

## The Peer Partnered Tenancy Project

This project aims to support people with mental illness to enter the private rental market using a peer-partnered, skill building approach. The project was initiated by the Open Minds Partners in Recovery (PiR) team and supported by the North Brisbane PiR lead agency, Brisbane North Primary Health Network.

Open Minds PiR has commissioned Enhance Care to modify the existing *Rent It Keep It* program for people with mental illness who may benefit from a peer partnered tenancy. The *Rent It Keep It* program prepares people with disabilities for participation in the private rental market

The first stage of the project consisted of hosting two workshops for stakeholders to come together, in conversation, around the question “What is needed for successful partnered tenancies for people living with mental illness?”. The purpose of this workshop was to discover what modifications or additions may be required for the *Rent It Keep It* program.

### The Workshops

Workshop 1 attracted 12 service providers from different parts of the system, all of them keen to address the issue of tenancies for people with mental illness. They were enthusiastic contributors to the process which consisted of:

- Welcome and Framing
- Check-In
- World Cafe x 4 rounds
- Next Steps
- Check-Out

The World Cafe questions were:

- What do people need to know before starting a peer partnered tenancy?
- What do people need to know when starting a peer partnered tenancy?
- What do people need to know while in a peer partnered tenancy?
- What do people need to know when leaving a peer partnered tenancy?

A rich harvest was gathered from this workshop which was captured and sorted through before a second workshop was designed which focused on the group highlights

The comprehensiveness of the *Rent It Keep It* program was reinforced, with most items suggested already included. There were several small exceptions, and one large one - *s Rent It Keep It* is an individually focused program, the necessary relationship initiation, building and maintenance for a peer-partnered tenancy is not well addressed in the program. Therefore, Workshop 2 focused on the following question:

- What is needed for healthy sustainable relationships for people living in co-partnered tenancies?

The process for Workshop 2 was:

- Welcome and Framing
- Check In
- Design Cafe x 2 rounds
- Next steps
- Check Out

The Design Cafe questions/topics were:

- How can we design a pathway for building and maintaining relationship?
- What could it look like?

More than 20 people attended, including people with lived experience of mental illness, service providers and real estate agents. The group was very productive and enthusiastic, and very willing to listen to other perspectives.

One of the unexpected outcomes was the shift in attitude for the three real estate agents in attendance – they expressed a heightened understanding of people's context, and a desire to be more closely connected to service providers to deepen this understanding, to access support, and to be more understanding agents for their tenants with mental illness. This was an exciting outcome.

On completion of the workshops, consultants from Purpose Partners (engaged by Open Minds to host the workshops) worked through the material generated and wrote this report outlining their suggested approach to modifying the *Rent It Keep It* program.

## Modifying the Rent It Keep It program

To keep proposed changes as simple and achievable as possible Purpose Partners suggest the following approach:

1. That a new peer partnered tenancy program be offered, and as part of that program, people participate in the existing (slightly modified) *Rent It Keep It* program as individuals.
2. That a concurrent module for matching and relationship building occurs in between program topic workshops.
3. That an additional module, Working Together for a Happy Home, be developed for inclusion in the matching and relationship module, for completion by the peer partners together.

The rationale for keeping *Rent It Keep It* separate from the matching and relationship building module is as follows:

- If *Rent It Keep It* is an individual undertaking, people can complete it without relying on a peer partner relationship – this gives them more options for tenancy.
- Keeping the matching and relationship building process separate means that if people are not able to progress through this process at any point, they can cycle back to the beginning, and try to find a suitable peer-partner in another group. In the meantime, their completion of *Rent It Keep It* is not dependent on a peer partner.
- It will be easier to build a separate module – Working Together for a Happy Home – rather than make the extensive modifications to *Rent It Keep It* which would be required for people to complete it together.

## Suggested modifications to the Rent It Keep It program

These suggested modifications, suggested by workshop participants, are more ‘updates’ or creative additions to the current content than modifications specific to peer partnered tenancies.

### Topic 4 - Rights and Responsibilities

- Add the Residential Tenancies Authority’s videos to the list of resources which may be useful for this topic (and for others - the videos cover before, during and after a tenancy)
- Add QSTARS (Qld Statewide Tenant Advice and Referral Service) to the list of background information for facilitators

### Topic 5 - Finding Places to Inspect

- Add Gumtree and flatmates.com.au to the notes of possible places for looking for somewhere to rent

### Topic 7 - Starting a Tenancy

- Add developing a fire safety plan and drills to this topic

### Topic 9 - Managing Expenses

- Add an activity about what to do if household items need replacing and it is unaffordable - where could people find low cost finance e.g. No Interest Loan Scheme

## Additional Module: Matching and Relationship Building

The following is a suggested outline for the process of matching peer partners and supporting them to build relationship and take informed action towards a peer partnered tenancy. It is based on group work for the most part, so that there are a number of potential partners available. It is suggested that participants also be completing the *Rent It Keep It* program as this process unfolds.

The outline of each session is followed by suggested actions.

### Session 1: Getting to know each other

A facilitated social occasion, with the aim of hearing a little about all the people in the group. This should include food and drink, icebreaker activities, storytelling, fun competitions, etc.

**ACTION: Develop facilitator notes for this session, and an invitation template**

### Session 2: Speed Dating (to be held after *Rent It Keep It*, Topic 1, Realistic Expectations, is completed)

Participants work on their speed dating worksheet, and then participate in a 'speed dating' process in which people have 10 minutes each to ask questions and receive answers. Participants then identify to the facilitator who they would like to get to know further.

People who do not find a potential partner can be invited back to the next scheduled Getting to Know each other session. The facilitator shares contact details for those who match and encourages people to arrange a social outing with all their identified matches – this may need to be supported by a worker.

**ACTION: Develop a worksheet that participants can use to note questions they would like answered by a potential peer-partner. Develop facilitator notes for supporting this, and the speed dating process.** Suggestions for inclusion in questions included lifestyle, skills and gifts, routine and social activities, health, employment, hobbies and interests, culture and religion, future plans, formal and informal supports, criminal history, TICA

## **Working Together**

At this point in the process, people who have found a preferred potential match complete the Working Together for a Happy Home module in place of Rent It Keep It, Topic 11, Sharing Accommodation. Others will need to begin again with another group, or be supported to find a peer-partner by alternative means.

**ACTION: Develop the Working Together for a Happy Home module outlined below**

### **Session 3: Celebrating success, sharing learning**

Occasional follow up peer support sessions could be offered so people can share what they have learned, what works and what doesn't, and celebrate successes. New potential peer partners starting out on the program could be invited to these sessions.

**ACTION: Develop session outline and facilitator notes and an invitation template**

N.B. A peer tenancy database was a suggestion made at the workshops. If this is developed, participants for this module can be sourced there, and if a match is already made in this way, peer partners can simply complete the final module - Working Together for a Happy Home.

## **Additional Module: Working Together for a Happy Home**

### **Session 1: Healthy Relationships**

This topic covers what a healthy relationship looks like, including:

- Respectful communication and conflict resolution
- How to build healthy relationships.

Other suggestions for this topic included identifying personal wants and needs, triggers for conflict, planning social activities to deepen relationship

**ACTION: Develop topic content, worksheets and facilitators notes**

### **Session 2: Our Tenancy**

This topic supports people to:

- Detail together what they can bring to a tenancy - household items, skills, money etc, and what they will do to fill any gaps.
- Explore their worksheets from Topic 1 of Rent It Keep It - 'Realistic Expectations' together and develop a shared Realistic Expectations diagram.
- Work on a shared 'Budgeting for Rent' Activity (also from Topic 1) to highlight any budgeting issues and to decide on a shared budget

**ACTION: Develop topic content, worksheets and facilitators notes**

### **Session 3: Our Agreements**

This topic supports people to make agreements about the following issues:

- Leasing - whose name/both names, RE agent contact
- Household bills - how will we divide these, how will we pay them
- Damage to shared goods or house - how will we decide who pays
- Household shopping arrangements - will we share costs, who will shop, how will goods be shared
- Shared household tasks - cleaning, maintenance, and repairs, rosters
- Guests - who, when, how often, how long
- Noise - what is acceptable
- Privacy - agreed boundaries, who we can share information with
- Pets - arrangements for their care and costs
- Support - what formal supports do we have, how will we negotiate supports in our shared home
- Crisis - when to call someone, who to call
- Conflicts - how will we resolve them?
- Leaving - how can we do this well if it happens?

**ACTION: Develop topic content, worksheets and facilitators notes**

### **Session 4: Our Relationship**

This topic supports people to deepen and maintain their relationship in a tenancy by discussing and designing:

- House meetings - how often, topics
- Shared activities - what can we do together to have fun e.g. social and learning activities
- Shared projects - what can we create together e.g. garden, music, cooking

**ACTION: Develop topic content, worksheets and facilitators notes**

### **Session 5: Our Plan**

This topic supports people to plan for:

- Finding a place
- Moving in

Using the relevant resources and activities from *Rent It Keep It* Getting Started Topics 5, 6, 7, people make an action plan for where to look, how to apply, how to sign up, how to move in and where to get help if they can't find somewhere.

**ACTION: Develop topic content, worksheets and facilitators notes**

## Other key questions

Workshop participants noted three other key questions which may be of use in future planning for service providers:

- Some real estate agents are open to changing their attitude to people with mental illness as tenants, and are seeking knowledge and skills. How could education and awareness activities be provided for them?
- Collaboration between services who support people in peer-tenancies is critical to success. How could services communicate well with each other in these circumstances?
- A peer-tenant database was a highly supported suggestion. How could Open Minds, or another service, support such a database?