

# **HOT** **TOPICS** action group

This fact sheet is to assist housing workers (TAAS, DOH, Community Housing) and other support agencies gain a clearer idea of issues;

- have a clearer and accurate assessment of what is needed by individuals with an intellectual disability
- prevent issues escalating and increasing likelihood of tenancies being successful
- avoid crisis work and accommodation in the future

## **Tips for engaging with groups**

Hot Topics Action Groups have been run in conjunction with Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) and the Queensland Disability Housing Coalition (QDHC).

# What is Hot Topics about?

Hot Topics consists of a number of Action Groups which focus on the experiences of people with intellectual disability who are residents of public or community housing.

Housing is the hot topic that unites the group, however after those issues have been dealt with, many other hot topics emerge as participants discuss the things that matter in their lives.

The focus has been to locate and gather people who have little support from family or friends.

**HOT**  
**TOPICS**  
action group

## Using the Hot Topics Conversation Model

Housing workers can effectively engage with the group as a way of consulting with them and listening to the issues that the services then need to address.

- be prepared to be flexible about a time and venue to meet with people
- be prepared to talk about a number of issues around the actual housing issue and wait for the information to emerge as people discuss various topics
- clarify that what you are saying is understood
- allow adequate time for questions and interpreters
- be prepared to have a number of breaks in the discussion, giving people time to process information



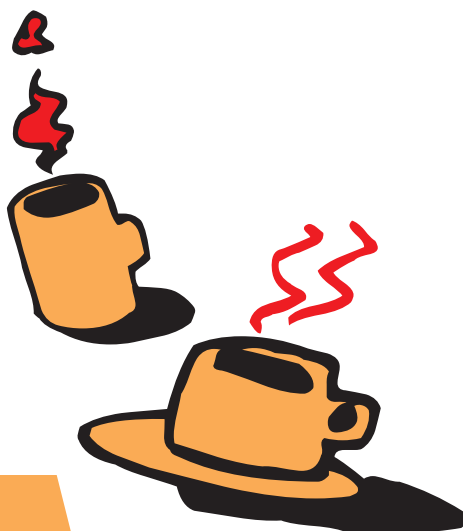
# What can help Hot Topics run smoothly

## Venue

- Find a venue that is known to most people who might be attending
- Make sure the venue is physically accessible and has accessible toilet facilities
- Look for a venue with comfortable chairs and compact enough to promote a friendly atmosphere for a small group gathering
- Make sure the venue has good tea and coffee making facilities.

## Catering

- Provide good quality simple, healthy food.
- Limit the amount of soft drink, and where possible provide juice, tea and coffee.



## Support

- Remember to gauge the needs of the participants, and arrange adequate support. For example, a support person might attend with a participant, if that helps the person feel comfortable and contribute in the group
- Sometimes participants may require interpreters if they are hearing impaired
- A good note taker will enable the facilitator to retain an accurate record of discussions, so issues can be followed up and the group can remain on track.

## Finding people to join

- Be prepared to work with uncertainty and some initial resistance
- Allow time to seek out and contact individuals with intellectual disability
- Make connections with parents, family members and disability support and employment services
- If you are not from the local community, build trust and connections through being flexible, available, consistent and approachable
- Make a commitment to visit the area regularly, and be available for ad hoc opportunities that arise to talk to people with disability, family members or service workers.

**HOT  
tips**

# Hot Tips for engaging participants



Roles that the group facilitator should take:

## Expansive and appreciative host

- Make people feel welcomed and cared about
- Welcome people effusively, and assist them to link up immediately with other people in the group
- Make people attending feel immediately more at ease, welcomed and appreciated
- Thank people for attending and let them know their contribution is valued.

## Creative organiser

- Create an atmosphere of relaxed welcome
- Work in an unhurried and unflurried manner, no matter who comes and what happens
- Have a plan of action
- Be committed to focused discussion that keeps on track while acknowledging the interests and energy of the participants.

## Committed group developer

- Maintain the energy, focus and delight in working with all the people who come.
- Provide the catalyst for participants to engage with one another, become connected to the group, and attend on a regular basis.
- Accept people as they are, and acknowledge them as valued human beings with opinions and experiences that are worthy of expression.
- Accept the diversity of people and strive to build positive and rich relationships between the members of the group.

## Where are groups currently held?

The first Hot Topics Action Group was started in Brisbane in October 2004. This group continues to meet on a regular basis.

Other groups were explored in Toowoomba, Gympie and the Gold Coast.

For further information please contact QDN at [qdn@qdn.org.au](mailto:qdn@qdn.org.au) or QDHC at [qdhc@qdhc.org.au](mailto:qdhc@qdhc.org.au)

The Hot Topics Project was a collaborative venture between the Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA), Queensland Disability Housing Coalition (QDHC) and Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN). Funding for the project was provided through the Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) Community Education Grant 2006.