port Lincoln is seasonal or casual (fishing, farming, tourism and events) and there is a lack of ongoing, stable employment with minimal new employment initiatives. Employment and income insecurity are key contributors to mortgage and private rental stress in the local economy, leading to negative social, economic, and health effects on households that combine to increase the demand for services already stretched beyond capacity. Port Lincoln also has a high transient population and participants said that this further depletes the supply of affordable, short to medium term housing and unmet need for crisis accommodation. Additionally, the rapid rise in population for several months over the holiday season means that some of the options that are available to clients such as caravan parks, motels and short-term rentals fill up with tourists or have high peak-season rental rates.

Supply of Social and Affordable Housing

There is an urgent need for an increase in all types of social housing and affordable accommodation in the region. Participants noted high levels of unmet need for transitional, supported, semi-supported and independent-living housing for all age groups and family configurations (single, women and children escaping domestic violence, families, older people and people living with disabilities). In addition, there are significant gaps in the supply of social and affordable housing consisting of smaller units for singles and young people, larger homes for families, and, crisis and supported accommodation for people with high and complex needs.

Participants said that wider community perceptions are that homelessness is not a problem in the Port Lincoln region. Local people are marginalised if they are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Specialist homelessness services cannot adequately cater to community needs with the demand far outgrowing available facilities and services. The smaller townships and their councils do not have the resources to provide housing and often rely on the larger centre services to assist. Housing for people with disabilities is only available in the larger towns and is in short supply. Some older people who are hospitalised and then recover from illness, remain in hospital because of a lack of suitable accommodation. The supply gap facing people living with disabilities and older people is widening with a lack of available aged care facilities and long waiting lists for people living on low incomes to enter aged care. Participants repeatedly raised concerns about limited crisis accommodation especially for victims of domestic violence and women with children, generally. A lack of crisis accommodation for families is evident across all demographics - a critical community need that is experiencing policy and funding failure.

Participants identified various under-used or vacant buildings in the area that they thought could be utilised as emergency accommodation and general housing. However, instigation of asset redevelopment and ongoing funding to support and maintain tenancy options in these buildings has not occurred by government-led approaches or through private social investment strategies. Participants noted that there is a definite need to develop and promote willingness in the community to work together to address the need for affordable housing, with the potential of addressing social investment in housing as one solution.

Discrimination in the Private Rental Market

Housing affordability was the major, ongoing concern identified by participants but interestingly, participants indicated that overcoming the issue of discrimination in the private rental market is a high priority. Participants explained that their clients experience discrimination solely due to their appearance and this is especially the case for Aboriginal people. Participants said that young people have little chance of securing a private rental property due to affordability and a lack of rental references. Despite the region having high per capita household income, there is a major lack of affordable, available and appropriate housing with relevant supports in place to ensure successful tenancies.

Flexible Property Management

Some participants talked about the need for more flexibility in property management processes and how this could benefit clients who need more time to stabilise their lives and their tenancies. Where there is rigid adherence to tenancy legislation, especially when multiple agencies are involved in case management, clients can quickly fail in their tenancies. Participants stated that clients with complex needs required several opportunities to achieve successful tenancies, deal with property damage and rectify rent arrears. Compounded tenancy issues can occur when real estate agents and property owners lack understanding of mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues and disability where there is a challenging behaviour component, so raising awareness amongst the community is a key issue.

Child Safety

The focus of one group of participants was on the safety of children. The group identified the need for a specialist accommodation facility that could serve multiple purposes to assist children and their families. Some of the families who they know are struggling to look after their children adequately would benefit from residential respite care with intensive support available on site. A respite facility could also offer parenting skills education and activities based on health needs, nutrition, cooking and budgeting. Participants stated that many young people do not have the independent living skills they require to maintain a successful tenancy so young people could use a multi-purpose facility as well. There are many families, well known to workers, who are neglecting their children, experiencing drug and alcohol issues and living in extreme poverty. Child protection and supported housing services are failing to meet the needs of these families because of complex policy and service delivery issues across portfolios and departments.

There is a lack of crisis/emergency accommodation or youth hostels for children who are too young to stay in motels unaccompanied. There is no established discharge plan for services to deal with young people released from youth detention and these children are falling through the gaps. Participants said that children need support and service collaboration in order to reintegrate into the community, but service providers are often unaware that the release of the children from youth detention has occurred pointing to the inconsistent implementation of policies. Frequently bailed to unsafe addresses, young people are residing with parents or friends in an environment of drug and alcohol abuse and family violence, and as a result, may quickly re-offend. This child protection issue requires urgent cross-portfolio government intervention and Shelter SA is planning a forum to establish priorities in the area.

Regional Costs of Service Delivery

Participants identified as a priority, the higher cost of community service delivery in regional and remote areas, for a number of reasons. The costs of worker and client transport and the lack of public transport are issues however, worker recruitment and retention, training costs and workforce planning also contribute to higher service delivery costs. Participants said that regional services funded in the same way as metropolitan services are not sustainable. One way to improve the effect of larger geographical areas on the costs of service delivery is to provide flexible, multipurpose services, good communication and improved collaboration between agencies.



Multi-Agency Response

Several participants reported that often, there is no connection in the client housing journey to streamlined interagency systems or effective information sharing such as central triage or case management systems. There were consistent comments by participants that interagency collaboration and case management needs significant improvement and working in silos is common. There is a lack of resources to facilitate improvement in this area and no council or agency taking a lead role or program funding available to address the issue. Funding streams and government department separation of services contributes to the capacity of services to work together, have an identified lead agency and multi-agency responses.

There appears to be some policy and protocol inconsistencies regarding who has responsibility for young people under the age of 18 years and referrals to other agencies. These inconsistencies are potentially a costly, high risk to clients, the community, service providers and State Government. The lack of cooperation, understanding and information sharing between providers is not an effective way to ensure that interventions produce good, long-term outcomes early in a person's life. Participants agreed that there is an urgent need for more funding, interagency collaboration and multi-agency responses to keep children safe in the region.

Summary

Shelter SA has collated the following items for action:

1. Briefings for ministers, senior public servants, media and the community about the lack of an adequate crisis response and unmet need in the region.
2. Need for multi-agency response to children and young people at risk of neglect and abuse, youth justice issues, poverty and homelessness.
3. Increase government, political and public profile of regional issues through briefings, publications, media, social media and campaigns;
4. Advocate for increased resources for the region targeting specific needs of various interest groups or target populations and address service cost model issues for housing and support services;
5. Apply research strategies to utilise government and non-government data on local demographics, homelessness, drug use, mental illness, evictions, damages, abandoned properties and related issues to inform participants on an ongoing basis;
6. Look at ways of working to improve relationships with the private rental sector to obtain better responses for client groups for both short, medium, long term and crisis accommodation;
7. Obtain and effectively use H2H and local agency data for targeted planning and service delivery;
8. Advocate for an increase in sector resources to the region;
9. Improve multi-agency responses, coordination and collaboration between services with complex clients in common;
10. Improve development and usage of existing property assets.

Appendix 1 Affinity Activity

From the priorities noted on the butcher's paper during the first brainstorming activity, table groups analysed and prioritised key issues using sticky notes. The participants placed their sticky notes under the ten key theme headings on the wall and rated them. The following table illustrates the key theme headings, the listed priorities or issues and the rating allocated for each priority.

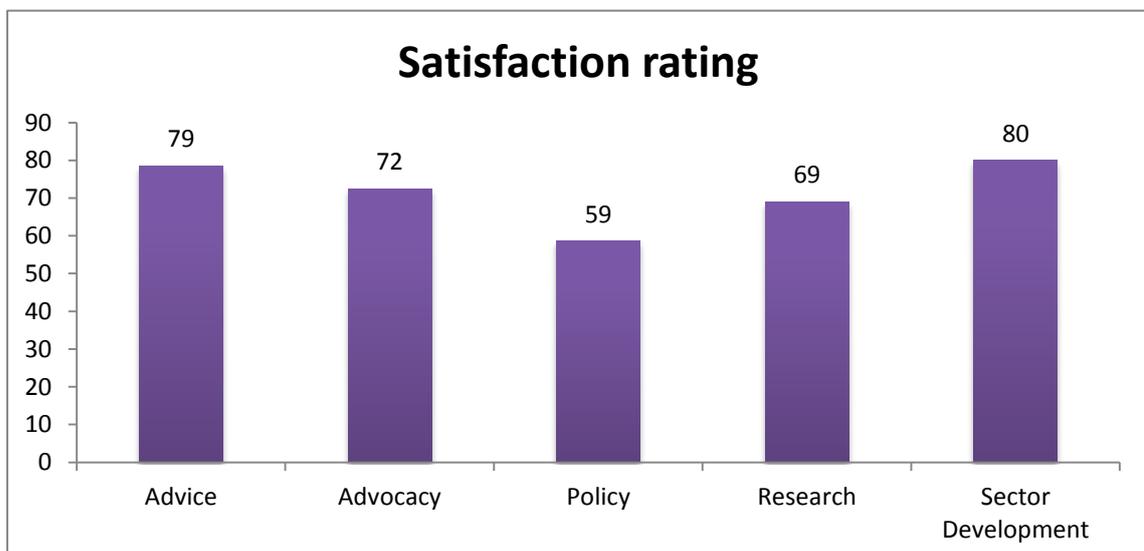
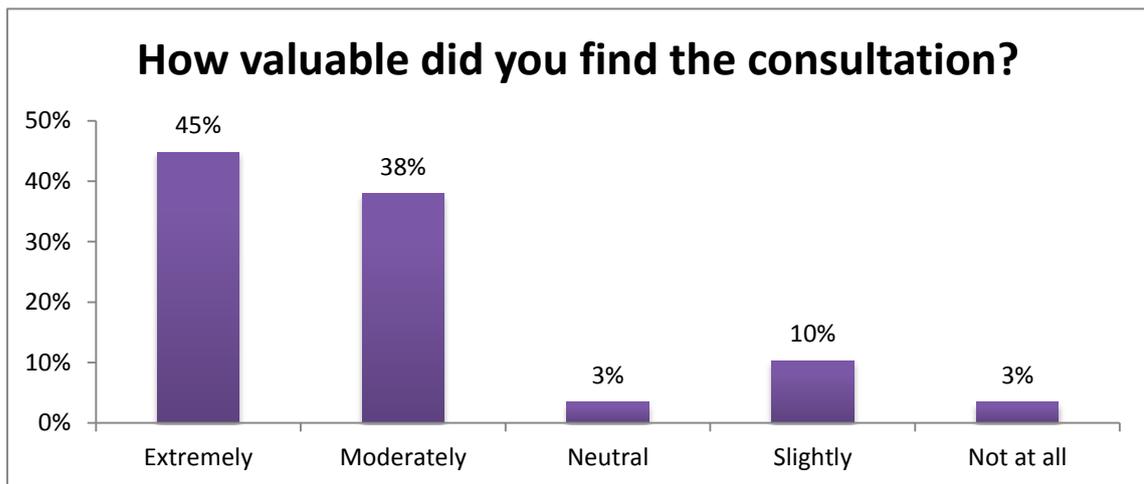
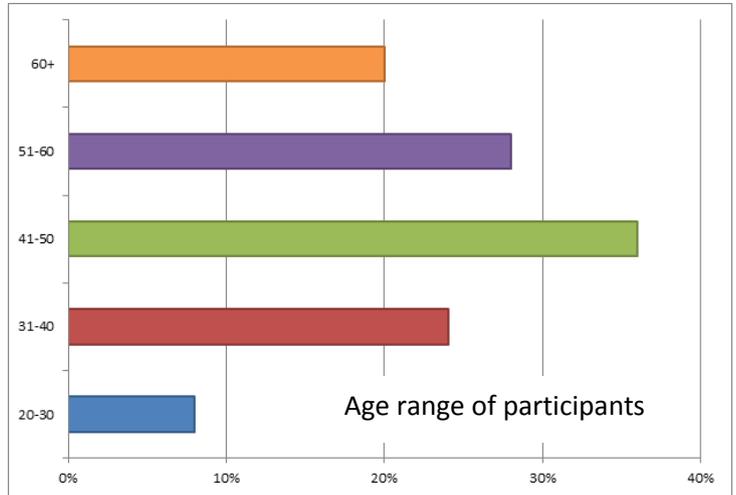
1. Uniqueness of The Region	2. Main Housing Issues	3. Community Perceptions	4. State Of Homelessness	5. Service Gaps
<p>Extreme Disparity between rich and poor (x4)</p> <p>Isolation – the tyranny of distance (x2)</p> <p>Cost of service delivery increases with remote communities (x13)</p> <p>Young people accessing appropriate accommodation (x1)</p> <p>Perception of rich population which effects access to funding (x1)</p> <p>Low population and large distances (x1)</p>	<p>Lack of funding, affordability and availability (x6)</p> <p>Lack of affordable housing</p> <p>Affordability, sustainability and availability (x2)</p> <p>Lack of affordable housing options for lowest income group (2)</p> <p>Affordable, available and appropriate housing with support in place (x14)</p> <p>Lack of availability and suitability (x1)</p>	<p>Depends on where you sit in the community as to whether you believe there is an issue (x4)</p> <p>Community understanding definition of homeless education required (x1)</p> <p>Lack of awareness</p> <p>Lack of community awareness of homelessness issues (x2)</p> <p>Lack of awareness about public housing and homelessness in general. Statistics not accurately representing true numbers of homelessness (x5)</p> <p>WCYCS is advocating strongly, wider community does not seem to be concerned (x1)</p>	<p>Hidden and worse than the perception</p> <p>Homelessness services not catering to community needs – reactive not responsive (x2)</p> <p>Lack of crisis accommodation opportunities across all cohorts of people (x1)</p> <p>Single men – emergency AND small affordable properties (x5)</p> <p>Lack of crisis/emergency accommodation, and exit points (x10)</p> <p>Demand is outgrowing facilities and services</p>	<p>Disability, aged care, social inclusion, mental health, DASSA, single people (x1)</p> <p>Connectedness! Integrity. Community (x3)</p> <p>Lack of public transport (x4)</p> <p>Increased cost and difficulty assessing health care (x1)</p> <p>There are many service gaps but we are a small isolated community SA we need flexible, multipurpose services with good communication and collaborative services (x12)</p> <p>Service silos. Funding not collaborative (x2)</p>

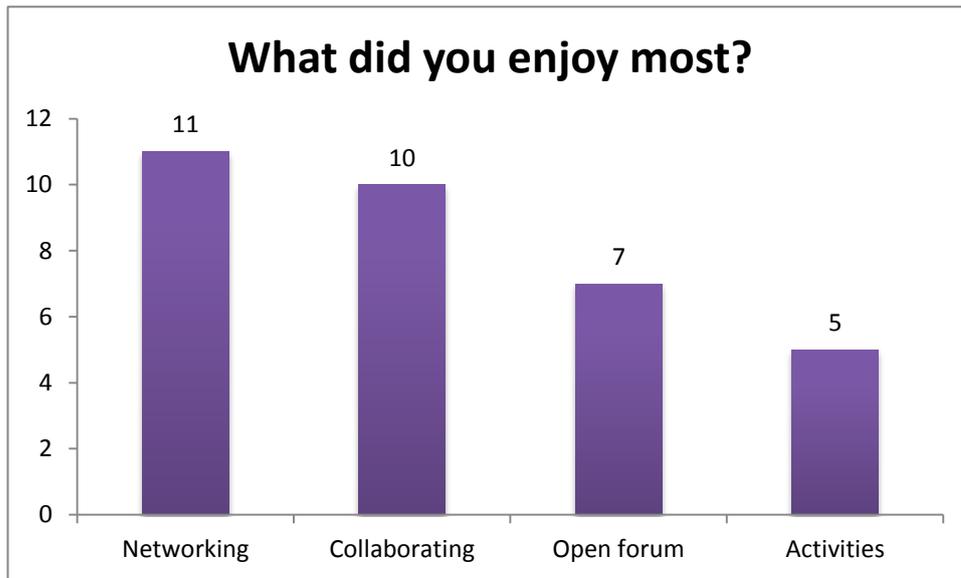
<p>6. Supply Gaps</p> <p>Appropriate multi-purpose supported accommodation facilities for young people (x1)</p> <p>Smaller units, larger homes, flats for young people, crisis accommodation, supported accommodation for high and complex needs (x12)</p> <p>More supported accommodation (i.e. Common Ground) (x5)</p> <p>Assertive and comprehensive outreach service for people with high and complex needs (x4)</p> <p>Fathers with children lack of facilities (x1) Accommodation for ageing people (x2)</p> <p>Lack of public housing (x1)</p>	<p>7. Private Rental Market Difficulties</p> <p>Affordability, discrimination, availability (x1)</p> <p>Discrimination against appearance, ex-custodial, age (young people), lack of private rental history, finances (x22)</p>	<p>11. Emergency Shelter Needs</p> <p>Access for wider group than already catered for in the community (x1)</p> <p>Culturally appropriate accommodation for ATSI clients. All people have a right to safe and supported accommodation</p> <p>Multipurpose to support all of community (x8)</p> <p>Single adults</p> <p>Single persons with high needs</p> <p>Alternative funding (x7)</p>	<p>12. Supported Accommodation Needs</p> <p>Affordable transitional semi-supported independent small housing for all ages and needs (x13)</p> <p>Disability. Density accommodation (i.e. Common Ground model). Parenting support accommodation in Ceduna (x1) Supported young people accommodations (x2) Supported accommodation needs to be multipurpose to cater to complex issues of individuals and families (x2)</p> <p>Disability and mental health (x4)</p> <p>Transitional for rehabilitating drug users + alcohol (x3)</p>	<p>13. Opportunities</p> <p>Utilise empty building spaces for housing. Change in community perception. (x10)</p> <p>PLACC has land but no funds. Eyre Housing Round Table (x2)</p> <p>Develop and promote willingness in the community to work together to address housing needs (x2)</p> <p>Utilise under-used properties. Involve property owners and developers. (x10)</p> <p>Idle commercial properties (x1)</p> <p>Lions Hostel, Port Lincoln Primary School, Truscott building, Weena Mooga building, underutilised hotels and caravan parks, Pt Lincoln hostel. (x1)</p>
--	--	--	--	--

Appendix 2
Evaluation results

About the participants

Occupations:	
Police officers	Pastor
Service workers	Team leaders
Coordinators	Directors
Intake workers	Volunteers
Bank officers	Youth workers
Managers	Case workers





What improvements can be made?

Some participants commented that they thought the questions posed were somewhat repetitive and a focus on the problems experienced. However, the questions asked, enabled participants to brainstorm priorities clients and workers experience and to discuss possible solutions.

What to discuss next?

Participants suggested further exploration of the subjects raised at the consultation, supported accommodation and social investment opportunities. Participants also noted that they would like to hear positive stories, how other regions have solved similar issues and inviting a government representative to speak to the group.

Continued advocacy of Shelter SA

A number of attendees highlighted that they intend to become members of Shelter SA because of the consultation and 93% of respondents indicated they would attend another consultation.