

Housing options

About this series

This information sheet is designed to help non-Aboriginal organisations find better ways to deliver effective and relevant services to Aboriginal people who are experiencing intergenerational poverty and homelessness. It is part of a series capturing key learning and ideas from the award-winning Wongee Mia action learning project, in Western Australia.

Importance of location

Location is vitally important to family members who are seeking housing, because it is aligned with culture, connection and safety. Family members have declined housing in locations where they feel they are lost and disconnected from what is important to them. They talk about wanting to be close to other family members because support is accessible and because it will make them feel safe. Elders talk about wanting their family housed nearby so they can gather everyone together and look out for them. People are very specific about wanting housing in certain suburbs or locations because of their cultural connection to particular piece of land. One person spoke about wanting a specific location because living there was the only time in their life they had felt safe.

Housing First

Wongee Mia was established within the context of a Housing First inspired collective impact project. The lack of available housing has meant the project has not been able to achieve all of the

Housing First goals because it taken time to secure housing for some people and others are still waiting. However, the project has demonstrated strong fidelity to the principles of Housing First by offering family members flexible support as long as needed, choice and self-determination, active engagement, social and community inclusion, harm reduction and recovery-orientated practice. The need for immediate access to long-term housing remains critical.

Lodging houses

Wongee Mia workers established good relationships with lodging house providers and secured places for several family members, while they waited for more permanent accommodation. Anecdotal evidence suggests single family members seem to do better in lodging houses than supported accommodation services, finding appeal in the 'one bill/one room' lodging house model, without being required to engage in a structured support program or set of service rules. This gives people more control over decisions about how they live and choices about engaging with support. Two family members identified that lodging was their preferred housing option.

Private rentals

To increase the housing options available, Wongee Mia reached out to private rentals.⁷ The approach met with very direct, undisguised racism. Properties that were available to rent were withdrawn as soon as it was

known that the request was being made on behalf of Aboriginal people being supported by the project. This highlights the need for social housing to expand and prioritise Aboriginal housing options.

Case study


The following case study illustrates the creative approach taken by Wongee Mia, with Noongar Mia Mia. The two organisations have worked together to house and support family, with keen respect and understanding of mobile households.

As an Aboriginal controlled organisation led by Noongar staff. As an Aboriginal housing provider, Noongar Mia Mia is committed to supporting its community and respecting cultural practices in the way it delivers services. The organisation's work is underpinned by housing standards, developed with community Elders and shared with all tenants, so tenants understand what Elders expect of them.

Sadie⁸ is a family Elder and was unhappy living in a Department of Communities' retirement unit. She felt targeted by her neighbours and faced complaints because of the frequency of family visitors, including times she provided shelter for close relatives who had nowhere else to stay. Wongee Mia arranged for Sadie to move to a property operated by Noongar Mia Mia. Initially, Sadie was apprehensive, as she did not know the organisation, but when she shared the story of her tenancy with them, and the strikes against her for anti-social behaviour, she felt heard.

⁷ Note: this was prior to the post-COVID rental crisis

⁸ Not her real name



Noongar Mia Mia understands the challenge of placing people in areas where they have no connection to their community. They found a three-bedroom property and Sadie was very happy with the place and its location. Her *'cousin friend'* lived nearby and there was room for family to live with her, so she was not alone.

Sadie moved into the property with two of her nieces. They stayed until one niece was offered her own tenancy. Sadie then asked another niece and her partner to move in after their cousins moved out.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it a rental moratorium and house inspections were placed on hold. Sadie offered her family members shelter to keep them safe. When they visited, Wongee Mia staff could see Sadie was happy to have her family around her. As the health crisis eased, the number of people staying at Sadie's home reduced. This was facilitated by the flexibility of Noongar Mia Mia, helping Sadie's extended family by allowing them to occasionally stay at Sadie's home, rather than reporting this as a 'breach' of her tenancy agreement.

Sadie continues to have a household that fluctuates in numbers – sometimes wanting to live by herself and sometimes having family members added to the tenancy. Throughout this journey, there has been open dialogue with Noongar Mia Mia about who is staying in the house, who is visiting and who moves in and is added to the tenancy.

Key questions for your own work:

- Can we provide larger properties for Elders so they can provide housing and shelter for their family?
- Can we make more use of lodging houses to accommodate people who prefer a less complicated housing option?