



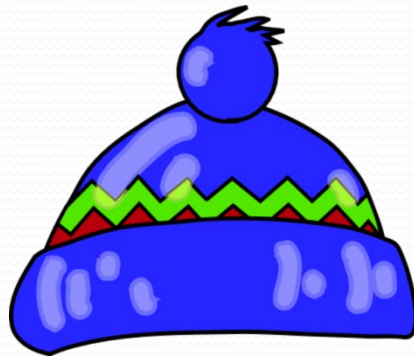
Can I bring my cat?

Meeting the needs and aspirations of
people using mental health housing
services

A collaborative project by the University of Auckland,
Positive Thinking Ltd, Pathways, and Pact

Who are we?

- Jacquie
- Gareth
- Johnny
- Steve
- Donald
- Ross



- We all have plenty of different hats that we brought to the table!



What do we already know?

- It is very difficult to maintain good mental health without safe, affordable and stable housing
- Service users face discrimination
- The private sector is expensive, and has a lot of unsafe and unhealthy houses
- People need help with WINZ and MSD
- People need help to find a bond, get the power connected, and move their gear
- Too much support can interfere with people's recovery, and too little can leave people vulnerable

Who did we talk with?

- 70 people
- 42 service users
- 28 staff
- All involved with housing support services in Dunedin, Hamilton or Auckland

What did we find?

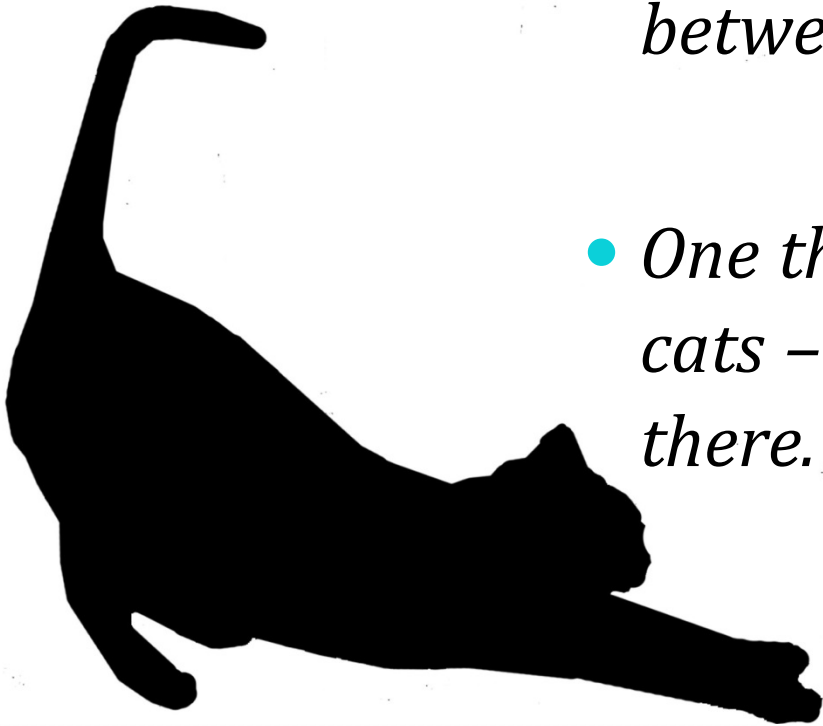
Supported housing works



- *I've got the support and the communication is good with the staff, I feel I can talk to staff about how I'm feeling. They surround us, my key worker is wonderful.*
- *I can't thank this service enough, they've showed me how to live my life as best I can*

Medical care wasn't mentioned as often as cats were!

- *I wouldn't have come if I couldn't bring my cats. Nothing comes between me and my cats.*
- *One thing I do like is I get have my cats – I've had three since I moved there.*



Isolation and loneliness

- *It would help if services could assist more, like more outings and social activities and more time with support workers – they do alternate shifts so when they're on evenings they can't do things with us.*
- *It can be lonely and isolating sitting in the flat all day*
- *In hospital it's good, there's occupational therapy with walks or art, music and writing and then you get here and it's like 'what do I do? It'd be good to have more activities because there's nothing to do.*

Rent, size and location

- *The rent could be cheaper – it's not fair rent for the amount of space we get. It's better than being homeless though.*
- *I don't like the area I live in, I feel cut off and that's not conducive to recovery. But if I didn't take it I would have nowhere and now I feel trapped because I can't afford to move*

Taking the next step: challenges

- *It's good when you need it but it is a bit of a trap. I pay \$90 and that includes bills. The cheapest I'll be able to find is \$170 or \$190 for a crap bedsit and then I'll lose personal income to pay for it and then there're bills on top of that.*
- *I don't want to live alone but I'm having a hard time finding a good friend or a partner*
- *I kept getting knocked back from places and was advised not to divulge where I was (the residential service). It's a part of the stigma you have to live with, so I'm always trying to make a good impression.*

Being who we are

- There's a balancing act of holding on to personal integrity whilst dealing others' perceptions:
- *It's not necessary to be normal. We have a different way of going about things and we have to hold back while holding on to our sense of identity.*
- One person set up a shared housing situation with other service users 12 years ago. Now they need a new flatmate and they were advertising specifically in mental health services because *“the way we live might not be normal to other people so I want someone who understands that”*.

Moving on?

- *Some people are so well supported in every way, financially, emotionally, and socially that the service sets up an unrealistic expectation of what life is like. It makes it really stressful for them to move on*
- *Reputation and history can be a huge barrier for some people as they often can't escape their past, even if they were unwell at the time.*
- *Finding affordable, sustainable housing in the right area with access to services in a safe and healthy environment is too hard.*
- *The financial and emotional risks involved in moving can send people back to hospital and then they need to start all over again. They can actually end up with more debt.*

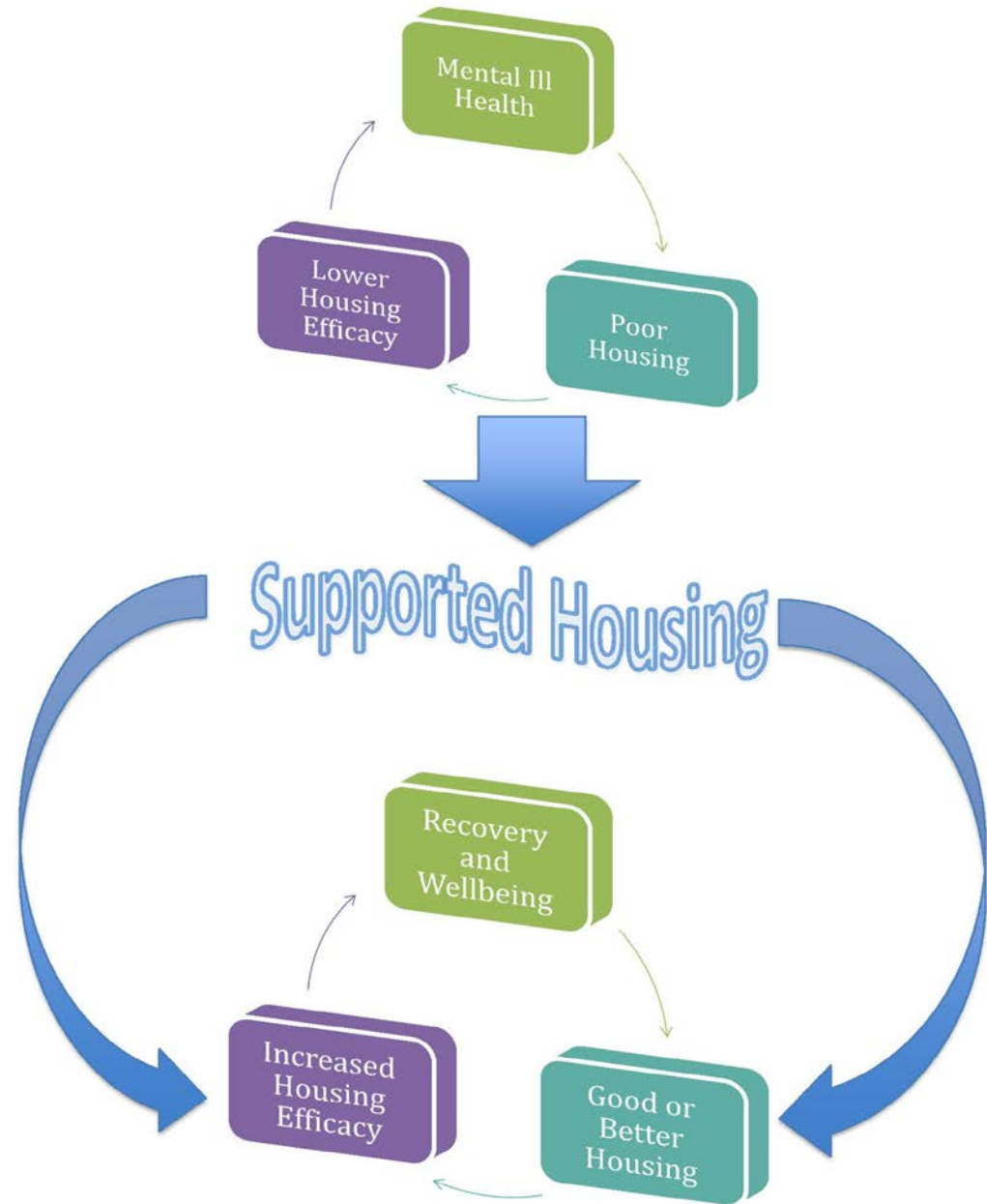
Balanced with this . . .

- *My dream is to share my life with my kids, be employed, have money and a place to live. I want to live the kiwi dream. I'd like to own my own home and correct the things I've done, give something back.*

Housing efficacy

- The power and the ability to get the housing you want.
- Low housing efficacy could include factors like increased debt, poor rental history, reduced state resources like prioritisation or allowances , or being in a state of crisis
- High housing efficacy could include having a choice of neighbourhoods, some good rental references, or a workable budget

The loops



Conclusion

- The involvement of housing support services can help people move from a difficult and deteriorating situation to a more positive, empowering one.
- On a basic level it works directly by providing better housing.
- It can also work on increasing housing efficacy through addressing issues like access to resources.

What should we do differently?

- Separate the provision of accommodation from the provision of support services
- Recognise that housing support is a social intervention that is being funded and measured by health outcomes
- Better MSD – Health interventions to assist people with lived experiences to get and keep their housing
- Respect and knowledge from housing and income support agencies towards the needs of people with lived experience
- Increased support to enable staff to “do” the job of housing support.

Can I Bring My Cat? YES!

(well, we think you should be able to)

