

# For squeezed-out renters, a place to call home

A PHOTOGRAPH of John Lennon became the catalyst to a friendship that has blossomed since two women moved in next door to each other at a housing village in New Farm.

Charmaine Idris and Michele Cooper met about six months ago at their new homes in Bowen Court, a vibrant over-55s affordable-housing village.

Michele said she knew her friendship with Charmaine was meant to be as soon as she walked into her neighbour's apartment and saw a picture of John Lennon on the wall.

"Since then we've become very close and supportive friends to one another. We share a love of music, cinema and conversation," Michele said.

Both knew the overwhelming stress and insecurity that can come with inner-city living.

Charmaine, 59, skipped from house to house for years, renting with family members when she could, while Michele, 62, was on the brink of homelessness after divorce and illness eroded her finances.

All that has changed since they moved into the stylish 51-apartment complex at Bowen Terrace, which gives low- and middle-income seniors squeezed out of the inner-city rental market access to affordable housing close to friends

and family, medical services, parks, libraries and public transport.

Queensland not-for-profit housing provider BHC and health care provider Blue Care last year spent \$12 million refurbishing and upgrading the apartments to include a range of accessibility features and several communal areas.

For Charmaine – whose spine was irreparably damaged in a 1997 knife attack that left her reliant on a wheelchair and cane for mobility – her new home has brought independence and security for the first time in years.

"My life is built around friends and activities in the inner-city, but having a disability and little income makes it very difficult to even find a home I can afford, let alone have my application accepted," she said.

"If it wasn't for these apartments, I'm not sure where I would be, it's as simple as that; I never realised there were developments like this in such a sought-after area."

As well as a strong sense of community, residents also benefit from excellent security. The complex is fully gated, has an onsite manager and a resident PIN code system for unit access.

It has 17 car parking spaces, charging stations for electric



BEST OF FRIENDS – Charmaine and Michele hit it off immediately when they became neighbours at Bowen Terrace.

scooters, mobility storage, community room with TV and kitchenette, herb garden and barbecue area.

BHC chief executive David Cantsaid he was delighted the partnership was enabling seniors to continue being a vital part of the community and not to be pushed out of the inner-city due to rising rents.

Michele and Charmaine are now looking to expand the social life in the complex, including regular DVD nights

and afternoon games days.

"When you've experienced the uncertainty of not having a place to call home, you really appreciate it when you do find yourself in a situation that's settled, safe and secure," Michele said.

There are still vacancies at Bowen Court for tenants who are over 55 and eligible under the National Rental Affordability Scheme.

■ BHC 3307-3000, www.bhcl.com.au

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