

MEDIA RELEASE

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INNER-CITY FRIENDSHIPS FLOURISH IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR OVER-55s

Best friends Charmaine Idris and Michele Cooper didn't know each other six months ago, although they were both familiar with the overwhelming stress and insecurity that comes with inner-city Brisbane's skyrocketing rents.

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

Now the pair has established an enduring life-long friendship as the first residents in a vibrant over-55s affordable housing village in the heart of New Farm – possibly one of the area's most diverse seniors community.

The 51-apartment complex at 405 Bowen Terrace gives low and middle-income seniors squeezed out of the tight inner-city rental market access to affordable housing close to friends and family, medical services and public transport.

Queensland not-for-profit housing provider BHC and health care provider Blue Care last year spent \$12 million dollars significantly 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," Charmaine 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."

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.

“We’ve both been through tough times so it’s a wonderful to have a friend who can really empathise with that.”

Charmaine regularly swims in the local pool and uses the CityCat to travel to TAFE Queensland where she is a volunteer English as a Second Language tutor for students from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

She said all of her fellow residents were sympathetic, patient and compassionate.

“Not long ago I had a fall in the middle of the night and the next day my neighbour gave me her number and told me to call any time, day or night, if I need help,” Charmaine said.

BHC CEO David Cant said he was delighted the partnership with Blue Care was enabling seniors to continue being a vital part of the community.

“People who have been an active part of their community for many years shouldn’t be pushed out of the inner-city due to rising rents,” Mr Cant said.

“This is their home as well – often where their friends and family are – and where they make a valuable contribution by supporting local businesses and community groups.

“BHC couldn’t be happier that such a diverse and liveable community has emerged since the Bowen Terrace apartments were renovated last year.”

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.

“I can’t tell you how good that feels.”

Apartments are currently available for rent at Bowen Terrace – for more information contact BHC on 07 3307 3000.

CAPTION: *After years on the brink of homelessness, besties Charmaine (left) and Michele have turned the corner through affordable housing provider BHC.*

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