

Sustaining Tenancies in Long-term Housing: A Partnership Approach

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Unison Housing is a registered Housing Association and provides a range of services including housing; homelessness services in Melbourne's west; private rental property management; owner's corporation management; and social enterprise property services.

Unison recently launched a new development consisting of 54 studio and one-bedroom social housing apartments in Footscray.

This new building has transformed an aged and dilapidated block of 17 small units into 54 brand new self-contained apartments. The new social housing building was developed with funding from the Victorian State Government's Victorian Property Fund and has been designed with a focus on residents' well-being and quality of life, with great natural light and airflow, a large communal area and outdoor garden, high-standard energy efficiency, accessible facilities, and enhanced safety measures.

The development is part of a larger commitment from Unison to replace rooming houses with shared facilities with good quality self-contained apartments, and almost 20 of the units have been allocated to former residents of Unison rooming houses. In addition, some of the original residents of the building have returned to the site in order to re-connect with a community where many of them have a long history.

Importantly Unison has entered into a new support partnership with McAuley Community Services for Women. This partnership was established to address the Unison Housing Research Lab's finding

that a high number of Unison tenancies were breaking down in the first 18 months¹ and that we needed to strengthen collaboration with support agencies who share our commitment to long-term outcomes and are willing to work with us over the longer term to achieve stable housing outcomes.

The partnership aims to ensure that women who are accommodated in this development continue to be provided with adequate support to settle into their new home and provides direct access to 14 units of social housing for women referred by McAuley who are homeless or at risk of homelessness — many of whom have suffered past trauma, family violence and mental illness.

The location of the new development is in close walking distance to McAuley House Footscray, which provides women who have exited that facility with a familiar neighbourhood and the ability to return there to maintain social and support connections and participate in group activities — vital in continuing to rebuild their lives.

This opportunity has provided housing for McAuley clients from a broad range of ages (18 to 65) and backgrounds, who have worked hard to prepare themselves for independent living. It not only provides new permanent homes for these 14 women, but also frees up beds for 14 more within McAuley's facilities — thereby housing 28 women who have been or are at risk of homelessness.

In addition, McAuley staff will be located at the onsite Unison office which will provide day to day opportunity for Unison and

McAuley to build relationships, develop a clear understanding of one another's roles and collaborate as issues arise. This co-location is considered essential, simply so that the two teams know one another and there is regular opportunity for communication, both formal and informal, in order to create a culture focused on ensuring women maintain their housing.

The opportunity to provide a high standard of comfortable modern housing, social connections with friendships formed and ongoing support provides hope for more of these types of opportunities. Working with Unison, McAuley will advocate to enable similar opportunities for many more women in their care.

McAuley worked collaboratively with donors to ensure that all the women they have referred have been able to furnish their apartments with brand new whitegoods and furnishings, including kitchen appliances and linen. And as we write, all of the McAuley tenants have signed leases and moved into their new apartments. Both services are eagerly awaiting the easing of restrictions, so we are able to be on site together more regularly and collaborate to develop community engagement activities on the site.

The real test, however, will be whether these supported tenants settle into the new building and establish successful long-term tenancies.

Endnote

1. Johnson G, McCallum S and Watson J 2018. *Who stays, who leaves and why? Occupancy patterns at Unison Housing between 2014 and 2016*, Unison Housing, Melbourne.