



Newsletter Summer 2012

Ending Homelessness in Canberra based on the Common Ground model

Welcome to the 3rd newsletter of the Canberra Housing Proposal to end homelessness in Canberra.

What is the Common Ground model?

Our project aims to end homelessness in Canberra. The Common Ground model of supportive housing has been successful overseas and around Australia in developing permanent, high quality, supportive, safe housing for the most vulnerable homeless people.

We have an opportunity to provide similar outcomes in Canberra.

We are currently waiting for approval to license the name "Common Ground" from Roseanne Haggerty, founder of Common Ground in New York. In the meantime, we have an interim title: "A Canberra Housing Proposal".

You are invited to follow us on our website here:

<http://tinyurl.com/commongroundcanberra>

Did you know?

Canberra has been revealed as the worst housing market for low income families in a nationwide survey of housing affordability conducted by Anglicare.

"When it comes to affordable housing, Canberra stands out as the worst blackspot," said Jenny Kitchin, General Manager of Anglicare ACT. "Canberra-Queanbeyan [is] the only major population centre in Australia with absolutely no affordable housing in the private rental market. The risk is that many low income families will fall into the gap between the private rentals and Government-run social housing."

Progress to date

The ACT Government recently concluded a feasibility study into the type of Common Ground facility best suited for Canberra. The Government is now considering the results of that study, and we are hopeful of favourable consideration in the 2012/13 Budget.



There are a number of proposed sites. Each is well located, close to a range of amenities including parks, public transport, shopping, health and social services and employment, and within a medium density mixed residential and commercial zone.

Our next awareness-raising event will be held in May 2012.

Sponsorship opportunity

Talks are continuing with the ACT and Federal Governments about funding, while corporate, business and individual donations and services continue to be sought.

Ongoing provision for concierge

As a team we are looking for sponsors and service providers for the project to provide for the onsite concierge to keep residents, staff and the community safe and for a range of services to support the residents.

Liz loses her eyesight but keeps the vision

Elizabeth Dawson, our dynamic and active coordinator, tragically lost her sight early in 2011.

For most people this would have been devastating, but it has led Liz to focus even more on her dreams and reaffirm her vision for the future.

Liz has continued meeting with people and researching opportunities for funding for the Canberra Housing Proposal.



Gail Kelly, the CEO of Westpac, is a woman Liz has always admired. A meeting was arranged by Rose Nairn of Westpac and

Diane Kargas AM. This meeting was a fantastic opportunity for Liz to further her story and to build a long-term relationship with another amazing woman.

The funding that Westpac offer to projects revolves around employment and community development activities. Until the accommodation is built, this type of activity is not yet on the agenda for our project

But Gail has encouraged us to keep in contact with her regarding the program and how Westpac can contribute in the future.

Founder of Common Ground USA visits Australia

In September 2011 the founder of Common Ground in the United States, Roseanne Haggerty, visited Australia. She had a roundtable meeting in Sydney attended by a number of Australian groups. At that meeting she emphasised that the model is not just about buildings; it is more important to develop a system for addressing homelessness.

She noted how the Common Ground approach to service provision saves governments money by solving intractable long-term problems. She also stressed the importance of innovative high-tech design for buildings.



Liz Dawson, Simon Rosenberg and Stephen Bartos from the Canberra housing project met with Roseanne in Brisbane. It was an opportunity to share our vision for the ACT, which Roseanne Haggerty observed was very much in line with what had worked successfully elsewhere.

Some important feedback the founder gave us included:

- A minimum of 50 units is probably needed to make a Common Ground facility viable.
- A 50:50 mix of the most vulnerable formerly homeless and low income people is desirable, and the groups should not be segregated.
- Getting tenant selection and management right is critical.
- Careful selection of staff is necessary to ensure that they have the right attributes to work with difficult clients, and as part of a team. One important attribute is “absence of the need to feel power over others”.
- While services are routinely offered and delivered on site, acceptance of services must never be a condition of tenancy.
- Services should be available to low income tenants as well as the formerly homeless.

Meeting with the Governor-General

Our Chair, Stephen Bartos, and Director, Liz Dawson, were fortunate

to have a meeting with the Governor-General, Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC CVO, in February 2012 to talk about homelessness and the Canberra Housing Proposal.

She was very aware of homelessness and said that she had been involved with a Brisbane service helping homeless women. She was very encouraging about our project and we appreciate the time she gave us.

Awareness-raising launch

The Ending Homelessness in Canberra team held an awareness-raising launch in May 2011. More than 100 people attended and were well informed by excellent speakers Stephen Bartos, our Chair, and Jenni Churchill, (then) Executive Officer, Australian Common Ground Alliance. David Mathews was MC and also fielded questions from the audience.

The launch received wide publicity with WIN News and The Canberra Times in attendance. Board member David Mathews was also interviewed on Mike Welsh’s Drive program on 2CC. The audio of the interview can be heard here:

<http://soundcloud.com/davidmathews/110525-2cc-common-ground>

The event was a success in raising more awareness of the Proposal for Ending Homelessness based on the Common Ground model.

Project aim and background

Stephen Bartos outlined the project aim to provide safe, supportive, permanent housing for the most vulnerable homeless people in



Canberra. He described some of the dangers and difficulties of living rough in the capital and how many are at risk of dying. Some men sleep on top of air conditioning vents during winter to try to lessen the effects of cold conditions.

How the project started

Jenni Churchill was informative on how the Common Ground project was first started by Roseanne Haggerty in New York. Roseanne adopted a new model of assisting the most vulnerable, when traditionally it was the 'house ready' who had been helped. She saw a way to provide helping services along with accommodation to assist in making housing options sustainable for people with high needs.

Initially Roseanne renovated one empty building and, inspired by its success, has gone on to see a total of 4,000 units completed to house people in and around New York.

The innovative project has spread worldwide and is spreading throughout Australia.

Most other States are already part of the Common Ground Alliance, which was formed to facilitate communication between Australian States and Roseanne Haggerty in New York. The Australian Common Ground projects replicate the approaches of New York.

Vulnerability Index

Jenni described a Vulnerability Index that can be completed via face-to-face

survey with people who are homeless. There are eight vulnerability factors.

The more factors a person has the more vulnerable they are. The most vulnerable are at most risk of dying.

Common Ground throughout Australia has already assisted many of the most vulnerable to move into secure housing.

Australian stories

During the event we heard from Larry, Leanne, Alicia, Daniel and Nikki who were on a DVD telling their stories of how their lives had changed since moving into apartments in Adelaide. They now had a growing confidence to look after themselves, to ask for help when they needed it, and to make new friends.

Find out more about Common Ground in Adelaide:

<http://www.commongroundadelaide.org.au/>

Invisible homelessness of women

During the awareness-raising event a few people shared stories about how homeless women cope, and we discussed their invisibility. Women rarely sleep outdoors, definitely not as often as men do. Women tend to sleep in a car, couch surf, or find other means of shelter.

One lady, whom we'll call Bernadette, shared her story. After increased domestic violence, Bernadette spent one night in her car before moving into a women's refuge in Canberra. She was able to get temporary accommodation, but also did house



sitting and couch surfing, and it took her about two years before she was able to finally get permanent accommodation for herself in a place she could call home. Bernadette's story is not uncommon.

Another lady, who spent some months in her car with her dog, told us how she had trouble knowing where to park her car and was constantly having to move it every couple of hours due to concerns about parking fines.

She told us how she made a warm meal of instant noodles by finding toilets with the hottest water to put in the bowl to moisten the noodles. She said she had to keep moving around as she felt it wasn't safe to stay in one place for long.

How you can help

We need many people involved who wish to see our homeless and low-income people safely housed in their own homes in Canberra.

This project is very meaningful and will be hugely rewarding. It is already attracting a large number of people to be involved. Why not you?

Give time, share marketing ideas, write stories, assist with resources, letter-box drop, or simply help spread the word to others in the Canberra community!

Write, email or talk to your local and Federal member about the need to address homelessness in our community.

Visit our website at:

<http://tinyurl.com/commongroundcanberra>

Useful links

Australian Common Ground Alliance
<http://www.commongroundaustralia.org.au/>

Common Ground New York City
<http://www.commonground.org/>

Common Ground Adelaide
<http://www.commongroundadelaide.org.au/>

Community solutions
<http://www.communitysolutions.org.au/Community Solutions>

Who to contact

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