

Forming Men's Groups in Residential Care Facilities





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The Purpose of this Manual

Since 2001, The Older Men's Network Inc. (TOMNET) has been delivering a range of services to older men in Toowoomba and surrounding rural areas. Its aim is to address older men's issues, including suicide prevention.

Over the past six years a "Community Connections Program" has been functioning and is now well established. This program targets two categories of men: those living in their own home in the community and those living in a variety of care facilities. Differences and similarities exist between the two groups. To some extent all the men are dependent upon others for their health and wellbeing; however some live alone while others have family or professional carers in their lives.

The extent of loneliness and isolation the men experience in relation to their physical, mental, emotional and social health needs, are significant. This is equally a matter of importance for those men in a care facility who have people – largely women – and activity all around them but nevertheless feel lonely and isolated in the proverbial crowd.

The Community Connections Program provides two key services. Those living in the community receive regular one-on-one home visits from TOMNET volunteers. From this point of engagement the man will be encouraged to visit one of the many activities within TOMNET or in the wider community.

For men living in care facilities, the opportunity to gather for a monthly meeting in the facility with other older men including TOMNET volunteers is a welcome inclusion in their lives. It is our experience that a flow-on effect occurs as bonding takes place among the facility men and friendships with the TOMNET volunteers are formed. This gives all the men involved a sense of belonging and even a purpose for living.

Working closely with administrative and direct care staff requires understanding and respect. Care facility personnel are very busy people due to workload pressures and time constraints. By working in partnership with facility personnel TOMNET can provide meaningful support to the men in the facility's care with the result that all three, the men, the staff and the volunteers can benefit from the experience.

The purpose of this manual is to outline the TOMNET model of service to older men in care facilities. It is designed to assist facilities and other community support groups to take on this challenging but rewarding work. Care facilities interested in forming a men's group can use the experiences and learning that TOMNET has demonstrated through its years of professional engagement with older men. Our skills and knowledge are there to be shared by way of this manual and in conversation with us.

Our hope is that you will embark on this venture and discover the satisfying benefits that accrue to everyone involved.

Louise Adcock
General Manager

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