

# The housing careers of Indigenous urban households

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## Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010

The research aims to inform policy development regarding:

- the mix of housing type, tenure and location;
- the desire for home ownership;
- cultural, social and environmental factors; and
- people's life stages and special needs.

# Methodology

Ethnographic interviews aimed at deriving the participant's life history with regard to his or her housing experience



# Interviews and participants



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Place	Fieldwork period	Interviews	Women	Men	Total participants
<b>Perth</b>	November 2006	11	11	0	11
<b>Carnarvon</b>	January – February 2007	20	14	8	22
<b>Broome</b>	January 2007	14	15	3	18
<b>Total</b>		<b>46</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>51</b>

# Shaping Indigenous housing careers

- Affordability
- Stability vs. mobility
- Homeswest vs. private rental

# The setting

## Geography and market

### Indigenous Perth, Carnarvon and Broome

Town	Indigenous population	% of total population
<b>Perth</b>	November 2006	11
<b>Carnarvon</b>	January – February 2007	20
<b>Broome</b>	January 2007	14

# Housing in WA

- 1996 – 2007      The long boom
  - 1996 – 2005 land value in Australia tripled, led by residential land
  - Housing affordability is currently at its lowest point in 16 years
- WA – the biggest decline in affordability for 2006
  - Rental vacancy rate of 1% in Perth
  - WA named the least affordable state or territory in the nation for housing
- Housing is difficult to find, difficult to retain, it's scarce and it's expensive.

# Stability of tenure

## Amelia, Perth

- *The advantage of Homeswest housing is that it's long term rental. Once you've got it you know you've got a home. Private rentals are all six to twelve months. ... With private rentals, it's always the same thing. The owners want to sell up.*

# The agency/tenant relationship

## Homeswest



# Arguing with Homeswest

- Resolving debt
- Waiting for a home
- Maintenance and repair

# Transparency of processes

- Bureaucracies are always a challenge



# Moving from rental to ownership

- 8 out of 51 participants were purchasing their own homes
- All were in work or purchased before retiring
- Most have family who owned or were purchasing
- All bought at least 4 years ago
- None had personally experienced violence
- None had ever had any problems with Homeswest

# Reason for buying

- At the end of the day, we own it. The kids have got something at the end of it.
- They kept sending the same brochure out and I kept throwing it away and I finally got sick of it so I went in there and asked them about it.
- Mum said, you've got to stop paying dead rent.

# Ideologies of housing

- Those who are purchasing their own homes come from families in which there is a history of property ownership.
- The aspirations of some participants did not indicate an ideology of ownership. Having one's own home meant renting.

# Living in the 'Bronx'

Carl, Carnarvon

- *Yeah, that part of town they call the Bronx. You can't give houses away over there. Not a single day goes by without fights and carrying on. They put a rope around the steps and tied the other end to the car and tried to drag them off. They just don't care. You can call the cops, the cops come in and they just say go ahead, take me away. It loses its impact.*

# Living in the 'Bronx'

Cont...

Mary, Broome

- *My sister is renting privately in the Bronx...It's just lots of little units and the drink, the drugs and the back packers in the tourist season, coming and going, you don't know who these people are. A couple of days ago someone was smashing up the cars in front, and then the other day they were trying to light up a car. It's not safe.*

# Old Broome



# Neighbourhood violence

- A localised form of regular violent behaviour which may be experienced by anyone who lives in the vicinity. It includes:
  - Vandalism
  - Gatherings focused on substance abuse
  - Loud, violent behaviour in the street calculated to intimidate
- It is not the same as feuding.

# Carnarvon

- Tonkin Crescent vs. Mungullah Village
- Historically, their reputations were reversed.
- Governance may be one factor, but Carnarvon Aboriginal people have another explanation.

- You don't know who these people are.....
- Itinerants – seasonal tourists and Indigenous people from out of town.

# Living with your relations

## American studies

- Bolger, R. M. (1996). Doubling-Up: a strategy of urban reciprocity to avoid homelessness in Detroit
- Dehavenon, A. L. (1996). Doubling-Up and New York City's Policies for Sheltering Homeless Families.
- Both from *There's No Place Like Home: anthropological perspectives on housing and homelessness in the United States*. A. L. Dehavenon. Westport, Connecticut, Bergin & Garvey

# Spatial & temporal commonalities

- Not enough low cost/rent housing
- High unemployment
- Lateral kinship structure
- Multi-family dwellings
- Preference for a group economy

# Effect of these features

- Level out the tough times
- Enable people to stave off the threat of homelessness