

QUEENSLAND DISABILITY HOUSING COALITION

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NEWSLETTER - APRIL 2007

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of QDHC Inc

THE VOICE OF PEOPLE TO CONTINUE TO BE HEARD --- WHERE TO FROM HERE?

(Editorial by Mike Duffan)

Ever since its inception in 1987, QDHC has had a firm commitment to ensuring that the voice of people with a disability is not lost in the largely inaccessible structures that make up government and the wider community. QDHC has always spoken loudly and forcefully on housing issues affecting people with disabilities, a very vulnerable and very often silenced and thus quite a marginalized group of society.

QDHC continues to espouse that all people, regardless of disability, deserve a decent, safe and appropriate place to call home. QDHC believes that people with disabilities, like everyone else, should be enabled to choose where they will live. We believe people have the right to live independently with appropriate support commensurate to their needs, and so enable their lifestyles to be entwined with that of the community.

Housing is, of course, not an isolated issue but is inextricably linked to other aspects of daily living, including a general sense of security and well being, a feeling of independence and control over one's life. There is almost universal agreement that housing is a basic human right, but the reality is that an overwhelming number of people - many of whom are people with disabilities - are still in search of the elusive 'appropriate, affordable, secure housing', and their numbers are increasing.

QDHC continues to work diligently to identify the barriers to appropriate housing that people with a disability experience, and to provide program and policy advice to the Department of Housing.

Many people with a disability, their families and support networks see sobering evidence that reasonable expectations of an ordinary life are not currently shared by governments or by many of their fellow citizens. Policy seems to increase competition among a growing number of people and families for already inadequate and seemingly shrinking resources. There are a growing number of people waiting for assistance that is able to meet modest needs. People remain living at home with parents long past a reasonable time to move out and establish their own households. People slip into nursing homes and institutions for lack of adequately resourced alternatives.

QDHC is firmly committed to ensuring that the voice of people with a disability is not lost in the largely inaccessible structures that make up government and the wider community.

PEACE!!

Mike Duffan

Karin's Kapers... just what has QDHC's Coordinator been up to?

I can't believe we are already in the process of producing the March/April newsletter for 2007! It's been the usual pandemonium here at the QDHC office. I continue to be amazed at how much work a relatively small organization can be involved in. Below provides a brief at-a-glance look at the work of our organization for the first quarter of 2007. Happy reading and thanks to all of those individuals, other housing peaks, disability advocacy organisations and networks that have been involved.

QDHC has been involved in the following:

Formal policy responses:

- Initial Response to the Funding Review of Housing Peak Organisations (Department of Housing)

Advice at meetings/forums/consultations/workshops:

- Whole of Government Reference Group on Disability (DSQ)
- Responding to Homelessness Reference Group (Dept of Communities)
- Consultation with ERM Consulting Group regarding Universal Design (phone interview)
- Monthly Housing Peaks Meeting
- Monthly Meetings with Housing Policy and Strategy (Department of Housing)
- Disability Action Plan Follow-up Workshop (whole of government)
- Quarterly meeting with Helen Ferguson, Director of Policy (DSQ)
- Senior Officers and DG Peaks Meeting (Department of Housing)
- Strategic Plan Workshop (Residential Tenancies Authority)
- Young People in Residential Aged Care Reference Group (DSQ)
- Peaks and Partners Meeting (Brisbane City Council)

Attended/spoke at workshops/conferences:

- Community Resource Unit Conference, attended and delivered a paper entitled "Home Truths" (March 2007)
- Future of the Sector Roundtable (QCROSS and community sector event)

If you would like further information on any of these areas of work, please call me at the office on **(07) 3391 3433**

Committee Profile

INTRODUCING...

ANGI CAPPELLI, COMMITTEE MEMBER

Hello, I have been privileged to be on the board of QDHC for a number of years and working with others who are committed to making positive changes for people with a disability. I work full time as a Community Advisor with the Spinal Injuries Association. My background is in occupational therapy. I have worked both within the community and government sector working in the area of disability.

Maia's Moment

Every week we get calls from people about housing – I'm probably the voice you'll hear on the end of the phone! People may be having trouble finding appropriate housing, or experiencing barriers in access, or they may be encountering problems where they are already living. By the time people call us, they often have already been through several other telephone calls searching for help. It would be great to be the last call they had to make! Often the solution is not readily available and, of course, QDHC is not a direct service provider. However, we do listen very carefully to people and suggest other possible avenues they might not have tried. Hearing directly from people informs the work of QDHC - whilst every person's situation is unique, often common themes exist. Similar issues may arise for many different people due to a particular inequity or problem in the system. We don't have all the answers about housing, but we do take note of these issues, follow them up and make every effort to ensure that these individual experiences influence the system in the future. It's people's real experiences that inspire the work that QDHC does.

Papers and Information across Karin's Desk...

Here is where we put information that is not directly related to the Newsletter's theme, but may be of interest to our readers. To obtain a copy or for further information please contact the office on 3391 3433 or qdhc@qdhc.org.au

Papers:

Disability Services Qld Strategic Plan 2007 – 2011 – Draft for Consultation

Department of Communities Strategic Plan 2007 – 2011 – Draft for Consultation.

Upcoming Conference:

"Closing the Gaps: Local Transport Solutions in Action", Local and Community Transport Conference, 10 – 11 May, 2007, Brisbane.

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Please Share – We'd Love to hear from you...

You may notice that this newsletter edition is short on personal stories... we would love to include more stories from QDHC members, so if you would like to share your housing experiences with us, please email us at qdhc@qdhc.org.au. If you don't have access to email, our postal address is P.O. Box 440, Stones Corner Q, 4120. We look forward to hearing from you soon!

In March this year, our Co-ordinator Karin Swift presented a paper 'Home Truths' at the Brisbane CRU Conference "Myth Busting and Momentum Building – Truth in the Lives of People with a Disability. The Schizophrenia Fellowship of Queensland Inc. attended the workshop and found it thought provoking enough to include in their April newsletter. As a thank-you from CRU we received a framed plaque. Below is a transcript of the presentation.

“Home Truths” Presentation at CRU Conference

Introduction:

Hello, I'm from an organisation called Queensland Disability Housing Coalition. QDHC is an independent community based organisation that acts as a peak body to represent the housing needs and associated interests of people with disabilities in Queensland.

Today we want to talk about various myths that exist around housing. We can't be sure (although some of us might like to guess) who started them, why they started and why they still exist today. But we can be sure to challenge some of them. To start with though, I want to clarify something about housing and support.

QDHC believes that housing and support should be totally separate arrangements. This is a major safeguard when a person is labelled as having complex needs. Why is this so? If a person is refused service, they will still have somewhere to live. If they are evicted, their service will support them to find another home. If they want to move, their support goes with them. This separate arrangement also sets tenancy rights – this is *their* home, not their service provider's, nor is it the office of the paid workers. Such an arrangement is crucial for services to operate in right relationship with the person with a disability and their family and friends.

The theme of this conference has really highlighted for us how complicated getting to the “truth” can be. Sometimes the myths and realities blur and contradict one another. QDHC devotes all of its energy to trying to work within these tensions to lobby for better housing for people with disability.

Now onto what we see as the myths...

The myths about housing and support

1. Housing for people with disabilities needs to be different than for anyone else.

We know that for adults with disabilities the option to move into typical housing to establish a home of one's own is often not on offer, and nor is the opportunity to change one's place of residence. This may be for a number of reasons:

- Suitable or affordable housing is not available

- Adequate support is not available

- People in decision-making roles presume that people with disabilities belong away from other citizens

- Housing and support are tied together in the one place

QDHC believes that all people with disabilities, like other citizens should have a range of housing options from which to choose how they live their life. These options should be consistent with what is available to the rest of the community, mirroring the variety of detached and semi-detached houses, units or flats, of a variety of architectural styles, with or without gardens. This means that special or separate housing solely for people with disabilities should not be the key or only feature on any menu of housing options.

2. Group homes are the most economic way of providing support

In today's world of economic rationalism it is easy to believe that this kind of complete package may be the way to go, however, there is evidence to suggest that grouping people together based solely on disability, can lead to dilemmas because personal choice can be restricted, inflexible service options are created, group conflict can occur and people can react negatively to stifling and controlling environments, lack of personal space, behaviour of others in the group home, thus leading to increased costs down the track, when interventions must be sought.

Also, group homes by their very nature appear to the outside world to provide a complete package and support from others in the community, neighbours or even people's family is often seen as unnecessary or frowned upon. This cuts out an entire level of connection for the person to their community, family and potential friends. An important connection that is freely given.

3. There is no other way of providing support other than group homes

There are other ways of providing support to people in a personalised and valuing way. Personalised supports operate very differently and are based on an ethical framework with guiding values and principles that determine how life and its relationships are played out. There is no one model of service, but as many different models as there are people supported. The following principles guide the provision of personalised support:

People belong in community life and are entitled to live a valued lifestyle based on the same rights, relationships, expectations and opportunities as other citizens.

This means the person has a unique life and receives personalised support that is dignified, respectful, responsive, flexible, and creative. It is highly relevant to what the person needs most and is played out in the same valued ways and places as others, capitalising on the relationships of ordinary life.

People have a natural authority to influence the direction of their own life, as do their family members and significant others when they have remained faithful and committed to the person's well being.

This means the person is well known and listened to and the service does all it can to support the personal vision of life, keeping the person as the focus of planning, approaches and solutions, with the sense of this being their life, and acknowledging what it would be like to walk in their shoes. The formal service system is acknowledged as only part of the solution, with family, friends and significant others playing a legitimate and valued role, especially with the person has significant support needs. Supports are provided with the person and/or their family with decisions kept close to the people involved.

Collective oversight of the governance of the service is vested in the people who use the service and/or family or significant others who are closest to them.

This means that the people involved share a vision of what it takes to be of good service and are involved in decision-making about major directions and policy of the organisation.

All people involved acknowledge that formal services are not guaranteed and can lose their way and increase the vulnerability of the person with disability.

This means that safeguards are put in place that protect the person in daily life as well as having formal mechanisms that reflect on how the service is going based on the perspectives of those involved.

4. Public housing is the only suitable, available option.

There are several typical housing options. These include public housing, Community Rent Schemes, private rental, community housing, non-profit housing companies, housing co-operatives, home ownership.

5. The income subsidy provided by government enables private rental.

Due to the skyrocketing property market, many people find private rental unaffordable, even with the assistance of rent subsidy. Also for many people with disability, the private rental market remains out of reach due to the inaccessibility of most housing.

6. Inappropriate systems (eg boarding houses, nursing homes etc) are better than being homeless. Boarding houses are the best some people can do.

It is sad, but these statements are often heralded around well-meaning but overstretched services that are doing their best to try and meet the shortfall in the current housing crisis. Whilst we all might agree that people who are homeless are very vulnerable, and perhaps more so than those who have a roof over their heads, it's a sad statement that homelessness is often our only benchmark when it comes to housing. Surely there are greater things we can aspire to for vulnerable people.

7. Private home ownership is the ideal that we are all striving for.

Home ownership is increasingly becoming more unaffordable to a greater number of Australians. It has become necessary for many people to take stock and make realistic decisions about what they can afford based on their income, lifestyle and increased daily living expenses. Many people are finding that renting offers an affordable flexible, option that doesn't tie people to a mortgage for the rest of their lives and allows them to save for other goals such as travel. For people with disability home ownership and even private rental often becomes out of reach due to other factors, such as a lack of homes with universal design features.

8. Group homes are the same as having flat-mates.

Most often people living in flat-mate situations get to choose the people they share their house with. A prospective flat-mate often has to undergo rigorous scrutiny and compatibility checks with other flat-mates in order to move in to a share house. Typically, flat-mate scenarios are the living situation of people in their young adult lives and provide an affordable means for people to move out of their family home and test the waters of independence.

Group homes on the other hand are an entirely different scenario. Because of processes such as vacancy management, finding a vacancy in an existing group home where a person can go and live with other residents who are already housed and supported there, people living in group home rarely get a say in who lives with them. Decisions of who lives where are made by the service provider based on support needs and convenience of rosters and shared support arrangements, rather than shared interests or compatibility. For many people, living in group homes becomes a whole-of-life option as they become 'stuck' there and unable to move on to other options because their support is tied to that house and not to them as an individual, or even if their funding is portable, them leaving would make the house unviable.

Trends and Future Directions: One Social Housing System

The Department of Housing is implementing one social housing system, which includes moving from a waiting list system to allocating housing assistance based on the level of housing need. So this means going from a system where you will eventually (even if it takes many years) be offered housing assistance, to a system where the people “assessed” to be having the highest need will be given priority. We are unsure about what the full impacts of this policy direction will be, however we have told that when the system is fully implemented:

A person looking for housing assistance will have simple entry points into one social housing system and will only have to register their need for assistance at one point of entry. Their eligibility for assistance will be determined through one common set of criteria.

If eligible, a client will be allocated to the housing assistance that best suits their needs and circumstances.

People will be housed in social housing for as long as they need to be housed. Clients housed from 1 January 2006 will have periodic reviews (every 4 or 10 years) against ongoing eligibility criteria and households will either be able to continue to lease their properties or they will be assisted to find alternative housing.

Long term social housing will be targeted to people most in need of this type of help. Other types of assistance will be offered to people whose needs could be met outside long term social housing, in private rental housing or indeed through home ownership.

A broader range of housing assistance options is being investigated to support the one social housing system and pathways through and from the system.

At the same time, the department is continuing to work with local governments, not-for-profit organisations, developers and industry bodies to achieve more housing that is affordable.

So to re-iterate:

MYTH 1

Housing for people with disabilities needs to be different than for anyone else.

TRUTH

Differences would only emerge in the areas of home modification and support that may be required. QDHC advocates that universal design is better for everyone. This would eliminate the need for home modification.

MYTH 2

Group homes are the most economic way of providing support.

TRUTH

There are many creative and cost effective ways to receive the assistance you require that do not rely on people being forced to live together.

MYTH 3

There is no other way of providing support other than group homes

TRUTH

There is no one model of support but as many different models as there are people supported.

MYTH 4

Public housing is the only suitable, available option.

TRUTH

There are several typical housing options.

MYTH 5

The income subsidy provided by government enables private rental.

TRUTH

For many Australian families, even renting is becoming difficult.

MYTH 6

Inappropriate systems (eg private boarding houses, nursing homes etc) are better than being homeless. Boarding houses are the best some people can do.

TRUTH

There is “small choice in rotten apples”. Homelessness should not be our only benchmark.

MYTH 7

Private home ownership is the ideal that we are all striving for.

TRUTH

Not everyone seeks to own their own home. ‘Buying’ into this myth is not always helpful.

Project News

For some time, Mary Kenny has been engaged with the Hot Topics in Housing project being undertaken by QDHC in conjunction with QDN (Queenslanders with a Disability Network) and funded by the RTA (Residential Tenancies Authority). Here’s an update on the progress of the project.

What’s happening with Hot Topics and A Chat about Housing?

QDHC and QDN have been collaborating to bring on the next stage of the project in Gympie, Gold Coast and Toowoomba. Mary Kenny, our project officer has started meeting with people in Toowoomba, and has hired the Dr Price meeting rooms at 6 Little Street for Wednesday afternoons. Four people have been meeting Mary for a conversation about housing and the things that matter in their lives. The meetings start at 3.45 and finish around 5.15 pm. If anyone wants to join in, please contact Mary on 3350 1682, or email on marykenny@optusnet.com.au this will help with catering.

We have tried a few different places to meet in Toowoomba, and we think that the Dr Price rooms are the most accessible for people. If anyone needs help with transport, Mary can assist with taxi vouchers.

In our Toowoomba group, we have discussed the need for more housing, and how to go about actually getting affordable housing in an area where there are few options. We were joined by Jasmine Sigg from Disability Services Queensland this week, and for one member of the group, the information that was shared, was very useful. We have enjoyed getting to know one another, a cup of tea and sandwiches, and sharing conversation about things that are happening in our lives, especially trying to find affordable housing. Mary has talked to Denise Whitelaw from TAAS and Masoud Ali-Akibari from Queensland Housing, both offered support and links to other networks.

Mary met with a group on the Gold Coast and most people there were keen to meet again to discuss issues and enjoy conversation. We are keen to meet again, and it will probably be at the Gold Coast Advocacy office. We are keen to find an accessible place on the southern end of the coast, so will let everyone know as soon as the venue is finalised.

Mary is travelling to Gympie next week to talk to people and confirm the venue at the Gympie Community Centre. Making a suitable meeting time has been difficult because several interested people work during the day, and night time meetings are not suitable.

We hope to finalise the project at the end of June 2007, however the groups may continue afterwards independent of QDHC and the project worker. We will keep you informed of next steps.

Two new projects are in the pipeline – project workers are currently being selected. Here's a short summary of the projects:

1. Housing and Support Project

QDHC has always emphasised the overarching principle, for all people in the community, of separation of housing and support. A lot of work has been done over the years with the Department and with some individual service providers on how this particularly affects people with disability. However, we want to engage with a much broader range of service providers and get them talking through with each other and with people with disabilities about what this principle really means, and how it affects people with disabilities in various situations. We want to get as many service providers as possible to understand and commit to the principle and help them work out practical ways of putting it into practice so that a lot of the barriers imposed on people with disabilities by current housing options can be eliminated.

This will be a major community education and development project – something to be done over a long period of time because it involves building relationships and trust and understanding which will lead to active working partnerships. So we've broken the work up into two stages -

- a. An initial **Seed Project** – a 20-week action-oriented project to design, plan and establish the longer-term project so that it is comprehensive and really effective in the longer term.
- b. The **long-term Housing and Support project** itself which we envisage would be a major focus of QDHC over the next three years.

2. Planning Housing Futures Project

QDHC believes that people with disabilities, once provided with appropriate supports, should be given every opportunity and encouragement to live in the community in housing of their choosing. This Community Education project is designed to strengthen that resolve in the community, to encourage people with disabilities and their families, as well as service providers, to grasp this vision with open hands, and to help them turn this vision into a reality.

The project will draw heavily on the Kit QDHC produced last year – “A Home of my Own: Right, Rhetoric or Reality?” and, in the process, trial and further develop some simple, user-friendly planning tools which we hope will be a very practical assistance to people who are engaged in planning their housing futures.

QLD DISABILITY HOUSING COALITION
ABN: 26 280 884 781
Membership Application/Renewal Form
Tax Invoice

NAME:.....

ADDRESS:.....

.....POST CODE.....

TELEPHONE:.....EMAIL ADDRESS:

PREFERRED FORM OF COMMUNICATION

(Email, Post, TTY, Fax, Phone, Other)

1. I would like to obtain/renew membership of the Qld Disability Housing Coalition Incorporated and agree to abide by its Constitution and Rules. I understand the annual membership fees are:

MEMBERSHIP CONTRIBUTION

ORGANISATIONS	\$22 (GST included)
INDIVIDUAL	\$16.50 (GST included)
INDIVIDUAL (Concession)	\$ 5.50 (GST included)

OR

2. I would like to make a donation to the Queensland Disability Housing Coalition Incorporated.

\$

I enclose a Cheque/Money order made payable to the Qld Disability Housing Coalition Incorporated for the amount of:

\$

I am joining/subscribing to the Coalition because:

.....

SIGNED:.....DATE.....

Please return to:

QLD DISABILITY HOUSING COALITION INC
PO BOX 440
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