

Summary Report on the work of the House of Welcome (HoW) – Jan 2010 to June 2011

Introduction

The House of Welcome (HoW) is committed to serve asylum seekers and refugees without discrimination on the basis of age, gender, race, sexuality and religion. We recognise that this group of people, displaced from their homes and homelands through war, conflict or persecution arrive in Australia suffering from trauma and loss; they are in need of help and accompaniment.

The House of Welcome (HoW) uses several strategies and programs to address homelessness, destitution and hardship among asylum seekers and refugees and supplements these programs with case work and social and educational activities.

1. HOW 'Safe Place' Transitional Housing Program

During the last 12 months this program has grown from 8 houses to 15 houses with house number 16 due in September 2011. During this 18 months we have 2010, we used 20 properties to house over 100 clients who faced homelessness.

Current Situation:

- HoW 'Safe Place' Housing - 15 Houses with 13 families + 8 single clients.
- HoW Tenancy Support program - 5 families in supported private tenancies.

In the 18 month period we have taken on 150 new clients or client families - about 400 people .
Over 70% requested help with accommodation or finances; 30% were homeless.

Referrals for Homelessness / Accommodation or Financial Assistance

1 st 6 months 2010	-	Avg of 10 per month
2 nd 6 months 2010	-	Avg of 18 per month
1 st 6 months 2011	-	Avg of 14 per month

During this 18-month period we successfully transitioned **9 families; 11 single females; 8 single males; 2 couples and 4 single mums with babies** through our 'safe place' housing into their own accommodation.

2. Financial Assistance 'Community Living & Family Support' Program

The program enables clients to stay in their own accommodation and have a basic living allowance. This program is for clients without regular income support. Those that secure regular work or government assistance come off the program. **Since July 2010 the program has grown rapidly from an avg. of 10 clients to an avg. of 22 clients or families.**

Through 2010, we supported 67 clients or client families and through this program.

		Monthly Avg	Total
1 st 6 months 2010	-	\$3,100	\$18,700
2 nd 6 months 2010	-	\$5,600	\$33,600
1 st 6 months 2011	-	\$7,000	\$42,000

3. Emergency Assistance Program

HOW also provides assistance for unexpected emergencies, such as emergency homeless situations, one-off rental support, medical emergencies, medications, some protection visa issues. The nature is ad-hoc.

1 st 6 months 2010	-	\$2,700
2 nd 6 months 2010	-	\$6,100
1 st 6 months 2011	-	\$3,200

4. Empowerment Loans

These are small no interest loans to clients who have some regular income. Repayments are flexible and the aim is to focus on education, housing or employment.

It is a new program (13 months old) and so far we have given out 30 loans to the value of about \$11,500 of which \$5,600 has already been repaid and reused.

5. Clothes & Food Aid

On average up to 30 clients or families receive food parcels, clothing or household items each week at our Centre in Carramar..

6. 'First Home' Household Furniture Aid

During 2010 we delivered household items to 85 families. *The program is not running in 2011 due to the need to allocate energy, focus and funding towards increasing needs of the core programs.*

7. HOW 'Drop-in' Centre & Volunteer Visits

The HOW provides client casework, Legal & Medical Referral, Family Reunion Support and Client Advocacy as well as English & Computer lessons and employment and housing support. The Centre is our heart - a place of welcome – where clients know they can feel safe and welcomed. We also have a program of volunteer visitors to ensure clients are not isolated.

Drop-in Numbers at our Centre (Mon – Thurs)

		Client Numbers	Refugees	Asylum Seekers
1 st 6 months 2010	-	Avg of 6.5 per day	40%	60%
2 nd 6 months 2010	-	Avg of 11.5 per day.	35%	65%
1 st 6 months 2011	-	Avg of 10.5 per day	25%	75%

We currently have 75 clients or families in on-going casework programs. And we welcome 150 new clients or families in the last 18 months.

8. Social Activities program

During the last 12 months we partnered with Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group and Josephite Community Aid to organise weekend breaks on the Central Coast and the Blue Mountains. We have run several activities at our centre including BBQ,s and play groups and we are starting a volunteer lead family day social outing program. We are running 6 small group English classes at the Centre at present.

Conclusion

HOW supports people from all nations, ethnicities and religions. It is the largest provider of direct accommodation in the sector and the only organization located in Western Sydney.

The HoW supports the daily realization of Human Rights but especially the rights of the child and the right to safety and a home. Family accommodation brings additional challenges and costs, but we are committed to maintaining this service.

The HoW gets no government support and exists solely on donations. The number of clients seeking our service continues to rise. The number of people being refused, falling through or falling out of Government and mainstream support systems is increasing. Our costs are also increasing.

The HoW supports all asylum seekers and refugees who are in need but primarily supports those most vulnerable, those most at risk through homelessness and destitution. By supporting their safety and stability we help grow their confidence and dignity and help them develop their own agency to find solutions. We also critically ensure they can best present their protection applications.