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The Secretary
Standing Committee on Health and Disability
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601



Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your inquiry on the current levels of access to safe, secure and affordable housing for people with mental illness, with particular reference to:

- Opportunities to involve non-Government stakeholders in the provision of appropriate housing
- The feasibility of alternative support-based housing models; and
- Any other related matter

Havelock Housing Association is a not for profit provider of Community Housing providing accommodation in over 400 properties to a range of tenants and their families from disadvantaged backgrounds on a low to medium income through a range of innovative and diverse projects.

Whilst we are unable to comment on the flexibility of criteria for gaining access to public housing and support mechanisms for people who currently live in public housing, we would like to comment on a successful program in which we have housed people with mental illnesses.

The program is known as the 'Community Accommodation Network' project but often referred to as the 'CAN' project. Havelock Housing Association's partnership with Richmond Fellowship is well known for its success and its capacity to improve the lives of people with mental health issues through the (CAN) program which was established nearly ten years ago in 1997 as a pilot program.

Havelock Housing Association together with Richmond Fellowship brings a holistic approach to sustaining disadvantaged tenants with mental health illnesses in a long term community housing model through the CAN project .

Through this partnership, Havelock Housing Association provides the asset/property and tenancy management and Richmond Fellowship provide the outreach support and coordinate the case management of tenants with psychiatric disabilities.

The program commenced as a pilot in 1997 with four properties but was soon recognised nationally for its success, in particular for its tenancy outcomes. Given its success the Association was successful in increasing the number of properties through head leasing properties and now manages 19 properties.

Further approval was given to extend this program in 2004 with an additional five houses being approved and currently being purchased under the Community Organisation Rental Housing Assistance Program (CORHAP) in recognition of its success.

In addition to this, the Association has just been awarded the management of the Gunghalin Singles Accommodation property which will house twenty single people. An allocation of four tenants with psychiatric disabilities will be housed through this program again through an extension of the partnership with Richmond Fellowship.

In total the Association will manage a total of 29 properties specifically housing people with a mental illness under the CAN project by December 2005 through this partnership.

Case studies have shown that tenants housed in this program have successfully integrated into the community, some of these tenants have commenced work and study since joining the program.

We understand from Richmond Fellowship that many of these tenants have previously been institutionalised, many have gone through the public/private housing system or remained with family but have not been able to sustain their tenancies due to the lack of integrated mechanisms and coordination of housing and support.

The satisfaction survey results for the CAN project provide evidence of tenants overall being very satisfied with their accommodation and the service provided through both organisations.

These tenancies have been sustained through the experience of two professional agencies that have worked closely together and have developed a strong working relationship over the years with a strong focus on sustaining tenancies.

The partnership works on all levels including operational/management and at a board level. Our organisations meet regularly at these levels to discuss the continued relationship with a focus on successful tenancy outcomes, continual improvement and growth for the project.

It should be mentioned that the CAN project, has the least bad debts, vacancies and arrears of any of our programs. This has been consistent for nearly ten years. During this time, the Association and Richmond Fellowship have not proceeded with a single eviction during this time and has minimized turnover from occurring through early interaction.

Through the partnership arrangement, the staff of the Association has increased its knowledge on a range of mental health issues that affect the tenants and have attended many forums on mental health issues. In addition to this, we receive much advice and assistance from Richmond Fellowship on specific mental health concerns that affect the tenants' capacity to maintain the property. We believe this knowledge and continual learning capacity provides an opportunity for the Association as a housing provider to have a solid understanding of providing accommodation for tenants with a mental illness.

The tenants in the CAN program are encouraged to increase their network and both partners provide linkages to a range of other community agencies/stakeholders and regularly hold workshops, social events and tenant meetings to encourage participation.

Basis of the Model

This model is based on separating the provision of the housing management services from the provision of individual and group support services.

There is a clear benefit for tenants by separating out the tenancy management from the support provision and it provides options for tenants to use support services to assist with tenancy issues without a conflict of interest.

Havelock Housing Association provide the asset/property and tenancy management services and rely on the expertise of its partners to provide the relevant support services.

The Association has identified that there are number of areas of support required to sustain the tenants .

The first main area of support is in the area of individual outreach support and case management requirements of individual tenants. These are managed by the direct support agency.

The second main area of support is providing general community development support to the tenants which may encourage group interaction and Anglicare under a separate partnership arrangement with Havelock Housing Association provides this to tenants of the Association. The Association has also approached Belconnen Community Services to provide general community development support in the Northern region of Canberra..

The third main area of support is in the housing provision which is carried out by Havelock Housing Association .

We believe that these three main areas of housing and support working should be separated but closely linked through partnership arrangements.

Interservice Agreement

The partnership arrangement is maintained through an interservice agreement that clearly defines the role and responsibilities of each of the providers.

Tenants in the program are required to sign an Authorisation form to allow both the support agency and the housing agency to liaise on any matter that will affect their housing or health.

Refusal of Support

Both partners at the commencement of the partnership agreed that tenants who choose to refuse support or seek support through an alternative support provider should not have to move out of the property. That is the provision of housing is not strictly tied to the provision of support.

Tenants who decide to refuse support are still able to remain in the properties. However, it is on the condition that they are able to maintain their tenancies. That is, they are still responsible for meeting their obligations as a tenant under the Residential Tenancies Act as any other tenant would be required to do.

In the event that this happens, and the tenant's health and mental state declines, we have found that the tenant in some cases will fail to maintain the property or rent at an acceptable level.

If the Association senses a decline of this nature, it has the ability through the partnership agreement and through the Authorisation from the tenant to put early intervention methods in place to prevent any eviction from taking place.

Both the support agency, the housing agent, the case manager, tenants and occasionally family members if agreed by the tenant will meet to discuss the best strategy for early intervention based on the needs of the individual tenant.

Allocation of tenants

The allocation of tenants is managed jointly between Richmond Fellowship and Havelock Housing Association. Richmond Fellowship maintain the waiting list in accordance with their policies around support needs.

Upon a vacancy, Richmond Fellowship carry out the first stage of the assessment e.g. that it meets the support needs and then provides the details to the Association to confirm that the tenant meets the income/asset criteria.

Both agencies assist the tenant through the inspection of the property, signing of the tenancy agreement etc. This ensures that the tenant is supported as best as possible through the moving in process which can often be quite stressful.

Summary

The Association believes strongly that the tenancy management and support management of tenants with a mental illness should be separated and managed through innovative partnership arrangements that can provide an exceptional and integrated service through a collaborative and holistic approach to service delivery.

In the CAN project, the outcomes for the tenants has been exceptional, the financial modeling for tenancy management are not only sustainable but has proven that the partnership has minimum vacancies, arrears, damages and bad debts and not a single eviction in the history of the program.

Partnership arrangements with a similar service delivery philosophy based on participation and empowerment for tenants, such as the CAN Project managed through Havelock Housing Association and Richmond Fellowship develops strong links and networking opportunities. This in turn, ensures that tenants' needs are met and the appropriate linkages to services are in place, providing a multi agent approach to tenancy management.

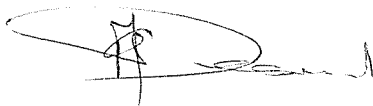
The Association provides accommodation for many other tenants with a mental health illness. Unfortunately, this is done in an individual way rather than through a partnership arrangement and we are often unaware of who the support agency is. Many such tenants do not manage to sustain their tenancies due to the lack of coordinated approach to managing both their health and the housing at the same time. Had some of these tenants been in the CAN project, their stories may be quite different.

We believe that in order to sustain tenancies for people with a mental illness in long term housing in a supportive environment that empowers tenants, a partnership arrangement between a support agency and housing agency is not only a good model to use but an essential model.

Further to this, Havelock Housing Association has made a strategic decision that all future projects will only be through a partnership arrangement to ensure that we provide the best services possible to our tenants and has determined that to do otherwise would be putting the tenants at risk.

Should you have any further queries about the CAN project, I would be happy to meet with you or can be contacted on 62572277 ext 19.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Gordon', with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

NR Nicola Gordon
Chief Executive Officer
Havelock Housing Association

30 June 2005