

# **Department of Human Services**

## **Linking to the Private Rental Market - Private Rental Brokerage Program**

### **Service model description**

**August 2005**

## **Table of contents**

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Aim of Service Model
- 3 Objectives
- 4 Eligibility criteria (including service requirements)
- 5 Program resourcing
- 6 Service model components
- 7 Service model deliverables
- 8 Auspice arrangements
- 9 Principles for service delivery
- 10 Concluding comments

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## **1 Introduction**

This document presents a service model description of an innovative, effective way to assist women and children who are leaving or have left violent situations, and who are seeking to re-establish themselves and their households in secure long term private rental accommodation.

The service model has been developed from the learnings of the Victorian Homelessness Strategy Pilots – Housing Options for Women and Private Rental Brokerage. These Pilots were operated from 2003 to 2005 and were subject to a formal evaluation, which was undertaken by independent consultants Thomson Goodall Associates. Six agencies participated in the two Pilots and developed their own approaches to the delivery of services, within broadly consistent guidelines. Information from the Evaluation, and agency inputs and related documentation have been drawn upon in the preparation of this report. The contributions of St Kilda Crisis Service, Women's Health West, WAYSS, EASE, Quantum Support Services and CHL are acknowledged.

One of the key findings from the Interim Evaluation Report (Nov. 2004) was that a 'good practice' model of service provision combined elements of both the Housing Options for Women and Private Rental Brokerage Pilots.

The model presented below is designed to provide a response to some, but not all women and women with children escaping domestic violence.

Good outcomes for the defined group of women and women with children will be impacted as much by appropriate 'targeting' of the resources, as by the way in which the service itself is delivered.

The service model has been developed from the draft service model prepared by Thomson Goodall Associates at the request of the Department of Human Services.

## **2 Aim of the service model**

The aim of the service model is to assist women and women with children who are escaping, or who have experienced family violence, to access and/or retain private rental as a long term housing option.

## **3 Objectives**

The objectives of the service model are:

- To ensure (eligible) women and women with children are assisted to establish and/or maintain private rental accommodation
- To provide a range of flexible financial brokerage packages together with related forms of assistance and support
- To complement domestic violence outreach services
- Within the Integrated Family Violence Service system, to establish cooperative and collaborative working relationships with relevant services
- To administer program resources efficiently and effectively
- To ensure equitable access to program resources by women and women with children

- To provide an alternative option to refuge, transitional and other forms of supported housing

The service model comprises:

- Assistance to secure private rental
- Brokerage funds to provide a time limited rental subsidy
- Housing related practical information, referral and establishment assistance
- Regular on-going contact and housing related assistance for the duration of the brokerage period
- Liaison/ partnerships with relevant housing providers (landlords), domestic violence support services, and other community based resources and organisations including police and courts.

#### **4 Eligibility criteria**

The service model exists for women and women with children:

- Who are escaping and/or have experienced family violence<sup>1</sup> in the last 12 months
- Who wish to establish and/or maintain private rental as a long term housing option
- Whose safety and security requirements can reasonably be expected to be met in a private rental accommodation situation
- Who are likely to be able to sustain private rental when the period of private rental brokerage and assistance ends.

This includes women and women with children who:

- Are planning to leave an abusive situation or have the perpetrator removed, with legal sanctions
- Have left an abusive situation, or who have experienced abuse in the last 12 months
- Are living in refuge, transitional housing, or other temporary supported or unsupported accommodation, as a result of family violence
- Are ineligible for/ choose not to access a refuge

Women are not eligible if they wish to continue to share a property with the perpetrator of the abuse.

Women who are unlikely to be able to sustain private rental payments, once brokerage assistance ceases, are not eligible to receive services through this service model. Women who require an intensive ongoing level of support to address a broad range and high complexity of service requirements may not be able to sustain private rental, and public housing may be more appropriate. This does not imply however that women must have minimal or no support needs, to be eligible to receive brokerage support.

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<sup>1</sup> Family violence encompasses physical, psychological, financial and sexual violence. Family violence can occur within a partner relationship, child parent relationship, sibling relationship or carer relationship

## **Assessment and planning requirements**

Each woman and household assisted by the service model should participate in a common assessment process comprising:

- A risk assessment
- Development of a safety plan
- An assessment and development of a financial / housing plan for establishing and sustaining private rental (post brokerage)
- Identification of domestic violence specific and/ or other support needs relevant to the household's capacity to sustain private rental.
- Willingness to enter into a contract with the auspice agency (and the landlord) consistent with the assessment and agreed plan.

If the woman and/or household is locating out of the region, it is necessary to ensure the household will be resourced in terms of knowledge/ capacity to access resources; referrals to appropriate agencies and resources; a settlement plan for each child,; and ongoing monitoring and practical housing related support for the duration of the brokerage.

## **Limitations to the service model**

The limits of the service model are described as follows:

- The service model is not intended to be an income supplement, or another Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) product. It is a strategic, planned and staged approach, which aims to result in sustainable independent living in private rental accommodation.
- The service model is not designed to provide a crisis response to housing needs.
- The service model is not intended to be a subsidised transitional housing (or 'stop gap') measure, pending an offer of a THM property or public housing.
- The service model does not duplicate a domestic violence outreach case management service. It offers a complementary private rental housing specialist response.

## **5 Program resourcing**

Core funding for the service model will comprise (per DHS Region):

- Unit cost for support \$1,570
- Average brokerage \$1,500 per support episode ( a maximum of \$2,000 per episode)

It is estimated that rural regions will provide support and brokerage for 25 households and that metropolitan regions will provide support and brokerage for 50 households, based on the average brokerage expenditure of \$1,500.

The Private Rental Brokerage service should be included as a service component of integrated family violence outreach services.

Issues to consider in allocating additional resources to Regions include:

- Regional population
- Incidence of family violence

- Range of regional options available/ accessible to women
- Current coverage of domestic violence outreach services
- Housing accessibility / affordability

## 6 Service model components

The proposed service model comprises:

### A Establishment

The establishment phase would include the employment and induction of staff; establishment of administration systems; preparation of assessment and application forms, MoU for partnerships. Agencies involved in the pilot project may be able to assist in the implementation of assessment and application forms.

### B Development of partnerships for regional coverage

Partnerships with relevant agencies would be developed and formalised. The purpose of partnerships is to ensure maximum regional coverage/ accessibility by women and children. Partnerships with sub regional service providers would be entered into on the basis of partner agencies having a capacity to promote the service locally; provide initial assessment; liaise with real estate agents; provide on going monitoring, support and practical assistance for the duration of the brokerage period; and undertake data collection.

### C Program promotion

The key tasks in service promotion are to promote the service to women and other groups including those who may not use, or know about refuges or other family violence services, and to clarify eligibility and targeting of the service. It is envisaged that this would primarily include domestic violence outreach services and housing services. Broader targeting would include promotion in other community agencies and community health centres.

### D Brokerage component

The brokerage component is based on the following guidelines:

- Allocation of funds to each household, based on assessed need for household to establish independence. An average of \$1,500 per household, and a maximum amount of \$2,000 per household is an appropriate guide.
- Brokerage to be paid directly to real estate agents/ landlords
- Brokerage payments to be made in a pattern over a period of time (maximum of 6 months) which correspond to Pilot methods 1, 2 or 3 below.

Method of Use	Assistance	Degree of Assistance
1. Sliding Scale	Where the recipient receives a large amount of rent paid in the beginning, and then slightly less amount of brokerage each week until the limit is exhausted.	E.g. Based on a rent of \$200 per week, reducing by \$10 increments, these funds could last 16 weeks, with a final payment of \$50.
2. Low Level	Where the recipient receives a moderate (e.g. 25% rent)	E.g. \$50 per week towards rent could last 40 weeks.

	amount of brokerage funds over a significant period of time.	(9-10 months)
3. High Level	Where the recipient receives a high level (over 50% of rent) of the subsidy over a short intense period of time.	E.g. \$125 per week would last 16 weeks (4 months)

## E Direct support service provision components

Direct service provision undertaken with the client includes the following:

- Receive referral (Self referral; internal referral from within the agency, HIR worker; referral from other agency)
- Conduct initial assessment for private rental brokerage eligibility (assessment to include a risk assessment and financial assessment)
- Complete (if eligible) a more detailed assessment with the woman to identify housing and housing information needs; needs associated with establishment of private rental; safety planning; needs associated with relocation to new area eg. schools, other resources.
- Assess for brokerage type and amount preferred (if a partner agency, make recommendations to lead agency for private rental brokerage package)
- Provide information about relevant housing, legal and other resources (eg. Bond, HEF, welfare assistance programs)
- Provide assistance and advocacy relevant to obtaining private rental housing (eg. use of internet, other). This can include assisting women who fit the criteria for PRB to find rental properties that suit their needs; advocacy with landlords
- Make referrals to domestic violence outreach and other appropriate agencies and community resources, including compiling a 'package' of assistance (eg. OoH bond; HEF; other) and referral for advocacy; information and support with magistrates courts and police to obtain Intervention orders; Sole Occupancy Orders, etc.
- Develop a housing plan, including a plan to sustain private rental post brokerage
- Broker a formal agreement between the women, agency and real estate agent/ landlord
- Undertake other practical assistance and support relevant to the household establishing a permanent home and/ or maintaining private rental eg. information about purchase of whitegoods, other.
- Maintain weekly/ fortnightly contact with women for the duration of brokerage period
- Administer the financial component of the service model (for all clients assisted by the lead agency **and** for referrals approved for clients of partner agencies). This includes reviewing applications for private rental brokerage for eligibility and for completeness; sending cheques to real estate agents; and conducting/ overseeing all administration associated with the service model.

The coordinated model requires a common assessment format and documented process for applying for PRB; documented lead and agency roles and responsibilities; types of brokerage packages available; and data collection requirements.

## **7 Service Model Deliverables/ outcomes**

The service model is designed to achieve measurable sustainable outcomes for women and women with children. These include:

- Enhanced access to, and establishment of safe, secure, private rental housing
- Long term sustainability of private rental
- Access by women and women with children escaping domestic violence to specialist domestic violence assistance
- Improved quality of life choices and outcomes for households evidenced by participation in the workforce; education and training; participation in community activities, utilisation of community resources
- Improved health and well-being for household members
- Stability and continuity of education for children
- Increased knowledge about, and use of community resources
- Client satisfaction

At a regional level, the model is designed to achieve:

- A private rental brokerage service operated within an integrated family violence response
- Reasonable regional coverage and access to private rental brokerage resources
- Increased access to the private rental market for women and women with children escaping domestic violence
- Enhanced access to the domestic violence service system by women directly, and via GPs, community health centres, and other services
- Demonstrated links between auspice and partner agencies to generalist, specialist and mainstream community resources, including formal relationships
- Proportion of women bypassing crisis and transitional housing

## **8 Auspice arrangements**

Characteristics of organisations which will be best suited to auspice and manage the service model in a regional or sub regional area include:

- Demonstrated knowledge and understanding, and experience in the delivery of family violence services
- Track record in client focused, quality practices and commitment to improved choices and outcomes for women and women with children escaping violence
- Capacity to provide a continuum of domestic violence services, with the proposed service model being part of a suite of service options; together with a coordinated team approach to service provision
- Sound knowledge, understanding and commitment to housing options

- Demonstrated partnerships with housing providers
- Successful partnerships and collaboration with other domestic violence and other relevant service providers, to meet client needs
- Demonstrated ability and capacity in the management of community based programs (including management structures, reporting, staffing, management and administration and adherence to relevant legislation, guidelines and standards)
- Demonstrated innovative and effective approaches to women and women with children escaping violence, including the delivery of specified outputs
- Demonstrated expertise and commitment to diversity, including a track record in service provision to women from diverse cultural backgrounds, women with disabilities, and women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds

## **9 Principles of service delivery <sup>2</sup>**

### **General principles**

- Women and women with children escaping domestic violence have a right to safe, secure, affordable and sustainable housing.
- Family violence has far reaching consequences for the individual and society including emotional, economic and legal consequences. Prevention and elimination of family violence is the responsibility of the wider community.
- Structural inequalities faced by women (particularly those from marginalised groups) contribute to the difficulties they experience in dealing with homelessness.

### **Operational principles**

- Women experiencing family violence have the right to be treated with dignity and respect and to have their accounts of experiences validated and believed.
- Safety and security of women experiencing family violence are paramount and must be met with a timely, practical response
- Services will maintain a harm minimisation philosophy with the women and children accessing the service
- Interventions (and assistance) that value women's skills and strengths and facilitate women gaining control, self determination and sustainability of housing will be the most useful
- Interventions that emphasise a renewal and creation of links between women and children and social networks and community resources and community will be of benefit to women and children who have experienced the isolating effects of family violence.

## **10 Concluding comments**

The proposed service model represents an innovative, cost effective approach to assisting women and women with children to re-establish independently in long term private rental.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from principles developed by The Salvation Army St Kilda Crisis Services

The Interim Evaluation Report (Nov. 2004) recorded the dramatic impact in the lives of the women and children who had been assisted by the combined brokerage assistance monitoring support approach. In particular, the Report noted that the model:

- Provides an option for women who may not otherwise leave a violent situation until a critical incident occurs, or at all. Apart from not choosing to enter high security refuge, some women cannot afford to move into private rental unassisted, and may stay in a violent situation with the perpetrator, jeopardising their own and their children's safety.
- The PRB assists women who may experience a range of difficulties and barriers in accessing private rental markets, including through discrimination. Women may lack skills in identifying suitable accommodation and in developing a financial budget, etc.
- Enables women to break the cycle of violence, re-establish a home quickly, develop goals, and experience wide ranging flow on benefits. PRB provides a short term, concrete outcome for women and children, on which other achievements can be based
- Reduces the burden on other resource intensive government programs such as crisis accommodation refuges, transitional accommodation, and potentially frees up places in these programs
- Does not involve housing stock, and averts entry to public housing which is more limited in choice in terms of type and location
- Allows women to maintain community networks and support through staying in or choosing a preferred area for re-establishment
- Allows safety issues to be addressed through the courts
- The early intervention focus of the PRB model potentially averts critical incidents resulting in hospitalisation; mental and emotional trauma and health issues; and intergenerational effects on children. There are reduced health and mental health costs.
- Provides an environment where women can more readily return to employment and study (if they choose), and other opportunities to participate in the community
- Assists women to settle children into school immediately on a long term basis without multiple changes; enables more constructive parenting
- Enables women to build up rental references for the future
- Facilitates general improvement in quality of life, health, self esteem for women and children
- Complements existing programs and services without duplicating services, and enables a coordinated service response between specialist housing assistance (PRB) and domestic violence outreach support (as well as other supports)
- Allows women to purchase essential items for establishment of a home, as well as pay off debts (eg. Bond loans) that may have been incurred by the perpetrator.