

HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.

Annual Report *2008-2009*



Long time activist HAAG member Evie Wallace will turn 100 years old on Christmas Eve 2009. Read about Evie's achievements in this years report.

IN THIS REPORT

Our Organisation

Chairperson's Report

Evie Wallace

Our Members, Our Services

Myer Foundation Project

Caravan Park & Villages

Our Campaigns -

Homelessness & Older People

Housing Options Service

Our other activities - Forums, Talks, Media

OUR ORGANISATION

Housing for the Aged Action Group is a state-wide organisation that provides housing services to older renters across all rental housing types. For tenants in private rental; public and community managed housing; caravan and residential parks; rooming houses; independent living units; retirement villages and a range of new models of older persons' housing including rental villages and semi-independent living. We have recently broadened our scope to include concerns for residents living in supported residential services.

The Committee of Management meets monthly at Ross House, 247-251 Flinders Lane, to handle the administrative and financial business of HAAG's services and the group's functions, and to act upon housing issues of concern to older people. Members are elected at the Annual General Meeting of HAAG, and casual vacancies are filled by Committee with general membership endorsement. 100% of the Committee are older people. Committee meetings are open to all members to attend.

Committee for the year as from AGM 2008-2009:

Doreen Rushby (Chairperson), Bob Brookes, Amy Duncan, Dalene Salisbury, Helen Ohlhoff (Public Officer), Joan Maxwell, Maree Bellett (Treasurer), Molly Hadfield O.A.M., Sivarasa Nallaratnam, Patricia Black, Robert Purves, Sarah Lawrence (Secretary), Wyn Stenton. Thanks to all of our hard working committee members for all they have done this year, you have done a brilliant job of getting us through some very difficult years. HAAG also wishes to acknowledge the wonderful funding and collaborative support provided Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Department of Health and Ageing.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT— Doreen Rushby

The year 2008-09 has seen happier prospects for HAAG in terms of our financial security. Funding from both State and Federal sources has been increased and we have had additional funding from the philanthropic funds. This increase has enabled HAAG to go ahead with various projects which have been on the agenda for some time but have been restricted due to lack of finance.

On a sad note, we had two significant staff departures during the year, Jenny Stewart and Bill Crombie.

After some thirteen years of dedication to HAAG, Jenny retired in August 2008. Jenny contributed enormously to the development of HAAG, and in her position as a housing outreach worker did an amazing job housing hundreds, if not thousands, of frail older clients who were in dire straits with their housing. On behalf of all at HAAG I wish Jenny all the very best in her retirement and look forward to her ongoing involvement as a HAAG member.

In late June 2009, we received the devastating news that our beloved book-keeper, Bill Crombie, had quite unexpectedly passed away. Bill had worked for HAAG for some six years and successfully managed our accounts through some very lean years. Our recent successful achievement of obtaining increased Government funding was in large part due to the forward thinking strategies devised by Bill. Bill was a very loving and kind man and all of us at HAAG will continue to remember and miss him.

I would like to make special mention of our Web Woman, Maree Bellett. In 2002 Maree was instrumental in developing HAAG's web page. Maree's computer skills were self taught and like everything in Maree's life she tackled the challenge of putting our web page together full on. Over the past seven years Maree developed and built up the website with all kinds of housing information and news, thus creating lots of interest and many monthly 'hits'. Unfortunately Maree experienced poor health throughout the year which led to her standing down as our Web Woman. Every one at HAAG thanks Maree for bringing HAAG into the modern era with her IT skills.

Whilst on the web page, and talented women, I would like to acknowledge and thank Kaye for stepping in as our new Web Woman. The production of our new site has been a collaborative effort between Kaye and Sarah from Webellion, and although it is costing us a small fortune in chocolate, Kaye and Sarah's long hours has resulted in a truly amazing site full of history, current issues, news and information. Many thanks to all the women who have contributed to our webpage.



Bill & Maree sharing a joke at last years AGM.

During the year we had two new workers join HAAG. Ena Ahern, joined HAAG as our 'Housing Options Intake Worker' under the ACHA program. Since joining HAAG Ena has done an amazing job ensuring the many hundreds of people who contact HAAG for housing assistance are linked into their nearest service, and referred to the most appropriate program that will deal with their housing, health, or aged care problem.

In June of this year Ani Lorient very kindly stepped in as our book keeper after Bill's passing. Ani helped the organisation out at a time when we most needed financial expertise and we are very grateful to her for stepping in at that very difficult time. I am pleased to announce that since then, the Committee, so impressed with Ani's skills and efficiency, have now appointed her as our permanent book keeper.

I would also like to express our thanks and admiration to Jenny, Kaye, Ena, Jeff and April for the stalwart work they have done during the past year. I don't know how HAAG could function without them.

So what for the future? We still must continue to keep public housing in the consciousness of politicians reminding them of the need to continue to provide public housing particularly for older people.

I am not standing for re-election as Chairperson but I am hoping to be elected as Secretary of our wonderful organisation. Thank you for the support and friendship you have given me in my term as Chairperson.

EVIE WALLACE

This year we would like to pay special tribute to our long term member, Evie Wallace. Evie will turn 100 years young on Christmas Eve this year. Evie has been a constant campaigner for consumer, housing, health and aged care rights. Evie began her work as a volunteer in 1966 in Moe, at the time of the change over to decimal currency. At this time Grocers began charging inflated prices and ripping customers off particularly in country Victoria. Evie noticed in the small townships of Warragul, Trafalgar, Traralgon and Morwell this was particularly the case. In response to this issue Evie and her fellow towns folk formed one of the first consumer organisations. In fact one of the many letters of acknowledgement Evie has received over the years was from the then Chair of the Australian Federation of Consumer Organisations Inc, Suzanne Russell, who stated that Evie's group was a unique group and perhaps the only one of its kind in Australia. After taking on the retail grocery industry, Evie and her group tackled many and varied issues including energy prices and the privatisation of essential services.

In more recent years Evie has drawn on her personal situation of living in a rental village to take up the issues of low nutritional food standards and housing design for older people. During the year Evie very kindly made a donation to HAAG to assist us through our difficult financial patch, but in honour of Evie the donation will be used for a project on disability bathroom design. Apart from her community activism Evie is also an ac-



Carmel McMennemin, Margaret O'Callaghan (rear) and Molly Hadfield (front) on one of our visits to Evie.

complished artist and poet and we have all enjoyed the many pieces of poetry that Evie has contributed to our newsletters and forums. Evie you are an inspiration to all of us who strive for Social Justice and from all at HAAG we wish you a very happy birthday with many more to come.

OUR MEMBERS

An integral part of the functioning of our organisation is the commitment of our members to our activities. A number of our members consistently dedicate a great deal of time to a range of our work. This may involve help around the office including the arduous tasks of folding leaflets and helping with mail outs. Most notably this year a number of our members put themselves forward to talk publically about their own housing situation. This occurred both through forums, radio programs, letters to the Editor and the making of a DVD that we will view at today's meeting. It is extremely difficult and often intimidating to speak publically about your own living situation but without the personal story the housing issue would never receive any press. So to all of those members who put themselves forward we are extremely grateful.

OUR SERVICES

Older Persons Housing Options Information, Advice and Referral Service

For a number of years HAAG has provided a Housing Options Service. This is the foundation service of our organisation and provides information to more than 3,000 older people each year. HAAG has operated this vital service unfunded for many years. However, this year we successfully negotiated with the Department of Health & Ageing to incorporate 'Options' information and client intake and referral into the Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged Program (ACHA). What this means is that we operate the service on a State-wide basis to ensure people calling are provided with information about the location of a wide range of different accommodation types, and information on different eligibility criteria, vacancies and different eligibility criteria. We also act as the central ACHA service for any clients needing to be linked into other ACHA services. Whilst we welcome the Department of Health and Ageing's recognition of this vital work we are still restricted in the amount of information, research and publications we can provide without the service becoming fully funded. With the assistance of a grant from the Myer Foundation we intend to operate a project over the next twelve months aimed at achieving government funding for the service.

Tenancy Advice Service

During the year our Tenancy Advice Service assisted 166 people with tenancy advice and 27 people were provided with an outreach appointments where they

were in frail health or the issue required inspection of the home. Many older people are now referred to trusted services within Consumer Affairs Victoria and all cases are monitored to ensure satisfactory level of service is provided. All clients assisted directly by HAAG are the most vulnerable who need our specialist support. We also provided information to a number of collective groups of older people wither living in retirement villages, residential parks or rental villages who sought information regarding their accommodation. There was a marked increase in the numbers of people living in this type of accommodation seeking assistance. It was to this end that we submitted a proposal to Consumer Affairs Victoria for funding for the of a specialist retirement housing information service.

Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged Program (ACHA)

Throughout the year the ACHA program continued to respond to the needs of frail older people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. As mentioned in the 'Options' service report the ACHA program took on responsibility for this information by us turning one of the outreach positions into an intake position. The intake position came into operation in early 2009 and has assisted some 198 people with information and or referral. The outreach position provided assistance in finding accommodation to 120 people. An overview of the last 12 months of ACHA work and the primary issues affecting frail older people still remains the lack of safe, secure and affordable housing. Despite the injection of State & Federal Government money into housing many more thousands of older Victorians became homeless due to their inability to compete in the private rental market. Without a massive injection of funds to build public housing in substantial quantities we can only envisage the numbers of older people becoming homeless increasing. On a brighter note we wish to acknowledge the Department of Health & Ageing for the 25% grant increase. This is the first increase ACHA has received since its inception some 13 years ago.

PROJECTS

Myer Foundation

In late 2008 the Myer Foundation announced that they were providing us with a \$100,000 grant. This Commemorative Grant to celebrate 75 years of the Sidney Myer Fund and 50 years of the Myer Foundation has been provided to 37 Australian non-profit organisations in recognition of their work. With funding cuts over the past three years we have been limited in the amount of member contact we have been able to have and this grant is a real boost to us growing the organisation. The grant will be used to run a 12 month project that will mainly aim to provide a better service to our members as well as provide more information to the broader Victorian community about older person housing issues and provide more assistance to older people in need. This will include meeting with more of suburban and country groups of people about housing information, along with producing relevant newsletters and lobbying with our members for our 'Options' service to be funded.

CARAVAN PARKS & VILLAGES

Since 2005 HAAG has been working with caravan park and residential park residents across Victoria to improve their housing conditions. We have convened a working group of residents that now numbers over 100 people from across the state. HAAG and the working group (CARPRA) have met with the Minister, Tony Robinson, and a number of Consumer Affairs representatives with the aim of legislative reform. The working group's main aim is to ensure that residents are provided with security of tenure as many parks have closed, forcing residents to relocate at major personal and financial cost. Other problems include the need for rent control, resident participation, abolition of deferred management fees and improvements to park manager's behaviour. One of the ways we highlighted the issues was by holding a forum at Federation Square on October 16th 2008 called **Caravans or Villages?** Over 100 people attended on the day. The event, organised in conjunction with the Mornington Peninsula Shire and the Municipal Association of Victoria, was opened by the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Tony Robinson and featured talks from five local councils who spoke about the loss of caravan parks but also the huge impact of the new residential villages that are emerging as a more affordable form of retirement village. Four state government department representatives also responded with information about how they plan to protect residents with the changing landscape. After the success of the forum we delighted the Minister kept his commitment to look at legislative change by announcing a review and releasing the 'Options Paper: Tenancy Policy Framework for Residential Parks.' Congratulations to CARPRA and all involved in achieving such an amazing outcome.



L-R. Jeff Fiedler, HAAG, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Tony Robinson, Jenny Macaffer, Mornington Peninsula Shire, Cr. Brian Stahl, Mornington Peninsula



HAAG's Caravan and Residential Park Residents Working Group meeting to discuss the discussion paper released by Consumer Affairs Victoria in June 2009.

Committee members Molly Hadfield, Joan Maxwell and Sarah Lawrence at a recent meeting.



HAAG regularly visits country Victoria to talk about housing options. Sometimes we visit very small towns that have high needs such as these residents we met in Manangatang.

HOMELESSNESS & OLDER PEOPLE

Federal & State Government Solution

The long anticipated federal government's White Paper on homelessness was released in May 2009. Called the Road Home, the White Paper sets out a plan to halve homelessness in Australia within 10 years. Similarly, the State Government announced that was also developing its own plan specifically for Victoria. After years of government inaction on housing HAAG jumped at the opportunity to participate in both strategies to ensure the needs of older people on low incomes are represented. We have written to the state government offering our services to attend the proposed Ministerial Roundtable and any other consultative forums that will be arranged during the strategy. We have also offered the opportunity for the state and federal governments to have direct discussion with HAAG members to hear their stories about their experience with the housing crisis and offer their contribution to solutions. However, while we support the current process we also believe there are some major gaps in the White Paper regarding responses to older people that we would like addressed. The White Paper presents alarming data showing older people had the highest increase of homelessness between 2001-2006 (23%) with a 30% increase in housing stress between 2003-2007. However, there are only a few specific initiatives for older people in the Options Paper such as a minor increase in ACHA funding, aged care places for homeless older people and commitment to one new specialist facility per year for four years. We commend these initiatives but they only address the needs of the most marginalised group of older people in society, such as those supported by the marvellous work of Wintringham.

HAAG's main concern is the large group of older people who are in housing stress in the private rental market. There are no specific initiatives in the White Paper to help this group, even though the Paper refers to them as high in need. The main reason they need considerable support is that they are often on the verge of homelessness. Throughout the year we heard from a significant number of older people who are receiving rent increases of between \$200-\$600 a month. These are often long term tenants who are suddenly forced out of their home as their rents become completely unaffordable. There are 40,000 aged pensioners in Victoria who are renting privately and who are paying on average more than 50% of their income in rent. Unlike young people, for whom shared accommodation can be an option of choice due to it being a flexible short term form of housing, older people generally need long term housing where the rents are affordable on the aged pension. Many of these private rental tenancies are unsustainable in the long term and organisations like ours spend the majority of our time assisting such people out of private rental accommodation into affordable housing in the public and non-profit sector.

Another Rudd Government initiative, the Nation Building Plan, will benefit older people by increasing the supply of affordable housing. As part of the \$42 billion economic stimulus package to revive the economy \$6.2 billion has been earmarked for affordable housing projects. This will build 20,000 new public and social housing dwellings, with Victoria obtaining \$1.5 billion to construct 5,000 homes. 70% of the housing is planned to be built within the next year. This one-off building plan will no doubt provide housing for many older people, but we believe there is a strong case for older people to receive priority in such a scheme.

HAAG's Housing Options, Information & Referral Service

Another initiative we think should be funded under any homelessness strategy is our 'Options' Service. The key to resolving someone's housing problem is information. Our service, which now operates on limited resources under the ACHA program, takes calls from the most critically affected older private rental tenants and provides them with advice and assistance to secure better housing outcomes.

It is a brilliant service but we need government assistance to sustain and expand it so that all vulnerable older Victorians can access our support. The need for such a service only increases as the form of housing supply from the non-profit and for profit sectors continue to diversify and the options become more complex for older people to access.

One of our main roles is to help older people in housing stress to navigate their way through complex range of options and link them with the most appropriate housing services available. To this end, we have a strong working relationship with public housing offices, Housing Association staff, up to 350 non-profit independent living unit providers, and we are also tracking the development of new housing providers.

Interestingly, our service approach is also supported by the British Government who have, in the words of Prime Minister Gordon Brown, decided to 'provide a new national information service to make sure that all older people have access to good housing advice' (Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods—A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society 2008).

To highlight our concerns about both strategies HAAG has, and will continue to convene meetings with our members and interested housing and support agencies who will be meeting with state and federal government representatives about our concerns.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Presented at the Housing & Local Government network
- Presented at meeting of Victoria Public Tenants Association
- Presented at Darebin Housing Advisory Committee
- Civic AGM
- Presented at Moreland Housing Forum
- Presented at the Yarra City Council older persons housing forum
- Met with the Municipal Association of Victoria
- Attended the Retirement Villages Conference
- Met with representatives from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs re. funding the Housing Options Service
- Met with the Director of Aged Care & Housing re. additional ACHA funding
- Met with Justice Bell of VCAT re. older persons housing issues and VCAT
- We provided a submission to the Commonwealth Government's White Paper on Homelessness
- Met with Office of Housing representatives regarding the need for an Older Persons housing strategy/unit
- Presented report to Consumer Affairs Victoria on the range of new housing models
- Produced report for the Residential Accommodation Strategy
- Gave talk to U3A & the Unitarian Church on housing options and the crisis faced by older people
- Met with representative from National Seniors Australia
- Continued to training sessions for Consumer Affairs Victoria staff
- Presentation to Strathallan Resident's Forum
- Presentation to Swan Hill & District Committee for the Ageing
- Continued to present HAAG's Raise The Roof radio program
- Continued to be a monthly guest commentator on 3cr's City Limits Program
- Provided talks to group of residents living in Retirement Villages, Rental Villages and Independent Living Units
- Gave a talk about public housing policy & procedures to Kensington Tenants Association
- Presented at City of Port Phillip 'Ageing in Place' forum
- Convened meetings of concerned organisation on the federal government's White Paper
- Article published in Council to Homeless Persons Parity Magazine
- Quarterly attendance at meeting of Social Worker professional body
- Convene the quarterly ACHA network meetings
- Coverage of older persons issues on various radio program and papers



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.

2nd Floor, 247-251 Flinders Lane,
Melbourne 3000.
Ph: 9654 7389 (Melb. metro.)
1800 637 389 (country)

Print Post Approved
331088/0083

**SURFACE
MAIL**

**POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA**

HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP

WHAT IS HAAG?

Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) is a member based organisation that works towards housing justice for older people on low incomes in Victoria.

HAAG offers free and confidential advice to older people renting their home.

There are four main parts of our service:

- * **Private Rental/Public Tenancy/Caravan and Residential Parks/
Retirement Villages/Rental Village Advice & Support**
- * **Housing Options**
- * **Outreach Service - Care & Housing**
- * **Community Education & Community Development**

Interested tenants and residents are encouraged to join
Pensioners No Charge

So ring us on 9654 7389 (Melb. metro.) or 1800 637 389 (country callers)
Address: 2nd Floor Ross House 247-251 Flinders Lane Melbourne. 3000.

Check out our website: www.older tenants.org.au