



Leading the Way

Your guide to becoming a Lead Tenant

What is the 'Lead Tenant' program?

The Mercy Community Services (MCS) Lead Tenant (LT) program is a way to support young people who can't live at home and need to start working towards living on their own. It's a transitional step – offering young people the freedom of living away from 'parents' or 'carers' but still having some support with case management, mentoring, life skills and community integration.

The 'Lead Tenant' program sits within a broad range of services to support young people who can't live at home, including out-of-home care support, transition and education services and supported independent living.

The overall aims of the Lead Tenant program are:

- To provide safe, flexible, nurturing, shared and informed transition support and accommodation options for young people in order for them to move safely towards adulthood and community (interdependent) living.
- To provide long term stable living.
- To encourage and support young people to understand and build positive relationships with people who are important to them.
- To respect, encourage and support young people's cultural journey.
- To support young people to identify, establish and maintain networks and support systems to assist them in their transition towards interdependent living. This includes engagement in local community activities, employment, education, health and wellbeing.

We do this by:

- Providing safe and respectful living environments for young people and Lead Tenants.
- Respecting and involving young people (and where appropriate their families) in choices and decision-making.
- Recruiting, training, resourcing and supporting Lead Tenants within current volunteer guidelines.
- Working collaboratively with the continuum of Mercy Community Services' programs and all key stakeholders to maximise opportunities for young people in the program.
- Working with other regional/state-wide Lead Tenant programs to maximise learning and outcomes for staff, volunteers and young people.
- Maintaining and building on existing partnerships and housing access systems – entry points etc.
- Developing partnerships with local communities (cultural, sporting, and religious) to more successfully integrate young people into their communities.
- Participation in weekly house meetings, engagement in activities, and monthly check-ins.

How does the 'Lead Tenant' program actually work?

The program looks like this – MCS provides a house. In the house lives one to three Lead Tenants and up to three young people. The house is supported by MCS workers (or SILP workers-SILP stands for Supported Independent Living Program) who regularly visit and work with both Lead Tenants and young people to make sure that things are going well.

No household arrangement is ever the same and this is why it's important for MCS workers to be actively involved in providing the right support to both Lead Tenants and young people. Our young people will have plans that are regularly reviewed and our Lead Tenants will receive regular training and coaching to help them deal with any issues that may arise.

What is the role of a Lead Tenant and what do they actually do?

A Lead Tenant is a volunteer who lives in a MCS property. They have their rent, utilities and some of their living expenses covered by MCS. In return, they provide support for young people living in the house with them. Lead Tenants are positive role models for young people living with them. They're able to share what it means to live an appropriate lifestyle, how to achieve personal goals, engage well in education or employment, how to take care of yourself, how to communicate well and deal with issues. Our Lead Tenants are encouraged to establish positive and meaningful relationships with the young people in the household and to take opportunities to help young people develop their social and recreational skills.

A good Lead Tenant:

- Demonstrates and models great social and interpersonal skills;
- Is patient, honest, respectful and consistent;
- Has a great sense of humour;
- Works as part of a team
- Upholds the values and ethos of MCS?
- Receptive and reflective on personal feedback
- Positive and enthusiastic attitude

Making sure our young people are living with the right, safe people is a big job. Because of that, our Lead Tenants will always have:

- A current Blue Card;
- A current Police check;
- A full assessment prior to them commencing as Lead Tenants, which includes a Self-Assessment, a medical history, an interview and anything else that helps with that assessment;
- Regular meetings with MCS workers (we call them 'supervision sessions') to ensure that you are equipped, coping and doing the best you can;
- Respect for privacy and confidentiality.

As a Lead Tenant, you are never on your own. During the day, our workers are just a phone call away and after hours we have a SILP Support Line that can help with emergencies.

What do I need to do as a Lead Tenant?

The expectations of Lead Tenants are as follows:

- We need Lead Tenants to work as part of a team, including with MCS workers, young people and other stakeholders.
- It is expected that one Lead Tenant will be in the house at night at all times between the hours of 10pm and 6am. Regular time off for the Lead Tenant to be away from the household can be negotiated. Similarly, due to safety for young people, guests are not to stay at the house overnight (unless there are exceptional circumstances, which you can speak to your MCS worker about).
- Following recruitment and training, MCS needs Lead Tenants to enter into a contract with MCS regarding their Lead Tenant requirements. This contract will outline conditions, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities. It will include the terms of the role and will cover what will be provided, including rent and living expenses.
- We expect Lead Tenants to host weekly house meetings with their fellow residents. SILP workers may also attend scheduled house meetings.
- We'll also expect Lead Tenants to do some activities with the young people in the house on a regular basis. MCS will provide financial assistance for these activities and SILP staff will assist tenants in the organisation of them.

How will I know if I want to be a Lead Tenant?

There are many reasons for wanting to become a Lead Tenant, which may include:

- A desire to make a difference in the lives of young people;
- Wanting to see young people succeed in life;
- Wanting to do something meaningful with our time and skills;
- Feeling that you have something to give to a young person in need.
- A desire or passion to work with young people in the future

Whatever your reasons for wanting to become a Lead Tenant, here are some things to consider first:

- Do you have the time, energy and commitment to provide a mentoring role to young people?
- What rewards might there be for you in being a Lead Tenant?
- Have you discussed this commitment with your family members or significant others?
- Can you accept the backgrounds and family lifestyles of children and young people coming into care?

- Are you comfortable with and supportive of a young person having access with his/her family?
- Can you understand the importance of confidentiality?
- Will you be able to work as part of a team with agency staff?
- Can you understand young people's behaviour and respond to their needs appropriately?
- Do you have a clear understanding of your own strengths and limitations?
- Are you able to ask for support when you need it?
- Do you understand the impact of trauma on a person's behaviour and how to respond sensitively, patiently and appropriately?
- Are you comfortable living in a shared residence with other young people and other lead tenants

Remember that although you have volunteered to be a Lead Tenant, the young people you will be mentoring have not asked to be in care. Be mindful about what you expect from them.

There are also plenty of personal rewards of being a Lead Tenant:

- Giving young people a sense of stability, belonging, self worth, independence, positive role models, ability to form relationships, discovering their talents and skills.
- Changes in your attitudes, skills and worldview.
- Providing a valuable community service.
- Personal growth.
- Professional development

What are the young people in the Lead Tenant program like?

Young people who might be involved in the Lead Tenant program are looking to transition to fully independent living. This is often a big step when you've just left a house or a residential care facility, so living in a Lead Tenant house is the next step.

Young people in the Lead Tenant program are in the care of the state and can't live at home with their parents. Young people come into care for all kinds of reasons, including:

- Family illness, crisis or stress
- Family rejection and conflict
- Their parents move away and they wish to stay in their community;
- Experiences of child abuse or neglect
- Mental health/substance abuse issues

While you might find out some information about the young people living in your house, it's important to be careful with this information. Don't use it to judge young people and certainly don't use it to predict what the young people might be like – they'll often surprise you! Like anybody, you should be respectful and expect the same in return.

Some young people find adjusting to supported independent living difficult. They've gone from having their meals cooked and their house cleaned to needing to do those things themselves. They've also got a newfound sense of freedom and this can take some adjustment (we've all been there!). Along the way, people sometimes make poor choices.

Young people in the Lead Tenant program are made aware that their responsibilities include:

- Participating as a household member, including attending house meetings and assisting to maintain the house in a clean, respectable way (including cooking, cleaning, budgeting and shopping);
- Respecting other tenants, personal space and property;
- Paying rent to MCS by the due date;
- Ensuring no illegal substances, alcohol or dangerous weapons are at the house at any time;
- Ensuring that no overnight visitors stay without the approval of MCS workers;
- Engaging in a daytime activity (education or employment) at least four times a week;
- Sleeping at the house for a minimum of five nights a week unless there is a prior agreement with the SILP worker;
- Letting Lead Tenants know where they are if they're not coming home during the night.

The young people might also have some interesting behaviours that could include:

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| • Acting out or testing boundaries | • Fighting |
| • Inappropriate affectionate behaviour | • Stealing or other criminal behaviour |
| • Short attention span | • Enthusiastic and energetic |
| • Poor peer relationships | • Sad, unhappy |
| • Sexualised behaviour | • Distressed |
| • Temper tantrums | • Relaxed / lazy |
| • Swearing | • Withdrawn |

It is helpful to remember that:

- All behaviour is communication.
- A young person's behaviour is a reflection of their life experiences.
- All young people are different and therefore it is important not to presume how they may or may not behave.
- Lead Tenants need to be flexible and sensitive in managing a young person's behaviour. It is often necessary to look beyond the behaviour to establish what the young person may wish to communicate.

Regardless of their behaviour, young people respond well to:

- Consistency
- Clearly defined boundaries
- Routine
- Being listened to
- Caring gestures, like a high-five, an encouraging word, a vote of confidence and a smile

What is the MCS worker there for?

MCS workers are there to help our young people achieve their goals and have their needs met. They're also there to assist Lead Tenants. Their role involves:

- Providing support to young people
- Developing partnerships within the community so that young people have a network of support to access
- Being available, during the day and after-hours (as part of a roster)
- Coordinate professionals involved in the young people's lives
- Develop plans (we call them Transition Support Plans, or TSPs) that support the young people to achieve their goals. These plans are developed in partnership with other supports, including the young person's Child Safety Officer.
- Facilitate any negotiations between the young persons and the Lead Tenants

What training do Lead Tenants get?

MCS wants Lead Tenant to be as ready and equipped as possible. Training is a part of this. Lead Tenants will attend some compulsory training when they first start and there are opportunities for ongoing training as needs arise and as areas of need are identified. When Lead Tenants meet with MCS workers they should discuss their training needs.

Insurance

MCS has some public liability insurance to cover the house and program-specific issues.

Lead Tenant Mentors are responsible, however, for insuring any personal vehicles as MCS cannot assist if vehicles are damaged.

How can I become a Lead Tenant?

If you've had a look at the information provided and would like to apply, you'll need to complete a Registration of Interest form (call us on 07 3865 7453 to request this). Following this:

1. We'll contact you to arrange an initial information session. This may be one-on-one or with a group. We'll tell you a little more about the program. At the end of this session, you'll be asked to complete:
 - An Application Form
 - A Self-Assessment Report
 - A Blue Card application or verification (depending on whether you have a Blue Card)
 - A Police Check

You'll also need to identify three referees that we can contact, as well as request a Medical Report from your doctor.

2. You'll participate in a 'Competency Assessment'. You should be prepared that this is quite comprehensive but is necessary for us to assess your application. We'll also use the information you provide in the Self-Assessment Report to guide this.
3. If you're successful and your checks have come through, we'll contact you to commence training!