

The Low Cost Accommodation Support News

Community Connections Program | Older Persons High Rise | Housing Support for the Aged | SRS Service Coordination & Support

Autumn 2007

Welcome to the third edition of the *Low Cost Accommodation Support News*, a newsletter for program managers, workers, and regional staff involved in the four Low Cost Accommodation Support programs funded through the Aged Care Branch of DHS.

In this newsletter:

- **Planning for the Statewide Forum 2007**
- **Support for High-Risk Tenancies Strategic Project – release of final report**
- **Staff changes within the Low Cost Accommodation Support Programs**
- **Operation “Droop Street”**

Statewide Forum 2007

At each of the program meetings this year there has been agreement by managers to proceed with the planning for a second statewide forum to be held at the end of this year.

We will be following a similar format to the 2006 meeting with some slight changes based on feedback from your evaluations.

A planning committee has been established and includes the following people:

- Peter McGrath – Salvation Army Eastcare
- Paulo Reid – Inner South Community Health Service and
- Muriel Cummins – Western Region Community Health.

If anyone else would like to be a part of the committee please let me know ASAP.

If anyone has ideas for a conference theme or suggestions for speakers please contact a committee member or myself. Preliminary ideas include:

- indigenous issues
- culturally specific themes
- homelessness and
- human rights.

There are numerous other themes that are pertinent to the clients of each of the programs so put on your thinking caps and communicate these to the planning committee. We also need to come up with a catchy and relevant title for the forum so we would appreciate your input.

Statewide Forum

8 & 9 November 2007

Venue: St Vincent's Hospital

Support for High-Risk Tenancies Strategic Project – Final Report released



Over the last ten years, public housing has been provided to an increasing number of disadvantaged people. This has resulted in a concentration of people with complex needs and difficult life situations in public housing.

People in this group can find it challenging to meet their responsibilities under the Residential Tenancies Act either because of their own vulnerabilities, personal problems or loss of community living skills. In 2006, the Strategic Projects Branch within DHS undertook a project to investigate how the Department could best support people in high-risk tenancies. Information about the profile of the population in high risk tenancies was sought as was evidence-based approaches that would assist this group of disadvantaged citizens sustain their tenancies.

The Support for High-Risk Tenancies Final Report provides details of the outcomes of this work. The report includes an action plan that outlines the work that will be implemented over the next couple of years as well as information about local work that is already underway. The final report can be accessed on the DHS website at <http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/>

Operation Droop Street

A group of Western Lodge residents move on – by Muriel Cummins (team Leader, WRHC)

2006, and 2007 to date, has been a roller-coaster ride for both Western Lodge residents and the SRS Support and Service Co-ordination team alike. On a number of occasions, it looked like Western Lodge was on the brink of closing down altogether. From May 2006, Wesley Mission and the Western Region Health centre began working in partnership to manage the SRS, resulting in the beginning of a strong alliance and many positive outcomes for Western Lodge residents. The issue of a possible pending closure was, and continues to be, on the horizon, and this is a concern for residents there.

The SRS support and co-ordination team provided ongoing support to clients during this period. Capped at 60 beds, and working at near capacity for the majority of the time, there was plenty to keep us busy as a team. Western lodge has a diverse mix of residents that have lived there long term, between a year and seven years, and newer residents who used the facility when in crisis or for short term accommodation.

In July of last year, the YWCA began discussions with the SRS team around the possibility of a group of Western Lodge residents moving to a newly refurbished independent living environment, Droop St rooming house. This represented a fantastic opportunity for this group of residents, and a challenge for the SRS team in working with appropriate clients to make the transition from a supported living environment to an independent living one.

The opportunity at first glance was an exciting one, however it raised many questions for the team:

- Which residents will benefit most from the opportunity?
- How do we choose the residents?
- How can we be sure they will cope with an independent living environment?
- How will residents cope with the prospect of change?

The team began by meeting with individual residents and completing SCoTT assessment tools, which key an initial indicator of the level of support needed. This created a profile of living skills for the population. We found that approximately 20 residents could potentially live in an independent living environment, provided individual needs were considered. This gave us a broad list of individuals who may thrive on the opportunity to live independently.

Following this, the team discussed each resident in detail acquiring additional information and perspectives from Western Lodge staff and support staff, such as case managers, working with the resident. We could not involve the resident in the discussion at this early stage, as we did not want to raise hopes in vain. A coded referral system was put in place, whereby we referred an initial group of 17 residents to YWCA, who had their own referral criteria and who carefully screened referrals to ensure the correct mix of residents. The coded referral system meant each referral described the client's issues without disclosing any confidential information. All information was fully de-identified. YWCA screened referrals and confirmed which residents they could offer places to.

This gave the SRS team the green light to begin discussions with residents, and this was a very important part of the process as it challenged the residents to consider change, consider their needs and skills and identify what their strengths and weaknesses might be as they moved into a new living environment. For many, Western Lodge was a comfort zone where they felt safe, knew and understood the norms of the environment, and had established a social network. The move meant losing all of this, and some residents required a great deal of support to make the decision to 'have a go'.

In late December 2006, just before Christmas, the first of an eventual group of fourteen residents began to move. The transition period was supported by follow-up visits from the SRS team, and return visits to Western Lodge over Christmas for BBQ's and festive celebrations. Many discussions with YWCA management, and attendance at residents meetings by the SRS team, helped ensure the transition ran smoothly. A series of men's cooking classes helped skill-up a few male residents who hadn't cooked for themselves in a long time.

Feedback has been extremely positive from clients who successfully made the move. Having a sense of autonomy in a new environment has meant confidence has steadily increased over the past few months. All residents have sustained tenancy at Droop St, with one exception who chose to live with a family member who supported her with her mental health issues. Ongoing support is provided to the rooming house from WRHC, with WRHC community connections program providing a drop-in service, and a health promotion program 'Healthy Alternatives' currently being run there.

This past year has been fraught with many changes, and been a learning experience for all

involved. Supporting clients to move from Western Lodge, and seeing them flourish in a new environment, was a great achievement for the SRS support and service co-ordination team. The partnerships developed between the team, Wesley Mission, and the YWCA, are strong and will continue to grow. Now the team face new challenges, as the Western Lodge client profile again changes, and new residents are often in crisis and staying for shorter periods...but all of this just keeps us on our toes and keeps us in learning mode! As a famous philosopher once said: 'There is nothing permanent but change' (Heraclitus)



Dates for remainder of 2007

Community Connection Program/ Housing Support for the Aged Program

Thursday 19 July
11am – 1.30

OP Hi Rise Support Program

Tuesday 7 August
10am – 12.30

SRS Service Co-ordination & Support Program

Tuesday 10 July
10am – 12noon

*All meetings will be held at 50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne.*

Staffing Changes - Low Cost Accommodation Support Programs

Gary Steadman (Program Co-ordinator Complex needs) at Doutta Galla Community Health Service has resigned from his position to take up a new role as General Manager at Macedon Ranges Community Health Service. Gary has been managing the CCP, HSAP and OP Hi Rise programs since early 2005 and will be sadly missed by all.

The OP Hi Rise program at Nth Yarra Community Health also farewelled Robyn Stringer early this year, who had been with the program at the Lygon Street estate since its inception in 2001.

Bev Farrugia from the Salvation Army Melrose Street program has moved to another part of the organisation after 6 years with their OP Hi Rise Program.

Thank you to each of you for your hard work and dedication to the programs you have been part of and we wish you all success in the future.

Useful Information

Need help with implementing the MDS V2.01?
Contact the HACC Help desk on Ph: 9096 7255
E-mail – haccmds@dhs.vic.gov.au

Victorian HACC Website

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hacc>

Low Cost Accommodation Support Programs Webpage

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/agedcare/services/lowcost/index.htm>

Office of Housing Website

www.housing.vic.gov.au

Contacts

If you have a story, event or a program you would like to share with colleagues from other Low Cost Accommodation Support Programs please let us know and it can be included in the next edition of this newsletter (word limit 500 words or less).

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