

ACT Shelter

Sixth Annual Report

2001/2002



Level 1 Civic Youth Centre
14 Cooyong Street
PO Box 894
Civic Square ACT 2608

Ph: 02 6247 37 27
Fax: 02 6247 3474
Email: actshe@atrax.net.au

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ACT Shelter Inc Constitutional Objectives

1. To promote and maintain the right of every person to access affordable, safe and secure long term housing that they identify as appropriate to their needs.
2. To promote and maintain the right of every person to housing of a quality which enhances people's health, well-being, dignity and life opportunities.
3. To promote the benefits of public and community housing, and other forms of housing assistance in the community and all spheres of government.
4. To publish, collect, research and disseminate information on matters relating to the provision of housing, particularly for people on low to moderate incomes
5. To create opportunities to support, establish resource and co-ordinate non-government organisations and agencies with similar interests and objectives to the Association.
6. To promote opportunities for members of the community to access housing provision free from discrimination as a result of factors including, but not limited to, age, gender, ethnicity, health status or disability.
7. To promote and support consumer and community participation in decision making in relation to their housing and to promote access to avenues of appeal across all housing tenures.
8. ACT Shelter is a Non-Profit organisation that aims to eliminate housing related poverty.

Management Committee Members

Current Members

the Rev. David Webster	Chairperson
Deborah Phippen	Secretary
Joanne Monteith	Treasurer
Eduard Duyvan	Member
Sherryl Allen	Member
Marion Reilly	Member
Caitlin Stephen	Member
Dawn Tracey	Member

Staff

Angela Seymour	CEO
Evie Kollas	Financial Manager

Chair's Report

In my last annual report I drew attention to, and welcomed, the increasing awareness in government and bureaucratic circles of the great and growing inadequacy of the quantity of 'affordable' housing and the associated growth of the number of households experiencing 'housing stress' – defined as households in which more than 30% of the household income is pre-empted by housing costs.

This awareness has continued to grow. There is now a clear recognition that it is by no means extravagant to speak of a housing 'crisis'. It is pleasing to record that the ACT Government is paying quite serious attention to this crisis, and seeking solutions. The revived and better-resourced Housing Advisory Committee and the newly-established Affordable Housing Task Group have both been working hard - and to timetables that recognise the community importance of housing and the urgency of finding realistic solutions to the critical shortage of affordable housing.

ACT Shelter is represented on both these important groups and continues to be extremely well-served by the calibre and devotion of its staff (Angela Seymour and Evie Kollas) and by the varied talents and experience of its board members. I express my thanks and the thanks of our membership to all of them.

We are also grateful to note that the Government has abandoned the program of transferring public housing stock to community management as any kind of solution to the problem of increasing the quantity of social housing. Two apparently intractable aspects of the task continue to cause concern. The first is that housing for the community has to compete for scarce funds with health and education for the community but that housing needs are not yet seen as being of the same importance as the other two. The benefits to the community of safe and affordable housing for all are not yet seen. The dangers to the community of the large and growing lack of such housing are not yet seen either.

The second is the continuing inability of governments (of all political persuasions) to arrive at 'solutions' that genuinely improve the supply side of the housing equation. Rent assistance scarcely does this – becoming all too easily a mere subsidy to landlords and developers. Means of attracting private and municipal investment into the intentional construction and maintenance of affordable (as distinct from 'up-market') housing are increasingly being discussed but are still mostly in the 'too hard' basket. Until this changes, the word for the appropriate housing of all members of the community will remain 'grim'.

The Reverend David Webster,
August 2002

Activity Report

Staffing

Both Angela Seymour and Evie Kollas have remained as our staff members throughout the year. Evie is contracted for five hours per week and Angela for a nine-day fortnight.

Funding

ACT Shelter's service purchasing contract was formally signed with the former Department of Health, Housing and Community Care in October 2001. Since that time responsibility for our funding has moved to Urban Services and then to the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

Negotiations for the 2002/3 funding commenced in May 2002 and we are very pleased to announce that we have been offered an enhanced amount of funding. This will enable us to slightly increase staff hours and hold a series of consultations on a new Commonwealth/State/Territory Housing Agreement which expires in July 2003.

Forums

Our main avenue of community consultation, information exchange and networking is by way of our monthly forums. This year saw forums on the following topics:

Affordable Housing
New Initiatives for ACT Housing
Tenant Participation
Accommodation Options for Newly Arrived Migrants
The Review of the Residential Tenancies Act
ACT Housing Policy Initiatives
Homeless Men with Families
Community Linkages
ACT Minister for Housing – budget initiatives
Homelessness Needs Analysis

Several of the Forums were attended by invited speakers, to whom we would like to express our thanks, once again.

Planning Processes

We held two Planning Days this year. One in June and one in August 2002. The first was to discuss our future directions for the year. Such issues as ACT Shelter office premises, forum topics and a consultation strategy for the negotiations of the next Commonwealth State Housing Agreement were detailed. The second planning day was to look at a restructure of staffing in the light of the increased funding awarded to ACT Shelter in the next financial year.

Consultation

ACT Shelter was contracted this year to hold community consultations as a part of the Affordable Housing Task Force. This Task Force was an initiative of the new government in response to the findings of the Poverty Report 2000. The consultations were held in 5 different locations throughout Canberra and drew participants who are in housing stress as tenants and home owners. The report of the consultations will form part of the final Affordable Housing Task Force report due for presentation to the Minister for Housing in October 2002. ACT Shelter is one of 14 members of the Task Force, drawn from industry, government and the community sector.

ACT Shelter consults with the Chief Minister's Department as a member of the ACT Government's Community Sector/Government Reference Group. The group has been set up by the Chief Minister's Department to:

Monitor and provide strategic advice on the implementation of key ACT Government policies relating to the community sector in the ACT. The reference group is monitoring a wide range of government initiatives including the formulation of a Social Plan for Canberra announced by the incoming Government at the end of last year.

Following a consultant's report to Government on the future directions of community housing in the ACT, a series of workshops were held to discuss its findings. ACT Shelter in attending these workshops was able to ensure that tenant's rights regarding equity of access, and protection under the tenancy legislation were not overlooked.

With the Government's new emphasis of supporting public and community housing tenants to link in with their communities, a steering committee has recently been set up to monitor programs that have been funded under this initiative. ACT Shelter has been invited to be a member of this committee.

The Government has initiated reviews of both the Residential Tenancies Act and Ainslie Village this year and ACT Shelter is represented on both review bodies.

Meetings with Members of the Legislative Assembly have occurred throughout the year. Amongst issues raised were the continuing concern regarding the lack of security of tenure for public housing tenants, housing issues for young people, the future directions of community housing, the 2002/03 ACT Budget and changes to Planning guidelines which may impact on the supply of social housing.

We also continue to meet on a regular basis with ACT Housing regarding procedural issues for tenants and applicants for public housing.

Other Activities

Tenancy Week, an annual event to coincide with International Tenants Day, was celebrated in the ACT at the beginning of November 2001 with stalls and a band in

Garema Place. Information stalls were staffed by ACT Housing and the Tenants Union in all shopping centres throughout the week and planning for this year's event to be held from 21-27 October is well underway.

Our links to our colleagues in Shelter organisations throughout Australia continue to be close. Representatives from all Shelters met in March in Adelaide where unfortunately a decision was made that lack of funds no longer allowed the National Shelter magazine "Housing Action" to be produced. Since the Federal Government defunded National Shelter in 1997 this magazine has been produced twice yearly through subscriptions, remaining funds and being heavily subsidized by some State Shelters. The decision was made to produce a broadsheet which will be paid for by contributions from State and Territory Shelters. As a result, ACT Shelter has had to raise its membership fees slightly in order to cover these costs.

The Australian Housing and Research Institute (AHURI) have held a series of seminars this year to highlight the housing research being carried out by various university partnerships in the lead up to the renegotiation of the Commonwealth State and Territory Housing Agreement which expires in July 2003. ACT Shelter attended seminars in Sydney and Canberra and was able to input into discussion about policy implications of various research projects.

ACT Shelter is also a member of the ACT Peaks Forum, and is represented on the ACTCOSS general committee.

Submissions:

- ACT Budget. The 2002/2003 budget process commenced early in the year and the ACT Shelter submission was made to the Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity in March. This was followed by a submission and appearance at the Estimates Committee in July.
- Inquiry into the health of school-age children
- Inquiry into Section 56
- Inquiry into the Rights, interests and well-being of children and young people

Newsletter:

The ACT Shelter newsletter continues to be mailed out once per month to members and is seen as a major component of our consultation process. We welcome any feedback on format or content. The newsletter is also available on our web-site.

Membership:

Our membership has remained stable at around 104 members this year. We were especially pleased to welcome Southside Community Services and Marymead Services as members this year. Unfortunately, due to the dire financial position of our national body, National Shelter, we have had to ask our members for a small levy to contribute to its continuing survival. National Shelter was defunded in 1996 and has been surviving on one off projects and voluntary input from State and Territory

Shelters since then. This levy will be added to membership as they come up for renewal.

Finally I would like to thank all members of ACT Shelter and our hardworking Management Committee for all the commitment and support that you have given to the staff over the past year. We trust that certainty of funding will enable us to tackle the ongoing job of ensuring low to moderate income earners have access to affordable, appropriate, accessible and secure housing.

Angela Seymour
Executive Officer
ACT Shelter
August 2002

Treasurer's Report

2001/2002 was ACT Shelter's sixth year of funding. This year's budget is in surplus, by \$6,608.12 as compared to a deficit of \$1,165.01 in the previous financial year.

We are happy to say that ACT Shelter's membership has continued to grow and this year we have one hundred and four members. Of these members eighty-three are organisational members; twenty-one are individual members.

We were able to avoid, perhaps for the last time, registering for GST. The increased compliance costs will impact on the organisational expenses, in the next financial year and this must be kept in mind in the 2002/2003 financial period. I hope that funding will be secured on a long-term basis so as to allow a more effective long-term plan to be developed with community and government involvement.

I have enjoyed my year as Treasurer and would sincerely like to thank Evie for all of her hard work and the support that she has given to me. Once again, she has ensured the accountability and accuracy of financial records of ACT Shelter as well as her strong commitment to the values of the organisation

I would also like to thank Angela Seymour for all of her hard work, cooperation and commitment.

Lastly, ACT Shelter wishes to thank the ACT Department of Health, Housing and Community Care for their financial assistance.

Joanne Monteith
Treasurer