



# McAuley Community Services for Women

a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy

29 January 2010

McAuley Community Services for Women (MCSW) provides accommodation, support and advocacy for women and their children who are homeless, primarily as a result of family violence or mental illness.

MCSW was formed in August 2008 by the Sisters of Mercy to expand its commitment to women and children and to incorporate its two existing long-term services:

- Mercy Care (est. 1988) - A 24 hour safe house providing accommodation and support for women and their children who have experienced family violence. The Mercy Care program incorporates a Specialist Children's Program to support children with the emotional impacts of family violence and programs to assist mothers to recognise such impacts on their children.
- Regina Coeli (est. 1986) - Medium-term, community accommodation for women who have experienced homelessness and mental illness. Regina Coeli assists women to achieve their goals through intensive, individualised case management support, on and off-site social and recreational activities, links with health services to assist woman to regain good health and wellbeing and continued, outreach support when or if women move into independent housing.

In addition to the above, MCSW will soon be delivering *Working for Wellbeing*, a program to assist women to obtain and maintain meaningful employment and to achieve greater independence.

*MCSW is committed to advocate for a better, safer and just society.*

## 1. General Comments

MCSW welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Office of Housing in relation to the proposed new segmented waiting list system.

MCSW supports any changes to the segmented waiting list system that will make it easier to comprehend and negotiate, and expedite the allocation of public housing to women and their children who are disadvantaged or at risk, in particular women with a mental health issue or who are escaping family violence.

MCSW is concerned, however, that the proposal makes no mention of public housing tenants applying for transfers and would like to stress that **women can be at great risk and have a critical need for housing whether they are in crisis or transitional accommodation or in public housing**. As such MCSW would strongly advocate for a system that gives the highest priority to all women escaping family violence, regardless of their housing tenure.

### Policy & Advocacy

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### Family Violence

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### Homelessness

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### **Improving Public Housing Responses Strategic Project**

MCSW takes issue with the comment in the background section that “the tenant population is now more disadvantaged due in part to a tightening in the rental market (p. 1)”. The main reason for the increase in the level of disadvantage in the public tenant population, rightly or wrongly, is the Allocations Policy, which prioritises applicants experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage due to the patently inadequate supply of public housing. It is erroneous to say otherwise.

MCSW agrees that strengthening links to other supports is critical to sustaining tenancies and strongly encourages the Office of Housing to remove barriers to the support of clients of the homelessness system as they move from crisis or transitional housing to public housing – e.g. service targets that assume homelessness clients are supported for (an average of) 13 weeks. This places pressure on homelessness services to achieve “throughput”, thereby exiting clients from support once they have been allocated public housing. This does not assist clients to sustain their public housing tenancy. Better outcomes for tenants are achieved by a continuation and tapering off of support when ready, rather than trying to link tenants into new supports once they are in crisis and/or their tenancies are in jeopardy.

MCSW also supports better choice for clients and strongly encourages the Office of Housing to review broadband areas – i.e. make the areas smaller, and the Special Accommodation Requirements System. This would decrease anxiety and assist applicants to make links with services and other community services – e.g. schools for children, prior to moving.

## **2. Basic Changes**

MCSW supports the principles on which the alternative model is based and supports in principle the basic changes – in particular the proposed creation of one segment for those who are homeless and those experiencing family violence.

MCSW is concerned, however, about women who are in the “unsafe housing – threat of violence” category, particularly if these women are actually subject to forms of violence, who are not given the same priority. MCSW encourages the Office of Housing to investigate the make-up of this section to see if some applicants are at the same risk, and therefore have the same needs, as women escaping family violence.

MCSW supports the abolition of the current segment 1 procedure and a less intrusive process based on segment 3 procedures.

## **3. Possible Further Adjustment**

While recognising the need to increase turnover in crisis and transitional housing, MCSW believes that further detail is required and discussion should take place prior to any further adjustments – particularly in relation to prioritising people in crisis or transitional housing over

those who have not been able to access such assistance. MCSW is particularly concerned about this in relation to the implementation of Opening Doors strategy in local areas as this will direct access to transitional housing and therefore access to public housing.

MCSW is also concerned about clients in other “transitional” facilities, such as the Regina Coeli program who may be disadvantaged by this system. As well as women and their children who are staying with family and friends temporarily while they wait for an allocation.

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