

TRANSCRIPT

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the adequacy and future directions of public housing in Victoria

Melbourne — 11 February 2010

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Witnesses

Ms J. Line, chief executive officer, Women's Housing Ltd, and

Mr J. Connellan, director, MC Two Pty Ltd.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the public hearing today. My name is Jude Perera; I am the chair of the Family and Community Development Committee. This committee, the Family and Community Development Committee, is inquiring into the adequacy and future directions of public housing. This is a parliamentary inquiry, not a government inquiry. All evidence taken in this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided in the Constitution Act 1975 and further subject to the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, the Defamation Act 2005 and, where applicable, the provisions of reciprocal legislation in other states and territories. Any comments you make outside the hearing will not be afforded such privilege.

We are recording the proceedings, and you will be sent a copy of the transcript, to which you will be able to make minor adjustments if necessary. We will have a 45-minute session. I invite you to make some opening comments, which will be followed by some questions from the panel. Please introduce yourselves for Hansard before proceeding to make your comments. The ball is in your court.

Ms LINE — My name is Judy Line; I am the CEO of Women's Housing Ltd.

Mr CONNELLAN — My name is Joseph Connellan; I am a consultant assisting Women's Housing Ltd.

Ms LINE — I would like to start by giving an overview of women's housing. We started about 11 years ago as a transitional housing manager. At that time we built up to about 100 transitional houses. Transitional housing is essentially about providing transitional housing for women who are homeless or are experiencing an extreme housing difficulty. They come to that program for a short time, and then from there we try to get them into long-term housing. For the most part we rely on public housing at those exit points.

A couple of years ago we also took on a rooming house program. That encompasses five different rooming houses; two of those rooming houses are aimed at men and the other three are for women. In that program we have mix-gendered clients coming in. The transitional program was set up for women only. More recently we have started to build our own developments and currently have, or will have, just over 100 new units under development. That is long-term housing, and it is aimed at women-headed households. For the most part the women who go into those houses will be women with kids, women particularly over the age of 55, and also couples. That is a small snapshot of our organisation.

I would like to start by talking a bit about the history of public housing in the way that we see it. I suppose about 40 or 50 years ago when public housing began it was a program aimed at workers. In fact when you first went into public housing at that time you had to have a job to go into public housing. It was well located next to employment, and people used to line up to try and get into that housing. I suppose many of you might know family members, as I do, for whom that was the first thing they did, particularly back in the 1960s and 1970s — they got married and went into public housing.

Over time, I suppose towards the late 1970s and in the 1980s, there were resources put into public housing, and we had a situation where the government policy changed and public housing was there pretty much for those highest in needs. I was looking for something else a few weeks ago on the internet, and I found the transcript of the audit committee that was set up to look into public housing in 1996, and at that time the words used in that audit committee were pretty much saying what we are saying now about public housing. They talked about priority housing; they talked about welfare housing; they talked about housing those highest in need.

So I suppose we have come to today whereby, as you are all probably aware, we are experiencing a housing crisis — not only in social housing but housing in general. As we have shown in our submission, we have increased population growth, rising land costs, low vacancy rates and essentially many people — not just low-income people — who simply have nowhere to live, so it is something that we will have to address.

Our submission talks about social housing in the context of both public housing and community housing — that is, the developments that we provide.

When we talk about the shortage of housing and the focus on women, women are particularly disadvantaged in this environment. They have lower wages; they go in and out of the workforce over a period of time. Many of them have very little saved up in superannuation. The statistics will show that on average women have half the amount in superannuation that men do. They are more likely to be carers; they are more likely to be looking after children; they are more likely to be working part time; they are more likely to be caring for and looking after elderly parents; and they are more likely to become homeless because of domestic violence.

This is a serious and big issue for women, because women who experience domestic violence leave the family home not because of their own choices and decisions and behaviours but because of someone else's choices and decisions and behaviours. They have no choice. Women who may be living in homes that are perhaps owned or secure homes in that situation leave secure family homes and go into poverty, essentially. So for women experiencing domestic violence, it is quite a huge issue.

In order to meet the demand in housing we obviously need to build more social housing, whether that be built by the public housing system or by the community housing system under the recent strategies that have been developed by the Victorian government in following that through, and also with assistance like the current stimulus package that has enabled us to build, I think — how many homes, was it, Joseph?

Mr CONNELLAN — Four and a half thousand; 2500 in the community housing sector.

Mrs SHARDEY — That is across the whole sector?

Mr CONNELLAN — Across the state, so 4500 in total — 2000 in public housing and 2500 in the community housing sector.

Ms LINE — So on our figures that we have represented in the submission we would say that under the current housing crisis we would have to keep social housing at least at that level in order to keep up with current demand, to give you an idea of the scale of the problem.

The CHAIR — This 2000 and 2500 is the current situation, is it?

Ms LINE — That has come in just in the last 12 months, and it has all come from the federal government as part of their stimulus package, so for most people it is probably a one-off. It is certainly the biggest injection I have seen in housing since I started in this sector in 1986. I have never seen that kind of money come in for housing, which is terrific, but we need to keep it up.

Another thing around building for this type of housing demand is that it is about housing sustainability, which we also highlight in our submission. We are talking about women and housing sustainability, and women make choices and decisions about where they want to live based on their relationships. It will be based on where their family ties are, where their networks are, where their friends are, where work is and where they have opportunities for their children, particularly in terms of good education and good employment prospects. Women will make that choice based on that in the first instance. The housing that they choose needs to be secure not only in terms of the physical built form of the house — that is, in terms of locks, security and those types of issues — but also where it is located; for example, it needs to be located in an area where women feel safe to walk around the streets.

We think about that and we think about the current situation where housing is so scarce, particularly public and social housing. What is being developed for women and those experiencing domestic violence is a priority system whereby women, according to their high need and also if they are experiencing domestic violence, get priority access into public housing. That sounds okay, except that there is so little housing available for them, and the priority housing system works whereby a woman must choose three broad bands. Three broad bands could cover just about the whole of, say, the eastern part of Melbourne. So you get a woman who is experiencing domestic violence; she obviously wants to live close to her networks and supports, but she is given a house maybe up to 20 kilometres from where she wants to live. We would say that is not a good housing outcome for that woman and it is certainly not sustainable.

I am just using that as one example, but there are many examples of that. In terms of sustainability it is important that women are able to live where they want to live and that the housing be people driven rather than house driven — that is, 'There's an empty house; you go and live in it and be thankful'.

Again in terms of sustainability we support the Office of Housing's policy on security of tenure. In other states it seems that they are bringing in capped tenure — that is, someone can go into a public housing property for three or four years and then after that time if they do not still meet the criteria they are asked to move on. To me that really unsettles the community — —

Mrs SHARDEY — What do you mean, 'if they do not still meet the criteria'?

Ms LINE — If they go into social housing, under the current criteria there is a certain income limit, a certain asset limit, so it could be that women go in there, do further education, get their kids organised, get a job, work their way up and all of a sudden — bingo — their income goes over that income limit. Then there is a possibility they could be asked to leave just because they have done really well. That is not only difficult for the woman who is living in that house, but it also upsets the community. They get to know their neighbours; it is all about sustainability and sustainability in the community. So we would really applaud the Office of Housing's policy on that, that when somebody gets to a certain income limit they pay 100 per cent of the market rent. If they want to stay there, that is fine.

Of course there is a flip side to that, particularly for an organisation like ours that is building developments. We are aiming at building mixed-income developments, therefore when we start we have 30 per cent that are on low income or Centrelink income; 40 per cent would pay 60 per cent of the market rent, and they might be working part-time; and 30 per cent pay 75 per cent of the market rent, and they are generally key workers — nurses, retail or in that area.

In our situation if any of those tenants improve their circumstances and go above those initial income limits, we would not want to evict them because they have done really well. Over and above that, the ones who are on the higher incomes subsidise those who are on the lower income, which is important for us because we are not funded for 100 per cent of the projects that we have built. We are funded 75 per cent for the projects that we build, and we have to debt fund the other 25 per cent of the total cost of the project. So for our financial situation we certainly have to have the income in order to pay the banks and our interest rates. Any money left over we want to put back into social housing. That is another point I would make on that.

I would just like to finish with the fact that our organisation strongly supports the continued growth and maintenance of public housing. Public housing is an important part of being able to meet the housing demand for low-income earners, but at the same time that public housing can be complemented by organisations like ours that target particular communities — in our case, women — and provide housing that is targeted to that particular community. We believe our organisation complements the larger work that public housing does.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your presentation.

Mrs SHARDEY — I found your submission really interesting; I learnt things I did not know about your organisation. You talk about the fact that the population has grown but the amount of housing stock has declined. Hanover housing actually did a graph for us. It showed that in 1998 there were 67 000 units of housing available. In 2006 that had gone down to 65 000. But not only has that number gone down, the population has also gone up, and the waiting list is around 40 000. That is one element. You have also talked about wanting to see diversity in the system with people on different levels of income being housed in the same area so there is not this sort of enclave of disadvantage in the one place. You have also talked about the principle of a choice base, so that you have a choice as to where you go and live. Particularly for women that would be an important element. In terms of those things that you have talked about and want to see, for them to occur would require a very big increase in public housing stock, because you are trying to provide for a much broader base of people, not just people who are on very low incomes.

I am not sure what the current number of units is — we will have to check that with the Office of Housing. There has been this increase that you have talked about through the stimulus package, which is very welcome, but how many more units do you think would be necessary across the system to cater for an increase in the population, the sort of diversity you are wanting to see regarding people from different base levels and the opportunity for choice so that people, particularly women, can go and live in places which are familiar, where their kids go to school and all of those things. Do you have any idea as to — —

Ms LINE — Yes.

Mrs SHARDEY — Sorry it took so long to say all that.

Ms LINE — No, that is okay. In the submission we talk about the current stimulus package and where that is up to. We would say — and put simply — if the levels of funding were kept at least at that level going forward, then that is what we would need to develop that kind of housing.

Mrs SHARDEY — Is that 4500 going to be achieved in one year or is that over four years?

Ms LINE — It is supposed to be. I suppose it is probably two years. It is from when it was announced. All of that housing, or at least 75 per cent of it, has got to be built and tenanted by December 2010. Anything that slips over that would be built and tenanted — —

We say December 2010 because you miss January. Probably some projects might be commissioned — —

Mrs SHARDEY — So that is about 4000 a year?

Ms LINE — Yes.

Mrs SHARDEY — You think we should be adding 4000 a year? That is net.

Ms LINE — Yes. In our submission Owen Donald in his figures said we have got a shortfall of 90 000 social housing units nationwide.

Mrs SHARDEY — That is Owen Donald. That is nationwide?

Ms LINE — That is nationwide.

Mrs SHARDEY — What about Victoria? We are 25 per cent of the population.

Ms LINE — So 25 per cent of that. Victoria is different too. It is a changing landscape. If you look at recent figures, Melbourne is growing much faster than the other capital cities.

Mrs SHARDEY — A thousand migrants a week.

Ms LINE — Yes, and it is interesting too if you also look at the population growth of Australia, you see it has got one of the fastest growing populations in the world. We are currently growing faster than China, Indonesia and — I am taking this from what I heard on the radio; I was listening to ABC radio somewhere — even some Third World countries. You see it, but it is surprising when you hear it like that.

Mrs SHARDEY — It is all of those mums having babies.

Ms LINE — Yes. We do. We have a strong immigration program and more women are having more babies. It is as simple as that.

Mr SCHEFFER — Can I just come back to the 100 long-term units that you mentioned in your submission. I also thank you for this submission you put together and your presentation; it was extremely interesting. But I just refer to where you talk about the extra 100 long-term units under development and the variety of configurations and locations. You mentioned in your presentation that 75 per cent of the funding for that was from the commonwealth government. Is that right?

Ms LINE — Yes.

Mr SCHEFFER — And 25 per cent you raised yourself out of your own — —

Ms LINE — Yes.

Mr SCHEFFER — Can you talk, firstly, a little bit more about how the funding structure operates if there is more to be said from what you have already contributed? Also, can you just talk about how you manage those issues like location and proximity to services and to employment and the kind of principles you outlined in your presentation? How do you build that into your planning for that 100?

Ms LINE — Yes, sure. The Office of Housing assists, I suppose, in terms of the locations. To give an example, when the stimulus package came up the Office of Housing asked for submissions from everyone as to, 'Where do you have projects at the moment and where would you like to build them et cetera?'. So a lot of housing agencies put up a lot of projects; we did as well. Then the Office of Housing went through. Given its rate and knowledge, I suppose, about where social housing is and where is required, then it picked which projects were the best projects and those which were well located. There is certain criteria you have to stick to. Essentially the housing has to be close to public transport, close to services, close to employment opportunities

and close to schools. You essentially have to pick your areas based on that criteria. That is okay. So you pick that.

Mr SCHEFFER — Do you negotiate that with the Office of Housing? Is there a bit of toing and froing there?

Ms LINE — No, we actually go out independently and cite those projects, then we provide that information back to the Office of Housing. If our project is considered viable, then the Office of Housing will let us know that and then we have to put together what it calls a capital pack, which is quite an extensive document that shows all of the proposed plans, the price with the stimulus package, how many jobs building that particular project is going to generate, planning issues, legal issues and who is going to build it and at what cost. Basically you have to have all that done. You submit that to the Office of Housing, and then it is quite a complex process of working out your different contracts with your builders and developers, and then you go ahead and build those projects. Some are more complex than others. In one case, for example, we have a turnkey project that is half built out at Meadow Heights. It is an eight-unit development. We have another one we have just signed the development agreement for, which is a 49-unit development in Bentleigh. It is three storeys, and being in that area — —

Mrs SHARDEY — What is a turnkey?

Ms LINE — If you went to buy a house yourself, you would pay 10 per cent down and 90 per cent when it is finished. In a development like Bentleigh, because it is such a big development and there is a cost associated with that, the way that you can make it cheaper to buy is by having draw-down payments. You essentially pay the developer-builder as you go along, which means that they get their money earlier and can therefore provide that product to you cheaper. Obviously there is a lot of complexity and risk involved in that. It is very different to a turnkey project where they build the house and you move in.

Mr SCHEFFER — That is good. Just to end up on that, I have a question with two parts. One part is whether overall your association is happy with that process and whether that works for you and is making sense. The other part is that further on in your submission you say that:

This can only fully succeed in a socially and economically sustainable way if the sector receives broad *political* support.

We are all aware that there has been some community — —

Ms LINE — Angst.

Mr SCHEFFER — Some angst about this. Do you involve yourself in that process?

Ms LINE — Yes.

Mr SCHEFFER — How do you think that is playing out? By ‘political’ — you are talking to us — do you mean you think government, for example, or MPs are not being constructive? Do we need to be more constructive?

Ms LINE — I will answer the first part of the question first. You asked me about whether we are happy with the process of how we do these developments. From our point of view, because we have control of that housing and because we wind up with the titles, we can do our own asset management strategy, which we think we can do better for ourselves. In that case the idea of leverage and owning part of that is a good idea, except that — and I mentioned this in the submission — when you are doing these developments further out, like in Pakenham, you have cheaper land so therefore your 25 per cent leverage, particularly at the start of the project, is more doable; when you want to build in a place like Bentleigh, where we do build and are building, the 25 per cent is difficult. It is not easy to do it. Your income out at Pakenham will not be much different to your income at Bentleigh, given the tenants that we are trying to house. I make the point on that. Therefore we are recommending that if you are building in inner city areas, that leverage be dropped to 15 per cent. Fifteen per cent is doable; we are fine with that; 25 per cent is hard. Another rider is that if it were 15 per cent, we would have more money to build more housing. Twenty-five per cent means you have nothing left over; it goes back to the banks.

The second part of your question related to political will. I would have to say that for the most part most local MPs, regardless of their political stripes, are supportive of social housing. They see the need for it, they are behind it and they support it, but many of their constituents do not, because they have a fear that what we are going to build are enclaves of disadvantage, which they see in places like the high-rises in Carlton and Fitzroy.

Community housing and public housing organisations and government, particularly local government, have a responsibility to educate local communities about these types of mixed-development projects. This is not about building enclaves of disadvantage; this is about building housing for people who currently live in the local community and who are living either on their mum and dad's couch or in someone's garage. That is essentially what we are aiming at.

The political will is about allowing more medium-density projects to be built more easily in places like Bentleigh and Sunshine, where we are building, and other areas that are closer to the inner city. A lot of people take it to heart. It is not just social housing that people will protest against, I might add; it is any type of medium-density housing. Am I answering the question?

Mr SCHEFFER — Yes, absolutely.

Mrs SHARDEY — It is a community perception thing that is the problem.

Ms LINE — Yes. You would be amazed at the stuff that is sent around as soon as a project comes up. Some residents groups are well organised now. We had a project at Sunshine that had only gone in for planning, and there was a letterbox drop with pictures of high-rises and people who looked quite homeless or drunk, with their bottles next to them, leaning against a high-rise — 'This is what's coming to our area'. I found that interesting.

In Bentleigh I attended a public meeting with 180 irate residents saying, 'We don't want them here'. Because we are Women's Housing Ltd, it was said quite clearly, 'You are all lesbians', and —

Mrs SHARDEY — You are kidding!

Ms LINE — I am not kidding. For an hour and three quarters we sat through that and them saying, 'Their children will run out on the road and get hit'. Mind you, the locals' children will not! 'How am I going to monitor who comes and goes from their houses?'. It was just absurd. The Bentleigh residents said to us, 'We don't want that type of housing here. Go and build it in the places where it has been traditionally built. Go out to the west and build it out there'. We had the same issue down at Sunshine about building there. Sunshine residents said, 'We have got too much social housing in this area. Once again you are building in a low socioeconomic area. Why don't you go and build in a higher socioeconomic area?'. In other words, you simply cannot win. This is where we would ask for government support.

Mrs POWELL — Can I follow on from that. I had two other questions but this is an issue that comes through my office time and again. Can I start by saying that I come from a public housing background. I was a migrant and at 10 we went into a public housing estate. I left when I got married at 21. I have had the public housing experience. But it was different then. You had people with low incomes but mum or dad worked. Whereas now with the spot purchasing — and Helen mentioned perception; the perception is from bad experience. The issues that come through my office, and Helen and I have met at public meetings where you are actually dealing with people of certain families that have gone into an area, it is about bad experiences. It is also, if I might say, about the Office of Housing not dealing with complaints urgently. There is nowhere for these people to go if there is antisocial behaviour to hit it on the head when it starts and before it escalates into neighbourhood war. They get told to go to the police. They get told to go to the council if there are dogs barking. They get told to document it, so every time a dog barks they have to get up in the middle of the night and document that the dog was barking at 2 o'clock in the morning and that it stopped at 3. This is the sort of thing they are told, so with the spot purchases the Office of Housing really has to manage those homes. I know people say this happens in the private sector as well, but in the private sector those people are dealt with by the neighbours as well.

How do you think we can work that one out? Should the Office of Housing put more staff on to deal with the complaints? How do you see that we can make it safer for the tenants in the public houses as well as the neighbourhood, because what we do not want to do is spot purchase houses in places where we are setting them up to fail? You talked about public meetings where they say, 'We don't want these people here'. That is really

not true; it is not about 'these people', it is that they have had bad experiences. How do we make it so that we do not set up people to fail? Is it the management of the Office of Housing? Is there a better complaints process?

Ms LINE — I think I would go back again to the model that we are building our developments on. I will go back again to the mixed-income-type developments. It is better for everyone all around. If I ask my transitional housing tenants, which I did when they came to lunch at Christmastime — we were talking about this very issue. They do not want to live with everybody just being on pensions with them either. They see the value of a mixed-income development. They have the same types of issues. They have neighbourhood issues that they have to deal with as well. That is one issue. The second part of it is around the management of the housing. Can I say that public housing is very big; it is huge. Helen may not remember, but I actually went to Helen's office some years ago representing the public housing tenants because I used to work for them.

Mrs SHARDEY — Who were you with? There was some guy.

Ms LINE — I was with Maurice, but anyway — this is being recorded! I am very wary of that. I think that what I said to Helen at that time is this: we have this big thing called public housing; it is a big circle. If we compare transitional housing to it, it is this big — that is how big the transitional housing is. And there would be a little dot over here called 'crisis housing'. And because of the policy settings where we only house those highest in need what is happening is they are coming through crisis into transitional and then they just go into this big sea called public housing. Over time — it would be eight years go, I think, Helen, when I came to see you, and it has gotten worse over time — that upsets everybody who is currently living in public housing. It is upsetting their communities that are there; their settled communities as well. Then you have this thing where they are getting spat out of public housing, go back through the crisis centres and back through transitional and we have got this revolving door thing happening. To my way of thinking, the only way that we can stop that is to settle and sustain the communities where we put people to start with. This also hits on your allocations policy. If the Office of Housing is only taking those highest in need because that is the way the policy works, then it would have very little opportunity to perhaps bring in other tenants who are the traditional tenants, the ones that you grew up with. Am I making sense there?

Mrs SHARDEY — Yes.

Ms LINE — That is what we are trying to avoid. We are trying to avoid it because that is the model we have set up.

Mrs POWELL — Do you think that as a committee we could also look at changing or recommending there be a change of policy that people who are not the most disadvantaged go into public housing, that there is a mix of incomes as well in public housing?

Ms LINE — Yes, I would recommend that.

Mrs SHARDEY — That means greater stock.

Ms LINE — That also means we need to build more housing.

Mrs POWELL — Much more.

Ms LINE — If we look at our growth in population, which is growing like this, and housing is like this — —

Mrs SHARDEY — It is scary; you have got a graph here.

Ms LINE — The issue, like all infrastructure, is going to have to be addressed. I do not think we can put our heads in the sand about that any longer. We have the same issues, particularly with our transitional housing tenants. They are highest in need, and many of those women might have mental health issues that may cause neighbourhood problems. The issue when you are dealing with neighbourhood problems is that it is much easier for us, because we are on the job because we have a small amount.

The whole issue for us, particularly in transitional housing, is that we all have to work under the constraints of the Residential Tenancies Act. Then we have to work under the constraints — which is not a constraint, but it is there — of the Privacy Act. On top of that the public housing authority has the same issues, and we have to

work within the charter of human rights. So if you have a tenant who really is causing angst in the community and you know that you are going to have to move that tenant to a place where they can get better support or other housing, which we do quite often, it is a process. You have to put a breach notice in, you have to give a certain amount of time. You have to go through all those processes, but over and above that, when the poor neighbours are ringing you and saying, 'But you do not know what is going on here', because I am constrained under the Privacy Act I have to say to them, 'Look we are getting it sorted out'. I cannot tell them, 'I have issued a 120-day notice to vacate', or 'I have issued a breach notice', or 'I should have them out in 14 days'.

Mrs POWELL — When in fact that is what they want to hear.

Ms LINE — That is what they want to hear.

Mrs POWELL — They want to know, and they will pull their head in if they know it is going to happen and they can just relax.

Ms LINE — Exactly. I even have the ones who work in public housing — because it will go up the line. The same issue we have for our properties will wind up on your desk, and then it will wind up on the minister's desk. We need to respond to that. Those working in public housing need to respond to the minister, and that is fair enough. But it is frustrating because I have to say to those people, 'Under the Privacy Act I cannot give you that information to give to your minister', but that is the law. I am not too sure that — —

Mr SCHEFFER — Are you suggesting that it be otherwise, though, on that issue?

Ms LINE — No, I am not. What I am trying to do, though, is explain that that is the law we work within that. We do agree with tenant dignity, and it is not my place to tell the neighbour that I may be going to kick this tenant out or to go into their private information.

Mrs SHARDEY — But you can say you are trying to manage the situation.

Ms LINE — Yes, you do. You manage it in a way whereby you are sympathetic with the neighbour as much as you can be; you go and visit the neighbour, talk to them and do those things. Eventually the reality is that you do say, 'Please ring the police', but in many cases the police are reluctant to act; they do not want to get involved. It is a difficult area.

The CHAIR — We are running out of time. Before we wind up, I want to ask you just a brief question. You were talking about transitional housing. As the potential clients come in, do you put them into transitional housing or do you have arrangements for different crisis accommodation?

Ms LINE — We do not have a lot of crisis accommodation. Essentially they go into crisis accommodation and then come into transitional. They might come from the refuges into transitional housing, particularly women experiencing domestic violence. Then they go from, say, the refuge into transitional housing. We supposedly should have them out within eight months. That is impossible now. When transitional housing was set up we were supposed to turn over 2.5 tenants per year per house. As I have said in our submission, our current length of stay is 15 months.

As I have also said in the submission about transitional housing, our capacity to provide those housing services to women has halved since 2007 because the Office of Housing leased a lot of the transitional housing, and, as I have said in the submission, the private owners can now get a better price in the open market so they are taking those houses back. So I am losing transitional houses because they are not being replaced by the Office of Housing. Then, at the other extreme, I am also losing capacity to provide housing for women because they are saying in our properties for a lot longer because I cannot find them exit points.

The CHAIR — You refer in your submission to the WHL-Wombat partnership.

Ms LINE — Yes.

The CHAIR — Do you think that is a better model?

Ms LINE — Yes, and that goes back to what Jeanette said about neighbourhood issues. We implemented this program initially in our rooming houses. One of our rooming houses in particular was having a lot of

problems when we took it over. Under that model the Office of Housing owns the block, we collect all the rent — a fair amount of it goes back to the Office of Housing for maintenance and asset management. We keep a portion to do just the tenancy/property management, and a portion of it goes back to Wombat Housing and Support Services which provides a community development program for the people living in those units. It has worked really well because it is about breaking down social isolation.

I believe that is first thing you need to do when you are dealing with clients, particularly those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This program is not so much about support; it is more about getting people involved in their local community, so it is about joining the local gym club, bowling club — we do a number of different things.

Mrs SHARDEY — Employment and training?

Ms LINE — Employment and training, but before you can get them into employment and training you actually need to get people's confidence up that they can socialise with other people; that is where we come from. The beauty of that program and why it is so successful is that those community development workers go for small recreation grants from other areas. They use that money to take our tenants on pretty good trips. For example, all the guys down at the rooming house hardly ever talk to one another and we took them all on a weekend fishing trip. The women like to do different things. The workers got tickets for all of them to go and see the musical *Wicked*. I mean, it is about going and having fun. The workers love it; they have a ball.

The CHAIR — Under this model you do not have to come up with the 25 per cent capital funding?

Ms LINE — When we are debt funding 25 per cent of the total cost of the project, we have no funds left over to employ that type of program, none. Having said that, under the housing provider framework model, we can — that is for the rooming houses. Recently we have extended it to 12 new units that we picked up the management for; 8 of those tenants are aged 75 or more and 1 of the community development workers is skilled with working with older people, so she does a different program with them. It is pretty much based around exercise programs as well — and socialisation programs.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for coming along. I am sure our secretariat will be in communication with you.

Ms LINE — Thank you for the opportunity to present, and good luck with the rest of it.

Witnesses withdrew.