

## **Commonweal Housing and Catch22 Peer Landlord Scheme Evaluation**

### **The nature of the peer landlord scheme**

The peer landlord scheme provides an innovative and supportive approach to housing for young people. Houses are jointly occupied by three or four young people, one of whom is assigned the role of 'peer landlord'. The peer landlord has the responsibility of offering support to other tenants, as well as overseeing the smooth functioning of the household on a day-to-day basis.

### **How does the peer landlord scheme add value?**

Young tenants in the peer landlord scheme are likely to have more in common with young peer landlords than with the professional key workers involved in other supported housing schemes. Because of this – and due to the increased level of contact that peer landlords and tenants have by virtue of their living together – peer landlords are well placed to provide support and guidance to tenants. This might consist of help and advice around issues such as employment and benefits applications and timely payment of rent.

The scheme provides peer landlords and tenants with experience of living in shared housing, which in turn provides good foundations for future living arrangements which might include further shared accommodation. In particular, the scheme enables peer landlords to develop transferable skills, such as communication, negotiation, engagement and conflict resolution skills. These are valuable general life skills, but might be especially useful in terms of securing future education and employment opportunities.

### **What kind of person makes a good peer landlord?**

One of the main factors contributing the success or failure of the peer landlord scheme is the suitability of the young person to the role of peer landlord. It is important for a peer landlord to have an appropriate degree of maturity, professionalism and confidence in order to fulfil the function of a peer landlord. In this regard, someone with a recent record of engagement with education or employment is likely to be best suited to the role.

Existing tenants with a positive history on the peer landlord scheme might be particularly well suited for progression to the role of peer landlord.

### **What kind of young person is suitable as a tenant?**

Tenants should be young people who have already made relatively good progress in their transition toward adulthood and independence. In other words, those who require intensive support around issues such as mental health or substance abuse are unlikely to be suitable for the scheme. Ideally, tenants should be those who are engaging in education or employment, and have clear plans for their future e.g. around future move-on accommodation.

## **What tools do we use to identify both peer landlords and tenants?**

Referrals for peer landlords and tenants are made by professionals in Catch22 and other relevant agencies. These people are interviewed to ascertain their suitability for the peer landlord scheme. In order for this process to work successfully, good communication should be made with referral agencies, because these agencies will have useful information about the young person who is being referred.

Interviews should include relevant methods of assessing suitability, such as conflict resolution exercises, and questions about key issues relating to shared housing. Wherever possible, existing tenants and peer landlords ought to be involved in the recruitment of replacement tenants when a young person moves on to further accommodation.

## **What have we learnt from this project and how will we apply this learning?**

### *Appropriate selection of peer landlords and tenants*

During the initial phase of the peer landlord scheme, pressure to fill accommodation resulted in a somewhat hasty appointment of peer landlords and tenants. With hindsight, these young people may not have been the most suitable candidates for participation in the scheme. Moving forward it is important that a well-structured recruitment process is established and followed.

One tenant in particular was upset that she had been placed in a three person household, in which the other two tenants had been good friends before the tenancy – this meant that she found it difficult to socialise with the other two residents, which led to her feeling isolated.

### *Training & clear expectations*

There was a general acknowledgement that peer landlords had not received appropriate training. Tenants in particular felt that peer landlords did little more than the tenants themselves in terms of the day-to-day management of the household, e.g. paying bills and arranging household repairs.

A formalised system of training should be established so that peer landlords are clear about their roles and develop the capability to fulfil these roles adequately. At the start of their tenancy, tenants need to be made fully aware of the role of peer landlords, in order to effectively manage their expectations and ensure that they can make the most of the support on offer from peer landlords. In particular, it would be useful for tenants and peer landlords to have an initial household meeting to discuss key issues around household management and responsibilities, followed by regular (e.g. monthly) household meetings to discuss any relevant issues. Professionals from Catch22 should also attend these household meetings whenever possible.

### *Disputes: the need for appropriate structures and support*

One of the main problems raised by the peer landlord scheme was around rent arrears. While peer landlords seemed comfortable in offering support and advice to tenants on issues such as education and employment, they were reluctant to engage with tenants around money issues. This resulted in some tenants falling into significant rent arrears.

A clear and structured approach should be created toward the payment of rent. For example, if a tenant misses a specified number of rent payments, this should trigger a conversation between the peer landlord and the tenant regarding the creation of a realistic payment plan. If this fails to rectify the problem by the time of the next rent payment, the peer landlord should make contact with the relevant professional in Catch22, who in turn should contact the tenant to discuss the issue. If the problem remains unresolved at this point, a formal response may be necessary, e.g. warning letters and the possible threat of eviction.

A graded system of support and sanctions – to be initiated soon after a problem of rent arrears has arisen – provides a good way of addressing this issue. Such a system ought to be covered in the training process for peer landlords. Moreover, tenants should be made aware of the procedures around rent payment at the outset of their tenancy, so that they are clear about what is expected of them.

### *Utilising peer landlords*

Whilst it is important that peer landlords are fully utilised in the scheme – i.e. that they are the main source of support for tenants, as well as the primary individuals responsible for the smooth functioning of the household – it is also important that they feel they can fall back on the support of Catch22 professionals when appropriate. To date it seems that peer landlords have negotiated a good balance between addressing issues themselves and calling on the support of professionals, with the exception of issues around rent arrears. Establishing the types of situation which require the support of professionals in Catch22 is another issue that should be covered during peer landlord training.