

A sustaining tenancies approach to demanding behaviour in Public Housing

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The study

- Systematic international literature review
- Interviews with social housing personnel in New South Wales, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Tasmania
- Outputs:
 - Positioning Paper
 - Good Practice Guide (Final Report)
 - Research and Policy Bulletin

The guide

- Divided into five parts

- Understanding the sustaining tenancies approach
- Good policy
- Good practice
- Sustaining Indigenous tenancies
- Resources for good practice

- Case studies

- Symbols

- Case study; research or practice note; resource implications; check list; informant quotes

Policy background

- Residents of social housing are increasingly drawn from vulnerable populations characterised by disadvantage and complex need rather than just low income
- Since 1996 the number of priority and special needs allocations into public housing has increased from 17% to 49% (Heintjes 2006)
- The role of SHAs is changing from efficient housing management, to management of complex tenancies and situations.

Demanding behaviour and high and complex need

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In Victoria it is estimated that between 2,000 to 2,500 public housing tenancies, (three to four per cent of all direct tenure public housing tenancies) are at risk of tenancy failure

- Identified risk factors include:
 - Mental illness and/or substance use
 - Physical disability or ill health
 - Indigenous
 - Large families
 - Single parent

Victorian Government Department of Human Services 2006

Demanding behaviour and high and complex need

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Overseas research suggests that public housing tenants who engage in anti-social behaviour come from groups with high and complex need. Risk factors include:

- A long history of substance abuse
- A history of family violence
- A history of physical or sexual abuse
- Mental health needs
- A physical or intellectual disability
- A history of state care

(Randall and Brown 1999)

The broader problem

Residential tenancies legislation:

- Requires SHAs to ensure that tenants do not act in a way which interferes with their neighbour's peaceful enjoyment of their premises
- Can disrupt neighbour's lives, causing some to move out, adding to the costs associated with tenancy turnover
- It can disrupt the reputation of a neighbourhood making it unattractive to potential residents
- It may involve behaviours which place the tenant and other household members at risk
- Balancing protecting tenants with sustaining broader communities

The other side of demanding behaviour

- Claims of demanding behaviour may result from intolerance of difference. Motives may include:
 - Prejudice against public housing tenants
 - Racism
 - Lifestyle differences, e.g. sexual preference, single parents
 - Cultural differences
 - Being of a generally unhappy or intolerant nature
- Situational factors may also be implicated
 - Inappropriate housing allocations
 - Poor housing construction

Disciplinary responses

- Introductory, probationary or renewable tenancies
- Good behaviour agreements
- Anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs)

New South Wales

- Renewable leases
- Anti-social behaviour policy including Acceptable Behaviour Agreements in public housing tenancies
- ‘Rights, respect and responsibility’ one of five areas of activity in the current state government plan

Northern Territory

- Introductory tenancies
- Anti-social behaviour policy including Acceptable Behaviour Agreements, neighbour applications for courts to evict public housing tenants whose behaviour is deemed unacceptable

South Australia

- Disruptive behaviour strategy that includes
- The formation of a specialist ‘disruptive response team’
- Acceptable behaviour contracts for all public housing tenancies
- 12 month probationary leases for all new tenancies
- Additional mechanisms for non-renewal of tenancies where there is significant disruption
- Agreements with support agencies to engage with tenants who engage in disruptive behaviour, including MOUs with Mental Health and SA Police

SHA responses

Tas, WA



Tasmania

→ Three month introductory leases

Western Australia

→ Good Neighbour policy which includes Acceptable Behaviour Agreements for all new tenancies and fixed term tenancies where there is a history of ASB

Failed tenancies are expensive ...

For SHAs they involve

- Documentation to support the eviction
- Legal fees
- Court attendance
- Unrecovered rent arrears
- Property refurbishment
- Higher occupancy rates
- They also contribute to the stigmatisation of public housing

... and through their association with homelessness create other costs

- Immediate costs of provision of crisis and transitional accommodation within the SAAP system
- Increased demand for services such as health, mental health, drug and alcohol, child and family services
- Increased criminal justice costs
- Lost productivity
- Costs of exclusion from education, employment and training
- Long-term costs associated with inter-generational disadvantage

Supportive responses

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■ Prevention

- Appropriate design and construction
- Community education
- Good Neighbour policies
- Sensitive allocations

■ Early intervention

- A regular and frequent maintenance program
- Early response to complaints
- Early warning systems

Supportive responses

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- **Support through:**
 - Provision of information to tenants and local communities
 - Referral to relevant services
 - Specialist tenancy support services
 - Partnerships with other services
 - Rewards for positive contributions
- **Negotiation through:**
 - Mediation services
 - Encouragement of self-help amongst tenants

Supportive responses

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- Staff training to:
 - Understand the relationship between eviction and homelessness
 - Understand the consequences of homelessness
 - Develop the values, skills and knowledge to work with tenants to sustain their tenancies successfully
 - Keep safe

Good policies

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- Appropriate location of the agency with cognate services such as Family, Health and Community
- Strategies for organisational learning and preserving institutional and key worker knowledge
- Strategies for social inclusion:
 - Holistic solutions involving formal and informal partnerships;
 - Promotion of tenant and community participation, and;
 - Tolerance and support within the community.

Good policies

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- Supportive practice model which is flexible, tenant centred and culturally sensitive
- Comprehensive information systems with clear guidelines on how to work within requirements of privacy legislation

Low resource responses

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- Flexible policies which account for cultural difference
e.g. timeframes for acceptance of an offer
- Anonymised case notes
- Information sheets to local schools
- Information brochures in clear, simple language
- Promotion of self-help

Low resource responses

...2

- Early identification of risk e.g. Allocations interview, maintenance workers
- Sensitive allocations
- Rewarding change
- Employing Indigenous workers
- Some partnerships
e.g. Housing SA and SAPOL

Dundee Model of intensive tenancy support

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- Target group is families with history of homelessness, ASB and high and complex need
- Intensive support and supervision in a range of settings
 - Small residential unit with 24-hour intense, highly structured supervision and support till specific goals are met
 - Dispersed accommodation in tenancies managed by the project
 - Outreach support in existing accommodation

Dundee Model of intensive tenancy support

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- Separation of housing and support services
- Multidisciplinary teams
- Individually tailored support plans including life skills programs

Benefits and success of the Dundee Model

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- Cost-effective through prevention of homelessness and associated costs
- Successful because of:
 - High degree of trust and co-operation amongst key stakeholders
 - Well-managed
 - Separation of housing and support

Benefits and success of the Dundee Model

...2

- Multi-disciplinary and multi-agency focus embedded with local ASB partnerships
- Provision of intensive interventions sustained over a considerable length of time with outreach support often required for 6+ months and residential support for one to two years.
- The ability of project workers to challenge individual family members based on the professional values of listening, being non-judgemental, promoting well-being and establishing relationships of trust.

Intensive tenancy management

South Moree, NSW Dept of Housing

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Context

→ Public housing estate with high levels of social problems

Strategy

- Intensive tenancy management program involving:
 - Tenancy management
 - Asset management
 - Community development
 - Social support
- Team of five staff located at Moree, including Aboriginal tenancy officers
- Linked with other state government projects such as early childhood intervention project, Families First Service Network

Intensive tenancy management

South Moree, NSW Dept of Housing

Benefits

- Rent arrears nearly halved
- Dramatic reduction in vandalism

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Housing Support Coordinator

Housing SA

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Context

- Successful tenancies demonstration project

Objectives

- Improved housing outcomes for tenants with complex needs

Strategies

- Specialist position in each region facilitating and supporting tenants with complex needs in public and private housing who are at risk of eviction

Housing Support Coordinator

Housing SA

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Benefits

- Reduction of failed tenancies
- Specialised knowledge and contacts for other workers
- Promotes inter-agency collaboration

Ingredients for success

- Knowledgeable and experienced staff
- Case conferencing with other services and agencies
- Client database which enables evaluation of risk

Larrakia intervention and transport service

Darwin

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Context

- Overcrowding and threats to tenancies sustainability of Indigenous tenancies caused by visitors from homelands
- De-funding of Community Day Patrols provided by Community Harmony program

Strategy

- Transport services to assist clients to return to country

Benefits

- Reduction of overcrowding and neighbour complaints

Larrakia intervention and transport service

Darwin

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Ingredients for Success

- Indigenous service provider
- Local knowledge of networks and relationships
- Partnerships with other services including Police and NT Housing

Conclusion

- The public housing sector is in a unique position to break the cycle of homelessness by integrating a sustaining tenancies approach into routine housing management practice
- A sustaining tenancies approach is also sound housing management since improved housing stability reduces the social and financial costs associated with failed tenancies

Resources



- Positioning Paper
- Good Practice Guide (Final Report)
- Research and Policy Bulletin

All at:

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p40327>