

H.A.A.G.  
**Older Tenants Voice**



SINCE 1988



[www.older tenants.org.au](http://www.older tenants.org.au)



SEPTEMBER 2015 | SPRING EDITION

HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP - 03 9654 7389

# A message from the Chair

A warm welcome to members and friends.

HAAAG has had another busy month. Now that we have assured funding we are busy with strategic planning and reviewing service organisation to ensure we get the best practices

Two further grants have been received from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund for projects. Shanny worked hard to get funding for an ILU project and Gemma for funding for furthering the CALD project. Congratulations to Shanny and Gemma for their great work.



A warm welcome to Rose Milton who is on placement with HAAAG for two months. Rose is here for about a month and will learn a great deal from our team i am sure.

This months PARITY magazine(Council to Homeless Persons) has three articles from HAAAG - by Anne and Shane, Gemma and an editorial by Jeff. You can read these on our web page or you can call in to the office at Ross House and read them here. Please feel free to call in and see us any time to see what is happening.

Here is a date to put in your calendar: The HAAAG AGM is on Thursday 12th November. Keep the day free, more details later.

Enjoy Spring. Cheers

## **WHAT HAPPENED TO THE NEWSLETTER?**

You will come accross some changes to things like our Website, our brochures and yes, this Newsletter. This is all in an effort to promote HAAAG as a reputable, professional, Industry leader and to get our messages across to a wider audience than ever before.

Rest assured our principles remain the same and our members and clients are still our top priority. If you would like to comment on any of these changes please email [crystal.mcdonald@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:crystal.mcdonald@oldertenants.org.au) or call 09 9654 7389



## STUDENT: ROSE MILTON

Hi, I am Rose & I am studying for a Diploma in Community Services Work at Holmesglen TAFE Moorabbin and a requirement of the course is that I complete 200 hours in the welfare sector. I will be on placement with HAAG between 17th Aug to 18th Sept 2015.

I am very lucky to have attained my placement at HAAG. This is my 3rd week & I have met many wonderful people – the staff, HAAG community groups & committees & others from associations in Ross House.

Due to the diversity of roles within the organisation and the inclusive nature of the people at HAAG, I have been able to observe, participate & learn about the operation, the strategies, the outcomes and the dedication of this group.

It is a privilege to see how HAAG assist and empower those who are older & disadvantaged in our society. I wish to thank April, Jeff, all the staff and all the committees who have welcomed & assisted my learning.

*"The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned." - Maya Angelou*

WATCH

LISTEN

READ

### RADIO 3CR:

City limits - 3rd Wed of Month - 9am  
Raise the Roof - 4th Wed of Month - 6pm

### PARITY MAGAZINE:

HAAG have a whopping 3 articles in the  
JULY issue of Parity

# Projects

## Preventing homelessness in older culturally and linguistically diverse communities

is a joint initiative of the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) and Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG).

The project includes a roll out of 80 community education sessions by bi-lingual workers, as well as the production of resources, such as brochures, in Arabic, Mandarin, Cantonese, Tamil, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Bosnia and Herzegovinian, Serbian and Croatian. These resources were created through close consultation with community reference groups, which occurred over a 6 month period.



*Above: Lina Hassan, one of our bi-lingual workers, presents information to a women's group from the Arabic Speaking Community*



The project has already increased the number of older people from culturally diverse backgrounds accessing housing assistance.

**The number of culturally diverse clients contacting Home at Last has increased from a stable 34% of Home at Last's client base over 3 years, to 51% within the first 3 months of the project's operation.**



This number is anticipated to rise again with the roll out of ethno-specific community education sessions across the state from August 2015.

### KEY AIMS

More people using Home at Last services from the target communities

More people from targeted communities understanding what Home at Last does-through community education

A better response from Home at Last to people who contact us from the key communities

More people from targeted communities finding secure, affordable housing through Home at Last

Half-way through the project, we are also seeing other results and are well on the way to achieving our targets:

**Increase access to Home at Last by translating material into 7 key languages.**

We have created various Community Education materials in consultation with community reference groups. See *previous page*.

Home at Last brochures are now available in 9 languages: Arabic, Traditional Chinese, Tamil, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbian and Croatian.

The project has also produced materials -see *previous page*- that help bi-lingual workers to deliver their information:

1. Community Education Resources with information about Housing Options and Home at Last.
2. Stories from each community that are translated and used to help communicate the message about what Home at Last does.

**A 100% increase in the number of people from the four key language groups finding long term secure, affordable housing.**

In 6 months we have already housed 12 people from the target communities. Our target for the year is 18 people, but we expect to exceed this.

**A 100% increase in the number of people from the four key language groups contacting Home at Last for Assistance**

78 people from the target groups have contacted Home at Last since January 2015. We expect this number to increase significantly after the roll out of community education sessions from August 2015.

**A 100% increase in the number of referrals to and from ethno-specific agencies**

Our referrals from agencies that support people from the targeted communities have increased significantly since the beginning of the project. So too have our referrals to support agencies. We are well on the way to our target of 84 referrals over the year..



## Bi-Lingual Worker Training

On the 21st and 22nd of July, 16 bi-lingual workers were trained to be able to present information (in their own language) to their communities about older persons' housing options and Home at Last.

10 sessions have already been completed since the beginning of August in Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic and Urdu.

*Above: Bi-Lingual Workers proudly display their certificates after being trained to present information about Home at Last and housing options to their communities.*



Through the process so far, we have learned that the provision of information is just one major facet of a complete strategy required if we are to provide equal access to housing for older people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Without knowledge of people's migration history, cultural values and practices, services can easily alienate clients from culturally diverse backgrounds, and will be unable to offer a service that suits clients' needs.

Another critical barrier is political. Policies that leave the most vulnerable, like Mohan (opp.), with no income and no access to the affordable housing sector must be changed. More research on the impact of these policies will help us to advocate for policy change into the future.

Gemma

# Mohan.

This is an actual letter from \*Mohan, an ex-journalist, who volunteers for 9 community organisations in Melbourne. Mohan came to Australia on a Contributory Parent Visa and is therefore under an Assurance of Support which means his family have committed to financially supporting him and he is therefore unable to access Centrelink payments for 10 years. This makes him ineligible for public housing, but unable to afford to rent privately. This case highlights a common issue that we have discovered through the project.

I'm 65 hailing from the Indian background. I have two sons and both are Australian citizens. Since I lost my wife in 2003 and there was no-one to look after me, I migrated here as a Permanent Resident under Contributory Parent Visa (Article 143) in 2010 on their advice, by paying around \$35 thousand (a substantial portion of the amount was paid out of my 'life time' savings). As my wife was a physically challenged bone cancer patient, a large portion of my life time savings had already been spent for her medical treatment in India. Even I had to dispose off my 1 bedroom flat in Mumbai for the purpose.

Although I still earn a monthly pension from my ex employer in India (around Aus \$ 250), this amount is 'nothing' in view of the high cost of living in Australia.

Here in Australia, I have been working as a language teacher on contract basis, but my monthly income has never been regular (on the average \$150 per month).

I don't get even a single cent from Centrelink as I'm on Assurance of Support from my son in law for 10 years (up to 2020).

Subsequently, my younger son left Australia for good and the elder son (with whom I have been staying here in Melbourne for last 5 years) has his own family responsibilities. He has been struggling hard to take care of my two grand sons (13 & 5 years respectively) and my daughter in law, as the lone bread earner in his family.

The house, where I have been staying has two rooms besides the master bedroom. I've occupied a room causing hardship to my growing grandsons and as such, I feel very bad to continue staying with him.

In view of the foregoing, I fear, I may have to face homelessness within 6 months, when my younger grandson will start going school.

Would you, therefore, please help me to avoid the imminent homelessness.

**Dr Alen Keirnan, from the Centre for Design and Innovation of Swinburne University,** approached HAAG a few months ago to see if there was scope to work together on a design project related to housing older people.

The Centre for Design and Innovation was recently established to create a team that focuses on human-centred design research. There are many aspects to their work, from the design of products to the design of physical environments through to designing the systems and services that surround and support people. Slowly the collaborative ideas have begun to blossom and the possibilities appear endless! The overall theme, at this point, seems to be quality of life across the lifespan and living spaces. The aim is to create a piece of research that can go on to inform the future of retirement housing design, as well as policy recommendations for systemic change. It's such an exciting opportunity for HAAG to be working with Swinburne.

**The Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation** has approved HAAG's project proposal to improve the experience of vulnerable older persons living in Independent Living Units (ILUs). Residents of ILUs are often vulnerable due to limited availability of appropriate housing options, lack of financial security and unpredictable tenure.

HAAG casework has shown that residents are unlikely to exercise their rights due to a lack of understanding or fear of repercussion, and often residents will not access advocacy services.

This project will utilise a community development approach to engage with residents to document their experiences living in ILUs to enable HAAG to develop a clear understanding of the policy and law reform needed to ensure ILU residents feel empowered and secure in their housing. The project would also enable HAAG to connect with residents, encouraging participation and contributions to future policy development, as well as improving information dissemination across this particular population.

Currently the grant agreement is being finalised and a job description is being created for a project worker. The ILU working group will act as the steering committee for the project, along with specific professional representatives that will enhance the project aims and objectives. HAAG would like to sincerely thank the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation for recognising the importance of this work.

#### MYER FUND/ ALMA GALFA EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

The project would involve:

- 1) A research scan of the housing service and issues faced by the GLTBI community.
- 2) Consultation with relevant GLTBI community representatives.
- 3) Development of focuses GLTBI information.
- 4) Training for the HAL staff.
- 5) Recommendations to other housing services on best practice.
- 6) Evaluation of the success of the project.

#### THE WICKING FOUNDATION

##### **FULL APPLICATION COMPLETE**

This national project will work with governments and the community to develop effective service responses integrated across housing, health and aged care service sectors. The Home at Last best practice model developed by HAAG based only in Victoria, provides the structure for implementation of a fully integrated information, support and rapid re-housing methodology to address the problem.



## **HOME AT LAST- A CAMPAIGN, NOT JUST A SERVICE!**

As all our members know, Home at Last is a free and confidential housing service for older people. Our purpose is to ensure that older people are able to live in housing that will be suitable for the rest of their lives. This means housing that is:

**Affordable | Permanent | In good condition | Well designed | Near facilities**

As part of our lobbying to achieve these aims HAAG has recently put together a submission to the State Government's current review of the Residential Tenancies Act (See page 11). The review, called Fairer, Safer Housing is focusing on the problems of the housing market in Victoria today. The problems it identifies are the key reasons HAAG started the Home at Last service and we are hoping that the review improves the living conditions of private renters.

We also eagerly await the State Government's decisions on the future of public housing where billions of dollars of investment are required to begin to address the ever increasing need for decent homes for all people on low incomes.

**HAAG HAS RECENTLY FORMED A CAMPAIGN AND POLICY WORKING GROUP THAT IS LOBBYING FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO HOUSING FOR OLDER PEOPLE. COME ALONG AND JOIN US!**

The following passage is from an article in the latest Parity Journal by Jeff Feidler. This special edition of the Journal is focused on the housing issues facing older people.

*With most government policy initiatives relying on private rental housing and projects focusing on brokerage support to sustain tenancies, HAAG argues that these schemes cannot work for older people. For example, factors that can provide sustainability in the private rental market such as improved employment prospects just do not apply for people in their retirement years. Older people also need to be assured they can live long term in their housing, a guarantee that they can pay an affordable rent on a pension and age in a well maintained and designed housing to suit their health and ageing needs.*

To read the rest of this article and many others go to our website: [www.olderrenters.org.au](http://www.olderrenters.org.au)



PHOTO:HAAG members at General meeting to discuss RTA review

## Residential Tenancies Act Review

On the 9th of July, HAAG held a general meeting to talk about the Victorian Government's review of the Residential Tenancies Act. The review will look at every aspect of Victoria's rental laws. It's a big deal for us, and we wanted to make sure our members were well-informed about the process, and get your feedback about the changes you want to see.

The turnout was great (we could barely fit everyone into the room we'd booked) and the discussion was vibrant and wide-ranging. Jeff and I talked about the background to the review and the content of the government's consultation paper, *Laying the Groundwork*. The consultation paper includes a lot of really useful statistics we can use in our campaign work – most notably, that older tenants are the fastest grow segment of the rental market. Once we opened up discussion to the floor, one of the main topics was, of course, public housing. We all agree it's important to get better rights for tenants, but if the government won't seriously invest in public housing we're just rearranging deck chairs while housing affordability gets closer and closer to the iceberg. HAAG needs to make sure the government doesn't use possible positive changes to tenancy laws as an excuse for failing to build more public housing.

We also talked a lot about security of tenure, and what's the best way to achieve it. The government launched the review with talk of plans for ten-year leases. This would be a lot more security than most renters have now, but is it really what we want? We talked about what would happen to people who needed to get out of a long lease early, and how the law could protect them.

We talked about a lot of other issues, too – both in the formal meeting, and casually over lunch. Those discussions all fed into our submission to the review, and the work we'll be doing over the next two years as we follow the review process through to ensure the best possible outcomes for older renters.

Over the last month or two, Jeff, Shanny and I have been hard at work on our first submission to the Residential Tenancies Act Review.

I have no idea how we managed to pump out 12,000 words about the biggest issues for older renters while also doing all our regular work, but we got there.

The submission lays out the major changes we need across all types of rental housing – **greater security of tenure, more effective rent controls, minimum standards, the right to modify a property, greater privacy** – and the different types of changes and standards we should expect in different kinds of accommodation.

From here, the government will be publishing a series of 'issues papers' that deal with the biggest issues raised in the first round of submissions – including one specifically about the needs of older renters. So we expect to be drafting a lot more submissions over the next year or two.

If you're interested in reading the submission you can **find it on our website at:**

<http://www.olderrenters.org.au/publications/residential-tenancies-act-review-laying-groundwork>



# HAAG WINS COUNCIL TO HOMELESS PERSONS EXCELLENCE AWARD

On Thursday 17th September HAAG's Home at Last service won a major award for Excellence in Ending Homelessness Amongst Older People. Held at the Victorian Homelessness Achievement Awards Ceremony as part of the Council to Homeless Persons Bi-Annual State Conference, the award was announced at a gala event that recognises the hard work of homelessness services in a range of categories such as families, youth and adults.

Voted by a panel of experts from the homelessness sector HAAG is delighted that Home at Last has been recognised for the hard work of the service and most importantly, successes in providing secure, affordable housing for older people at risk of homelessness.

HAAG wishes to congratulate the other award nominees in the older person's category;

- Home Connect Partnership (VincentCare)
- Denise Lamble, Community Connections & Housing Support Case Worker, Quantum Support
- Dr Alice Rota-Bartelink, Research Manager, Wintringham
- Sampson House Project (Anchor)

Congratulations also to Naime Cevik, sister of Home at Last Outreach Worker, Melis Cevik, who was nominated in the category of the Beth Thomson Lifetime Achievement Award. Naime is the Team Leader, District Services Team of the inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence.

A big thank you and well done to all our wonderful dedicated staff, management committee and members for this important recognition! The award was accepted by HAAG Chairperson, Vicki Gutsjahr and committee member Daisy Ellery. Members and staff then celebrated in grand style!

This award is important for the future development of Home at Last as we strive to ensure that there are significant improvements to housing and homelessness services for older people.

Specialist housing assistance for older people needs to be more available right across Victoria, in fact Australia, and we will continue to work hard for the rights of older people to achieve housing justice and secure, affordable accommodation.



## *Handmade quilts of love & care*

There is something special about snuggling under a warm quilt on a cold night. Though light in weight, the quilt soon traps the body's heat in the air cells created by the quilting by the unique combination of layering and stitching. Handmade quilts are so much more than just warm bedcovers, they are love, care, memories, hope, and creativity expressed through the patterns, materials, and hands of their makers.

June Walkenden , a long time HAAG member, has been busily making quilts for HAAG clients. June has been using her love of quilting for a deeper purpose, and she says it made her feel as though she is making a difference. Well, she certainly does. When we present our clients with one of June's quilts, they cannot believe someone actually made them a handmade quilt which is a beautiful, precious and deeply personal object.

Graham whose story is outlined over page received one of June's handmade quilts had this to say:

"This is not an average quilt; this beautifully coloured and decorated quilt brightened up my new cosy unit."

June's handmade quilts have been well received by our clients. Both HAAG and our clients are so grateful to June for making such beautiful quilts that not only brighten up people's lives, but also make moving into new housing a home.

PHOTO: June Walkenden with one of her handmade quilts



PHOTO: Howa Del holding one of Junes quilts





Graham was referred to our Home at Last Service by his local council who were providing Graham with home supports. Graham had been living in the same private rental accommodation for 20 years, the property was in very poor condition and he was paying 60% of his income in rent.. Both the council and Graham's GP were becoming increasingly concerned that Graham's health was declining as a direct result of the poor housing he was living in, no repairs or improvements had been made to the property in the 20 years Graham had lived there, and from the state of the property not for some time before that. We are pleased to report that after working with our Home at Last Service Graham has now settled into a lovely public housing unit. Graham is over the moon with his new digs as it provides everything he needs in terms of the modifications he needs, and it is in the same neighbourhood as his family who he now sees every day.

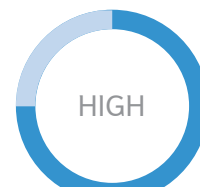
## HOUSING SUPPORT SUMMARY

### Greatest Success

The high number of clients housed and referrals accepted. Getting clients into Social Housing complexes. Having a number of DHS decisions (to reject applications) overturned.

### Greatest Challenge

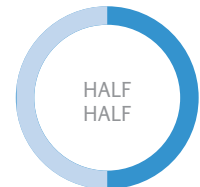
Managing the huge number of housing offers, viewings, sign ups and relocations with limited staff (due to staff leave)



CASE LOAD



PAPER WORK



CASE COMPLEXITY

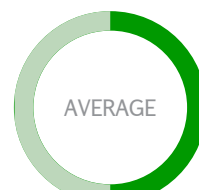
## TENANCY ADVICE SUMMARY

### Greatest Success

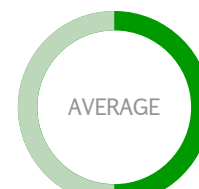
I made a bad landlord so angry he called me an obscene name at the Tribunal, which pretty much felt like a standing ovation

### Greatest Challenge

Managing a steady volume of casework while also powering out what turned out to be a very lengthy submission to the government's RTA review.



CASE LOAD



PAPER WORK



CASE COMPLEXITY

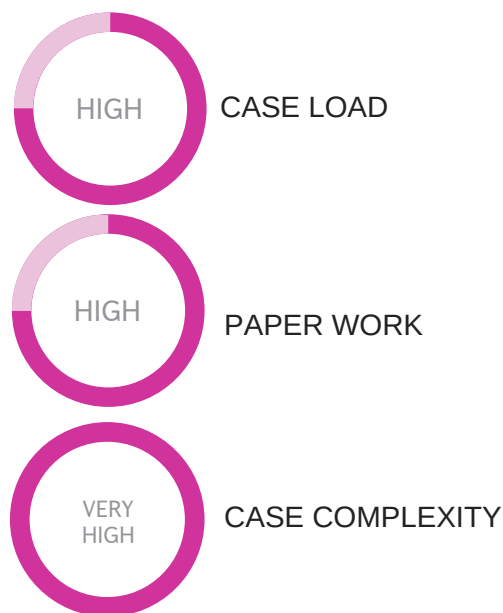
# RETIREMENT HOUSING ADVICE SUMMARY

## Greatest Success

Receiving the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation grant for the ILU project.

## Greatest Challenge

Working with and trying to coordinate groups in relation to case work matters.



**The CARPAV working group** has continued its worthwhile work during this quarter by assisting HAAG to respond to two reviews, as well as continuing to work on its more detailed submission for the next phase of the RTA review.

The ILU working group prompted HAAG to join as a Golden Days Radio member this quarter which will also support the groups intention to increase working group membership and engage with more ILU residents across Victoria.



**The newly established HAAG Communications group** began meeting in August to discuss the way in which HAAG communicates to its various audiences, the channels of communication HAAG use (eg, post, website, radio) and to design targeted, Key Messages that effectively communicate HAAGs purpose and objectives to anyone who's listening. And some that are not!

Using HAAGs manifesto as a working guide, the HAAG Communications Strategy is almost complete. This document will contain a thorough review of HAAGs current situation in the public eye, and provide recommendations to improve our connections to an increasingly diverse audience. In doing this it is hoped that HAAGs voice— both during campaigns and the everyday- will be clearer, louder, more accessible, and well recognised.

**Housing for the Aged Action Group Inc.**

1st Floor, 247-251 Flinders Lane,  
Melbourne 3000.

ADMIN: 9654 7389

Home At Last: 1300 765 178

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Fighting for Housing justice  
for Older people since 1983

**HAAG also offers FREE confidential advice and support to over 55's**

Housing Options Information

Outreach care and housing support

Private renters assistance and tenancy advice

Retirement housing advice and support