

Hobart Women's Shelter
Response to the Consultation Brief for the Third Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence
Action Plan
May 2022

Introduction

The Hobart Women's Shelter (HWS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback for consideration in the development of the Third Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan. Comments made in this submission are focused on the issues that specifically relate to the homelessness of women, children and families, many of whom have experienced family violence. Our response is also targeted to 'Action 20: Invest in crisis accommodation through the Affordable Housing Action Plan 2019-2023' as set out in the 2019-2022 Action Plan.

The Hobart Women's Shelter has been operating since 1974 and is Australia's second longest serving provider of crisis accommodation to women and children experiencing homelessness and/or family violence. This feedback is informed by HWS's experience, knowledge and expertise about the impacts on, and possible solutions for, women and children who need access to crisis accommodation.

HWS welcomes practical and legislative initiatives that seek to reduce family violence and homelessness for Tasmanian families. The Third Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan represents an important opportunity to deliver meaningful reform in this area.

As one of Australia's longest serving providers of crisis accommodation to women and children, HWS knows all too well the challenges and frustrations involved with increasing service demands and insufficient resources to help women, children, and families in desperate need.

HWS calls on the Tasmanian Government to intervene in homelessness and family violence through the delivery of measures outlined in this submission in partnership with HWS and other women's specialist services.

The Current Shelter Model

Since March 2018, Hobart Women's Shelter (HWS) has been located at South Hobart. The Shelter comprises of 15 units on site, 10 pods, an administration centre, a playground, an activities room for younger children and a teenage activity room. HWS is funded to provide crisis/emergency accommodation. The units themselves have mixed bedroom configurations with 6 x 1 bedroom units, 17 x two-bedroom units/pods and 2 x 3-bedroom units. Two of the units have disability access but have limitations. In addition, we provide transitional accommodation to families in homes located at Mt Nelson.

In July 2020, the Department of Communities funded the installation of 10 x two-bedroom pods. These pods are converted shipping containers and were installed as a temporary

solution to provide additional crisis shelter. They have been installed on Hobart City Council land under a peppercorn lease and are currently leased until July 2023.

The site is securely fenced and has key card vehicular and resident security access. The site is monitored by CCTV. All communal areas and entrances have security cameras. A peripheral beam monitors the inside perimeter of the back fence which raises an alarm if security is breached. Units and pods are equipped with duress alarms, and workers have access to portable duress alarms when working at night.

From the 27 April 2021 – 27 April 2022, 21.5% of the 247 women and children that accessed our Crisis Shelter identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

The Hobart Women's Shelter has identified 3 key issues to be considered in the Third Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan

1. Investment in long-term affordable housing for women and children experiencing Family and Sexual Violence
2. Investment in additional crisis accommodation and service support for women and children experiencing Family and Sexual Violence
3. Our experiences of service gaps that need to be addressed to support women and children experiencing Family and Sexual Violence.

1. Investment in long-term affordable housing for women and children experiencing Family and Sexual Violence

The Issue

Tasmania is in the midst of a housing crisis. The lack of permanent social housing for women in Tasmania impacts the ability of the Hobart Women's Shelter to provide crisis accommodation as women are staying for longer as there are very limited permanent housing solutions for them.

The recent Equity Economics Report: Nowhere To Go - The Benefits Of Providing Long Term Social Housing To Women That Have Experienced Domestic And Family Violence¹ states that family and domestic violence is the primary reason women and children seek specialist homelessness services, but only 3.2% are currently receiving the long-term housing solutions they need.

The State Government's Housing Dashboard (Oct 2021) shows that the average waiting time for priority housing applicants had gone up from 57.4 weeks in November 2020 to 78 weeks

¹ Equity Economics 2021, *Nowhere to go - The benefits of providing long term social housing to women that have experienced domestic and family violence*. www.equityeconomics.com.au

in October 2021 and the number of applications on the housing register has increased from 3755 to 4506 over the same period.

Housing Outcomes for Women leaving Hobart Women's Shelter May 1st 2021 - 30th April 2022

From 1/5/21 – 30/4/2022, 139 women accessed crisis accommodation at the Hobart Women's Shelter. There were 32 housing outcomes (23%) vs. 69.7% the 20/21 financial year. For those that didn't achieve a housing outcome they exited back into homelessness, returned to unsafe living conditions, and went back to sleeping in cars or living in unsuitable living conditions and on the street.

This lack of a permanent housing solution in Tasmania with a focus on women and children will have damaging social, psychological, and educational repercussions for this generation and the next unless something can be done to change this.

The Solution

The Nowhere To Go² Report shows that there is an immediate need for an additional 16,810 social housing units in Australia, to provide women somewhere to go when their only option is to leave their homes due to domestic and family violence. Equity Economics analysis shows that the provision of 16,810 social housing units would:

- Cost up to \$7.6 billion, with costs to Government potentially lower through partnering with community housing providers and utilising other innovative financing models;
- Deliver immediate economic benefits of \$15.3 billion and create 47,000 jobs across the economy;
- Would avoid \$122.5 million in a year in costs due to women returning to a violent partner; and
- Would avoid \$257 million a year in costs due to women experiencing homelessness after leaving their homes due to family and domestic violence.

Investing in safe, quality housing for women and children facing family and sexual violence delivers national economic benefits, creates jobs, saves lives and avoids government budget costs in the longer term when women and children come to crisis medical and housing services.

The Hobart Women's Shelter is embarking on a project that aims to increase the number of permanent homes for women and children facing homelessness. We are developing a

² Equity Economics 2021, *Nowhere to go - The benefits of providing long term social housing to women that have experienced domestic and family violence.* www.equityeconomics.com.au

prototype for a house that uses rapid assembly and other methods to provide a greater guarantee of the price per housing unit and length of time to deliver.

Building more permanent homes for women and children means that there are more exit points from the Shelter and consequently more women and children experiencing family violence and homelessness will be able to access Hobart Women's Shelter crisis accommodation services.

Based on discussions with women with lived experience of violence and homelessness, this project aims to create homes that are uniquely designed to ensure safety, respect and connection to community. The prototype also incorporates research on trauma-informed design.

50 Homes by HWS 50th Anniversary

The Paul Ramsay Shelter from The Storm Report states *'The undersupply of medium and long-term accommodation for women and children living with domestic and family violence means thousands of women seeking help are left without a safe and secure place to stay, leaving them trapped – a feeling which is exacerbated when there are children involved and at risk.'*

The Hobart Women's Shelter currently has 25 crisis units. Our plan is to expand the accommodation options for women by building a further 25 permanent / long-term homes over the next 3 years.

In total 50 homes to mark 50 years of service by the Hobart Women's Shelter.

We need more permanent / long-term housing options for women affected by family violence so they can leave life threatening relationships without the fear of homelessness.

Through fundraising efforts, we have purchased a block of land and have received partial funding to build the first Prototype. This block of land will accommodate 2 x 2-bedroom homes.

To complete our first two homes, we need to raise a further \$650,000. As part of the response measures under the Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan we ask that support of this initiative be considered.

Please see attached: Attachment 1: Brochure. Attachment 2: Plans for the build of the 2 homes.

2. Investment in additional crisis accommodation and service support for women and children experiencing Family and Sexual Violence

The Issue

The Hobart Women's Shelter supports women from almost all Local Government Areas in Tasmania. Recent data from the Hobart Women's Shelter shows a disturbingly large number of women and children were turned away from the Hobart Women's Shelter during the last 22 months. From July 2020 - April 2022, 1005 women and 1189 accompanying children from across Tasmania sought crisis accommodation at the Hobart Women's Shelter.

1706 women and children seeking accommodation at the Hobart Women's Shelter were turned away due to a lack of space. This represents 8 out of 10 women and 8 out of 10 accompanying children turned away from our crisis accommodation services. These figures are more than double the national number of women who are turned away from crisis accommodation across Australia. Every day our staff take calls from women experiencing family violence, women thinking that we have capacity to help them.

The lack of capacity to meet the ever-increasing demand for housing in the short term has affected the movement of women through and out of the HWS. The fundamental consequence of this is that many women are turned away from HWS each day, as their accommodation needs cannot be met. The availability of crisis accommodation to deal with the immediate need for safety and then being provided with assistance to access safe, secure and affordable permanent housing is a fundamental human right.³ Access to affordable and safe housing is necessary for women escaping domestic violence and for whom their home is an unsafe place to live to re-build and re-establish their lives.⁴

We have great concern for the many women turned away for HWS every day. Without access to crisis accommodation women run the risk of remaining in a cycle of abuse and homelessness or return to perpetrators due to the lack of alternative accommodation.

Women in Tasmania form 72% of all people who are not assisted by specialist homelessness services in Tasmania. This represents the highest proportion of women unassisted in any State in Australia. In 2020/2021 the Hobart Women's Shelter received around 40% of all calls for crisis accommodation in Tasmania. (AIHW SHS Data 2020/2021).

Women and their children have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID19 pandemic and that the growth of social housing for women in Tasmania has not kept pace with the need. The pandemic has increased the economic stress and vulnerability faced by hundreds of

³ Tually, S. 2008c, *Why women and housing?* briefing paper prepared for Security4Women, Southern Research Centre, AHURI, Flinders University, Adelaide, June 2008

⁴ Tually, S. 2008b, *Understanding the housing careers of people who have divorced, families, those who have left home ownership and public tenants in the 21st century*, Project E Report, Southern Research Centre, AHURI, Flinders University, Adelaide, January 2008

thousands of Australian families and women who never thought they would experience homelessness. Family violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women in Australia and, during COVID19, violence against women and girls has been named the shadow pandemic by UN Women. For the period of 27 April 21 – 27 April 22 63.10% of women that presented at HWS identified Family and Sexual Violence for the reason.

In mid-2020, in response to the pandemic, emergency 'surge funding' from the Paul Ramsay Foundation was provided to 33 women's shelters across Australia. There were strong links between fear of being homeless – especially with children – and remaining in family violence situations. The lack of stable housing was a key reason for women returning to a violent partner.

The demand for crisis accommodation outstrips the supply.

There is a clear need for investment in additional crisis accommodation options for women and their children, coupled with funding for specialist staff to supporting the many women experiencing Family and Sexual Violence in Tasmania.

The Solution

Investment into additional crisis accommodation and support services. Explore options to acquire some of the car park (owned by the Hobart City Council) or other land/houses that reside beside the HWS to build additional crisis units. Or further develop the current site to accommodate more women (building on top of the Administration building). HWS would require a small amount of funding to support additional women and children due to existing infrastructure and our organisational structure.

3. Our experiences of service gaps that need to be addressed to support women and children experiencing Family and Sexual Violence.

3a. Women with disabilities

The Issue

Women with limited mobility due to disability, chronic health issues or aging are not able to access shelter accommodation at the same rate as women without these limitations. There are no units at the Hobart Women's Shelter that could accommodate a woman in a wheelchair.

We have not been able to accommodate women in wheelchairs in the past, and where their Carer is the Perpetrator there is no funding for a "live in" Family Support Worker.

2 of our 25 units have been identified as Disability accessible. But it is only the bathroom that is accessible for a woman in a wheelchair. The kitchen is not accessible, i.e kitchen bench and cooking facilities are not adjustable.

The Solution

Consider a funding stream for women with disabilities experiencing Family and Sexual Violence to have live in Support Workers during a stay in crisis accommodation. Fast track access for funding through the NDIS. Modify existing facilities to accommodate women with a disability.

3b. Counselling services for children and young people experiencing family violence

The Issue

Waitlists for counselling with ACF and CHYPP are extensive exceeding 6-12 months and most families not able to access this support during their stay in crisis accommodation.

The Solution

Provide additional funding that provide for counselling services to support Women and Children experiencing Family and Sexual Violence.

3c. Extend the definition of what constitutes Family Violence under the Family Violence Act 2004 (Tas)

The Issue

Under the Act, family violence occurs where violent conduct is committed directly or indirectly against a person's spouse, partner or ex-partner. Spouse or partner is another person with whom the person is, or has been, in a marriage or 'significant' relationship, whether the couple are living together.

This limits a Victim/Survivors eligibility to access Specialist Family and Sexual Violence Services and appropriate Justice response. We have had cases where women are homeless and so is the Perpetrator but she has not been eligible for critical services as she was not living with the Perpetrator.

The Solution

Extend the definition of Family Violence to include Women that are experiencing Violence from a child, family relative, and Carer and, also to take into consideration where Women have been in a relationship with a Perpetrator but they are not living together.