

Case study

HART 4000: a recipe for collaboration and synergy

A new model for delivering services reduces pressure on homeless people in Brisbane but highlights the challenge of moving from crisis responses to long-term solutions.

Summary

HART 4000 is a consortium of Brisbane-based welfare and community development agencies that collaborate to provide multiple access points for homeless people seeking help. A coordination team provides case coordination and homeless people can receive help from a variety of agencies without having to travel from service to service repeating their story and request. The consortium's goal is to focus on sustainable outcomes and tenancies; a challenge when faced with the extent of day-to-day need presented by the 891 people who used HART 4000 in its first 11 months of operation.

Partners

The founding HART 4000 consortium consists of:

- New Farm Neighbourhood Centre (including TAASQ Inner North)
- Brisbane Youth Service (BYS)
- West End Community House (including TAASQ Inner South)
- Wesley Mission Brisbane
- Inner Northern Community Housing, and
- Better Housing Projects Association.

Background

The model proposed by the consortium and funded by the Queensland Government is defined by:

- multiple access points for homeless people via consortium members
- new levels of coordination:
 - a centrally located coordination team ensuring assertive approaches to case coordination and gathering a variety of visiting services including legal, health, hygiene, storage and housing provider services
 - a coordination team that maintains links with a broad network of housing providers in the interest of homeless people and their diverse needs
 - compatibility across the consortium in relation to assessment, crisis intervention and case planning, and
- the optimal use of existing resources and synergy between consortium members.

The service delivery model features:

- a case management model focused on sustainable outcomes and tenancies
- consortium member agencies with a track record of working with people facing homelessness
- housing providers that contribute bed nights and transitional housing to HART 4000
- strong partnerships with existing service providers to enhance client outcomes

- strong advocacy in relation to homelessness issues and a contribution to the development of other initiatives across the state, and
- close work with the Micah hub in Brisbane's inner south to coordinate the allocation of brokerage dollars and complementary service delivery.

In the consortium's first 11 months of operation there were 1727 contacts with 891 homeless people. On average, each client was seen two or three times while 160 clients were provided with ongoing support with more than 10 contacts.

One third of incoming referrals came from the consortium members and a quarter of referrals for service were made to consortium members, predominantly for tenancy advice, group work and community meals. Half of the referrals made to other services resulted in a positive outcome, such as housing provided or other service accessed. The 260 referrals to non-consortium agencies revealed their inability to provide a service (e.g. full case loads or no resources available).

Brokerage funds are available to meet financial needs that contribute to homelessness. The average brokerage provided is \$85 per person, with many clients receiving smaller amounts and some receiving larger amounts, especially regarding rent arrears.

Drivers for collaboration

About three to four years ago various levels of government and the welfare service sector began to recognise that to improve the plight of homeless people, new funding responses were required. It was also acknowledged that housing was not the only issue or solution and that enhanced communication and a coordinated service response with support and housing co-located were preferable solutions.

Throughout this period, the Brisbane City Council championed the homelessness agenda from a social justice and inclusion perspective. Council commissioned research into the homelessness and housing situation in Brisbane. Its *Finding Beds Report* (YEAR) provided recommendations about access to crisis beds, support services and the need for enhanced communication across the non-government and government sectors. This research provided an incentive within the sector to consider support options for homeless people and prompted a hope that change was possible.

The collaboration story

Discussions about the development of the HART 4000 model were facilitated within several community forums, including the Inner City Place Project's Affordable Housing and Homelessness Working Party, the Peaks and Partners forum (a Brisbane City Council initiative) and other community housing and Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) networks. New Farm Neighbourhood Centre (NFNC), Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) and West End Community House (WECH) provided led the discussions. When the Queensland Government announced the tender for a homeless information and referral hub, a creative, strong working link already existed between these services.

Organisations were linked by a shared history of responding to the needs of homeless people, for example, dealing with the effects of boarding house

closures and helping with the New Farm Park trial of basic public facilities for homeless people. It was apparent that consortium members were like-minded about gaps in service provision, and had a similar vision for innovative responses.

These agencies' relationship led to the idea of a high-quality, integrated and coordinated service model with multiple entry points for homeless people of all ages, initially for inner Brisbane and, eventually, on a statewide basis.

Other multi-agency homelessness initiatives were considered, particularly Rough Sleepers in central London and Common Ground in New York City. Both initiatives were successful because of their multi-agency status and their use of integrated service delivery, including the development and provision of housing (temporary and permanent), employment and training programs, health care services and volunteer programs.

Consortium members noted that service responses north and south of the Brisbane River were being polarised, so an inner-city service model with multiple access points for all homeless people was preferred. It was envisaged the consortium would add value to the HART 4000 Coordination Team's work with:

- early intervention and housing advocacy through the Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Services (TAAS) based at both NFNC and WECH
- a focus on young people, as well as a medical clinic, expertise in locating accommodation, a young parent support group, an activities program and outreach through BYS
- social supports through WECH, NFNC and BYS
- housing options through Better Housing Projects and Inner Northern Community Housing, bringing additional bed nights from the community housing sector for homeless persons, with the support of partnership agreements and individual support plans with the HART 4000 Coordinating Team
- the resources of a large church-based organisation through Wesley Mission Brisbane with an existing inner-city homelessness mission and emergency relief service. Wesley Mission also offered CBD office space with the opportunity to access volunteers for related initiatives
- a community development focus and a central location in the inner south of the service region through WECH
- a willing and capable manager of the service through NFNC. NFNC was seen as the 'right fit' because of its long commitment to helping homeless people, its established open-house and outreach activity, as well as a management committee with a strong grasp of the issues of homeless service provision.

The HART 4000 Consortium's goal was to provide holistic support, enhance existing relationships, provide extra resources to homeless people and build social capital. Each consortium representative was responsible for briefing their management committees and maintaining their agency's commitment to the project. The commitment of each agency's management was seen as critical to the success or failure of the bid.

Tools and strategies for collaboration

HART 4000's collaborative approach is distinguished by:

- a clear governance model. The consortium is governed by project management group with clearly defined terms of reference. The project management group is a sub-committee of the NFNC management committee which is ultimately accountable for the service. The group meets monthly — or more often if required— and each consortium agency is represented, as is the HART 4000 coordinator. The group's development plan includes a 'critical friend', an Indigenous mentor, a client representative and a funding body representative. The first critical friend is in place. The appointment of an Indigenous mentor is being negotiated through the HART 4000 indigenous key support worker. A client representative will be appointed from among clients serviced in the first year of operation. A standing invitation has been issued to the Queensland Department of Communities community support officer as a funding body representative, with agreement that attendance is on an as-needed basis.
- a clear service delivery model. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) which was agreed to in the first few months of operation and signed by all consortium partners, and
- a mission statement: 'achieving positive and sustainable changes for homeless people' well-established relationships and a shared understanding of homelessness between consortium partners, and partnership agreements with key agencies such as housing providers.

Outcomes

HART 4000 has forged new ways of collaborating between key inner-Brisbane community services. Clients have benefited from the coordinated approach to needs assessment and a simplified approach to referrals for resources. This has reduced the need for homeless people to travel from agency to agency, repeating their story each time. It has also enhanced HART 4000's flexibility in approaches to practice.

Both the consortium's housing providers, Inner North Community Housing and Better Housing Projects Association, say they have a greater understanding of the overall service needs of a challenging group of their clients, and both have developed programs outside of the HART 4000 consortium that provide a continuum of support for these clients, whom they also refer to the consortium partners with confidence. In this sense, the consortium concept also worked in reverse: the individual agencies grew their core business and enhanced their service delivery as a result of collaboration.

Success factors

The consortium is a success because:

- it is a unified force committed to providing a quality service and making a difference in partnership with homeless people in Brisbane
- of its robust planning processes, underpinned by a strong evidence base for the model being provided
- it is based on a multi-agency understanding of a multi-dimensional issue
- potential conflicts between consortium partners are being identified early and honestly
- policies and procedures were developed early in the process and well before the service began operation

- physical locations of consortium partners — inner south, inner north and CBD —ensure the consortium benefits from each agency's local knowledge and connections
- members share strong social justice values that uphold the dignity and respect due to homeless people
- it develops culturally appropriate responses for Indigenous community members, enhanced through the involvement of a specialist indigenous key support worker
- consortium members provide expert advice
- it provides comprehensive information to homeless people, the community sector and key parties
- Wesley House's location is co-located with the *Big Issue*, providing access to work opportunities and an existing volunteer base. The consortium also involves the Albert Street Homelessness Ministry and the emergency relief service, and
- WECH and NFNC's community development activities enable the coordination team to meet with homeless people in a non-threatening way in the place they live via early morning outreach, training, group work or community meals.

The State Government funded two homeless service hubs —Brisbane Homelessness Service Centre (Micah Projects) and the Homelessness Assessment and Referral Team (HART 4000)— in Brisbane's inner city, with shared boundaries and constituencies. The HART 4000 staff team is in regular contact with Micah hub staff, to ensure appropriate responses for homeless people who are accessing both services. The hubs also collaborate on special projects and responses. Staff of both hubs meet to share findings and plan joint intervention strategies. An MOU has proved an effective tool for collaboration, while keeping this essential working relationship positive and open involves ongoing commitment.

Maintaining positive working relationships with all key services, such as accommodation, legal and health services is critical to sustain the referral options the hubs can provide. The imperative to work positively with all service providers underpins HART 4000 consortium members' work with government, community and church agencies.

Challenges

Use of brokerage funds

HART 4000's approach to brokerage funds use is aimed at sustaining existing and new tenancies and support arrangements, rather than supplementing an emergency relief welfare response.

Seeing many people for one-off assistance was never HART 4000's aim but demand has outreached the capacity for response. HART 4000 provides a coalface crisis response to homeless people; however staff have worked hard to create and maintain relationships within a case management framework.

Links with other services

HART 4000 sees itself as part of a government policy and program response to the effects of homelessness. The two Brisbane hubs were the first services established as part of the rollout of the Queensland Government's Responding to Homelessness Strategy. They have formed the foundation for the establishment

of other responses such as hubs outside of Brisbane, Roma House in Brisbane, Homeless Persons Information Queensland, the Homeless Health Outreach Team and the Court Diversion program. The links with these new responses, as well as existing services, will be a significant factor in the hubs' success in achieving positive and sustainable changes for homeless people.

Government policies and programs

Broader government policies and programs also effect HART 4000's options to address homelessness with clients. Some may involve new challenges. Examples include the implementation of new 'move on' powers in all Queensland public spaces; public access to addictive substances and gaming; government spending priorities for public housing and other affordable housing stock and for community-based services for substance abusers and people with a disability and mental health issues; and the implementation of the One Social Housing System creating easier access to services but also a possibility that some clients are excluded from services altogether.

Competitive tendering processes

Competitive tendering processes in an environment where community agencies are being encouraged by the Queensland Department of Communities to form service delivery partnerships can present a challenge. There are also no additional resources for the development and coordination of these partnerships, ultimately creating unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved within overstretched community organisational infrastructure.

Adding value to Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services

One challenge for homeless information and referral hubs is to offer a service that adds value to the work of the existing Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. This is important in an environment where the sector has had increasing volume and complexity of demand from families and vulnerable individuals, but no real increase in funding for many years. It is important that people at risk of homelessness and the sector as a whole consider they are benefiting from the new commitment of funds towards responding to homelessness.

The future

The Wesley Mission building is due for demolition in 2007. HART 4000's new location will be an important aspect of its ability to provide accessible services.

In future, HART 4000 will concentrate on ongoing relationships with people at risk of homelessness to sustain tenancies and remain connected to their community. This will enable people to address underlying issues that have contributed to either episodic or chronic homelessness.

For more information

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