



5 years
COMMON
GROUND

**MISSION
AUSTRALIA**

Celebrating 5 years

Mission Australia Housing and Mission Australia are celebrating 5 years of delivering housing and support services at Common Ground Sydney.

From little things big things grow

Finding a place to live every night can be tiring. For 12 years, John lived on the streets of inner-city Sydney getting to know which laneway or doorway were the safest to sleep.

A jockey and a stable hand, John arrived in Australia from Scotland in 1989. In his late 40's John's life slowly began to spiral into a world of alcoholism, leading him to a life on the streets and "constantly watching my back" for the next 20 years.

Mission Australia's Missionbeat service, which has been patrolling streets for more than 30 years, crossed paths with John one wet and cold night. Over a number of years of working with John on the streets he agreed to stay in a short-medium term shelter that Mission Australia run on Sydney's northern beaches. As John improved, Mission Australia offered him permanent accommodation as one of Common Ground Sydney's first tenants in 2011.

For someone who was always used to "living life on the edge" John had not been able to plan ahead. From this day on, John could start to put plans in place, beginning with "getting a goldfish". This was a big step towards stability for John.

After being a long term tenant, John sadly passed away. In memory of John, Common Ground Sydney held a small service for him onsite with staff and tenants.

Common Ground Sydney is a \$32 million initiative designed to help tackle homelessness and Sydney's affordable housing crisis. It is easily the most significant single development Sydney has seen in this area for many years.

Mission Australia Housing

As a leading community housing provider our aim is to deliver safe, secure and affordable housing with services that are tailored to individual need and in communities where our tenants are supported in their daily lives and in their longer-term aspirations.

Established in 2009 by Mission Australia – a national community services organisation that has been actively engaged in building independence with individuals and families for more than 155 years – Mission Australia Housing has the scale, reach and expertise to transform lives and create thriving, sustainable communities where people want to live.

Mission Australia Housing currently operates across 4 states (NSW, TAS, QLD and VIC) offering tenancy, asset and property management services and owns or manages more than 1,900 social and affordable homes, including Sydney's \$32 million supported housing initiative, Common Ground Sydney. This initiative is modelled on the New York-based Breaking Ground program (formerly known as Common Ground) that integrates stable housing with intensive case management support.

Mission Australia Housing works closely with Mission Australia, combining expertise in property and tenancy management with capability in social services delivery. Wherever we work, we focus on our tenants, increasing the life opportunities available to them.

Together, the two partner organisations work towards our combined goal of reducing homelessness and strengthening communities across Australia.

Housing snapshot:

* includes Mission Australia services



3,247
tenants
housed



1,914
properties owned/
managed



128
homelessness
services*

The Common Ground story

Breaking Ground (formerly known as Common Ground) was founded in New York in 1990 by Rosanne Haggerty with the aim of ending homelessness for people experiencing long term homelessness. Breaking Ground currently provides almost 3,000 units of housing in New York City, and is now successfully established in many other cities in the US and in Australia.

In Australia, Common Ground is first and foremost a housing model. It is a permanent supportive housing solution to end long term homelessness- it is not a homelessness service offering crisis services or transitional housing to homeless people. Common Ground provides people with a safe place to live permanently and the support to help them achieve stability in their lives.

Common Ground houses long term homeless people through a 'housing first' approach that provides permanent housing, direct from homelessness, and the support people require to remain housed. Common Ground does this by offering on-site services specifically designed to sustain people in their tenancies and maximise their ability to live independently. These may include support for medical and mental illnesses and/or substance use, through to linking people with training, education and employment opportunities.

'Housing First' recognises that stability is more likely to be achieved if an individual has somewhere permanent and safe to live. It does not require people to engage in treatment programs or prove their housing readiness, however support services are offered on a voluntary basis.

Common Ground targets the most vulnerable long term homeless in the community. These are people who have been homeless continuously for six months or more, or who have experienced multiple episodes of primary homelessness over a 12 month period and often with significant impact on their health and wellbeing while homeless. They frequently have substantial barriers to housing stability.

However, Common Ground is also a 'mixed tenancy' model. Other people, who may not have a history of homelessness – but who need affordable housing can also live in Common Ground developments. Commonly this group includes low income earners who struggle – due to affordability – to live close to their place of work.

Principles

The six critical principles of the Common Ground model are:

- 1 Quality, permanent, affordable housing**
All tenants pay an affordable rent, usually a percentage of their income or a reduced market rent, and have the same rights and responsibilities as residents of any apartment building.
- 2 A diverse social mix**
Common Ground buildings house a mix of formerly homeless people and low income tenants (for example, students or workers on low wages).
- 3 Coordinated on-site tenancy management and support services**
Services are located on-site, with links to other existing community services, to assist tenants to maintain their tenancies and connect them to the local community.
- 4 A safe, secure environment**
Safety and security are key elements in the design and management of Common Ground. Supportive Housing sites usually include an on-site 24 hour concierge service.
- 5 Separation of tenancy management and support services**
High scale Common Ground buildings are managed and supported by two distinct and separate services. That is, building/tenancy management and on-site support services are operated by different services.
- 6 Integration with the local community**
Common Ground models aim to be good neighbours and to foster social inclusion within the area they are located.

Common Ground Sydney aims to successfully end long term homelessness through housing the most vulnerable people in our communities. It is not a homelessness service offering crisis services or shelters to homeless people - it is a permanent supportive housing solution.



A place to call home

Unsure where she was born, Cheryl has been homeless most of her life.

Although her earliest memories are hazy, Cheryl clearly recalls the sense of chaos that came with her childhood on the streets in Kings Cross with her sister, being raised by her mother in a paedophile ring.

By the time Cheryl was 8 she had been introduced to Heroin and became addicted for more than 23 years. At 14 years of age the girls turned to prostitution for money and at 18 her sister, Cheryl's biggest hero, tragically passed away.

To deal with this enormous loss Cheryl used more Heroin.

After a period of living in transitional housing Cheryl put her name on the social housing list and in February 2013 she was invited to live at Common Ground Sydney.

"Since living at Common Ground, I'm no longer just a face in the crowd. I was sick of the way people were judging the homeless as lazy and "dirtying the streets." I now have my independence and my own home. I feel safe with the 24/7 concierge and I'm close to shops, transport, the library, doctor, clinic."

Cheryl commends the staff, saying "The staff here are really nice and they take the stress out of daily life. While many of us are happy to independently go about our lives, the support staff can help us with arranging doctor appointments, helping with rent and electricity issues, food vouchers. You name it!"

Cheryl enjoys having her own permanent space to call home and even enjoys personalising her apartment with homewares.

"Living at Common Ground gives me a place to call home. Permanent accommodation and living in this community gives me a reason to wake up, be independent and get my life back. I can focus on achieving my own goals. Even something as simple as cooking in my own kitchen gives me a sense of achievement. Before living here, I used drugs on the street to fit in. Now the cycle is broken and I'm clean."

Cheryl says Common Ground Sydney provides stability in her life as being constantly on the move was proving difficult. "It is a nuisance moving all the time. It's like a merry go round and it is difficult for someone with my background to compete against other people for private accommodation. It's nice to call somewhere home and to have my own bed, my own shower and own kitchen."

Since living at Common Ground Sydney, Cheryl has adopted two pets, a cat called Georgie Boy and a bird called Polair. Regular RSPCA visits to Common Ground Sydney ensures that all pets are cared for and are micro-chipped. Cheryl is also involved in tenant meetings and enjoys participating in her community.

Common Ground Sydney

The Common Ground model focusses on long-term solutions to homelessness, rather than just offering a bed for the night.

In partnership with the Department of Family and Community Services NSW, this 5 Green Star rated 6-story development was designed by Hassell and built by Grocon.

Common Ground Sydney offers 104 units:

88 studio apartments

12 one bedroom apartments

4 two bedroom apartments

A formerly homeless labourer, Frank who was employed on the Common Ground Sydney construction project by Grocon, said the onsite support services were the most crucial in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

“If you come straight from the streets you need those life skills,” he said. “A lot of homeless people come from broken backgrounds where they don’t learn that.”

Frank



Frank and Roseanne Haggerty (Founder of Common Ground, New York)



Common Ground Sydney (cont)

Long term homeless

Traditionally, the long term homeless live in a cycle of surviving on the street, being admitted to hospitals, shelters or prison, and then going back to the street. The stress of surviving each day in this cycle puts a tremendous amount of pressure on people's mental and physical health.

Social housing

Rising rents and a lack of low-cost homes are pushing a growing number of people out of the inner city. Common Ground Sydney offers social housing to men and women on a low income who have received priority approval for social housing in New South Wales. Providing social housing is critical to our commitment to foster inclusive, mixed-income communities. It enables men and women who could not afford to live in the inner city, to contribute to the unique character of Sydney.

Affordable housing

The cost of housing in Sydney is reaching a crisis point, making it difficult for police officers, nurses, hospitality staff and other key workers to continue living in the city close to their jobs. Some face the unenviable choice of forgoing other essentials in order to pay for housing or living in overcrowded conditions to reduce their housing costs. The affordable housing program at Common Ground Sydney is geared towards key workers on moderate incomes, who are not eligible for social housing. Rent is set at less than 75% of the market rate.



Evidence shows that providing homeless people with safe, secure, long-term accommodation and access to support services in the same location gives them the best chance of getting their lives back on track.

How we do it

Mission Australia Housing

Mission Australia Housing has provided tenancy and property management services at Common Ground Sydney since opening in 2011 with the building being vested to us by NSW State Government in 2015. Mission Australia Housing has overall responsibility of Common Ground Sydney, including building and tenancy management, and management of all other contracted services (excluding the support services).

Mission Australia

Camperdown Support Services is managed by Mission Australia and is based onsite providing wrap around support services to our tenants. Camperdown Support Services works closely with the housing management team from Mission Australia Housing, and with a range of professional independent, government and voluntary service provider's onsite. Camperdown Support Services critically provides tenants, including 52 people

exiting long-term primary homelessness with individual case management and coordination of onsite health, recreational, social and welfare services.

Over the last few months Camperdown Support Services have been working in partnership with RPA Mental Health Services with Karen*, a long term tenant (3 years), who was initially diagnosed with drug psychosis.

In 2015 Karen had been scheduled on 5 occasions throughout the year and on the last occasion placed on a Community Treatment Order.

She is now receiving regular and consistent mental health support through her RPA Social Worker, is taking prescribed medication, has reconnected with family and is looking into volunteering work.

Clinical services

Clinical services and access to health support is managed by Camperdown Support Services. These services are available to all Common Ground Sydney tenants with some services available to nearby public housing residents. There are 2 clinicians rooms located on the ground floor along with a number of private meeting rooms for services to use.

* Name has been changed to protect the privacy of the person we helped.

How we do it (cont)

Community and tenant engagement

At Common Ground Sydney both the housing and support services work with tenants, government agencies, community organisations and other stakeholders to enable our tenants to participate fully within their communities.

We do this at Common Ground Sydney through:

- Regular tenant meetings on-site
- Working in partnership with local organisations to run tenant events (Camperdown Community Day)
- Attending local tenant group meetings (Joanna O'Dea)
- Connecting tenants with support services in the community
- Holding information workshops
- Working with local councils
- Recognising tenant achievements

Camperdown Support Services work with Mission Australia Housing and a range of external support agencies, government agencies and community organisations to facilitate access to premises and on-site activities for tenants, nearby public housing tenants and the wider community. Our partner organisations include:

Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (RPA)

Animal Welfare League

Homeless Health

Legal Aid

Mercy Foundation

Harvey Norman

RSPCA

Centrelink

TAFE Outreach

Employment Solutions

New South Wales Police

Aboriginal Legal Services

Trustee and Guardianship

Fit For Good

Neami / Way2Home

MissionBeat

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

Food Bank

OzHarvest

Local GPs and clinicians

Pymont Cares

JobNetwork

Camperdown Mental Health

Glebe Community Services

City of Sydney

Meals on Wheels

There are also a range of individual and organisation volunteers who provide training, education and recreational classes and activities on and offsite.



Photo by Nicole Chettle



How we do it (cont)

Camperdown Community Day

Community is more than just a group of people united.

Community serves a vital role of support and gives individuals a sense of belonging and a feeling of connection.

We live in a fast paced world, everything is instant, change is constant and it is too easy to become isolated in your own home or workplace. Communities close this gap and provide care to individuals who are impacted by the daily stress and chaos of today's world.

Since 2015 Mission Australia has led the Camperdown Community Day which is an annual event of celebration, recognition and connection.

The planning committee for the event includes Glebe Community Development Project, tenant representatives from Johanna O'Dea, private residents from City Quarter, Leap-fish Community Arts and is headed by Mission Australia Common Ground Sydney.

This year, Camperdown Community Day was again filled with free engaging activities, services and entertainment for local residents that aimed to build and strengthen the community in Camperdown. There was a real community spirit felt throughout the day with many people attending and participating in activities, including local community member and celebrity TV host of Play School spanning 30 years, Betina Collings. A long term supporter of Common Ground Sydney, Betina opened the event and cooked up a storm of maple pancakes for everyone to enjoy.

Common Ground Sydney tenants said they had a fantastic day full of fun, and yet again the weather did not disappoint. It was nice and sunny, just what was needed for the day to be a success. Local people engaged and connected with each other through a range of fun, friendly and exciting activities, food and information.

"We saw people share, sing, and dance, sit and laugh together as the day went by. It was all smiles", said Catherine Karanja, Professional Services Coordinator at Common Ground Sydney.

Other community organisations were on hand to give out free advice and services including Sydney University's faculty of nursing who performed health checks on residents such as checking blood pressure, heart rates and blood glucose levels. They also handed out brochures about basic concepts of the heart from the Heart Foundation.

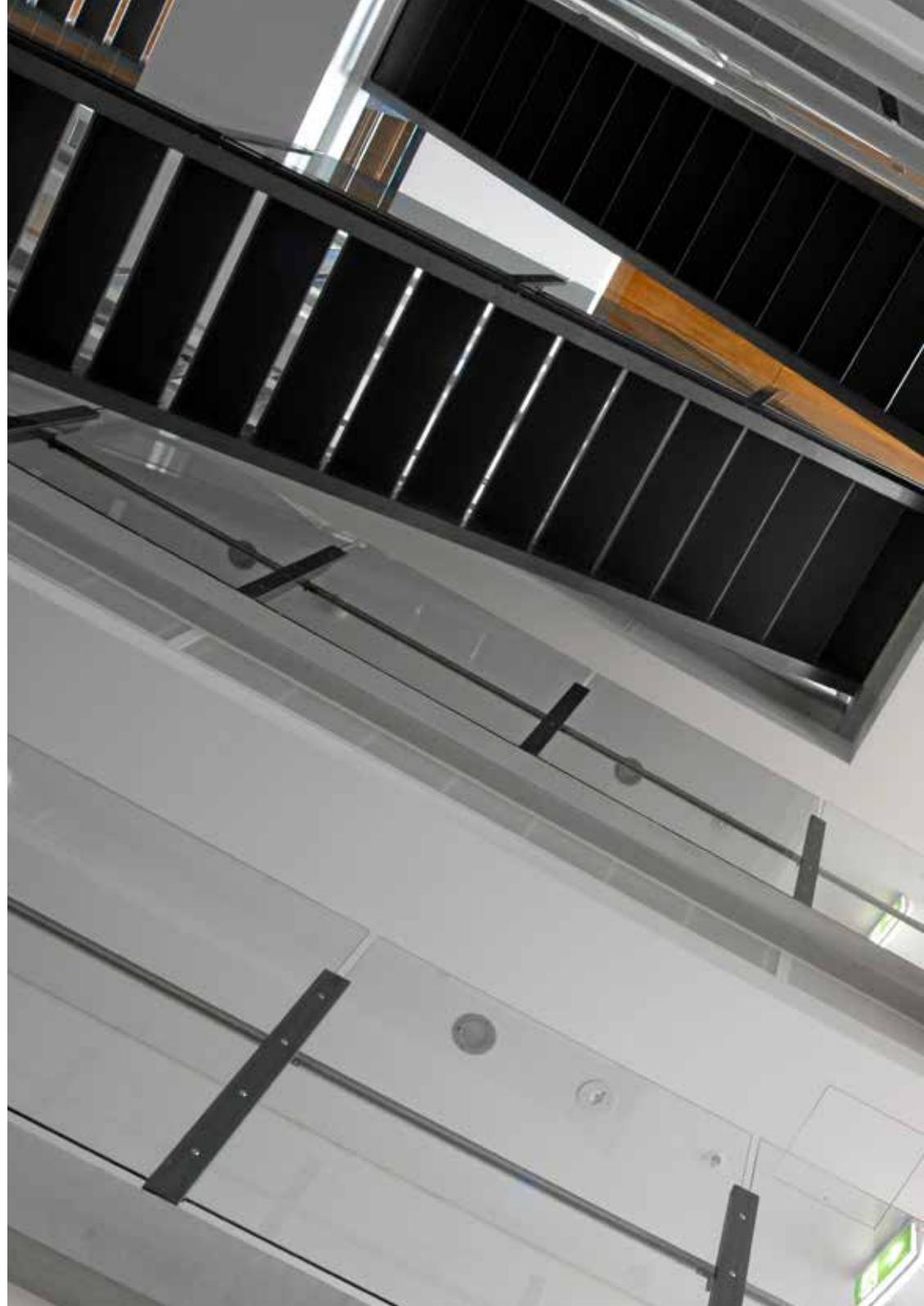
The day included music performances from local residents and also the Sydney Street Choir. Everyone thought that the event was a great initiative, that Camperdown needed it and that it is just getting bigger and better every year!

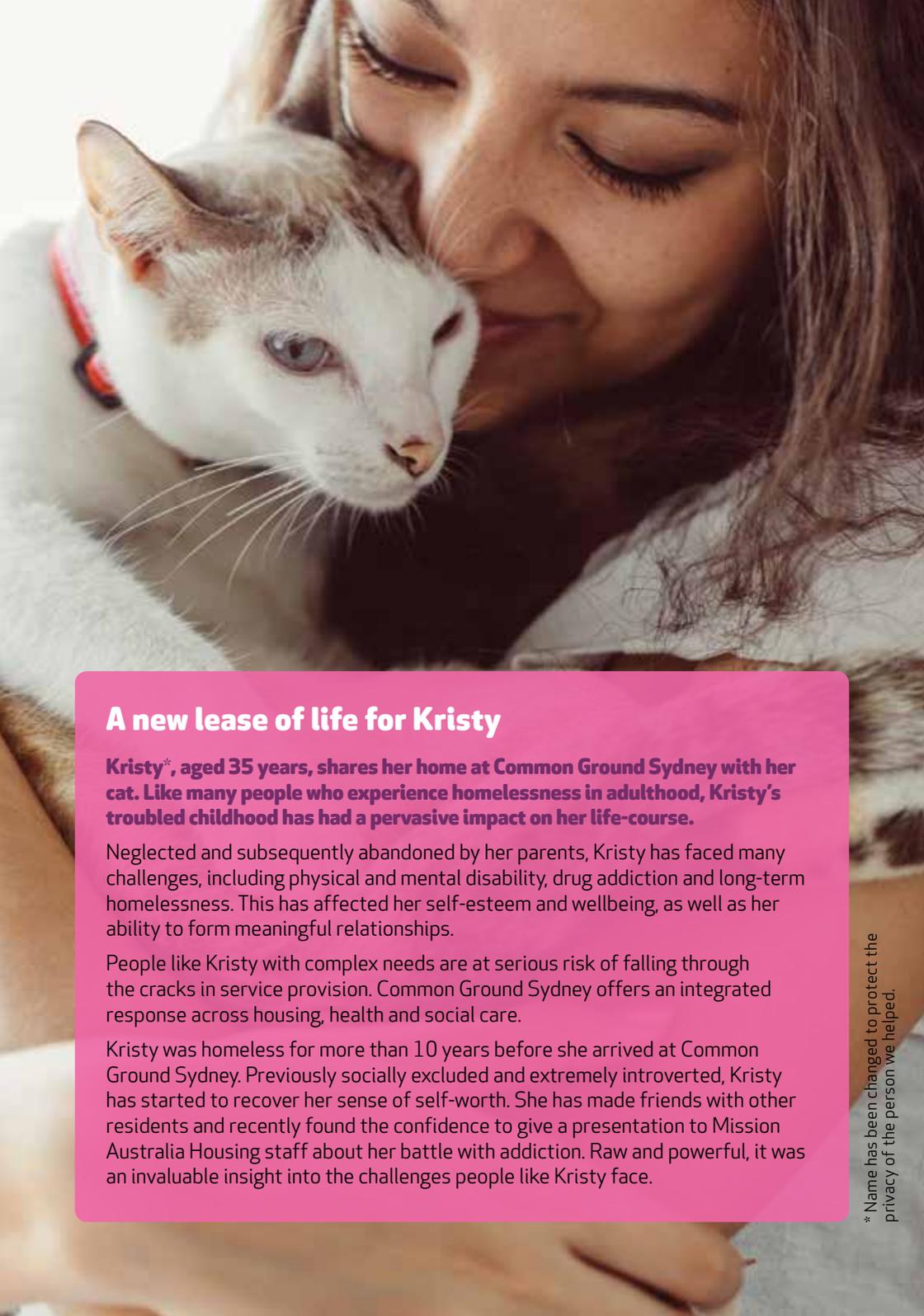
How we do it (cont)

Housing first



Social mix





A new lease of life for Kristy

Kristy*, aged 35 years, shares her home at Common Ground Sydney with her cat. Like many people who experience homelessness in adulthood, Kristy's troubled childhood has had a pervasive impact on her life-course.

Neglected and subsequently abandoned by her parents, Kristy has faced many challenges, including physical and mental disability, drug addiction and long-term homelessness. This has affected her self-esteem and wellbeing, as well as her ability to form meaningful relationships.

People like Kristy with complex needs are at serious risk of falling through the cracks in service provision. Common Ground Sydney offers an integrated response across housing, health and social care.

Kristy was homeless for more than 10 years before she arrived at Common Ground Sydney. Previously socially excluded and extremely introverted, Kristy has started to recover her sense of self-worth. She has made friends with other residents and recently found the confidence to give a presentation to Mission Australia Housing staff about her battle with addiction. Raw and powerful, it was an invaluable insight into the challenges people like Kristy face.

* Name has been changed to protect the privacy of the person we helped.

How we do it (cont)

Outcomes for tenants

Of the 62 units made available for Formerly Long Term Homeless or Priority Social Housing tenants:

- 108 tenants within this group have been housed since 2009
- 58 have been in their property for over 12 months (93% sustained tenancies over 12 months)
- 47 tenants have vacated due to medical reasons, internal transfers to more suitable accommodation or have passed away
- 11 of these tenants identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- 30 tenants from this group were the first to move into their unit after the building opened and have sustained their tenancies for over 4 years. The average length of homelessness is 13 years

Outcomes for Sydney

- Reduction in long term homelessness in Sydney
- Improved tenant health status
- Increased access to mainstream services
- Broad community development

Average length of homelessness

for tenants at Common Ground Sydney is **13** years 

30 formerly homeless tenants

have sustained tenancies for over **4** years 

Over the past 5 years

93% of tenants have sustained tenancies longer than 12 months 

Meet Rufus

Rufus adopted Common Ground Sydney staff after the severe NSW storms in 2015. Rufus entertains staff and tenants alike, greeting visitors on arrival with a screech. An incidental doorbell, he also seems to think he is the resident office security guard!

Mission Australia Housing understands the attachment many people have to their pets and how important companion animals can be to the health and wellbeing of people and their journey to recovery.

Words from our tenants:

"I love living here! I love and appreciate all the services you offer, especially at Common Ground. Hats off to all of the wonderful staff here!"

Annual Tenant Survey, 2016

"Great team overall, very courteous and helpful. Always with a ready smile and great attitude."

"Overall, an amazing service so far as housing goes."



Rosemaree McGuinness, Building Manager
Common Ground Sydney with Rufus.
Photo by Kecia O'Sullivan

**Mission Australia
works together with
Australians in need,
helping them move
towards independence**

Contact us

For further information please contact
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we stand