

Submission into supported accommodation: please maintain Jackson's funding so he can continue his good life.

Author: Sally Richards OAM

I am writing this submission on behalf of my adult son Jackson West.

Background

My son, Jackson West, is the third of 4 sons born to me and my husband Mac West (deceased). He was born on 1st January 1986; he will be 36 years old in 2022.

Jackson has Phelan-McDermid Syndrome which is a deletion of part of the 22nd chromosome resulting in profound intellectual disability.

In Jackson this manifests as a young man who:

- Is completely dependent on others for his every need and want
- Is non-verbal – has no expressive or receptive language
- Is doubly incontinent
- Has severe and unpredictable sleep disturbance
- Has no concept of danger or safety
- Has no ability to entertain himself – eg he doesn't watch TV or have any toy or device he can use or activity that he can do on his own.
- Has no ability to protect himself from others, cry for help or attract attention if he is being attacked or hurt – this has happened several times in his life
- Has had several serious and life-threatening illnesses
- Is immune-compromised
- Has bi-polar disorder
- Has visual migraines
- Is in danger of being neglected to the point of collapse and illness – this has also happened several times in his life because people who don't know him well do not know what he needs and when he needs it – even something as basic as a drink of water.

Jackson's disability created enormous pressure and stress on us as a family. His father, Mac, had bi-polar disorder and committed suicide on 2nd June 2009. Jackson did not cause his father's suicide; however the unrelenting difficulty of caring for Jackson and the uncertainty about his future no doubt contributed to Mac's unstable mental health and was instrumental in Mac deciding that life was not worth living.

I was Jackson's sole carer for four years after Mac died. I continued to care for him at home, earn a living and pursue supported accommodation for him during those years.

His three brothers all live interstate and cannot provide any physical support to me or to him.

The Long Road to Jackson's Home

On the 13th June 2002 (that's 19 years ago) another mother, Karen, and I started the work to secure Jackson and Dan (Karen's son) a home of their own. Jackson was 16 years old at the time. 11 years later he moved into Benambra Intentional Community in Phillip ACT.

During those 11 years up to the turning of the sod I went to more than 114 meetings with bureaucrats, disability workers, disability organisation, politicians, architects.

Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, who was the Governor-General at the time, opened Benambra. The ACT Chief Minister of the day, Ms Katy Gallagher, attended and spoke at the opening. There were 200 attendees at the opening including everyone who had played a part in creating and establishing this innovative complex where Jackson lives.

Karen and I gave many presentations interstate and within the ACT about Benambra, the philosophy and how it works.

Everyone who hears about Benambra or visits Benambra is impressed at the lives our sons have. No-one can imagine a better life for Jackson and Dan. Or a better residential community.

*Further information about Benambra is included in **references 1, 2 and 3** below (references 1 and 2 are included as part of this PDF and reference 3 is a link to the Benambra website).*

Current situation

Jackson West has been living in his own home for over 8 years since he was 27 years old. He moved into the Benambra Intentional Community in May 2013. He is the head tenant of his Housing ACT home.

Remarkably, he has lived with the same co-resident, Adam, ever since he moved in. He is surrounded by a stable, reliable team of supporters who treat him with dignity and respect. He, his co-resident and his support team are superbly supported by Hartley Lifecare Inc.

His life is wonderful. He has a job, he has activities, he contributes to the ACT business community, he volunteers, he is surrounded by people who put him squarely at the centre of his own life.

His life today represents **19 years** of work, commitment, tenacity, vision, creativity, partnerships, despair, desperation, hope and optimism.

His life needs to continue as it is.

This model of care clearly works – for him, for his co-resident, for his support staff, for me, for Hartley Lifecare.

Jackson is clearly happy – he has choice and control over who lives with him, who supports him, what his life looks like. He has the reasonable and necessary supports to give him a life rich in home-life, work, experiences, activities, volunteering.

His staff are clearly happy – this is evidenced by the fact that Adam has been there from day 1 and is still there over 8 years later. Also evidenced by the fact that his key support worker has also been there from day 1 and is still there over 8 years later. Also evidenced by the fact that his support staff consistently tell me that they love working at Benambra with Jackson.

I am clearly happy. I finally have a life that is not dominated, controlled and constrained by the needs of Jackson. We have a relationship that more closely resembles the relationship I have with my other sons ie he is living his own best life and we see each other regularly and frequently for meals, catching up, socialising.

Hartley Lifecare is happy with the model and the support. They feel increasingly uncertain as to how they can continue to deliver their high quality service if the NDIS keeps changing the rules, funding and their support of organisations like Hartley.

The Future for Jackson

So 19 years later what can Jackson and we, as a family, expect from the NDIS?

I must say it seems tenuous and uncertain as to how the vagaries of NDIS funding will affect Jackson's home and his life.

And also how it will affect Hartley Lifecare's ability to support Jackson in his own home. Hartley is the best disability organisation I have worked with in the 35 years of Jackson's life. They are exemplary when it comes to listening to the people they support, their staff and their families. They work to the highest standards always. They go above and beyond in their care, professionalism, compassion and flexibility.

In reading the NDIS documents and what they state a person with a disability can expect from the NDIS, it seems as if Jackson would have no difficulty in accessing the level of funding he needs to maintain his home, his life, his supporters.

His living arrangements tick every box. The following are met with diligence, professionalism, care and dignity.

- Help with making decisions like where you want to live and what supports you need to make that happen
- Personal care, including help to shop, cook or pay bills
- Help to set up and manage your own home
- Help to build your independence
- Building and maintaining connection with others
- Help with making day to day decisions
- Support to manage your emotions or behaviour
- Carers who help you on a regular basis
- People who you call to help you when you need it (on-call)
- Training for the people who support you.

Jackson's life is excellent and stable. Jackson is more settled than he has ever been – he started to settle down once he moved into Benambra and this has continued and improved.

His life is calm, routine and predictable. His home is also calm, routine and predictable. His supports are calm, routine and predictable. His life, his home and his supports have been developed around him and for him. All of these contribute to his physical, mental and emotional well-being.

The people who support him know him well. They know how to read his body language, his expressions, his noises, his behaviour. This takes time – a lot of time – and is not to be overlooked or taken lightly.

Jackson's well-being depends on people knowing him very well and being able to interpret all of his movements, expressions and noises.

His well-being depends on continuity of home, support and life.

Benambra Intentional Community

Please read the attached PDF: A Place to Call Home (*reference 1*). It explains the philosophy, the beginnings, the development. It explains what a great place it is for all the residents.

Jackson has a community around him. Most of the people who live in Benambra have been there as long as Jackson. They know him, they care about him, they watch out for him. They create a safe, warm community because they moved there with the philosophy that community is important for everyone.

All the residents in Benambra benefit from living there. All the residents love living there. They all feel safe in this community that cares for and watches out for other community members.

This intentional community was an integral part of the home and life for Jackson and Dan that Karen and I worked on and developed over 11 years. It is part of the continuity of life and support that Jackson needs and is entitled to as an Australian citizen.

Jackson Has a Job

Despite Jackson's profound intellectual disability, he has a job. He has been working as a courier (fully supported of course) for over 13 years. I set up and started JACKmail in 2007 and Jackson has been working in it ever since. JACKmail has never missed a day of delivery despite illness, car crashes, deaths.

Jackson has been an employee and a contributor to the ACT business community for all those years.

Again I think this is remarkable. There is a video about JACKmail below (see *reference 4*).

Me – Jackson’s mother

I have been a disability activist, advocate and innovator for over 3 decades. I received an OAM several years ago for my work in and contribution to the disability community; in particular for my voluntary work in Disability ACT, my work with families, my mentoring others about person-centred business and the work setting up Benambra and a co-residency model of support. I have given a TED talk on building positive lives for people with disabilities; see **reference 5**.

The last few years I have not done as much activism, advocacy and innovation. I thought I could take a break from the relentless work of ensuring my son Jackson had a life, a home, a job, a future that did not depend on my monitoring every political and funding decision.

I thought I had done that.

But it seems like I must once more get active to secure Jackson’s future.

Jackson and I are both asking the NDIS to continue to support him in his home and life and supports. If you cut his funding it will deleterious to him.

What is next?

I would like assurance that Jackson’s life will continue the way it has for the past eight years.

I would like assurance that he, his brothers and I can relax knowing that there will not be an upheaval in his life due to changes in the philosophy of and funding by the NDIS.

I would like a response to this submission.

Thank you for reading my submission.

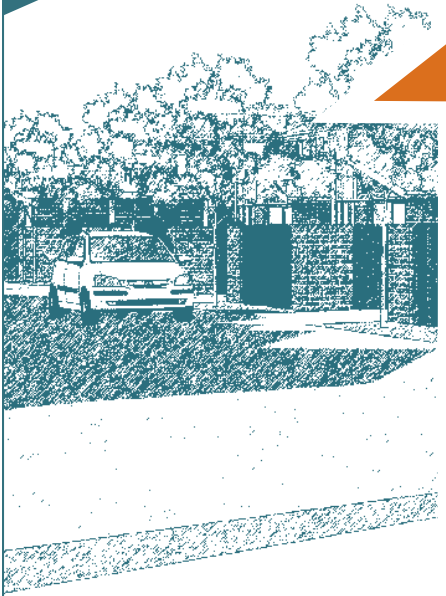
Sally Richards OAM

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References

1. A Place to Call Home: The Story of the Benambra Intentional Community (**PDF of book included with this submission**)
2. Article: Benambra nominated for the 2016 ACT Chief Minister’s Inclusion Awards (**PDF included with this submission**)
3. Benambra Intentional Community Website: <https://www.hartley.org.au/event/benambra-intentional-community/home>
4. A video about JACKmail: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90PQjH7pD1U>
5. Sally’s TED talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmyNZldO7uA>



THE STORY OF THE BENAMBRA
INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

SALLY RICHARDS AND
TIMOTHY WEST

MAY 2014

A PLACE TO CALL
HOME

THE STORY OF THE BENAMBRA INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

Sally Richards and Timothy West

May 2014

Getting a Life Family Governed Group 2014



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Foreword

The Benambra Intentional Community project is a story of love, hope and commitment. It's also about how something wonderful can be achieved when government and community take a risk on an idea and work together to achieve it.

My first involvement with the project came in 2004 when I met with Sally Richards to listen to her idea for her son Jackson to live independently in an environment where his rights were acknowledged and respected. Karen Connaughton and Cheryl Patrick soon joined Sally to create the Getting a Life team — forming a formidable team advocating for a new accommodation arrangement that recognised their three sons' right to not only independent housing but also a home.

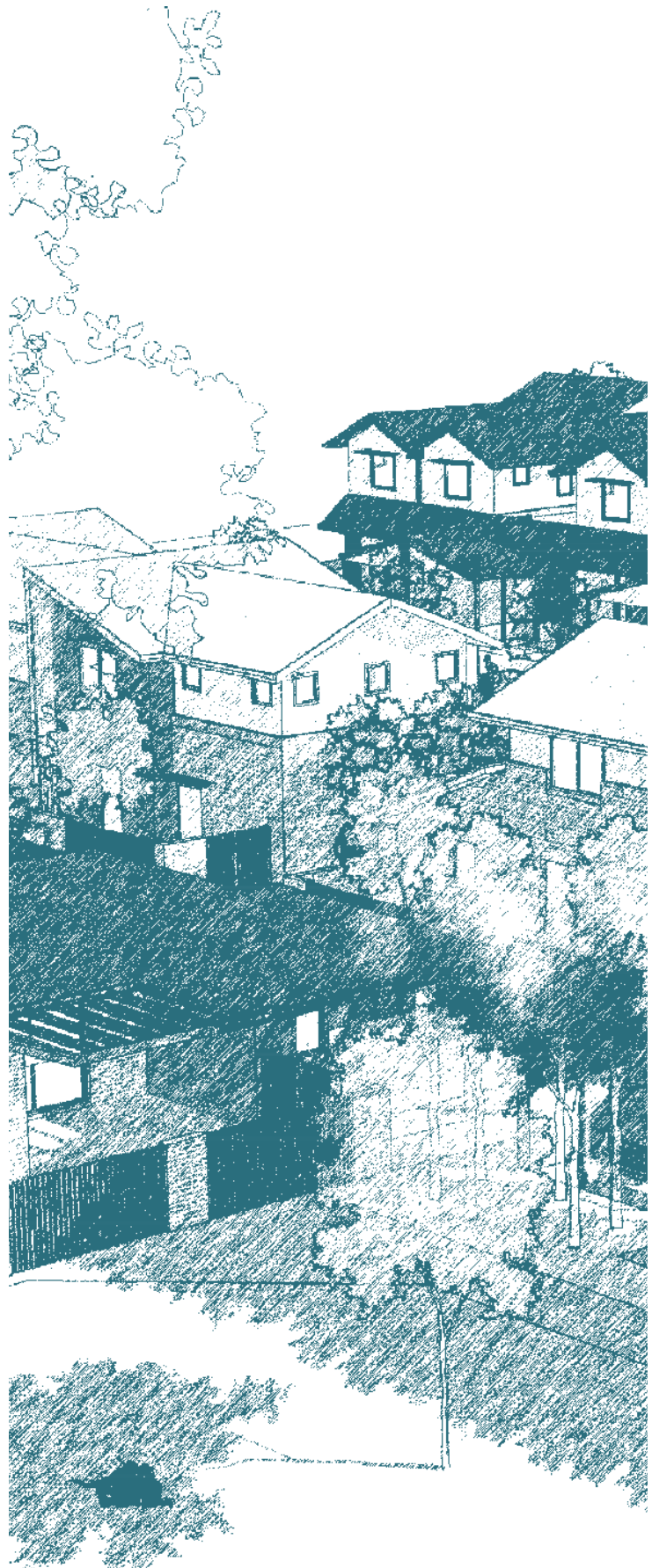
I watched from a distance as these three women campaigned, organised and gathered supporters around them. Everywhere they went the momentum for this project grew. One of the strengths of the Getting a Life (now Benambra) Intentional Community project was that it was developed from the communities that knew and loved Jackson, Ben and Dan. The model wasn't imposed from above, which would have required the young men to fit in, but instead it was crafted around their needs first, thereby giving it the very best chance of success.

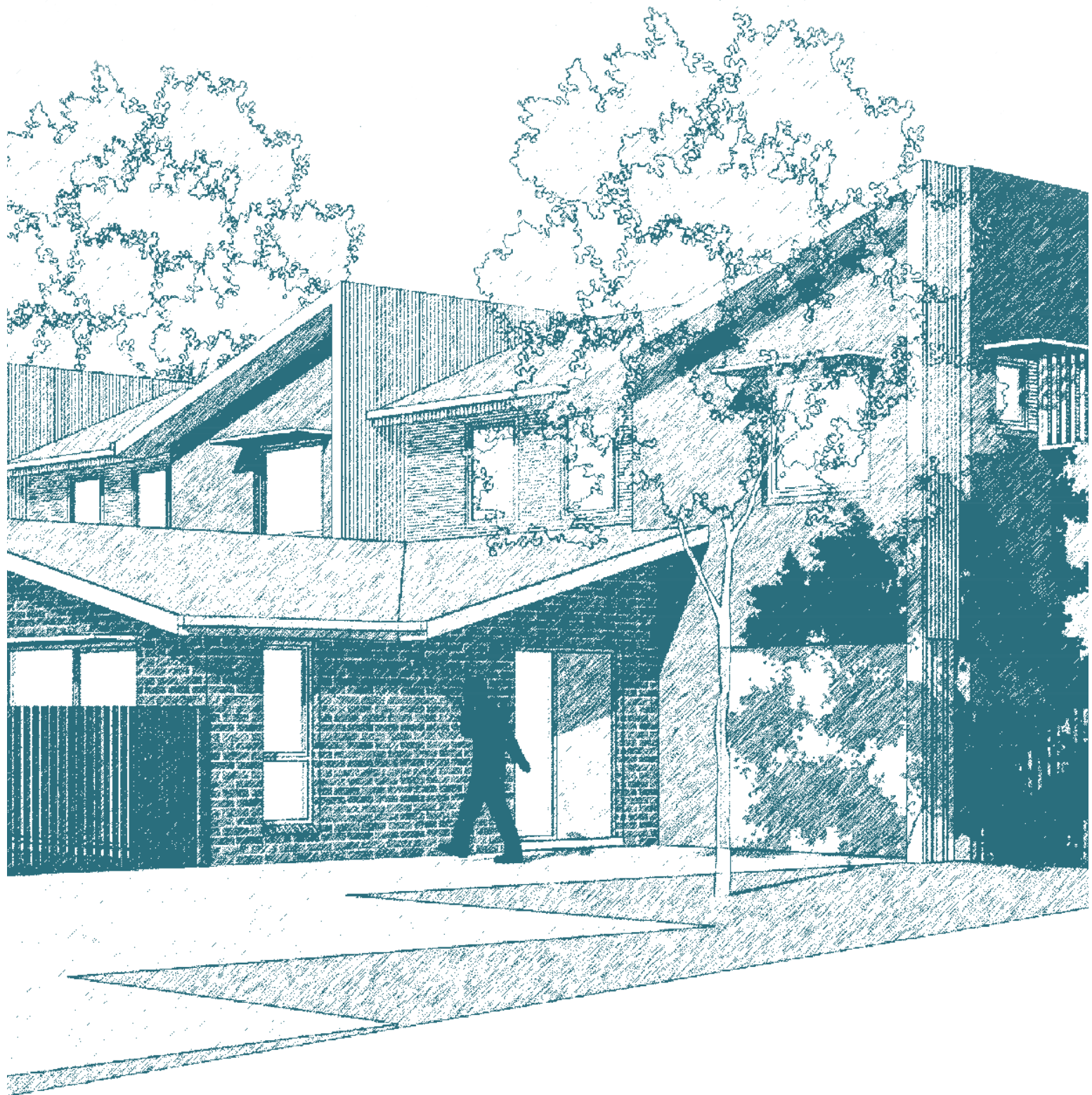
As I watched this project develop over a number of years, culminating in the official opening in 2013 by the Governor-General of Australia, I have been inspired by the families' work and dedication to secure for their sons what many of us take for granted. I've also been heartened by the ability of the oft criticised bureaucracy to work flexibly to deliver a new way of supporting families and people with a disability. The partnerships made with the nongovernment sector, in particular Hartley Lifecare, have also been essential to the overall success of the project.

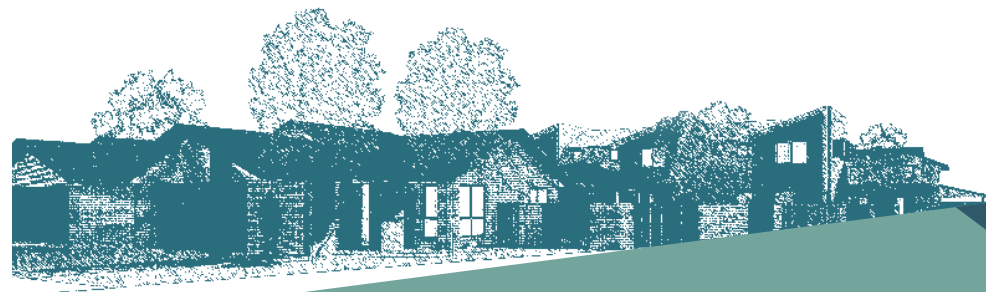
This project stands as a shining example of what can happen when good people work together to create for three young men what sustains us all — a home and a community.



Katy Gallagher MLA
Chief Minister
ACT Legislative Assembly







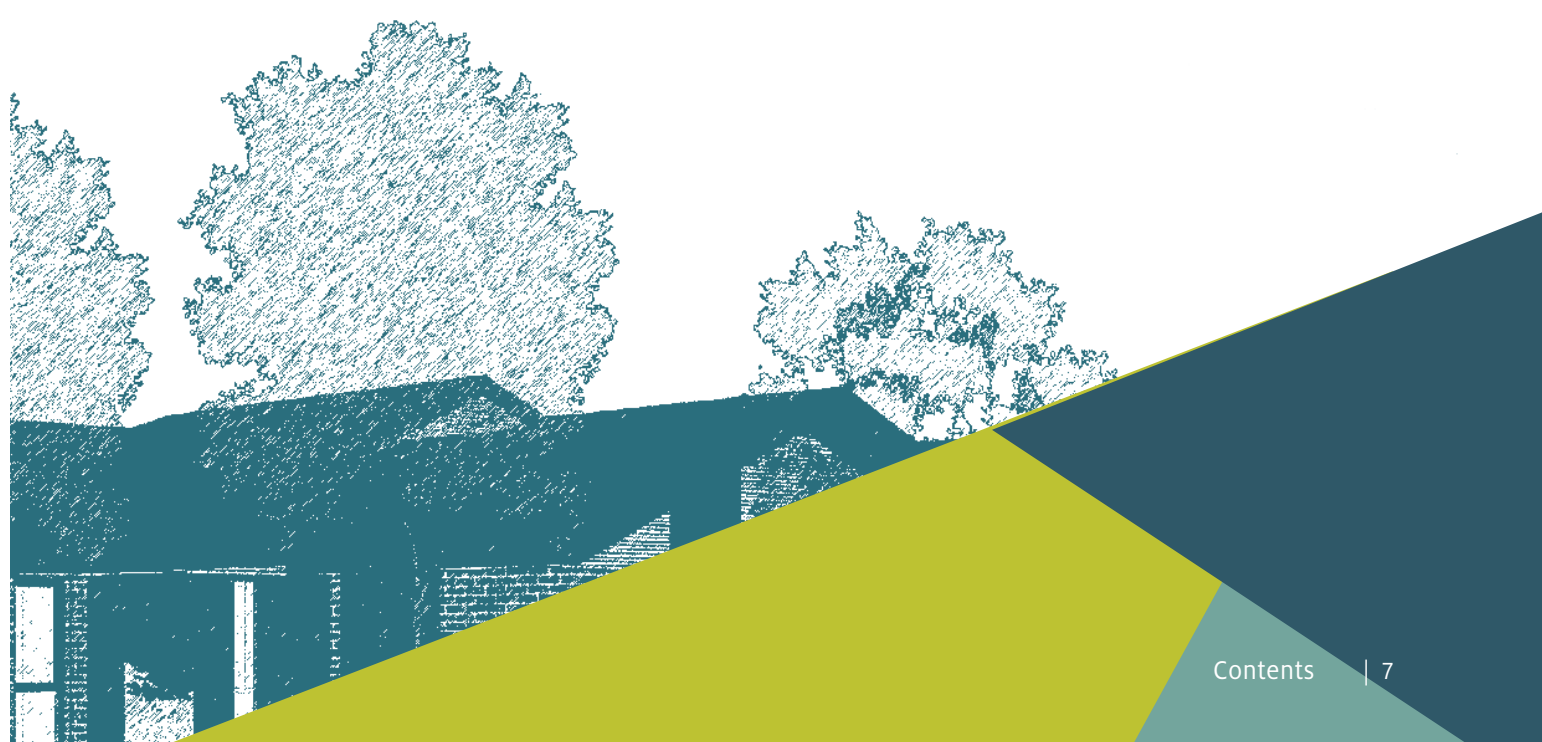
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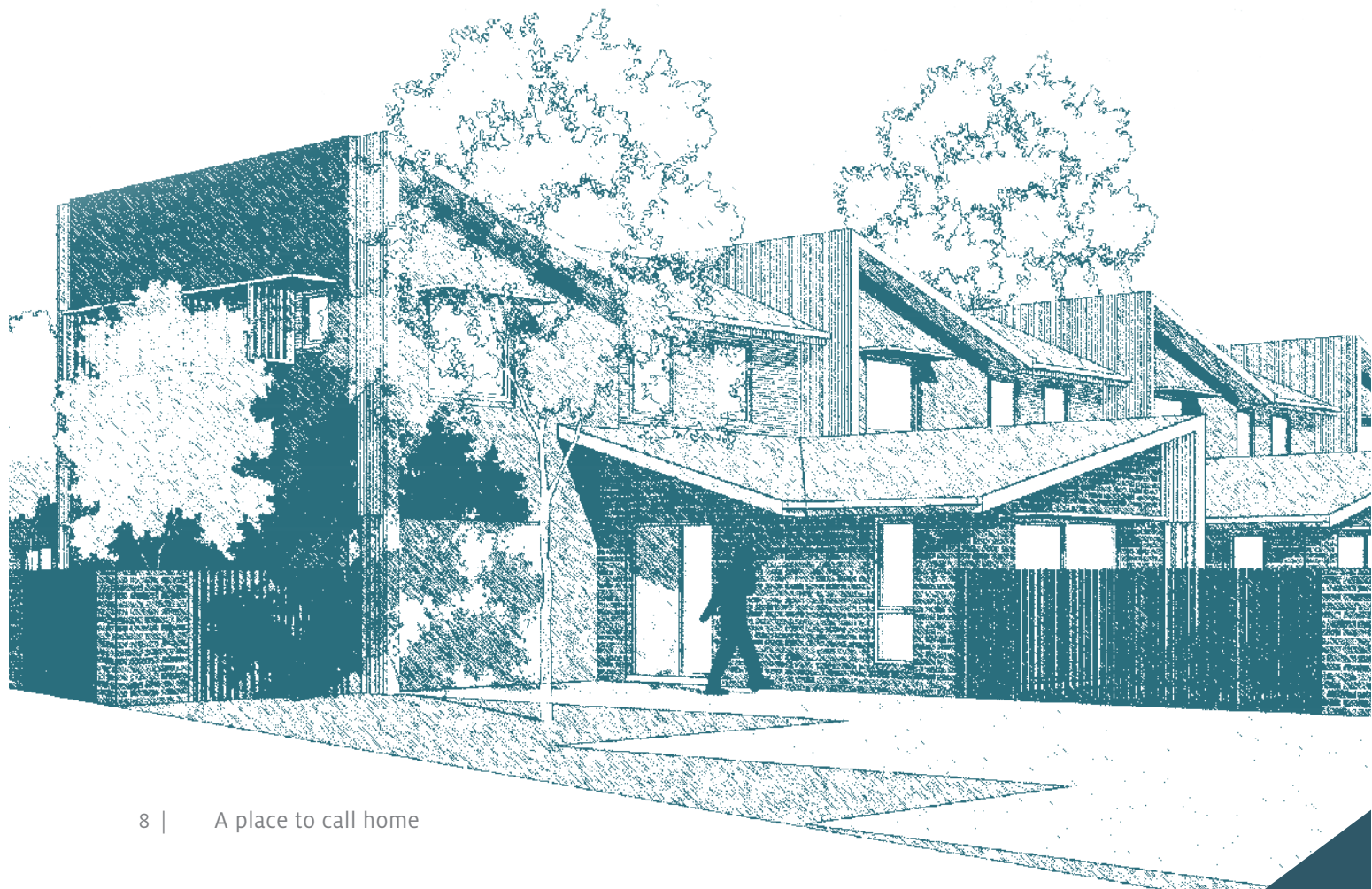
A PLACE TO CALL HOME

WHEN PEOPLE GET A HOME OF THEIR OWN YOU WILL SEE THEM FLOURISH. THE LEVEL OF DISABILITY IS NOT IMPORTANT. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THE HOME ARRANGEMENT THAT HELPS PEOPLE THRIVE.

Michael Kendrick, Talks That Matter,
www.belongingmatters.org

Everyone deserves a place to call home — a place where they belong, feel safe and can be themselves. Every parent wants their children to grow up and, when they are ready, to leave home and move into their own home. The Benambra Intentional Community — a unique residential development in Canberra — is that place for Jackson, Dan and Ben, three young Canberra men with a disability.

This paper tells the story of the establishment of the Benambra Intentional Community from its inception to its completion. The story starts with the birth of three babies, each with a disability, moves to an alliance of the mothers of these babies, describes the formation of a family governed project — Getting a Life — and culminates in the building of 25 homes where the three young men live in a friendly supportive community.



Author's note

We have come a long way since the institutionalisation of people with a disability was the norm.

Deinstitutionalisation, with the promise of community homes and community living, was a positive theoretical step but the reality did not match the promise.

Group homes became the solution of choice for policy writers, governments, disability organisations and services. If you had a disability you were expected to live with other people with a disability — but the only thing you might have had in common with them was that you had a disability; you might not know or like them or have any other thing in common.

It is a great leap to treat people with disabilities as people with their own rights, wants, needs and preferences. It is a greater leap to ask them what they want and to place them at the centre of their own lives, their own homes and their own community.

There is nearly always a tension between providing people with adequate safeguards and security of tenure, services and funding and giving people a real life with choice and control. Parents of adult children with a disability worry endlessly about who will care for their child when they no longer can, through either the frailty and disability that comes with ageing or through death. For many parents the fear that their sons and daughters would never find supported accommodation was and still is very real. Many parents in their 70s and 80s are still waiting for this peace of mind.

Jackson, Dan and Ben are lucky in that they were born in the 1980s when policy was changing and people with disabilities were starting to be seen as people first and their disability second; when people with disabilities were seen to have human rights and when the idea of a person-centred life increasingly became best practice. They are also lucky that their mothers were prepared to fight for them to have a life whose choice, quality and contribution more closely resembled that of their brothers.

These three men have rich, varied, contributing lives with layers of safeguards. They have a wonderful organisation and people they have chosen to support them. Most importantly, they have a home they can each truly call their own and each of them is thriving.

SALLY RICHARDS AND TIM WEST

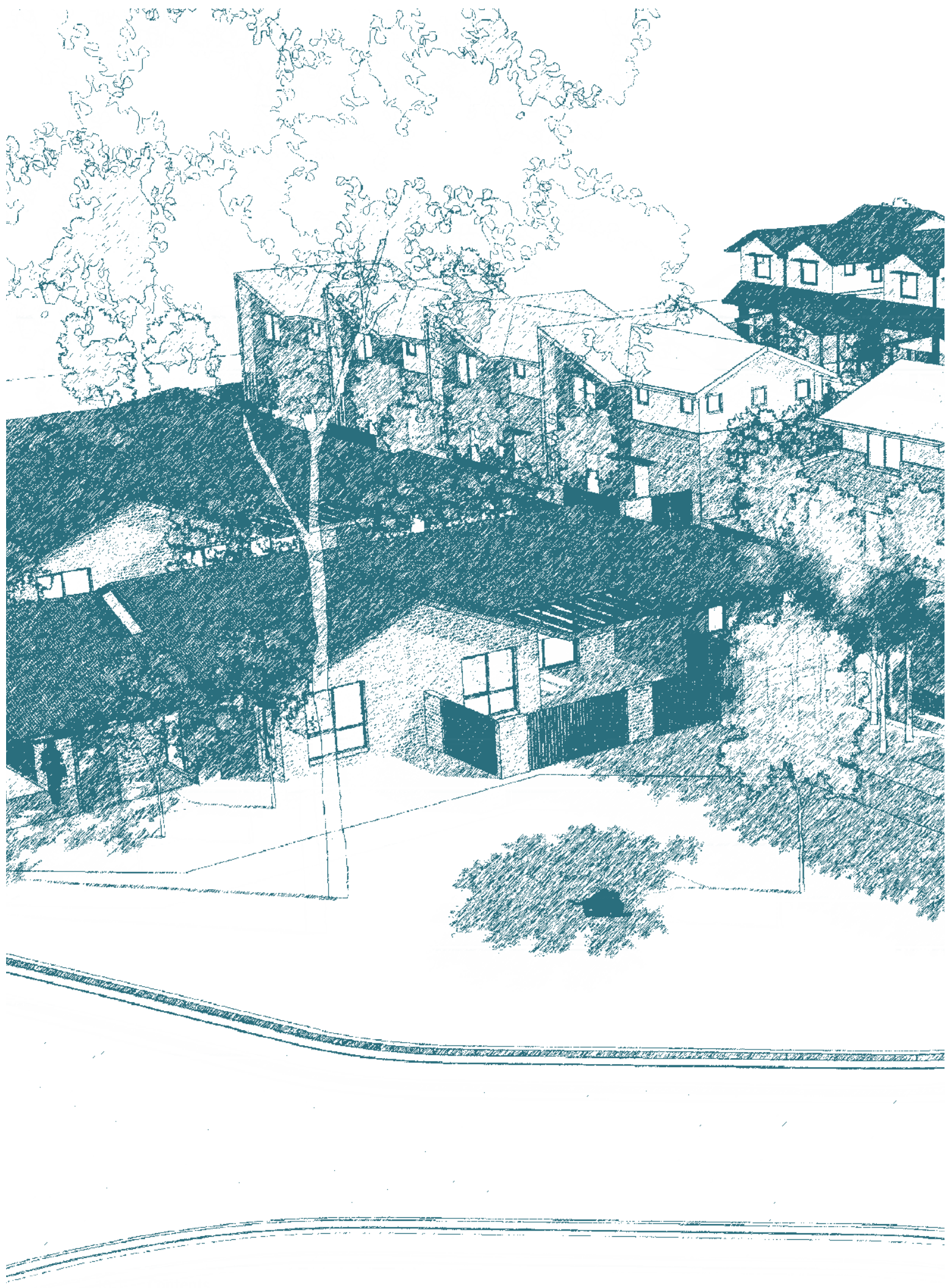
(Mother and brother of Benambra resident, Jackson West)

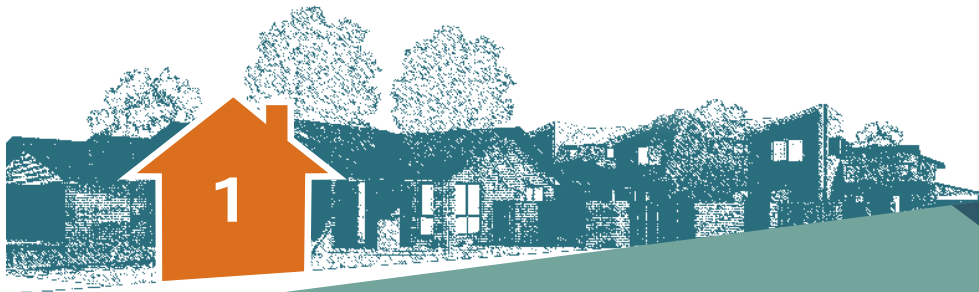


WHAT'S IN A NAME

In the planning stages of the project, we called our vision 'The Getting a Life Intentional Community'. When the buildings became a reality, they were named 'Benambra' — from a list of names approved by Housing ACT for naming residential complexes.

Benambra is the name of a small town in the Victorian alpine region, not far from Omeo. The name is thought to be of Aboriginal origin, meaning either 'hills with big trees' or the more colourful 'men spearing eels'.





Benambra Intentional Community: vision and values

THE BENAMBRA INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY IS A UNIQUE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE SUBURB OF PHILLIP IN CANBERRA, THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY (ACT).

The development is a cluster of 25 units designed to house three young men with a disability within a community who have intentionally chosen to live near them. Each man has his own home with a housemate — or co-resident — as their major support. The combination of intentional community and co-residency is a powerful and effective way of ensuring supported, independent lives for these young men.

A neighbourly and welcoming place

An intentional community is a neighbourly, welcoming place to live where residents respect, help and are friendly to each other and are committed to creating a community of support. Residents of the Benambra Intentional Community welcome and get to know new and existing members of the community, and actively and willingly help others in the community by sharing their time, skills and resources with each other. Residents attend and contribute to community meetings, social events and occasionally invite others into their homes as part of creating a safe and inclusive community. Residents have elected to move into Benambra knowing that three young men with a disability are living there. All residents welcome diversity and acknowledge the gifts and talents of each person.

A graphic element consisting of a white house icon on a green background, followed by a series of horizontal bars containing text. The bars are arranged in a descending staircase pattern from left to right. The text describes the values and structure of the Benambra Intentional Community.

The values of the Benambra Intentional Community

- Residents demonstrate a belief in the vision and mission statements of the Benambra Intentional Community and in the benefits of this community to themselves and others.
- Residents are committed to being good neighbours, getting to know each other by name, helping out with minor tasks that others might find difficult and sharing resources such as gardening tools.
- Residents are interested in being actively involved in their community and neighbourhood.
- Residents help others.
- Residents work cooperatively, collaboratively and harmoniously with others.
- Residents make positive changes and implement ideas for improvement.
- The structure of the Benambra Intentional Community is described throughout this document; Appendix 4 contains detailed information on how residents of Benambra were selected.

A housemate to share with

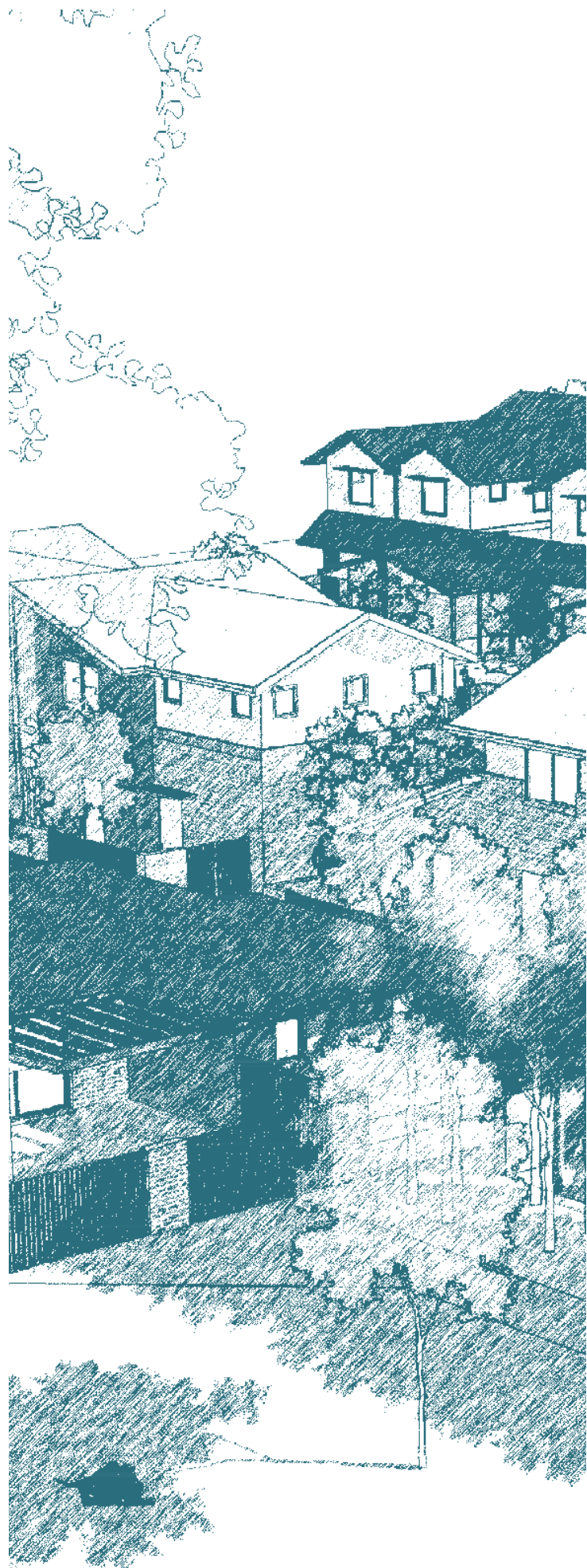
In the Benambra Intentional Community, each of the three young men has a co-resident or housemate. Co-residency is a model of support where one or two people live with the person with a disability as paid housemates. The co-resident can be a single person, a couple in a relationship, a couple of friends, a single parent — there is no rigid definition of who can be a co-resident. In exchange for agreed duties the co-resident lives rent free, is paid an annual salary and has negotiated built-in respite. Each co-residency position is individual and tailored to the person with a disability. The salary of the co-resident reflects the intensity and nature of the support needed by the person with a disability. The co-residency arrangement at Benambra is described in detail in Section 3 and co-residency documents are shown in Appendix 5.

Sustainable governance

The Benambra Intentional Community was the ‘brainchild’ of a group of three mothers who joined forces to create a better life for their sons with a disability. In 2004, they formed a family governance group, which they called Getting a Life. ‘Family governance’, in this form, is a group of people with disabilities and their families who join forces to exert more control over the lives of the people at the centre of the family governed group. They are not typically incorporated and each family governed group is not necessarily like any other.

Common features of family governance can be that the families organise and develop their child’s life, including work, leisure and support. The administrative, fiscal and legal requirements are delegated to a host agency. In the case of Getting a Life, the host is Hartley Lifecare, which is an incorporated nongovernment organisation in the ACT. As our host agency, Hartley allows us to be autonomous in areas directly related to our sons but we work closely with Hartley in other areas. The Getting a Life family governed group has funding to employ a coordinator for 7 hours a week. Our current coordinator’s role is to develop and foster relationships within the immediate residential community and to make links in the local community and also in the broader community. This might include organising an intentional community barbeque, a house concert or a working bee; cooking meals for a member who is ill or incapacitated; or delivering muffins to a neighbour.

Further information about Getting a Life and Hartley Lifecare is in Section 5. The structure of the Getting a Life family governed group is shown in Appendix 1.



Key people at Benambra

BENAMBRA IS CENTRED AROUND THREE YOUNG MEN WHO HAVE DISABILITIES, JACKSON WEST, DAN CONNAUGHTON AND BEN PATTRICK. THEIR MOTHERS, RESPECTIVELY, ARE SALLY RICHARDS, KAREN CONNAUGHTON AND CHERYL PATTRICK.

Jackson West and Sally Richards

www.jacksonwest.org

Written by Sally Richards

Sally Richards is Jackson's mother. She has been a disability activist, advocate and innovator for many years. She was a founder of the Getting a Life family governed group and established JACKmail — a successful courier business — for Jackson in 2007.

During the past 14 years Sally has presented at national and international conferences, worked on strategic priorities with government departments, worked with families to assist them to plan for the future and has been the family/community voice on boards, reference groups, panels and advisory groups. As a fierce supporter of the National Disability Insurance Scheme she spoke at the NDIS Congress in Melbourne in 2011.

Her latest joint achievement is the Benambra Intentional Community.

Jackson's disability

Jackson has Phelan-McDermid syndrome, which is a micro-deletion on the long arm of the 22nd chromosome. He also has extra material from chromosome 1 co-located on chromosome 22. His condition manifests as a profound intellectual disability and he needs full support in every area of life. He needs the 24-hour presence of a responsible person, such as a family member, friend, co-resident or other support staff. Part of his syndrome is disturbed sleep and this is the most difficult part of living with him.

He is a generally happy person who is easy to have around. His emotional demands are few. He doesn't have any medical conditions such as asthma or epilepsy but has a low-grade autoimmune condition. He is gentle, loves music and driving in the car.



Jackson's upbringing

Jackson was born on 1 January 1986 and grew up with Sally, his father Mac and his three brothers: Tim, Duncan and Lewis. He spent some years in shared foster care, fortnight about, due to serious illness in the family and other stressors.

His early life was dominated by illness with many hospital visits and several operations. He was not a happy boy for many of those years.

He attended disability-specific pre, primary and high schools. He graduated at the end of 2006 and started work in JACKmail in February 2007.

Current life and family relationships

Jackson moved into his own home, number 13 of Benambra, in May 2013 when he was 27 years old. He shares his home with his co-resident, CR1.

Part of the co-resident's job description is to foster relationships within the community. CR1 and Jackson are generous hosts and often invite others for a barbeque. Jackson and CR1 share their herbs and tools, water the communal vegetable garden, invite neighbours for a meal and are friendly to all.



Jackson hosts dinners and every time one of his brothers or a friend or relative is in town he and CR1 invite them for a meal. Sally loves going to Jack's house for dinner or a visit and she also loves inviting him and anyone who is with him to her home for a visit or a meal. As well as this, CR1 and Sally try to make Jackson's home a place of music. He has hosted one house concert so far with more to come and a Guerrilla Gig was organised with two local bands. His life is expanding as he meets the family and friends of his co-resident and other support staff.

Jackson seems incredibly happy in his new home with the support and care of CR1.

It has been a huge change for Jackson, for CR1 and for his mother, but they are all doing very well in their new lives. Sally reports that she has learned to 'butt out' quite a lot, to let go of the controlling reins and to allow CR1 to run the house in his way rather than in the way she would do it.

'JACKSON AND I NOW HAVE A MORE TYPICAL MOTHER AND SON RELATIONSHIP, WHICH IS JUST THE WAY IT SHOULD BE.'

Work

Jackson works in JACKmail, a courier business that his mother and father established for him in 2007. For the past 7 years he has worked every weekday morning from 8.30 am until 12.00 pm picking up mail from post office boxes and delivering it to business premises.

This work gives Jackson a legitimate place and role in the ACT business community; he is known and greeted by many and is busy and contributing to the Canberra community. His presence as a worker in the community changes attitudes towards people with a profound intellectual disability every day.

He has 4 weeks' holiday a year when JACKmail closes down over Christmas and the New Year.

Leisure

Jackson is a busy young man and when he is not working has a variety of leisure activities. He goes to the gym — a fitness gym for some kilometres on the treadmill and a gymnastics gym where he does trampolining and balance work. He attends a music class, goes swimming, volunteers for the ACT library service and enjoys bushwalking and being a passenger on his tandem.

He regularly goes to the Tradies Club for dinner, is a member of a dinner club, Cuisine Team, goes to music gigs and relaxes at home with his jukebox and co-resident. He often visits his mother on the weekends and hosts many dinners and barbeques.

Dan Connaughton and Karen Connaughton

Written by Karen Connaughton

Karen Connaughton, Dan's mother, was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend social role valorisation training early in Dan's life. Armed with this knowledge Karen has worked to ensure people with a disability have the life they deserve — a life of meaning and value. Along with others in the ACT community, she strongly advocated for, and worked with the ACT Government and the Department of Education to develop a system that supported the inclusion of students with a disability in mainstream schooling. As a result of this advocacy, Dan, and now many other students with a disability, have had the opportunity to receive an education at their local school and college.

Karen was the president of the Down Syndrome Association for two years and on the Board for four years. She also spent 10 years on the Board of Advocacy for Inclusion. During the past six years Karen has worked with Sally and Cheryl to establish the Getting a Life family governed group and Benambra Intentional Community. Her hope is that the Benambra Intentional Community model be one of many innovative housing options available for people with a disability.



Dan's disability

Dan is an amazing young man who has defied the gloomy prognosis attached to him in the first years of his life. Dan has trisomy 21 (Down syndrome). This means he has three expressions of the 21st chromosome. Dan was very unwell at birth and spent four months in intensive care before he was discharged from hospital. On discharge, his prognosis was poor. His family was advised that he was unlikely to survive to his first birthday and if he did, he would be severely disabled.

Today, Dan, with 24 years of life experience, has skills and attributes way beyond what would be expected. He can read and write a little, catch a bus independently once shown, use the computer and make life choices (some good, some not so good).

Current life and family relationships

Until May 2013, Dan had been living at home with his parents and brother, Sean. As Dan had attended the local schools he was well known in the neighbourhood but, in recent years, the neighbourhood has changed. Many of Dan's friends and acquaintances from school have moved away and the families had downsized their houses. As a result, while Dan was known by the immediate neighbours, his wider social networks were quite small. Given Dan's difficulty in communicating, making new friends was quite a challenge.

Since the move to Benambra, Dan's life has expanded considerably. He lives with his brother who provides both support and companionship. In addition, Dan receives some paid support through Disability ACT, and Home and Community Care funding. His parents call in every day to provide additional support and guidance.

Dan's network of friends has increased enormously and he has benefited not only from the support and friendship of the intentional community members but also from the other residents in the complex. This new social network has increased Dan's self-confidence and supported his ability to live as independently as possible.

Dan has also received considerable support from Jackson's and Ben's co-residents and in a very natural way has been included in the activities they are involved in. The modelling these men provide within the community has assisted others to better understand how to include people with disabilities in their everyday lives and Dan, Jackson and Ben are all benefiting from this.

By living in his own place Dan has had the opportunity to host his extended family when they have come to Canberra on work or holiday visits. This is extremely important to him and he delights in inviting people to stay.

The south-side location of the complex has meant that Dan's family and friends can call in and visit on a regular basis. It has also meant that Dan is reasonably familiar with the surroundings and the bus route.

Work

Dan continues to be employed by the National Convention Centre (NCC), which is a strong supporter and advocate of an inclusive workplace. However, by Dan moving into his own place, he has further cemented the view that people with a disability have the same desires and aspirations as other young people. Since May, a number of Dan's work colleagues have called in to visit him at home, play a game of cards and have a coffee — something that never occurred when he lived at home with his parents.

The Executive Officer of the NCC and Dan's immediate supervisor attended the opening of Benambra, which was an extremely proud moment for Dan. It again validated the views of the NCC — that people with a disability should be supported to live a normal life that includes open employment and open accommodation.

A change as big as moving into his own home has put emotional pressure on Dan and as a result every effort has been made to keep 2013 as stable as possible in other aspects of his life. However, 2014 sees Dan recommence some study at the Canberra Institute of Technology, which he can walk to from home, and volunteering in Tuggeranong and Woden in addition to his paid employment at NCC.

The location provides great access to public transport, and coupled with the much appreciated support funding, all of these opportunities are now possible for Dan.

Leisure

Dan continues to participate in bowling and dance on a Saturday, and his variety in leisure opportunities has also expanded since his inclusion in the community. Since moving to Benambra he has had the opportunity to host barbeques, dinners, birthday parties and other festive celebrations. On Christmas day, Dan, with the support of his family, invited other residents who did not have any commitments over to dinner.

A get-together usually involves a game of cards with whoever is keen to play and depending on the weather a game of soccer with some of the more active residents.

Dan is regularly invited to others' houses and to participate in joint social activities. He and his family have organised working bees around the complex and this year have registered Benambra in the Clean Up Australia Day.

Dan enjoys having the 'permission' to walk around Benambra and talk to neighbours who are out and about. Dan's confidence has grown over the past 7 months and will only increase as he gets to know the residents better and they become more familiar with his communication style.

The opportunity for Dan to live in a community of people who care about each other (unpaid support), and when necessary be supported by paid support, has made a tremendous difference to Dan and his family's life. Dan's life is good — he feels valued and really enjoys being part of 'something bigger'. For his family, knowing Dan is safe and that they have people that can be called upon at short notice if required is invaluable and made the transition from home to a more independent life a reality.



Ben Patrick and Cheryl Patrick

Written by Cheryl Patrick

Cheryl Patrick is the mother of Ben. Cheryl has spent the past 25 years gathering knowledge and experience in disability and related areas to enable her to advocate for a better life for her son, Ben, and for people with disabilities and their families.

She has participated in numerous workshops, conferences, social role valorisation training courses and sat on several reference groups. Cheryl has worked in the disability field in systemic advocacy and community development.

Cheryl has been a member of the Getting a Life family governed group since its inception in 2004. In 2008, she became involved in the development and establishment of the Benambra Intentional Community.

For 12 years Cheryl was a board member on the national peak body, Children with Disability Australia, which represents children and young people with disability and their families. She also served a two-year term as deputy chair on the ACT Disability Advisory Council. Cheryl was a founding member and served an eight-year term on the ACT BLITS Advisory Board (Business Leaders Innovative Thoughts and Solutions).



Ben's disability

Ben was born with cerebral palsy, the eldest of identical twin boys. Ben's twin brother, Ryan, was stillborn due to a twin-to-twin foetal transfusion at 32 weeks. Ben was delivered at 33 weeks by forceps; the probable cause of Ben's cerebral palsy is either the foetal transfusion at 32 weeks or the early forceps delivery.

Being born with cerebral palsy has resulted in Ben having a severe physical disability. Ben is unable to walk or stand and needs support to sit upright. Ben has limited use of his hands and limbs and has a learning disability. Ben's eyesight is poor and with his glasses on his clear vision range is only good for a few metres. Ben can talk but he can be difficult to understand at times. Ben requires full support in all areas of his life; he needs a 24-hour presence of a responsible person such as a family member, friend, co-resident or other support staff to ensure that his everyday and personal care needs are met.

Ben uses an electric wheelchair for his mobility, independence, leisure and work. Ben has a caring nature with a wicked sense of humour and a friendly personality.

Ben's upbringing

Ben was born on 15 May 1987 and lived with his mother Cheryl, father Steven and two younger brothers: Matthew and Luke.

During Ben's younger years he spent a lot of time going to appointments with occupational, speech and physiotherapists as well as other medical professionals.

Ben underwent several operations in his growing years to try and rectify the spasticity in his legs and muscles. Ben's general health has always been good.

Ben attended a disability-specific preschool and primary school up until halfway through year 3, when he transferred to the local mainstream primary school close to home. Ben graduated from his local college in 2005 and started work at the Canberra Hospital in 2009.



Current life and family relationships

On 22 May 2013, Ben moved into his own home in Benambra. Ben's home was built specifically to meet Ben's mobility and care needs while incorporating a very natural and homely feel to the design. Ben lives with his co-resident, CR2. Ben interviewed several people for the co-resident position and CR2 was his preferred choice.

Ben moving into his own home at the age of 26 was a monumental change for everyone — Ben, CR2 and his family. His mother says that 'as a mother, letting go of your full-time caring role is not something you can do overnight but it does happen gradually'.

Ben's transition into his new home has been a fairly smooth process and his mother believes that much of this is because Ben and CR2 get on so well. In Ben's words, CR2 is 'a brother from another mother'. Ben also has a team of dedicated support people who work with him in all aspects of life.

Ben and CR2 often have friends and family over for dinner and are active participants in the local Benambra community. Ben still has holidays with his family, and Ben and CR2 go visit Ben's family for dinner regularly. Friends and family will often ring or drop in to see Ben in his new home or invite him out.

Ben is now the 'king of his own castle' and has more freedom, choice, independence and responsibilities as do most young men his age.

Work

Ben started working as a mail courier at the Canberra Hospital in 2009. Ben's job involves delivering mail from the mailroom to the wards and offices within the hospital. Ben initially started working on a trial basis with a full-time support person who assisted Ben to learn his job and liaise with other staff in the hospital.

Ben is now a permanent part-time employee working 15 hours per week. In Ben's words, 'this will change my life'. Ben is now a valued member of the mailroom team and he has made many friends and work colleagues over the past few years. Ben now has a sense of purpose and responsibility; he loves his job and earning his wages.

Ben's employment as a mail courier was the result of 4 years of negotiations, meetings and encouragement between Ben's parents and staff at Canberra Hospital.

Leisure

Ben enjoys going away on fishing and camping weekends with his family and friends. Ben plays tenpin bowling once a week and is a member of a bowling competition. Ben occasionally plays bocce with friends and goes swimming once a week.

Ben is a member of the Southern Cross Club and the Hellenic Club in Canberra and occasionally goes out for meals and functions. Ben enjoys playing games on his phone and computer, going to the movies and watching DVDs.



Overview of Benambra

Physical structure

Benambra consists of 25 public housing residences in an inner south suburb of Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Most of the houses are two storeys and have two bedrooms. Ben has a three-bedroom single-level home, and Jackson and Dan each have a three-bedroom two-storey home. There are two other single-level three-bedroom homes.

Benambra is located close to a shopping and business centre, a bus interchange, a shopping centre, medical facilities and community organisations. A location close to a hub of community activity and transport was vital, as was its proximity to each of the young men's families, employment, friends and established relationships.

Community structure

Jackson, Dan and Ben were allocated their homes first. The other intentional community residents were then allocated theirs. The intentional community comprises 21 people in 10 houses interspersed among the development. The intentional community residents elected to live in the community and abide by the intentional nature of community and neighbourliness. The residents had to meet certain criteria and had to apply to be members of the community, as set out in subsequent sections of this document and detailed in Appendix 4.

The remaining 15 homes were then allocated to other families from the ACT Housing list according to standard ACT Department of Housing practices. We refer to these houses as 'non-intentional community residents' in the remainder of this document. Sections 6 and 8 describe the roles of intentional and non-intentional community residents.



Administrative and oversight structure

The ACT Government paid for the land and the construction of the houses. The houses were commissioned by Housing ACT. They tendered AMC Architects to design the development and St Hilliers to build. The units are now owned by Housing ACT, who is responsible for maintenance and building insurance. Jackson, Dan and Ben are head tenants and their names are on their respective tenancy agreements. Housing ACT is responsible for house maintenance, communal garden space and allocation of houses as they become vacant. Hartley Lifecare covers Worker's Compensation, Public Liability and contents insurance.

Hartley Lifecare, a nongovernment organisation, provides the human resources and administrative support and insurance needs, and works closely with the family to recruit, train and evaluate the employees that work with the individuals. Staff involved in the intentional community (co-residents and carers, etc) are formally employed by Hartley. They can be selected by the families or by Hartley in consultation with the families, and do not have to have a prior relationship with Hartley. The following general principles underpin the employment of staff within the intentional community:

- Staff must meet Hartley's pre-requisites for employment.
- Staff must follow Hartley's policy and procedures.
- Any workplace relations issues are dealt with by Hartley with family input.
- Families are heavily involved in advertising for, recruiting, training and evaluating the employee.
- Jackson, Dan and Ben and their families have a final say on who gets hired.

All residents of the intentional community are registered as volunteers at Hartley. This ensures they are covered by insurance for any volunteer work they do, and allows them to receive information about Hartley and be part of any volunteer celebrations.

Financial arrangements

As with all ACT public housing tenants, Jackson, Dan and Ben pay rent that is based on a percentage of their income. The co-residents do not pay rent as part of their conditions of employment. The co-residents rent is covered by a component in Jackson, Dan and Ben's individual funding support packages. The cost of utilities is shared equally and each person living in the house pays for their share of food and consumables.

Jackson, Dan and Ben receive individualised funding from Disability ACT and this is auspiced by Hartley Lifecare, who is responsible for the employment of the co-residents and all other support staff and administrative, fiscal and legal matters. This individualised funding pays for the co-residents' salaries and other support for Jackson, Dan and Ben within their homes.

Jackson, Dan and Ben each receive other support from other government departments, such as Home & Community Care and the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), and block-funded nongovernment organisations.

It is important to understand the complex financial and support arrangements that enable each of these young men to have lives of choice, quality, contribution and control.

Take Jackson as an example. He works five mornings a week from 8.30 am until 12.00 pm. While the business earns money, his employment in JACKmail is contingent upon the business also receiving FaHCSIA funding to employ a person with a disability in open employment. With the assistance of FaHCSIA funding plus the income earned by delivering a service to ACT businesses, JACKmail provides support to Jackson for 24.5 hours a week — up until 1.00 pm four days a week and until 3.00 pm once a week.

Jackson's afternoon activities are funded through block funding to a disability service provider, which provides him with 10 hours of support per week. He also receives support from Woden Community Services, which is block funded to provide Jackson with support for 7.5 hours a week. An additional 4 hours per fortnight is provided by yet another block-funded disability service provider.

Dan and Ben have equally complex arrangements with different organisations and funding sources.



In-home care and support arrangements

An essential part of the intentional community is the support that Jackson, Ben and Dan require to carry out their daily lives. Jackson and Ben use a co-residency model of care, which has been adapted to the specific needs of each young man. The model is described below.

Dan lives with a housemate who does not receive a salary but lives with Dan rent free in exchange for agreed hours of assistance. This reflects the lower level of support that Dan needs.

All three young men require support due to their respective disabilities. While Dan is quite independent, Jackson and Ben require high-level support due to their more profound disabilities. Both require assistance with all aspects of personal care. They require overnight support and a 24-hour presence. However each of them wanted to live in their own home and not in a group home. The challenge was to find an affordable way of supporting Jackson, Ben and Dan in their own independent homes using the level of funding to which each young man is eligible, and which did not compromise their wishes and quality of life. The co-residency model, adapted from a number of models used by support agencies in Perth, achieved this.

In this context, a co-resident is a person who shares the individual homes of Jackson, Ben or Dan. Jackson, Ben and Dan are the head tenants of their respective homes, and the co-resident is invited to live with and support them in many life areas for a specified period. The extent of this assistance and support varies between each of the three young men and based on their different support needs. (For Jackson's, see Appendix 5.)

The co-resident position is supported by appropriate documentation including a job description, selection criteria, duty statement, details of salary and conditions of employment. The co-resident position differs markedly from a more traditional support worker role as this position is a 'whole-of-life' position.

The co-resident is formally employed by Hartley Lifecare but works to and with the head tenant, their family and other important people in the head tenant's life. There is a period of probation.

The co-resident shares the head tenant's home and is expected to be an exemplary housemate and, depending on the arrangement, to be responsible for cooking, cleaning, shopping, transporting, monitoring the health of the head tenant, seeking medical assistance as necessary, giving medication, attending to personal care and building relationships. To acknowledge this contribution, the co-resident is appropriately remunerated through the provision of rent-free accommodation and/or a salary

component. As each of the young men has differing levels of need for support, this is reflected in the remuneration package.

Included in the support funding from the ACT Government is rent allocation for the co-resident. So ACT Housing gets paid rent but it doesn't come out of the co-resident's salary.

While the co-resident lives in the house under a formal employee-employer arrangement, it is expected that the co-resident will view and treat the house as their home. It is a place where they can invite family and friends for social occasions and pursue activities of their interest (e.g. study, art, music, etc.) when not providing direct support to Jackson, Ben or Dan.

The home is a shared environment with only the bedrooms being private. The co-resident needs to be mindful of the head tenant's right to privacy and vice versa. Others invited into the home, including family members of the head tenant also need to respect the privacy of all who live in the house.

There is an operating office as part of the house, used by other Hartley Lifecare staff and family members who provide support when the co-resident is not on active support duty. One bedroom is set aside for these staff and family members.

Through discussion and agreement with the respective families and friends of Jackson, Ben and Dan, and as outlined in the individual duty statements, the co-resident has times during the week, some weekends and some public holidays when they are not required to provide support and are able to pursue other interests, have a weekend away or study. As an example, Jackson's co-resident has:

- 48 hours every 2nd weekend from 4.00 pm Friday to 4.00 pm Sunday
- 2 evenings a week from 6.00 to 11.00 pm
- Monday to Friday 8.30 am to 4.30 pm
- 3 hours on alternate Sunday afternoons.

All of the respite is negotiable. A portion of the co-resident's salary is quarantined. This can be used at the co-resident's discretion to purchase extra respite or holidays. Any money not spent after 12 months, they receive as salary.

In relation to the day-to-day management and expenses in the household, the co-resident is responsible for:

- 50% of gas and electricity expenses
- 50% of the food bill
- the furnishings required to furnish their own bedroom and bathroom

- personal insurance (fire, theft, etc.) to cover the loss of any of their personal belongings
- the cost of repairing or replacing any furnishings or equipment that is damaged by the co-resident, their friends or their families (this does not include general wear and tear expenses).

The following is negotiated between the co-resident, the head tenant and their family/friends before employment:

- parties
- sleepovers by friends and families
- pets
- alcohol consumption
- extra or unscheduled leave.

A key aspect of the co-residency position is building and maintaining relationships and fostering community.

Because Dan is more independent, and in particular does not require assistance with personal care, his co-resident has fewer duties and is termed a housemate. The housemate lives rent free in exchange for approximately 10 hours of assistance each week. This can be helping with shopping, cooking, cleaning, transport, entertainment. The housemate is not expected to do any personal care. The housemate is not paid a salary.



The role of Hartley Lifecare in the lives of the three men and Benambra

By Eric Thauvette, Executive Director of Hartley Lifecare

Hartley Lifecare supports people with disability in their homes and in the community by providing supported accommodation, respite care and community support services. We encourage and support the idea of making people more independent and living their lives as they choose to.

At Hartley, we believe that the people who best know the individuals with a disability are usually their families and friends. They have been involved for years and are in a much better position to know the individual's aspirations and needs and can assist them to exercise choice and control.

When the Getting a Life family governed group was formed around three individuals with disabilities, we welcomed the involvement of the families; this has resulted in the best outcomes for these three men with goals and future visions set by them and by those who care for them. Involvement from the families gave details of current needs as well as future needs.

For Jackson's employment, his parents created a business for him: JACKmail. JACKmail is a very successful business delivering mail to businesses around Canberra for more than seven years. With the help of the family, Hartley has had the privilege of providing the support to Jackson though employing a driver/support worker since the beginning of the business in 2007.

Hartley is most successful in providing support when family is involved. In the cases of Benambra and JACKmail, the involvement of the families means that our employees are more committed, have a sense of involvement with the person's longer-term goals and are more loyal to the family because they are supported by them. This results in lower turnover, greater commitment and higher pride in our employees' work.

Hartley benefits from this model due to the results achieved for the individuals with disability as well as the positive influence it has had on the staff. Input from the families is crucial for Hartley's assessment of the support and services we provide.

The long road to Benambra

Early days

Nearly three decades ago, the lives of three families were changed forever. To each of these families a son with a disability was born and each family became immersed in all things disability. Their lives were, to a large extent, defined by having a child with a disability. Jackson West (born 1986), Dan Connaughton (born 1989) and Ben Patrick (born 1988) are the babies who have grown into the three young men who are the core tenants of Benambra.



The Getting a Life project

In 2004, the families of Jackson, Dan and Ben became a team. The mothers, Sally Richards, Karen Connaughton and Cheryl Patrick, were and continue to be the main drivers in establishing and maintaining quality in their sons' lives. In 2004, they established Getting a Life — the first family-driven family governance group in the ACT.

For several years the focus of Getting a Life was creating good lives for Jackson, Dan and Ben. The group focused on employment, recreation and building relationships within their community. They secured funding to employ

a coordinator for seven hours a week and, in these early years, their coordinator would look for employment and recreational opportunities; attend meetings on behalf of the group or accompany the mothers to meetings and take minutes; visit Jack, Dan and Ben while they were out participating in community or recreational activities; and do research and write reports.

The idea

Over time, the group turned their thinking to homes and community. Each of the families started work on this at different times (one family as long ago as June 2002) and in different ways. Several years ago they put their heads together and decided that the Getting a Life group should continue to work as a team to create homes and community for their sons. There are many different types of intentional communities, only some of which are built around people with a disability. The ones the group learned much from were:

- Rougemont Intentional Community, Ontario, Canada
- Pinakarri Intentional Community, Fremantle, Western Australia
- Juno Women's Housing Co-operative, Ainslie, ACT (women only membership)
- Somerville Ecovillage, Perth, Western Australia.

They also learned much about co-residency and building good lives from:

- Perth Home Care
- Lower Great Southern Community Living Association
- My Place, Subiaco, Western Australia
- Vela Microboards Australia
- Local Area Coordinators in Western Australia.

The Getting a Life group were particularly inspired by the Rougemont Intentional Community in Ontario, Canada. They met with three of the Rougemont families and with Janet Klees, their coordinator, several times over several years and benefited much from their collective experience and wisdom.

And so began the long business of selling the idea to ACT Ministers and senior ACT Government bureaucrats, garnering support and making the idea become real. (A truncated timeline of significant events is in Appendix 2.)

Making the idea a reality

The Getting a Life group first pitched the idea to senior ACT Government bureaucrats through a presentation on Rougemont Intentional Community on 4 November 2004.

The first real supporter of the idea was the then Minister for Disability, Ms Katy Gallagher. Mr Martin Hehir, then CEO of Disability, Housing and Community Services, and Ms Lois Ford, then Executive Director of Disability ACT, were also champions and allies.

The group continued to advocate on behalf of their sons with the new Minister for Disability, Ms Joy Burch. The group found her and her Disability Adviser Mr Neil Finch to be willing listeners and sympathetic supporters. Eventually, Housing ACT agreed to look into a serious concept proposal.

Finding suitable land in the centre of Canberra was the biggest hurdle and this took some months. Eventually Mr Peter Johns from Housing ACT discovered land close to shops, buses and community facilities on the south side of Canberra that was already zoned for residential development.

The allocation of land by the ACT Government to the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services was approved in the first half of 2011 and Minister Joy Burch announced the building of the intentional community soon after.

Housing ACT then engaged AMC Architects to design the development. The ACT Planning and Land Authority approved the development application in November 2011. All through 2011, the group met with AMC Architects to refine and finalise the plans for the homes of Jackson, Dan and Ben.

Construction of Benambra

The sod was turned in March 2012 and construction started in February. The houses were finished a little more than a year later, in April 2013. Jackson, Dan and Ben were given the keys on 29 April 2013 and moved in shortly after.

Selection of intentional community tenants

In June 2012, letters were sent to 1400 existing Housing ACT tenants. The letters explained the intentional community, described the kind of people who might like to live there and invited them to two information sessions to find out more and to ask any questions.

The information sessions were held in September 2012. Getting a Life, Housing ACT and Hartley Lifecare held the sessions and each gave a short talk about their role in the development.

Interested people were given an application form. A panel of community organisation members and a representative from Housing ACT reviewed applications. Initially a family representative was going to be on the panel but this did not happen (see Section 8).

Successful applicants were notified and invited to two social events, one in December 2012 and one in April 2013. This was so the new members of the intentional community, the families, Hartley and Housing ACT could meet each other and start the relationships that would be so crucial for the success of the community.

Documents, brochures and forms used throughout this process are contained in Appendix 4.

Selection of non-intentional community residents

Residents of the other 15 houses in the community were chosen from the Housing ACT waiting/transfer list. The undertaking by Housing ACT was that all tenants would need to be supportive of the principles of the intentional community and would be selected to create a mixed community with sensitivity to the needs of Jackson, Dan and Ben and the cohesion of the community. Housing ACT said that they would be specially selected as people wishing to help provide a community that is supportive, friendly and sensitive to the needs of people with a disability.



The opening of Benambra and onwards

The Getting a Life (Benambra) Intentional Community was opened by Dame Quentin Bryce, then Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia on 20 May 2013. The speech delivered by the Governor-General is contained in Appendix 3.

Since then, the families, co-residents and intentional community members have actively worked to build community and establish relationships.

The intentional community members all know and greet each other. Some have formed friendships and relationships are being forged. Individuals regularly hold barbeques and afternoon teas. The community has held music events, working bees, several meetings and a Christmas party, and has participated in Clean Up Australia Day.

The three young men have grown in confidence and are enjoying their new lives, as members of a thriving community. The families of the men enjoy seeing their independence at the same time as knowing they are well cared for. For all concerned, the intentional community component has been a success.





Essential features of the project

THIS SECTION DESCRIBES SOME FEATURES THAT WERE ESSENTIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT OVERALL AND THAT ARE CERTAINLY WORTH BEARING IN MIND FOR SIMILAR FUTURE INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY PROJECTS.

Ownership of project by the three mothers

This project was conceived, initiated, negotiated and driven by the families, who stuck fast to their philosophy and ideals. They worked for many years with many people, groups, organisations and departments. They continue to work with their sons, their co-residents, flatmates, support staff and the residents to develop what was started, and to strongly embed the people and the culture into the community. They continue to work with Housing ACT and Hartley Lifecare to circumvent potential problems, and to ensure existing or arising difficulties and complaints are dealt with promptly.

Support of local government

The Getting a Life group had its champions and without them the community would never have been built. ACT Legislative Assembly Ministers for Disability Joy Burch and Katy Gallagher listened to them, believed in them, supported them and ultimately made it happen.

Partnerships and allies

No-one achieves something as ambitious as this on their own. It is critical that partnerships are formed between individuals, and between families and organisations, families and government departments, families and government, and families and nongovernment organisations.

Each individual and group is one piece of a mighty puzzle. It would not have been completed if any of the puzzle pieces were missing. As time went on, more organisations and people became important (e.g. St Hilliers Building Contractors and the project manager, Mr David de Luca).

Mr Martin Hehir, then CEO of Disability Housing and Community Services, and Ms Maureen Sheehan, then Executive Director of Housing ACT, recognised the innovative quality and potential of the proposal and also supported the idea in principle initially and practically later.

Ms Lois Ford, then Executive Director of Disability ACT, encouraged the group to persevere.

Hartley Lifecare has always been a partner with full confidence in the group's ability to make their different and ambitious ideas work.

AMC Architects understood the concept of intentional community very quickly and spend many hours meeting with the group, listening to them, identifying the individual needs of Jackson, Dan and Ben, and redrawing plans to satisfy those needs.

Regular consultation with all parties

Meetings. Discussions. Negotiations. Compromise. Persuasion. Consultations. Problem solving. Writing. Re-writing. More discussion. Re-writing again.

These processes dominated the lives of group members for many years and were particularly intense in 2012 as things were coming to fruition. The group met with all partners and allies regularly and often. It was necessary to have many meetings to work out the big-picture plans and then the small-picture details.

Early big-picture discussions were about the difficulties of finding suitable land, how many units, the ratio of people with a disability to people without, how to select the tenants and how many families to include in the intentional community.

The small-picture details, to mention a few, involved writing the values of the community, the expectations of the intentional community members, the terms of reference for the panel members for selection of the residents, the co-resident job descriptions, the duty statements for the co-residents and the memorandum of understanding between Hartley and the Getting a Life family governed group.

Willingness to reconsider norms, assumptions and standard models

The project required several changes to accepted norms and standard rules and procedures within the ACT Government and nongovernment organisations. It was absolutely essential during the development of Benambra that changes to these norms, rules and procedures were considered and granted. Specific examples of new models and arrangements essential to Benambra are:

- **The location of the community.** As described in Sections 3 and 6, Benambra was built in the centre of Canberra, in an area where no land for public housing was thought to be available. Finding this land took more than 12 months of concerted effort by the mothers and by staff from Housing ACT.
- **The design of the houses.** As described in Section 3, the houses for Jackson, Dan and Ben needed to have three bedrooms: one for the resident themselves, one for their co-resident or flatmate, and a third for overnight respite staff. Because the co-resident (in Jackson and Ben's case) or housemate (in Dan's case) live in the house permanently, it was not possible for them to share their bedroom with other support workers who typically stay only for one or two nights. The three-bedroom requirement was not compatible

with Housing ACT's house practice, which stated that a person requiring full-time care was eligible to a two-bedroom house only. However, the three-bedroom requirement was developed as an innovative way of providing cost-effective support to which Housing ACT agreed.

- **The employment contracts for the co-residents.** As described in Section 3, the co-resident model is an atypical method of care that had not been used, in this form, in the ACT previously. The co-resident model required additional flexibility of the funding organisations and required Hartley Lifecare to produce a new employment contract. The position description for Jackson's co-resident is contained in Appendix 4.
- **Payment arrangements.** The new model arranged to pay the co-residents an annual salary and to pay the relief staff per 24-hour block rather than paying them per hour.
- **Tenancy.** Jackson, Dan and Ben are head tenants and their names are listed as such on the tenancy agreements. This not usual practice for people with intellectual disability.
- **Selection of the residents.** The choice of other residents for the intentional community was as important as the choice of co-residents. The process is described in Section 4.

It is important to emphasise that each of the above changes was at first thought to be either unlikely or impossible. However, each was also essential to the success of the community. While the specific roadblocks faced by other communities will probably be different to those faced by Getting a Life, the magnitude of the problem may be similar, and years of effort may be required to circumvent them.

Essential features of the community

THIS SECTION DESCRIBES THE FEATURES ESSENTIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF BENAMBRA. SUCH FEATURES ARE LIKELY TO BE ESSENTIAL IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANY FUTURE SIMILAR INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY.

Key principles of the intentional community

The key principles, which underpinned the design and development of Benambra, were:

- The purpose of the community is to provide safe, guaranteed, lifelong housing in an inclusive, friendly, respectful environment for Jackson, Dan and Ben.
- Jack, Ben and Dan had to be there first.
- Others were invited to live there knowing that three young men with disabilities already had been allocated housing within the complex.
- Potential intentional community residents had to agree to a set of expectations and principles (see Appendix 4).
- Intentional community residents had to register as volunteers with Hartley Lifecare for insurance purposes.
- Jackson, Dan and Ben were to be head tenants with their name on the tenancy agreement.

Location of the community within the city

The location of the intentional community was vital and non-negotiable for the families. Jackson, Dan and Ben's homes needed to be close to a bus interchange, close to shops and other services, reasonably close to

their families in case of emergencies and close to their historical communities.

The difficulties in finding land zoned for residential development on the south of Canberra held up the process for a couple of years.

A diverse community

The families of Jackson, Dan and Ben clearly stated from the beginning that this community would not be a segregated and congregated disability-specific community. They wanted a variety of people of different ages from different backgrounds with different family make-ups. They wanted it to be full of people who would welcome their sons and who would appreciate them for the things they offer a community.

The families had to continue stating clearly that if the proportion of people with a disability in the community became too large then the inclusive and supportive nature that they hoped to develop was likely to fail. The community needed more people who could give time, energy and resources than people who needed support. If the balance of people living there became weighted towards people with a disability, then the informal support for Jackson, Dan and Ben would inevitably be eroded and the intrinsic purpose and nature of the intentional community diluted.

Community design

It was essential that the community design be compatible with the fostering of a safe and cohesive community, and with the specific life and care arrangements of each of the three residents. Design

features considered, but not all attained in the final design, were:

- The arrangement of houses. Ideally, the houses would have been in circles or clusters that create a safe inner space, rather than in rows.
- The location of the residents' houses within the community. Ideally, Jackson, Ben and Dan's houses would have been in the centre of the community.
- Communal spaces. Ideally, an indoor communal space such as a small hall or function space would be present. Benambra has an outdoor communal barbeque space.
- Fostering of informal interaction. Ideally, the community would be structured such that accidental, informal interaction can occur. This might be walking past another person's house on the way to the mailbox, or having shared spaces between houses that are natural play areas for children from both houses.

Tenant selection

The selection of the intentional community tenants is just as important to the community as its physical structure and location. The essential criteria for members of the intentional community were that people who wished to live in the intentional community needed:

- to be existing ACT Housing tenants of at least five years
- to have an excellent tenancy with no record of domestic violence, alcohol or drug abuse, police involvement, non-payment of rent, vandalism, causing community disruption or disharmony
- to complete an application to live in the intentional community
- to be selected by a panel of a Housing ACT employee and community members
- to be prepared to sign on as volunteers of Hartley Lifecare
- to have a 'working with vulnerable persons' check.

The selection process for tenants was described in Section 4. This process, which required the tenants to be proactive, to attend information sessions and to apply to be members, helped to ensure that only people genuinely interested in, and appropriate for, the community would apply.

Funding and finances

For the security of independent supported living in their home, Jackson, Dan and Ben need guaranteed tenancy through Housing ACT, which they have. They also need security of guaranteed funding at a level that enables them to live with enough of the right kind of support at the right time and in the right place (reasonable and necessary support) and that enables them to exercise choice and control over their lives.

The funding needs to remain individualised so that each of them can tailor their lives using the funding allocated to them. The co-resident's salary reflects the level of support required by Jackson, Dan and Ben. Other support staff are paid under Hartley Lifecare's Collective Agreement.

Community spirit and togetherness

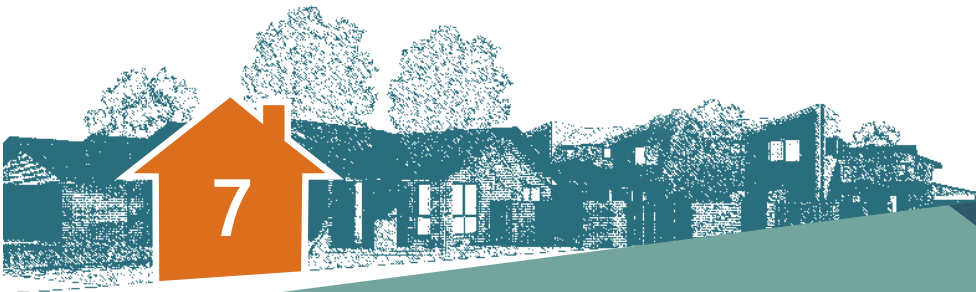
Everyone who lives and works in the intentional community is encouraged and expected to bring people into the lives of the young men and bring the young men into their lives. Therefore the line between work, family and leisure is blurred. Jackson, Dan and Ben, the co-residents, housemates and respite supporters all invite family and friends to dinner; they take Jackson, Dan and Ben to dinner with their families; they go on picnics and barbeques together; and they are invited to Jackson's, Dan's and Ben's families' homes for dinner, as are their families.

There are few boundaries around who can visit the homes or whose homes Jackson, Dan and Ben visit. No-one has to get permission to drop in for a cup of tea, mix their work with pleasure or leisure, or to invite Jackson, Dan or Ben to dinner. It is a much more natural way of operating and it more closely resembles life in the non-disabled world.

Hartley Lifecare hosted getting-to-know-you barbeques before anyone moved into the community. The mothers and co-residents initiate meetings, barbeques, morning teas and working bees.

A Benambra Facebook page and an email distribution list has been set up so that everyone knows about social events, meetings or working bees. There is a community noticeboard to display information that concerns all residents (e.g. rubbish collection, maintenance or music events).

One of the mothers, Karen, prints out invitations inviting non-intentional community tenants to events such as the guerrilla gig, the Christmas party and the Easter egg hunt.



A place for everyone to belong

EVERYONE HAS FOUND A PLACE TO BELONG IN BENAMBRA AND EVERYONE BENEFITS. IT IS RELATIONSHIPS THAT ENRICH A LIFE, SAFEGUARD PEOPLE, CREATE A PLACE OF BELONGING, AND MAKE A REAL COMMUNITY AND A REAL HOME.

Generally people with a disability have fewer friends and relationships than others and are less connected to their community. People with disabilities, their family, friends and allies often need to intentionally create the circumstances that foster relationships and inclusion. Benambra goes beyond the rhetoric of community inclusion and puts the rhetoric into practice.

Policy, procedures and regulations are important but it is the people who transform a place from a workplace to a welcoming place where all people have a valued presence.

Benefits of the Benambra Intentional Community

Jackson, Dan and Ben ...

... benefit as they are now head tenants in their own ACT Housing homes with the reasonable and necessary support they need to fully enable choice and control over their lives. They have security of tenure and are surrounded by people who have chosen to live with them in an inclusive community. They have many unpaid people who know and care about them, who greet them, visit them, join them in social events and help them informally when needed.

They have self-selected or family selected support staff who have chosen to work with them. The support staff and co-residents place Jackson, Dan and Ben at the centre

of their work and include them in family and community occasions and celebrations. All are professionally supported by Hartley Lifecare.

The residents who are part of the intentional community ...

... benefit because they live in a warm, friendly, supportive community. They benefit from the relationships that have developed and are continuing to develop. All have made new acquaintances and friends within Benambra and all enjoy the many social and musical get-togethers that Benambra hosts. They have learned much about Jackson, Dan and Ben and how they are contributors as well as consumers. The intentional community residents give to the community and they receive from the community.

The other Benambra residents ...

... who are not part of the intentional community benefit because they have good neighbours who work hard to physically maintain the grounds and garden, are considerate and respectful of other residents and are inclusive of all. They are invited to all the community events and some have become part of the diverse life of Benambra.

The co-residents and support staff ...

... benefit because they work in a flexible, friendly, professional environment where the work–friend–family boundaries are blurred. They work with much support from the families of the young men as well as from Hartley Lifecare. When they are ‘at work’ they are part of the community. This is supported by Hartley Lifecare who has ensured that the select group of support staff who work with Jackson, Dan and Ben are experienced, have the opportunity to work with each of the young men, are

invited to attend all celebrations and are known by the rest of the community at Benambra.

The co-residents are supported by a stable core of other support staff who each know Jackson, Dan, Ben, their families and the co-residents well. They also know the intentional community members as they often attend social events at the community.

Hartley Lifecare ...

... benefits from their involvement in the intentional community and through supporting families in such a unique and exciting way. Their involvement reflects well on them as an organisation and helps them grow their expertise and their confidence in working differently (see below).

Housing ACT ...

... has benefited from the recognition they have received for their courage in developing something new and commitment to seeing the project through to completion. In 2013, the department won a Real Estate Institute Award and jointly presented a paper with Sally Richards

at the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Conference in Adelaide. The development was nominated for a Master Builders Award in April 2014.

Disability ACT ...

... benefits as it is recognised for funding a unique model of supported accommodation.

The families ...

... of Jack, Dan and Ben benefit. They have the peace of mind that comes with knowing that their sons live in a safe, friendly, supportive environment where they can exercise choice and control over many aspects of their lives, and have the reasonable and necessary supports to live enriched, contributing and independent lives.

The suburb ...

... benefits in having a great residential development as part of its community. The broader suburban community know that Benambra is a quiet community with tenants who have pride in the physical environment and who do not create disturbances or upset community harmony.



Benefits for Hartley

By Eric Thauvette, Executive Director of Hartley Lifecare

The intentional community model has resulted in three men receiving very individualised and appropriate support services that are also incredibly flexible. The support workers who care for them are more than just workers; they have become an important part in the individual's life and they are also involved in many aspects of planning and decision making. This model of support has increased the employees' dedication and commitment to the men they support, their families and extends to the intentional community.

The general community has been very supportive of this model and has allowed us to raise awareness and the importance of inclusion of people with disability.

The support services we provide work best when families of the individuals are involved. We learn and know more about the individual, which places us in a better position to support them properly.

The biggest advantage for Hartley is the positive outcomes we see for the people that are supported. Where we have family involvement we see more commitment and more devoted workers. The support workers get feedback on their work directly from the families, which is very powerful.

This means that there is a lower turnover in staff and that we don't spend a majority of our time recruiting. Families of individuals supported are often best placed to see what might not be working right or need adjusting. Working with the families allows us to identify issues early and be able to deal with them quickly. In turn this allows us to spend more time on the proactive and important matters that arise within the men's homes and the rest of the community.

The intentional community is a very innovative model that is being recognised and Hartley benefits in being part of this model of support. Most of all, this model addresses the needs of the individual with a disability and has the best outcomes for them.

Challenges and compromises

Challenges

There are always challenges and compromises. The families had to work with bureaucracy and this was not always easy. It took a long time and for years the families were frustrated by verbal assurances of commitment but no action.

It is fair to say that in the early years (2004 to 2010) it always necessitated a visit to the ACT Minister for Disability (whoever it happened to be at the time) to get action from Housing ACT.

Once suitable land was found, Housing ACT was professional and organised, and the project gained and held steady momentum until the houses were completed.

The group thinks that they worked well with Housing ACT during all of the building, refining of policies and selection processes. A good respectful working relationship was developed, which, in the end, delivered a wonderful community for 25 families who live in public housing.

Compromises

Inevitably there were compromises and some promises broken.

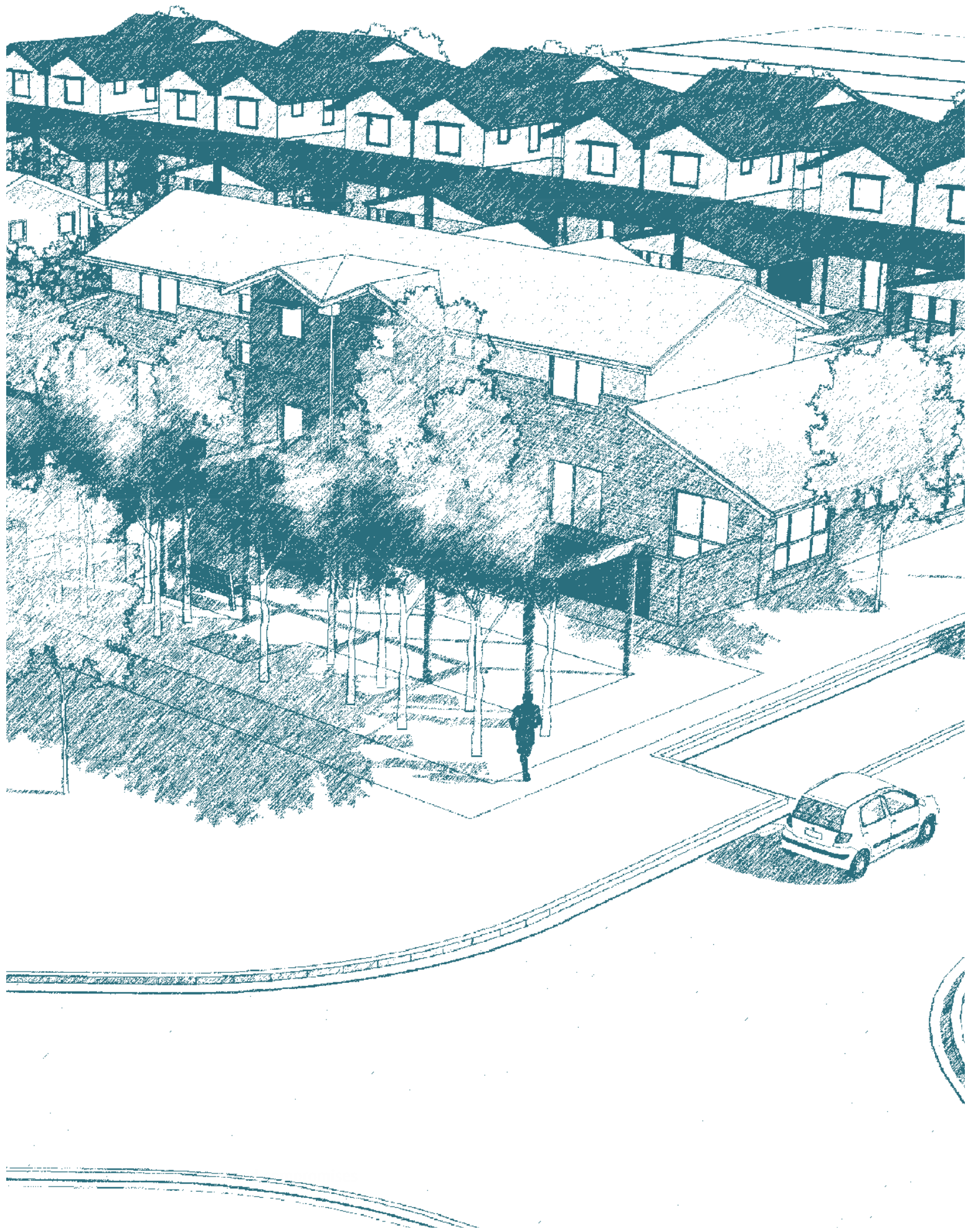
The families of the three young men were promised a place on the selection panel for the intentional community residents along with government officials and community members. For undisclosed reasons, and without discussion or notification, this did not occur.

Many of the tenants who were not part of the intentional community did not seem to be aware they were living in the physical environment of an intentional community. It had been agreed that all residents, whether part of the intentional community or not, would be aware of the nature of the residential development they were moving

into and the expectation that people would be friendly and inclusive and foster community harmony. There have been some difficulties with tenants' personalities, behaviour and activities, which has threatened the peace and cooperative spirit of the community. There have been several times when police have been called to some non-intentional community houses. (See description of non-intentional community residents in Section 4.)

Physically, the group wanted the development to be more circular with the houses around a central green or at least not in rows. But Housing ACT needed to maximise the land use by building as many houses as could fit; therefore the houses are in rows. The group also wanted a community building but again, to maximise the number of houses, this was not possible.

There has been some compromise about the ratio of people with a disability to people without a disability living in the entire complex. The core families wanted the ratio to more accurately reflect that of the broader community. However, there are eight people with a disability living in the community — a ratio that is much higher than in the broader community.



Safeguards

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE LIVES OF THE THREE YOUNG MEN, THE ONGOING FUNDING THAT SUPPORTS THE THREE YOUNG MEN, AND THE COMMUNITY ITSELF, ARE ALL SAFEGUARDED.

Jackson, Dan and Ben

Jackson, Dan and Ben are three young men who have enormous potential to live good lives where they are valued for who they are, valued for the contributions they make and valued as young men equal to any other young man, and entitled to the kinds of benefits and opportunities other young men have.

Currently, this potential is realised.

They also have a right to be safe at all times and to know that their lives will remain secure in future regardless of changes in government, bureaucracy or disability funding, services or policy.

The Getting a Life group have started to establish this level of safeguarding through partnership with Hartley Lifecare. This organisation understands completely the community, the philosophy, and Jackson, Dan and Ben and their needs. The Hartley Board is cognisant of and supportive of Hartley's partnership with the group.

It is easy for a life to be diminished, even after it has been established in the way Jackson, Dan and Ben's have been established. Therefore, it is important that they have people close to them who understand person-centred living and who can work to maintain their lives of quality, choice and control. It is important that Jackson, Dan and Ben have many people who know them and know what their lives look like now, so that they can look out for them and for any erosion in their quality of life in any area: home, support, work, leisure, health, happiness.

While the parents of Jackson, Dan and Ben are alive, active and advocating, there is some likelihood that they can ensure their sons' lives remains as they are now. But safeguarding mechanisms are needed for when the parents are not around. This may be a circle of support or a microboard. Each family will likely individually address this concern for their son.

This work will never cease throughout the young men's lives.

The individualised funding

Jackson, Dan and Ben need to know that their individualised funding and hence their independent lives are secure. They need the assurance of recurrent funding. Again, this needs to be reliable funding that will never be threatened by changes in government, bureaucracy or disability services, funding models or policy.

There is not much that the families can do about this except to continue developing the community and promoting it widely so that all can see what a fantastic place it is and what fantastic lives Jackson, Dan and Ben have. But, it is more than this — it shows:

- what community with three young men placed at the centre can look like
- how people will contribute to their lives and be good neighbours because they were asked to
- how the community benefits and learns from Jackson, Dan and Ben
- how three families have the peace of mind and their own new lives because of the Benambra Intentional Community
- how this community can be an example of best practice to other people with a disability, families, communities, governments, policy makers and the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The intentional community and the non-intentional community

The power to decide who lives in both the intentional and non-intentional community lies with Housing ACT. It is the people who make or break a community. Much has been invested in this community to date — financially, emotionally and practically. The families do not have control over who Housing ACT offers homes to within the community.

The families have asked Housing ACT to write into the job description of the Director of Gateway Services, a department within Housing ACT, that the position involves liaising with the families of Jackson, Ben and Dan when vacancies occur. The families have asked that a potential new director understand that the mix of families within the community is key to its survival and success and that they be familiar with the community, the philosophy, the selection process for new tenants in both areas of the community.

The families have been given verbal assurances for this but have not seen anything in writing to date.





10

A place to call home — our vision is realised

THE GETTING A LIFE VISION OF AN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY EXISTS. IT IS BUILT, FINISHED, PEOPLED, WORKING AND DEVELOPING.

It was worth all the years of hard work, all the years of waiting, all the frustrations, tears, setbacks, seemingly insurmountable difficulties and every one of the many meetings. It was worth the discussions, arguments, debates, disagreements, unanswered emails and phone calls, the seemingly endless lobbying. It was worth the hours of thinking and writing and re-thinking and re-writing.

The Getting a Life group, with all their supporters and allies and with the work of many, have achieved the almost unachievable. The Benambra Intentional Community sits there in Phillip ACT as a successful example of one kind of supported accommodation for people with a disability.

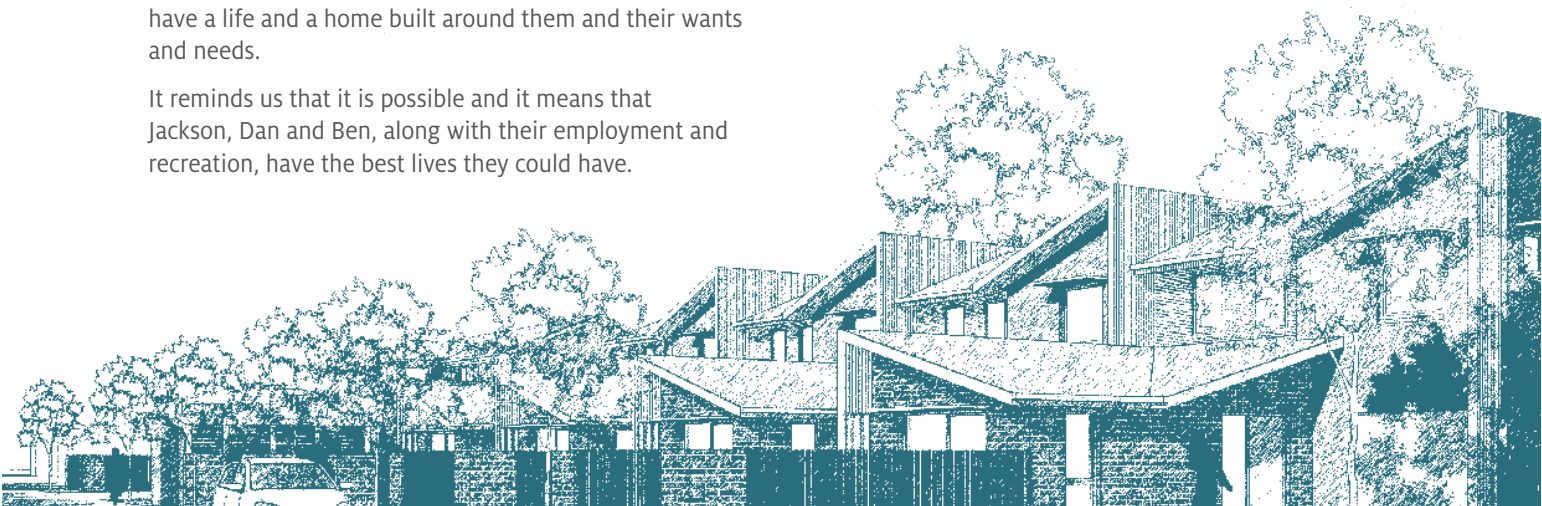
It reminds us that no matter how severe the disability or what kind of disability a person has, everyone can be in control of where they live, who they live with, who supports them and how they are supported. It doesn't matter how much or how little support a person needs to live in their own home, that support — with adequate funding — can be tailored to that person so that each person has a life unique to them. It means that they can have a life and a home built around them and their wants and needs.

It reminds us that it is possible and it means that Jackson, Dan and Ben, along with their employment and recreation, have the best lives they could have.

It means they are as safe as it is possible to be. There are many people who know and look out for them. There are many people who know all the support staff. Family are always welcome. Friends of family are always welcome. Co-residents and other support staff talk directly to family; they call to ask advice or give information, they send photos of joyous occasions, they drop in on Jackson, Dan and Ben's parents for a cup of tea and chat and vice versa.

The Getting a Life group have had much to celebrate over the years — each small step was cause to celebrate. They have had many highlights: acquiring the land, turning the sod, watching the build, getting the keys, moving in.

The official opening by Dame Quentin Bryce, then Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia on 20 May 2013 was the most wonderful event. There were hundreds of people there — everyone who had had anything to do with Benambra including many family members and friends, colleagues, politicians, bureaucrats, community organisation members, previous Getting a Life coordinators, workers on the build and residents. There was such an air of hope, happiness and achievement. Everyone was happy for Jackson, Dan and Ben and their families. It felt and was momentous.





A thank you

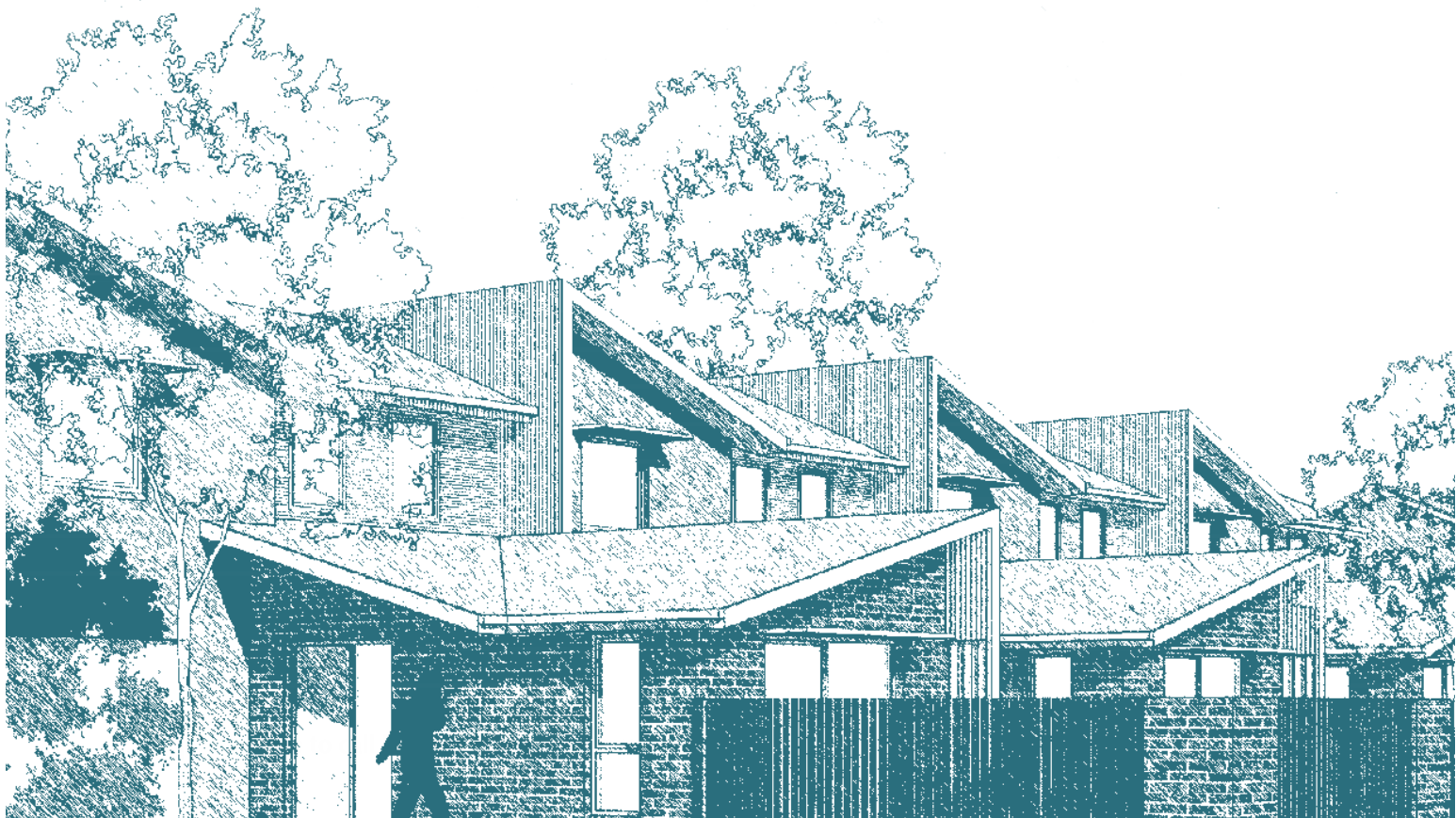
By Sally Richards

We have much to be thankful for. We are thankful for the support of so many people, for the professionalism and expertise of Housing ACT staff, for our funding from Disability ACT, for the consideration and responsiveness of AMC Architects, for the partnership we have with Hartley Lifecare. We are thankful that our sons are living in such a warm friendly community in new homes.

We are thankful for the wonderful support our sons receive from the co-residents and the other support staff. The co-residents are working well, providing our sons with the necessary supports so they have a good life. They are also working to build community and relationships within the community.

I am thankful for my new life, post full-time carer of my son Jackson. I suspect Karen and Cheryl feel the same.

We are keen for our innovative supported accommodation model to be an example to others. Not to emulate it necessarily, but to use our ideas, lessons, compromises, mistakes and perseverance as an example of what can be done; to use it as a motivator and assurance that many things are possible, and that just because it hasn't been done before doesn't mean that it can't be done now.





Acknowledgements and key relationships

The families

Karen Connaughton has been a staunch ally and equal contributor to this project. She especially spent hours working on the funding budget. At all times she has been and continues to be a mentor, friend, strategic thinker and hard worker.

Dan's father, Michael, and brother, Sean, have been a great support and are keen contributors to the community.

Cheryl Patrick has been involved in the project since 2008. She has attended many meetings and has seen the project to completion.

Ben's father, Steve, and brothers, Matt and Luke, have generously contributed electrical expertise and time to the community.

Tim West, Jackson's eldest brother, has provided his time, intellect and writing skills to co-author this paper.

All three of Jackson's brothers, Tim, Duncan and Lewis, are emotional and practical pillars of strength and humour.

Mac West, Jackson's father, gave his love and support for 23 years of Jackson's life.

Key champions

We could not have succeeded in our venture without the support of our key champions:

- Katy Gallagher MLA, Chief Minister of the ACT Legislative Assembly; formerly Minister for Disability
- Joy Burch MLA, Minister for Disability
- Eric Thauvette, Executive Director, Hartley Lifecare Inc

- Martin Hehir, former Chief Executive Officer, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services
- Lois Ford, former Executive Director, Disability ACT
- Maureen Sheehan, Executive Director, Housing ACT.

Other thanks

We also thank:

- Dame Quentin Bryce, former Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia
- Alastair McCallum and Dean McPherson of AMC Architects
- Liz Alexiev, Disability Programs Manager, Hartley Lifecare
- Mr Neil Finch, Disability Adviser to Minister Joy Burch
- staff from Housing ACT, in particular David Collett, Peter Johns, Franco Frino, Shaun Kelly, Richard Baumgart, Bridie Doyle, Frank Duggan
- staff from Disability ACT, in particular Kate Starick
- colleagues and friends, including Ian Ross, Community Connections Inc; Chris Redmond, Woden Community Services; Maureen Howe, Disability ACT
- David de Luca, Project Manager, St Hilliers
- Jason Aslimovski, Site Manager
- Johanne Beirne, former coordinator of Getting a Life
- the co-residents and support staff at Benambra
- the core residents who form the intentional community of Benambra.

Appendix 1: Getting a Life family governance

Family governance has many forms. This section describes family governance as it works in the Getting a Life group. While other models exist, we have found ours to be very successful. Our model has three elements:

1. The governance group, Getting a Life

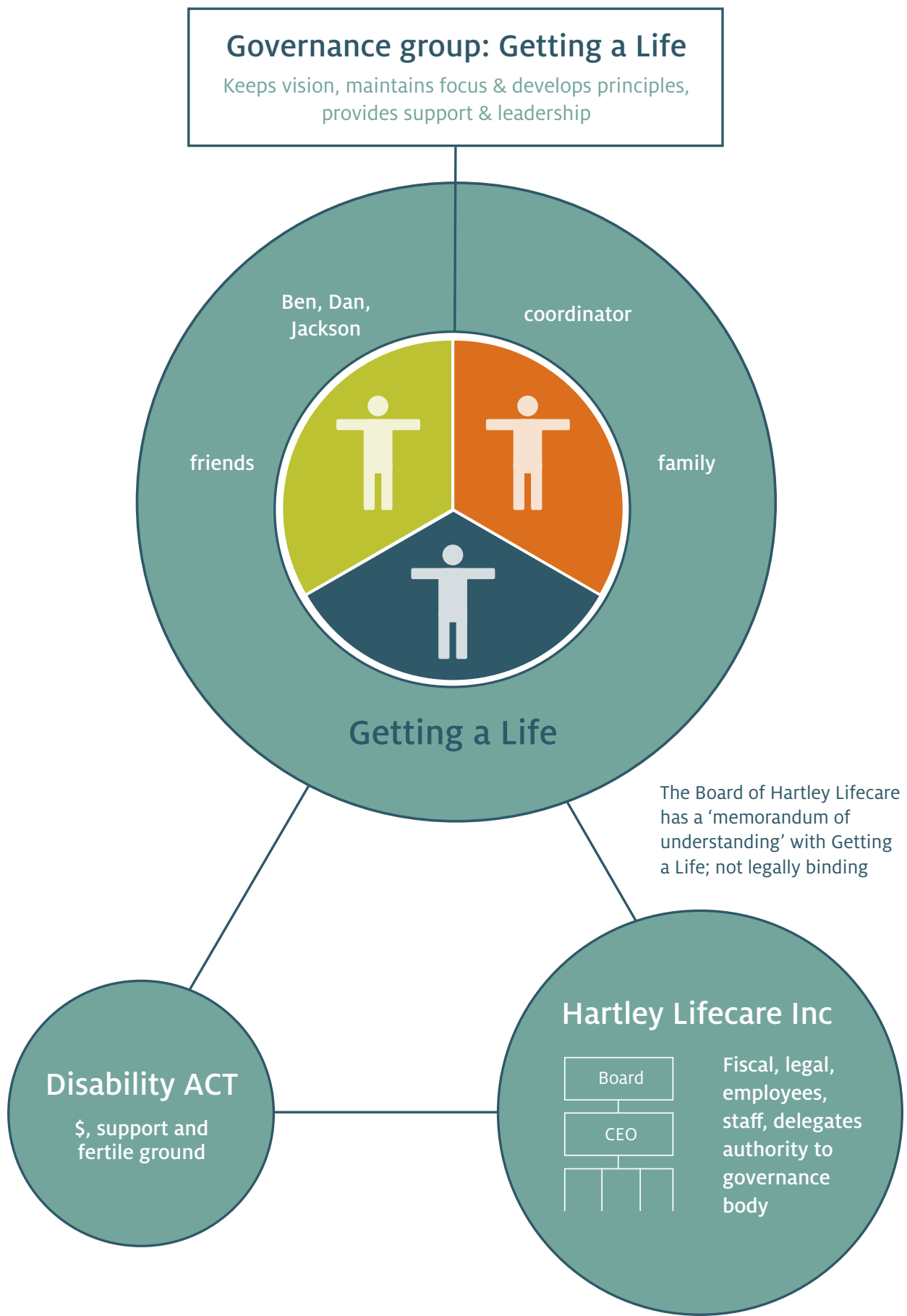
- a. Consists of Ben, Dan and Jackson, their families, the coordinator. All must understand and agree with the principles and philosophy of the project and want to be involved.
- b. Promotes and encourages a mutual ethic of right relationship, that is: humanness, integrity, individuality, honesty, openness, trust, modesty, etc.
- c. Doesn't standardise responses.
- d. Encourages unique and relevant responses to each persons wants and needs.
- e. Governs Getting a Life by guiding and making decisions about the principles, direction and membership.
- f. Ensures resources are directed where most needed ie the individual.
- g. Safeguards the ethical/guiding principles and intent of Getting a Life.
- h. Creates space for discussion, creativity, innovation, research and 'doing better'.
- i. Provides support and leadership to others.
- j. Chooses and guides a host agency with which it has a written and moral agreement (memorandum of understanding).
- k. Is accountable to project members, the host agency and any other organisation that invests in the project.

2. The host agency, Hartley Lifecare Inc

- a. Supports guiding principles.
- b. Maintains right relationship.
- c. Provides administrative, fiscal and legal support and advice to the Governance Group.
- d. Delegates authority to Governance Group to direct Getting a Life.
- e. Is a bureaucratic shield from departmental requirements.
- f. Trains and legally employs support workers.
- g. Informs the Governance Group of their legal obligations when choosing/managing staff.
- h. Informs people of their rights and responsibilities.
- i. Processes workers' salaries and associated costs.
- j. Manages departmental reporting obligations.

3. Disability ACT

- a. Provides fertile ground.
- b. Creates space for us to trial innovative approaches and solutions.
- c. Has belief and trust in us and encourages us to come up with our own relevant solutions.
- d. Supports a non-standardised approach.
- e. Is flexible.
- f. Provides some funding.



Appendix 2: Timeline of key events

The development of Benambra required more than 140 meetings between 2004 and 2013. In early years, these were mostly proposed and organised by the three mothers operating as the Getting a Life family governed group. Towards later stages, once the project to design and build Benambra was under way, meetings were also organised by staffers in ACT Government departments. This section sets out some of the most important meetings and events during the development of Benambra.

30/09/2004	Presentation by Sally Richards to senior ACT Government bureaucrats on Rougemont Intentional Community.
9/06/2005	Meeting with Mr John Hargreaves, ACT Minister for Disability.
14/06/2005	The Getting a Life group hosted the Rougemont/Deohaeko families in Canberra.
7/02/2006	Presentation on Rougemont Intentional Community to Housing Forum, ACT Legislative Assembly.
Next 18 months	Meetings with Ms Katy Gallagher, ACT Minister for Disability, CEO Disability, Housing & Community Service, Chair Hartley Lifecare Inc, ED Housing ACT, Disability Adviser to Ms Katy Gallagher, President and Vice-President of Canberra Community Housing.
2/04/2008	Meeting with Guida, Moseley and Brown Architects for concept drawing.
27/06/2008	Bus trip organised by Housing ACT to look at examples of community housing.
16/04/2009	Meeting with Mr Kel Glover, Stimulus Package.
1/06/2009	Meeting with Mr David Dawes, Chief Minister's Department.
31/03/2010	Meeting with Mr Neil Finch, Disability Adviser to Ms Joy Burch ACT Minister for Disability.
25/08/2010	Meeting with Ms Joy Burch, Mr Neil Finch, David Dawes, Ms Burch's Chief of Staff.
17/09/2010	Outing with Mr Neil Finch, a trip to view seven potential sites for the Intentional Community.
27/09/2010	Research trip to Perth.
18/01/2011	Ms Joy Burch launches the land/houses development on site.
24/02/2011	First meeting with AMC Architects.
7/03/2012	Sod turning — start of construction.
16/05/2012	Building stops due to builder going into voluntary administration.
31/05/2012	Building resumes.
28/06/2012	Slabs laid.
03/05/2013	We get the keys and Jackson, Dan and Ben move in.
20/5/2013	Opening of Benambra by Dame Quentin Bryce AC CVO, then Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Appendix 3: Speech by the Governor-General at the official opening of the intentional community

Acknowledgements: Ms Katy Gallagher, Chief Minister. Ms Gai Brodtmann, Member for Canberra.
Distinguished guests, all.

I am delighted to join you today for a very special housewarming. This place is a model of creative thinking and clever planning — a residential enclave that will be so much more than bricks and mortar. The vision: that every person who lives here will be engaged with the others. The aim: to create a community and foster a spirit of neighbourliness not because the residents are the same, but indeed because they are different from each other with a variety of talents and needs. The reality: 25 residences, including three for a particular trio of young men, Jackson, Ben and Dan — a common stake in the success of a new accommodation project and social initiative.

Countless ingredients have combined to bring this venture to fruition. Overwhelmingly though, it has been driven by the parents of Jackson, Ben and Dan, who have harnessed their love and hopes to ensure that their sons lead fulfilling lives. With the support of their families, these young men have already achieved much. They have learned skills, established networks and carved out unique career paths. Jackson has an award winning mail and pick-up delivery service. Ben is a mail courier at the Canberra Hospital. Dan is studying horticulture at the Canberra Institute of Technology and working part time at the National Convention Centre.

The next challenge — a big one — is for these young men to move into their own homes. The self-reliance this will entail is a natural and necessary step in their personal development and quality of life. I would like to pay special tribute to Sally Richards, the mother of Jackson. Sally and I have had several animated discussions about things practical and philosophical. It was Sally who hatched the 'getting a life' plan more than a decade ago, who has never taken no for an answer, and who has been unswerving in her belief in this project.

Sally, your dedication is truly inspiring. Again and again across my lifetime, I have observed that it is the parents of people with disabilities who make the difference. They know what is needed, they think about how to achieve it, and they work tirelessly to that end. As carers, advocates and fellow citizens, we owe them a huge debt of gratitude. Sally, Cheryl and Karen, who joined forces in 2005, have worked together through all manner of challenges and frustrations to reach this milestone. I congratulate you, individually and collectively, on your hard work.

To Jackson, Ben and David, I say 'bravo'! I wish you success and happiness as you embark on a new stage in your life. I am full of admiration for your willingness to have a go. The occupants of the other 22 residences are uniquely placed to build on the work that has gone into establishing this community. You can be powerful and positive forces in your neighbours' lives. Embrace that responsibility, and discover, through your involvement, new opportunities, understandings, knowledge and communication. Your own lives will be richer for it.

Friends, I hope that this community can be a shining example to all of us who are committed to enhancing the lives of people with disabilities, enabling them to participate as fully as possible in our national life. I have great pleasure in declaring the Getting a Life Intentional Community officially open. Welcome to the neighbourhood!

Appendix 4: The intentional community residents

This appendix contains documents, forms and brochures used in the advertising of the intentional community to existing ACT Housing tenants, information for tenants interested in the community, the selection of intentional community members and the forms that ACT Housing tenants eventually used to apply to live in the community. The specific documents are:

1. *General benefits of living in the intentional community.* When we first proposed the intentional community idea, some people were unclear as to why anyone would want to live in the Intentional Community. This document was used in educating people as to the benefits of living in the community.
2. *Brochure advertising the intentional community.* This document, from May 2012, was mailed to 1400 ACT Housing tenants before information sessions held about the Intentional Community.
3. *Responsibilities and obligations of residents of the Getting a Life Intentional Community.* This document was distributed to all ACT Housing tenants who signalled interest in the intentional community at an information night.
4. *Intentional community application form.*
5. *Philosophy of the intentional community.* This philosophy statement was distributed to, and had to be signed by, all new members of the Intentional Community.
6. *Intentional community selection criteria.* This form was used in the interview and assessment of prospective Intentional Community members.

The documents begin on the next page.

Getting a Life Intentional Community

There are a number of reasons why people are interested in creating an Intentional Community. The GAL group have embraced this concept because of the very sense of community that it promotes – because of the level of support and the feeling of belonging and sharing that can exist in an intentional community. This model of collaboration is attractive to many and in our case it is also important in helping to create independent lives for Ben, Daniel and Jackson, individually.

General Benefits of living in an Intentional Community:

- This Intentional Community model will provide tenants with independent, high quality, low cost accommodation with security of tenure.
- A stronger sense of neighbourhood and community exists because it is encouraged and expected.
- It is a live-able community where all are encouraged to participate and contribute in the running of that community.
- An intentional community encourages an atmosphere of inclusion.
- There exists a healthy balance between privacy and community. Each member lives independently whilst benefiting from the community.
- There is also a feeling of security and a sense of protection against crime. All members develop relationships with their neighbours and feel that their personal property and home will be watched out for by other community members.
- Generally the concept includes the availability of community/shared spaces (BBQ area, veggie garden etc) and this encourages members to get to know each other and also saves on resources. It is envisaged that this community would include a common room and a common open space which would foster the development of a supportive community around each member's home.
- More vulnerable members are more likely to be able to access company and assistance when necessary.
- It allows the creation of a village feel in an urban setting. It encourages the creation of an environment of familiarity and trust.



Come and live in a new Housing ACT residential community!



The Getting a Life Intentional Community



A new 25 unit development in Alsop Close, Phillip



Responsibilities and Obligations of Residents of the Getting a Life Intentional Community

All residents will respect and live by the basic rules of the community which are as follows.

All residents will:

- Actively include and welcome all other residents, new and existing
- Give help, friendship and time – and receive same – from other members
- Contribute 2 hours a month to the overall look of the community such as gardening, upkeep, tidiness
- Contribute to the social structure of the community - occasionally invite others into their homes, attend community social events
- Work to form lasting personal relationships with other residents
- Attend general residents' meetings
- Be available, if asked and free, to be a positive and safe presence for Jackson, Dan and Ben in one of the homes in the Intentional Community
- If available and free, assist Jackson, Ben and Dan with minor tasks such as bringing in the washing, collecting the garbage bin, making a phone call, buying a forgotten grocery item and similar
- Be willing to share resources such as mowers, whipper snippers, wheel barrows and other garden tools
- Control the behaviour and noise of their pets
- Abide by the Territory dog and cat policy (have to put the right words in here)

We plan to have a small and dedicated group of residents, The Community Builders, who meet regularly to think about and encourage the growth of community spirit and togetherness within the community.

All people who are connected or related to residents of the Intentional Community will be aware of the importance of contact, connection and building relationship between the residents. They will be supportive of the philosophy and aims of the community.

Risks to Jackson, Daniel and Ben

Jackson, Dan and Ben are, to differing degrees, vulnerable young men. They rely on the good intentions, honesty, integrity and support of others both inside and outside their homes, the intentional community and the broader community for their well-being and standard of living.

They are at risk of:

- Poor support, neglect and abuse.
- Having their standard of living compromised
- Not having their basic needs met
- Not having their wants met
- Not being heard/having a voice

Intentional Community Application Form

The purpose of this form is to give Housing ACT tenants the opportunity to apply to be a resident in the Intentional Community. **If you would like help with completing the form, please contact:**

- XXXXXXXXXXXX Housing ACT

Members of the intentional Community

The Intentional community will consist of 25 new Housing ACT properties in a development in Woden. Three of these properties will be allocated to already identified clients who have a moderate to severe disability.

Other residents selected to move into the community will commit to the requirements of the intentional community to create a neighbourhood of friends and support.

How we will select members for the intentional Community

Interested tenants will complete this application form which will be forwarded to a specifically selected panel of experts drawn from relevant government and community services.

Each application will be read by the panel members, who will work together to choose the tenants for the project based on the responses to the three primary criteria included in this application.

Selection Guidelines

The guidelines for choosing tenants for the Intentional Community will be used to assess each application. Please read these carefully before completing the questions on the following pages.

Guidelines for choosing members of the Intentional Community

A member of the Intentional Community will be:

- a current tenant of Housing ACT;
- be enthusiastic about the opportunity to create and participate in a neighbourhood of support;
- be prepared to attend general residents meetings;
- be prepared to become a registered volunteer of Hartley Lifecare;
- help provide an environment that is supportive, friendly and sensitive to the needs of people with a disability; and
- provide friendship to three young men with disabilities by way of advice and practical support.

How do I complete my application?

1. Fill in your contact details and answer the questions on the following pages:
Application form for the Intentional Community.
2. Post your completed expression of interest form to:
Housing ACT, Locked Bag 3000, Belconnen, ACT 2616
or email to: XXXXXX
3. Please note that forms are to be received by Housing ACT no later than Friday 17 August 2012.

Accessibility

The ACT Government is committed to making its information, services, events and venues, accessible to as many people as possible.

If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like to receive this publication in an **alternative format** – such as large print or audio – please telephone **(02) 6205 0619**.

If English is not your first language and you require the **translating and interpreting services** – please telephone **131 450**.

If you are deaf or hearing impaired and require the **TTY typewriter service** – please telephone **(02) 6205 0888**.

Application for the Intentional Community 2012

Name	
Postal Address	
Phone	(h) (mob)
Email	
I am a public housing tenant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (the Intentional Community is only available to existing Housing ACT tenants)
Applicant's signature	
Date	

1. Please provide some examples of how you are a good neighbour and help to develop or participate in your community?

2. Please outline any community based experience you have, such as undertaking a caring role or volunteering for a community agency.

3. Please outline why you are interested in participating in the intentional Community and what you think you can bring to the community.

4. If you are chosen as a member of the Intentional Community, would you agree to becoming a registered volunteer with Hartley Lifecare (including allowing a police check to be conducted)?

Yes

No

5. If you are chosen as a member of the Intentional Community, would you agree to participate in the general resident meetings and to contribute time and energy to supporting the other members of the Intentional Community?

Yes

No

6. Please tell us anything else that would be of interest in our consideration of your application for the Intentional Community?

Thank you for your application and Housing ACT will be in contact with you about the outcome in the near future.

PHILOSOPHY of the INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

THE VISION STATEMENT:

The Intentional Community is a community of people who support all residents of the Intentional Community to feel safe, supported and included and where all residents contribute to the ongoing welfare of each other.

THE MISSION STATEMENT:

The Intentional Community is a neighbourly welcoming place where residents respect, help and are friendly to each other and are committed to creating a community of support. To bring this vision into reality, residents of the Intentional Community will welcome and get to know new and existing members of the community and will actively and willingly help out others in the community by sharing their time, skills and resources with each other. Residents will attend and contribute to residents' meetings, social events and occasionally invite others into their homes as part of creating a safe and inclusive community.

THE VALUES STATEMENT:

Residents will demonstrate a belief in the vision and mission statements of the Intentional community and in the benefits of this community to themselves and others.

Residents will be good neighbours, get to know each other by name, help out with minor tasks that others might find difficult and share resources such as gardening tools.

Residents will be actively involved in their community and neighbourhood.

Residents will help others.

Residents will work cooperatively, collaboratively and harmoniously with others.

Residents will be proactive in making positive changes and implement ideas for improvement.

AGREEMENT

I agree that I am committed to the vision, mission and values statement of the Intentional Community and commit to:

- Living the values and beliefs outlined for the Intentional Community now and into the future.
- Contributing time and resources to ensure the mission and values outlined become a reality
- Building a community that includes Ben, Jackson and Daniel and all other residents of the Intentional Community
- Becoming a volunteer of Hartley Lifecare and have a Working with Vulnerable People check (similar to a police check)
- Attending and contributing to general resident's meetings and community social events.
- Resolving any conflict through community based solutions.

Signed.....

Date.....

Intentional Community Selection criteria

Members of the intentional Community

The Intentional community will consist of 25 new Housing ACT properties in a development in Woden. Three of these properties will be allocated to already identified clients who have a moderate to severe disability.

Other residents selected to move into the community will commit to the requirements of the intentional community to create a neighbourhood of friends and support.

How we will select members for the intentional Community

Each application will be read by the panel members, who will work together to choose the tenants for the project based on the responses to the three primary criteria included in the application and the selection guidelines that were included with the application.

Guidelines for choosing members of the Intentional Community

A member of the Intentional Community will be:

- a current tenant of Housing ACT;
- enthusiastic about the opportunity to create and participate in a neighbourhood of support;
- prepared to attend general residents meetings;
- prepared to become a registered volunteer of Hartley Lifecare
- willing to help provide an environment that is supportive, friendly and sensitive to the needs of people with a disability; and
- able to provide friendship to three young men with disabilities by way of advice and practical support.

The panel will assess each application using the selection criteria panel response form and, using consensus, seek to agree on ratings for all applications. The numerical ratings are not binding, they are to be used to assist the panel members and the panel as a whole to reach considered, accountable and fair decisions. If further information or clarification is required the panel may seek to interview applicants in person or via telephone.

When making its decisions, the panel will take into account differing levels of writing ability and English language proficiency that applicants may have. The panel will consider the need for the Intentional Community to be diverse and representative of the wider A.C.T. community and the need to match properties with the individual needs of applicants.

The panel will then select up to 22 future residents from these applications. Note that the panel may not approve 22 from the first selection round and future expression of interest rounds can be held until 22 residents have been selected.

Appendix 5: Co-residency documents

This section contains documents about the co-residency model:

1. *Information regarding the co-resident model of support.* This document was used in the education of ACT Government staffers, Hartley Lifecare and other interested parties.
2. *Position description: co-resident for Jackson West.* This document is the formal position description for the co-resident that cares for Jackson West.

General Information on Co-Residency in Benambra Intentional Community

Adapted from Lower Great Southern Community Living Association

- The co-resident lives with the person with a disability.
- A co-resident may be a single person, a same sex or heterosexual couple in a relationship or friends, a single parent, or a family.
- The co-resident applies for the position addressing selection criteria and is interviewed by the person with a disability, their family and Hartley Lifecare.
- This model is cost effective. Co-resident's are currently offered a salary with salary packaging.
- The co-resident performs their job according to a duty statement.
- The co-resident has annual leave, workers compensation, superannuation, training and support from Hartley Lifecare, the families and the other residents in the intentional community.
- The house is home to the person with a disability and the co-resident/s.
- The support by the co-resident is tailored to the needs and interests of the person with a disability.
- By employing a co-resident with similar interests to or shared interests with the person with a disability both lives are more enjoyable and expanded.
- The person with a disability is encouraged and supported to do as much as they can for themselves.
- Family support and ongoing involvement is valued and encouraged. In our model of support the lines between work, leisure, family and friendship are blurred. The person with a disability, co-residents, support staff are encouraged to bring many people into the home and life of the person with a disability and vice versa. This is dependent on the permission of the person with a disability but it is likely that
- many people who would not otherwise have contact with people with a disability do so as family and social networks of the co-resident extend to include the person with a disability and at times their family.
- Existing natural networks are maintained and expanded.
- Routines, from previous living arrangements can be replicated where appropriate.
- People can receive all the support they need in their own home.
- People can age in place.
- The level of disability does not preclude people from this model of care.
- There is an opportunity for lifelong relationships to be formed
- The role is much more than that of a support worker as living with a person and sharing a home forms a bond different to and stronger than the conventional one of support worker/client.
- There is opportunity for flexibility and spontaneity in a person's life.
- The person with a disability is the head tenant and holds the power. This is their home and they decide who lives with them, who supports them and who will be invited into their home and who will be asked to leave.
- People have the opportunity to be individuals and not one of a group of people with a disability sharing a house.
- People can own household items which is not always possible in other models of support.
- Much of the work being performed by the co-resident such as cooking dinner, cleaning the house etc are duties that they are also performing for themselves since they are in their own home. This needs to be considered when negotiating the salary.
- The co-resident has core support days and hours with negotiated respite built in; this is flexible and can change for special events, public holidays or longer holidays.
- The co-resident has a vested interest in all parts of the person with a disability's life as the happiness and health of the person will affect both of them.



**HARTLEY LIFECARE INC.
POSITION STATEMENT
January 2012**

BRANCH:

Disability Programs

JOB TITLE:

Co-Resident – Jackson West

SUPERVISOR:

Disability Programs Manager

LOCATION:

Phillip

AWARD:

Hartley Lifecare/Union Collective
Agreement 2008

SALARY:

Salary packaging of up to \$xx,xxx tax
free is available

CONDITIONS:

- Ability to work varied hours and days including evenings and weekends
- Subject to police check
- Australian citizenship or appropriate visa required
- Incumbent will undertake mandatory training in-line with Hartley Lifecare's policies.

SELECTION CRITERIA

1. Demonstrate strong commitment and appropriate values towards people with disabilities and their families.
2. Experience in providing appropriate support to people with disabilities including personal care, social support, community support and domestic support skills.
3. Ability to promote the health and well being of people with disabilities.
4. Demonstrated good housekeeping skills.
5. Demonstrated ability and commitment to cooking healthy, balanced meals.
6. Good communication skills.
7. Ability to apply occupational health and safety, and participative management principles and practices.
8. Current Driver's Licence and First Aid Certificate.
9. Ability to effectively use computers and Office suite such as Microsoft Word and Microsoft Outlook.

JOB DESCRIPTION

1. Provide personal care, community and social support and domestic services as required by Jackson, Sally Richards and the Manager.
2. Ensure Jackson is supported to do all that he can for himself.

3. Attend to the following: personal hygiene, grooming, dressing, eating and medication, as outlined on Jackson's plan and as directed by Sally Richards or the Manager.
4. Attend to Jackson's physical and material well-being and safety, while encouraging independence, and offer alternative individual choices where possible.
5. Provide support and companionship to Jackson at home and in the community.
6. Respect the privacy, dignity and confidentiality of Jackson and his family and other support workers.
7. Identify and act on factors that may contribute to Jackson's physical deterioration and social isolation.
8. Report to the Manager on Jackson's health and well-being and any other matters of concern.
9. Undertakes work showing due care and diligence and follows all safety guidelines related to providing a safe home.
10. Communicate effectively with Jackson, his family, friends, the co-ordinator and Hartley staff.
11. Maintain accurate records as required.
12. Inform and liaise with office and other staff on all relevant matters.
13. Attends training, planning sessions and meetings as required by Hartley Lifecare or Sally Richards.
14. Abides by the policies and procedures of Hartley Lifecare including staff code of conduct and occupational health and safety policies.

Benambra nominated for the 2016 ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards

Posted on [January 11, 2017](#)

Sally entered Benambra in the 2016 ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards. Although we did not win or get a mention, we thought it was worth posting our entry on the website.

Benambra nomination

Benambra Intentional Community* is a community of 11 homes within a residential Housing ACT complex of 25 homes. The intentional community (IC) began as the result of a vision and a strategy of the families of three young men with a disability; Jackson, Dan and Ben.

The beginning was engineered but three years 4 months on the community has a life and a culture of its own. The three young men are at the centre of a warm and diverse community of ordinary Housing ACT tenants. They have relationships with all the people in the IC and some relationships with the broader Benambra community. They have many more relationships outside the complex in the broader community because of the IC members.

The IC members have embraced the philosophy and goals of the vision and have welcomed living alongside Jackson, Dan and Ben. Each of the community members has brought other people into the community and into the young men's lives – they have introduced them to friends, family, extended family, colleagues, neighbours. Each of them is respectful of the young men and treats them with the dignity, friendship and support they deserve.

The young men have much richer lives than they did pre- Benambra. Their lives are richer in the number and quality of relationships, in the number of social events they attend outside of organized ones within the IC, in the warmth of the recognition and friendship extended to them by the IC, by the safeguards afforded by the knowledge that there are many people looking out for their well-being.

Disability awareness has increased through the efforts and extended contacts that each IC member has. Each person who comes to a social event, celebration or gardening day/working bee at Benambra is introduced to the young men, they ask questions about and are informed of the philosophy and goals of the IC.

Over the past 3 and a bit years there would have been more than 150 people who have been welcomed into IC events and who have returned many times to be a peripheral part of the IC. The IC goes for a Relationship Building Weekend Conference each year to strengthen ties, embed further the practices and philosophy of the IC and as a thank-you to everyone involved in Benambra. Support workers are keen to come without payment, IC members bring children, grandchildren, friends to the week-end, the IC members look forward to it and are most appreciative of the opportunity and Jackson, Dan and Ben always enjoy it.

The co-residency model of support also encourages relationship building and inclusion into the immediate and broader community. It is a stated part of the job description and listed in the duty statement.

The IC grows stronger each day and each member says that they are the lucky ones to know Jackson, Dan and Ben and to be a part of such a warm and wonderful community of connection and friendship.

Benambra Intentional Community is the first community of its kind in Australia – the first that combines intent to form a close mutually supportive community with the support model of co-residency. Both of these elements work together to expand the lives of all the IC residents. Each individual within the IC has expressed their joy and relief at living in an inclusive place of connection, friendship and support. Each has expressed their affection and respect for Jackson, Dan and Ben. Each has found their community.

The support model of co-residency purposefully blurs the boundaries between professional support and living in a shared home, and blurs the boundaries between professional support and other friendships and relationships. The co-residents are encouraged to expand Jackson's, Dan's and Ben's lives through inviting friends and family into the home and encouraging and accepting invitations to the homes of these friends and family members.

For Jackson, Dan and Ben it means they have their own life and relationships separate from that of their immediate family. Each of them now has a relationship with their parents that more closely resembles that of their non-disabled siblings; they visit the family home, are invited for dinner, drop in for cups of tea; and invite family to their home for visits, cups of tea or dinner.

The layers of safeguarding around each of the young men and the IC through the encouragement and establishment of diverse relationships, the co-residency model, the other IC members, their families and the professional oversight of the support arrangements by Hartley Lifecare means that their lives have the greatest chance of being safe, interesting, involved and respected. They are also valued for contributing to the rich and diverse life that is the IC environment.

Everyone in the IC is a winner. Everyone benefits and everyone acknowledges that they benefit. This is a community where inclusion of all is the norm, where disability is seen as another facet of a personality and of being human, where people are expected and want to be good neighbours to others, to include them in life, to invite them to be a part of their lives, to support and value them for who they are and their intrinsic values of humanness.

There is a [photo book which documents the first 2 years of community life at Benambra](#). There are many other photos and news items on the website all of which give weight to the inclusive nature of the community. Scroll down the first page on the website to see a list of presentations by Sally and Karen and to see the interest generated by the community. Sally has been interviewed by additional universities in 2016 including the Centre for Disability Studies, Sydney University and others.

** An Intentional Community is a planned residential community designed from the start to have a high degree of social cohesion and teamwork. Benambra Intentional Community was created with the specific purpose of including three men with a disability.*

What the Intentional Community People say

"I first came in contact with the Benambra community last year as a musician to play at a wedding celebration and at their Christmas function. What struck me most was the joy that these people shared among themselves. But it was a special kind of joy, because at the centre of it all were these three young men who each have a disability.

I saw in the faces of Jackson, Danny and Ben a real sense that they were deeply loved and valued by people who were not family members.

The commitment of Sally, Karen, the support workers and other team members to this community has created something that is unique in that everyone benefits from what Benambra stands for.

I was so impressed by what I saw that I have now joined and live in the community myself. I honour these people and I honour what they are doing, and I trust that they will continue to be supported in the wider community for the benefit and good of all."

– Reverend Dr V Z (IC resident)

"I like living at Benambra because I have good friends and I can help people in the community. I like having my own home and I enjoy the community functions and using my car to take people out."

– BP (IC resident)

"Working at Benambra is like champagne —FULL OF BUBBLES AND POP! I have worked here for 3 years and this community has given me a place to belong; a place to live while at the same time being in a caring role. It is a place for all community members to share their lives with other like-minded and caring people. I LOVE LOVE LOVE IT."

– MG (support worker)

"When I first heard about the IC I thought what a great idea for Jackson, Dan and Benny to branch out on their own and what an opportunity for me to give a little something back. What I've discovered is this community has not only been a chance to give but to stretch my social boundaries and improve my quality of life and health. I am both honoured and grateful to be part of this wonderful community and call these three remarkable young men my friends. I highly recommend others to come join in."

– V M (IC resident)

"I love living in Benambra with my friends. Everyone is very kind and helps me. They have time to talk and listen to me and play games and have BBQs with me. I feel very happy to live here. I like living here because of all the fun we have together. I like everyone."

– D C (IC resident)

"What I enjoy about the community is the diversity of the group; we all have something to share and something to learn from each other."

– D B (IC resident)

“Being a part of Benambra gives me a sense of belonging that I have not had since I was young. Over time we have become a community in more than just name, with Jackson, Daniel and Ben as the cornerstones. We share good times and bad and know that in a time of need we have friends indeed. I cannot imagine living anywhere else.”

– C (IC resident)

“The community is very friendly and works together for a great future.”

– A R (IC member and co-resident)

“This community is amazing. As a regular attendee of Benambra events I feel extremely emotional when I observe the love and support they show each other but in particular Jackson, Daniel and Ben. The community has offered an enormous amount of practical (e.g. developing a fire plan that ensures each of the residents has at least one buddy to assist them at times of emergency) and emotional (e.g. ensuring birthdays are formally recognised and celebrated) support to the three men. The guys are happy, safe and supported thanks to the Benambra IC residents in their lives. It is a strong example of the value of inclusion and being embedded within a community for people with a disability. If more communities embraced this ideal the world would be so much richer.”

– K C (parent of IC resident)

BENAMBRA

*A place insulated from apathy
but not isolated from society,
where people of heartfelt mind
purposefully build an interconnected web of relationships with their
neighbors to support, include and share with each other.
Where no one is forgotten in the dark and celebratory journeys of
togetherness are provided to all who give to themselves and others.
A window to the past when the clichés of caring were common and
residents had a respectful responsibility for each other.
A door to the future when local becomes global,
micro becomes macro
and everyone has a respectful responsibility for everything.
A dream to build in security, an expanding enrichment of meaningful
lives in Benambra Intentional Community.*

– SC (IC support worker)

“Any time spent at Benambra is enlightening and a great example of what happens when a caring, cooperative and selfless group of people are brought together.”

– S C (IC resident)

“I have been living at Benambra since the first day and I love it. I am surrounded by people who care about me, acknowledge me, talk to me, take me out, offer friendship and assistance. I see my family often but at Benambra I have my own home, my own community, my own housemate and my own friends. I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.”

– J W (IC resident – written by his mother)

“My association with Benambra started two years ago when my son began working as a support worker for a couple of residents. During this time I have attended many Benambra social gatherings both on and off site and have always come away feeling joyful and pleased to have become involved. I know that my son’s work with Benambra residents has inspired him to be more mindful of the contribution that people living with disability can make to the broader ACT community and he values his time at Benambra as a wonderful opportunity. What most impresses me about the community is the way in which all residents, as well as associated family and friends, have developed a strong sense of belonging. Within this close-knit extended network there exists a generous culture of giving, where everyone is willing to learn from others and embraces the idea of appreciating one another’s strengths. Shared meals are an integral part of any Benambra social gathering, and whether the theme is Easter or Halloween or Christmas, the food and the experiences are always amazing and executed with a great sense of fun and good humour.”

– K H (friend of Benambra)

“This is an absolutely amazing community full of supportive people, each of the many events Benambra holds has helped make this the friendliest street I’ve ever had the privilege of living on.”

– C B (IC member and co-resident)

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