

# SUSTAINING TENANCY CASESTUDY

## A Trauma Informed Approach

| TENANT                | SAM   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>COMPLEX NEEDS:</b> | GAMBLING, HOARDING, GRIEF, SOCIAL ISOLATION, TRAUMA AND MENTAL ILLNESS. |

**Sam, 40 years of age, has sustained his tenancy for three years. Throughout his tenancy there have been occasional issues with noise disturbance and property management. Sam receives a Disability Support Pension and his rent is directly debited fortnightly. Recently, Sam cancelled his direct debit and has fallen into rent arrears, he has also commenced hoarding items and has not attended appointments with his mental health case manager and social supports.**

### Sam's History

Prior to securing housing, Sam experienced primary homelessness for numerous years. Sam believes becoming homeless was a direct result of his gambling and mental health problems.

Sam describes his childhood as difficult as his father was very violent and emotionally abusive to him and the rest of the family. He states he felt unsafe most of the time and began experimenting with drugs at fifteen to feel safer. At age nineteen he was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder and was hospitalised on numerous occasions. Sam managed to stop using drugs and with the assistance of a psychiatrist and medication, his mental health stabilised. Throughout the next few years, Sam was engaged in employment, developed a social network and was living in private rental with his partner. Sam describes this time in his life as a happy time.

At age thirty, Sam's father suddenly passed away. While Sam had sporadic contact with his father, he felt devastated at the sudden loss and this triggered his childhood memories.

To cope with his feelings, he immersed himself with work, commenced gambling, stopped seeing his friends and became increasingly isolated.

Sam's gambling increased throughout the next two years and his relationship ended. Shortly after, Sam stopped taking his medication and became unwell, his mental health declined and he lost his job – due to these compounding issues his gambling increased and he became homeless.

During his period of homelessness, Sam slowly developed a relationship with the homelessness assertive outreach team. The team provided Sam with an integrated service response based on a Housing First model. Upon securing housing, Sam was receiving a high level of support, as he stabilised, his support levels gradually reduced and he was able to maintain positive mental health with one monthly appointment with his community mental health case manager, regular medication and access to a psychosocial program.

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### Current Needs

Sam's tenancy is at risk due to rent arrears. The CHP has sent Sam numerous letters requesting to meet with him to develop a repayment plan. As he has not responded for some time, his arrears have increased and he is at risk of losing his tenancy. Sam's mental health case manager has also tried to contact him, however when Sam makes an appointment he fails to attend.

Sam finally contacts the CHP and agrees to meet with the housing worker and his case manager. Sam advises he has not been able to pay his rent as he has no money due to gambling, he is depressed,

has stopped his medication regime and feels like his only comfort is the items he has been collecting.

Sam's gambling issue has compounded other needs and placed his tenancy at risk. As he has no money, he has had reduced access to his psychosocial program, this has increased his isolation and exacerbated his depression. Sam's strength is resourcefulness and this is evidenced by not only his history but by his attempt to alleviate his stress by collecting items. While this action might further place his tenancy at risk, it is an action that has assisted Sam to cope throughout this difficult time.

### RESPONSE TO ASSIST SAM TO SUSTAIN HIS TENANCY

In applying a trauma informed care and coordinated response to Sam's situation, the following stages are highlighted:

#### STAGE 1: REVIEWING THE ISSUE

At the beginning of the interview it is impossible to predict how motivated Sam will be to change or whether he has the current capacity to do so. However, over engaging by confronting or moving into action plans too quickly may result in potential disengagement. It is important to use effective communication skills that will engage and motivate him toward addressing the issues.

Validating his feelings is important in the rapport building process. A simple reflective statement that lets him know his struggles, frustrations and challenges have been heard, will assist to keep him engaged.

Sam's initial appointment is critically important for setting the tone and expectations of the CHP and motivating him to accept help. Encouraging Sam to identify what he believes to be most important will help to build rapport and foster his empowerment. Assisting Sam to identify his strengths, such as resilience, previous social relationships and positive recovery, will assist him to work towards developing solutions to his current problem.

It is essential to begin establishing an understanding of Sam's gambling history, his mental health and how this condition impacts on his social isolation. Given the reoccurring theme of his trauma history, it may be useful to talk with Sam about what support he might need to work through these issues.

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### STAGE 2: IDENTIFY NEEDS AND GOALS

As information is collected throughout the interview it is helpful to clarify and reflect back to Sam the effects of his decisions / actions. To support transparency, it is useful to highlight how his gambling has impacted on his rent arrears – his tenancy being at risk if he continues to accumulate debt and not organise a repayment plan.

A key aim for the interview would be to assist Sam to identify the preferred outcome to his tenancy risk and the strategies required to achieve these. It is important that the strategies are realistic and that there are appropriate resources available to achieve the goal. It is also useful to identify the motivating factors for achieving the goals as such a strategy provides an incentive to pursue the chosen goals.

At this stage, it is critical to distinguish the issues that are impacting his immediate situation and those that require a more long-term solution. Assisting Sam to distinguish these can reduce the level of anxiety as each issue is discussed and a plan is developed.

Again, highlighting his strengths assists to progressively rebuild his confidence and increases his capacity to resolve his short term needs.

### STAGE 3: SETTING THE GOALS

A collaborative process should occur between Sam, the housing worker and his case manager. The aim of this is to engage Sam in the process of determining what issues are important to him and the steps required to resolve the issues.

It is important that there are available resources to assist him to work towards these goals. To ensure an integrated response, a range of service providers may be required to support Sam. These may include, reconnection with the mental health service, psychiatrist, a trauma counsellor, a gambling recovery program and ongoing contact with the housing worker. In the initial stages, these services might be required to provide a more intensive response and decrease as Sam stabilizes and his issues are resolved.

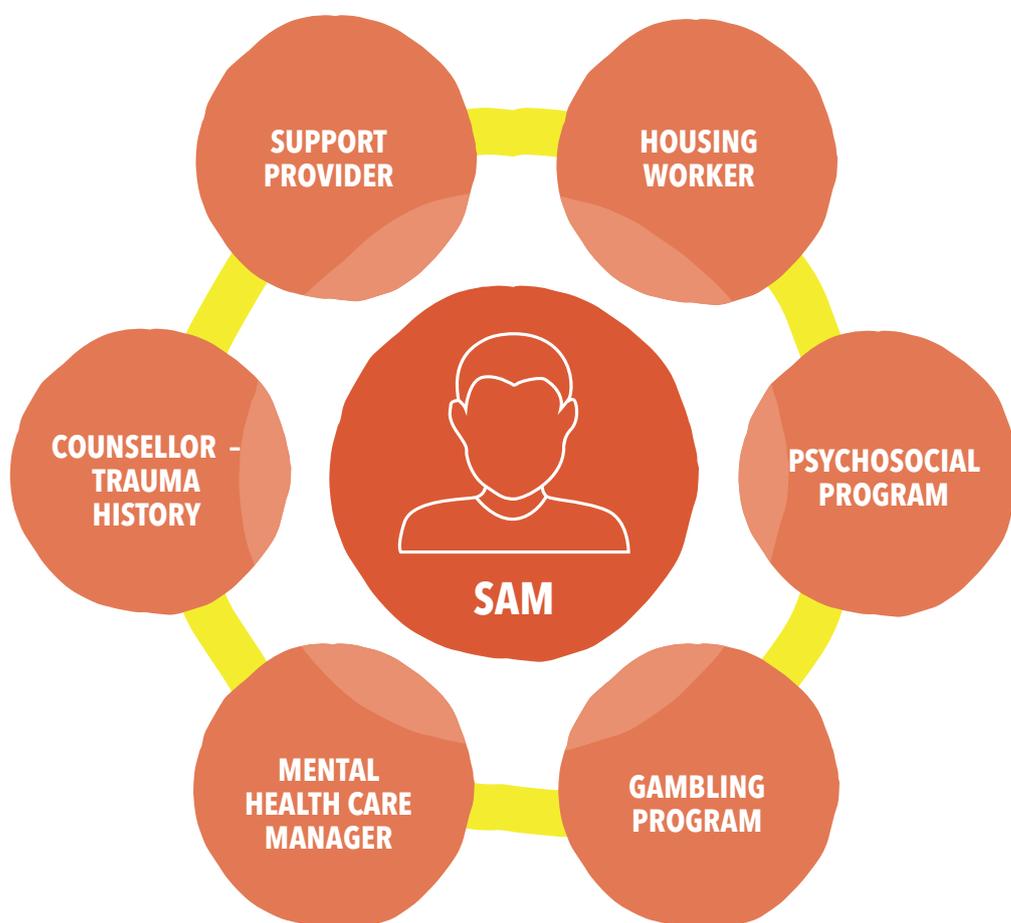
It is important to clarify the purpose of each provider and to facilitate links with these services. It is good practice to formulate a Tenancy Response Plan which includes the strategies and timelines for accomplishing each goal. The plan should include all providers, their function, the actions required and the intended outcomes.

## Sustaining Sam's Tenancy - Tenancy Response Plan

**Crucial to sustaining Sam's tenancy will be the development of a Tenancy Response Plan between service providers. Sam's current issues require a holistic coordinated response as opposed to a fragmented unitary response. A coordinated service response can be delivered through formal or informal partnerships between service providers.**

To ensure the delivery of a coordinated response to sustaining Sam's tenancy, it is necessary that a generalist support provider takes the lead in contacting the range of organisations that may be required to collaborate with Sam. The coordination of such a multiple provider approach is often the task of a support service as opposed to the housing provider.

The initial planning meeting with multiple providers and Sam will focus on the development of his Tenancy Response Plan. The meeting will clarify the roles, responsibilities and expectations of each service provider and develop the strategies required to assist Sam to achieve his goals. The diagram below shows the range of organisations required to potentially support Sam to sustain his tenancy:



## Sustaining Sam's Tenancy - Tenancy Response Plan

THE DIAGRAM BELOW IDENTIFIES THE PROCESS TO DETERMINE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TENANCY RESPONSE PLAN:

