



BRISBANE COMMON GROUND MEDIA RELEASE

No Place Like Home

Wednesday 21 August 2013

Secure, permanent housing is the key to breaking the cycle of homelessness.

For the past year, 146 people who had previously struggled to find and keep housing have created homes for themselves in 15 Hope Street South Brisbane, and have become part of the Kurilpa Point community.

For some, the struggle was affordability. For others, the added burden of complex health and personal issues had resulted in housing loss and a long-standing cycle of homelessness.

15 Hope Street is managed by Common Ground Queensland, a not-for-profit housing provider specialising in supportive housing for people who face challenges in securing and keeping housing. Known as Brisbane Common Ground, the building is a 14 storey apartment complex comprising 146 pleasant but modest studio and one bedroom apartments, with a front-desk concierge service to provide a safe and secure environment.

Sonya Keep, General Manager of Common Ground Queensland said the first year of operation had been both rewarding and challenging.

“Tenants have come from a variety of life experiences and have generally settled in to the building and the neighbourhood very well, particularly when you’re aware of some of their difficult life stories. Establishing themselves as successful tenants is a great basis for going forward, particularly those tenants who have had long periods of homelessness.”

She said, “Contrary to common perceptions of social housing, we have excellent relationships with neighbours, and work together on neighbourhood issues of mutual interest, such as general community safety.

“We see 15 Hope Street as an asset for the whole community,” Ms Keep said. “Many local organisations and community members are using the meeting rooms and function room for business meetings or personal celebrations.”

Among those neighbours is John Panaretos of town planners Urban Strategies in Grey Street.

“Consultation with Common Ground’s neighbours started before the building was constructed,” said John. “I am pleased to say that Common Ground Queensland has kept this two-way communication going, both contributing to the residents’ integration into the life of the community, and awareness by the wider community of Common Ground’s challenges and achievements.”

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Paul Hey, of Montague Developments, also said, "Since Common Ground have moved in we have found very little negative impact on street life. In fact the presence of the Common Ground security and concierge has improved general neighbourhood security, while having trained staff on call 24/7 has been an advantage for the area."

In supportive housing, the housing is intentionally linked with support services available to assist people to sustain their housing and improve their health and quality of life. In 15 Hope Street, Micah Projects provides this support and links people with other services, such as health, education and employment.

Karyn Walsh, Coordinator of Micah Projects, said "Stable housing is the foundation for people being able to address longstanding issues and to getting their lives back on track."

"The 22% reduction of rough sleeping in Queensland as recorded in the 2011 Census is one of the success stories of the National Partnership to End Homelessness. Census data indicates that this drop was higher for Brisbane, approximately 72% in inner Brisbane City and 57% in Greater Brisbane. We anticipate the creation of targeted housing in Brisbane Common Ground will allow for continued progress in the efforts to end rough sleeping".

"Breaking the cycle of homelessness is the critical first step in people being able to begin to enjoy the benefits of a home, a neighbourhood and a community," Ms Walsh said.

"Micah Projects would like to see more supportive housing, so that people are able to stabilise and get themselves out of the cycle of crisis and homelessness," she said.

"Supportive housing doesn't have to be a large building, like Brisbane Common Ground. With appropriate outreach support, people can do fine in any neighbourhood or mixed housing developments and become part of that community."

Two people's personal journey from homelessness to home in Brisbane Common Ground is the subject of a short documentary video, *Two Lives* by award-winning filmmaker Peter Hegedus, which will be launched next Monday night at the Bille Brown Studio, in the Queensland Theatre Company complex in South Brisbane.

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