

'Our Homes' Research Project

Interim Report
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DRAFT

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Emerging Insights

[These insights remain in development. The points listed below are for comments and feedback from the Steering Committee and Indigenous researchers. In the final report, findings that are specific to either Galiwin'ku or Santa Teresa will be in separate sections]

- Tenancy agreements are seen as just one amongst many contractual arrangements, and ways of being responsible for people and places, that are alive and well in remote Aboriginal communities.
- When people in Galiwin'ku described themselves as living in a 'manymak (good) house' they often referred to many factors coming together: the ability to observe proper avoidance practices, remaining connected to winds and seasons, living with or nearby to family and feeling their house would be safe during a cyclone.
- In Santa Teresa, it was emphasised that maintaining good and productive relations between residents and external organisations, includes renovation, repairs and maintenance work that is carried out respectfully and a competent standard.
- The experience of earlier times, when people within the community were employed to carry out repairs, maintenance and housing construction work, was looked upon favourably by many and seen as an aspiration to return to.
- It is sometimes inappropriate for head tenants step into a role of authority over their elders or family members to enforce particular rules or behaviours. Being able to defer to other authorities in certain situations can be helpful.
- Immediate and extended family groups offer crucial networks of support, and visits made by family from other communities are welcomed as a way for families to remain connected.
- Some households were better equipped to manage these visitors than others, with amenities such as an extra toilet and veranda space making a considerable difference to safety and comfort at these times.
- Good government engagement is crucial to good relationships around housing and household management. Good engagement is best carried out face-to-face, and extends to include a respectfulness in the way in which maintenance and other services are delivered (by a range of providers).
- Clear information regarding the 'money story' for each house, including where rent goes, rent paid per household and distinction between rents and other bills may reduce anxiety and help people to feel more in control of their housing situation.
- The Room to Breathe program is seen by many as an exciting and promising program with many people aware of the renovations they might expect, and anxious to find out when they might occur.

Introduction

The Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, Northern Territory Government, engaged the Ground Up team at the Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University, to provide research around people's experiences of managing their houses and housing situations in two remote Aboriginal communities – Galiwin'ku and Santa Teresa.

In this interim report we detail preliminary findings emerging out of the first stage of the project. We refer back to the research aims identified in the project contract, using these to structure the presentation of discussion outcomes in each community. Under each of these key questions, we offer a brief commentary, followed by quotes from respondents. The commentary draws attention to particular themes emerging in the research, some of which are common across sites and others that are not. Findings from each community are presented separately, and at the end of each community section, preliminary suggestions for further support needs are identified.

We are seeking feedback from the Steering Committee and other government staff on these interim findings, so as to help shape the direction and scope of further research in Stage 2 of the project, and direct the focus and format of the final report.

The closing section of this interim report outlines a proposed discussion section. This section will be completed as part of the final report, and will draw on previous research (incl. on remote housing, engagement and financial literacy), and further qualify the project findings and recommended support needs.

What we did

We have worked collaboratively with local researchers to develop our research focus and approach in each project community. We've approached community members in their homes, and spoken to them about their understandings of remote housing, tenancy agreements, and repairs and maintenance services, as well as their experiences of maintaining healthy living conditions for their families.

In Galiwin'ku

In Galiwin'ku we connected with the research organisation Yalu' Marngithinyaraw and worked with two of their senior researchers, Rosemary Gundjarranbuy (<https://iri.cdu.edu.au/rosemary-gundjarranbuy/>) and Stephen Dhamarrandji (<https://iri.cdu.edu.au/stephen-dhamarrandji/>). We also engaged two new research mentorees. Hazel Gondarra (<https://iri.cdu.edu.au/hazel-gondarra/>) who has some research experience working previously on the Whole of Community Engagement Project (CDU), and Simeon Dhamarrandji (<https://iri.cdu.edu.au/simeon-dhamarrandji/>) who was a new junior member of the team with some experience working on Yalu' youth diversion programs. Both

of these new mentorees received a research induction and on-the-job training, and took the opportunity to develop research profiles on the Indigenous Research Initiative website (links listed above).

We followed a research plan collaboratively developed with the Yalu' senior researchers, which prioritised visiting people in their homes, and speaking to the head tenants who had authority to comment on the house and how it was managed. Prior permission was sought at the February Local Authority meeting, and research was undertaken directly afterwards. We sought to visit families broadly distributed across all camps in Galiwin'ku, visiting 13 houses in total (4 in Buthan, 4 in Middle Camp, 3 at Cliffside and 2 at Beach camp). The Yalu' researchers preferred to initiate semi-structured interviews which were partly in English and partly in Yolŋu matha (language), with questions focussing around 4 main topic areas:

- The story of how you came to live in this house, who lives with you, and how you feel about your house
- How you work with government tenancy officers, and how they work with you
- Issues to do with your housing lease and that affect you or your family
- What you do to manage visitors, and help everyone living in your house stay happy and healthy

They also offered respondents the opportunity of an 'open question' where respondents could speak freely about their own experiences of living in their house, and caring for their families. Interviews were recorded via note taking by the CDU researcher, as well as through audio and iPad recordings made by the research mentorees.

In Santa Teresa

Prior to beginning work in Santa Teresa we connected with Tangentyere Council Research Hub and worked with one of their senior researchers, Vanessa Davis (<https://iri.cdu.edu.au/vanessa-davis/>). We also engaged Natalie Pepperill who is a qualified interpreter and a new member of the Tangentyere research team. Natalie has been invited to create a research profile on the IRI website. We also sought to engage two local male researchers in Santa Teresa, however while they expressed interest they were not available in the community at the time we were there.

Prior permission to carry out the research was sought at the March Local Authority meeting. Following on from this meeting, a research plan was collaboratively developed by the CDU and Tangentyere researchers and sent to the Steering Committee. As in Galiwin'ku, this plan prioritised visiting people in their homes, and speaking to the head tenants who had authority to comment on the house and how it was managed. Once in Santa Teresa, we carried out a workshop to collaboratively design a questionnaire that the Tangentyere researchers would take with them when they interviewed residents (see appendix). We visited and conducted interviews at 19 houses in Santa Teresa across all camps (Eastside, Old Village, New Village and areas in the centre of town). The majority of these interviews were conducted by the Tangentyere researchers working independently to visit houses across the community. Interviews were recorded using the questionnaire forms developed in our workshop, and by taking notes. Discussion between the Tangentyere and CDU researchers at the end of the day also helped yield further stories and assisted with interpretation.

Preliminary Findings:

Galiwin'ku

What clients feel are the barriers to managing safe and healthy homes in remote locations

Challenges to managing safe and healthy homes often emerge at the intersection of social and environmental conditions of remote living. People expressed that feeling safe in your home, relates to feeling that your home is a well suited to the environment in which you live. Similarly, feeling safe and respected in your community involves some level of active engagement in housing design, construction, maintenance and repairs.

Environment

The feeling of living in a safe home was often associated with a sense of having a house suitable for the weather conditions in Galiwin'ku. This includes the possibility of frequent heavy rains, cyclones in the wet season and other phenomena associated with a tropical climate.

- The trees are not safety. When the cyclone comes its too crowded – there are trees around the house
- The house is not manymak because when the big rain comes it comes right through
- Feels safe here, that the house is cyclone proof
- These ones have a room underneath the upstairs house, but if big rain comes they are stuck downstairs
- There are holes where black ants/termites get in
- Sometimes housing is doing a good job, but needs specialists to check the ground. Check to area top/bottom before building

“What will happen if there is another cyclone? There is a big tree just next to the house, I have told people about it but so far nothing. We are worried that it will fall on the house and hurt the children.”

The sense of living well in a good house is associated with being able to catch breezes, and remain connected to the environment in Galiwin'ku – birds singing, sunsets and the beach air (see also reference to building design, below).

- We see the sunset and feel the afternoon breezes
- It was good when I was in the in demountables. I was as at the far end of the demountables. Could hear birds singing, was nice and quiet.
- My house is manymak (good), I'm near to the beach and can feel the sea breeze

Community fencing and traffic management

Key to a safe and healthy home in remote communities is being able to keep young children safe. Family member's main concerns are about young children. This is particularly now that houses are clustered in close proximity to each other, and close to roads. Care needs to be taken to protect children from traffic. It is generally recognised that responsibilities for

safety inside the house lies with the family, but beyond this, issues of roads and fencing lie with the council or other organisations (see reference to roles and responsibilities below)

- We are worried about the fence, for safety. Worried about the kids running out onto the road. The gate is not drilled in properly.
- Everything good, just main concern is no space inside and outside. Too close together. Don't feel comfortable, should have put fence up over the other side.
- It would really help to have a fence. People start gambling without permission, everyday in the area next to the house. We want privacy, its hard to ask them to go away.
- Need to upgrade the fencing. Is big access for the car and should have another gate for the people. Once the car is parked in we want to close the gate and use the other one. Is close to public area. Should put in fencing. There are many children here – it's for safety.

Remote jobs and tenancy programs

It is recognised that the situation around housing is very different for people living in remote communities than it is in Darwin or other major cities. This relates a strong reliance on CDP, forms of income management associated with Centrelink, as well as structures of contracting and apprenticeship.

- The situation is different in Darwin, urban situation is different. There is a gap for remote: from school, instead of getting qualifications, we go onto Centrelink, 5 hrs a day. Like casual job getting small amount of money
- CDEP was manyak (good). There was lots of employment. Now there is CDP and activities
- Used to be a long time ago Yolŋu working. My uncle used to be coordinator for housing. Yolŋu used to build houses. Hazel's uncle was a carpenter – knew how to build a house from their ideas.
- I was working for Delta Reef. They are still going. There were many opportunities when delta reef comes. Can drive heavy vehicles and work. But other contractors – no trust
- There are many people with building certificates, but main thing is to go to New Start.

“Yolŋu from here did a lot of apprenticeships with Delta Reef. Then there were many contractors coming in for houses and people applied for the jobs with the new company knowing they had previous training in the area. But there was no recognition of this. Had to sign up for activity with CDP before they can put you on the job. If you have an apprenticeship, then you are qualified for a job. Why no job?”

What level of understanding the households have about their responsibilities under their tenancy agreements.

People expressed general understandings that their tenancy arrangements involved a reciprocal agreement between themselves and NT housing. However, the making of this agreement was not often seen as a two-way relationship, with many of the details around what was included or excluded in this agreement being unclear.

Rent payments and leasing

There is significant confusion surrounding rental payments and the way in which rents are calculated and deducted from Centrelink or wage payments. This is expressed as frustration around not knowing the 'real cost' of a house, and if or how this relates to the number of people in the house paying rent. There is also some uncertainty around the relationship between rent payments and Power Cards with systems of payment changing frequently, and power being associated with what is necessary to run a house, rather than separate to housing and rental payments.

- They are deducting more money over time. Need to find out with Centrelink or Territory Housing, what's the actual price?
- Sometimes we only get a little bit from Centrelink. Are other fees deducted so we can't afford to pay rent, but we don't know when this is happening.
- We set aside bond money. We're not sure about the bond money
- Sometimes they come to collect information about who is here. Any adult over 18 has to pay rent
- If is overcrowded, and all adults are paying, perhaps they could give them a discount?
- \$150-60 for everyone in the house, no matter who is staying there. But what is the real cost?
- Before we had a deduction from Centrelink for pension and other disability payments. This was every fortnight. But has here been anything deducted from Centrelink pay for powercard?
- I was paying \$40 a week that came straight out of Centrepay. Then it changed. Might be because they introduced metre box with token, is that when the price of rent increased? It would be good to find out that story.
- It seems really not good that the power and the rent are charged separately. The power could be in with the rent, because there is often no money for power. Would be good to be doubling up power card and rent, because where is the money going?

"We're not clear where the rent goes. Don't know where the money goes when it comes out of our account"

"Now Powercard has to be paid at the shop. But is this still deducting from Centrelink where the money is kept. Is it going to Centrelink or government?"

Tenancy officers and relationship with NT Housing

Residents were generally aware of who the NT Housing tenancy officers were, as well as names of people working in the office in Nhulunbuy. They did not have regular contact with these officers, but knew they were around. Some people commented that the engagement by these staff was good, but there was some disconnection between the story they were carrying and what people understood or saw as relevant for them.

- We are happy with the tenancy officers. Happy with the tenancy agreement.
- The housing officers. They are ok, but not always telling a true story.
- Housing came to do an inspection but I didn't ask what they came for.

- I didn't go through process of seeing and understanding what has been written (lease)
- Housing officer came and told how much money was going to be taken out, but was not asking us about that.

What the current roles and responsibilities of individuals, families or groups are in managing houses and tenancies.

Responsibilities were often described as residing with the head tenants in the house. Although designations of responsibility and 'ownership' were not clear in all cases, with tenants recognising the presence of many, sometimes conflicting, systems of ownership and ways of being responsible for people and places that were present, and sometimes in tension, within households.

Head tenants and visitors

It was generally the head tenants (generally a couple) who described themselves as having responsibility to maintain clean houses, and acceptable sleeping arrangements. When visitors arrived, it was generally this couple who would move to sleep in the kitchen so as to provide more space for others, and who would arrange a shuffling of sleeping arrangements so brothers and sisters would remain separate.

- The wānā watanu (land owner) is on the lease. Everyone else is paying the rent.
- Every fortnight I get \$30 and the rest of the money goes to rent. Not sure if other people are helping to pay the rent on the house. Maybe they are helping. I pay maybe \$100 rent, not sure exactly. Can be \$30, \$90 or \$80 that goes into my account. My daughter helps pay the rent as well, she works at the shop. Sister-in-law maybe pays rent, but not sure. The housing advise her that if any adults are living here, they have to pay rent
- If other family come in, then we tell the Tenancy Officers and they put those people on the lease too so they also pay rent. Any adults can have rent paid out of their Centrelink or wages.
- When the power goes out, I have to go looking for family and stay in their house until the power can come back on

"How we be safe in the house is boys stay in one room and girls in another. Sometimes the main tenants, husband and wife are in the kitchen."

Private/government responsibilities

There were clear distinctions between private and governmental responsibilities described by some tenants. They talked about the safety of their house and household as relating to both inside and outside areas, although responsibility for maintenance across these areas differed; with inside primarily being recognised as the responsibility of the tenant, but outside common areas as being the responsibility of other organisations.

- I sometimes complain to the shire about the outside area of my house because outside the boundary of our house is the shire's responsibility.
- Shire is to take responsibility outside the fence (P&W or shire) and inside the fence is my responsibility.

- Leasing – There are many different forms of leasing. Is this to do with me? Shire? TOs? NT government? Territory Housing?
- Room to Breathe – what is happening with that? We are waiting.

If the tenancy management model works within a cultural context, and if not, how can this be improved.

Overcrowding emerged as the key issue of concern for residents in Galiwin'ku. Many talked about this as associated with the importance of living together in extended family groups, and how this puts pressure on house sizes, particularly over time. Some people chose to leave these living practices aside and adopt nuclear family structures to deal with this issue, but for others this is not an option that is practical, or that they are prepared to seek out.

Yolŋu families

- For Yolŋu we stay together. We have to be around family members and a clan group. Same for next generation. (When wife and kids... have to go back to grandfather and grandmother...)
- Yolŋu always stay in the same house. When children are 17 – 18 they don't move out, but perhaps a partner, husband or wife, moves in and then children. The number of people in the house keeps growing.
- When grow up, yapas and wawas (sisters and brothers) on each side. But as you grow up what will happen? When eldest daughter comes back to visit, all brothers and sisters have to move out from room. All come to sleep in one room
- I put in an application to Territory Housing. I've got my own family to look after. We live together – 2 adults and 3 sons in 3 bedrooms. It's good. If you are not planning ahead when you get married and maybe want to have your own house, then you go to your family and live with them.

“The generation growing up won't have big space. We need to look not at how many there are now, but what family will become.”

Maintaining cultural practices

The maintenance of proper cultural practices becomes harder when houses are overcrowded or not designed properly. This affects the ability to maintain proper avoidance practices, and to maintain general peace and harmony in the house. Some people work to change their housing arrangements so that they can follow protocol better, and maintain a better quality of life.

- When people are living in a crowded house people are relying a lot on others for what to get. There are a lot of arguments going on between people. But the arguments are not about the person, they are about Centrelink.
- When we moved we got a new house for ourselves. Moved into a house with only a couple and two boys. It is big enough now.

“There was no Yolŋu culture in the big house that we used to live in. There was too many people so we couldn't do avoidance and live as we're supposed to. So we decided to put in an application for a new house, so there could be barrier between wäwa and yapa (brother and sister).”

- All grown up children, have no space. Some need to sign for new houses – young adults, sons and daughters are staying. Need private room.
- If you get something, you give. Get half for your family and give the rest to other family – old story.
- These days everyone is relying on Centrelink. Money goes in and money goes out. Sometimes you save money and family members come and ask.

What is seen as the best mechanisms for individuals and families to: ensure homes remain safe and healthy for occupants; request repairs and maintenance; report incidents; or seek information from the Department.

When people described themselves as living in a ‘manymak (good) house’ they often refer to many factors coming together: the ability to observe proper avoidance practice (i.e. having separate rooms and bathrooms), being able to feel the breeze, living with or next to family and feeling their house was safe in cyclone times. Achieving this was not described as a technical or service delivery question; but rather related more to the kinds of governance and decision-making practices that connect between government and Galiwin’ku.

Accessing Repairs & Maintenance

Almost all people we spoke to had a clear understanding of how to access repairs and maintenance. There is clear and easy process for alerting Marthakal that there is a problem which was appreciated, however speed of repairs were often identified as too slow. For some, NT Housing staff are recognised as able to offer extra assistance in these situations.

- I know there is a free call to Marthakal to report a problem
- Free call Marthakal repairs and maintenance
- If there is damage, can go to the office and request repair
- Sometimes I complain about repair and maintenance needing to happen, because it always takes a while
- Talks to Clem (housing officer) about fence and back door, but still waiting
- I know Cheryl and Clem from housing. Cheryl is mainly in the head office.

Housing design

Housing design emerged as a key theme within discussions with design recognised as key to maintaining cultural practice, being able to remain connected to environmental conditions (such as sea breezes), and manage adverse events (such as cyclones and heavy rain). It is not only having a house that is important, but also the way that house inhibits or supports certain practices and living conditions.

- The housing people told us there was a house, and we were excited to have a house. But as soon as we arrived it was a different story – it didn’t feel manymak
- We would like our own design, not just something

“I have a manymak house. The design is good. External veranda, shade area for afternoon sunset.”

from Darwin.

- There is no storage at Buthan in those new houses. Old houses have a different design and had much more storage.
- They (HRG) should ask if they should put you in this house, if it is a good design and if right for you. Give chance to take us to the house and see if we like it. Now you just sign, give the key and you are supposed to like it.
- This house is not so good design. A house like this could have an extra room – 3 or 2 more bedrooms, extending the bedroom

Housing Reference Group and NT Housing

The HRG is well known amongst people in the community, and is understood as making decisions about housing allocations. Sometimes the process of these allocations causes frustration amongst tenants, who see the HRG as an extension of Western bureaucracy. However, there is also an interest in finding ways to support intergenerational involvement in the group so that younger generations can learn the necessary skills to participate.

- The HRG say OK, make agreement, on behalf of people on the lease who will be getting the house. After that members go with Territory Housing and meet the tenants.
- HRG make decisions about your house, but they should ask where to put you in
- HRG are a puppet on a string on remote control.
- It would be good to have younger generation to be part of that situation, start to get involved.
- Don't hear if members are going to be there for long.

“They need to get all information and pass it on. Sometimes they get that information and then they pass away. The balanda just bring new people in and there isn't (knowledge) passing on happening.”

What support is currently available to assist in managing the homes, what might be required, and how should support be delivered. Who could deliver support and how would communities like it delivered.

There was clear understanding of how to access maintenance services and tenancy officers, however, these relationships were generally described as transactional (and in relation to this, as slow or adequate) rather than as supportive of people and their home management.

We recorded few comments relevant to this question, and would suggest that 'home management' is generally perceived as a family responsibility, rather than as something that outside services or organisations can, or do, assist with.

How families and individuals want to manage their visitors and what assistance may be required to help manage visitors.

The arrival of visiting family members is often a welcome part of everyday life, but can bring difficulties around housing. It can be difficult for head tenants to step into a role of authority over their kin to ask for, or enforce, particular behaviours. Being able to defer to other authorities in these situations can be helpful.

- Family comes for ceremony reason. Yapas (sisters' families) come from Milingimbi for ceremony. Wāwas (brothers' families) from Ramingining. Are all djungaya (ceremonial managers) for Gupapuyŋu.
- Family comes for funeral and don't pay rent, just go back
- Coming in one month, finish. Then next month, coming again.
- Here, we are all family and it hurts to tell people to leave. It would be good to have some fencing to help keep gambling away.
- When they play here, sometimes people get money out of the game to pay rent for the light and power from the house. Sometimes they don't do this, sometimes they do.
- Some family members are staying, probably they can't afford to pay rent because of the money side. Can contact housing officer to tell them if people are staying a long time.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

How the Department can further support clients to manage their household within the cultural context. Support needs could include education around money management (costs for running the house), cleaning and caring for the house and yard, increasing understanding of the tenancy agreement conditions, and awareness of processes for requesting repairs and maintenance.

Good engagement practices

There was a clear message within the interview responses that good government engagement is crucial to good relationships around housing and household management. As, one tenant suggested "its number 1 for government to come here and talk with us". However, beyond recognising the importance of face-to-face interaction between government staff and community members, the mode of this interaction appears relevant.

- *Engagement carried out in a purely transactional mode may miss opportunities for developing working relationships also configured around care and support (at a government-household level).*

Clear money stories

There was considerable confusion and frustration around rental payments and other costs associated with managing households and homes. Some of this concerned the lack of visibility around what rental costs are as well as whether they are fixed or changeable, how they relate to numbers of adults in a house, if they relate to the 'real cost' of a house, and how rental costs connect with powercards. Frustration over the lack of understanding and control over how Centrelink and processes of income management operate, were cited as a cause for anxiety and disharmony in households.

- *There may be considerable benefit gained from further information around these issues. In particular:*
 - *Whether there are caps on rental payments per house, and what these caps are*
 - *Distinctions between rental payments and power costs (and much more information around payments for power in general)*

- *Creation of a diagram for each house showing the flow of money into and out of personal bank accounts, and where rental payments go when they leave personal bank accounts*
- *What NT Housing uses rental payments for once they are withdrawn from individual accounts*

External infrastructure

Considerable emphasis was placed on good and working external infrastructure around houses, with fences being the most notable example. Fences were considered as important for much more than aesthetic reasons, and were described as playing an important role in keeping children and families safe. If fencing is maintained well, parents can be confident that children can play outside without running onto the road, and clear boundaries can be seen between 'private' household space and public areas (which may be used for card games and other purposes). Alongside fencing, the presence of large trees that might damage houses during a cyclone were also described as causing stress and ill-feeling within families.

- *Good and well-negotiated management of external infrastructure around houses can positively impact on an overall sense of safety experienced by families in their homes.*

Design

There was significant discussion around the importance of housing design, and how this impacts possibilities of maintaining cultural practices, and general harmony within groups of people living closely together. There were preferences cited for extended families living together. However, sometimes it was maintain customary avoidance practices (including separations between men and their sisters and mother-in-law and connections grandparents and grandchildren. In such instances, some families choose to split into smaller groups so they can maintain these practices more easily. There was also considerable emphasis placed on being able to still be a part of the environment of Galiwin'ku (winds, birdlife, sea breezes) whilst living in a house, and some designs maximise this possibility while others do not. Those who had contributed to discussions about housing design in the past felt that their suggestions had not be listened or responded to.

- *The potential to influence housing designs (or not) should be made present in engagements around this issues, and the suitability of a house should be recognised as residing not just in the house itself, but ways in which the house enables experience of other environmental and significant cultural factors.*

Preliminary Findings:

Santa Teresa

What clients feel are the barriers to managing safe and healthy homes in remote locations

Both the very variable climate in Santa Teresa, and the history of housing in this settlement, generate challenges for people managing their houses. Extremes of hot and cold intensify issues associated with aging infrastructure. And these are further exacerbated by the sense that while people used to have some autonomy and control over house construction and maintenance, this is now largely gone.

Environment

Many tenants referred to the extreme hot and cold of the Santa Teresa climate, and how their houses were suited in better or worse ways to mediate these effects. Some older people remembered the stone houses that people used to live in as being good at insulating the heat and cold.

- Small houses get very hot in the summer. They are half brick and half tin. The tin part is like boiling yourself. Stone houses are what we used to have, no electricity – no light, no TV, no air con, no fridges. Growing up with old people and going hunting.
- Need houses that cater for our really hot summers and very cold winters
- We need Territory Housing or government to renovate our houses properly. When it rains water comes through cracked houses and our verandas are full of water. Come wintertime our houses are still cold, because cold wind comes under the house through the cracked walls.

Aging structures

The need for updating of housing infrastructure was clearly expressed by many. There was a sense that the small size of many houses, and the maintenance issues they experienced, were largely due to the age of many buildings, some of which are ready to be condemned.

- Most of the houses have had renovations and extensions from older houses that were built back in the 50's or 60's. The rooms are small. Windows also small and most verandas still have dirt, no cement laid out.
- The houses out here are mainly 2 bedroom houses and the houses were built back in the 1950's and 1960's. Bedrooms are too small, not much room to put furnishes in that room. Kitchen not much space to cook and move around. That is why our houses are overcrowded
- Houses are small. Overcrowding issues for 30-40 years. Need R&M to be properly renovated as we don't have to repeatedly report it over and over. Rent's too high.

"I want my house to be condemned. We've been waiting since last year for a new one. When you sleep inside, you can see through to the outside. I rang them up, my daughter rang them up. Someone else called."

- My daughter was supposed to get a house since last year. Her little one was supposed to be demolished, and she'd get one of those jigsaw ones.

Remote jobs programs

There was a sense that previous pride associated with building and managing houses in your own community was now difficult to sustain, particularly under current maintenance contracting arrangements and remote jobs programs.

- Before Indigenous people were working, had our own builders, people had jobs here
- They should get local people to fix small things up. But for big problems like plumbing they need to come out quick to fix it up
- Get the community blokes to work with them (contractors). They used to have contracts.
- There used to be people here that had maintenance jobs – mechanics, people fixing car, plumbing.

“Before the Intervention we used to do all these things. When the Intervention came in we were doing all right and then everybody went down. The whole community went down. Before there were lots of jobs – rubbish collecting, at the school, in the church, gardening. There were lots of jobs that people were doing, and now its just activities.”

What level of understanding the households have about their responsibilities under the tenancy agreement.

Tenancy agreements tended to be discussed as a legal document to which different groups were a party, each having particular roles and responsibilities that were understood and practiced to a greater and lesser extent. These responsibilities were largely to do with rent and maintenance, rather than household management and support.

Tenancy agreements

Understandings of tenancy agreement documents were highly variable with some people being very clear about what these were and what they meant, while others were less clear (particularly older people), or understood the general idea but were uncertain about finer details.

- I have signed the Tenancy Agreement but not the lease
- Don't know anything about the lease, but I signed up to be the new Tenancy of this house, that is all.
- My sister helped to explain the lease agreement
- When signing the paper it is clear what it means. It means I'm looking after the house and paying rent
- They explained it to us but we didn't know the amount. After the renovations this was deducted from Centrelink
- No, I don't understand at all

“My Mum signed a lease while I was at work. Old people are not used to a lot of changes. People come with a pencil and paper and don't explain what they are signing. I understood but not old people.”

Tenancy officers and relationship with NT Housing

There is a general satisfaction with the particular people (tenancy officers and contractors – with sometimes little distinction being drawn between these roles) who visit houses in Santa Teresa. However, there was also a general sense that since court proceedings around housing rents and repairs began, there were far fewer visits being made by government staff to the community.

- When they started, it was good. Everything was up to date, meetings were held regularly. They organised demountable for tenants when the tenants houses were being renovated
- We haven't seen Territory housing coming out to us, Zodiac has taken over the housing side of things
- They (Territory Housing) are supposed to look after the community. They don't come out to our community much. Never seen them in the community.
- They don't work very well, they drop notices off when nobody is home and then the notices get lost
- Zodiac have a male tenancy officer who work really good with us. He used to come regularly last year, now we haven't seen them regularly

"Yes, the tenancy officer works well with us, really well. When Mike the Zodiac worker is in the community he comes around to our houses and asks if anything is wrong in our houses."

Rent payments

Rental payments remain a source of some concern and frustration, with some people being unclear about the amount they are and should be paying, and correct requirements around bond payments.

- They should start being honest, let us know how much rent we are paying
- I remember signing. I got a shock when saw the cost of our rent payments. And have another one outstanding.
- Everyone living in the house has to pay rent. If there are 10 people, then 10 people pay rent. I called up to find out about how much rent I was paying, but I was told that was confidential and that I should speak to a lawyer.
- Bond payments – all of a sudden people were getting a bill for \$5000, \$6000, \$7000. We don't know why that happened.

What the current roles and responsibilities of individuals, families or groups are in managing houses and tenancies.

It was clearly expressed that immediate and extended family groups were crucial to maintaining support and wellbeing of people in Santa Teresa. However, there was a separation between these comments around mutual care and support, and discussion of housing. This gives the sense that a lot of what was important to how you care for each other and family largely exceeds issues of housing and household management.

Head tenants and families

When asked how their tenancy agreements impact on how they manage their households and care for their families, many people pointed to how important it was for family to live close by to each other, but that the agreements themselves were not a part of these relationships. There is some moving about that happens to keep households functioning safely and well when family from elsewhere arrives.

- We live close to each other because that's how we can support each other, and care for our elderly mother.
- All of these signing paper doesn't have any effect on me and my family, I know my family is still doing things what we used to do before.
- Nothing has affected my family's life or family's way of living
- When families come to stay, we give them our bedroom and move to the kitchen to sleep because the kitchen is not safe for them. That's why we take it.

Private/government responsibilities

Beyond the private sphere, many stories were told about shifting responsibilities between different management approaches, and maintenance contractors. There was a sense that these organisations were not always delivering on their responsibilities.

- Territory Housing was managing us but then Zodiac took over. Before all of these changes, community council used to look after the houses and rent and R&M
- Inspections are all gone – Zodiac. People used to complain. They used to go into people's homes and take photographs and make funny comments. Everyone complained.
- Territory housing used to do inspections, but now its under Tangentyere constructions. They sometimes do a good job
- Territory Housing and Zodiac used to come out with papers and chasing people for rent. Just showing bill and how much they were behind for rent and bond. People were frightened about how to pay back.
- Some people went on ABC and then zodiac disappears.

If the tenancy management model works within a cultural context, and if not, how can this be improved.

There were some points of friction between the tenancy model and cultural practice expressed, in particular the way it is now difficult to move house when someone dies. Being able to live close by to immediate and extended family was described as exceptionally important, and as possible at the current time.

Arrente families

The ability for families to live together, or close by to each other, was described as a significant and necessary form of support; enabling the maintenance of ways of living and story telling that are important, and providing material assistance for everyday living and healthcare.

- Our parents never separated us, they grew up together in one place.

- Its good to have family close by. They come and stay and talk story at night, have a yarn.
- Yes, my daughter lives across the road and 6 kids and a husband and my granddaughters partner. Its good. Other daughter lives outside old village, she lives in another house.
- Its good for me. Now we can support each other. My mother, sisters and other kids all close by.

“Having your family live long way makes you feel alone. It’s a good thing to have them close by, all living around you.”

Maintaining cultural practices

Being able to move for sorry business is an important cultural practice that was described as currently difficult to uphold.

- Before ‘the mighty shires’ and remote housing I moved for sorry business. You can’t move for sorry business any more. Have to meet the requirements and can’t swap. This makes people upset and unhappy. If you have cultural business you have to swap or move away. But this can’t happen with remote housing rules, since this came in without consultation.

What is seen as the best mechanisms for individuals and families to: ensure homes remain safe and healthy for occupants; request repairs and maintenance; report incidents; or seek information from the Department.

The Room to Breathe program is seen by many as an exciting and promising program with many people aware of the renovations they might expect, and anxious to find out when they might occur. With this, as with other repairs and maintenance work, processes and mechanisms for maintaining house safety were seen to work best when carried out with respect (as opposed to sloppy maintenance, which after being done once, still needed to be done again).

Accessing Repairs & Maintenance

Almost all people we spoke to had a clear idea about who to contact and how to report maintenance issues. There was some discussion of how it is difficult to get through on the phone, and delays associated with repair and maintenance work. However, a number of people also mentioned that what was most worrying, was that when repairs were done, they were not done well.

- I just ring straight to Ingerreke, I have a card with their number on it
- I report it to Ingerreke, housing mob gave us their number to call if we need to report anything in the house. Sometimes they are quick and sometimes they take a while.
- Have to ring up Ingkerreke put you through to housing. Waiting, waiting, waiting. Don’t know what day they are coming.
- I called every day. Rang them about air-conditioning because my husband is on dialysis. Rang every day before Christmas.
- Not good, not quick enough. When we report our problems we wait 2-6 months before they come out to fix it. And we ring every day if its like sewerage problem, so they can come out quickly to fix it

- They don't work very well, they drop notices off when nobody is home and then the notices get lost
- House is very old, more new house. When renovation is done in this community it needs to be done properly. When raining water leaks through our veranda gets flooded
- Maintenance and renovating are not being done properly. Builders covered up with paint rather than fixing cracks in the walls. They just took out the air conditioner, after renovations dust still gets in the doors, the ceiling is not fitted to the walls properly.
- Ingkerreke – but there is a catch. You have to have 10 or more houses with the same problem before it gets fixed. But now they come the very next day. Put them on the news one day and could see all the working groups after that – plumbers, electricians. As soon as the community complained about how long it takes for leaking tap to be fixed and media comes, they start working. They needed a push and a shove. Is really good now. Perhaps they wanted media attention.
- People in this community are smart, they took that case to court. All agreed something needed to be done about housing, now we are going the right way – except this hasn't fixed the problem of being overcrowded.

Housing renovation and design

Renovation is an ongoing reality for many people in Santa Teresa, as their houses are old and in need of continual maintenance and repair. Renovation and design which will bring these houses towards more modern designs is seen as a priority.

- House is small. Not enough to cater to me and my 5 kids, rooms are like match box. The house I am staying in was built back in the olden days. I would like a new house to cater for my 5 kids
- I've been trying to get the message across. Every house in community has only got one toilet, one shower room. Should be two of everything. And a big laundry. Family comes and goes.
- Government should keep their promises and follow up on things. We were told it was a two year project, they came, measured our homes, not been back since. We might have even had the housing minister here. (Room to Breathe)
- Room to Breathe came and went. They looked around, made us feel good, and have not been back since.
- Houses small for big family group. It has been extended over very old houses. Need renovations done properly. I have overcrowding issues in my house, no room to move around if we want to do cooking. Can't put furnitures in the house. Space – no veranda. When it rains the place is flooded. When grandchildren have shower they have to share one shower, and the water flows into the small veranda. All my grannies always slips on the floor after having shower

"We want to see the government put new renovations like they promised us when we signed the paper with Room to Breathe. We have so many problems in this community. Like overcrowding, small houses, no room to look after our family. House is not safe in some area."

- Ever since the houses have been renovated, there have been lots of spiders. Now there are gaps between the ceiling and the wall. Some powerpoints are too dangerous with little kids. They should be up high. That's part of housing design.

Housing Reference Group and NT Housing

People from 13 out of 19 houses visited had not heard of the HRG in Santa Teresa, and did not see it as a key mechanism or route by which they could raise issues and concerns associated with their houses. Those people that did know about the HRG, either tended to be on it, or were wary of its current working politics.

- I am a HRG member. There is 11 members on the HRG
- We look at applications for housing also look at who's application has priority to move into a new house or a vacant house. On the L.A. we talk about general concerns for the community.
- Do help people, tell people what's happening, who is going to get the house. Tell families what's going to happen. Let community know.
- There's 11 people on he HRG but nothing is happening. They are not doing anything at the moment.
- We have a HRG but always some family group that are members and always share between each other. And when they meet up and support each other they don't share information with the community.
- Not sure, what is that?
- I don't know anything about HRG. I don't know if we have one in the community

"At the HRG we talk about housing. Look at all applications. Help people with applications. People report to us and you follow up these complaints."

What support is currently available to assist in managing the homes, what might be required, and how should support be delivered. Who could deliver support and how would communities like it delivered.

Residents were very articulate about some of the shortcomings of various services, and service delivery providers, in Santa Teresa. When services are delivered poorly, without respect and without attempts to engage carefully and well, they are not experienced as supportive by people in the community. However, some suggestions were offered as to how these services may be delivered appropriately and well, including through a dedicated desk or office within the community itself.

- When they come and put in a new air conditioner, it still wasn't making the air colder. My husband used to do air-con, so he went up the ladder. He went up and fixed it. The water wasn't running through. He climbed up. I was worried, because he is on dialysis.
- We would like them to come sooner and get the job done properly. Need them to come out quicker, not make us wait for weeks and weeks or sometimes monthly
- Don't know what the role is but I know what Zodiac does. They come out to check up on the houses in the community
- Zodiac inspections are all gone. People used to complain. They used to go into people's homes and take photographs and make funny comments. Everyone complained.

- Pest control should let everyone know to remove the blankets out before they spray. They have sprayed peoples blankets and bedding before. They don't come now because people complain.
- They should talk to us face to face. Or leave notices where everybody can see, for example, the community store
- Give us a day or two days when they will come out, so we can be ready. Are people here that can fix things, but they don't have tools
- Set up a space where we can come and see that person to report our problems that we have in our house
- Engage with people of this community to hear our concern about the houses we live in.

“Set up little office where people can walk in and put in their problems of their houses. Get a man and a woman to work together.”

How families and individuals want to manage their visitors and what assistance may be required to help manage visitors.

The arrival of visitors into Santa Teresa is greatly appreciated by the people we spoke to. They look forward to the arrival of family for sporting carnivals, race day, concerts and other special events. At the same time, some households were better equipped to manage these visitors than others, with amenities such as an extra toilet and veranda space making a considerable difference to safety and comfort at these times.

- Yes, it makes my house a bit overcrowded but it is good to catch up with family on these special days
- Yes, even though the houses are small. We are happy to have them in the house
- We get a full house (she says with a big smile) and fill up the veranda. Packed. I have families from Hermannsburg. They camp all around the veranda. They leave a lot of mess.
- Good to have visitors but still overcrowded. People need extra toilets, showers. If there is going to be overcrowding, it will be for those events. When they go home, there will be a big clean up when they are gone.
- I feel happy. Sometimes I feel sad when people ask for room.
- I feel happy and have a lot of catch up with stories, but also get worried because we have people sleeping outside

“When we have sports weekend families come and camp for the weekend. I have a small house but happy to share with my family who comes from another community. I let them sleep in my yard. I get a bit shame but invite them in because they are my family.”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

How the Department can further support clients to manage their household within the cultural context. Support needs could include education around money management (costs for running the house), cleaning and caring for the house and yard, increasing understanding of the tenancy agreement conditions, and awareness of processes for requesting repairs and maintenance.

Good engagement practices

People in Santa Teresa emphasised the value and importance of good engagement and communication on the part of government staff, service deliverers and contractors working in the community. They emphasised the significance of clear communication around tenancy issues, as well as the importance of face-to-face interactions as a basis for good ongoing working relationships. In the stories told by residents, good engagement is also something that extends beyond good communication, and also includes a respectfulness in the way in which maintenance and other services are delivered (by a range of providers)

- *Maintaining good and productive relations between residents and visiting staff includes contract and other work which engages respectfully with the interest of Santa Teresa to maintaining liveable housing for themselves and their family.*

Remote housing services

Even with contracts for delivery of repairs and maintenance services changing frequently in Santa Teresa, there was a good awareness around who should be contacted and how if repairs are needed to housing. However, the phone communication can often be protracted and difficult for residents to manage.

- *Suggestions for a desk or office physically located in the community where people can bring housing problems and receive appropriate assistance could be explored (potentially as an element of AAAC business)*

Tenancy agreements

While the finer details of tenancy agreements are known to some people, there are not known to all. Older generations in particular were named as less easily able to come to grips with these agreements, both as documents and as contracts around certain behaviours and responsibilities. There was also some confusion around the price of rents and the status of bond payments.

- *There may be considerable benefit gained from further information around these issues, (e.g. the status of caps on rental payments per house). Particularly given recent rapid changes around remote housing management (i.e. between Territory and Australian governments) and the recent court cases concerning Santa Teresa residents.*

Housing renovations

Within the community there was significant anticipation around the Room to Breathe policy, and the relief it might bring to people experiencing overcrowding and poor living conditions. There was appreciation for the renovations proposed, but a growing sense of unease around the time it was taking for work to begin.

- *Clear communication around realistic timelines may assist productive relations between government staff and Santa Teresa tenants around the Room to Breathe program to be maintained and enhanced.*

Discussion

The above sections have reported separately on research carried out in the two project communities. This section (when completed) will draw links between these findings previous research carried out by the Ground Up team, using these to further elaborate and qualify the 'Our Homes' project findings.

Particularly including previous research on:

- Remote housing (More than a Roof Overhead)
- Engagement practices (Remote Engagement Coordination – Indigenous Evaluation Research, REC-IER)
- Local decision making
- Financial literacy (TCU Financial Literacy Project)

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Appendix

SANTA TERESA RESEARCH QUESTIONS

House Tenant: House no.:
Age: Gender:

When did you move in?
How long have you been in this house?
How many people stay here?
Is this house overcrowded?

WORKING WITH TERRITORY HOUSING

1. Can you tell us a bit about Territory Housing?
2. Have you signed a lease or tenancy agreement?
3. Did you understand what that piece of paper means?
4. Has that lease affected you or your family?
5. Have you had regular housing inspections?
6. How well have tenancy officers worked with you in your community?
7. How could they work better for you and your community?

HOUSING REFERENCE GROUP

1. In your community, do you have a HRG?
2. What are its roles?
3. How do they help the community?

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

1. If something needs fixing in your house, who do you report to?
2. How do they respond?
3. How would you like to see this work better?

VISITORS AND FAMILY

1. When there is a big event (e.g. sports weekend, horse racing, concert etc) do you have many visitors staying in your house?
2. How do you feel when you have visitors staying in your house?
3. In Ltyentye Apurte does your family live close by to you?
4. Is that good for you, or not? Why?

OPEN QUESTION

1. Are there other things you would like government to know about housing in this community?