

INQUIRY INTO APPROPRIATE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

Name of Organisation: GROW

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GROW is essentially a 12 step program of mutual help support groups for people who have mental health issues or who wish to grow to a mature state in their living skills.

GROW began in 1957 in Hurstville. **GROW** is available to mentally ill people as

- A program of recovery
- A program of prevention and rehabilitation
- A program of adult education for life.

GROW is a Caring and Sharing Community of people who are using the GROW Program and the GROW Group Method to help each other to overcome maladjustments and inadequacies, develop enduring friendship and grow towards maturity.

Residential Program

The residential program offered at the Grow House in Narrabundah is a five bed residence for those Growers who have initially been attending a Grow group for three months. To first apply, the person needs to write a letter stating why they would like to become a resident, after which, the applicant is invited to attend an interview. At the interview, the applicant is made aware of the regulations along with a discussion of their proposed length of stay, attitudes to community living and house duties etc. The level of mental health recovery for applicants needs to be in the vicinity of a medium term, whereby they have learned and developed strategies to help with problems by using Grow and/or doctors, psychiatrists and other community workers. The current program began in November, 2004 when the current House Worker was employed in September of that year.

The aims of the residential program are to:

- Assimilate the Grow Community Centre within the wider community at Narrabundah.
- To provide a secure home for both short term and long term growth based on **GROW'S** "Three vital needs", that is:
"To be someone, to be at home, and to be going somewhere".
- To foster personal and interpersonal growth through living and putting the **GROW** Program into practise.
- A community growing in maturity and aiding and encouraging one another to grow through *shared leadership and responsibility*.
- To take our responsible and caring place in society.

There are currently 4 people living at Grow House. Any person applying to enter the Grow House must have a mental health and/or dual diagnosis. Each person has agreed to and signed the regulation form. One of the regulations is that the residents attend a regular weekly Grow group and weekly house meeting, to continue to work on personal problems and problems associated with living in community. The house meeting is the place to share one's progress personally as well. Each resident sets goals when they enter the program. This is done with the House worker and helps to give the resident direction in terms of personal and community re-integration. This may mean activating oneself to look for volunteer work and/or paid work. We encourage residents to make this one of their goals as well as aiming to develop and improve daily living skills and their mental health. The current residents began community cooking and shopping in November of 2005 and this has assisted in developing a better community spirit in the house.

The **Support Worker's** prime duties include:

- Encouraging residents to practise **GROW'S** 12 step program in their daily life.
- Encouraging and supporting residents to acquire daily living skills.
- Encouraging and supporting residents to access generic services in the community.
- Encouraging residents to develop individual gifts, talents and personal resources which enables them to move towards more independent living.
- Encouraging and supporting residents to keep appointments with doctors, psychiatrists, social workers, case managers.
- Acknowledge, nurture and develop leadership.

Note: The Support Worker and also the Fieldworker positions in the **Grow** organisation are advertised as non-professional positions as required for Government funding. Grow is not a counselling service as the Grow groups are run by lay people and Grow uses only the **Grow** program in the groups. Grow acknowledges the work of professional doctors and psychiatrists in the community and advises Growers to follow guidance in relation to their health. **Grow** does not interfere with this.

Problems

1. The Government funding Grow receives covers only 38 hours per week, which means the Support Worker attends the house from approximately 9 am to 5pm Monday to Friday. The hours are made flexible each day to accommodate the needs of the residents. There is no night duty staff employed at the residential program. During December and January 2006, there was a crisis involving one of the residents whose health had deteriorated over that period. Both ambulance and police were called on more than one occasion to assist with the resident who had collapsed twice and on another occasion had been reported wandering on the road. One of the other residents living in the house called me at 12.30 am to ask what should be done for this person with regard to the police who had not been very successful in coaxing the person to return to the house and stay put till morning. They eventually did persuade the person to return to the house till the morning. The ambulance paramedics considered that the resident was not sick enough to be admitted to hospital.

The **Crisis Assessment** team came to the house and assessed the resident and administered medication to ensure the resident had a reasonable night's sleep. They also would not admit her to a hospital. I felt that the person was too ill to be left in the house where there was no professional, especially as there is no night staff also. At this time there could have been a potentially serious event take place.

2. During October 2005, an applicant from an ACT Community Health Service entered the house. Grow had, during this time, been willing to accept applications from those outside of Grow. The person concerned was really not willing to work on themselves, did not abide by the regulations and often acted in a violent and offensive manner towards other residents. The person left the Grow House at the end of November, on the same day that a meeting had been arranged with that person's case workers. Fortunately, the case workers were present and witnessed the event which involved violence and took the person away immediately to another supported accommodation.

Proposal

Could there be installed an on-call system for overnight casual staff (both with medical training and/or non-professional social training) who could attend the house for one or two nights or whatever time frame is necessary at the time to fill the gap where no night staff is available at suburban residential programs such as at Grow House. This would also serve to help de-escalate any emotions relating to other residents who are struggling to cope with the situation, especially during the early morning hours.