

28th August 2014

The Committee Secretary,
Standing Committee on Public Accounts,
Legislative Assembly for the ACT,
GPO Box 1020,
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Attn: Dr Andréa Cullen

Re: Submission for National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

Background

The Our Place program is a supported accommodation service for young people aged between 16 and 21. The service has been modelled on the Foyer program and as such Our Place connects accommodation with requirements to engage in education, apprenticeship or traineeship.

All young people who participate in the program are required to be enrolled in education, traineeship or apprenticeship upon signup and pay 25% of their income to their rent. Even though living skill training is offered at the program, young people need to have a level of independence to be able to cope with the expectations of maintaining their own accommodation. Twelve of the units at Our Place are two bedroom dwellings and young people share these units with one other young person of the same gender. Two units are one bedroom apartments and are granted to young people who have shown strong independent living skills. The service has a three bedroom unit that is used as the staff office space, which is also located onsite to the program.

Operating since 2011 Our Place has consistently exceeded the expected program outputs. In the latest data of 2014 the following is a list of Our Place successful outcomes –

- Total number of Service Users supported – 29
- Number of support periods opened – 11
- Number of support periods closed – 7
- Average length of closed support periods – 448.3 days
- Number and percentage of closed support periods with a case management plan in place – 7 (100%)
- Number of service users accessing repeated instances (within 12 months) of service – 0

Further to this data there is evidence that of the service users who exited the program, 85.8% identified as having completed their goals while at Our Place, with 57.1% having gained employed at the close of the support period.

Our Place has strong collaboration with ACT Government and the services have worked together to arrange a traineeship program for selected tenants in the ACT Housing department during the December school holidays. This strategy is designed to provide clients work experience as well as highlighting the expectations of what is required to sustain employment after their time at Our Place. This initiative has been running for two years with 6 clients being granted the opportunity to participate in the 8 week program.

Of the young people who have left the service in 2014, 3 clients entered the private rental market. This has been highlighted as a significant achievement for young people who originally entered the service struggling to complete their education.

Staffs view is that this success is due to modifications being implemented in the program and as a result the service is observing significantly greater outcomes for clients. These modifications include:

- More in depth questioning at interview time – before the client is accepted in to the program.
- Re-working / re-wording of our application questions.
- Increased collaboration with support services to better meet the needs of clients. This includes counselling, tutoring and service visits.
- Connection with the community via organisations allowing time to participate in Our Place volunteer work.
- Practical living skill training – staff will work individually with a client to meet their needs rather than offer a group presentation that may not be relevant.
- Staff will contact education providers every fortnight for attendance records. If a client has dropped below requirements a meeting will be arranged to address barriers.
- Laptops have been purchased by the service so clients are able to access information in the office space. This has significantly increased education outcomes.
- The Outcome Star evaluation case management system has enabled clients to discuss their barriers and their success in a strength based model approach.

These implementations have allowed the outcomes of the service to continue to expand and improve, as evidenced by the number of young people completing goals (ie/ finishing their education), increased length of tenancy and entering independent living after their exit from Our Place.

NEEDS

Identified needs as recognised by the service include:

Client Safety:

There are many documented and reported incidents that have resulted in the increased concern regarding the safety of program residents.

The service is desperate to have security cameras installed to assist staff in keeping residents safe and gaining evidence of the responsible individuals. Staff have liaised with Police in these matters and the police have increased patrols in the area, but have also identified that security cameras would assist in follow up action.

SHARED LIVING

Staff at Our Place have identified that shared living is difficult amongst our clientele. The issue of sharing space with another (unknown) young person has significant impacts on the outcomes of clients.

These impacts may result in individuals isolating themselves in their rooms, disconnecting from community and education pathways and constant anxiety/stress in regards to responsibilities around the household.

An example of this is the story of one of our clients who entered the program and began sharing with another female. The new client, who was identified as being high functioning, became depressed, isolated and detached due to the stress of sharing the unit with another person who was not as equipped to handle the responsibility of maintaining a household. After numerous failed attempts by staff to rectify the situation, the client was granted one of the single bedroom units and her mental health immediately improved. She completed year 12, enrolled in university, was able to gain employment and exited the program after gaining private rental. The client expressed that these results would not have been achievable if she continued in the shared living arrangement.

Staff have expressed the belief that significant amounts of our time are spent in tenancy management, as opposed to ensuring education outcomes, due to the difficulty of at risk young people entering shared living arrangements.

Solution:

The service would like to offer that any future development be designed around single bedsit units for clients. This eliminates the problems of shared living and also reduces the expectations of maintaining a large environment. This arrangement also significantly reduces the risk of numerous unknown persons coming in to the service to "visit" occupants.

By having an independent smaller living environment, clients are better able to focus on outcomes, as evidenced by similar foyer models interstate.

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FUTURE FOCUS:

The service sees the potential of future Foyer developments with the desire to propose a second service model to complement Our Place.

Since 2011, Our Place has consistently exceeded expectations as documented in the audit report and sees a second development being designed to fill the need of homeless young people who have a desire to fulfil education outcomes. Presently Our Place has capacity for 26 young people and the service has had to decline many referrals due to lack of space.

Working collaboratively with Canberra Institute of Technology, Canberra universities and secondary colleges will assist in meeting the needs of the vulnerable members of the community. Taking into account the learning's of the Our Place program, a second development built with single bedsit units and adequate security would enable clients to excel in meeting education and life goals.

Yours sincerely,

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