

Vision to help Brisbane's homeless

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An abandoned building in Brisbane's inner-south may be demolished and transformed into a \$44 million affordable housing complex, under a pioneering model to quell homelessness.

Queensland is in the unenviable position of having the second highest rate of homelessness in the country, but will be the third state to house a purpose-built, assisted-living apartment complex by mid-2010.

Today marked the launch of the Queensland arm of New York-centred homeless organisation Common Ground, which will manage the 146 apartment complex in South Brisbane, designed to house a diverse range of struggling individuals: some 'rough sleepers', some 'couch surfers', some low income workers.

The organisation is working to secure a site on Merivale Street in South Brisbane, although the \$40 million funding will be subject to further contract negotiation.

The prime minister's wife and patron of the cause Therese Rein, was at Brisbane's Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) today to launch the housing development she touted as "revolutionary".

Unlike homeless shelters, 10 per cent of Brisbane's 2070 homeless individuals will be offered permanent tenancies.

Clients will move into their own new units, enter in rental agreements and pay rent - or the equivalent of 30 per cent of their income.

"Everyone is deserving of dignity...and there is great dignity in becoming a tenant," Ms Rein said.

Of the New York example, located one block from the city's iconic Times Square, Ms Rein said, "It didn't smell like an institution. It's not luxurious, but it's adequate."

"Maybe it's a little bit cramped, but that's not bad for aspiration."

Seventy-five rough sleepers will be offered an apartment, while 75 low income individuals will also have the opportunity to become tenants, to serve as unofficial role models for their neighbours striving to re-enter the mainstream.

Common Ground Queensland chairwoman Penny Tarrant said the apartments would be reserved for individuals and couples.

"Families with children will change the dynamic of the development, but I hope that we can soon have a separate development for them," Ms Tarrant said.

Queensland Minister for Community Services and Housing Karen Struthers said \$4.38 million would fund on-going services essential to the Common Ground *model, including 24-hour on site support for tenants.*

"Aside from the on-site support, it encourages visits from other support services such as drug or alcohol counselling and mental health support," Ms Struthers said.

Recent Census data showed there had been a 60 per cent increase in the number of people sleeping rough in inner-city Brisbane.

"We need to all work together with a shared goal - to end homelessness. Nothing is more important than that," Ms Struthers said.

Australian construction giant Grocon will build the complex at no profit.

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