

MEDIA RELEASE

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CUPCAKE CREATIONS HIT SWEET SPOT FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMUNITY

A bumper delivery of cupcakes is the icing on the cake for a group of tenants taking part in an award-winning self-development program at a Brisbane affordable housing development.

The year-long tenant engagement program provides networking, life skills and access to support services for the residents of the eight-storey Bonney Lane development in Fortitude Valley, owned by not-for-profit affordable housing company, BHC.

The weekly program reflects BHC's goal to not only provide affordable housing for homeless people, but also access to a network of vital community agencies that help enhance tenants' quality of life.

Brisbane cake designer and owner of The Flour Girl Sherie Harper was so moved after hearing the personal stories of the tenants involved in the program, she decided to bake 200 cupcakes for the Bonney Lane residential community.

"I had the radio on in my car and heard about this program and how it was helping people overcome obstacles like homelessness and enabling some residents to recover from alcohol and drug abuse," Ms Harper said.

"It doesn't take much to have a lapse in judgement or find yourself on a different life path. I know how quickly your life can take a totally different direction and I wanted to do one small thing to help."

Earlier this month the program won an Excellence in Tenant Engagement and Social Inclusion award at the 2014 PowerHousing Australia Exchange.

BHC Business Development Manager Rebecca Oelkers said the program – which resulted from a partnership with homelessness, housing and community agency consortium Under 1 Roof – had touched many lives and had resulted from a partnership.

"With BHC's Bonney Lane development, we decided to trial an outreach program which would help tenants gain access to a variety of support services and programs to help improve their quality of life," Ms Oelkers said.

"But this program has gone one step further than that, offering a range of social and recreational opportunities such as weekly cooking lessons, craft workshops, a book exchange and excursions throughout southeast Queensland.

Ms Oelkers said the program, led by community development co-ordinator Deb Jones from the New Farm Neighbourhood Centre, had changed lives.

“The feedback from Deb Jones and the tenants has been fantastic,” Ms Oelkers said.

“The program is helping to break down barriers: people feel less isolated when they have a network of support and are able to share problems and discuss their life goals.

“We have tenants at Bonney Lane who have reconnected with their families, or are now studying for new career paths, because they finally have safe and secure housing and have the right support systems in place.”

Ms Oelkers said BHC was hoping to implement the tenant engagement model at other BHC affordable housing developments.

“We know that this supportive housing model makes a big difference to tenant well-being. It increases the likelihood of people sustaining their tenancies and ultimately, being able to give back to society,” Ms Oelkers said.

BHC has the largest wholly-owned, purpose-built affordable housing portfolio in Queensland, providing specialist property and tenancy management services through a dedicated operations team.

Since its inception in 2002, BHC has helped more than 3000 households into more than 1500 brand new homes, across 35 key growth locations throughout Brisbane.

CAPTION: (L-R) Bonney Lane tenant Jill, cake designer Sherie Harper, and BHC's Rebecca Oelkers get ready to enjoy a cupcake in honour of BHC's award-winning tenant engagement program.

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