

Housing PEOPLE



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Australasian **Housing** Institute

Meet a new member – Sue Cripps



When Sue Cripps took over the helm of Homelessness NSW five years ago it had been an unfunded peak body for more than two

decades. Today, as we catch up at the launch of the NSW Homelessness Action Plan, co-hosted by the AHI and Homelessness NSW, she is able to say that “our organisation has anchored its position as one of the key voices in raising issues around homelessness.”

Arriving in Australia 22 years ago from the UK as qualified psychiatric nurse, Sue began working in a mental health service at Darlinghurst. “That really opened my eyes to the numbers of people who are homeless and have a mental illness,” she says. Meanwhile the experience of managing a SAAP

service in western Sydney for women with a mental illness and their children taught Sue about the broader need for state planning.

After a couple of years working in policy for the Homelessness Unit of Housing NSW, Sue took up her current position, which involves the mammoth task of consulting with and representing 120 member organisations.

And what does she think of the action plan? It gets the thumbs up: “I have been lobbying for years for NSW to have a whole-of-state strategy around homelessness – this is a big success,” says Sue. “The NSW Government has done some great work, but previously this was an approach based on place-specific projects as opposed to a broad strategic framework.”

Sue thinks it is particularly important that the action plan identifies a

regional planning process to build regional homelessness action plans. “We need a diverse response that addresses the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in country NSW, which I think we haven’t had to date.”

“Importantly (and it’s so exciting) we now have national leadership – a Prime Minister who has made homelessness his key social policy agenda item,” Sue adds. “That engagement and support from senior levels of government has brought about a White Paper and a national framework which has trickled through to state action plans.”

“People have been chasing me for years to become a member of the AHI! I think we are now at this crucial point where a major change process is happening and I think the Institute has a key role to play in helping foster the debate around homelessness as part of the broader housing response.”

David Cant joins homelessness council



David Cant, CEO of the Brisbane Housing Company and a well-respected member of the AHI, has been appointed to the newly-

established Prime Minister’s Council on Homelessness. The announcement was made during National Homeless Persons Week with Tony Nicholson, Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, being appointed as the chair.

The council will provide independent strategic advice critical to the early years of implementing the

government’s White Paper on Homelessness, The Road Home, and monitor its progress.

The council members bring diverse experience and a broad depth of expertise across housing and homelessness issues throughout Australia:

- Mr Ian Carter, Chief Executive Officer, Anglicare, WA
- Mr Alan Kirkland, Chief Executive Officer, Legal Aid Commission, NSW
- Ms Pat Brahim, Chief Executive Officer, Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation, NT
- Ms Netty Horton, General Manager of Community Services, St Vincent de Paul Aged Care and Community Services, VIC

- Prof. Margaret Hamilton, Chair, Multiple and Complex Needs Panel, VIC
- Ms Christine Edwards, Chief Executive Officer, The Myer Foundation and the Sidney Myer Fund, VIC
- Mr David Cant, Chief Executive Officer, Brisbane Housing Company, QLD

The first meeting of the council will be held in August 2009 with members identifying critical issues and factors which will impact the White Paper goals.



AHI hits Harrogate



A small delegation from the AHI recently attended Europe's biggest housing conference – the UK Chartered Institute of Housing Annual Conference and Exhibition held in Harrogate between 16 and 18 June.

Among the 6,500 participants was the Institute's very own president, Shane Edmonds: "What struck me is the huge industry around social housing in the UK," Shane said. "The number of business in the exhibition centre was just amazing. Everything from organisations that actually arrange for people to live in your vacant social housing property while its being repaired (so that squatters don't move in) to sophisticated firms that had GPS tracking of employees and contractors around estates."

Shane believes that the visit was extremely important in terms of raising the AHI's profile and networking. "Joan Ferguson and I spent a lot of time working on that. It certainly inspired us to focus on the AHI's international network."

A major theme was the 'personalisation agenda' for housing in the UK, which is about building services around individuals rather than groups of people. "It's about people having more control and choice over the services which are provided to them; about tailoring services to client need and client want," Shane said. "The UK system has quite a significant amount of tenant representation."

Another delegate was James Hadlee, Senior Housing Officer with Christchurch City Council. "The conference was everything I expected it would be," says James. "It was an immense hub of information which focused on many international issues presented from the perspective of individual countries. "The many forums and 'think tanks' highlighted areas of best practice and alternative options for participants to take back to their own operations."

James was particularly impressed with customer focused organisations delivering service excellence. He says much of the support for this came from information systems which enabled increased ownership

and buy-in from customers/tenants, as well as systems being put in place to support the ongoing development of neighbourhoods and communities so that residents feel a sense of place and pride.

"We are now giving fresh thought to how we can continue to improve and benchmark customer focus and service delivery in our service," says James. Tenant participation models we observed demonstrated concepts that would be relatively new for our organisation and this is certainly something we are keen to explore further."

James was also able to visit different Housing Offices and hear about the various ownership arrangements between local and central bodies based on different funding concepts. "We were taken to council estates that had issues present, yet clearly demonstrated the tremendously positive results of regeneration programmes."

One further highlight of the trip was a visit to a wet house in Manchester. The concept of accepting and supporting that some long term alcoholics will not rehabilitate to a point of being completely dry is one that may draw some controversy through different sectors of the community. "However, the results of this organisation spoke for themselves," James adds.

"The whole trip – conference, exhibition and subsequent visits – was professionally stimulating and definitely a career highlight."



Rocco Esposito and Leonie King (Housing NSW), Paul Diggory (CIH) and Shane Edmonds at the conference.



Shane Edmonds catches up with CIH President Howard Farrand.



James Hadlee



Circles of learning

This year, 'learning circles' could become an exciting addition to the Institute's professional development agenda. To find out what these are *HousingPeople* spoke to the experts – veteran AHI trainers Steve Morgan and John Flanagan.

Although there are several models, Steve says that a learning circle is basically a network of people who meet. "One advantage of a learning circle is that it allows for the transfer of training – for information that's provided in the workshop to be applied at the workplace level, and it is something that gets applied over a period of time," he says.



Steve Morgan

In practice, a group may meet 4–6 weeks after the original workshop and then several weeks later again to continue and reinforce their learning, picking up the mechanisms, skills and confidence to perpetuate the circle. And as for facilitation: "You don't necessarily need an expert," says Steve, "it might be helpful, but you certainly wouldn't be relying on it. The trainers are usually available for support early on but gradually the participants will take ownership of the process."

John Flanagan believes that one area where learning circles come into their own is the issue of workforce development within the housing sector. "It's a broad church, so it's useful to be able to connect people from a range of housing organisations and support services

together to share information and skills," says John. "Learning circles are able to do that in a quite defined and structured way."

John has developed learning circles around the issue of professional supervision, which has created a network of potential supervisors (or mentors/coaches) that services in more isolated or remote communities are able to use. The success of these reinforces Steve Morgan's view that learning circles are often of most benefit to rural and remote staff who may not have direct and regular access to a high level of expertise.

"They can build the capacity of housing services," John says. "We provide the training then follow up with learning circles. It's about taking the learning out of the expert's hands and handing it to the students."

Housing People, Housing Communities Conference > 3rd December, Auckland, Rendezvous Hotel

In one exciting day, hear from local and international speakers on the topics that will shape the future of social housing policy in New Zealand:

- The impact of the global financial crisis on housing
- Homelessness
- The role of Community Housing
- Transforming social housing estates
- Integrating housing delivery with support services
- Changing the "one size fits all" approach for social housing
- Building a global housing community

Join The Hon Phil Heatley (Minister for Housing), Howard Farrand (President of the UK Chartered Institute of Housing), Michael Lennon (Housing Choices Australia) and HNZC's Chief Executive Lesley McTurk for a lively discussion on key housing issues.

Take advantage of our Early Bird rates by registering today

Early Bird rates: member \$250 and non-member \$295, available till the 30th of September

Normal rates: member \$295 and non-member \$350

Click here to register online. Program out soon!



Fresh research picks up new award

At the first session of the Housing Researchers Conference (5th August), federal housing minister Tanya Plibersek announced the winner of a new award category in the Australasian Housing Research Awards. The inaugural winner of the the Housing Minister's Award for Early Career Researchers is Dr Louise Crabtree, Research Fellow and Research Program Coordinator at the University of Western Sydney.

"My work is based on the theory coming out of new ecology," Louise said. "I'm looking at the utility of the research frameworks in new ecology for developing the integration of affordability and sustainability in housing."

According to Louise an old ecological paradigm is that when systems are subjected to disruption they will seek to restore the equilibrium state or balance.

Meanwhile new ecology deals with concepts of adaptive capacity and resilience, and looks at the ability of systems to respond to shock, chaos and uncertainty without compromising core functionality.

This field of research asks what sort of factors facilitate or undermine the ability of a system to adapt. "It is based on research done on the management of such things as fisheries, forestry and pasture land," Louise explained. So how does all this relate to housing? "I am looking not only at physical impacts, such as the necessary energy and water resource bases, but also at the the social and economic impacts." Louise said.

"How do we set up tenure and governance forms in housing so they can deal with stressors such as climate change, loss of affordability, demographic shifts, ageing etc.? We need to start looking at housing differently – can a house be a carbon sink, an energy provider, a water treatment facility or a food producer?"



Dr Louise Crabtree receives her award from Dr Ian Winter.



Dr Ian Winter, Dr Louise Crabtree, Minister Tanya Plibersek, Associate Professor Vivienne Milligan and Dr Kathleen Hulse at the conference. Photos: Liss Ralston.

For the diary



Australasian Housing Institute

Event	Location	Date
Re-inventing Social Housing – Breakfast with Michael Lennon	Sydney	1 September 2009
Disability Housing Forum	Brisbane	2 September 2009
Re-inventing Social Housing – Breakfast with Michael Lennon	Brisbane	2 September 2009
AHI Queensland Branch Networking event	Brisbane	14 September 2009
Breakfast with Rhonda Phillips – Service Integration	Melbourne	16 September 2009
Breakfast with Rhonda Phillips – Service Integration	Hobart	17 September 2009
Re-inventing Social Housing – Breakfast with Michael Lennon	Adelaide	23 September 2009
Re-inventing Social Housing – Breakfast with Michael Lennon	Perth	24 September 2009
Dealing with Complex and Demanding Clients – in house	Devonport	13 October 2009

To register online visit the [Events and Seminars page](#) of the AHI website