

I attended the Aged and Community Services Finance Forum on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> February and had the opportunity to speak with Dr Fitzgerald regarding the Commission's Draft Recommendation 10.1 that there be a *coordinated and integrated national policy approach to the provision of home maintenance and modification services, with a nominated lead agency in each jurisdiction*. Dr Fitzgerald asked me to forward the following information to you.

Comhouse Co-operative Limited is a not for profit, community sector based, maintenance service provider which was established in 1996 to assist Housing Co-operatives /Associations maintain their properties, currently in excess of 1600.

We have over 250 contractors from all over South Australia in all the trades needed to provide a full maintenance service to our clients. Because of the economies of scale and relationships we have with our contractors we are able to extend our service to similar organisations at minimal cost. These include:

- Community of the Aged (COTA – Seniors Voice)
- Aged & Community Services SA & NT.
- Home and Community Care (HACC)
- Veterans
- St Vincent de Paul Society

We are able to provide this service to any organisation that provides assistance to older or disadvantaged clients of the community and those that seek the reliability and security we offer.

***Our service is not a subsidised service and we directly invoice our clients.***

Our experience supports the recommendation of the Commission as we have found that the current delivery of Maintenance Services under the Home and Community Care service is carried out differently by providers (mainly Local Government Authorities) with some providing the service direct and others sub-contracting the service. This makes the service inefficient and sometimes inflexible and often the level of service provided varies from one jurisdiction to another.

Through our contact with **Foundations** (the National Body for Home Improvement Agencies in the UK) it is clear that the scope of work and the organisation of these agencies would fit the recommendation of the Productivity Commission. You may already be aware of the UK program but I am attaching a couple of useful reports on their system. Andrew Chaplain (CEO) and Malcolm Ramsay (Policy) have both worked in Australia and have a good understanding of our systems. Andrew can be contacted at [AChaplin@CEL.co.uk](mailto:AChaplin@CEL.co.uk)

We have always thought that there was potential for operating a Handyman service as a pathway to employment for jobseekers. I am now pleased to announce that we have formed a joint social enterprise project with Interwork Ltd. Interwork is a flexible and innovative specialist employment and training service for people who experience disadvantages in accessing the open employment market. Their employment, vocational training and personal support services help people to contribute their skills and abilities to the community, businesses and industry through meaningful employment.

Initially to run as a pilot, trainees referred to the program will obtain training in Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) and minor maintenance skills at Certificate II or III levels. They will be supervised by a qualified tradesperson and all participants will be subject to a National Security Check. A fee schedule will apply to the home maintenance services provided, but in

order to keep the cost down to an affordable level it is proposed that requests will be clustered into suburbs so that the maximum number of jobs can be completed without a lot of travel. Where there is government or other subsidies they will be applied to reduce direct costs to clients.

We are proposing to commence the pilot in May 2011 and operate initially in the Northern and North Western suburbs. We are currently in the process of publicising the formation of the Maintenance Team to organisations that will benefit and have set up information on the following website:

<http://www.interwork.com.au/service-community.html>

If you require any further information I shall be more than happy to provide it.

Regards

Tony Collins  
Comhouse Cooperative Ltd  
A Not-For-Profit Organisation