



A safe, supportive and caring home for people with enduring mental illness

President's Report for 2019 AGM for MyHome in Canberra

Welcome

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and pay respects to their elders past and present. I would also like to welcome everyone and thank you for attending.

I would also like to thank all the Board members for their support and their contributions during the past year. I would also like to acknowledge the close links with the Woden Rotary Club and the St James Uniting Church and members of the Canberra community for their continued support.

The Year in Review

1. Re affirming the need for the MyHome in Canberra model of care
2. Reviewing options
3. Supporting the ACT Government in meeting its stated aim in the Parliamentary Agreement
 - (a) Cohort Study
 - (b) Review of long-term supported accommodation models and the governance over the site
4. Fund raising
5. New website

1. Re affirming the need for the MyHome in Canberra model of care

This past year has seen the MyHome board actively working with the ACT Government to ensure people with long term mental illness are heard and their concerns addressed. We have seen time and time again governments both state and federal focus on crisis management. It is not that these crisis facilities are not required, but that they are a costly short-term fix. (The current bush fire threat is one such an example.) Yet the financial cost of this approach means that people with an enduring mental illness still continue to suffer. They are the forgotten ones. They are the ones who have no voice and rely on the goodwill of family and friends and some charities to help them. Ageing parents are left to carry the burden of caring for adult men and women at a time in their lives when they should be free to enjoy what's left of their own lives.

On our behalf, Carers ACT sent out a questionnaire to members with caring responsibilities. Of the 42 respondents almost all said they would support their adult family members going

into a safe and secure residence such as proposed by MyHome. Often long-term sufferers simply need support to manage their medication, have someone to share stories with them and to support them when they go out into the community. MyHome's vision is not to establish an institution, but a gated community that provides independent living in a safe, secure and caring environment to its residents. We aim to encourage recovery and autonomy for the residents.

Living in a mixed affordable housing complex does not suit everyone. Many people with an enduring mental illness require care, support and security. The biggest concern for people with an enduring mental illness is losing their home. Who will complain because they turn up the radio to hide the voices in their heads? Can they keep their pet that protected them when they slept rough on the street? Who will place demands on them for goods just so that they will not be evicted, or cajole them into giving things away to so-called friends?

In speaking with Safe Shelter ACT they expressed their concern that there is no obvious access to get homeless people into permanent accommodation.

There is a proposal to set up a pink bus for homeless women, and another safe shelter for women proposed for Tuggeranong. These provide short-term crisis accommodation only.

We have prepared costings to show the effectiveness of our model of care, and they are available from MyHome on request.

2. Reviewing options

We have been asked several times to be flexible in our model of care. We have agreed that we would consider modifying our model if that was shown to be advantageous. We also agreed to look at providing a step up/ step down facility within the complex if it was required.

We have worked with Uniting to look at a larger development on the Curtin block that took into consideration the need for affordable housing and the Curtin masterplan. This has made our project very much larger than we originally envisioned. Unfortunately whilst the ACT Government was supportive, the requirement to change the lease purpose clause for the block meant that the total concept could not be fast-tracked. This delayed the project and gave the impression that the Uniting Church and MyHome were not in agreement on the way forward.

The Uniting Church who own the land and MyHome have submitted a joint application to the ACT Government for funding in the 2019/20 financial year to show that we are united in proposing the provision of suitable and secure units on the land.

Use of the Church land that is currently under-developed would enable the Government to save the costs of land and infrastructure, and would set a model for developing other community land in the ACT for social infrastructure.

We still believe that the model of HOME in Queanbeyan has many good aspects to follow.

3. Supporting the ACT Government in meeting its stated aim in the Parliamentary Agreement

The Parliamentary agreement between Labor and the Greens clearly commits these parties in government to work with community and business partners to construct purpose-built accommodation for people experiencing mental health concerns and housing difficulties utilising the MyHome project plan.

3 (a) Cohort Study

We worked with the ACT Government on the Cohort Study to analyse population needs for housing to inform future mental health accommodation initiatives and to align future facility planning concepts. The study focused on people with high and complex needs from within the total population of people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. The study indicates that over the 6 years up to and including 2016-17 there were on average 200 homeless people in the ACT with high and complex service needs (HCSN); and 184 people at risk of homelessness with HCSN.

The report did not seek to identify people who were living with their elderly parents and at risk of becoming homeless when this housing was no longer available. Our survey through Carers ACT highlighted the plight of this group.

We have provided our findings and costings to the ACT Government to facilitate their decision-making process.

3 (b) Reviewing the long-term supported accommodation models

The ACT Government has acknowledged the need for providing supported housing for those with an enduring mental illness. An amount of \$200,000 was allocated in the 2018/19 financial year but this has been re allocated by the ACT Government in the 2019/20 budget. We worked with the ACT Government to prepare a preliminary brief for engaging a suitable consultant to examine the business plan and governance arrangements of MyHome.

The tenders have been called and evaluated and we understand a preferred consultant has been selected to complete the study. We are awaiting confirmation that the Consultancy has been let.

How the building will be managed, who will be the onsite managers and what other development works will be undertaken will all have to be determined once the review is completed.

4 Fund Raising

Fund raising has not been a major focus this year. The board felt that it should focus on the other matters, at this stage, rather than fund raising. We did hold a wine tasting event and

we were well supported by the Woden Rotary club, Woolworths, Ikea, and Dominos Pizza in Weston. We are grateful for their support.

We are proposing another wine tasting event early next year and another concert to raise additional funds. Once we receive a firm commitment from Government that the project will be funded we will ramp up our fund raising efforts.

5 New Website

Our website has been reviewed by John Eyers. The new website will make it much easier for people to navigate the site and to see what we are doing and engage the community in our activities. We believe it is a great achievement.

Conclusion

We continue to review our documentation and our model of care. We are engaging with other service providers and having community consultations and radio interviews.

We have made considerable progress, but more work needs to be done. We need to continue to consult and engage effectively with relevant ACT Ministers, and Uniting, to obtain approval for our budget submission and obtain funds to build our planned supported accommodation project.

I am sure that, with the ongoing support of Rotary, St James Uniting Church, our other Church neighbours, the Curtin Residents Association, Uniting and the Canberra community we are much closer to achieving our goal of having supported accommodation built for people with an enduring mental illness.

I would like to thank you for attending the AGM and supporting MyHome in Canberra.

Shukry Sahhar

President

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