

FINDING A PLACE: A WAY FORWARD OR A MEDIA HIJACK?

In December 2004, the WA EOC Report, *Finding a Place*, was launched with the theme of moving forward in the spirit of cooperation. Instead of public support for this important first step in addressing systemic inequity, a racist debate followed. TAS' Executive Officer, Rob Spinks, and Tenant Advocate, Debbie Wardle, examine the local media's role in contributing to the "racist storm".

The WA Equal Opportunity Commission released its long-awaited Report, "Finding a Place: An Inquiry into the Existence of Discriminatory Practices in Relation to the Provision of Public Housing and Related Services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Western Australia", on December 15th 2004. All speakers at the launch highlighted the importance of being socially responsive within the findings of the Report. Ted Wilkes and Yvonne Henderson, in particular, spoke at length about how the recommendations of *Finding a Place* could be used to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal tenants, Homeswest and the community in general, emphasising however, that these outcomes could only be attained if all stakeholders worked collaboratively.

While *Finding a Place* potentially has national implications for all Indigenous people and state housing bodies, the Inquiry was primarily concerned with the Western Australian State Government and Indigenous housing issues. Given the implications at a local level for improving housing and social arrangements for a collective of Western Australian citizens, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the local media would support such findings.

It is a well-established fact that the media has a role in framing public opinion on social issues. Given that public opinion can affect the climate for establishing political priorities and for developing social policies, the importance of this role should not be underestimated.

However, while welfare agencies and government departments such as the EOC attempt to place poverty before the public as an important and pressing social issue that governments have a responsibility to address, the attempt to do so is often hindered by competing unsympathetic media representations of welfare and social issues. And so it was with the release of *Finding a Place*.

A "racist storm"

On December 16th – the day after the launch of *Finding a Place* – the national paper, *The Australian*, ran an article, "Inside the squalor of Aboriginal lives", by Moira Raynor. In this article, Raynor states, "The report is expected to cause a racist storm. The people of WA are quick to judge its indigenous population ... as dirty, disruptive and rotten tenants whose children therefore deserve to live in squalor." *The West Australian*, as the largest and most influential local media voice, responded accordingly, and, while the storm was short-lived, a quick scan of letters to the editor between December 16 and 30, will confirm that it was most certainly racist.

The West Australian took the lead in discrediting the Report as politically correct hogwash with the front page headline on December 16th pronouncing, "Housing Policies Racist – Aboriginals should be given favourable treatment by Homeswest". That day's editorial further endorsed the newspaper's position, labelling *Finding a Place*, "a socially

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- The New Direction of CLE at TAS

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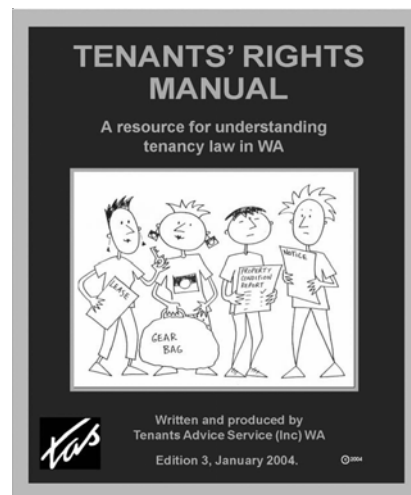
The new *Tenants' Rights Manual* (2004)

First published in 1993, *The Tenants' Rights Manual* has long been one of TAS' "mothership" publications and is still the only comprehensive resource manual on private housing tenancy rights in Western Australia.

Following changes to the law, the redevelopment of the *Tenants' Rights Manual* was a high priority in 2003/04. The third edition of the *Manual* has been revised, updated and expanded to include new material, and each of the fifty chapters presents a different aspect of the issues involved in private residential tenancies. It also includes sample court forms, tenancy agreements and applications, and letters.

Substantial changes have also been made to the presentation of the information. The *Manual* has a dual purpose built into its structure. Its loose-leaf format and fully cross-referenced chapters enables the *Tenants' Rights Manual* to function as both a tenancy resource for community workers and as information sheets for direct distribution to tenants. Workers are encouraged to make copies of relevant chapters to give to their clients, and TAS' fifty Tenancy Information Sheets are taken from the *Manual* for this purpose and mailed to callers on the Advice Line.

IF YOU ALREADY HAVE A 1ST EDITION (OR 2ND EDITION MANUAL, YOU WILL NEED TO REPLACE IT (and not just add to it). The *Manual* costs \$50 for TAS members and \$70 for non-members (plus \$9 for postage and handling). You can order the *Tenants' Rights Manual* (3rd edition) direct from TAS' website - www.taswa.org - or by phone on 9221 9499.



FINDING A PLACE: A WAY FORWARD OR A MEDIA HIJACK?

divisive document that deserves to be condemned for making race an issue in the delivery of public services.” The editorial’s single reference to Ted Wilke’s powerful launch speech reported that he had said there were racist people working at Homeswest. This was taken out of its context and presented in a manner suggesting that this was the key point of his speech. Wilke’s minor statement became evidence supporting *The West’s* claim to the social divisiveness of the Report.

In contrast, *The Australian* newspaper’s socially responsive approach to the release of *Finding a Place* conveyed the best of advocacy journalism. On December 16th, the national paper devoted a full-page to the Report. The feature dealt with specific issues, decoded terms and policies used by Homeswest staff in their dealings with Aboriginal tenants, and included seven case studies from the Report itself. A story on an Indigenous family in Kelmscott, accompanied by a photo portraying the family in a positive light, provided a human interest angle.

The West’s coverage of such a significant social document may well raise the question of how well the local news print media is functioning as a public forum for truly representing social life in Western Australia. It also raises the question of how much they are contributing to the continued oppression of the marginalised by encouraging an unsympathetic public response to such a major social concern. Given that public opinion can provide a strong influence on the position Government takes in addressing such issues, the extent and the intention of the coverage seems in direct contrast to responsible advocacy

journalism. Thus it is not hard to conclude that much of the local mainstream media, as represented by *The West Australian* newspaper, is contributing to the creation of a climate of opinion where there is increasing tolerance of social inequality and of poverty.

Moving Forward

As initial emotions subside, we need to remind ourselves that the release of *Finding a Place* may be the end point of an Inquiry, but it is the starting point for another phase – that of moving forward and implementing its recommendations. *Finding a Place* makes 165 recommendations to redress the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal tenants and prospective tenants. Many of these recommendations appear to take into account the impact of specific cultural or common issues faced by Aboriginal people seeking housing – in effect to provide strategies to address indirect discrimination. Perhaps the most critical is the first of the 165 recommendations: the creation of an Implementation and Monitoring Group to determine a program for the implementation of the Report’s recommendations.

Despite the best attempts of *The West Australian* to turn this important Report into a mechanism to fuel racist tensions, it remains a comprehensive, well-researched and valid document. As a major contributor to the Investigation, TAS looks forward to working with other stakeholders to improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal tenants, using *Finding a Place* as a guiding framework.

The Findings of the EOC Investigation include:

- Direct and indirect discrimination are difficult charges to prove under the current legal system.
- Indigenous access to appropriate and affordable housing is a comparable problem in Australia, Canada and New Zealand.
- Homeswest has received increasing criticism in recent times that its practices do not always correspond to policy – in particular in regard to Aboriginal people.
- While Homeswest has experienced continuous review and criticism from advocates and various Aboriginal organisations, it argues that the absence of a successful complaint of discrimination against Homeswest is evidence that it doesn’t discriminate on the grounds of race in the provision of public housing to Aboriginal people.
- Aboriginal people living in DHW housing appear to experience a higher level of overcrowding than non-Aboriginal people living in DHW housing.
- In rural WA housing affordability appears to be relatively similar for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal tenants in DHW housing but in the metropolitan area there is a greater variation and DHW does appear to promote affordability for Aboriginal households.
- Aboriginal children living in the metropolitan area appear to be worse off than children living in the rural area.
- Aboriginal people are more likely to be housed in the fringes of the Metropolitan area

Through New Eyes: the direction of CLE at TAS

TAS welcomed the arrival of Community Legal Education Coordinator Michelle Burgermeister in the second half of 2004. Michelle's background as counsellor, trainer and educator has enabled her to take TAS' CLE in a new direction. *TAS Talk* editor Gillian Carter interviewed Michelle to find out what that vision entails.

What were your first impressions of CLE at TAS?

I was very fortunate when I first started at TAS to walk into a position which had been so well run for many years. The fundamental basis of Community Legal Education was already well-established, giving me a solid foundation to build upon.

For example, TAS is in a unique position being an RTO – a Registered Training Organisation. That is, we provide courses that are nationally recognised. Becoming an RTO is something that was extremely foresightful of my predecessors. The RTO status not only provides opportunities for people to undertake TAS training and build it towards a qualification, it also links TAS to the highly developed, technical world of training that exists. I am keen to exploit this RTO status further, particularly with changes to the industry 'training packages' (see 'CLE Projects for 2005 and Beyond').

How did you approach implementing change?

Being new to the Community Legal Sector allowed me to be the 'naive inquirer', a term borrowed from my counselling background. My first question was to clarify what exactly is involved with CLE. In doing this, I identified that there are different parts: professional development and training, consumer education, and public interest. It then became apparent that it was important to make these distinctive because they had different purposes and approaches which required different strategic directions.

As a sector, we are accustomed to thinking of CLE solely in terms of training needs and skill-building.

How does professional development differ to these?

Professional development is about building the skills and expertise of the sector. In having this distinctive category, it is possible to more readily identify, prioritise and target particular forms of work within the community sector, and their training needs. This is not only about developing the skills of individuals, but about developing the tenancy sector in terms of professionalism, standards of service and competency to achieve the best outcomes for clients.

My sense is that there are many highly skilled people out there doing great stuff as tenant advocates, however, the sector is still underdeveloped as a professional group. This is something that often happens in the 'helping fields', where people underestimate the expertise involved in doing what they do effectively. I think advocacy and tenancy work is undervalued, and I am keen to raise the profile and recognition of this area of work.

What are the implications of this for the delivery of CLE to consumer groups?

It just is not practicable for one worker in the city to reach all the consumer groups across the state. Fortunately there are many workers doing some great CLE out there, and I am keen to see how we can harvest this experience and package it up for others to use. By empowering and resourcing other workers to deliver CLE within their communities, CLE then becomes more accessible in two important senses of the word. Firstly, it becomes possible to achieve a multiplying effect and reach greater numbers of consumers. And secondly, because it is delivered by a worker with a greater knowledge and understanding of the needs of that particular community or group, it also enables the CLE to be delivered in ways that are appropriate to that group.

Through New Eyes: the direction of CLE at TAS

In identifying the three parts to CLE, you separate consumer education from public interest. What is your approach to consumer education?

I think there is a need to direct more CLE toward those disadvantaged consumers who are not well positioned to voice their needs and wants, and therefore do not request education. It is for this reason that I am interested in doing more proactive CLE with consumer groups, as well as maintaining the level and quality of reactive – or requested – CLE.

I am currently wanting to identify a particular target group based on their vulnerability, disadvantage with the law, or locality, and develop strategies applying a community development approach to reach them with CLE. The aim is to develop some innovative and culturally appropriate tools for getting the message across. In this way, we should be able to rely less on luck and more on knowing what is the most culturally appropriate way for CLE to happen with this identified group.

And how is 'public interest' CLE different again?

What I call 'Public interest' is for developing broader community awareness which not only educates people about tenancy issues but, more significantly, also promotes the *importance of* tenancy and housing – particularly in areas of human rights, and current or key policy issues. In a society that is so fixated on home-ownership, the significance of tenancy and tenancy issues are often underestimated. The approach for this is different to professional development and consumer education, though there is an overlap. Rather than using group work,

public interest CLE would rely more on a campaign approach using a range of other mediums such as mass media, publicity stunts, displays, and so on.

To this end, we are thinking of starting by promoting the importance of tenancy and basic human rights through the International Tenants Day in October 2005. We hope to develop a range of strategies and resources for community groups, advocates and tenancy workers to do something in their own locality (See 'CLE Projects for 2005 and Beyond').

Have you had any feedback about this approach from others in the sector?

In the discussions I have had so far, there seems to be support for this approach and even excitement about its potential. However, for this model to be achieved, it needs to be a two-way dialogue between TAS and the community sector. I just hope that others share the vision and have the enthusiasm to want to collaborate together to build something far more effective than we can currently working as we are in 'silos'. Together we can achieve much greater things for the tenants out there!



*CLE Coordinator,
Michelle Burgermeister*

CLE PROJECTS FOR 2005 AND BEYOND

Training Calendar

We are planning to make some changes to the foundation courses in tenancy to bring them in line with the updated Community Services and Health Training package and some learning innovations. The first course to see some significant changes will be “Court Advocacy (Tenancy)”. As usual, TAS plans to go regional and offer these courses in the Pilbara, Kimberley and Albany.

New Courses

New courses are being developed. These are: *Advanced Advocacy with Homeswest* – this will expand skills and include relevant aspects of Administration Law; *Developing and Delivering Community Legal Education* – this course will look at providing an opportunity for people to share their experience and knowledge, using some tried and true techniques and best practice principles for CLE; *Domestic Violence and tenancy*; and *Human Rights & Housing & Tenancy*.

Targeting Shared Housing, and Boarders and Lodgers

It just happens that some of the most vulnerable people in our community end up in these types of accommodation situations, yet their rights are often neglected. TAS has decided to target these consumers over the next year. This means we will be looking at in more detail what rights and legal remedies are available for those in such situations. We are particularly keen to focus on issues for Head tenants (who have the dual role of tenant and landlord) and ways to deal with complaints for boarders and lodgers (including “homestays”). We aim to improve our community legal education (including training and publications) and advice line information for this group.

International Tenancy Day

This is in October 2005, and we are keen to see activities happening around the state. Our proposal is to develop resources and kits for community groups and agencies to enable them to conduct local activities around the Day. This will involve some creative ideas for

community awareness raising, CLE events and lobbying. To this end we are forming an International Tenancy Day Planning and Development Committee and invite everyone to become involved. Phone 9221 9499 or email michelle@taswa.org if you are interested.

Young People and Tenancy

Rooves for Youths is YACWA’s new manual for youth workers to provide education to young people on preparing them for tenancy. TAS and YACWA are now going to partner together to further promote and develop this project, so there will be some new training courses for youth workers and a range of policy work done around issues with young people and tenancy.

Promoting Access to the Small Disputes Division

When it comes to access to justice, tenants are missing out big time. Statistics show that very few tenants turn up to court and even fewer disputes are brought to court by the tenant. When tenants don’t turn up it is often presumed they are in the wrong. Yet this is not always the case. It is likely that tenants are pretty intimidated by the whole process. So we are developing a project and campaign aiming to reverse this trend. This will include working toward understanding why tenants don’t turn up to court, and CLE activities and strategies to increase advocacy opportunities for Court, and such a setting up a Special Legal Clinic for this. The project will include baseline research with a post project evaluation.

Getting Qualified – Certificate IV in Community Services Advocacy

At present TAS’s RTO (Registered Training Organisation) status is underutilised and undervalued. We are working towards expanding this role and creating a qualification for workers. We think we can offer a unique, and very hands on course aimed at people involved in advocacy and paralegal work. This will not only give opportunity for those without formal training to gain a qualification for skills they already have, but will also provide an opportunity to develop the sector.

TAS Talk's guest contributor, Shelter WA's Research and Policy Manager, Paul Pendergast, gives a brief overview of the 2001 Census Report, *Counting the Homeless 2001: Western Australia*.

The Department for Community Development recently released *Counting the Homeless 2001: Western Australia*. Chris Chamberlain's and David MacKenzie's analysis of the 2001 Census reveals that, on Census night 2001, there were 99,900 homeless people in Australia of which 11.7% – or 11,697 people – were in Western Australia.

Chamberlain and MacKenzie use the cultural definition of homelessness to measure the extent and nature of homelessness in Western Australia. This definition breaks the broad, general category of homelessness into three distinct levels:

- **Primary homelessness:** people without conventional accommodation;
- **Secondary homelessness:** people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another; and,
- **Tertiary homelessness:** People who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis.¹

Homelessness by region

Homelessness is not something confined to the urban centre. Based on Chamberlain and MacKenzie's more detailed table in the Report, Table 1 depicts the demographic distribution of Western Australia's homeless population by region. It clearly shows that, in contrast to popular belief, approximately two thirds of Western Australia's homeless live in rural and remote areas.² The Table also reveals a distinctive pattern of homelessness across the state: namely that the rate of homelessness increases with remoteness from Perth.³

Table 1: Number and rate of homeless per 10 000 of the population by region

	Perth	South West	Great Southern and Midlands	South Eastern	Central	Pilbara	Kimberley
Number	5,637	958	405	613	1,286	637	1,733
Rate	42	52	59	116	221	169	555

Adapted from Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie, *Counting the Homeless 2001: Western Australia* (Melbourne, 2004).

Perth: On Census night 2001, the Perth metropolitan area had 5,637 homeless people which equates to 42 homeless people per 10,000 of the population. Breaking this figure down further, only a fifth of Perth's homeless were located in the Central City area (1,262). The Fremantle/Rockingham area had the largest number of homeless with 1,349, while 1,112 were located in the south east corridor, and 1,082 in the north metropolitan area.

South West: The Report confirms that at a rate of 52 per 10,000 of population, the South West has a higher proportional rate of homelessness than the Perth metropolitan area. Participants at Shelter WA's recent Busselton and Margaret River housing forums expressed their belief that there is a general perception of the area as wealthy which disguises the reality of the extent of homelessness in the region.⁴

South Eastern: The Report shows a homelessness rate of 88 per 10,000 of population for Kalgoorlie/Boulder, and 116 per 10,000 for the entire region.

Central: Overall the region has a rate of 221 per 10,000, or five times the rate for Perth, increasing dramatically to 527 in Gasgoyne and 590 in Carnegie.

Pilbara: Has a rate of 169, or four times the rate for Perth.

Kimberley: The Kimberley is not only WA's most northern region, it also has the highest homelessness rate at 555 per 10,000, or thirteen times the rate for Perth.

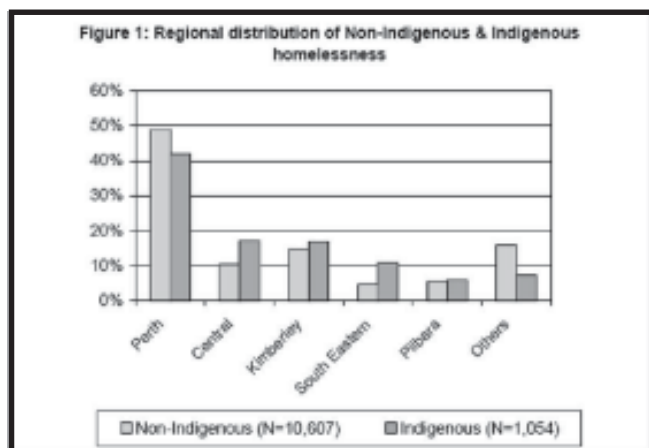
Regional Distribution of Non-Indigenous and Indigenous Homeless

Figure 1 shows the differences in the regional distribution between non-Indigenous and Indigenous homeless people. Approximately half of homeless non-Indigenous live in Perth (5,194) while the

Homeless: in the City? *Counting the Homeless 2001: Western Australia*

other half are located in smaller concentrations ranging from 15% (1,555) in the Kimberley to 5% (497) in the South Eastern.

In contrast, just over a third of Indigenous homeless people are located in Perth (443), with two thirds located in regional areas. 17% (180) are located in the Central region (which includes Kalgoorlie) and 17% (178) are in the Kimberley.



Homelessness Responses

The Report also reveals some serious structural problems with the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), Western Australia's main program aimed at addressing homelessness. These include:

Limited supply: The SAAP is only scratching the surface of our homelessness problem. Figure 2 shows that 58% of homeless people are staying with friends and relatives on a temporary basis, 19% are in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough, 15% are in boarding houses and, finally, 8% are in SAAP services.

Geographic mismatch: Early intervention is an affective way of short-circuiting homelessness, ensuring that temporary episodes aren't allowed to develop into chronic homelessness. The correct location of homelessness services is critical to effective early intervention. Chamberlain and MacKenzie highlight this imperative in their analysis of the relation between the geographic location of SAAP accommodation and the actual location of those the Program is designed to assist. They write:

[On Census Night 2001] there were 945 people accommodated in SAAP in WA and one-third (33 percent) were in Central Perth. Yet most people become homeless in outer suburbs, regional centers and country towns. The provision of early intervention services in these areas assists people in the early stages of homelessness, including those at risk, and reduces the move to the inner city.

Length of homelessness: The shorter the period of time people experience homelessness, the more effective the invention will be. The Report's finding that two thirds of SAAP clients remain homeless for more than six months (exceeding the chronic homelessness threshold) is therefore alarming. Rather than take resources away from the most disadvantaged, Chamberlain and MacKenzie stress the need for additional resources and that these should be directed toward early intervention.

Age Profile of the Homeless

One of the most disturbing aspects of Chamberlain and MacKenzie's findings is the age of people experiencing homelessness. Their figures show that children comprise over one third of the homeless, with 9% (1,040) aged under 12, and a further 30% (3,508) aged between 12 and 18 years. When added together with young adults (18 to 24 year olds), 48% (5,610) of Western Australia's homeless are aged under 25 years.⁵

Conclusion

Counting the Homeless 2001: Western Australia shows that a significant proportion of not only the state's population, but the state's young population, is denied the basic human right of housing. The SAAP is currently being redesigned to make it responsive to the needs of the homeless population, and clearly it needs to increase its focus on early intervention and to address the

geographic inequities of the program. However, SAAP alone cannot resolve homelessness. Significant investment in social housing is also required so that people experiencing homelessness can establish themselves in independent housing before crossing the line into chronic homelessness.

The full report is available at www.countingthehomeless.com.au

NOTES

- 1 Australian Bureau Of Statistics, 2041.0 Occasional Paper: *Census Of Population & Housing – Counting The Homeless 1999*.
- 2 Shelter WA's own findings show that, while Perth has a very significant population of homeless people, homelessness is also a major issue outside the metropolitan area (Shelter WA, Regional Housing Forums: Kalgoorlie, West Kimberley, South West).
- 3 This same pattern was identified at the Shelter WA Community Forum, Housing Indigenous People in Regional WA, October 2003.
- 4 Shelter WA (January 2004), "But where will the cleaner live? Final Report on the Busselton and Margaret River Housing Forums", Paul Pendergast, Samantha Lambert and Karel Eringa.
- 5 The findings of Shelter WA's independent series of homelessness surveys are in accord with these figures.

Tenancy Advice in WA: a community partnership approach

A short discussion with any community legal centre in Australia will confirm that tenancy law is an area of high unmet need. In the latest annual report of the National Association of Community Legal Centres, tenancy was listed as the second highest legal complaint category. In Western Australia, requests for service far outweigh the available resources. It is clearly outside the scope of any single agency or government department to meet this legal need in Western Australia. Instead, the strategy to address this need for tenancy-related legal services in WA relies heavily on a community partnership approach.

Community partnerships operate at a number of levels to provide tenancy services. As the Central Resource Unit, TAS supports the 12 community agencies (11 of which are Community Legal Centres) that comprise the Tenancy Advice and Education Program (TAEP) in WA. This support takes the form of specific legal advice, policy and law reform coordination, supply of publications, and community legal education support, including professional development.

The community partnership approach is not just confined to the WA Tenancy Network operating under the TAEP. Each year over 200 community agencies in WA provide specific tenancy advice to their clients, often with direct support from TAS. More than 180 community agencies hold the current *Tenant's Advice Manual* (2004) and over 120 community workers participate in TAS tenancy training annually. This less formal network of community agencies delivering tenancy related services adds enormously to "the services that are on the ground".

Community agencies are highly valued as partners in providing this service, however, community agencies also have the potential to provide another valuable element to advancing tenancy law services in WA – with little further demand on their resources. That element is input into policy and law reform.

As an agency that has the opportunity, and is often called upon, to provide input into policy and law reform in Western Australia, TAS can only voice the information about issues of particular concern that are brought to its attention by its partners in the community. "On the ground" service delivery is one of the most valid means of informing policy. To this end, TAS issues an open invitation to both its members and workers in community agencies delivering tenancy law services to advise us of emerging issues, or noticeable trends in relation to clients presenting with tenancy problems.

TAS and many other stakeholders in the area of tenancy law service provision continue to lobby for further resources to meet the enormous need for tenancy law advice in WA. It is, however, important to acknowledge the important role currently played by the large number of community agencies that provide services in this area. We look forward to further developing this partnership and receiving input relevant to policy and law reform.

Rob Spinks, Executive Officer

Geraldton Resource Centre: a profile

Geraldton Resource Centre were the recent winners of the Richard (Dick) Fletcher Award for their outstanding contribution to the advancement of consumer protection in their community. TAS Talk editor Gillian Carter takes a look at the Geraldton Resource Centre to find out where the key to their success lies.

Each region of this state is marked by its own particular geography and the communities which inhabit it, and the character of these communities is shaped by the land in which they are located. The terrain, the weather, and the often vast distances between the communities and the urban centres which service them, all contribute to the unique needs of the people who live there.

In the rural, regional and remote areas of Western Australia, the infrastructure and basic services we take for granted in the metropolitan area are less readily accessible, if they are available at all. This geographical disadvantage compounds the difficulties experienced by those who are already economically, socially and politically disadvantaged. For a service to effectively meet the needs of such diverse and widely-spread communities, it needs have a model of operation which engages with the politics of location. In successfully providing services to a population of 67,000 covering a geographical area of 690,000km², Geraldton Resource Centre is such an organisation.

Diversity of Service

In the twenty years since the Centre commenced operation as GERO, it has expanded and developed its services in an effort to address the increasing unemployment and poverty in the region. The range of services provided by the organisation includes:

- Geraldton Community Legal Centre
- Rural Women's Legal Outreach Service
- Nyarlu Miyarungalgu – Aboriginal Women's Legal Outreach Service
- Financial Counseling
- Private Rental Accommodation Support Service
- Home/Community Visitors Scheme
- Supported Housing Assistance Program
- Tenancy Assistance
- Prison Transition Accommodation and Casework Program

At the core of the engagement with the politics of location is the recognition that the disadvantaged in the community are not one generic group. Nor are they located in any single identifiable and accessible place. That so many of the Centre's services incorporate some kind of outreach, whether formally or informally, is an indicator of responsiveness to the compounding effect of location. If we look at Geraldton Resource Centre from this geographical perspective, it becomes clear that the range of services the Centre offers directly reflects the diversity and structure of the community it serves.

The Value of Knowledge

Geraldton Resource Centre's philosophy states their commitment to empowering people to access their rights, to make their own choices and to access services on a non-discriminatory basis. At its most fundamental level, the day-to-day service provision of the organisation works to empower the individual through advocacy and direct assistance, and the provision of accessible information about, and tools to navigate, the legal and financial issues which impact upon their lives.

On a broader level, the Centre's community education is not only directed to the individual, it is also directed, in the form of seminars and forums, to specific professional, special interest, and disadvantaged groups, and also to the community at large. This last category aims to raise awareness about the broader issues affecting the disadvantaged in the local community. This works to raise the public profile and interest in issues, and also widens the possibility of others working to effect change.

The value of knowledge, however, extends further than the provision of consumer information to the community. In partnership with the Central West College of TAFE, GRC developed the nationally recognised Certificate IV in Business (Legal Studies). This has enabled Legal Aid WA and the Community Legal Centres Association of WA access to train paralegals, resulting in improved

Geraldton Resource Centre: a profile

services to clients not only in the region, but across the state.

It is this relationship between knowledge and empowerment that informs Geraldton Resource Centre's model of operation. At the local level, The Community Development Employment Program model at GRC focuses on intensive training and mentoring of both staff and volunteers. The model is tailored to the specific needs of those working in the region, taking into account the value of existing local knowledge, as well as the difficulties experienced by those working in isolation.

The Value of Community

In a world which is racing toward globalisation and homogeneity, Geraldton Resource Centre, in both theory and practice, exemplifies how a focus on the local can result in a model of operation that is able to address the broader systemic features and relations of social organisation in a way that is responsive to the specific needs of the communities in the region. Perhaps the key to making a long-lasting and significant difference lies in not just serving the community, but in being an active member of that community.

WA Consumer Protection Awards

On Friday 12 November, 2004, the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection (DoCEP) hosted the inaugural Western Australian Consumer Protection Awards. The Consumer Protection Awards are designed to publicly acknowledge and reward the contributions made by an individual and a non-government organisation to advancing consumer protection in the community.

The Rona Oakley Award for an individual who has "influenced and inspired the advancement, development and promotion of consumer protection", and the Richard (Dick) Fletcher Award for an organisation or group who have "made a significant and enduring contribution to the advancement of consumer protection in their community", are named in honour of two Western Australian champions of the cause of consumer protection.

Consumer advocacy, concerned as it is with the pressing needs of those disadvantaged by the inequities of the present, rarely looks back at its own social and political trajectory in terms of celebrating a long history of achievement. Caught in the raw immediacy of the present, aware that we must effect positive change for the future, momentary glimpses into the past merely serve to remind us that the exploitation of the vulnerable has its own long history.

Now enshrined in a form that gives acknowledgement and thanks in a field where both are rarely given, the names Rona Oakley and Dick Fletcher remind us that the advocacy of the present has been built upon a solid historical precedent of committed and inspired effort. As an annual event, the West Australian Consumer Protection Awards hold the potential to not only highlight the contributions of the consumer advocates of the present, but also to provide a moment where the efforts and achievements of those of the past can be foregrounded, remembered and celebrated.

The Rona Oakley Award was presented to consumer rights advocate and City of Cockburn financial counsellor, Anne Hawkins. Geraldton Resource Centre were the recipients of the Richard (Dick) Fletcher Award.



Award Finalists. Back row: Rob Spinks (TAS), Denise Brailey, Anne Hawkins, Verity Cripps, Su Mahalingham (CCLS). Front row: Zane D'Mello (GRC), Cheryl Cassidy Vernon (YLS), Gay McNamara, Michele Kosky (HCC).

TAS Training Calendar



February to June

Tenancy Law for Community Workers

3 & 4 March 2005

11 & 12 April 2005

19 & 20 May 2005

Tenancy Law & Homeswest Issues

14 & 15 March 2005

2 & 3 May 2005

Court Advocacy (Tenancy)

Replaces: Advocacy in the Small Disputes Division

17, 20 & 21 June 2005.

CUSTOMISED TRAINING

We can customise our courses or offer information sessions or workshops at your workplace or professional group. Topics can include share housing, boarders & lodgers.

CONSUMER EDUCATION

We offer very interactive and practical sessions on tenancy matters to all types of consumer groups. For instance "How to read (& understand) your tenancy agreement". See website or call for full range of topics.

RESOURCES & SUPPORT

Delivering education yourself? We can provide advice, support and a range of resources to assist you.

WANT MORE INFORMATION OR TO REGISTER?

For full details of the courses ask for our training calendar flyer or visit our web site: www.taswa.org. For other enquiries, call the Community Legal Education Coordinator on 9221 9499.

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The logo for Tenants Advice Service (TAS) is written in a stylized, cursive purple font. The letters 'tas' are lowercase and slanted to the right. The logo is positioned in the bottom left corner of the page, partially overlapping a purple circular graphic.