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4 February 2022

Committee Secretary
Mental Health Select Committee Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Committee Members,

Inquiry into the Opportunities to Improve Mental Health Outcomes for Queenslanders - Common Ground Supportive Housing Model

1. Introduction

Selina-Anne's face brightens as she continues, "Then, the angels... I call them the angels, swept in and picked me up. I feel like the luckiest person in the world to have a second chance." Selina-Anne explains the next battle was to get well physically and emotionally and that being in one place was instrumental for getting grounded again, "I've learnt about boundaries, healthy interactions and new ways of relating" ... "how do you thank people that have changed your life so completely and restored your trust in humanity so you can dream?"

This is an excerpt from Selina-Anne's story published in a Common Ground Queensland Annual Report. Selina-Anne was a tenant at Brisbane Common Ground for seven years, she is now 47, she has a 5-year-old child, and has lived successfully and independently in the community for the past two and a half years.

Common Ground is a supportive housing model that offers permanent, safe and affordable housing that is intentionally linked to personalised support services. The model was originally developed in the United States in the 1980's as a solution for people who have experienced chronic homelessness, a population with high prevalence of mental health and associated co-morbidities.

As highlighted by Selina-Anne's story this submission demonstrates the elements of the Common Ground supportive housing model that position it as an effective enabler of successful mental health outcomes, providing tenants with housing stability that is coupled with a continuum for prevention, crisis response, harm reduction, treatment, recovery and empowerment. Evidence has shown that access to Common Ground supportive housing leads to improvements in quality of life whilst decreasing the need for clinical treatment and crisis intervention for people who experience mental illness.

The Common Ground supportive housing model is specifically designed to accommodate and support people experiencing multi-layered challenges. Common Ground offers an integrated framework. Underpinning these actions is the belief in each person's right to a safe place to call home, self-determination and solution focused outcomes. This is achieved through Common Ground team members generating a positive culture where tenants are recognised as living an independent life in their homes. This positive engagement includes recognising tenants' independent practice as well as the philosophy of working within a holistic approach to address people's strengths, goals and expectations.

2. History – Common Ground Supportive Housing

The Common Ground model of Supportive Housing originated in New York City in the early 80's. The model's success, in working towards ending homelessness, has led to its' expansion internationally. The model is based on six key principles which have been fundamental to its success in high density single site developments:

- Permanency and affordability of housing – permanent housing with rent set at no more than 30% of income
- Tenancy mix – to ensure a vibrant and diverse building community, tenancies are offered to people who have experienced homelessness and to people with low incomes.
- Safety and security – 24/7 concierge ensuring a welcoming but controlled and secure access to the building
- On-site support services – 24/7 access to support worker with additional wrap around holistic health and support services.
- Social inclusion – maximising independence and personal empowerment within a connected community
- Design – thoughtfully designed and well maintained home environment that also serves as an asset to the community.

Federal funding for Brisbane Common Ground Brisbane Common Ground was granted in 2009 and delivered by the Queensland Government in partnership with Grocon, Micah Projects and Common Ground Queensland. It is referred to as a flagship initiative under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (Queensland Government 2012). The model of supportive housing sat within the policy context and agenda set out in the Commonwealth Government (2008) White Paper on Homelessness: *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*. The White Paper outlined a vision for offering supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who 'need' it by 2020. Central to the policy aim is the provision of programs offering integrated support to people with high and complex needs; these include innovative housing models that offer secure housing and wrap around support (Australian Government 2008).

To date, five Australian States and one Territory have implemented at least one Common Ground development. A sixth State, Western Australia, is currently developing two new sites for delivery of Common Ground supportive housing.

3. Brisbane Common Ground

Brisbane Common Ground opened in July 2012 offering 146 units of permanent rental housing in a fourteen story building located in South Brisbane. 73 of these units are offered to people who have experienced chronic homelessness and 73 units are offered to people who are on low incomes and require access to affordable housing. The building also includes onsite offices for the tenancy manager and support provider along with a range of spaces for tenant and community activities.

This supportive housing project is delivered in partnership between Common Ground Queensland, the property and tenancy manager, Micah Projects, the on-site support provider, and the Queensland Government who provide ongoing operational funding. The project aims to assist tenants sustain housing, improve their quality of life – health, social and economic, and reduce their utilisation of acute, crisis and emergency services (Queensland Government 2012)

The initial Federal Government funding for the project included provision for an independent evaluation which was conducted by the Institute of Social Science Research at the University of Queensland. Subsequent to the external evaluation, Common Ground Queensland and Micah Projects have continued to gather feedback from tenants regarding their experience and satisfaction with the housing and support offered. On average 59% of tenants report they have problems with their health that restricts their quality of life, 64% of these tenants also report that their satisfaction with life has improved since living at Brisbane Common Ground. On average 83% of tenant's report that Brisbane Common Ground feels like home.

4. Brisbane Common Ground Independent Evaluation Findings

The purpose of the evaluation undertaken by the University of Queensland was to examine if the initiative was successful in assisting tenants to maintain secure housing and improve their health, wellbeing, social and economic outcomes. Four dimensions of the project were considered including the implementation of the initiative, effectiveness of building design and performance, effectiveness of the supportive housing service in achievement of service objectives and value for money of the model.

Responses from the first round of tenant interviews conducted as part of the evaluation reveal 67% of participants disclosed having been diagnosed with a mental illness. 70% indicated their mental health condition had improved since being housed at Brisbane Common Ground. 56% reported they were better able to access treatment and manage their mental health. The researchers make the following point on page 91 of the evaluation report, *"The high rates of diagnosable mental illness are important. If the majority of people residing at Brisbane Common Ground have a diagnosable mental illness, it raises policy questions about where government funding should be provided, and what mental health services should be made available"*.

Key findings from the longitudinal research regarding the effectiveness of the service to deliver tenant outcomes included:

- Brisbane Common Ground removed barriers to access for people experiencing chronic homelessness and fostered conditions for tenants to sustain housing
- Tenants reporting that their physical and mental health had improved since moving to Brisbane Common Ground along with their access to health care.
- Improvements in satisfaction with life and mental wellbeing over a twelve-month period.

Key findings regarding value for money were established by researchers through accessing and analysing government administrative data to determine tenants reduced use of Queensland Government services since being housed and supported at Brisbane Common Ground. The value of cost offsets was conservatively estimated at \$13,100 per person for the 12-month period, after allowing for the costs of providing the supportive housing solution.

Mental Health Savings

Common Ground Queensland has been instrumental in minimising excess use on Community and Medical Services as evidenced by:

- Mental Health Episodes – reduction from 1,029 presentations to 359
- Days as admitted patient – reduction from 420 days to 399
- Visits to Emergency Departments – reduction from 156 to 144

Queensland Police Interaction

Common Ground Queensland has assisted tenants in the following areas:

- Victim/Offender occurrence – reduction from 50/24 to 24/11
- Appearances in Court – reduction from 108 to 61
- Nights in custody – reduction from 45 to 27

Annual Community Savings

- Community saved \$13,100 annually per tenant
- Total savings:
 - Health - \$832,335
 - Criminal Justice - \$122,904
 - Homeless Services - \$169,364

5. Summary

Common Ground Queensland has a mission to end homelessness and we understand that a mental health illness will often have a debilitating effect in separating people from others in society, increasing their vulnerability and dependence on community and government medical and welfare agencies.

Over the past ten years, Brisbane Common Ground has provided a place where people can live without fear and isolation, be treated as a tenant and not defined by a diagnostic label or labelled as mental ill or disabled. Stakeholders have been highly successful in creating an environment for reducing the symptoms associated with mental illness that are not directly managed through medication alone, such as social isolation, social withdrawal, apathy, the absence of self-confidence and self-worth, anxiety and lack of sense of belonging. In addition, the Common Ground supportive housing model has an international evidence base that demonstrates its effectiveness in decreasing homelessness, hospitalisation and involvement in the criminal justice system.

Common Ground Queensland would welcome the opportunity to further discuss this model in detail with the Queensland Parliament Mental Health Select Committee. I would like to extend an invitation to the members of the Committee to visit Brisbane Common Ground as an opportunity to experience firsthand this alternative platform for delivery of an adaptive, holistic and personalised

solution that could be replicated to enhance outcomes for Queenslanders requiring mental health treatment and support.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sonya Keep". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'S' and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sonya Keep
Chief Executive Officer
Common Ground Queensland



SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PRINCIPLES

The Common Ground Model of supportive housing is a proven and cost effective solution to end homelessness that is based on a set of validated principles. Supportive housing can be delivered in single site high or low density developments or in scattered housing sites.

Brisbane Common Ground is a single site, high density supportive housing initiative that has been purposefully designed, developed and delivered to incorporate the key principles that underpin successful housing outcomes.

DESIGN

A thoughtfully designed and well-maintained positive home environment that includes community spaces and opportunities for the wider community to participate. An asset for the whole community.

PERMANENCY & AFFORDABILITY

Housing is permanent, affordable and self-contained with rent calculated as a percentage of income.

TENANCY MIX

There is a mix of tenants with a proportion having experienced homelessness and some who have not. The mix ensures a vibrant and diverse building community.

SAFETY

A Concierge service is provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to ensure welcoming but controlled access to the building.

SERVICES FOR TENANTS

An onsite support provider offers a holistic, tenancy-focused service to those who require support to remain housed. This includes individual support, health services, and links to other community and mainstream services. The Property and Tenancy Manager maintains the safety and amenity of the building, educates tenants on their rights and responsibilities, and works in partnership with the support provider and tenants to sustain tenancies.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Each element of supportive housing aims to create the greatest possible degree of empowerment and independence for individuals as well as a thriving community for tenants and neighbours.

“It’s about
coming
home”

IMPROVING THE LIVES OF MANY

Brisbane Common Ground was delivered through a pioneering government-business-community partnership. Capital funding was provided by the Australian and Queensland Governments. The building was constructed at cost with no profit or margin by Grocon, Australia’s largest privately owned development and construction company. Supportive Housing Partners Common Ground Queensland and Micah Projects oversee operations, supported by the Queensland Government.

Common Ground Queensland is Queensland’s first specialist supportive housing property and tenancy management organisation committed to providing supportive and affordable housing to meet the growing needs of individuals and families who have experienced or are at risk of homelessness, or suffer from a disability, including mental health and addiction. We are interested in working in partnership with individuals, organisations, and government to create solutions that benefit the whole community.

www.commongroundqld.org.au

Micah Projects provides onsite support for tenants as well as service coordination of community and health services. Micah Projects has partnerships with Mater Health Services, St Vincent’s Hospital Brisbane and Qld TAFE for health and employment services to tenants.

www.micahprojects.org.au

To discuss opportunities to be involved in the creation of homes for vulnerable Queenslanders, please contact CGQ on (07) 3370 8320.



BRISBANE COMMON GROUND

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

HOME • COMMUNITY • HOPE



DELIVERED JOINTLY BY:



**common
ground**
QUEENSLAND
ending homelessness

MICAH PROJECTS INC

Breaking Social Isolation
Building Community



BRISBANE COMMON GROUND

WELCOME HOME

QUEENSLAND’S 1ST SUPPORTIVE HOUSING INITIATIVE

The importance of having a place to call home should never be underestimated. There is no substitute for a door that locks, a warm bed, a comfortable chair – somewhere to call your own. Situated at 15 Hope Street in the heart of South Brisbane, Brisbane Common Ground offers 146 thoughtfully designed, affordable, permanent and safe residential units.

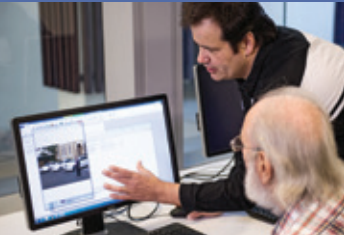
This initiative represents tremendous value to the greater community, providing resources and infrastructure critical to building social inclusion through creation of enduring networks and relationships across local organisations, residents and individuals.

This landmark initiative is delivered jointly by Supportive Housing Partners, Common Ground Queensland and Micah Projects Inc. (Micah Projects). Common Ground Queensland provides tenancy and property management services, with Micah Projects providing valuable on-site support services to tenants.



SMARTER LIVING

A thoughtful approach to design ensures that safety is prioritised through building security systems and a 24/7 Concierge service. Each unit is fully self-contained offering independence and privacy for tenants. Every two floors are connected with shared outdoor spaces to foster connectivity and community.



DIGITAL INCLUSION

Computer facilities provide tenants with connectivity to vital online services, enabling communication with friends and family, participation in social media, and opportunities for training and skill development. For tenants with access to a personal device, Wi-Fi is provided free of charge throughout the building.



PERMANENCY

An important and often overlooked feature for our tenants is access to a personal postal address. The personal post boxes in the foyer offer access to services and information that would be inaccessible without a permanent address. Secure tenure and tenancy rights are governed by tenancy leases for all tenants.



WARM WELCOME

Our Concierge desk located in the foyer operates 24/7, providing a welcoming entrance and sense of security for tenants and visitors. In addition to this, the Concierge team provide ongoing information, assistance and support to tenants.

COMMUNITY ASSETS

The hiring of these spaces adds to the financial viability of our building and offers employment opportunities for our tenants, who are employed in the Function Room Support Team.

GAMBARO ROOM

This rooftop function space offers magnificent views of the city. It is ideal for events of all types, including dinners, workshops and meetings, which can be serviced by the adjoining commercial kitchen.



KURILPA ROOM

The light and spacious Kurilpa Room, located on the 1st floor, is available for private functions and can be configured to cater for board meetings, seminars, and workshops.



CREATING COMMUNITY

The building comprises several collaborative recreational spaces for tenant and community engagement including the art room, technology centre, tenant lounge, library, and games room. Providing these interactive activities and resources through this proven affordable housing initiative builds enduring networks and relationships across the wider community. This commitment to creating a sense of belonging and social inclusion for our tenants as well as the general public has been key to the success of this housing model.



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Affordability and innovation through environmental design enable Brisbane Common Ground to meet a 6 star BERS (Building Energy Rating Scheme) rating for environmental sustainability. This approach is evident throughout the building with its solar energy panels, green roof, edible garden and rainwater collection.



TENANCY SUPPORT

The Common Ground Queensland team works collaboratively to provide tenancy management, property and maintenance management, function room management, and security trained Concierge services to tenants in order to provide a genuine feeling of home and a safe and permanent place to belong.

Micah Projects offers a multi-disciplinary team of specialist support, health and allied health staff dedicated to working with the tenants to improve their quality of life and achieve their goals. Through their broader organisation and partnerships with other service providers they offer additional activities and services to support health, independence and housing stability.



JACARANDA ROOM

This dynamic space brings tenants together through access to a variety of recreational activities such as music groups and yoga classes. The space is designed to adapt with the changing needs of our tenants and houses a comprehensive DVD library.



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The art room offers tenants 24 hour access to a creative community space. Tenants are also offered regular facilitated classes and activities, creating opportunities for making friends, developing skills and building confidence.



HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The shaded seating area in our backyard provides an ideal space for meeting and relaxing. The attached Fitness and Wellbeing Centre facilitates a variety of sporting and health activities for tenants. These valuable improvements to our building offer additional green space and common areas and were made possible through community-wide partnerships and support.



Brisbane Common Ground Evaluation Snapshot

Supportive housing successfully supports people with chronic experiences of homelessness to **exit homelessness immediately**, move into secure housing and sustain that housing.



Housing
Management

COMMON GROUND
QUEENSLAND



Support
Services

MICAH PROJECTS



Concierge
Service

COMMON GROUND
QUEENSLAND
& MICAH PROJECTS

Brisbane Common Ground (BCG) is run on a unified supportive housing model. The positive relationships and shared objectives of housing, support, and security providers are the key to the success of Brisbane Common Ground.

THE BRISBANE COMMON GROUND PARTNERS

Share a vision

Translate evidence into practice

Understand the complexities and opportunities for effective service delivery

Work to establish Brisbane Common Ground as a home for tenants

Tenants shared their experience at Brisbane Common Ground. They reported feeling...

Connected,



60%
counted more than two
other tenants as friends



71%
socialised with other tenants
at least once a week

Communal Spaces

It is not simply the design of the built environment that fosters social interactions but a common factor among residents that gives them reason to either come together in social spaces or use social spaces individually.

Safe,



86%
of tenants felt satisfied
with their safety

Concierge Service

The concierge service, including both the security and tenant services personnel:

- monitor the building,
- control access to the building,
- respond to tenant need,
- promote onsite safety for visitors and tenants,
- ensure responsible use of communal resources, and
- foster a warm and friendly environment.

Supported,



76%
found BCG staff helpful
with personal problems



71%
found BCG staff helpful
in accessing services

Collaborative Onsite Support

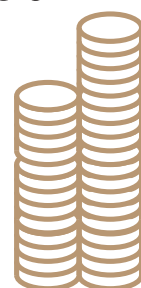
In addition to close onsite collaboration between tenancy and support providers, Brisbane Common Ground's success relies on a shared vision for supportive housing.

and at Home



93%
felt Brisbane
Common
Ground was
their home

The community saved
\$13,100
annually per Tenant[†]



[†] includes the cost of tenancy at BCG

* figures based on the 41 consenting tenants

Total savings *

Health
\$832,335

Criminal Justice
\$122,904

Homelessness Services
\$169,364

Service Use Reduction



MENTAL
HEALTH
EPISODES

1,029
↓
359



DAYS AS
ADMITTED
PATIENT

420
↓
399



VISITS TO
EMERGENCY
DEPARTMENT

156
↓
144



POLICE
OCCURENCES

Victim/
Offender

50/24
↓
24/11



APPEARANCES
IN COURT

108
↓
61



NIGHTS IN
CUSTODY

45
↓
27

Feedback from the tenants

♀ 18-30 YEARS

I feel safe.

I have made it my own.
I say who comes in and who doesn't. I feel happy here and able to live the life I always wanted.
... It's my home
... I feel safe here – which I've never experienced before.

♂ 61-70 YEARS

I feel that it is my home

... which means that I can put things in it. I can make it my apartment and my room and my space and it all reinforces the emotional and material security.

♀ 18-30 YEARS

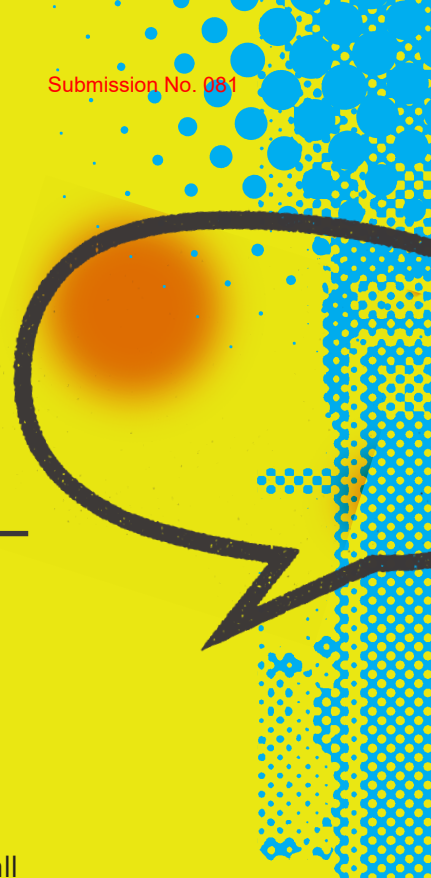
Being completely independent

... and living on my own gives me a great sense of pride in the sense that I am able to support myself in any and all ways required to lead my own life.

♀ 41-50 YEARS

You can mix with people

... and get friends to mix with and they always give you a hand; they help you when you need things.



This snapshot is from *Brisbane Common Ground Evaluation: Final Report*. Prepared for the Queensland Government, Department of Housing and Public Works by the Institute for Social Science Research, The University of Queensland.

Evaluation funded by the Queensland Government, Department of Housing and Public Works.

For more information please contact
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