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YWCA student-led social work program wins national award

A Melbourne student-led program for women who have experienced homelessness won a national award at a ceremony held in Canberra last night.

PowerHousing Australia, a national organisation that provides 100,000 people with affordable housing, presented YWCA National Housing with its Award for Excellence in Tenant Engagement and Social Inclusion for its Women's Housing Inclusion Program (Y-WHIP).

Y-WHIP, is a Melbourne-based program run by university social work students to build a sense of safety and community and to provide emotional support and integrated services for tenants of YWCA rooming houses.

YWCA's Director of National Housing and Property Development Jan Berriman said factors such as poverty, financial inequality and other structural barriers placed women at significant risk of housing stress and homelessness.

"Almost 70% of the women housed by YWCA have experienced family violence and many of them lack access to appropriate trauma counselling, employment, training or financial assistance, making it difficult for them to sustain a rental tenancy agreement or gain suitable employment," she said.

"To address these issues, we have partnered with Monash University Masters of Social Work students to create Y-WHIP, a social inclusion and support program that helps women living in our rooming houses across Melbourne to access the support and services they need to build their futures, sustain a tenancy long term, and perhaps seek employment or education."

Ms Berriman said feedback from tenants about the program had been overwhelmingly positive.

"A recent survey showed that more than 85% of residents felt more socially connected and emotionally supported after the program and more than 65% also felt more encouraged in resolving different problems in life and felt more confident to handle conflicts with other residents," Ms Berriman said.

"It shows that with the access to the right support and services, we can help women to build and maintain community and social connections, and to feel equipped in handling life's challenges."

More information about YWCA National Housing: <https://www.ywcahousing.org.au>

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ABOUT YWCA National Housing

YWCA National Housing is one of the largest medium to long-term affordable housing providers for women in Australia. Each year, we provide nearly 150,000 nights of safe, secure and affordable accommodation for women across Australia.

We provide and advocate for improved access to safe, secure and affordable housing, which is fundamental to women's social, economic and educational participation, and the realisation of gender equality and women's human rights.

YWCA National Housing is a subsidiary of YWCA Australia, a feminist organisation focused on improving gender equality for women, young women and girls.