

Session 6

11.30am - 12.45am (15mins per speaker)

Tuesday 30th November

Topic: Changing Service Delivery Models - The Impact of Increased Targeting

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• **Introduction**

My presentation today will look at the issue of targeting with reference to experience of MACHA as a housing provider to homeless and vulnerable adults in the inner city of Adelaide.

In doing this I will cover two areas:

1. Provide a brief description of the program - handouts are available which provide more detailed information if people are interested.
2. Discuss some of the changing demands on services such as MACAH and the nature of our responses to these demands.

Before doing this I would like to make a quick point and suggest that targeting as applied by community services such as MACHA may be seen to be a significantly different concept to that of targeting in much current social/housing policy . The development of targeted services by organisations such as MACHA has in many ways been a recognition of the diversity of needs in our community and the need for a broad range of services to meet these needs. The current public policy emphasis on targeting may be seen as a process more concerned with cutting costs, using limited resources as effectively as possible and, at the end of the day, reducing the overall range of services available to the less well off in our community.

I will come back to this theme as I go, but would like to start by looking at MACHA as an example of a targeted community sector service.

As a housing association, MACHA is one of about 30 such organisations which work to link housing and support services for various high need target groups in South Australia. Much of what is covered in this presentation is also relevant to many of these organisations. However, MACHA does also provide a unique example of a particular model of service delivery to homeless and vulnerable adults in the inner city of Adelaide which provides 'linked up solutions to linked problems'.

- **Overview of MACHA**

Description of program:

- The Multi Agency Community Housing Association (MACHA) was established in 1991 as part of a collaborative approach by non-government, local government and State government agencies working with homeless people in the inner city of Adelaide with the aim of increasing housing opportunities for these people. MACHA’s purpose is:
To provide housing and co-ordinate support in the inner city of Adelaide for adults who have a low income and who:
 - * have been homeless for an extended period;
- The needs of people referred to MACHA for accommodation are complex, typically people present with multiple issues, including mental illness, substance abuse, gambling addiction, ill health, premature aging and personality disorders. Many have suffered significant grief and loss and have endured a cycle of homelessness and dependence on health and welfare agencies. Typically MACAH tenants have failed to sustain accommodation in public and private housing.
- The program currently manages over 90 houses and units in the inner city, with a further 24 units and a 25 room boarding house under construction.
- The MACHA model is one which incorporates tenant support services with the provision of housing. MACHA has been designed to pursue housing development opportunities and undertake the functions of a landlord whilst member/support agencies provide support services to tenants. Referrals into MACHA are via nominated agencies which are required to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the applicant, identify support needs and provide ongoing support as required. A formal contract between the referring agency and MACHA is required as part of the referral process. MACHA assesses referrals from these agencies and, if approved, applicants are put on a waiting list and placed as housing becomes available (currently 45 on waiting list). After applicants are housed MACHA works closely with the nominated support agencies in the ongoing management of tenancies
- Currently referral and support services are provided through the following agencies:

• Aboriginal Sobriety Group	• Adelaide City Council Community Centre
• Adelaide Central Mission, Byron Place Day Centre	• Hutt St. Day Centre
• Adelaide Day Centre	• Offender Aid and Rehabilitation Services (OARS)
• Anglican Inner City Aged Care Program	• Salvation Army

• Catherine House Women's Shelter	• St Vincent dePaul
•	• Westcare Baptist Mission

- Many of these support services are funded through SAAP, but they also draw on funding through other Commonwealth, State, Local; Government, Church and charitable sources. There is of course also a strong voluntary element in many of these services.
- Management of MACHA is through a voluntary Board consisting of:
 - 3 representatives of support/member agencies;
 - 3 tenant representatives;
 - 4 representatives from the broader community;
 - 3 observers from government agencies (SAHT, Family and Community Services, Adelaide City Council).

Outcomes

- A turnover of about 16% per annum and an average length of stay of nearly 2 years, which appears to be increasing, indicate a growing level of stability amongst our tenants.
- MACHA's approach, which focuses on the individual also appears to be very effective from an administrative view, with rent arrears and tenant debt levels low and virtually no money written off. - important for the future viability of the organisation.

Both of these are significant achievements considering the previous housing experiences of MACHA tenants.

In the language of the new millennium MACHA is an example of a program which has addressed the following

1. MACHA has **targeted** its services to a high need group in the inner city (homeless and low income adults) - as described, MACHA was set up by agencies already working with these people with this specific purpose;
2. MACHA has developed **cross program linkages** recognising the multiple needs of its target group and the importance of the necessary supports to sustain tenure.
3. MACHA is attempting to provide options in response to the **failure of mainstream services** to adequately provide for the needs of this group.

4. With regard to the concept of **Social Exclusion**, a recent evaluation of the community housing model applied by MACHA, found that the stability offered by secure supported accommodation broke the cycle of homelessness for many MACHA tenants and provided the opportunity to regain some sense of direction and purpose in life - one important indicator of this was the changing use of community services, from crisis/homeless services to mainstream services such as (RDNS/Domicillary Care):

Whilst successful in these areas, there are of course other areas of the program requiring further development.

1. A key area of concern is our dependence on the voluntary input of support agencies. The commitment of these agencies has been a major strength and crucial to the success of the MACHA model. At the operational level MACHA seeks guarantees of ongoing commitment through a formal contract at time of referral, but at the policy and funding level there is no such commitment. Millions of dollars of public assets are committed to the targeting homeless people in the inner city of Adelaide, with no long term guarantee that the support resources necessary to sustain tenancies will continue to be available.

2. A second area of concern to the program is the lack of secure resources to fund the necessary program infrastructure. - National Award winning MACHA does not have the necessary guaranteed infrastructure funding to remain functional beyond the end of this financial year, although we are of course confident that it will be forthcoming.

These program concerns highlight two broader issues:

- The first is the need for cross program linkages with co-ordinated policy and program development, at the Govt policy and funding level. In SA the formation of the mega Department for Human Services, incorporating health, housing and welfare, is premised on such a concept, and although the language of social inclusion is not yet being used, that of linked up solutions to linked up problems is.
- The second issue highlighted is the need for those responsible for the provision of housing services to come to terms with the reality of targeting their services to high need groups - those who generally present with multiple issues and require a range of services in addition to those traditionally associated with housing management (ie flexibility, negotiation, community development, responsiveness, and intensive tenancy management) The requirement for this inevitably has resource implications for staffing and other operational costs. In SA a review currently being undertaken by the SA Community Housing Authority is seeking to address these challenges and to establish some benchmarks in terms of resource requirements for the larger community housing organisations in SA which all target high need groups.
- **Is there a growing range of needs that need to be met by housing providers ?**

The resolution of these operational/structural issues is made more urgent by the pressure to continue developing and expanding the program in response to a growing range of needs presenting to housing providers such as MACHA.

1. Demographic changes and broader social issues:

These are well known, but worth repeating, as is the fact that the debate over housing policy takes place in an environment where any response which does not acknowledge and deal effectively with the broader range of social and economic factors confronting Australian society is simply inadequate.

These include the fact that the population is aging, unemployment remains consistently high and full time work opportunities are declining, programs of deinstitutionalisation of people with mental health problems and intellectual disabilities have not been matched by adequate policy responses, there are increasing numbers of single people and sole parents and a poor economic outlook for lower income families. Also, looking to the near future it is worth remembering that with the introduction of a new Goods and Services Tax greater emphasis than ever will be placed on the redistribution of income through the taxation system.

However, we have large numbers of people who exist completely outside the labour market and therefore the taxation system. For people who cannot gain work, income redistribution does not occur except through inadequate social security transfers. Provision of other social supports and networks, one of the most important being housing, must occur if these South Australians are to escape dire poverty.
(Shelter SA., 1999: p4)

The reform process currently being undertaken with regard to social housing is also having an impact on demand for MACHA's services:

Traditionally, access to social rental housing in SA has been relatively open - the major barrier to access has been home ownership. There has not been a formal income and assets test or a needs test. Hence social housing has been open to a broader cross-section of the community than in other States.

However, public and community housing in SA are being required to introduce housing reform criteria which, under the banner of targeting, restrict entry. At the same time SA public housing has is continuing to reduce its stock (sold over 1,000 properties over the past year) and, combined with low vacancy rates, this has resulted in 15% fewer people being placed in public housing this year than in the previous years.

In the context of over 30,000 people on public housing waiting lists, private sector vacancy rates of 1.9%, an historically low level particularly at the lower cost end of the market, this is inevitably placing greater pressure on other housing providers such as MACHA. There is growing concern in Adelaide at the numbers of those in urgent

housing need who are being turned away by agencies whose role it is to provide for such need.

It must also be remembered that public housing is not alone in experiencing significant cuts to its resource base and growing pressure to target its services - other Govt funded services are also under such pressure and we have seen a significant reduction in the capacity of these services to respond to the support needs of our tenants.

- **What are some of the strategies being adopted to meet these needs?**
- **How much of this is being generated by targeting, and how much is it also a response to a growing awareness of “social exclusion”?**

MACHA is responding to the growing demand for secure affordable accommodation in a number of ways.

One of MACHA's responses has been to increase the length of tenure offered to tenants. Where initially tenants were required to move on after a maximum of 2 years with MACHA, there is now no restriction on the length of tenure - people simply had nowhere to go, so such an expectation was unrealistic unless MACHA was prepared to make people homeless again. Introduction of the housing reforms in SA is unlikely to have a major impact on MACHA's capacity to provide a longer term tenure, but we have in fact had to become less targeted than previously and have done so, as is our mandate, in response to unmet need in the inner city of Adelaide. (A perverse response to targeting at the broader level).

In combination with greater tenant stability generally, this has contributed to a low vacancy rate and long waiting lists at MACHA which can only be effectively addressed by growth in MACHA's housing stock. MACHA is therefore focusing on increasing its housing stock to better meet the demand, with an emphasis on new construction rather than SAHT stock transfer. Stock transfer of public housing does not address the unmet need, although it does enhance MACHA's financial viability. Currently MACHA has over \$4million of property under construction in inner city -

MACHA is also responding to the need for further development and expansion of its services in other ways.

1. Increase the number and range of support services linked with MACHA- negotiating with a number of agencies and program areas to build these links. A concern here is that SAAP, which is the major program providing support services to MACHA tenants, is not growing
2. Target development to particularly high needs groups (i.e. target our targeting !!) e.g. . Frail Aged Homeless where MACHA has recently completed a 16 unit development providing appropriate built form which is linked with Aged Care Packages. This has been a co-ordinated response by collection of housing and support services in the

inner city to identified needs which are not being catered for by mainstream aged care services.

3. Develop strategic/planning links with Local govt and State Govt programs. There is a focus on vulnerable adults in the inner city and MACHA is working to ensure the role it plays is integrated with the broader responses of these bodies. One concrete outcome of this process is MACHA's recent allocation of \$850,000 towards the cost of a purpose built 25 room boarding house in the inner city as part of a joint venture between SAHT and MACHA, supported by the Adelaide City Council
4. MACHA and its member agencies are also part of the Inner City Administrators Group, made up of representatives from inner city services, which is adopting a co-ordinating role in a broader response to the issues of inadequate services to homeless people in the inner city. One of these responses is that of an advocacy role and I refer you to the brochures for a recent publication funded by ACC, Revealing the Inner City: Responding to Poverty in Central Adelaide, which has articles contributed by inner city agencies addressing issues ranging from inadequacy of income security payments to social housing reform. .

- **Conclusion**

A few general thoughts in conclusion:

It is important to ensure that the language of social inclusion and targeting facilitates the development of adequate responses rather than becoming a mechanism for selling inadequate response.

To illustrate this, a few brief points .

1.. Firstly, I come back to the point I made at the beginning of this talk. We have always had the targeting of particular services to specific groups. The community sector has always recognised the need for targeting in the community context, where there is a multiplicity of needs requiring particular responses. MACHA is one example of a positive way in which this concept can be applied to respond to the needs of particular individuals in a particular community. But this is not a narrow concept of Targeting, it is one which recognises the diversity and range of needs in our community and seeks to provide for them all. It is not a concept of targeting which is based in minimal response focussing only on those defined as being in greatest need (by some definition)

Such a reductionist approach at the broader public policy level has more in common with the old residual welfare model than any concept of a broader responsibility for meeting the needs of those less well off in our community

Such an approach at the broader public policy level in fact has a perverse impact in that it puts pressure on agencies such as MACHA to reduce the degree to which they target their services - in response to the broader range of unmet need presenting to such agencies.

2. The concept of Social Exclusion may hold many possibilities, **but only if there is the political will to seriously address it** - without this we are in danger of simply adding the term to the following list:

“I used to think I was poor. Then they told me I wasn’t poor, I was needy. Then they told me it was self defeating to think of myself as being needy, I was deprived. Then they told me deprived was a bad image, I was underprivileged. Then they told me underprivileged was over used, I was disadvantaged. I still don’t have a cent, but I have a great vocabulary”.

Jules Feiffer