FROM CONCEPT TO COMMUNITY

LESSONS IN MEANWHILE USE HOUSING

CORONATION CORE

Habitat for Humanity

Aboriginal Women & Children's Crisis Service

PROPERTY INDUSTRY FOUNDATION

THE MEANWHILE USE OPPORTUNITY

Australia's housing crisis presents a striking contradiction: more than 122,000 people are experiencing homelessness, while tens of thousands of residential properties sit vacant. At the same time, vacant assets continue to impose significant costs on owners through ongoing maintenance, security and insurance requirements, highlighting an opportunity to create value rather than simply absorb the costs of vacancy.

While the Meanwhile Use Housing model has been successfully applied to larger assets such as hotels, student accommodation and former institutional buildings, its application to standard residential housing remains underutilised. This paper sets out why residential Meanwhile Use Housing is viable, where it can have the greatest impact, and how landholders can work with community housing and social service partners to scale the model responsibly.

Residential properties provide:

- Privacy and dignity through self-contained living
- Stability for children through proximity to schools, routines and community
- Trauma-informed environments for families rebuilding after crisis

This is particularly critical for women and children escaping domestic violence, where shared accommodation may not always provide the safety, privacy or stability required.

THE PROBLEM: IDLE ASSETS

Australia's housing crisis presents a clear challenge: while more than 122,000 people were experiencing homelessness at the time of the 2021 Census, recent ABS administrative data analysis has identified almost 24,000 inactive dwellings in Sydney alone.

Together, these figures highlight both the scale of housing need and the opportunity to better utilise existing residential capacity.

The result is a system where:

- Families face prolonged housing insecurity
- Existing properties remain unused for extended periods
- Vacancy is treated as an unavoidable cost of the property lifecycle rather than an opportunity to deliver social and economic value.

THE OPPORTUNITY: MEANWHILE USE

Meanwhile-use housing refers to the temporary activation of vacant properties to provide short-term accommodation.

The model brings together property owners, housing providers and community organisations to create outcomes that no single organisation could achieve alone, resulting in an approach which is:

- Rapid: utilises existing dwellings
- Flexible: adapts to varied property types
- Cost-effective: avoids the cost of building new dwellings or expensive, extensive redevelopment costs.

CASE STUDY
CORONATION HOUSE

Coronation House demonstrates how a vacant residential property can be activated quickly and responsibly to provide transitional accommodation for families in crisis.

The initiative was delivered through a partnership between Coronation Property, Habitat for Humanity Australia and Aboriginal Women and Children's Crisis Service, with each partner bringing a clear and complementary role.

To date, the partnership has delivered more than 1,200 nights of safe accommodation and has supported families who may otherwise have experienced homelessness.

The model also demonstrates the practical value of partnership. From property identification to the first family moving in, the process took less than three months.

CASE STUDY
CORONATION HOUSE

“Having a secure place, even for a short time, meant my kids could sleep, go to school, and feel normal again. It gave us space to breathe and start planning what comes next.”

RESIDENT TESTIMONIAL

Working in partnership, the team took less than three months from property identification to the first family moving in.

To date, outcomes delivered by the partnership:

- 1,200+ nights of safe accommodation provided
- Supported five families who may otherwise have experienced homelessness
- 5,000+ additional nights committed.

Cost efficiency:

- Approximately $20,000 to refurbish the home (Coronation partnered with Habitat Women to add air conditioning in all rooms, update flooring, paint the dwelling, undertake compliance works, etc.)
- Significantly less than the capital cost of delivering equivalent new accommodation in the same area.

FROM CONCEPT TO COMMUNITY: LESSONS IN MEANWHILE USE

THE THREE STEP GUIDE

TO REPLICATE THE CORONATION HOUSE MODEL

1. IDENTIFY THE ASSET

Audit your portfolio to identify suitable vacant residential properties.

- Coronation Property audited its holdings and identified a vacant house in the City of Sydney ready for activation.

The cost of rent was agreed at $1 per year for the identified Community Housing Partner on a head lease agreement.

2. PARTNER FOR DELIVERY

Engage a partner that can both refurbish and operate the property.

Habitat for Humanity Australia played two roles:

- Through Habitat Women (their social enterprise): delivered refurbishment works while providing employment and training for women from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- As a registered Community Housing Provider (CHP): took responsibility for operating the home as supported housing (including tenure management, maintenance and insurance obligations for tenant damage).

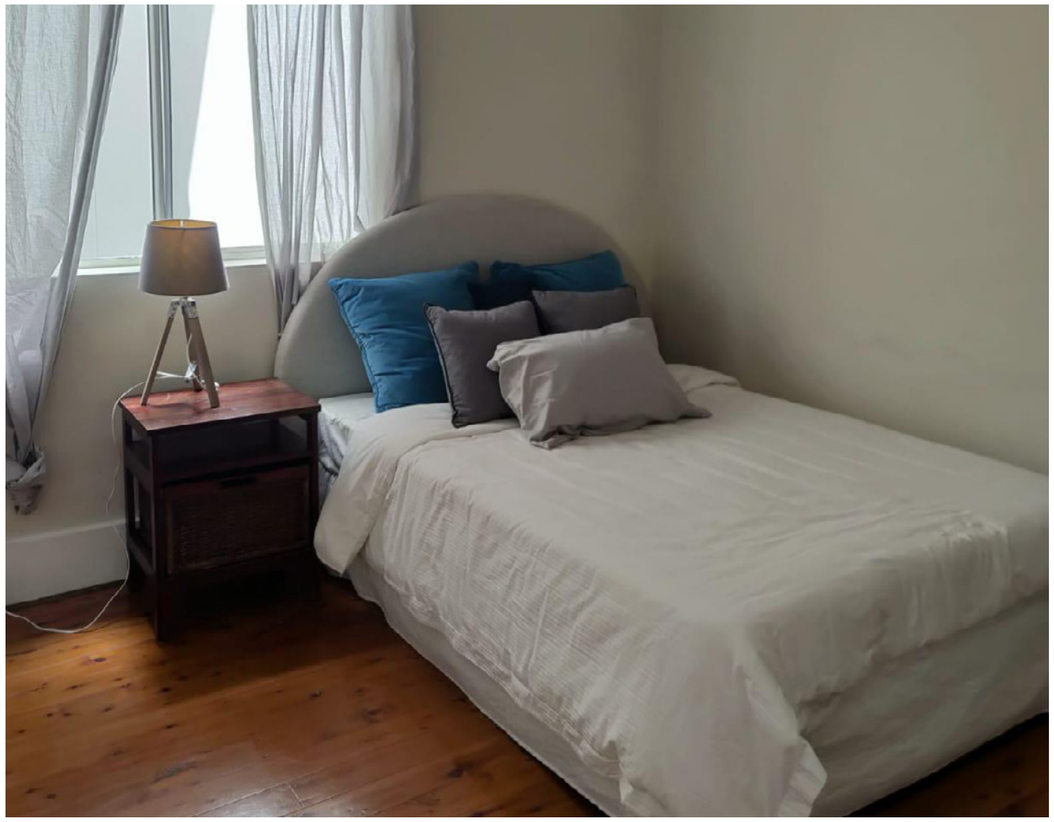
Successful projects are built on partnerships that combine complementary capabilities, allowing each organisation to focus on what it does best while contributing to a shared outcome.

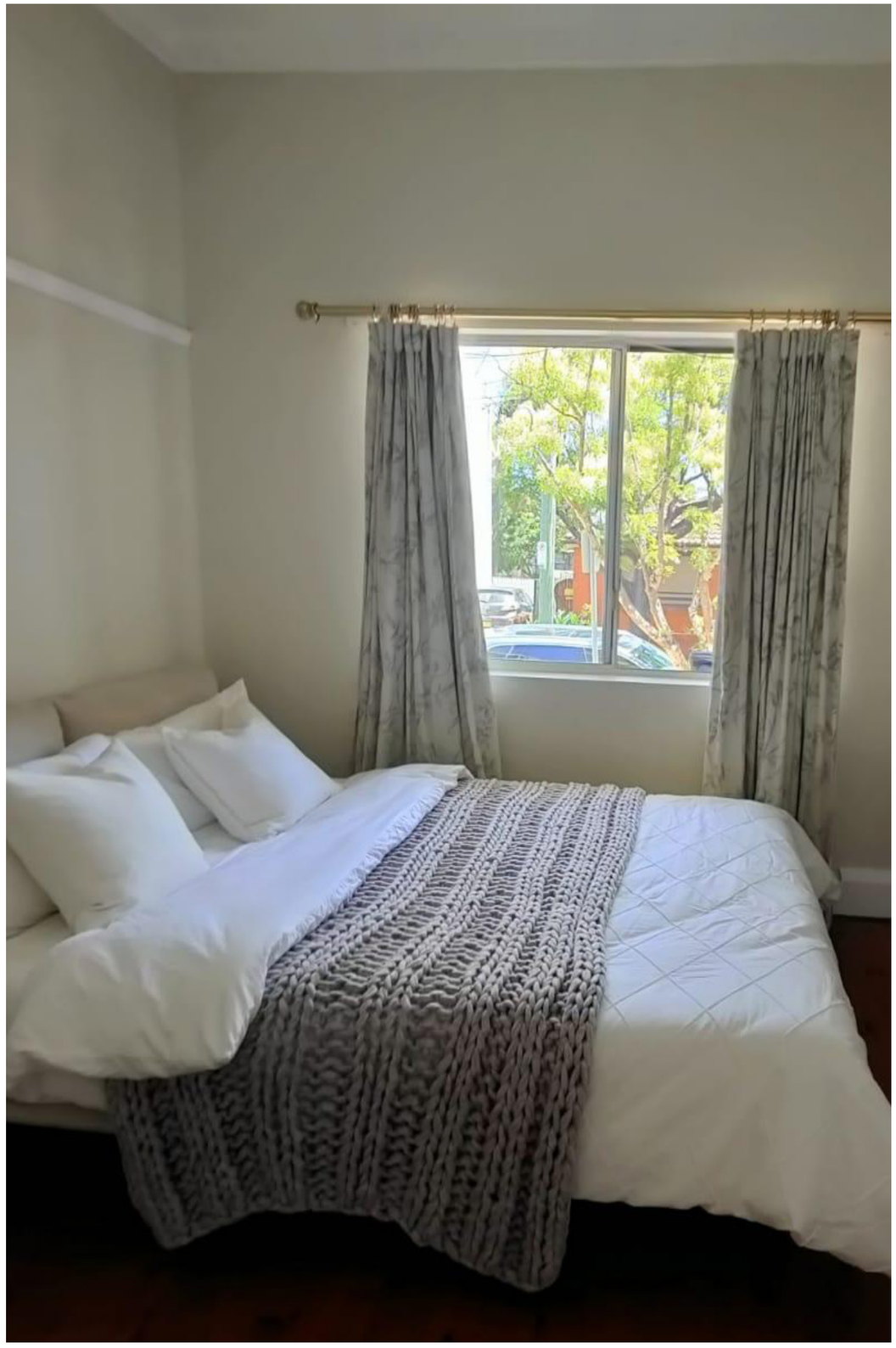
3. DEFINE THE SOCIAL SERVICES PARTNER

Determine the target cohort and appoint a specialist organisation to manage residents.

- The Coronation House partnership aligned on supporting women and children escaping domestic violence

- Aboriginal Women and Children's Crisis Service (AWCCS) was appointed by Habitat for Humanity Australia to provide case management and ongoing support for residents.





MISCONCEPTIONS WITH MEANWHILE USE

One of the misconceptions raised by landholders regarding Meanwhile Use Housing is what happens once the property is no longer available for housing. In reality, this is precisely where the strength of the model lies.

Meanwhile Use Housing is not designed as a permanent solution. It plays a deliberate and important role within the broader housing continuum as transitional accommodation.

Positioned between crisis or emergency housing and longer-term housing, Meanwhile Use provides individuals and families with a safe, secure environment while they stabilise their circumstances and prepare for more permanent housing outcomes. Its temporary nature aligns directly with its purpose.

By partnering with a Community Housing Provider alongside a Social Service Organisation with demonstrated expertise in tenant support and transition, the program ensures that residents are actively supported to move toward longer-term housing solutions.

SCALING THE OPPORTUNITY

PROPERTY OWNERS & DEVELOPERS

- Audit residential stock that would be vacant for a period of 18 months or more
- Partner with an accredited housing provider and social services organisation
- Start a meanwhile-use activation.

Tip: The Property Industry Foundation has a platform to connect landholders with CHPs and support service organisations based on dwelling need, tenure length and type of use.

COMMUNITY & HOUSING SECTOR

- Expand delivery partnerships
- Standardise operational models
- Advocate for system-wide adoption.

GOVERNMENT

- Establish enabling policy settings
- Incentivise participation
- Support coordination frameworks.

JOIN THE MEANWHILE USE MOVEMENT

The housing crisis is often framed as a problem of supply. But the existence of thousands of vacant homes suggests a parallel issue: underutilised capacity.

Successful projects such as Coronation House have already demonstrated its potential. The challenge is making participation easier so that more organisations can activate vacant homes and replicate proven models.

Meanwhile Use Housing can help bridge this gap by activating existing residential properties for safe, dignified transitional accommodation.

The opportunity now is to scale this model through considered partnerships, clear operating frameworks and a shared willingness to put underutilised housing to work.

CONTACT

Habitat for Humanity Australia
Kristeen Chao
Program Manager, Habitat Women
kchao@habitat.org.au

Property Industry Foundation
JV Douglas
Innovation Manager
jvdouglas@pif.com.au

Aboriginal Women and Children' Crisis Service
Katie Brennan
Services Manager
katie@awccs.com.au

Coronation
Kirsten Steedman
Head of Social Impact
k.steedman@coronation.com.au

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