

THE ABBEYFIELD MODEL

The Abbeyfield model offers a community based group housing option for older people and people with a disability who are in need of housing and support:

- Houses are initiated, developed and managed by volunteers from local communities in partnership with Abbeyfield Australia;
- The houses are integrated into the streetscape and are non-institutional in design and operation;
- Residents are encouraged to be active and involved in the running of the house and the life of the community; and
- The operation of the houses is supported by a formal legal and administrative framework linking the local and national levels

THE COMPONENTS OF THE MODEL

Abbeyfield's primary focus is to provide a locally managed housing option for low income people with a particular housing need. Abbeyfield group houses, which provide accommodation usually for ten people, are integrated into the local community and are developed as far as possible to be '*an ordinary house in an ordinary street*'. More often than not residents have previously lived in the general area and continue to benefit from and contribute to their communities.

The Abbeyfield model has four interrelated components which together form a supportive environment and encourage independent, group living for people with different needs. The four components are:

- The house;
- The local community;
- The housekeeper; and
- The residents themselves.

Each of these component parts is an essential element in creating a supportive and flexible environment. Residents have security, companionship, good food and comfort without surrendering their right to make decisions.

THE HOUSE

An Abbeyfield house typically provides a private bed sitting room plus an ensuite bathroom for each of ten people. All other areas of the house are shared. They include: kitchen, laundry, sitting and dining rooms, the house bathroom and a spare room to enable relatives or guests to sleep over. A self contained house keeper's unit is an integral part of the house. The surrounding garden is available for residents' active and/or passive recreation. Abbeyfield houses are usually purpose built or sometimes consist of existing properties which are renovated or refurbished. Each house is architect designed and conforms to the Abbeyfield design guidelines which, in turn conform, to the Australian Building Code. Abbeyfield houses are non-

institutional in design and appearance but are easily accessible and safe for the residents. They are domestic in scale and integrated into the local community and its streetscape.

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The development and operation of an Abbeyfield house is dependent on the continuing involvement of members of the local community, or of a community of interest, who together make up the local Abbeyfield Society. The Society's members are volunteers who manage, in partnership with Abbeyfield Australia, the development and on-going administration of a house. Local societies often include members of other established community, church or service groups and representatives of local government. These local societies have a crucial role: they often locate and secure land for the house, contribute to the planning process, oversight the construction or renovation of the building, raise funds to meet the costs of fit-out, assess residents, employ the housekeeper, manage the house budget and take responsibility for ensuring that all rooms remain occupied and that maintenance and upkeep are carried out. They also provide support and assistance to the residents and the housekeeper when and if it is needed. The local Abbeyfield Society is made up of people with a concern about housing choices. They contribute a wide range of skills and knowledge to each project.

THE HOUSEKEEPER

An Abbeyfield housekeeper is employed by the local Abbeyfield society. The housekeeper does the household shopping, prepares two meals a day, five days a week, cleans the shared areas and provides a focus for the house. Casual workers are employed to provide meals at the weekend. A rent-free self contained unit is provided for the housekeeper on the premises. The housekeeper is employed under the terms of an industrial award, *The Liquor and Accommodation Industry - Abbeyfield Society Supportive Houses - Award 2000*, which clearly defines the housekeeper's duties and responsibilities. His/her wages are paid out of the residents' weekly contributions. The housekeeper does not provide personal care for residents nor is he/she responsible for solving residents' problems and disagreements. The housekeeper is expected to refer these and other issues which may arise in the house to the volunteer members of the local Abbeyfield Society for consideration and resolution in consultation with residents.

THE RESIDENTS

Abbeyfield in Australia offers housing to people in need. At present, housing is available to people aged 55 plus who have few assets and are dependent on the Age Pension and to younger adults with a mild physical or intellectual disability in receipt of a Disability Pension. Financial eligibility criteria for residents is usually that which applies to public housing but it can vary depending on the source of capital funding at the time of construction. However, Abbeyfield residents are generally people living on low incomes. Residents are mostly single, though married couples can also be accommodated by giving them access to two rooms which are shared according to the couple's needs. Residents tend to live in the area or have other connections with

the house through relatives or friends but access to Abbeyfield depends on housing need.

Residents' tenure is protected by a formal Residence Agreement which includes the terms and conditions of residence in an Abbeyfield house and sets out their rights and responsibilities. Residents contribute to the management of the house through a residents' or house committee. Any disputes which arise can be dealt with by the house committee or, if needed, through a more formal dispute resolution process.

Sometimes residents are isolated, lonely or frail. Others are testing their independence and autonomy while others may need guidance and structure. All require a measure of support but value their independence and wish to manage their own lives. Support for Abbeyfield residents may be provided by their peers, the members of the local Abbeyfield society, the housekeeper, within the terms of the industrial award, by home based or community care services or by family and friends.

If a resident's health or developmental needs can no longer be met at the house, he/she may move to alternative accommodation or seek assessment to move into a more appropriate environment. The level of support provided in an Abbeyfield house allows residents to remain independent but it is not sufficient to encompass dementia, extreme behaviour or a high degree of frailty.