

## Concierge Training at the Gatwick Hotel



### Background

The Gatwick Hotel had been experiencing problems with people who are not residents hanging out the front, harassing passers by for cigarettes and money. The Gatwick management and the police also claim that this group is responsible for the majority of violent incidents that have been occurring at the hotel in recent times. Most of this group live in St Kilda and are located at the Inkerman St flats; some of the others are homeless and living in cars or around the local area.

The owners of the Gatwick, Rose and Ettie have found it difficult to turn people away when they asked to go to the toilet or used intimidatory tactics to gain access. The St Kilda Inclusion Project in partnership with Good Shepherd, Community Connections from Inner South Health Service and St Kilda police explored ways to support Gatwick management make changes to their procedures that would result in greater safety for their residents and improved amenity for the local community.

The first proposal by the group was to explore the option of the Gatwick hiring 24 hour security guards for a two week trial period with the support of the police and other community agencies. The sticking point in implementing this was the cost of the security guards to the Gatwick and it also turned out that security companies would not man the doors directly but would only intervene if there were any issues once people were in the lobby. It would still be up to the staff to prevent people entering the premises.

During the course of these discussions, Rose and Ettie mentioned that a small number of residents helped them staff the office and other duties around the hotel. These residents were not paid directly but received a reduction in their rent. They were not provided with training in what could be a very difficult work environment.

We recognized that this could be a great opportunity to train and support the residents that were already working there. SIP approached the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) to run their Concierge Training which they provide to security staff at public housing high rises so it was directly relevant to the Gatwick.

This is a Certificate 3 course and a unit of a Certificate 4 course in Community Studies. It teaches non-confrontational methods to manage difficult situations and was run over three days at St Kilda Town Hall. Four residents and three managers participated in the training.

### Introduction of New Procedures

Changes have already been put in place with great success for the last two months. They include strict guidelines around visitors who must now sign in and can only have access to rooms if they are escorted by the person they have come to visit. Non-residents can no longer access the foyer or toilets. Other improved security and communication procedures have been implemented such as:

- The door is now manned 24 hours a day
- A formal roster is now in operation
- Have two staff rostered on during the day and one at night
- An incident book has been reinstated and is being filled out every time an incident occurs. This has helped staff during handovers and to follow up on actions
- An alarm is about to be installed on the back door that will help to monitor the movement of residents at night
- Staff has been provided with new shirts with the Gatwick logo on them distinguishing them from other residents and helping with a sense of pride in their roles.

### Outcomes for the Gatwick Community

Management have reported that although they initially experienced threats and increased damage to property when the changes were first implemented, this has now dropped dramatically. They reported that during the day, non-residents would be trying to access the building every five minutes, now on average its six times a day.

Management also noted that:

- Residents are feeling safer and are more at ease.
- Police have only been called once in the last two months rather than daily
- Residents are now questioning strangers in the building about their business.
- Much less vandalism. There used to be 3-4 incidents a day involving situations such as broken windows and doors or graffiti. This has been reduced to about one incident a day.
- Fewer visitors for the residents, so a major reduction in problematic behaviors.
- There seems to be an improved atmosphere generally.

### Outcomes for the participants

The trainer from BLS reported that she noticed a real improvement in people's confidence over the 3 days. The course was very interactive and involved a lot of brainstorming and discussions. Most of the participants have no formal qualifications and one had difficulties in reading and writing but all quickly learnt that they had great ideas and experience to contribute.

Ettie and Rose have noted an overall improvement in the participants' attitude. They are:

- More willing to try other things
- More willing to share their experiences
- More reliable and take their own work more seriously
- Take more pride in what they do
- Better able to manage people and difficult situations
- Managing their anger in more positive ways such as walking away from a confrontational situation to collect themselves before returning to resolve the situation more diplomatically.
- Forming strong bonds between participants.

One of the participants reported that as a result of the course, he felt confident enough to pursue other employment. He has since got a job working as an assistant boiler maker in the boating industry. Rose and Ettie are about to employ another resident through the BSL traineeship scheme where support and training on the job are provided for a 12 month period with payment for the trainee. Other trainee options are being explored with the other participants.

Six other Gatwick residents have asked to also do the Concierge training and a new course including other members of management will be scheduled for later in the year.

Rose and Ettie reported that as a result of the changes at the Gatwick, they are much less stressed and can now take holidays more regularly.

### What we learnt:

- It was important to meet with the Gatwick residents before and after the course helped to make sure that they were fully informed about the course and gave them the opportunity to debrief afterwards.
- It was helpful to support the residents in getting to the St Kilda Town Hall for the duration of the course and to provide them with tram tickets for their trip home.
- To have ongoing liaison with the St Kilda police who have provided information and support around the use of trespass charges for any non-residents that are proving very difficult to stop entering the property.
- It was very useful to include members of the Gatwick Hotel management in the course as they must make the final decisions about implementing the new procedures for improving security for both the workers and residents. It is also good for them to hear the concerns of the residents and to tackle them as a team.

## Future possibilities

The success of the concierge training has opened up other training and employment options that we are currently exploring with the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Some of these options include:

- Expanding the three day Certificate 3 training unit to other private hotels and rooming houses that employ their residents in some capacity. This may include other courses such as general maintenance or gardening. The BSL can tailor their courses according to the job role and help equip these residents with more skills and confidence.
- Provide pre-employment training options of 4-5 weeks duration. If the participant is on Centrelink benefits, this is free. This is an accredited vocationally focused training that can concentrate on particular areas of work or be more general. Local job providers who are willing to offer a 12 month traineeship are sourced so that participants know that there is the possibility of a real job at the end of the training.

The trainees are effectively hired by the BSL and paid \$13.21 per hour, a minimum of 13 hours per week. The BSL bill the organization the trainees are working for plus \$2.70 for all their support and administration structures. The BSL provide on and off the job training and actively support the participant and organization through any difficulties that may arise.

Trainees are assisted into mainstream employment at the end of the 12 months. It is a fantastic opportunity to link local businesses and organizations with people from marginalized backgrounds in a way that is fully supported and offers a higher chance of success for all parties. The Gatwick will be offering a traineeship to one of the participants that completed the concierge training.

## Postscript

1) There was acknowledgment from the start of this project that its success could have displacement consequences for the group of people that were regularly hanging out the front of the Gatwick. The core members of the group, a mother and daughter living at the Inkerman Heights Housing Estate in Inkerman Street, meant lack of access to the Gatwick resulted in the group spending more time on the estate. In one case; the group commandeered the bedsit of one of the estate's vulnerable tenants. The Inner South Community Health's Older Persons High Rise Worker (a position based on the estate) reported that the daughter commenced a relationship with a man recently out of prison who came to live with her on the estate. He committed a spate of attempted burglaries, actual burglaries and assaults on a significant number of the estate's elderly residents and hence creating a high degree of distress and fear throughout the community at the estate. He has since been returned to prison and an intervention order preventing the daughter returning to the estate has been issued. The mother is believed to be now applying to move out of the St Kilda area to other public housing accommodation in Reservoir area.

2) Two of the participants have been employed to provide security at a Good Shepherd function being held at the St Kilda Town Hall at the end of the month.

*Report written by Robyn Szechtman 13/08/2009*