



# WOMEN'S HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAM

EVALUATION BY RMIT UNIVERSITY



## INTRODUCTION



The following provides an overview of YWCA's Women's Housing Support Program and the key findings of the *"Little things that are big": An Evaluation of the YWCA's Women's Housing Support Program* report.

The two-year evaluation was undertaken by Associate Professor Juliet Watson, Professor Robyn Martin and Dr Freda Haylett from RMIT University and funded by Homes Victoria and Lendlease FutureSteps.

The evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach, including a review of existing data and documentation, literature review, secondary analysis of quantitative program and housing data, and interviews with program clients, team members and stakeholders.

# ABOUT WOMEN'S HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Women's Housing Support Program (WHSP) was developed by YWCA Australia to address the need for specialist settlement support to assist older women in their transition to housing stability, safety and positive wellbeing.

The WHSP aims to help women settle in the Lakehouse accommodation and assist them in accessing long-term housing, while being able to live somewhere affordable, safe, and secure.

The Lakehouse is a former aged-care facility, repurposed by YWCA Australia in 2018 as a housing model for older women experiencing homelessness. This 38-bed rooming house in inner-city Melbourne offers single bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms for women over 50.

The programs includes client support co-located with tenancy management, to provide a seamless and integrated service to the Lakehouse clients. Since the WHSP commenced at the Lakehouse in June 2022 to November 2023, 31 out of a possible 40 clients were supported.

WHSP provides wraparound case management, through a flexible model of support during the client's stay at the Lakehouse and continues this support as the client settles into long term housing. The WHSP utilises our sustaining tenancies framework.

## An Effective Model of Support

**The evaluation found that WHSP offers an important and effective intervention to older women experiencing homelessness, who would otherwise have few specialised housing and support options.**

The evaluation assessed the program model and found:

- The program's key strength is co-location with housing support, which communicates clear role differentiation and brings these differing and complementary skills to bear through flexible, agile, and respectful engagement with clients.
- Evidence that the WHSP is successfully delivering an essential service that is achieving beneficial and effective outcomes, particularly in the areas of housing stabilisation, service systems navigation, and pathways into ongoing housing.
- The WHSP achieves these outcomes through its sustaining tenancies model, which offers flexible support and service delivery, and which is client-centred and trauma-informed.
- The WHSP is effective in securing long-term housing, with WHSP clients more likely to exit into long-term housing than the general Lakehouse population. This is achieved through individualised support plans that are attentive

to each client's unique needs resulting in appropriate housing being sourced. Program staff prioritise matching long-term housing to specific needs, whether these are health-related or a need to reside in a particular community, producing better outcomes for clients.

- The program staff also demonstrate the specific knowledge and practice skills that are required to support and advocate for older women experiencing homelessness. For the WHSP to be successful in supporting women to achieve their goals, the program staff need to not only be skilled in case management, but also to be attuned to the specific needs of older women, including issues such as family violence, health, disability, and ageing. The evaluation identified that the WHSP team is attentive to each woman's unique needs, including their housing preferences:

*"We're not housing them to just anywhere and everywhere to tick a box, we're housing them to suit them and make it last"*

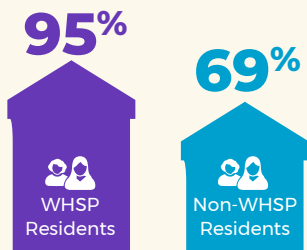
Program staff member



# IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR OLDER WOMEN



The overall purpose of the WHSP is to assist women to exit homelessness as soon as possible, while sustaining their Lakehouse temporary accommodation.



95% of WHSP residents (21 women) who moved from the Lakehouse, moved to long-term housing

Evictions and abandonments have both decreased since the WHSP program began at the Lakehouse.

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It achieves these outcomes through its sustaining tenancies model, which offers flexible support and service delivery, and which is client-centred and trauma-informed.

The WHSP has achieved remarkable success in sourcing housing for clients. This is particularly noteworthy in the context of a severely under-resourced housing sector that does not have an adequate supply of social housing to meet the needs of people on low incomes, and for whom private rental properties are largely unaffordable.

## What We Heard

The women interviewed reported that their **key support needs were securing long-term housing, accessing health services, getting emotional support, and assistance with technology.**

All spoke positively about the supports they had received from the WHSP, particularly with regard to how the program staff assisted them to navigate the service sector, and how the accommodation provided some stability, enabling them to address unresolved issues that may have been long-standing.



*Help just for the basic things [...] you know what I mean? Just little things that are big."*

Tania







*I'm motivated. Oh, I'm seeing [my WHSP worker] today, I get up, have a shower. You know what I mean? So, it can be a something a bit to look forward to knowing that I'm not doing it by myself."*

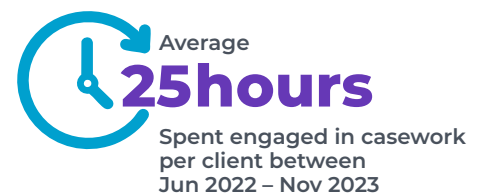
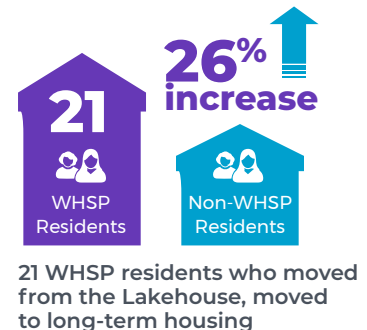


**Deborah** WHSP client



## Key Findings from the Evaluation

- Client outcomes are generated through the delivery of personalised and flexible supports, which respond to clients' readiness to engage.
- Clients often arrive at the Lakehouse with unaddressed health and welfare needs, and benefit from program staff navigating systems, coordinating medical, allied health and other supports, and assisting with technology to address these issues.
- Clients report a high level of need for emotional support. Relatedly, administrative data show 81% of clients had a clinically diagnosed or self-diagnosed mental health condition.
- Administrative data show that inadequate dwelling conditions was the main presenting reason for accessing the WHSP. Mental health issues, lack of community support, and financial difficulties were cited as the other main drivers for seeking support.
- Of the 22 residents who exited the Lakehouse after the WHSP commenced, 95% (21 women) moved to long-term housing, an increase of 26% when compared with non WHSP residents (69%).
- 45% of residents exiting under the WHSP model moved to social housing, which was nearly double the 23% who moved to social housing who were not WHSP clients.
- Support workers spent an average of 25 hours engaged in casework per client between June 2022 and November 2023.
- Although this evaluation focused specifically on older women's experiences of homelessness, the evaluation found that it had applicability to other housing programs, particularly those that work with other groups of women and gender-diverse people.



## Contact Us:

For more information on the Women's Housing Support Program contact [womenshousingsupportprogram@ywca.org.au](mailto:womenshousingsupportprogram@ywca.org.au) or call the YWCA office on **03 8341 8700**