



Shelter SA Aboriginal Housing Summit
“Our Grannies are our strength”
November 2013

Contact
Dr. Alice Clark
Executive Director
Shelter SA
alice.clark@sheltersa.asn.au

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Executive Summary

The overarching message delivered by Shelter SA Summit participants is that they want their human rights to be recognised with acknowledgement as our Nation's First Peoples. If this is guaranteed it is the basis for participants to achieve their other rights and needs.

Safe, secure, affordable and culturally appropriate housing is the foundation upon which children can be protected, taught about respect, learn about culture and receive support from strong families and communities.

Aboriginal housing and homelessness are priority areas for the systems and policy advocacy undertaken by Shelter SA and we wish to thank the Summit participants for their contribution to our election platform leading up to the SA election on 15 March 2014. Shelter SA calls on all political parties to address the platform issues raised at the Summit.

Shelter SA acknowledges the Mercy Foundation who generously assisted in making the Summit possible through their Small Grants Program www.mercyfoundation.com.au





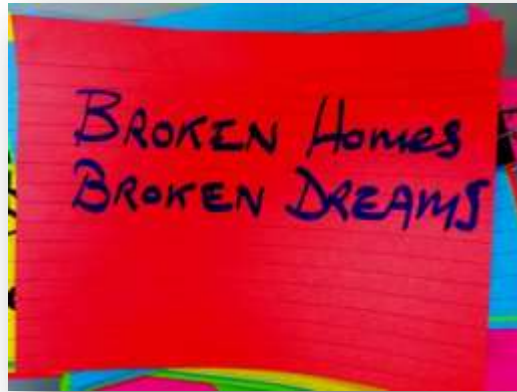
Shelter SA – Election Platform - Our Nation’s First Peoples

Aboriginal people are over-represented in homelessness statistics. Mainstream health, education, employment and housing policies and services are not culturally appropriate for Aboriginal people. The factors contributing to disadvantage are well known and there is a breadth of high quality research that provides solutions to issues arising when people have to fit into the dominant culture. Political will on this issue, from all parties, is required to 'Close the Gap'.

The Shelter SA Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Branch have repeatedly stated that Aboriginal controlled and culturally safe, appropriate policy and service provision is required to change their situation, based on evidence in the form of research and consultation. Shelter SA held two gatherings for Aboriginal people at the end of 2013 and the participants call upon all political parties in South Australia to publicly state their vision to address housing and homelessness issues. It was the consensus view of the participants that this must include the achievement of basic human rights:

- All interactions and relationships with Aboriginal people to be based on RESPECT;
- Culturally appropriate housing designed and built to accommodate extended family, with quality materials and durable living spaces;
- Understanding of cultural obligations to accommodate family and disuse of the term 'overcrowding';
- A safe, affordable, secure home is the basis upon which Aboriginal families can achieve safety, teach respect to their children, have control over their environment, share language and culture;
- Self-determination must be at the heart of all public policies and service delivery to move away from a mainstream system and towards one that is culturally appropriate;
- The provision of cultural training for public servants and not-for-profit organisation employees to ensure appropriate and consistent responses to requests for assistance and tenancy management;
- Support and mentoring for Aboriginal people working in the public service;
- Cultural advice made available for all housing providers including government and non-government;
- Community housing providers encouraged to develop and implement a Reconciliation Action Plan;
- Data to be collected and shared publicly about Aboriginal tenancies: ie numbers of tenants and available houses; length of stay; reason for leaving/eviction and tenancy management in community and public housing;
- Data to be collected and shared publicly about ex-Aboriginal Housing Authority properties status; and
- Address debt and maintenance issues faced by Aboriginal people, especially elders caring for grandchildren.

SA State Strategic Plan extract: Reducing overcrowding by 10% by 2014 is stated as “on track” but it is argued, that the concept is not useful to describe inappropriate housing design and kinship obligations to accommodate family. Aboriginal cultural studies only appear in 40% of school curriculums – target not achieved.



Aboriginal Summit November 2013

Introduction

Shelter SA is the peak body for housing in South Australia. Shelter SA's vision is that all people have a safe, secure, appropriate and affordable place to call home and that housing is a human right. Without access to shelter, people cannot attain their other rights or their basic needs. Shelter SA has a particular focus on the issues experienced by Aboriginal people as our Nation's First Peoples. We have been communicating with a large network of Aboriginal people about housing and homelessness since 2008, holding regular meetings for a smaller number of people from the network to share information, discuss ideas and invite input into our work.

Shelter SA has collected a large number of stories about experiences people have had that revolve around being unable to access the housing they need so that they have a place where they can settle, send their children to school, gain and keep employment and look after themselves and their families. Housing is the foundation upon which people can reach their goals and nurture their families.

Aims

Leading up to the South Australian election in March 2014 Shelter SA has spoken with Aboriginal people directly to hear about their **positive** experiences and visions for a better future. If governments and the community want to see results from Government policies such as 'Closing the Gap', 'Every Chance for Every Child' and reducing Aboriginal overrepresentation in homelessness, the justice system, unemployment and poor health statistics we must provide guidance to political leaders and attempt to shape their vision for South Australia. The purpose of the Shelter SA gatherings was to ask the political parties in South Australia to include the results of this consultation in their plans for the future of the State.



When people talk about problems, they often unintentionally magnify the very problems they hope to resolve. When we focus on problem-solving we are assuming that something is broken and needs to be fixed. Looking at issues as being deficient or lacking can undermine human organising and motivation, because it creates a sense of threat, separation, defensiveness and deference to experts. Problem solving as a way of inspiring and sustaining change is limited. But there is another way – to look at people and systems in a positive way – that they are full of assets, capabilities, resources, and strengths that can be identified and repeated.

Positive questions can inspire, intrigue, delight, clarify, invite and build community. They can create pathways to positive experiences, help people to reflect on issues of importance and notice what is of value. For example, the question “how did you learn to do such a good job?” honours an individual’s skill and generates useful information about creating a path to work for others. The question “how can we support and learn from your community?” assumes there is much to be learned and invites relationship and trust. “How can we get this done now and how can I help?” infers confidence in an idea and a readiness to act on it. A positive connection is reinforced by asking "What makes you glad to live in this country?" instead of "What are the biggest problems here". Shifting ownership of the future to citizens is activated by "What can you do to make a difference?"

A focus on positive stories can teach us lessons about what we want in the future:

- Housing, health, education and employment must be looked at as one interconnected system not separately and must be culturally appropriate;
- Aboriginal people want and need control over their own lives and decisions that affect them; and
- We need to create the right environment to allow strengths to grow.

Shelter SA aimed to create an environment to assist participants to see themselves as part of a community they can actively change rather than as objects of a system that limits their imagination or determines their actions.

Methods

The methods utilised were based on Appreciative Inquiry¹ (activities 1 to 3) and the KJ Method, after its author Kawakita Jiro², more commonly known as the Affinity Diagram

¹ See Cooperrider, D., Whitney, D. (2005). [Appreciative Inquiry : A Positive Revolution in Change](#). Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

² Kawakita, J. (1973) The KJ Method and my Dream towards the “Heuristic” Regional Geography, Japanese Journal of Human Geography, Vol. 25, Issue 5.

(activity 4). In total there were 25 participants in the consultation. 83.3% of participants at the Adelaide Summit identified as Aboriginal and at the Murray Bridge Summit, 14.2% of participants. The workshop activities were:

- Step 1. Positive stories - We asked participants to work in small groups of two or three people to share positive stories about their lives and used prompts to encourage discussion. Participants chose a scribe and someone to report back to the large group.
- Step 2. Messages from the stories – Participants were asked to contribute a word or short phrase to describe the main positive message emanating from their stories.
- Step 3. Advice, questions, statements and challenges arising from the messages – Participants were asked to use their positive messages to formulate statements and questions.
- Step 4. An Affinity activity allowed participants to sort the statements and advice into groupings without interference from facilitators and decide on headings for the groupings.
- Step 5. Participants were then asked to mark (with a pink heart-shaped sticker) which statements and questions they felt were the most important, again without inference from facilitators.

Results

Steps 1 & 2 - Positive Stories & Messages

Participants were asked to share positive stories in small groups. One participant commented “there’s nothing positive about housing”. Some participants struggled to think of a positive story that related to housing but by the end of the session, all participants could see the positives within their stories. Many of the stories started with a negative situation such as spending time in prison, being homeless or struggling but they all illustrated strengths and how people overcame hardship, being treated poorly, harsh conditions and hard times.

In general stories were not explicitly about housing or homelessness however, during the introductions it was suggested that housing, health, education and employment are linked and cannot be thought of separately. Participants established that a safe, affordable home is critical as the basis upon which to build their lives with the benefits of support, mentoring, respect, culture and safety.

Table 1 presents the results of this activity.

Table 1 Positive Stories

Stories	Positive Messages	
Having a home to go to and support are vital	Care	Housing
	Support	Understanding
People start motivating others by improving themselves	Role Models	Support
	Attitudes	Strong Family
Parents are role models for their children; "our grannies" are our strength	Respect	Sharing
	Honesty	Care
We draw strength from being able to stand up and speak for ourselves	Tradition	Language
	Culture	Dreaming
Support is a critical element when people are struggling	Health	Housing
	Support	Rehabilitate
Role models and mentors help raise children amidst adversity	Motivations	Listening
	Culture	
Getting to know family again after being removed as a child	Understanding	Empathy
	Apologising	
"Kids know they can come to my house" – they know where to find me and safety, then I can teach them about respect and responsibility	Security	Community
	Support	Respect
"My daughter is the first Aboriginal person to every attend the world titles"	Discipline	Safety
	Assertive	Protection
Family home is important	Security	Choice
	Family	
Family is important, so we can look after each other	Family	Support
	Safety	
We have a heart and will always take people into our home	Control	Choice
	Culture	
Mentoring is important for young people at risk of homelessness	Role Models	
"Mother was a strong woman, she had a hard life but nothing stopped her from moving upwards and onwards"	Empathy	Understanding
	Respect	Families
It is so important to us to keep our children safe and give them a good upbringing	Role Models	Morals
	Family	

Recognising Human Rights



Advocacy and culturally appropriate support is needed

Tenant Knowledge & Empowerment

Housing SA have all these values they want staff to possess but they don't use them at regional offices.
Housing SA is not customer friendly – "lift your game".
Don't be punished for the actions of a few [tenants].
Aboriginal Housing [Authority] to be re-instated.
Has been mainstreamed.
Need to have Aboriginal Housing agencies again
Be accountable!
Introduction package for tenants.

Community Funding & Resources



More funding for individuals with mental health issues going to people who need it.
State to lobby to maintain Aboriginal legal services.
Housing affordability for all Aboriginal families.

Effective & Real Engagement



Listen to your constituents for once!
Listen to the people.
Have an attitude that it is a privilege to house families, instead of families jumping through hoops to please you.
Young people re-connect with elders and their culture.
Mutual agreement between tenant and authority.
Nungas know what Nungas want.
We are not nuclear families.
Respect for all.

Increase Employment Strategies at Decision Making

Levels ♥

Have cultural sensitivity and identify culturally appropriate support services.
Put people who have empathy and understanding in key positions, who support struggling families and individuals.
More jobs for Aboriginal people.
Mainstream workers to understand [Aboriginal] culture more.
Aboriginal [liaison or contact] person at every region.
Understand that Aboriginal people live all across the state and need to be assisted – not just on the APY lands.
A lot of resources go into the lands but we live in the city too.

Cultural Integrity, Safety and Practice



Without culture we ♥ can't pass on our history or our muda-stories. Stories to teach skills and lores for living.
Cultural safety!
Work closely with community to address issues around housing and child protection. If no suitable housing can have children removed.
Can we have housing where families can nominate what Housing SA trust site they wish to live – so families can all live together in their own houses and create community again?
Need a 'change of guard' at heads of government who's department has programs that work for Aboriginal communities?
Understand cultural obligations regarding housing needs.
Without language, we can't have culture.
How will you make sure your government will be culturally aware?
Cultural awareness at grass roots level.
Understanding culture at all levels. Must be authentic.
Understanding diversity of Aboriginal cultures and obligations.
Recognise that Aboriginal tenants have obligations to their community and it should be reflected in policies.
Policies don't reflect community needs.
Maintaining culture amongst young Aboriginal people.
Develop stronger understanding of family relationships.

1 ♥ = 1 affinity vote from participants

Steps 3 to 5 – Advice, Affinity & Voting

Participants were asked to write the key advice or questions emanating from their stories on post-it notes. These were placed and grouped on a wall *by the participants* to create categories. The categories identify key ways policy can reflect positive influences in Aboriginal culture and the key themes are presented below.



Pic 1 Participants discussing/grouping advice

Key Theme 1 - Recognising Human Rights

This theme was placed above all of the other categories as an overarching heading by the participants. It is important to note that participants did not want the title 'Aboriginal rights', as they believed this created a distinction between human rights and Aboriginal rights. It was established by the participants that without recognising their basic human rights in a way that goes beyond just reconciliation and 'Sorry Day', none of the other themes will ever be addressed. Shelter SA describes housing as a basic human right. For Aboriginal people, who are overrepresented in homelessness statistics, this theme speaks to the heart of issues around poorer health, lower school retention and higher unemployment in the Aboriginal population.

Key Theme 2 - Cultural Integrity, Safety and Practice "Our Grannies are our strength"

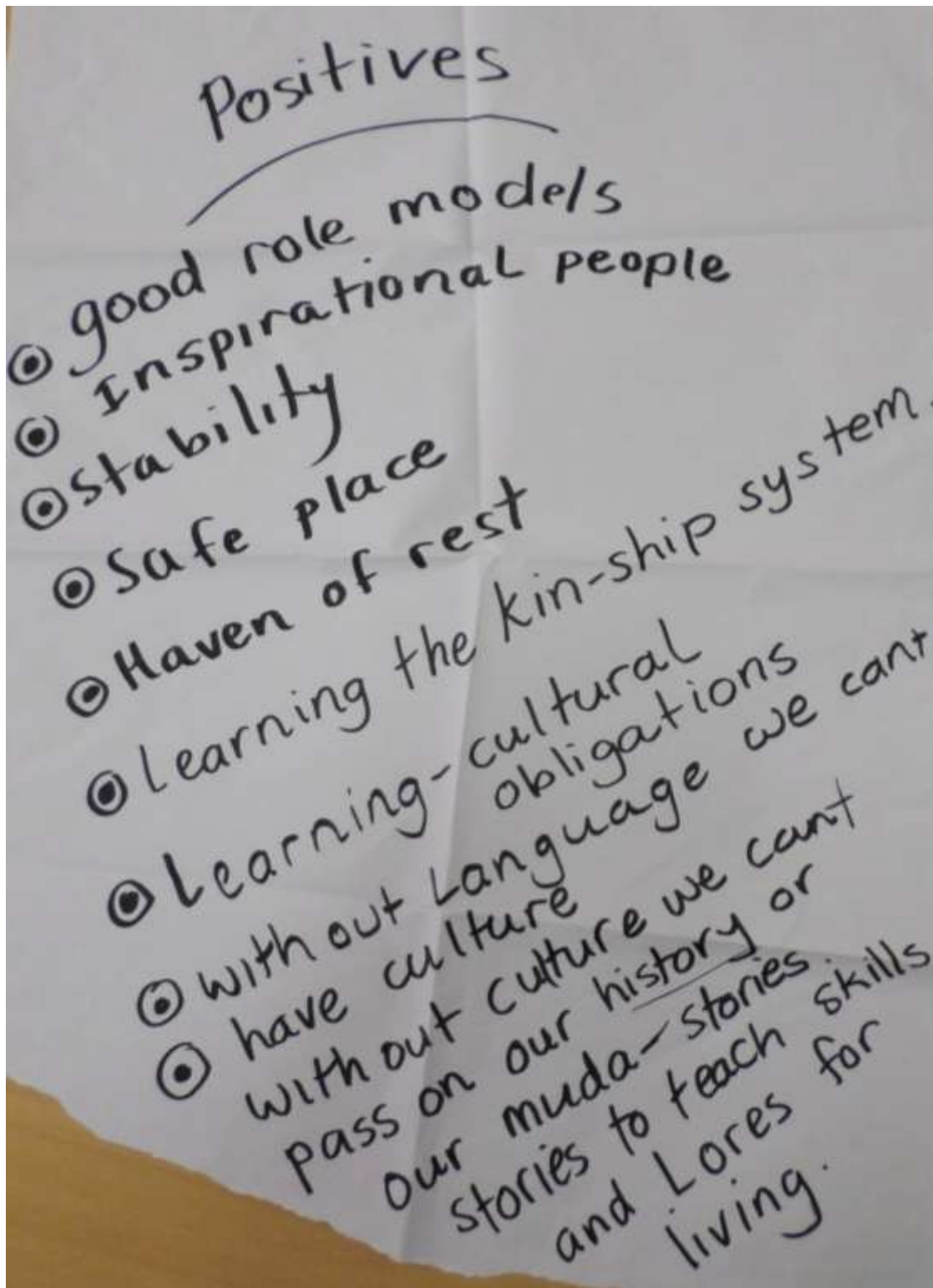
Culture was a prevalent issue voiced by the participants and formed the heading for the most densely populated grouping of advice. The advice was centred on the lack of community awareness of housing policies that work to disadvantage Aboriginal families and create rules that impede their ability to share their homes with extended family. A loss of culture was also feared by the group through the lack of safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing. Those who have carried the traditions are now aged and young people are not being taught 'muda stories' or 'lores' designed to provide identity and morality. The mainstreaming of housing policy has created a sense of cultural insensitivity. Some messages stated, "how will you make sure your government will remain

culturally sensitive”, and a call for “cultural awareness at [a] grass roots level”. One person simply stated that “policies don’t reflect community needs”. Despite the promises in policy shift within *Housing SA Blueprint 2013 -2018 - Connecting People to Place*, culture is being neglected in the mainstreaming process and this theme highlights how culture is an untapped resource available to policy-makers should they aim to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal people. Shelter SA has commented publicly about the mainstreaming of public housing and homelessness policies and service delivery on several occasions, calling for an Aboriginal led community housing organisation to be established in SA. Making cultural advice available to community housing providers could also assist them to better understand the context so they could be more effective when educating Aboriginal people about their rights and responsibilities and attend to tenancy issues.

Female Aboriginal Elders were noted by participants as a particular source of family and cultural strength. Many of the participants are grandmothers who are referred to as “Grannies” and who are raising their grandchildren. The Grannies meet regularly at the Parks Community Centre to share information and conduct advocacy. Working together against adversity they have shown great perseverance and strength.



Pic 2 Positive messages relating to ‘Effective and Real Engagement’.



Pic 3 Positive messages participants drew from their own positive stories.

Key Theme 3 - Effective and Real Engagement

Participants at the Shelter SA Summit strongly emphasised that Aboriginal voices need to be heard in decision-making processes. Much of the advice centred on the idea that Aboriginal people know what Aboriginal people need, but are not being included or heard. One participant's advice paper

asked the decision makers to “listen to your constituents for once”, whilst another simply asked for “respect for all”. The dynamic nature of Aboriginal families was mentioned as something that is overlooked as a result of mainstreaming, and calls were made to reconnect young people with elders. This theme calls on decision makers to effectively and legitimately engage with Aboriginal people rather than enforcing their ideas upon other cultures. Shelter SA has repeatedly made recommendations to State and Local Governments about the necessity to include Aboriginal people in community responses to homelessness.

Key Theme 4 - Tenant Knowledge and Empowerment

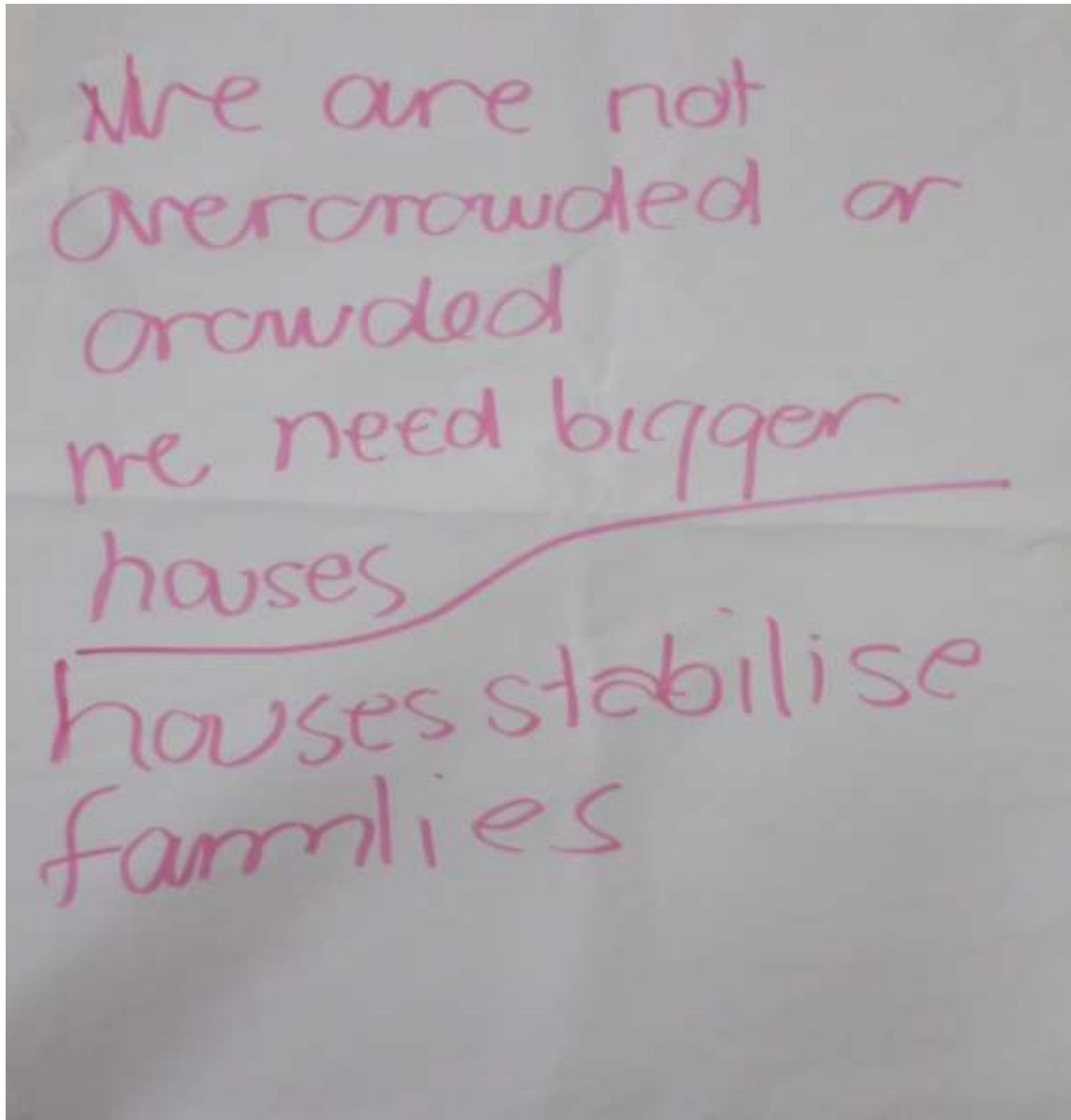
This theme was directed at procedural and policy issues related to Housing SA and housing affordability. It was expressed that the housing system is “not customer friendly” and that a lack of accountability exists within the system. Many Aboriginal people feel disadvantaged because of negative stigma and some staff in regional areas not upholding key cultural values. The participants also believed that tenants are unaware of their rights and need to be given introduction and information packages, as knowledge can lead to empowerment. This theme calls for a reassessment of the system and the reinstatement of an Aboriginal Housing Association to address the lack of tenant knowledge and culturally appropriate services.

Key Theme 5 – Increase Aboriginal employment targets especially at decision making levels

Participants called for an increase in Aboriginal employment targets within the public service, especially at the decision making level to ensure higher levels of empathy and understanding as a practical way to assist Aboriginal people to access the mainstream system and to create more culturally appropriate policy and service provision. Participants agreed that despite culture being seen as a strength of Aboriginal people, it is not recognised or included in policy development or implementation. One participant said, “this [the current situation of Aboriginal people] is a result of mainstreaming and a lack of Aboriginal workers in the field”. Another participant stated a need for at least one “Aboriginal person at every region”. Policies and workers who deal with housing issues for Aboriginal people must understand and respect Aboriginal culture as a basic skill set and continue to learn and reflect upon their knowledge.

Key Theme 6 - Community Funding and Resource

The participants highlighted that there needs to be financial investment in Aboriginal housing for progress to be made. One piece of advice from this group was that there needs to be “more funding for individuals with mental health issues going to people who need it”. This theme identifies the lack of affordable housing options for Aboriginal people, especially those experiencing mental health issues.



Pic 4 Positive messages participants drew from their own positive stories.

Key Theme 7 – “We are not overcrowded!!”

A safe, affordable home is key to family and culture. Participants stressed that they are not crowded or overcrowded – they live in extended family groups. Culturally appropriate housing to accommodate families larger than traditional nuclear families would see people living with adequate space, privacy and storage room. An increase in the supply of affordable housing would likewise act to increase the options available to people who wish to move on from staying with family especially when tensions arise due to living in accommodation that is too small for large families.

Conclusion

The message board centred on advice derived from positive stories from Aboriginal people presents the most important ways in which policy can be improved. There was a belief that the starting point

must be recognition of the human rights of our Nation's First Peoples. The ongoing theme of the advice was the importance of culture.

Affinity Diagram

Voting

The product of the anecdotes and subsequent messages was to create a platform for the participants to identify their affinity to key messages. Participants were asked to mark, with a heart sticker, which statements and questions they felt were the most important, again without inference from facilitators.



Pic 5 Affinity Diagram with messages from participants placed under self-identified categories. Hearts represent affinity shown by participants for a certain message

The results of this activity showed clear affinity towards human rights (58%). It is interesting to note that this heading was not originally placed on the wall, but was recommended by the group during the open group discussion. Because the advice was delivered as a group, it is understandable that the majority of participants would then show a collective affinity to it. The exercise does indicate that recognising human rights, as opposed to the opposed notion of 'Aboriginal rights', is the starting point for change from participants' perspective.

Fig 1. Adelaide Summit Affinity Diagram Responses



The two other messages that received priority represented themes that had been prevalent throughout the Shelter SA Summit. The importance of understanding and using culture as a means of developing appropriate housing policy, and the need to engage and educate tenants represent two practical ways change could be made. The messages also highlighted two areas in which Aboriginal people felt the biggest need for change. The importance of culture was further demonstrated when the advice centring on muda-stories and lores was given a priority during the voting process.

Whilst the advice board covered a wide range of issues that could be changed by analysing positive stories from Aboriginal people, the Affinity exercise allowed for the depth of the issues to be understood. The results highlight the issues that are most important to participants;

- Rights
- Culture
- Engagement

Evaluation

Participants were provided with evaluation forms and their responses have been collated. Feedback was extremely positive and the main messages were that people are keen to meet again with a longer session to allow for more detailed discussion and input. When participants were asked what they least enjoyed about the gatherings 44% responded that there was “nothing they did not enjoy”, 20% did not like stories that focussed on negatives and 7% felt that more time was needed.

Fig 2. How Valuable Did You Find Today's Summit?

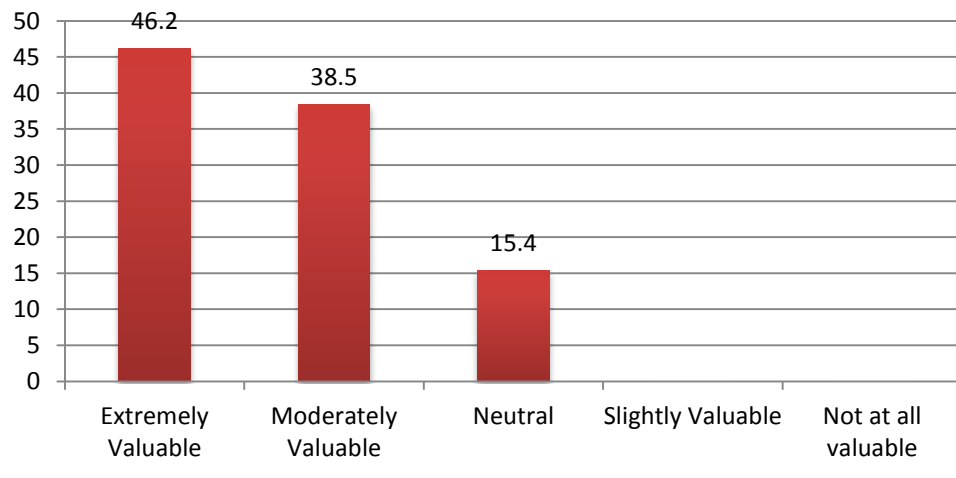


Fig 3. What Did You Most Enjoy?

