



Our Homes Research Project

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Santa Teresa Community Report

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GroundUp



Summary

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.

The purpose of the project was to speak to people in Santa Teresa and learn about how:

- People want to manage their households
- Houses can be maintained so people are safe and healthy
- Communication between government and communities can improve
- Tenancy models are working for people on the ground
- The department can support household management within various cultural contexts and dynamics

In Santa Teresa, researchers from Tangentyere Research Hub and CDU worked together. They visited people in their homes, and spoke to them about their experiences with rent, repairs and maintenance, contractors and government. They also asked them about ways NT government can support people to manage their households, and be safe and healthy at home.

In this report, we provide details of what people told us, as well as some proposed recommendations for the Northern Territory government. We are seeking feedback from people in Santa Teresa about whether you are satisfied with what is included in the report, or of you would like changes to be made.

What we did

For this project, researchers from CDU and Tangentyere visited Santa Teresa twice to talk to people about their houses

- 11 – 14 Mar, 2019
- 30 Apr – 3 May, 2019

We spoke to 38 households, visiting people at home, sitting and talking with them

Interviews were primarily conducted by Tangentyere and local researchers. Vanessa Davis designed the questions and coordinated the research. She was assisted by Natalie Pepperill (visit 1) and Marie Mullodad (visit 2).



Community Voices

Rent payments

- “Rent payment is shocking because paying for old house. Renovations are just add on tin shed, market rate is charged – but this is not right amount.”
- “Even though I don’t know if I’m in debt or not, I still worry.”
- “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.”

Housing Leases

- “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.”
- “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.”

Problems with Repairs and Maintenance

- “It’s managed by Ingerreke. But they all live in town and we got to ring them and let them know the problem we have in our house. They come take photo and go back to town and don’t come back for a few months or years.”
- “Before all this other stuff came in we had local maintenance. Before the shire came in. They used to do everything what we are now paying people to come in and do – electrical, toilets, air-conditioning.”
- “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 Ingerreke 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.”



- “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 manage repairs. But they do a bad job. One fella came to fix a tap in the laundry. He took out all the tiles and replaced them and the tap is still bugged. Came and took photos. You think they are coming to fix, but they take photos and come back later. The fella said about the air conditioning, ‘I can’t climb up there, I’ll send someone else out’.”
- “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.”

Staying Safe and Healthy

- “We need our houses to be renovated properly. When it rains water comes through cracked houses and our verandas are full of water. Come winter time our houses are still cold, because cold wind comes under the house through the cracked walls.”
- “Our yards and gardens are all tidy, outside every thing is neat and proud. But inside its different, damage and overcrowding.”
- “I needed a new house for my son because any bugs he catches could make him really sick. Only thing did was put fence up to stop horse coming onto veranda and poo-ing. Needed a bigger, more open, space”
- “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.”

Jobs in the Community

- “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.”

Managing Visitors and Overcrowding

- “We live close to each other because that’s how we can support each other, and care for our elderly mother.”
- “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.”
- “Having your family live long way makes you feel alone. It’s a good thing to have them close by, all living around you.”
- “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.”
- “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.”

The Housing Reference Group

- “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”
- “Housing Reference Group... Not sure, what is that?”
- “We have a HRG but always some family group that are members and always share between each other.”
- “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.”
- “People that need a prioritised house. HRG can look at priority list. But that list got deleted.”
- “The HRG can work well but it depends who is on it. Should be 2-3 people for each place (eastside etc) and people who can speak up. It is easier for a lot of people to talk one-on-one. Otherwise they can get shy in the meeting and all confused about what they are talking about. Some people get confused with big words.”

Decisions About Houses

- “At the house we’re staying in its not suitable for my son. The doctor came and said the house wasn’t suitable. That house is like a tin shed, really cold. During winter its really cold. In summer gets really hot when air-conditioned isn’t working. Doctor wrote a letter. My mum has got it. She gave a copy to territory housing, but no use.”
- “Sometimes I just feel like signing on for house in town because no houses here. But its easier for the kids here. Hard to go into town to work because no-one to babysit. Family are around here.”

- “Needed new house for my son because any bugs he catches could make him really sick. That is why I needed an urgent house, but 8 years later we are still sleeping in the same house”

Working with Government

- “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.”
- “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.”

New Renovations

- “Room to Breathe – what is happening with that? They came here, made us feel good. We are waiting.”
- “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.”

Moving After Sorry Business

- “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.”
- “I lost my son living in that house. I went away for a couple of weeks. Lost my husband. Went away for a few weeks and came back. We used to swap houses but these days we can’t. I don’t really feel happy living in same house as where I lost my husband.”
- “They need to understand two-way culture. They respect white mans culture more, but there is Aboriginal culture here. When you lose someone you have to swap out of the house.”
- “I don’t think you can swap houses any more. Have to go through territory housing. Used to move out, but now have to go back.”

Proposed Recommendations

- Let people know clearly the story around the rents that they pay – including, where rents go to, how much is paid for each house and how much is paid by each person.
- Run a local desk or office in Santa Teresa where people can report tenancy and other repairs and maintenance issues
- NT government works with Ingerreke to improve the speed and quality of repairs and maintenance
- NT government works with Ingerreke to include skilled Aboriginal people in housing maintenance work, providing employment for local people
- Prioritise people with medical conditions when making decisions around housing allocations
- Provide clear timelines as to when housing renovations and reconstructions will occur in Santa Teresa
- NT government and Ingerreke contact people by SMS, and tell them when they are coming to visit. As well as using other forms of communication (e.g. a note under the door)
- Provide clear communication around timeframes for Room to Breathe renovations

