

HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.

# Annual Report

## 2012-2013

IN MEMORY OF MOLLY HADFIELD, WHO INSPIRES HAAG'S ACTIVISM,  
WE CELEBRATE 30 YEARS OF FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHTS  
OF ALL OLDER PEOPLE TO HAVE A DECENT HOME



**Molly Hadfield OAM 14 July 1922-10 November 2012**



**Housing for the Aged Action Group**

ABN: 80 348 538 001 Reg: A0017107

**Postal address: 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Ross House**

**247-251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000**

Phone: 9654 7389 Fax: 9654 3407

**Home at Last** service: 1300 765 178

Email: [haag@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:haag@oldertenants.org.au)

Web: [www.oldertenant.org.au](http://www.oldertenant.org.au)

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## Our Chairperson, Wyn Stenton



Hello to all HAAG members and staff as we celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of Housing for the Aged Action Group.

I would like to express my gratitude for the foresight & persistence of people in the past who formed our organisation and lobbied the Government to provide a range of much needed community services.

What a vital function was created to enable the older community to be able to get advice, support & assistance to gain appropriate housing. After all, a roof over one's head is a given right not a privilege. The past 12 months have been our busiest on record as we have expanded our services and sought further funding of our Home at Last service.

We wish to thank the Minister of Housing Wendy Lovell for re-funding Home at Last into stage 2 of the Homelessness Innovations Action Projects until June 2015. This extension of funding will ensure that many more older people at risk of homelessness are assisted into appropriate, safe & secure housing over the next 18 months.

The Big Event for the year, apart from the development of the Home at Last service was the Home at Last Forum. What a great day, so much information from academic and community speakers on the latest research and activities on homelessness. In particular we also heard from the individual stories provided by a number of our members about the joy & pleasure they told of having a secure, safe & appropriate home to live in at last.

I'd also like to acknowledge the hard work of our sub-committees & working groups. The Governance committee has been a fantastic experience meeting with government department representatives plus workers from other agencies. The Independent Living Units working group have reformed & are working to improve the legislation that covers their housing and the Caravan, Residential Parks and Villages working group has expanded statewide & has been campaigning hard over the last few months for more law reforms for their housing. Very recently we have formed a Private Renters Working Group that is campaigning for improvements to tenancy law and more affordable housing.

Congratulations to all staff for their hard work and also our amazing volunteers for the effort & support helping with mail outs, attending sub-committees and their involvement in our community education work.

As I am not standing for re election for the Committee of Management because of health issues, I must express that I have had the most interesting learning experience over the last 9 years of working with HAAG. I wish whoever is elected to the new committee that they enjoy working with HAAG as much as I have. I will always be available to provide support in any way I can. I could go on for a long time about all the fantastic activities for the year such as visits to not-for-profit housing such as Harmony Village (a co-operative housing model); social housing in Altona built by the government and managed by Yarra Community Housing; teleconferences with rural residential village residents and more but the list of community engagement achieved for the year has been endless.

You know it only takes one person to get the ball rolling to improve living conditions for older people, so my last word to you all is to pressure both State & Federal Governments for more appropriate housing for older people & so prevent homelessness.

Cheers,

Wyn Stenton Chairperson

## Our Management Committee

Housing for the Aged Action Group is the state-wide organisation of older renters in Victoria – across all housing types. For tenants in private rental; public and community managed housing; caravan and residential parks; rooming houses; independent living units; and a range of new models of older persons' housing including rental villages and semi-independent living.

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 represent older people. Committee meetings are open to all members to attend.

Committee for the year as from AGM 2012-2013:

Wyn Stenton (Chairperson), Bob Purves (Vice Chairperson, resigned June 2103), Dalene Salisbury (Secretary, Public Officer), Patrick Barron (Treasurer, deceased April 2013), Ena Ahern, Maree Norris, Marian Foster, Bob Brooks, Margaret O'Callaghan (resigned January 2013), Siva Nallararatnam, Bob Purves, Max Penaluna (resigned June 2013).

During 2013 HAAG also developed a sub-committee structure to more rigorously administer the Home at Last service and oversee it's finances. Members were: Wyn Stenton, Maree Norris, Dalene Salisbury, Bob Purves (until resignation) and Bob Brookes.

Thanks to all of our hard working Committee of Management for their support and continued lobbying for more public housing, for their presence at forums, workshops, rallies, and public meetings and for always being prepared to promote the services and mission of Housing for the Aged Action Group.

HAAG also wishes to acknowledge the wonderful funding and collaborative support provided by Consumer Affairs Victoria, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing and most recently the Department of Human Services.



## Our Members

An integral part of the functioning of Housing for the Aged Action Group 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 participation on a working group, help around the office including the continuously arduous tasks of folding leaflets and helping with mail outs. Our members were also active through forums, radio programs and regularly write letters to newspapers.

Most importantly HAAG members tell their own story to politicians, representatives from government departments and at forums and events. It is extremely difficult and often intimidating to speak publicly about your own living situation but it is the way that those in power know the real situation facing older people. So to all of those members who put themselves forward we are extremely grateful.

Now, almost 30 years after its inception, HAAG is providing housing services to more older Victorians than ever before. With a focus on assisting private renters and those in other forms of insecure housing such as boarding houses, HAAG's Department of Human Services funded project, '**Home at Last**', has already helped hundreds of older people to find secure, affordable and appropriate housing. But none of this work could have been done without HAAG's strong base of more than 400 members and volunteers. HAAG's members and volunteers are mostly people who have experienced housing hardship in the past and who share a commitment to "making a difference" in the lives of older people who are going through what they themselves experienced.

Our members and volunteers go above and beyond when it comes to their work at HAAG. HAAG's Chairperson, Wyn, recently spoke to her local doctor about how **Home at Last** can help older people who are worried about their housing by providing tenancy advice, retirement housing support and advice and general information about their housing options. Wyn hopes to continue this important work by speaking to all of the doctors in her area about how **Home at Last** has helped her and can help others. Wyn said that, "As a member of Housing for the Aged Action Group, I am working towards making sure that all older people can live a comfortable, secure, affordable life in their senior years".

Another long-standing HAAG member always picks up a bunch of **Home at Last** brochures when she comes into the office. She likes to leave them on the seats of trams and trains so that more people can learn about the service. Housing for the Aged Action group is thankful to its members and volunteers for how they 'make a difference' in the lives older Victorians who are struggling in private rental housing or living in insecure housing.



**Volunteers, staff and committee at HAAG's  
volunteer awards ceremony on the 17th May 2013**



## Our sadness at members' passing

2012-13 was a sad year for HAAG members with the passing of three important and longstanding members of the organisation: Molly Hadfield, Pat Black and Patrick Barron

### Molly Hadfield

We have all been devastated by the news of Molly Hadfield passing away on Saturday the 10<sup>th</sup> November 2013 at 90 years of age. Molly, who was HAAG's founding member from 1983, had been fit and able right up to a month before she died and had famously appeared all over the media protesting with hundreds of other people at a demonstration on a fair go for pensioners. Molly was photographed by The Sun newspaper holding a protest sign and punching her fist in the air in an action that epitomised her life of struggle for people on low incomes and the right to a decent home, income and services for all.

Molly was a strong campaigner for public housing as a secure and affordable provider of a decent home for older people. Molly believed that it is, and always will be, the government's responsibility to provide a good supply of quality housing for the community.

Mostly we will miss Molly as a compassionate humanitarian who always believed in the link between the personal and the political. Molly defined our attitude to the importance of home, the compassion we must show in the way we help people, an innate interest in the lives of those who are under stress and doing it hard and the importance of helping people with the attitude that at any time any one of us could be faced with adversity and need a helping hand. Everything HAAG has done, and will continue to do, will be defined by the beliefs and practices of Molly Hadfield.





## Pat Black

Pat passed away on 19th April 2013. Born in March 1926 Pat had a wide and varied career as a nurse, particularly during the second world war. After having six children she also was the primary carer for many years for her invalid husband after a car accident. Pat always vowed to help those less fortunate and in later years she worked as a research assistant and assistant director of a homelessness shelter for men. After retiring Pat volunteered for HAAG, ACOSS and Mary of the Cross Centre. Pat campaigned on many housing issues as a HAAG member including the need for law reform in Independent Living Units, Special Residential Services and most of all, public housing. In Pat's words: "My last prayer each night is that God will let me live long enough to see my dream of adequate housing for all, fulfilled."



Pat Black (right) with Molly Hadfield in 2010

## Patrick Barron

Pat passed away in April 2013. Pat was a valued member of HAAG's management committee since 2009 where he mostly took on the major responsibility of Treasurer. Pat working life consisted of long term association with the banking sector including the ANZ bank and in his latter working life was office manager/paymaster and personnel officer with a large manufacturing company. In retirement Pat was a long term volunteer with the Colostomy Association and the Citizens Advice Bureau in Mentone. Pat's experiences of living in various forms of housing including rooming houses provided valuable support to HAAG's reform work in affordable housing.

Pat Barron at a management committee meeting



## Some of HAAG's magnificent members over 30 years



Joanna Tierney & Marg Dopper



John O'Dea and Marg Dopper



Edith Morgan & Elisabeth Coldicutt



Maree Bellett (standing, rear) and other members



Below, Margaret O'Callaghan and Molly Hadfield speaking at a forum



Above, Feng Xia demonstrating her skills



Above, Molly, Kate Cyne, Elisabeth Coldicutt



Above, Ken Dixon, Molly, Frances Swann, Edith, Marg  
Left, Anne and Des McDevitt with ex-HAAG worker Curtis Greenwood



...and a few staff members too



Jenny Macaffer and Susan Kowalczyk at HAAG's photo exhibition called Back to the Future



Above, Jenny Stewart and Dalene Salisbury at rear of res parks forum



Above, June Walkenden speaking



Above, Carmel McMennemin, Maree Norris, Carol Kutlesa



Above, Murray Burles speaking at the Ageing In Place? forum at Melb Town Hall

Right, Carmel, Molly and Margaret visiting Evie Wallace



## Our Staff

April Bragg, Manager Housing Support

Jeff Fiedler, Manager Education & Housing Advice

Kaye Trainor, Administration Co-ordinator

Ani Loriente, Finance Co-ordinator

### Housing Support

Megan Baker, Housing Intake Worker

Tegan Leeder, Housing Intake Worker (from 17th July 2013)

Crystal McDonald, Housing Intake Worker (27/09/2012 - 25/05/2013 then 6 months maternity leave)

Melis Cevik, Outreach Housing & Support (from 13th August 2012)

Anne Maher, Outreach Housing & Support (from 9th July 2012)

Shane McGrath, Outreach Housing & Support (from 14th May 2013)

### Education & Housing Advice

Shanny Gordon, Retirement Housing Worker

Marc Westley, Tenancy Advice Worker (from 9th July 2012)

Fionnuala Spillane, Community Education Worker (from 16th July 2012)

Gemma White (from 13th August 2012)

John McMillan (23rd July 2012 until 12th October 2012)

2012-2013 has been a landmark year for staffing at Housing for the Aged Action Group as we have increased our numbers from six to thirteen staff with the beginning of the Home at Last service. The organisation has been very lucky with the people who have been employed and while there have been challenges for the organisation with it more than doubling its staffing capacity, everyone has fitted in really well to the overall running of the services and support to the all aspects of HAAG. Most importantly the extra resources have produced exactly what we had been aiming for; much improved services to older people in Victoria. Home at Last has created a new structure at HAAG with April and Jeff assuming management roles and the development of two teams: Housing Support and Education & Housing Advice. These services are now based on a pool of funds from three sources: Department of Human Services, Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Department of Health and Ageing. There are currently funding agreements in place for all three programs up to June 2015.



## Home at Last

Housing for the Aged Action Group's Home at Last Housing Information and Support Service has been developing rapidly since it launched from July 1, 2012. Much work has gone into the process of establishing a new office, employing staff, providing training, developing promotional material like our new leaflets and posters and beginning to establish the service across Victoria.

Home at Last is funded by the Department of Human Services as part of the state government's Homelessness Action Plan. A major part of the Plan has been the development of new prevention and early intervention approaches to reducing homelessness in the community. Home at Last is one of eleven Homelessness Innovations Action Projects that are trialling new ways of assisting people at risk of homelessness and providing help before a crisis occurs rather than providing 'band-aid' responses after eviction has occurred.

To achieve this Home at Last is taking two main approaches:

- Firstly by providing information to older people who wish to plan ahead for their housing future to ensure that they have stable housing when they will rely on the aged pension.
- Secondly, helping older people who have been served with a Notice to Vacate from their housing to find affordable housing within the time frame of the notice they have received (usually 60 days).

The target group for the Home at Last service is older people living in unstable or insecure housing who are at risk of homelessness, in particular those living in the private rental sector but not limited to this group.

Other categories of need include older people living in privately operated rooming and boarding houses, substandard caravan parks, older people who have been evicted and are living in 'temporary' accommodation with acquaintances, friends or family. Older people with other complex factors contributing to causes of homelessness such as mental illness and alcohol abuse will be directly referred to specialist organisations that focus on this type of client such as Wintringham and ARBIAS.

A number of key elements have been put into place very quickly that are seeing our service becoming extremely busy.

Our community education workers Fionnuala Spillane and Gemma White have been promoting the service with over our brochures and other material distributed to over 1300 organisations across Victoria. This has also created requests for Home at Last to visit community groups and agencies to talk to groups about the service and how we can help. Home at Last has visited many communities across Victoria in areas as far flung as Mildura, Bendigo, Ballarat, Horsham and Gippsland, so if you here about us coming to a venue near you then please come along to the talks that have been arranged.

Our information, intake and referral service initially established with Anne Maher, Megan Baker and Tegan Leeder now have case-loads building to the point where they are extremely busy and have had substantial success in assisting our clients to be housed. During the year we were able to create an additional Outreach Worker position and Anne moved into the position in February 2013. Crystal McDonald filled Anne's position in the intake and referral service role from February to late May before taking maternity leave and Shane McGrath joined the team in June.

Along with her role in the intake and referral service we take this opportunity to acknowledge Crystal for all of her amazing work in developing the additional data base that was needed for the HAL service evaluation.

Our ACHA Outreach Worker Melis Cevik is spending most days out visiting clients arranging the logistics of helping people apply for housing and the physical process of assisting them to move from one home to another.

Header Newspaper Altova 25 January 2013

ALTONA



Alma Peterson enjoys her new home through older persons housing information and support service Home At Last.

## Alma looks towards a brighter fu

ALMA Peterson was glad to see the end of 2012. A subtraction in her life, really great 2013," Mrs Peterson said. "That's because last month "I am just so grateful and happy here. It's so nice to have a home again," Mrs and people improved with self awareness

HAAG's Home at Last service arranged publicity on housing issues and our services at a wide range of locations around Victoria. This included newspapers, radio and regional television. We also continued our monthly 3CR radio program called Raise the Roof and appeared on the City Limits program regularly. Two articles were produced for the national Parity journal produced by the Council to Homeless Persons

"The Senior" News January 2013

Our times

## Keys of the kingdom



AFTER a traumatic few months Paul was finally able to smile again when he was handed the keys to a rental unit.

With the help of Home at Last, Paul was able to put behind him the stress of possibly being homeless, after the Office of Housing offered him a place to call home.

Home at Last is a new statewide initiative provided by Housing for the Aged Action Group and is one of 11 Homelessness Innovation Action Projects funded by the State Government.

The aim of the projects is

ing outcomes. The focus of the Home Last service is to help old people at risk of homelessness, particularly those struggling in the private rental market.

Paul, 71, is a recent success story.

He received a notice to vacate because his retirement village was closing.

Paul has a heart condition and had three triple-bypass operations.

He was extremely worried about becoming homeless he had hoped to continue living independently in safe and affordable housing.

## Help for vulnerable seniors

A new state-wide initiative is helping vulnerable older people towards long-term affordable and appropriate housing.

Home at Last is provided by Housing for the Aged Action Group and is one of 11 homelessness innovation action projects funded by the Victorian Government as part of its Homelessness Action Plan.

The Home at Last service is assisting two main groups:

- Those who have uncertain housing futures are helped to plan ahead towards finding affordable housing that suits their needs:

problem for older people as it is often insecure, unaffordable on an aged pension and difficult to adapt as people age.

Home at Last is a one-stop-shop of housing information, advice and support for older people.

It responds to the individual needs by providing a caring, personalised service.

Home at Last staff develop individual housing and support plans and either provide direct assistance or, where more convenient, refer a client to a local service.

Referrals to services are coordinated by Home at Last to

Sunraysia Daily Friday, December 7, 2012



HELPING HANDS: Gemma White and Kim Parker at the launch of the new service.

## Service to help elderly tenants

By Lauren Roden that situation by encouraging OLDER people at risk of home- and Haagen and HAAG were set up by people in the community who were concerned for the status of

Home at last (终于找到家) 是一项免费支持和咨询服务, 帮助年长者寻

Our tenancy advice worker Marc Westley has been working closely with the Information, Intake and Referral team by scrutinising legal notices that have been served on people presenting to our service and assisting to negotiate with landlords and appear at the tribunal to obtain more time to help us find housing outcomes.

Shanny Gordon continues to work on complaints from residents in retirement housing as well as advising the frontline Home at Last service workers about factors residents must consider when contemplating moving into not-for-profit retirement villages, residential parks and rental villages.

Our agency training and protocols worker, John McMillan, left later in 2012 to pursue other opportunities and it was decided that this position would be re-continued during the second stage of the project. We thank John for his work at HAAG.

In the first 18 months Home at Last has assisted more than 3000 older people who are in housing difficulty in the private market and directly and indirectly housed more than 350 into long term public and social housing. Ongoing, we are managing to re-house the vast majority of people we are assisting and as each month goes by our service is getting busier.

Home at Last entered a process of evaluation by the Department of Human Services at the beginning of 2013 and was ongoing up to June 2013. We are pleased that the value that the service is providing to the community has been recognised with further funding until June 2015. We now plan that Home at Last will become fully developed into the vital state-wide service we know is needed now and in the future as we have an ageing society where the demand for affordable will increase substantially.



Minister for Housing, The Hon. Wendy Lovell, helps launch Home at Last with Molly Hadfield





## Service reports

### Administration

It has been a year of exciting growth for the organisation and has been wonderful to welcome on board all the new workers in Community Ed, Tenancy and *Home at Last*. I have continued to provide extensive administration back-up for all staff and this has been a real challenge as we have continued to build the new service from day one to its present level of development.

The website for HAAG which I manage has continued to grow. Among the new features of the website is that visitors are now able to listen to podcasts of our monthly radio program "Raise the Roof". Along with some team members I have worked on a new website for HAAG and this is always an enjoyable project for me. We have engaged a consultant who has been developing a whole new format that will provide a fresh look with more accessible features suited to the needs of older people. If you have any membership enquiries please don't hesitate to ask me and I can easily confirm your membership status.

### Community Education

In line with Home at Last's focus on preventing homelessness, the Community Education program aims to get information about housing options and the Home at Last service into the broader community. With this information, older tenants can actively seek out secure, affordable housing before they experience a housing crisis. There are three main approaches used to do this, these are; community education sessions, service promotion and use of media.

#### Community Education Sessions

Community Education sessions are the main activity of the Community Education team. These sessions show examples of the different types of housing that are available to older people and discuss their benefits and disadvantages, in accordance with the standards set out by HAAG members in the Housing Manifesto. The sessions look at whether the housing offers security of tenure, is affordable, adaptable, close to services, accessible with mobility aids and so on. They also highlight the Home at Last Service, who we assist and what we can assist with.



Moreland City Council Information Day for Seniors, Town Hall, Oct 2012

The Community Education team is invited to talk at council based seniors groups, clubs, planned activity groups and ethno-specific groups. We also offer public talks, which are advertised in local shops, cafes, councils and newspapers. There are usually a variety of people in different situations attending the sessions, which means that people find different aspects of the talk valuable. People who are in private rental may leave the session with new information about the types of affordable housing that they have access to. They may also have some new ideas about public housing, as Community Education sessions aim to dispel some of the popular myths about long waiting periods, run down stock etc. Private renters will also know who can assist them to find housing and how to access that assistance. Home owners may come away with information to pass onto a friend or family member who is renting, as well as some information about retirement housing, downsizing and things to consider such as design and accessibility.



Fionnuala at *Where the Heart is ...* Festival, Edinburgh Gardens, Fitzroy March 2013

For the 6 month period between February 2012 and July 2013, 46 Community Education Sessions were completed and this aspect of our work is increasing as more groups become aware of our service.

### **Home at Last Service Promotion**

The Community Education program also has a promotional element. This is comprised mainly of speaking to relevant organisations (both groups of workers and meetings with managers .etc) to raise awareness of the Home at Last service. Some examples of organisations we speak to are:

- Migrant Resource Centres and Settlement Services
- Local Councils, especially Aged and Disability Services
- Gamblers Help and other Financial Services
- RDNS and home care services
- Hospitals and Community Health Services
- Centrelink Social Workers

Housing Support Agencies  
Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres  
Office of Housing (Department of Human Services)  
Local Libraries

Promotional work also occurs at various Expos and Forums such as Healthy and Active Ageing expos and the opening day of Seniors Week. Here Community Education sets up an information stand and gives information to interested community members.

Another aspect of service promotion is public distribution of brochures and posters in doctor's surgeries, pharmacies, Citizens Advice Bureaus, hospitals, police stations and so on. Additionally, brochures and posters are placed in local cafés, op shops, markets and public spaces to increase awareness of Home at Last services.



Public Information Session, Bendigo, Feb 2013

### **Media Promotions**

Community Education uses local and state wide media resources to spread information about Home at Last and increase awareness of the struggles faced by older renters. Some publications that have featured articles about Home at Last are:

The Age  
Sunraysia Daily (Mildura)  
Bendigo Weekly  
The Senior  
The Mclvor Times  
Bendigo Advertiser  
The Preston Leader

Fifty Plus  
Hobsons Bay Leader  
Mornington Peninsula Police Seniors Register Newsletter  
Neighbourhood House and Learning Centres Newsletter  
Golden Years (CALD Community Service Workers Publication)  
Health Victoria (Victorian Government Publication)  
Medicare Local E-news  
Victorian Country Women (CWA)

Home at Last was also featured on a Channel 9 news Report in Mildura.

### **A Targeted Geographical Approach**

Community Education uses a targeted approach to decide which geographical areas will receive intensive information distribution and targeted community education sessions. The following areas received a high level of information saturation at the beginning of the period:

Mildura  
Campapse  
Greater Bendigo  
Darebin

Following the release of the 2011 ABS rental statistics, the following areas were identified having high numbers of renters over the age of 65, who were on a low income. These continue to be areas of focus for Community Education:

Greater Shepparton  
Greater Dandenong  
Greater Geelong



Jolly members at one of HAAG's massive mail outs to promote Home at Last



## Housing Information & Referral

2012-2013 was very busy for the Housing Support workers in the Housing Information and Referral (HI&R) service. Since the HI&R service formed a year ago the number of client phone calls, and office drop-ins, have steadily increased where the service is seeing on average a 100 people per month. During the year a total of 1,172 people sought assistance from our Housing Information & Referral workers with 484 of those people seeking housing options information and the remaining 693 people needing support for a housing crisis they were experiencing.

The reasons for clients contacting the HAL service have tended to stay the same, from people wanting the housing options information in order to plan for their future, others receiving Notices to Vacate (NTV) (the most being 60 or 120 day notices), and from those paying exorbitant rent of around 80-90% of their income. A lot are also living in highly unsuitable housing -- instances of damp and mould, properties that are now inaccessible due to changing needs, and landlords not willing to do repairs to essential services like heating, are also reasons for contact. All of these problems are reported as having an impact on people's health and wellbeing. We occasionally also get a few strange calls, like social housing landlords trying to stop people keeping pets, or the South Yarra real estate agent who recently tried to get us to help her evict a 'difficult' older tenant. And some client's stories are so sad that you don't know how people manage to get through things at all.

Around about half of the clients contacting the HAL service are referred out to other Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA) Programs or the Community Connections Program (CCP), as these are the only programs that provide one on one support that most of our older client need, and this has been the most difficult part of our job. Due to a lack of resources a lot of other services have closed their books or have huge waiting lists for their service, meaning a majority of clients are waiting a long time just for allocation to a housing worker. In these instances HAL's own ACHA Outreach program has been picking up the most vulnerable and urgent of clients (i.e. those with NTVs or high rent meaning a NTV is highly likely), picking up clients out of our ACHA Outreach program area has meant that HAL's ACHA Outreach Program numbers have increased from 132 clients in 2011-12 to 265 in 2012-13. We are working both with individual services and the Department of Health and Ageing on ways to address this problem.



Tegan, Megan, Anne and Melis



Crystal and Shane



Overall the Housing Information & Referral service is doing very well and running smoothly. With the majority of staff having been in their roles for over year now, HAAG are confident that the assistance and information being provided to clients and other organisations is of a high standard and continues to receive excellent feedback.

### Case Study

Michael aged 76 was referred to the Home at Last Service (HAL), Housing Information & Referral (HI&R) Service by a not for profit organisation as he did not meet their eligibility criteria, the organisation predominantly works with families and younger people. Michael was in public housing in regional Victoria but gave up the property when he moved to QLD to look after his unwell daughter. Following this he had been living a transient lifestyle for many months, moving from his children's places in Queensland and Tasmania, and then back to Victoria where his only accommodation options became his van and occasional stays in hostels when funds permitted. He had spent months moving from campsite to campsite, mostly in isolated areas of regional Victoria as he thought these may be a little safer than staying in the bigger places frequented by younger single men. He came to HAL's HI&R service when age related problems, like failing eyesight, started affecting him and his ability to stay on the road.

A Housing Support worker from the HI&R Service met with Michael in our offices and completed a Homeless with Support (Seg 1) public housing application form with him. The approval of his application was delayed, and after constant follow up with the Office of Housing, we finally received confirmation some two months later that he had been accepted onto the Homeless with Support (Seg 1) waiting list with his area preference being one metro and two regional. After working with us for about 3 months Michael was offered a public housing property. As Michael had no phone he kept in touch with us by pay phone every couple of weeks so he could check the progress of any housing offers, it was also the only way we could check how he was travelling and if he was having any difficulties we could assist him to resolve. Michael stated his major concerns during this time, apart from being homeless, were **snakes** that were on the move due to spring weather, and the often unsafe conditions of shower blocks in the camping areas he was staying in.



When the formal offer of housing had become available, in the Preston region, the Housing Support worker took him to the property inspection and he was so excited about its location and the type of housing it was. The fact it had a small front and back yard that he could fix up, bus stop outside the front door, and onsite parking for his van which was becoming worse for wear, was more than anything that he had dreamt of in a housing offer. A week later Michael moved into the property and referrals were made so that he could furnish the property as he had been living out of his van and didn't have a fridge or any furniture. On a follow up visit to Michael a couple of weeks later he stated that he had never been happier, and that he didn't think he was deserving of such a lovely place. Michael also became a member of HAAG and is now an active volunteer with the organisation.

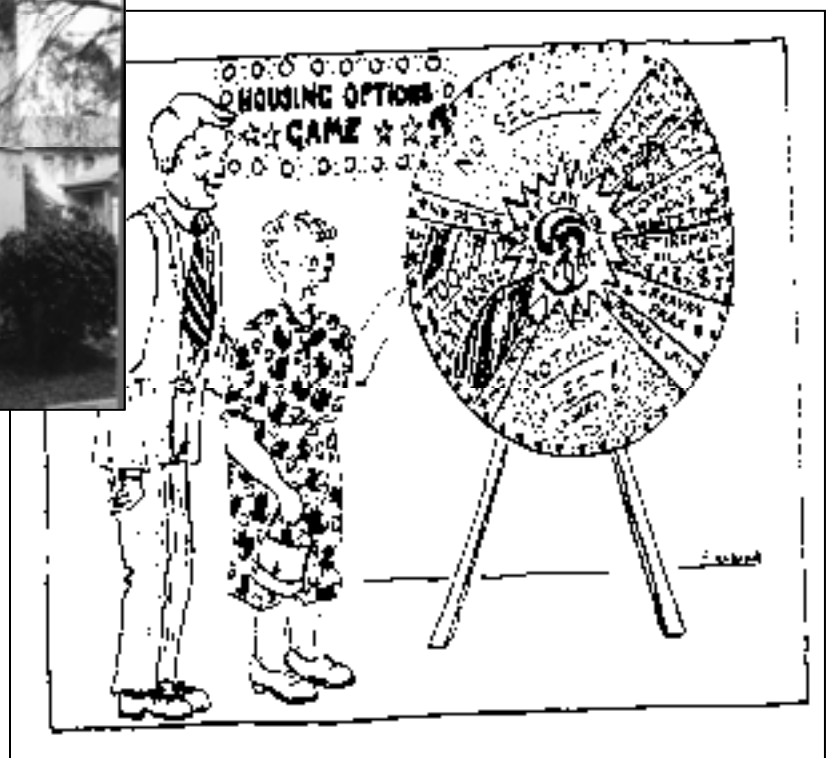


## Outreach Housing Support

The Home at Last Services Outreach Program is funded by the Department of Health and Ageing through the Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA) Program and the Department of Human Services through the Victorian Government's Homelessness Action Plan. The outreach housing support program seeks to assist older clients who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or who live in unsafe, insecure and inappropriate accommodation. We assist clients to obtain appropriate, sustainable and affordable housing. We provide a flexible service which is based on priority and duration of service provision depends on each client's level of housing and care needs. We also link our clients to the most appropriate range of care providing services in order to address their immediate and ongoing needs so that they can maintain their independence.

We work in partnership with other agencies and services via developing professional links and refer our clients to those services that will assist them in the long run. Some of the services include local government (Home and Community Care), Aged Care Assessment Program, Health Care Services, Home Care Packages and Commonwealth Carelink Services.

The Outreach Program service delivery is based on an empowerment model in that we believe our clients are not to be blamed for their problems and they are able to generate solutions once they are provided with information, tools, resources, and opportunities. We also believe that our clients are able to make decisions from a range of housing options once they have access to the available information. Our initial assessment process therefore involves providing clients with relevant information about housing and care choices. In consultation with our clients, we then develop an action plan to determine their housing and care needs, thereafter applications and referrals can be made on their behalf.





Below is a case study that describes the roles and tasks of an outreach worker.

### **Case study:**

Tony heard about the Home at Last service at one of our community education events and referred himself to the HAL service for housing assistance after receiving a 60 day Notice to Vacate from the landlord; he received the notice a day after a scheduled property inspection. Tony was 59 years old but prematurely aged due to multiple health conditions. Tony had been living in his flat for 16 years and during that time had attempted to get some maintenance for the flat. He had particularly tried for the last few years as there was heavy water damage throughout the flat due to flooding several years ago, neither the real estate agent or the landlord ever responded. The flat was damp and smelled of mould and mildew and this was having a detrimental impact on his health.

At the time of the assessment by a HAL Outreach worker, Tony appeared to be quite distressed at receiving the Notice to Vacate he was highly anxious and was very worried that he would not be able to find a new place to live, he was concerned that he would end up homeless, something that had never happened to him before. The HAL worker also observed that Tony had behaviour of hoarding as the flat was extremely cluttered which represented a fall risk for him. The flat was full of miscellaneous items stacked from the floor to ceiling. Tony was also limping and he said that he had pains in his legs. Tony further stated that he was diagnosed with 'Dissociative Disorder' some years ago but received no ongoing treatment. As Tony did not have any Mental Health worker / Case Manager assisting him with his health conditions, with his consent, the HAL Outreach Worker referred him to Vincent Care Community Connections (CCP) Program which provides services to people with mental health issues or a psychiatric disability, and who are not linked to mainstream or specialist services. Since the referral Tony has also been receiving one on one support and case management from a Social Worker to ensure he has access to appropriate health services so that he can be appropriately diagnosed and manage both his physical and mental health conditions.

The HAL Outreach worker completed a 'Homeless with Support housing application' (Seg 1) with Tony which was not approved, for the reason that although he received a Notice to Vacate, he was not really homeless as yet as he was still living in his flat and therefore his application needed to be changed to Supported Housing application (Seg 2.) This application was approved and put on the early housing waiting list. The HAL worker then referred Tony to a HAL Tenancy Support Worker for support at VCAT to get an extension of time on the Notice to Vacate; this was done to allow more time to explore his housing options. However, while this was happening Tony received a VCAT Notice of Hearing from the landlord who had made an application for an Order of Possession of the unit. This meant there was a distinct possibility that the Order and Warrant of Possession to remove Tony from his existing unit would be granted by the VCAT and consequently he would be homeless. The HAL Tenancy Support Worker represented Tony at VCAT and successfully argued that that the hearing should be adjourned until the inspection could be done on the condition of the building. The hearing was adjourned to future date.

As Tony was not too fussed about which suburb he lived in, phone calls were then made on a weekly basis to the different housing service providers in order to advocate on his behalf for an urgent housing offer. One of the housing providers stated that they did have a vacant property and an interview for Tony to attend was then duly organised. Upon attending the interview at the public housing property, Tony was offered a brand new, completely modified one bedroom apartment, suitable for a person with a disability. Tony moved in to his new property some 6 weeks after commencing work with the HAL Outreach

Worker. The HAL Outreach worker, in consultation with Tony, linked him up with available services in his new housing area. One of the services he is currently accessing is the local council's Home & Community Care services which the local carer actively works with Tony to improve his skills to maintain his new property. Tony is also linked to local social support services to attend social groups so he can meet new people to reduce his isolation. The last time the HAL Outreach worker visited Tony, he stated that he was feeling very relieved and secure in his new place. He further stated that he did not have a holiday for the last 40 years and has begun saving to have a holiday in the near future.



## Retirement Housing

Over the course of the last financial year the Retirement Housing Information Service has provided information, advice and support in approximately 302 matters, including approximately 1000 residents.

Of the 302 matters:

24 were group clients, where 3 people or more were being supported for the same matter at the same park/village.

44 were ongoing or recurring.

Ongoing cases represent matters that continue to be negotiated beyond a 3 month period.

Recurring cases are residents who continue to call for information and support from the service but presenting different issues each time.

The break down of housing types represented in the data above was as follows:

By far the largest group 164 cases were made up of matters raised by residents living in caravan and residential parks and villages.

104 of the 164 cases were matters related to Part 4A of the RTA.

Part 4A has now been in effect for almost 2 years and we are now beginning to see how it applies to park and village matters. What has been noted is that most of the new sections appear to be very grey in their application and often cannot definitively provide a right. This has made it difficult when advising residents as more often than not the only way to test the legislation is to take it to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), and this is where many older people hesitate.

What can be said is that some of the more common questions asked from parks and village residents are around their limit to liability when continuing to pay site fees after they leave the park, around the sale of the dwelling and assignment of lease and around site agreements in general.

92 cases were made up of independent living units and retirement villages. Where 27 were covered by the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (RTA) most came under the Retirement Villages Act 1986 (RVA) with 58 representing not-for-profit retirement villages and 7 representing for-profit villages.

This area continues to be difficult as right are limited, as is the process towards access to justice. Access to legal support is also scarce and therefore difficult to acquire. There have been moves made by the government to make some amendment to the Act in relation to information disclosure but there is still a pressing need for a more general review of the Act.



The remainder of matters covered various other types of housing such as rental villages, services apartments, private rental, social housing, homeowners needing housing option advice and homelessness.

18 cases represented specific support to residents groups at meetings or in relation to residents committees.

The service continues to provide support to residents committees, whether in forming a committee or in ongoing support and resources for an existing committee.

The retirement housing service also undertook some regional trips, with information sessions, letterbox drops and visits organised in Bendigo, Echuca, Rochester, Nagambie and Seymour this period.



### **Policy advocacy**

Throughout the last financial year the Retirement Housing Information Service also continued to play a role in the area of policy advocacy.

### **Residents committees:**

During this period a report was produced, that came out of a pilot project, undertaken in the Southern and Gippsland regions, documenting the value of, barriers to, and resources needed for, residents committees in Victoria. The service along with project worker Janet Reid organised a launch in conjunction with Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, in August 2012 to celebrate the outcomes and the collaborative work.

As an extension of this work the project and its outcomes, in relation to tenant participation, were presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> National Housing Conference in November 2012.

### **Site agreements:**

The service has been working hard to ensure all site tenants under Part 4A of the RTA have an agreement in writing. The deadline has passed which gave park owners a 12 month grace period to fulfil their obligations under this section. It has resulted at times in the practice of this protection not being quite what perhaps the legislative change intended. A standard site agreement has been circulated by the Victorian Parks Association and after looking at it closely, and working with the Tenants Union of Victoria (TUV), we found that some terms did not seem to comply with Part 4A.

This has caused problems where in some cases site tenants with existing agreements were told to sign the new one and relinquish their old one, even though it might have a lease term attached. In other cases site tenants have been pressured into signing the agreements without having a chance to seek advice.

Discussions were entered into with TUV, Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) and Vic Parks to negotiate where we felt terms did not fulfil their obligations under the law.

It has also been expressed that as per residential tenancy agreements CAV should provide a standard template of site agreement to parks. CAV is a neutral body working for both the site tenants and the owners and this way perhaps the document would be better indicative of the rights and obligations of both parties.

During this period the service also met with TUV and Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC) to discuss how we can work together to ensure residents rights are being promoted through the proper provision of site agreements.

The service met with CAV compliance and enforcement to discuss issues around compliance and enforcement in relation to site agreements.

### **Retirement Village Roundtable/CAV Working Together Forums/Conciliation**

The service has continued to work closely with CAV during this period, as well as with other agencies in a number of different formats, either sharing information or commenting on proposed legislative changes. The service continued to engage with various CAV programs, especially in relation to case work and policy advocacy, such as the conciliation and dispute resolution teams.

The service met with Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC), Residents of Retirement Villages Victoria (RRVV) and Leading Aged Services Australia (LASA) to discuss how we can begin working more on the needs of the Not-for-Profit sector of retirement villages and begin engaging with CAV and the Minister around the key issues.

### **National residential parks meeting**

During this period the service met with residents associations and services from Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales in relation to residential parks.

It was the first time the states had all met together and the aim was to work toward creating a national body that could share information and support each other towards improvements in law and policy. Of the states, Victoria is the only one to currently not have a separate piece of legislation for residential parks.



Inaugural meeting of national residential parks organisations (Shanny top, second right)

**Government/Members of Parliament**

This period saw the service meet with:

the CAV Minister’s advisor Alexander Seccombe;

Lily D’Ambrosio (Shadow Minister for Consumer Protection) to share information about the service and more specifically our work around caravan and residential parks and NFP retirement villages.

Lily D’Ambrosio and Richard Wynn (Shadow Housing Minister) together to discuss the broader housing policy outlook.

Lily D’Ambrosio and Robin Scott (Shadow Minister for Finance) at a residential park. This was an opportunity for D’Ambrosio and Scott to speak directly with residents about their key issues.

HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.  
**Older Tenants’ Voice Since 1988**  
 SPRING September 2012



HOUSING -  
 A RIGHT, NOT A  
 PRIVILEGE

HAAG IS ON  
 RADIO 3CR  
 'Raise the Roof'  
 Wednesdays once a  
 month at 6pm  
 855 on the AM dial

Retirement Housing Worker Shanny also edits and produces our quarterly newsletter Older Tenants Voice

HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.  
**Older Tenants’ Voice Since 1988**  
 SUMMER December 2012



HOUSING -  
 A RIGHT, NOT A  
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HAAG IS ON  
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 4th Wednesday of each  
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HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP  
  
 HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.  
**Older Tenants’ Voice**  
 Since 1988

*Molly*

Mary Catherine Hadfield OAM  
 4 July 1922 - 10 November 2012

**Housing—A right not a privilege**



Autumn Edition March 2013

HAAG is on radio 3CR  
 'Raise the Roof'  
 4th Wednesday of each month at 6pm  
 27 March - 24 April - 22 May



In Loving Memory  
 If life on earth has truly passed,  
 I loved you all to 1  
 I weep not and can  
 I love each other

haag



YEARS Winter edition  
 June 2013



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.

**Older Tenant’s Voice Since 1988**

*Housing - a right not a privilege!*

HOUSING for the Aged Action Group



## Tenancy Advice

### Snapshot

201 client files were opened under the Tenancy Service for the 2012/13 financial year, representing 264 people requiring casework assistance. 95 of the 201 clients had received a Notice To Vacate (NTV) from their landlord. Other primary reasons for approaching the service was retrieval of bond (24), rent increases (19), repairs(19) and lease breaks (9). The Tenancy Service represented clients in 32 VCAT hearings, the majority being Hearings for Warrants of Possession. The main focus of the service was on encouraging people to exercise their legal rights by providing paralegal advice and assistance, along with representation and advocacy when required.

### Main Issues: Notices To Vacate

The tenancy service expended much of its resources responding to insistent efforts to evict older people from private rental through the serving of Notices To Vacate by real estate agents as the representatives of landlords. The reasons varied and each individual client circumstance was unique, but a resounding motivation for the issuing of many of these notices To Vacate appeared to be nothing more than the perception that a higher rent could be secured from the next tenant. The Real Estate industry appears to lend itself to encouraging a regular turnover of tenants, creating enormous disruption to the tenant.

Residential Tenancies legislation empowers the landlord with ease of eviction. The No Reason Notice To Vacate is unique in the world, and is a serious obstacle to security of tenancy ever being available through the private rental market. The vast majority of people the tenancy service assisted were on a periodic, or month to month lease. The norm of leases is an initial 12 month period that in almost all circumstances evolves into a periodic lease. That is, unlike other countries such as Germany and Switzerland, leases in Victoria and Australia are not employed as a means of tenure security. The periodic lease as standard, coupled with the No Reason NTV, affectively means that tenants can be and often are, evicted on a whim. A new property manager takes a dislike to the tenant, a landlord wants a mate to move in, an agent spruiks to the owner that if we get rid of old Betty and put a lick of paint on the place we could hike the rent up by a third, whatever it may be; from the perspective of the legislation, there requires no reason.



Tenancy Advice Worker, Marc Westley



No reason notices can be defended if deemed retaliatory, but if there is major conflict, in most circumstances it is advantageous and necessary for the tenant to source alternative housing. In one case we successfully initiated a restraining order on an intrusive and intimidating landlord, but longer term the client, understandably, moved of their own accord. Though the tenancy service successfully challenged Warrants of Possession in VCAT hearings, we are also all too aware that if a real estate agent and/or owner wants a tenant out of a property, by hook or by crook, they will get them out. It may take them considerably longer than they would have preferred or envisaged, but eventually, the tenant is going to have to move.

### **Affordability**

Statistics recently produced by National Seniors Australia reveal that utilities and rent have risen at more than double the inflation rate over the last five years. This has led to an increasing attrition rate of older people leaving the private rental sector. This is usually triggered by the latest 6 monthly increase in rent. Yes, there is a prescribed process to challenge the increase, but the current market rate across Victoria, barring a few old sheds at the back of Nar Nar Goon, is unaffordable to anyone solely reliant on a pension payment for income. Even those with savings see those savings quickly decline by having to cover high rental costs. The market rental rate is way above the ceiling for maximum rent assistance, meaning that every rent increase has to be absorbed entirely by the renter. It is a system which is grinding pension reliant people into the sort of poverty conveniently shipped off in the public mindset to some faraway third world. The third world in fact is likely to be next door. People unable to purchase petrol, or public transport, people rationing food, not using utilities because of the cost, staying in bed for the majority of time to save on utilities, forgoing medication to cover the latest rent hike or inexplicably high electricity bill. Or, in the case of one long term 74 year old client of the tenancy service residing near Ballarat, doing away with utilities altogether, cooking on a hand sized portable gas camping cooker and using a torch for light.

The Tenancy Service was approached for assistance and representation by a number of people residing in what is loosely labelled 'social housing'. The majority of these clients were querying rent rises and the method of calculation of rent levels. There is a fear present among many social housing tenants based on the possibility of significant rental increases over the next few years. One church based housing provider has increased rents quite markedly while reducing services to tenants, possible to subsidize losses in other speculative ventures. This comes at the same time management is sending letters to tenants explaining that their rents are now calculated at market rate. The fear among many residents is that the switch from a previous public housing type rent rate set at a percentage of income, to a market based rate set arbitrarily on the going rental rate for the type of property in the area, could potentially drive people reliant on a pension payment, out of these properties through rent rises. This fear is particularly prevalent in inner city social housing developments, where rents could theoretically, under market rate, double overnight. Suspicion of the longer term motives of these social housing suppliers such as housing associations and church based providers, is high among tenants. There is the further suspicion many of these providers are very much focused on profiteering and on further leveraging public housing stock for their own personal advantage, to the long term detriment of the lower income tenant. There is growing evidence that social housing, far from a solution to affordable and sustainable housing, is part of the problem, particularly where it arises at the cost of the retention and potential expansion of public housing stock.



## The Market

Private renters find themselves in a market where demand outstrips supply, where record low vacancy rates have become the norm and where record population increases, particularly in Melbourne and the metropolitan surrounds, place further pressure on the cost and availability of affordable accommodation. Mix in a chronic lack of legislative protection for the tenant and you have a precarious environment for all but the high end renter. Real estate agents and property owners are not charitable or benevolent institutions. They are in the business of making money. The landlord's primary focus is on maximising return on their property investment, and they pay real estate agents to ensure this happens. The industry does not by design lend itself to the housing needs of older people. The older tenant is regarded in general as an anomaly.



## Tenancy and the new Home at Last Service

Home At Last and the ACHA outreach program were vital complimentary services and guided tenancy activity toward specific client outcomes. For instance, brokering of an adjournment in a Warrant of Possession, either through VCAT or with the landlord's representative prior to a VCAT hearing, focused on the future access date the client was, or was likely to, access affordable housing brokered by the HAL service. Often this date would fall well beyond the termination date quoted on the client's Notice To Vacate. The client was in the vast majority of cases able to retain their existing private rental accommodation up until appropriate re-housing, without the need for any transitional or crisis accommodation to be relied on. Tenancy support was delivered as part of a co-ordinated and holistic assistance package.

### Case Study

If the Tenancy Service were granting an award for the most tenacious and inspiring private rental tenant, it would be given to Edith. Edith emigrated to Australia from Eastern Europe in 1948. She is 90 years old and kindly consented to HAAG citing her in in this report. She also appears as a case study in VCAT's 2012 -2013 Annual Report. Edith was referred into our tenancy service by Consumer Affairs Victoria in November 2012, related to repairs to her rental flat she had been requesting to be fixed, via her landlord's real estate agent. Motivated by rent rises every 6 months and the huge increase in her utility bills, Edith initiated the prescribed process of compelling her landlord to carry out the repairs, which led to 3 VCAT hearings, culminating in an Order for her hot water to be replaced. It was a great example to other older private renters that by exercising their rights and ensuring landlords and real estate agents comply with their statutory obligations, positive results can be achieved. During this process, made protracted by the real estate agent's obstinate insistence that repairs were not required, Edith was subjected to ageist taunts by her real estate agent such as: 'she's too old to be in private rental, she should be in a nursing home', 'it's all in her head'. From the experience of the Tenancy Service, these recalcitrant attitudes appear prevalent in the real estate industry. People in private rental can and often are treated by real estate agents as second class citizens. As Edith said, 'I just want to be treated with a little respect, I pay my rent, I have rights, this is my home'.



# Campaigns and Policy Action

## Securing Our Future: Retirement in Residential Parks and Villages in Victoria

### Forum held on 12th July 2012

The Securing Our Future forum looked at the two greatest concerns for residents living in residential parks and villages: security of tenure and resident/management relations. After the introduction of Part 4A in the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, providing some improved protections for people who own their moveable dwelling and rent/lease the site on which it stands, residents felt it fell short of their expectations and did not address their key areas of concern. The forum aimed to revisit these topics by presenting alternative models of management and security. It also aimed to empower residents, through the use of residents committees and the residents' voice, to work together and be proactive in their approach towards reform.

Our guest speaker was David Bunce, from the University of Adelaide, who has a Masters by research in relocatable homes and is currently undertaking a PhD about housing co-operatives including residential park co-operatives. David spoke about why tenure changes are necessary, the consequences of inaction and how changes can take place using examples from the UK and the US.

David offered ways of creating change that will provide security, such as:

- Separate the long term, permanent residential parks and villages from the tourist parks, to ensure business owners have a purpose.
- Allow residents the offer of first refusal to buy a park/village if it is being sold.
- Rezone parks/village land as residential to be used only for permanent housing.
- 10% commission for park/village owners for on-site sales as the trade off for long term security for residents. The 10% is the highest that owners can charge.
- Support resident owned co-operatives with government loan guarantees and support by not-for-profit trainers.

David encouraged a positive 'you can do it' attitude by suggesting that what is needed is a champion to take on the cause and pave the way. This then became a theme throughout the rest of the day where people agreed that someone needed to take the lead and pursue the cause to achieve reform.

Our first panel discussion addressed the topic of resident/management relations. The panel consisted of:

- Elizabeth White, CEO, VIC Parks
- Anne O'Hehir, Residential Tenancy Program Manager CAV
- Keith Sykes, Manager Residential Accommodation CAV
- Ben Cording, Solicitor Tenants Union Victoria

Although different perspectives were expressed throughout the panel discussion there was a respect and understanding that grew out of the opportunity to hear what each side was saying. Elizabeth presented the industry perspective and explained the role of VIC parks which is to inform and advise park/village operators. CAV provided the neutral eye from experiences working with both sides. Ben provided the legal expertise and expressed liveliness about residents exercising their rights. It also began

what HAAG hopes will be a continued conversation between residents, and their representatives, and industry towards an improved relationship model for parks and villages.



Shanny Gordon introduces the parks forum panel, left



Parks and Villages Residents Committees Project Worker Janet Reid, right



Keynote speaker David Bunce from Flinders University, Adelaide, left



CARPAV member Allen Baillie, right

## **Residents' Committees Building Bridges in Parks and Villages**

During 2012 a project was developed by Shanny Gordon, Retirement Housing Worker, with the aim of documenting the benefits and barriers of residents' committees for retirees in caravan and residential parks and villages will hopefully assist to improve relationships between residents and operators in parks around Victoria.

HAAG, with funding from the Victoria Law Foundation, created the project out of a need to inform older residents in parks about their right to form committees in response to changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*. In September 2011 Part 4A was introduced into the Act improving protections for permanent parks residents who own their dwelling but lease/rent the site on which it stands.

HAAG, in conjunction with the Mornington Peninsula Shire, launched the project report on Tuesday 21 August 2012 to present what residents, operators and stakeholders feel is needed to support stronger relationships in parks, allowing for a more inclusive living environment.

Janet Reid, the project worker employed by HAAG, focused the project in the Gippsland and Southern Metropolitan regions, with a large number of parks from the Mornington Peninsula represented. "It is important to get dialogue happening because at the end of the day both residents and managers/owners want the same thing, to have amicable, clear communication that enables a positive living environment", says Janet, "Residents Committees can help provide the pathway for that to begin".

The aim of the project was to document the values of, barriers to and resources needed for residents committees in parks and to provide a balanced view of the sector in relation to these areas. The project has found that residents and operators are actually not far apart in their vision for the future. HAAG's hope is to act upon the conclusions from the project to generate strategies that will empower the parks sector towards a new culture.

The report sets out the findings from the project, along with recommendations for further strategies to strengthen committees and their relationships with park managers and owners.

HAAG is interested in continuing this work and hopes to be able to inform and support residents all across Victoria to form residents' committees.

### **Project recommendations:**

- Training for park/village managers and owners  
65% of people interviewed during the project felt training for managers and owners was needed.
- Training and support for residents committees  
There is a need to inform and educate residents state-wide
- Mapping of parks/villages to identify how many permanent residents there are state-wide and where
- The legislation needs to acknowledge residents committees as legitimate entities able to act as a collective  
There is a need to formalise dispute resolution procedures for parks/village to guide clear communication.



Residents meeting, left

Janet Reid, Wyn Stenton,  
Gemma White and Melanie  
Rygl from the Victorian Law  
Foundation



Audience at the launch of the Existing  
Together—Residents in Residential  
Parks and Villages Report in Morning-  
ton



## Home at Last Forum April 2013

On the 18<sup>th</sup> May 2013 HAAG held a forum at Victoria University called **Home at Last – The Meaning of Home and Community for Older People**. About 200 people attended the event that brought together the latest research on older persons housing, information on HAAG's Home at Last service and older people telling their own stories in person and on film.

The Home at Last Forum was organised to provide information to the community and housing, aged care and community agencies about the issues facing older people at risk of homelessness. The main aim was to raise awareness of the plight of over 330,000 older Australians who are forced to live in the private rental market and discuss solutions to this growing problem.

After an introduction by HAAG's chairperson Wyn Stenton, we were most grateful to have the forum opened by Angela Connors, Director, Service Development and Design, Department of Human Services. Angela spoke about the state government strategies on homelessness and acknowledged the importance of providing specialist services and housing outcomes for older people.

Keynote speaker was Dr. Maree Petersen, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland who discussed the following theme: Tackling homelessness is a national priority within Australia. Yet there is a limited understanding of older people's homelessness, in particular how older people experience homelessness in different geographies across Australia. Maree's paper presented findings from an Australian national study analysing first time homelessness amongst older people. It also provided a rich understanding of the nature of older people's homelessness in different parts of Australia, in particular their housing history that culminated in housing crisis.

The second major speaker was Dr. Shelley Mallett, General Manager, Research and Service Development, Hanover Welfare Services. Shelley spoke about Hanover's research that has provided a better understanding of the services and service responses that can prevent older men and women from entering housing crisis and homelessness. Her talk explored whether being a man or a woman impacts on how an ageing person enters, experiences and moves through housing crisis, even homelessness.

The forum also launched an important report conducted by two students from Chisholm Institute, Mary Morrissey and Liz Lucas. Called "What will happen to me" the report was the result of 6 months work interviewing 12 older clients of HAAG who had been at risk of homelessness in the private market before accessing long term affordable housing. The subsequent report documented the experiences and impacts on the lives of the interviewees when faced with housing insecurity, poverty and terrible conditions. The conclusions from the report recommended a range of reforms needed in regards to tenancy law and housing supply.

The forum also later heard from John McInerney, CEO from Common Equity Housing Ltd., a not-for-profit company that provides co-operative housing. John spoke particularly about Harmony Village that is a mixed development of an older persons co-op joined on site with a retirement village. The innovative design and practices of Harmony Village gave good insight into the possibilities of future retirement housing.

The forum also heard about the progress of HAAG's Home at Last Older Persons Housing Information and Support Service and it was announced that the service is working towards soon housing 100 older people at risk of homelessness within the first 12 months of the service's operation. Up to the date of the forum more than 500 clients had their housing stabilised, re-housed or on track to affordable accommodation for life.

The highlight of the day was hearing from HAAG's members during a tenants' panel session where seven people who had been at risk of homelessness and re-housed with the support of Home at Last spoke about their experience and the meaning of home and community to them. On top of this our new film was shown that highlighted the experience of a number of people from the panel and their new cluster of housing in Altona. Brilliantly produced by our great colleague Toni Bentley from Bentwheel Productions, the film dramatically evokes the importance of home and community for older people, the theme of the day.

Overall the event was a great success and we also obtained good media coverage on national and Melbourne radio that has spread further awareness about the need to tackle this rapidly growing problem of older people threatened with homelessness in our community.



Home at Last Forum Keynote speakers Dr. Maree Petersen, right, and Dr. Shelley Mallett, below



The forum residents panel, right



## **National Residential Parks Development**

On Tuesday 9 April 2013 HAAG met for the first time with residential park representatives from around Australia to discuss the possibility of forming a national alliance towards improved rights for older residents in residential parks. South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria were all present as we discussed our many shared issues across the parks sector. Although the legislation is different for every state, and Victoria is by far at the bottom of the ladder, the issues are still the same. Watch this space for more information about the progress of this group. It is a first for parks in Australia!

## **VCAT Regulatory Impact Statement**

VCAT produced a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) in January proposing to increase VCAT fees in relation to applications, hearings and dispute resolution sessions, and was asking for submissions to be made in response to their four proposed options.

The Tribunal was created to provide access to justice for those on low incomes, without requiring all of the detailed legal supports higher courts require. That being said the RIS makes it clear VCAT is trying to compare itself to the very courts it was created to vary from, saying that according to cost expenditure they require a system that is more in line with user pays.

VCAT is clear that the proposals in the RIS are based on feedback from Members' experiences of the time, resources and costs involved in the day-to-day functioning of the Tribunal, as well as the increasing complexity of cases. They also state though that they have poor data analysis. To this they say that up until the next review of the VCAT regulations (in 2016) they will gather proper data to be able to make more accurate assessments of the cost recovery required into the future.

The four options proposed in the RIS are to keep costs as they are until the next review, to provide for increases of 30% cost recovery, to provide increases of 45% cost recovery or to tier the cost recovery starting at 30% in the first year and gradually up each year to 45% in the third.

HAAG recommended that fees stay as they are due to the concern any increases would deter older tenants and residents from taking matters to VCAT.

Up until now under the Residential Tenancies List tenants applications only make up a very small percentage and yet as a trust-funded list their bonds pay for VCAT's associated costs.

Under the appropriation-funded lists, specifically the Civil Claims List where retirement village matters are heard, retirement village residents as applicants make an even smaller number again.

Although pension waivers are available many older people do not know this and the RIS failed to mention whether pension waivers would apply to all increases, particularly where it was indicated parties would have to split costs.

We have yet to hear what the outcomes of the submissions are but we will keep our members updated on any progress.

## **Student homelessness project**

From June to October 2012 HAAG combined with the Chisholm Institute's community development course by hosting two students-on-placement, Mary Morrissey and Liza Lucas. Mary and Liza conducted research that included a qualitative research questionnaire where they interviewed 11 HAAG clients who

have been at risk of homelessness. The aim of the research was get an understanding of the reasons why older people may have reached a point of housing crisis. The analysis shed light on an understanding of older persons' histories that determine what led them to be living in vulnerable housing circumstances, as well as documenting the crisis experience and the eventual housing outcomes.

Liza and Mary's work produced some valuable insights into the factors that cause older people to become at risk of homelessness and the report they produced will provide important evidence for HAAG to present to governments when we are lobbying for improvements to laws and policies on housing. The report, entitled *What will happen to me?* Was launched at our Home at Last Forum in April 2013.

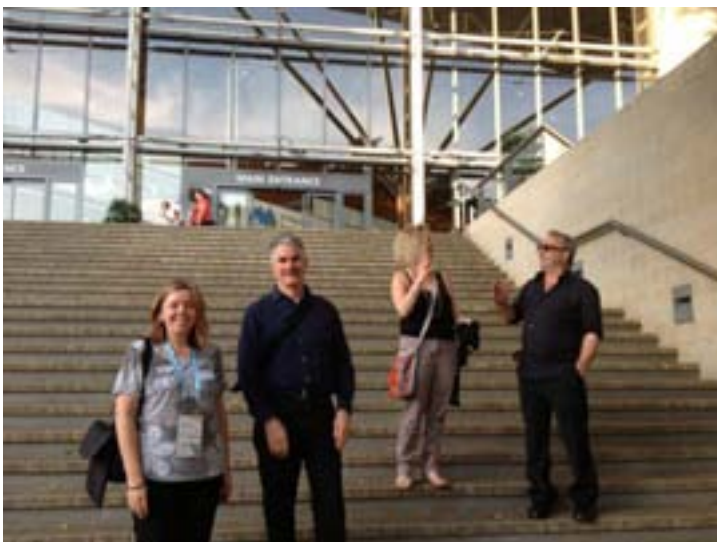
Mary and Liza presenting their "What will happen to me?" homelessness report at the Home at Last Forum in April 2013



## Conferences

HAAG has had a strong national presence this year being invited to speak at several conferences over the past few months. This included the National Homelessness Conference in September 2012, the 7th National Housing Conference held in Brisbane in October 2012 and the Australian Association of Gerontology Conference in November 2012.

A highlight for the year was that at the Housing Conference HAAG was successful in giving two presentations with Jeff Fiedler and Shanny Gordon invited to attend. Jeff spoke about the Home at Last service and explained why there is such a need for a specialist older person's service. Shanny spoke about residents committees in caravan and residential parks and villages as a form of tenant participation looking at the values of, barriers to, and resources needed for residents committees.



Anne, Jeff, Shanny and Ken Dyson from the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council at the Brisbane National Housing Conference 2012. Fionnuala took the photo.

## Working Groups

The Retirement Housing Service continued to facilitate and support the **Independent Living Unit (ILU) Working Group** and the Caravan and Residential Parks and Villages (CARPAV) working group.

At the end of 2012 the ILU working group decided to take a break into 2013 and reassess its position. The group lost its focus due to the difficulties related to engaging with government about the key issues. We tried changing the point of focus and concluded that perhaps a few excursions in 2013 to see some alternative retirement housing models would assist the group to re-examine how they would like to move forward.

**The Caravan, Residential Parks and Villages (CARPAV) Working Group** have continued their hard work. Part 4A has taken up the majority of time and the group had turned some of their focus onto increasing membership and publicity of and for the working group.

The working group also undertook a state-wide survey asking representatives from around 30 various parks/villages in Victoria questions about Part 4a, site agreements and key concerns they may have. A follow up survey was also conducted around whether residents felt information was properly disclosed prior to entry into their park/village. It was a great opportunity to document the current climate in parks and will hopefully provide CARPAV with the incentive to move forward and take steps to make further improvements to the rights and protections of parks residents.



CARPAV members meeting

## Private Renters Working Group

A new initiative recently developed by HAAG is the Private Renters Working Group. This group was formed out of the interest of a number of people who had been assisted by HAAG's Home at Last service. Almost all member of the working group had at some stage in recent years been at risk of homelessness in the private rental market. All members have now obtained, or are on the road to obtaining public or social housing. After facing such precarious housing circumstances, this group have dedicated themselves to helping the many thousands of other older people in our community who are facing the same problem. The group, while in its infancy, is beginning the process of developing a log of claims for improvements to government policy and law and will be endeavouring the conduct publicity to increase awareness of the problem and lobby governments for change.



Inaugural meeting of the Private Renters Working Group



## Notes

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**HAAG members demonstrating in the old city square in the early 1990's**