



SHELTER

because housing matters

Building partnerships with support providers

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1. Introduction

1.1 The scope of this resource

This document is intended to provide community housing organisations with some resources and tools to assist in the process of building and sustaining partnerships with support providers.

The integration of support and housing is the most fundamental equation for ending homelessness and sustaining the tenancies of people who are vulnerable and housed.

Housing within the One Social Housing System (OSHS) is geared to those with the highest identified needs. As tenants are more likely to be living with some level of assessed vulnerability, community housing providers need to work seamlessly with support providers to achieve their objectives.

This resource will help community housing providers consider:

- How to identify possible partnerships
- How to understand the needs of their tenants as a basis for building support options
- How to build systems and procedures that enable housing providers to identify support needs within an early intervention framework
- How to measure success.

1.2 About Q Shelter: how we can help

Queensland Shelter has existed since the mid 1980's and is a state-wide housing organisation working to achieve improved access to and quality of housing programs delivered to vulnerable Queenslanders.

Queensland Shelter's current role is focussed on capacity building support to deliver improved housing outcomes. This includes a role supporting community housing providers with registration under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH). Q Shelter also has a wider role to develop and deliver products and services which more generally build the capacity of the community housing provider sector. This can include delivering and brokering training, facilitation, organisational development and regional networking activities.

Q Shelter includes a Capacity Building Team with business development managers and capacity development coordinators, all focussed on providing services and products to help the sector.

- If you require more information or clarification about this document, please contact the community capacity building team on 3831 5900.
- You can find more resources on the website at: www.qshelter.asn.au.
- Please let us know what further assistance you need and we can assist either by linking you with the people and/or tools that may be able to help or explaining more about the role we can play directly.



2. The context of community housing provision: the drivers for partnering support providers

The OSHS is geared towards prioritising those people with the highest needs and diverting others into the private housing market.

Social housing in Queensland is also more likely to be intended as a transitional option with 45% of tenants expected to eventually move through this type of housing into private rental housing.

Vulnerable tenants may have complex needs requiring a range of supports and resources to address those needs. The transition to private sector housing is also a critical milestone where vulnerability can play a part in reducing the sustainability of housing. We know that the most vulnerable people can be at risk of homelessness if they have to leave community housing or if they only have access to private rental housing.

As people entering the OSHS may also be exiting homelessness, there is a need for a structured and deliberate approach to support planning to accompany the successful establishment and sustainment of a tenancy.

Community housing providers already work extensively with support providers to enhance the wellbeing of tenants. This resource is intended to build the capacity of the sector to partner successfully and realise the full value of synergising the unique but interconnected roles of housing providers and support providers.

3. Understanding the needs of tenants

Housing providers have access to a tenant's application for social housing which includes some important information about need and vulnerability. Initial tenant interviews will be an opportunity to better understand new and emerging needs since the application was complete. It is an opportunity to fully assess needs as a basis for working with the tenant to engage existing support providers or identify unmet support needs as a basis for actively linking with support providers.

Tenants may experience a range of needs across various domains such as:

- Health
- Mental health
- Substance use
- Social and family connections
- Community involvement
- Organisational skills
- Communication
- Behaviour
- Housing history including any episodes of homelessness
- Debt issues
- Legal issues
- Involvement of a range of agencies and institutions in care and/or compliance issues.



These domains are not necessarily negative and can be reminders to consider the various strengths and positive features in people's lives. The main purpose is to fully understand the range of issues leading to the person's eligibility for social housing as a basis for building a robust plan to work with and/or link the person with adequate support.

Reflective activity:

What information does your agency collect as a way of understanding a tenant's support needs?

How do you conduct initial interviews to ensure tenants have the opportunity to talk about their strengths as well as their needs?

What questions do you ask to understand whether the person already has a support worker/provider involved?

Is the tenant willing to consider giving their consent to the housing provider working with the support provider if a tenancy is assessed as high risk or if a tenancy starts to deteriorate?

Who are the support providers in your region and how would you rate the quality of your relationship with them? Are referral pathways clear and effective? What areas of improvement are needed?

Are you able to generate reports from tenant data that provides your agency with aggregate data on support needs? Can these reports help with planning and establishing new working relationships with support providers who can assist your client group?

The following framework is from a tenancy sustainment action plan produced by Nottingham City Homes. It highlights the various areas of vulnerability and risk and what some supportive strategies might be:

http://www.nottinghamcityhomes.org.uk/documents/about_us/performance_and_service_improvement_committee/2011-12/120717/Item6_app_Tenancy_Strategy.pdf

The DESC Vulnerability Assessment Tool also is a framework for assessing vulnerability as a basis for prioritising housing and building a plan to sustain that housing:

http://www.desc.org/documents/09.11.2012.DESC.Intro_to_Vulnerability_Assessment_Tool.incl%20VAT%20&%201-page%20validity.pdf



4. Understanding roles and relationships

Generally it is considered important to maintain a clear separation between the functions of housing provision (housing and tenancy management) and support provision. This separation usually manifests in housing providers and support providers being separate entities or where an agency does both, policies and procedures are in place to ensure that a tenancy issue does not exclude tenants from adequate support at a time when they may need it the most.

There are some clearly different roles between housing and support provision as follows:

Housing provider	Support provider
Rent receipting	Direct support
Arrears management	Lifestyle support
Maintenance (responsive, planned)	Brokerage
Management of medium and high density environments	Key worker
Tenant engagement and participation	Care coordination
Tenancy management	Case management

Some activities may overlap such as:

- The establishment of a tenancy
- Community linking
- Early identification of issues and/or deterioration in a tenant's wellbeing.

Housing provision is generally not about personal or lifestyle support. Housing providers as social landlords however can adopt supportive tenancy management practices such as:

- Early identification of rent arrears and engagement with the tenant about supportive ways to manage rent arrears
- Supportive approaches to regular inspections
- More frequent visits to tenants assessed as 'at risk'
- Engagement within larger dwellings to improve the level of social cohesion and wellbeing
- Community linking and orientation through tenant directories, referrals etc.
- A workforce skilled at recognising risks and working seamlessly with support providers to address those risks as early as possible with the goal of sustaining the tenancy.

The best context for working well with support providers is when housing providers have in place the systems, procedures and workforce with capacity and capability in supportively managing tenancies and linking as early as possible with support providers when it is needed. This requires good rapport with tenants and agreed procedures for linking with support providers when a tenant's situation is deteriorating.

5. Assessing your capacity for partnerships

Being willing to partner other agencies requires skills and capacities at every level in the agency. Some agencies have a strong culture of working fearlessly with others. Some agencies maybe more



fearful and sometimes there may be 'legacy' issues where past events or milestones present an ongoing barrier to effectively working together.

Reflective activity:

What existing partnerships are in place?

What agencies don't you partner with? Why?

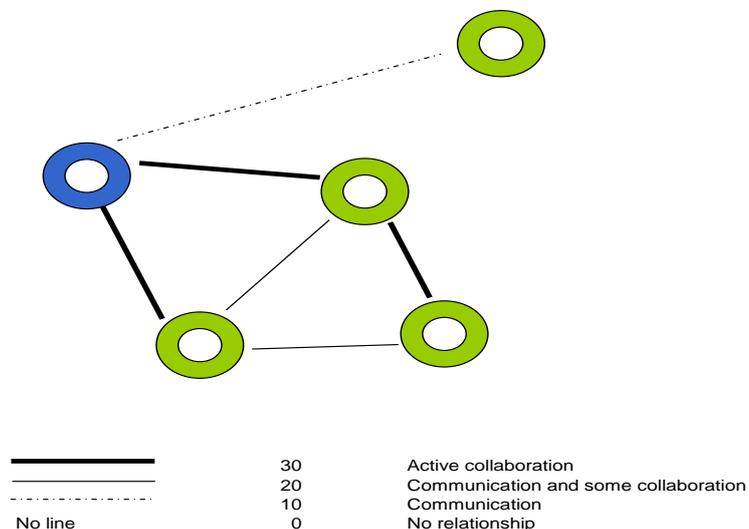
In what ways does your agency partner well?

In what ways could you become a better partner?

What structural arrangements have we put in place to strengthen and formalise partnerships?

What do we need to learn to partner more?

Reflective activity: Use this tool to map your existing partnerships and collaborative arrangements with support providers. Match it with reports on tenant needs. Which partnerships are missing and what can be done to strengthen these links?



Source: Jim Caveye.

6. Planning for tenancy sustainment

Tenancy sustainment is more likely when housing and support providers are working seamlessly together. Some agencies can improve their capacity to do this by:



- Developing a tenancy sustainment plan between and among relevant housing and support providers
- Developing a plan for ensuring vulnerable and at-risk tenants are identified and that every effort is made to identify existing and potential support
- Policies and procedures about building rapport with tenants and seeking their formal consent to a care coordination approach between the housing manager and support provider.
- A tenancy sustainment plan can be an organisation/region level plan and may include roles and responsibilities for multiple agencies in the region.

7. Support planning

Support plans build on an assessment of a client's needs and strengths to identify all of the steps, actions and responsibilities that will be essential to achieve positive outcomes. An important part of a support plan includes well-written objectives which lead on to actions and responsibilities. This is especially important where a tenant is considered highly vulnerable and/or where multiple agencies are involved in ongoing assistance. Support plans usually identify actions for support providers, the tenant/household and other key stakeholders / agencies who can offer something that contributes to wellbeing.

While support plans are usually instigated and maintained by the support provider, they can be a very helpful tool to housing providers. Housing providers can:

- Ask if a support plan is in place
- Take on actions within a support plan (such as negotiating consent to work with the support provider, supportive approaches to inspections particularly where mental health is an issue)
- Agree to certain protocols about visits and maintenance in light of any presenting issues such as mental health.
- Seek tenant permission to see and file the support plan
- Participate in reviews of the support plan
- Identify issues early and trigger agreed protocols to engage support providers
- Agree to certain protocols about early intervention.
- Agree to more frequent visits (with client involvement) where vulnerability is assessed as high.

Support plans are defined here to mean plans that are focussed on the needs of individual tenants rather than a whole of organisation approach to support and partnerships.

8. Workforce capacity

It is important to invest in workforce capacity to achieve leading practices in engaging with a partnering support providers. This might include:

- Recruitment and selection processes that explicitly assess capacity and capability in partnering support agencies
- Recruitment and selection processes that assess capacity and capability in identifying and responding to vulnerability



- Workforce development in areas such as mental health first aid, substance use, multiple diagnoses, early identification and response protocols, trauma informed practice
- Workforce development in areas such as negotiating partnerships, resolving conflicts etc
- Workforce development in areas such as tenancy sustainment, housing first and rapid rehousing.

9. Challenges and opportunities

There can be a number of challenges embedded in the relationship between support and housing providers. While the roles are completely related, they sometimes confront different challenges such as:

- A housing provider managing a higher density property in which behavioural issues impact on a lot of people
- Support providers working to ensure someone does not exit social housing into homelessness because of the serious risk to wellbeing that will follow.

Under 1 Roof is a consortium approach involving housing and support providers and it acknowledges the following challenges and factors impacting on diverse agencies and people working together:

Collaborative work involves many challenges which require commitment and expertise by all involved. It is important that these challenges are articulated as a basis for honest dialogue about moving forward. Some of the challenges identified in the development of Under 1 Roof also have embedded opportunities:

- “Agencies may work from diverse paradigms and perspectives
- Organisations are varied in size
- Practitioners bring diverse levels of experience and different backgrounds
- There are diverse beliefs, assumptions and ideologies among practitioners
- There is competition for funds
- There can also be pressure to compete for organisational profile and reputation
- All workers involved (front-line and managers) have limited time to contribute to coordination activities
- There is a high volume of clients and the demand on each agency for services is significant
- There are natural tensions between different roles and functions (compliance versus support for example)
- The context of service provision is changing
- There can be tensions between ideas and methods which appear to be binary (either/or) propositions such as:
 - Privacy versus coordination
 - Assertive practice and outreach versus self determination”

Under 1 Roof, 2012

Under 1 Roof acknowledges that to provide integrated coordinated care resulting in sustained tenancies, there are a range of important roles including:

- Support providers
- Housing managers



- Community development workers (providing broader community linkages and opportunities for participation)
- Specialist assistance (such as health, substance use etc)
- The tenant themselves as a partner in seeking and accepting help.

While the tension is important to acknowledge, structural arrangements such as protocols, agreements and agreed triggers will all help to ensure the different roles are all playing their part. There is a lot of evidence suggesting that the most vulnerable tenancies require the most assertive and pre-planned approach to integrated housing and support. Supportive housing models are all based on a seamless relationship between housing and support despite the natural tensions that exist.

The earlier support needs are assessed and understood the more likely it is that tenants will consent to a partnership approach with support providers. This early approach gives the best chance of having in place some agreements with the tenant rather than trying to negotiate this level of involvement once a tenancy is at risk and perhaps the tenant's own circumstances have become more difficult resulting in tension with the housing provider.

10. A rational for working towards strong partnerships with support providers

There are some significant drivers for working to sustain tenancies through the involvement of support providers in seamless partnerships. These have been identified by Under 1 Roof as including:

- The breakdown of tenancies costs housing providers time, money and other resources
- Exiting social housing into marginal housing or homelessness has serious health impacts with homeless people experiencing lower life expectancy and higher rates of premature mortality
- Sustained tenancies are the basis for people to begin building community connections and to experience a stronger place of belonging as a basis for improved wellbeing. They help make communities stronger.

Under 1 Roof 2012

11. Conclusion

Housing providers are accustomed to having effective partnerships with support providers. In jurisdictions where housing and support are well integrated, there has been a measurable reduction in homelessness. This approach requires working with the natural tensions and building the structural arrangements through agreements that will ensure support is effectively triggered when a tenant needs it the most. It is possible to measure the success of the integration of housing and support through outcomes such as sustained tenancies, reduced vacancy rates and reduced eviction rates, all of which can be calculated as producing substantial cost savings for housing providers.