

Community Engagement Policy



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1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to articulate a framework within which WHL engages with the wider community.

The specific purposes of this policy are to:

- Promote the awareness of WHL services among the wider community
- Develop renters' understanding about services available for use in the community
- Provide information about partnerships with agencies which foster collaboration in service delivery
- Outline WHL's strategy to create thriving and inclusive communities through linked in support and engagement

2. Statement of commitment

- Women's Housing Ltd (WHL) is committed to the rights of all women and children to live free from the threat of family violence and the threat of homelessness that inevitably accompanies this behaviour.
- WHL is committed to a socially inclusive society in which all renters can feel valued.
- WHL will provide a quality service to renters that provides opportunities for them to gain further skills and to be linked into their local communities.
- Renters will be encouraged to be active participants in their immediate community so that they can help to shape the community within which they live.

3. Scope

This policy applies to the Rooming House, General Lease and Community Housing Program.

4. Essential features of the Community Engagement Policy

The essential features of the WHL Community Engagement Framework include:

- Research into barriers and challenges affecting WHL renters engaging in the wider community to their full capacity.
- Provision of training to WHL employees so that they have the tools and skills to implement the Policy.
- Formal and informal collaboration with relevant agencies and services to facilitate renter participation in the wider community.
- Development of collaborative practical initiatives to improve renter engagement.

- Exploration of partnership initiatives with other services.
- Development of a Community Plan for each housing cluster.

5. Community Engagement Strategy

WHL believes that for a housing community to survive and thrive it requires a combination of the following attributes:

- Sense of purpose
- Healthy lifestyle
- Healthy outdoor spaces
- Security and sense of safety

WHL recognises that housing is only one element of the various needs and aspirations in many of our clients' lives.

5.1 Goals of the Community Engagement Strategy

The basic goals of the WHL Community Engagement Strategy is to:

- Improve community life
- Value diversity
- Encourage return to work
- Encourage a healthy lifestyle

These goals can only be achieved through partnerships with other agencies which will integrate and strengthen various housing and social support programs.

Accordingly, WHL has adopted a holistic service approach across its portfolios which integrates personal support, community activities, employment initiatives, education and training, health and financial management.

5.2 Target communities

The primary target community of WHL is women and women with children experiencing a housing crisis. Within this group, WHL particularly targets:

- Older women
- Women experiencing domestic violence
- Women exiting prison

In its broader program provision WHL currently houses:

- Single women and women headed households in Transitional Housing
- Single men and women in Rooming Houses
- Women headed households, couples and single men and women in affordable housing dwellings

The aim of the Strategy is to wrap existing services around mutual clients to improve the sense of community and belonging for renters.

6. Community Plan

Each Housing Cluster will have a community plan developed. This will detail:

- An outline of the property and any issues that may impact on social connection with the wider community
- Renter mix
- Local services and potential partners that WHL can work with to improve the engagement with the wider community
- A link to the overall Community Engagement Policy
- Identifies focus for the year and where resources are to be focused.

The community plan will be reviewed annually with the Tenancy Services Manager.

7. Implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy

7.1 House meetings

WHL will hold house meetings with all renters that reside within a cluster of housing; this includes Rooming Houses, high density General Lease properties and high-level Community Housing properties.

House meetings are generally scheduled quarterly at all Rooming House and General Lease properties and 6 monthly at Community Housing properties. Tenancy Officers (TOs) may schedule these meetings more frequently where there is an issue that requires immediate attention.

Guest speakers may be invited from a range of services including health, education, support services or women specific services.

These meetings provide a forum for renters to engage with WHL about issues that concern them at their property.

Minutes will be taken of all meetings, and these will be mailed out to all renters at the property.

7.2 Community days

A community day will be arranged at all rooming houses annually. The purpose of this will be to facilitate renters' access to services in the local community.

7.3 Community development

WHL will seek options for additional funding and resources so that community development activities can be provided at properties.

The TW will seek to empower the renters through the creation of committees and clubs as per the consensus of the renter groups.

7.4 House visits

WHL staff will attend all housing at pre-determined days. Generally, staff will visit the Rooming Houses weekly. Staff will visit the larger cluster housing blocks at least monthly. Renters are advised via SMS or other notice of these visits occurring.

These visits are to make sure that renters are managing well in their homes and there are no problems with the tenancies.

As a part of this service, WHL can link renters into education, employment and training by organising services to attend a House Meeting and/or community day to speak and link renters into services.

7.5 Renter projects

From time to time, WHL will seek renters to be engaged with projects. All out of pocket expenses will be covered at this time.

8. Partnerships

WHL is a member of peak groups such as Community Housing Industry Association Victoria, Council to Homeless Persons and PowerHousing.

WHL also has partnership agreements and/or affiliations with several other agencies.

As part of the Community Engagement Strategy, WHL is seeking to broaden partnership arrangements further by engaging with:

- Local Neighbourhood Houses
- Local Councils
- Local Health Services
- Community and Church Groups

9. Working with support agencies

A fundamental condition of gaining entry to WHL's Transitional Housing program (THM) is a renter's acceptance of ongoing support from a housing support service during the tenancy.

Effective working relationships between WHL and support agencies are crucial for producing long term housing outcomes for THM renters. WHL is mindful that renters who have complex needs require substantial support to maintain their tenancy.

In general, prospective renters apply for and access WHL properties through support agencies who nominate existing clients for allocation to WHL THM properties. Alternatively, prospective clients who approach WHL directly are referred to the appropriate support agency before application.

Working relationships between WHL and support agencies are formalised through the THM Memorandum of Understanding, which is required under DFFH funding agreements.

9.1 Formal arrangements with support agencies

Signed agreements will be established with each support agency. This will specify each party's responsibilities according to the following guidelines.

The agreement establishes protocols to guide WHL when working in partnership with the support agency.

WHL reviews and negotiates agreements at the time of each sign-up to a property.

9.2 Developing positive relationships with support agencies

WHL will foster positive relationships with support agencies and other relevant organisations in informal and formal settings.

WHL seeks to establish and maintain constructive and positive working relationships with support agencies on a day-to-day basis, based on the common objective of producing the best possible outcomes for clients.

WHL also engages with a range of other agencies and government departments.

WHL will encourage all relevant agencies to visit and provide WHL with information on their service so that staff are well informed. Speakers are encouraged to attend WHL team meetings.

10. Women's Advisory Group

WHL has established a Women's Advisory Group. (WAG). The WAG meets monthly with WHL staff and provides a voice into the operations of WHL. The WAG is instrumental in the development of the centralised Community Engagement Program (CEP).

The centralised CEP is held monthly at a central location. This is made available to all female renters. The program provides a thematic program of events. These events will provide a focus on issues such as:

- Well-being
- Financial Security
- Creativity
- Legal Matters
- General Health and Nutrition
- Living well on a budget
- Styling on a budget

The CEP enables renters to be linked to the wider community and builds a community within Women's Housing Ltd.

11. Documentation

All community groups working with WHL will be asked to sign an MOU before they commence working with WHL. This will include reference to client confidentiality.

All volunteers will be asked to provide:

- Working with Children's Cards
- Police Clearance and
- Signed confidentiality and code of conduct forms

12. Responsibilities

12.1 CEO

- Oversee key partnerships
- Ensure that WHL is engaged in key strategic issues affecting women in the wider community

12.2 Operations Manager

- Oversee operation of this policy.
- To facilitate partnerships

12.3 Line Managers

- To be aware of policy
- To facilitate staff in the implementation of the Community Engagement Framework
- To provide leadership in community development activities at properties

12.4 Tenancy Staff

- To implement this policy

13. Relevant legislation

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Victoria)
- Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic)
- Housing Act 1983
- Housing Performance Standards

14. Related documents

- WHL Renter Rights and Participation Policy
- WHL Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participation Policy
- WHL Diversity Policy
- WHL Reconciliation Action Plan