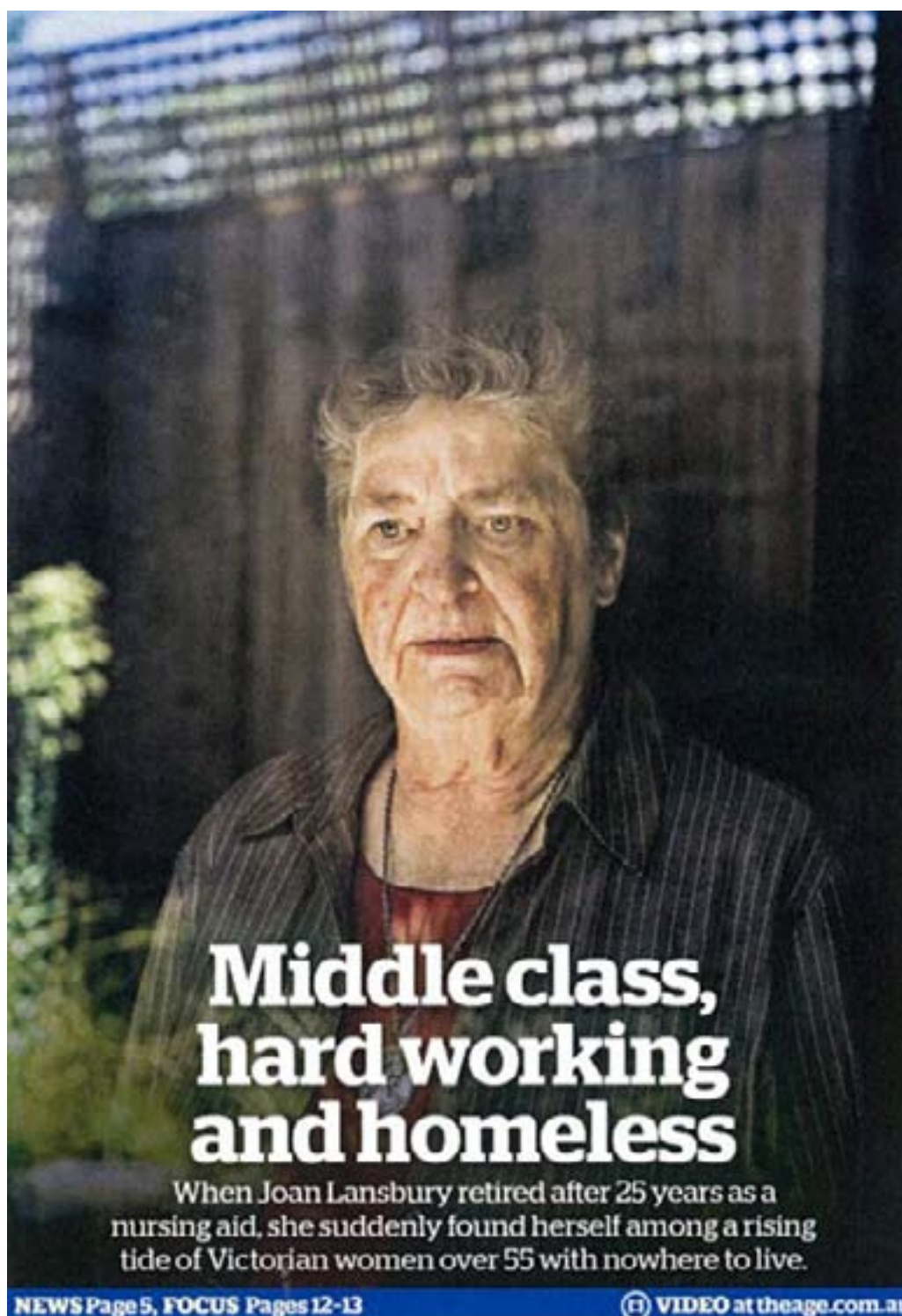


HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.

Annual Report

2013-2014



HAAG member Joan Lansbury featured in a special article in The Age in 2014



**We continue to work for older persons' housing justice in the spirit of Molly Hadfield
14.7.22—10.11.2012**



Housing for the Aged Action Group

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CONTENTS

Our managers	page 4
Our management committee	page 5
Our members	page 6
Our past HAAG inspirations	page 8
Our governance committee	page 10
Our staff	page 11
Our services	page 12
Home at Last	
Service reports	
Administration	page 15
Community education	page 16
Agency Training & Protocols Development	page 21
Housing Support Program	page 22
Data Project	page 25
Housing Information & Referral	page 28
Outreach Housing Support	page 30
Retirement Housing Service	page 33
Tenancy Advice Service	page 36
Campaigns and policy action	
Surviving or Thriving Forum	page 38
2nd National ACHA Meeting & Aged Care Reforms Consultation	page 41
HAAG's State Election Policies	page 42
Partnerships with Local Government	page 45
Working Groups	
Private Renters Working Group	page 46
Independent living units	page 47
Caravan and Residential parks and Villages	page 48
Partnerships with Academia	page 49
Student Placements	page 50

Our Managers

April Bragg and Jeff Fiedler

Welcome to Housing for the Aged Action Group's report on another very busy year in 2013-14 as we have been building up to a Victorian state election in November and the continued work of our landmark service, Home at Last.

We would like to congratulate our members on the development of our housing policy platform that sets out the problems experienced by our members in a range of housing areas, as well as providing solutions in the form of recommendations to government. The document was developed through a range of member consultations but principally developed by our working groups and at HAAG general meetings. We have met with the relevant Government and Opposition representatives to reinforce our views and they have heard loud and clear from our members whose lived experience always communicates a strong message. After the election on November 29 we will focus our lobbying efforts to the new government and push for action on all of our concerns. A special thanks to our amazing working groups on the following areas: Private rental housing, Independent Living Units and Caravan and Residential Parks and Villages. We encourage all HAAG members to get involved to support our campaigns.

This year has also been momentous for the further development of our Home at Last – Older Persons Housing Information and Support Service. After being successfully evaluated by independent analysts KPMG and re-funded into Stage 2 during 2013, we were very grateful that the state government extended funding until June 2015. This has enabled Home at Last to become recognised as the primary contact point in Victoria for older people at risk of homelessness. In fact, after our first year of operation, we had assisted 14% of all people in Victoria aged 55 years and over who needed help from a specialist homeless service. Recent trends are showing a further 50% increase in overall client numbers, and most importantly, our services are reaching those most in need with 95% of people contacting Home at Last requiring help because they have a pending risk of homelessness. This success has caused great pressure on our hard working staff whose compassion and dedication are focused on achieving real outcomes for our clients in the form of long term, affordable housing. Thank you to our Community Education, Agency Training and Housing Support staff for the cohesive strategies you have developed to create awareness of our services, establish the linkages and finding people homes. Our one-stop-shop approach also importantly provides help to existing tenants and residents through our Tenancy Advice and Retirement Housing Services that assisted 80% of older people aged 70+ across the statewide TAAP advocacy Program. Our Data Project has ensured effective compliance with our evaluation requirements and future research needs whilst our Administration staff have provided fantastic office support. Special thanks to Ani for her incredible finance work to juggle an increasingly complex budget.

Sincere thanks to our funding bodies: the Department of Human Services, Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Commonwealth Department of Social Services for supporting our work.

Finally, thank you to our dedicated management committee who have provided endless support through our monthly meetings, special Home at Last and Finance working groups and constant involvement with our day to day work, delegations to departments and politicians.

2013-14 has been a year of building momentum politically and through our services. We look forward to taking on our major challenges over the coming year.

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.

Whilst the 2012-13 AGM elected office bearers Dalene Salisbury as Chairperson, Pauline Williamson as Vice-Chairperson and Bob Brooks as Secretary, a re-shuffle saw the following changes to office bearers introduced that were maintained for the year. All other ordinary committee members duly elected continued for the whole financial year.

Pauline Williamson (Chairperson), Bob Brooks (Vice Chairperson), Maree Norris (Treasurer), Sue Leigh (Secretary), Dalene Salisbury, Eunice Walters, Gordon Beard, Kris Spark, Carmel McMennemin, Sally Stabback, Sivarasa "Siva" Nallaratnam, Vicky Gutsjahr.

During 2014 HAAG continued to operate a sub-committee structure to more rigorously administer the Home at Last service and oversee it's finances. Members were: Pauline Williamson, Maree Norris, Gordon Beard and Bob Brooks.

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.



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 writing 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, more than 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. Two stand-out members for the year were Joan Lansbury and Alma Dri-Paterson for their courage and fortitude in conducting important media activities. Joan appeared on the front of The Age newspaper and featured in a two page feature article about the growing problem of older people at risk of homelessness. Alma appeared on a national television program with Jenny Smith from Council to Homeless Persons. On both occasions they spoke about their own housing experience and the value of the services they received from HAAG's Home at Last service.





Vicki Gutsjahr speaking at a general meeting



Patricia Gillespie speaking at the 2013 AGM (right)



Carmel McMennemin starts the 30th birthday celebrations for HAAG



Members from MacIntyre Road Altona (right)

Our Past HAAG inspirations

This column is dedicated to Edith Morgan. We must not forget the people who inspired Housing for the Aged Action Group and continued to represent the values to which we aspire

Edith Morgan

Edith Morgan died on the 10th of March 2003 aged 85. For many years Edith was a great inspiration to all at Housing for the Aged Action Group.

Edith was on our Management Committee for six years and was always the first person asked to be a key-note speaker at our annual statewide forums. Edith is remembered by our organisation as a tireless campaigner for a range of human rights issues and she saw public housing as one of the central platforms to this aim. Edith would come into the HAAG office at least once a week. Everyone would drop what they were doing and we'd have a cup of tea, usually also with Edith's close companion and HAAG founding member Mollie Hadfield. Edith would want to know the latest goings on in housing, what issues we were concerned about, and whenever we had a dilemma about a problem she would always have a clear perspective on how we should deal with it. Edith's support and direction for our organisation gave us enormous confidence and stability.

Edith also made it clear that the housing privatisation plans of federal and state governments was a dangerous exercise that threatened the basis of housing justice that is public housing. She believed that any politicians who supported the sale or diminished role of public housing had sold out the community and she would express her view with appropriately colourful language.

Whilst we saw Edith as a great asset and felt very proud that she belonged to our organisation, it wasn't until we attended the celebration of her life at the Collingwood Town Hall that we realised the enormity of her contribution to the community over her lifetime. Her involvement, and indeed leadership, in many campaigns and causes was quite extraordinary.

Edith's obituary in *The Age*, by journalist Deborah Gough, captures some of her achievements:

"Edith Morgan had a way of getting noticed. Her work as Collingwood's first social worker, and her activities on a special guardianship board that looks after disabled people unable to make financial, legal and personal decisions, as well as the work for aged groups, gave her prominence but it was an early morning trip to the docks during the Patrick stevedores dispute in 1998 that many fondly recall.

Morgan and her long time friend Molly Hadfield had listened to reports through the night of the dispute and made their way to Trades Hall at first light. Hitching the front line of a picket to stop a goods train trying to break the strike and shift wares from the docks. The stand-off gained wide coverage and the pair—septuagenarians and grandmothers—emerged triumphant, arms raised after the train driver walked off the job.

Born Edith Coldicutt to an Essendon grocer, she learnt early in life about social injustice, and watched her father give away boxes of vegetables to struggling families during the Depression.

Morgan was a member of the Communist Party before joining the Australian Labor Party, and she was active in the socialist left faction. In 1972 she stood against Race Mathews for preselection for the seat of Casey, but was beaten by just one vote. She was also active in the Union of Australian Women. When her four children had grown up, she returned to school at the age of 49 and later used her qualifications to

become Collingwood's first social worker from 1972 to 1984. There she threw herself into her work helping the poor and those in the high-rise commission flats, and also helped with the establishment of the Collingwood Children's Farm and the North Yarra Community Health Centre. She was instrumental in the establishment of the Share care foster care program and Fitzroy Collingwood Rental Housing Co-operative.

During her time on the Guardianship Board, she was known to take a collection from her fellow board members to help anyone who turned up and had no money. She also sat on the Social Security Appeals Tribunal.

The office for which she was best known was her role as the president of the Pensioners and Superannuants Federation. She also helped start the Older Persons Action Centre and Housing for the Aged Action Group, after tiring of hearing younger people speaking on behalf of her age group.

Her husband, Bill Morgan, died in 1979.

She lost a substantial amount of her sight when she was in her 70's but many did not realise it. As a fiercely independent person, she went about her business as busily as ever. Morgan was awarded an Order of Australia Medal and was once Senior Citizen of the Year. "



Molly Hadfield and Edith Morgan leading a march at the Docks dispute in 1998

Our Governance Committee

Since the beginning of the Home at Last Project HAAG has had the great benefit of being supported by a Governance Committee. Members of the Governance Committee come from a wide ranging background of housing and aged care services as well as state and local government. Most importantly HAAG members are also involved. The Governance Committee is not part of the overall management structure of HAAG but plays a vital advisory role to the advancement of the Home at Last service.

The current members are Paula Svehaug (HAAG member), Helen Draper (HAAG member), Kate Incerti (City of Port Phillip), Ken Dyson (replaced by Peter Sibly in 2014 (Shire of Mornington Peninsula), Rose Vince (City of Knox), Fran Moloney (City of Yarra), Wei Choong (Department of Health), Terry Kelly (North West Aged Care Assessment Service), Bryony Edwards (Department of Human Services), Matthew Munforte (Department of Human Services), Gina Kuras (non-attending Department of Human Services).

The role of the Governance Committee is to provide feedback on the progress of Home at Last and provide advice on it's strategic planning as it evolves from a project to hopefully providing a permanent place in the homelessness sector. Members have provided a vital role in contributing the wider community and human services sector views on the development of Home at Last and also has been a valuable contributor to government as it co-ordinates its Victorian Homelessness Action Plan (VHAP) Reforms. Thank you so much for your involvement, especially considering the extremely busy working lives you all lead.



Home at Last Governance Committee members:

Paula Svehaug (left), Ken Dyson (above) member in 2013 with, Dr. Wendy Stone at the Surviving or Thriving Forum, Kate Incerti (above right), Fran Moloney (below right).



Our Staff

April Bragg, Manager Housing Support

Jeff Fiedler, Manager Education & Housing Advice

Maria Cozzi, Team Leader, Housing Support (from April 2014)

Kaye Trainor, Administration Worker

Lisa Coonan, Administration Worker (from June 2014)

Ani Loriente, Finance Co-ordinator

Housing Support

Tegan Leeder, Housing Intake Worker (except for 3 months whilst on student placement with Centrelink from June 2014, replaced for that time by Paolo Posso)

Crystal McDonald, Data Project Worker (returned from maternity leave)

Melis Cevik, Outreach Housing & Support

Anne Maher, Outreach Housing & Support

Megan Baker (left December 2013)

Shane McGrath, (transferred to Tenancy Advice Worker)

Paola Posso, Housing Intake Worker (from June 2014)

Naomi Gebert, Housing Intake Worker (from April 2014)

Education & Housing Advice

Shanny Gordon, Retirement Housing Worker

Marc Westley, Tenancy Advice Worker (until February 2013)

Shane McGrath, Tenancy Advice Worker (from February 2013, previously Intake Worker)

Fionnuala Spillane, Community Education Worker

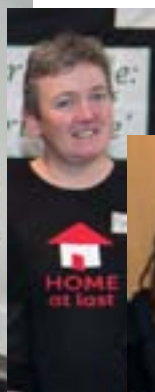
Gemma White, Community Education Worker

2013-14 has been a continued year of growth for HAAG services under the banner of Home at Last. The year began in difficult fashion as we awaited the decision of the state government on the continuation of the Innovations Action Projects and our service in particular. Whilst funding ceased at the end of June 2013 it was not until August that we were officially informed that we were one of the seven projects to continue into stage 2 from an original number of eleven projects. Home at Last is now consolidated around a pool of funds from three sources: Department of Human Services, Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Commonwealth Department of Social Services. There are currently funding agreements in place for all three programs up to June 2015. It is hoped that, upon successful evaluation by the Department of Human Services, that Home at Last becomes an ongoing part of the housing and homelessness sector.



Home at Last staff at the Surviving or Thriving Forum June 2014

Fionnuala (left) and Ani (second left) absent from photo. Paola and Lisa (below) joined us in June



Our Services

Home at Last—Older Persons Housing Information & Support Service

Home at Last is the one-stop – shop of housing assistance provided by HAAG. Home at Last incorporates funding provided by the Department of Human Services (Innovations Action Project until June 2015), Consumer Affairs Victoria (Tenancy and Retirement Housing Service as part of the TAAP Program) and the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (Outreach Care Service under the ACHA Program). Whilst HAAG has provided services funded by Consumer Affairs and the Department of Social Services for many years, the Innovations Action Project funding has provided the opportunity to expand the service to incorporate additional components such as Intake, Information and Referral, Community Education, Agency Training and Protocols and a Data Project.

Since the **Home at Last** service began, more than 21,000 people have been provided with information and 8000 older people assisted at community education sessions. Over 2000 older people have been advised and assisted to address their future housing options. Of these, 1240 clients under threat of losing their homes have received help to either stabilise their housing, supported in transition towards a long term affordable housing solution or have been assisted to access public, social housing or one of many other options. sourced by Home at Last such as independent living units, movable dwellings (otherwise known as granny flats), Council housing, Abbeyfield housing etc. More than 550 people have been moved from precarious housing into long term affordable housing.

Key Lessons from the Home at Last Project

There have been a number of key lessons from the **Home at Last** project that provide some direction towards a much needed framework for an older persons' homelessness strategy in this neglected area of housing and homelessness policy. HAAG's **Home at Last** service has presented these recommendations to the Victorian Government for consideration in the next stage of their homelessness services review.

Some of the important findings from **Home at Last** are:

Which factors cause older people to experience rental housing stress?

Data collected from the **Home at Last** service has highlighted the circumstances that have caused many older people to find themselves facing their retirement years in insecure, unaffordable and unadaptable rental housing. Factors presented by clients include: people with careers on low wages where they have saved few assets to enable them to buy a home; more people with mortgages that extend well into retirement years causing people to fall out of home ownership when they are faced with reliance on the aged pension; unforeseen life changing factors that create barriers to home ownership such as family breakdown and personal or family illness; an increase in the numbers of single older women who have had interrupted careers due to raising families; and, not being able to access public housing during years where a person's working income has been higher than the housing eligibility guidelines. Most significantly, since the mid-1980 there has been a lack of supply of public and social housing as a viable option.

Therefore many older people are caught in the increasing housing trap of private rental accommodation with escalating costs and reduced income on the aged pension. As the wave of baby boomers reach aged pension age (beginning with those turning 65 in 2012) the 'population bulge' of this group is going to become a major community problem if not urgently addressed.

Early Intervention and prevention requires new thinking about homelessness services

As **Home at Last** has focused on early intervention strategies it has challenged the way many homelessness services currently operate. For example, the **Home at Last** community education workers have given a wide range of talks encouraging older people to seek early advice about their housing situation in advance of escalating rents and threats of eviction. Crisis housing services contacted by these clients are challenged to prioritise such cases when inundated with clients presenting as homeless on any given day. In HAAG's view, if early intervention and prevention strategies are to be strengthened in the future then it may be necessary to develop a two-tier service system for crisis and early intervention. Early intervention service responses should focus on longer term case assistance by providing a wide range of housing options to suit the needs of a client, assistance with processing affordable housing applications and taking steps to stabilise a person's existing housing situation until long term solutions are found.

Also, **Home at Last** believes it is important to present housing options to older people as a natural transition that we should take for granted as part of our life cycle. Through life we make decisions about leaving home, share housing when younger and perhaps then having families. However decisions in later years are often fraught with anxiety and fears for the future. Too many times **Home at Last** sees older people go through great trauma when housing assistance is belatedly sought after a serious health incident or landlord eviction has forced an urgent, and often inappropriate, outcome. If older people viewed retirement housing as a normal pro-active decision then it may encourage more positive planning and early action to achieve the best possible housing solution available.

Need for an Older Persons Homelessness Support (OPHS) Program

As stated previously, older people are highly reluctant to approach crisis housing services for assistance. The Specialist Housing Service program has not been designed to respond to the needs of older Australians but instead they require a purpose-designed program that can provide the tailored assistance that older people need. Such a program should be designed to expand on the excellent but poorly funded Commonwealth Government Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA) Program that provides one-to-one support for frail older people living in housing difficulty. An OPHS Program would have central information and support services in each state linked to regionally represented workers in a nationwide network structure. The OPHS Program would ideally provide training, service development, data collection and research components which responded to the rapidly changing housing landscape for older people.

Integration with other services appropriate for older people

A specialist older persons program should be closely aligned with allied services that are significant to older people such as Aged Care Assessment Services (ACAS), the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program, hospital and medical professions, local government and agencies such as Centrelink. For example, **Home at Last** has found that aged care services do not often identify housing problems even though the quality of a person's home is crucial to the successful provision of their client care. Also, such services refer many older people at risk of homelessness into the residential care system simply because it fits their service framework whilst better linkages with housing services would provide more appropriate outcomes. Many of these clients could otherwise continue to live independently were appropriate external supports provided. Similarly, older people exiting hospital after recovery from serious health problems may not be receiving appropriate advice or support if housing factors are not considered as part of stan-

dard hospital discharge planning. For example, major life-changing decisions may be required regarding home modifications or, where a person's accommodation design and landscape prohibits their return home altogether, rapid action may be required to obtain alternative housing. **Home at Last** has been developing service referral protocols with many of these agencies to better integrate housing services and outcomes with clients' health and aged care plans.

Targeted assistance to older people in key locations

An important strategy of **Home at Last** has been the targeting of its community education work in ways that aims to communicate with older people who are isolated and have limited or no links with family or social services. A pilot project was developed in the northern suburbs of Melbourne that partnered with the City of Darebin, North East Housing Services, Merri Outreach Support Services, Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre and Homeground to improve overall housing service integration assistance to vulnerable older people. The project has involved a number of strategies including local neighbourhood initiatives that delivered posters, leaflets and other materials to small shopping centres and through direct mail distribution. This approach aimed to communicate with socially isolated older people who rely on services within a small radius of their home such as local milk bars, chemists, medical clinics, hairdressers, newsagents etc. Success of this strategy was demonstrated by the fact that the City of Darebin has provided the highest referrals to **Home at Last** from any local government area during the project.

Older persons' public and social housing policy development

The **Home at Last** service has demonstrated that a significant public and social housing policy review is required to ensure effective outcomes are achieved when linked with early intervention service strategies. For example, there is a need for government housing policy to consider the future as well as the current eligibility criteria of older people who are on low working incomes and planning for retirement. Older people are often caught in a wedge where they can't afford to stop working because they could not afford their rent, but are consequently ineligible for public housing due to their level of income being higher than the policy guidelines. A person planning retirement should be offered special consideration to assist them through the transition that may also include moving from private rental housing to public and social housing. Similarly, clients who are eligible for worker-based social housing are sometimes heavily penalised and face eviction upon retirement as the social housing landlord may not reduce their rent when their working income ceases.

National housing policy development

The strong evidence of a trend towards older persons' reliance on rental housing rather than home ownership requires a major re-think about Australians' housing aspirations. While home ownership will continue to be a significant housing tenure in the future there is clearly a need for federal and state governments to lead a national conversation that would legitimise, promote and develop a range of alternative long term rental housing options that are viable and desirable forms of secure and affordable housing.

A range of housing options are needed that go far beyond the current trend towards industry driven options such as resort style retirement villages. Such options must be based on concepts that link people with local neighbourhood communities; housing integrated with aged care services and housing choices to suit a range of needs as we age such as inter-generational housing and a wide range of service integrated housing models.

Service reports

Administration

This year has seen an expansion of the administration area, with Lisa joining the team in mid June 2014. Lisa is in the administration position every Wednesday and Friday and she has brought her legal and housing expertise to the reception role at HAAG.

If you have any administration enquiries Lisa will be only too happy to assist you on those days. Otherwise, you will find Kaye on the admin/reception desk the other days of the week.



Kaye Trainor

Our new-look website is up and running and Gemma and Kaye are managing the content and developing it in a range of exciting ways to make it more relevant to the community and our members.

Our facebook page is managed by Shane and twitter is managed by Tegan – this is a great feature to have on the website and we invite interested people to interact with us on topical issues as they arise.



Yes, those all important mail-outs to members, co-ordinated by Fionnuala and our Administration team, sometimes involved fun and games!

Community Education

Community Education had a busy year with more than 500 activities being completed, resulting in contact with over 21,000 people during this reporting period. The results of this work are being seen in the numbers of clients coming in through Intake. The staff in the rest of the service do such an excellent job with clients that some of them go on to become our second best advertisers. It's not unusual to see a former client coming back to the office with a new client in hand. Of course, our best advertisers are HAAG members and volunteers who often leave the office with half a dozen leaflets tucked in to their bags and assist us in promotions in a variety of ways.

Joan Lansbury, appeared on the front page of The Age on 8th April 2014. This led to nearly 100 tweets and 150 shares on Face Book. Joan's appearance in The Age led to an increase in contacts from people looking for assistance with house, but also it led to more interest from media outlets about Home at Last. The following month Alma Dri-Paterson appeared on Channel 9's programme *Mornings*. That really saw a boost in calls in to Home at Last, including some from interstate and one from far off England!

Both Joan and Alma were presented with framed pictures of their promotional works at the HAAG Forum in June 2014. It really is very powerful when our former clients are able to speak to the media about their personal experience.



Alma Dri-Paterson on Channel 9 with Jenny Smith from Council to Homeless Persons in May 2014 (above)

and

Joan Lansbury on the front page of The Age, 8th April 2014 (right)



Volunteers

The volunteers at HAAG assisted by speaking to the media on TV, radio and the newspapers, staffing information stands at public events, speaking to the public at information sessions, working on mail outs thus helping to deliver information to letterboxes of thousands of individuals, community organisations and agencies around the state. The dedication of volunteers coming to events early in the morning to help set up, staying until the last envelope was filled at a mail out or putting themselves in to the limelight so others might hear of this service is an enormous addition to the work of the organisation. Community Education works because of the support from dedicated HAAG volunteers and staff, it is a collaborative effort and the results speak for themselves.



Members mailing out leaflets and booklets to 1,500 agencies across Victoria

Maree and Vicki handing out information at Flinders Street Station (right)



Left: Richie, Shanny and Peter at the Seniors Festival 2013

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (CALD)

The ageing of CALD communities is a significant challenge for health and community services across Victoria. Not only are there increasing numbers of people from CALD backgrounds needing services, the CALD population is ageing at a faster rate than the non-CALD population. The following groups had community education sessions delivered in their own language (using an interpreter): Cambodian (x2), Vietnamese (x2), Chinese (x8), Greek, Filipino, Polish and Arabic. Links have also been developed with over a dozen other cultural and linguistic groups by phone, post and email. It is pleasing to see that over 30% of our clients are from CALD backgrounds but plans are afoot to build on this.

In an effort to be more focussed in the delivery of information to CALD communities Community Education researched which communities had the highest need of support around their housing. We identified communities with lower incomes and higher rates of private rental for people over 55 years of age. Crystal McDonald, HAAG's Data Project Worker provided some assistance from Home at Last data, establishing which communities have been taking up the services and helping to identify communities that may need extra support to access Home at Last's services.

As a result, HAAG has applied for funding for two projects in conjunction with the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria. *Preventing Homelessness through Engagement with CALD Communities* is a 3-month project which will ensure Home at Last materials are available in five languages. Funding has been secured through the R.E Ross Trust for this project. *Preventing Homelessness in Older CALD Communities* is a one-year project for which news is awaited following a funding application to the Lord Mayors Charitable Foundation. This project would strengthen the efforts to target and increase access for the CALD groups who are most in need of housing support. This project would assist in delivering more talks to particular CALD communities and build on the relationships developed with relevant community organisations such as migrant resource centres and ethno specific support groups.



Community education activity at a CALD Planned Activity Group



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Community Education have made efforts to develop relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Home at Last had a stall at *Share the Spirit* Festival on January 26th 2014. Links are developing with the Indigenous Community through attending various events organised by Aboriginal organisations and by visiting aboriginal organisations. When a focus is made in a particular local government area one of the first organisations visited is the local Aboriginal co-operative. Events such as 'Wills and Bills' days, Healthy, Happy and Deadly Day and various family fun days are held in indigenous communities. Staff from Community Education attend these type of events, set up an information stand and make our information available. Building trust in the Aboriginal community is a slow process.

At the Forum in June Graeme Briggs gave a very moving Welcome to Country, and played the didgeridoo as part of the ceremony. This is the first time Housing for the Aged Action Group has included a Welcome as part of our annual Forum.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex Community (LGBTI)

Home at Last has held information stands at several events in the LGBTI community with a presence at Midsumma Carnival, in Melbourne where we shared half a stall with Matrix Guild, who support the care and accommodation choices of older lesbians in Victoria, and half a stall with Vintage Men, a social support group for mature gay, bisexual men and their friends. Over 100,000 people attend Carnival giving us great access to the LGBTI community. We held stalls at *Out in the Open* in Shepparton, and at *Chill Out* in Daylesford and had terrific welcomes from our country cousins. The events were great fun too and a good opportunity to get news of Home at Last in to regional Victoria.



Community Education Worker Fionnuala Spillane and her alter-ego 'Super HAAG' spruiking the Home at Last wares at community events such as Chill Out Daylesford (right), across Victoria

Hospitals

Community Education posted information to all Social Work and Occupational Therapy departments in Melbourne's public hospitals at the end of 2013. This has been followed up during 2014 with phone calls and emails to track down team leaders to set up in-service education sessions with staff teams. Sessions have been delivered with various staff teams at 20 different hospital settings. The results of this work have been ongoing referrals in to Home at Last. Referrals from hospital based workers are a significant proportion of total referrals received. These hospital departments have been added to the data base and

they will now receive two posting per year along, making it over 1700 organisations currently receiving our information at each mail out.



Gemma at a Community education event in Geelong

Local government areas

Community Education has engaged in the following council areas to deliver public information sessions: Casey, Geelong, Hobson's Bay and Dandenong. Prior to these sessions workers contacted a number of local services to raise awareness of Home at Last. We have commenced this awareness raising in Mornington Peninsula ahead of delivering public information sessions in August 2014.

Engagement with these councils meant a number of other promotional activities, as well as engagement with local services. Below is an example of how Home at Last worked with the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council on increasing community awareness of Home at Last.

The Mornington Peninsula Strategy

As part of the Mornington Peninsula Strategy the Community Education team set about delivering information to a variety of community groups and government agencies on the Peninsula focussing mainly on Hastings, Rosebud and Mornington, where the public events will be held. We have been contacted local media and received good coverage in local papers syndicated through the area. Workers have sent letters and emails to over a hundred organisations and called in to many of them while visiting the area. Posters have gone up in local businesses and community organisations. We have spoken with a range of organisations such as neighbourhood houses, senior citizens centres, ethno-specific older persons groups and Community Registers. We also set up information stands at local street markets.

A forum was held with Home at Last staff and Peninsula Youth and Family Services and Mobile Integrated Health as part of the process of developing formal referral protocols. Protocols will also be developed with Home and Community Care (HACC) and Aged Care Assessment Services (ACAS) to provide information and support to a high needs group of older people: Vulnerable renters with increasing health frailty and high need for stable, affordable, adaptable housing in good condition. A similarly focused delivery of information was completed with Darebin Council, and wound up in July 2013.

Agency Training and Protocols Development

A major part of the Home at Last service has been the provision of information and development of protocols with agencies, particularly in the health and aged care fields. 2013-14 saw a major advancement in this area with a planned strategy to develop linkages with agencies. This involved organisations that are potential referral points to Home at Last, such as health and aged care services, and localised housing services that Home at Last has been able to referral older clients to where it makes more sense for locally based services to provide direct assistance.

This strategy mainly involved the following approaches:

- Integration of older persons housing services with the broader aged care and health sectors is vital to the provision of effective assistance to older people. Home at Last has implemented the early stages of a plan to integrate and imbed Home at Last with programs such as Aged Care Assessment Services, the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program, the Transition Care Program, Linkages, Occupational Therapy, hospital social workers and medical doctors. Discussions have been held at the Commonwealth Government level to encourage a better understanding that housing should become a fundamental part of the aged care system as governments continue to emphasise home based aged care as the central place for the provision of aged care services. It has become very clear that linkages into the health and aged care systems are as vital to addressing the needs of older people as integration with the homelessness sector.

Community education workers made contact by mail, email and follow up phone calls with health services, particularly hospitals, to provide talks to staff. Talks were mainly given by Jeff Fiedler and April Bragg. These included: the Royal District Nursing Service, Northern Hospital, Royal Melbourne Hospital (various campuses), Alfred Hospital, St. Vincents Hospital, Austin Hospital, Peter Macallum Cancer Hospital, Pain Clinic Caulfield Hospital and Monash Health. The hospital system often struggles to assist older people who have become hospitalised due to sudden ill-health and often need housing assistance to enable a suitable outcome based on the changed health and support needs of a person.

- Similarly, it has been found that the aged care sector often prematurely house older people in the aged care system because they do not believe there are options available in the community. To this ends talks to Aged Care Assessment Services (ACAS) and Home and Community Care (HACC) have proven to be highly valuable in creating linkages for client referrals. Agencies provided talks to included the Aged Care Social Workers Network, Goulburn Valley Primary Care Program, Broadmeadows Health HARP Team and Mt Eliza ACAS.
- Considerable work has been done to develop formal referral protocols between Home at Last and agencies in the homelessness and housing fields. In particular, targeted projects were conducted in the City of Darebin and Mornington Peninsula Shire areas to bring together Home at Last and local agencies to develop systems to ensure the services can work together in the best interests of older people at risk of homelessness. This included a series of meetings with agencies management, joint staff workshops and development of service mapping and written protocol agreements. Further protocols are underway with specialist services such as the Federation of Chinese Associations.

Housing Support Program

Over the last financial year the Home at Last housing support program supported 994 people with housing information and support. Unlike our first year of service operation, as the Home at Last service, the majority of people seeking support this year were those who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The majority of these people were women, with the highest age group being those aged between 66 - 85 years old.

Looking back at the main reasons why people needed housing support a very grim picture emerges on what is happening to people who can not access affordable housing. We had an enormous increase in requests for assistance from people who just couldn't afford to pay their rent any longer, with many of them paying between 80-100% of their income in rent. As a result of such high rents, many people reported they had become unwell due to lack of funds to buy essentials things such as food, warmth and medication, with many people reporting they had been hospitalised as a result of their housing poverty. Another substantial increase in requests for help were those who reported being evicted from their private rental and having no other housing option other than being forced into substandard, and dangerous rooming houses, or equally unsafe shared housing arrangements.

Other increases in presenting reasons for support were:

- Elder abuse. Houses being sold to pay for a son or daughter's mortgage or business which the older person had guaranteed with their homes. In many cases the older person had become homeless as they could not access the private rental market.
- There was also an increase in the number of cases where physical violence and manipulation of income and assets by family members had occurred.
- We saw an increase in the number of older women escaping family violence, a number of these women were in their 70's and 80's.
- Significant issues around overcrowding when people were forced to couch surf at family and friends.
- People not being able to be discharged from hospital due to not having a home.
- Many people no longer able to live in their rental home due to needing modifications, this was also the case for many people who had ended up with a hospital admission but could not return home due to accessibility issues.
- People living in substandard private rental housing, being to afraid to ask for repairs in case their landlord evicted them.

As evident in the issues we are seeing, it is very clear the private rental market continues to fail low income older people, we hope from the successful housing and support outcomes we have achieved over the past two years of service operation it will result in Government's at all levels investing in both hous-

ing and support for older people.

Over the past two years the Home at Last service has been evaluated by KPMG and this year saw the conclusion of the last major part of the evaluation. For the last two years, the service has been assessed quarterly against standards to ensure our data and client outcomes are providing a high quality housing service for older people. Part of the evaluation also included interviews with people who had used the service and over the two years, this has involved some 90 people. We would like to thank everyone who participated in the interviews for their time and generosity, your input has been invaluable in recognising our service model works and to ensuring the service receives funding beyond 2015.



Some of the terrible housing conditions older people have been living in over the past year

The final report is not due to be handed to Government until November 2014 but the verbal feedback we have received from both KPMG and the Department of Human Services has been really positive and we are delighted that our service outcomes are being recognised.

The Housing Support Program has achieved great re-housing results for people not only over the past year but since the inception of the service in June 2012, as you can see from the data charts within our own Outreach Housing Support Program we have housed some 241 people into long term affordable housing, and a further 206 people on their way to be housed by services we have referred them to in their local area.

We know from the KPMG evaluation of our service that 98% of clients that we housed have remained happily housed, demonstrating once again the effectiveness of the early intervention and prevention strategies of the Home at Last service.

Of course our effectiveness is very much reliant on good working relationships and we have established many of these both with referring agencies the Office of Housing Area Offices and many Social Housing providers. HAAG sincerely thanks all of the organisations that have supported both us and our clients to achieve such remarkable housing outcomes; we are truly appreciative of your ongoing support of our service.



Sub-standard and filthy housing conditions



Data Project

A short History of the Data Project Position *by Crystal McDonald*

The What? It is a bit obscure. A position forming its edges as it ages- like cheese (and it goes so well with wine). The Data Position evolves in response to the changing data requirements of Home at Last, translating the work of the organisation into (semi) meaningful reports and statistics.

The Data Project position was born in the big bang of the Home at Last project. Its purpose was to gather all the little figures from the corners of the HAL universe and order and present them to the gods of “The Department” (Department of Human Services). The gods smiled upon the impressive reports produced and granted HAL another year of life in which they excelled in their service to those they assisted. However, HAL felt there was more they could do with these figures: figures that represented over 2000 vulnerable people.

So HAL entrusted the Data Project Worker with the task of modifying ‘SHIP’ -the prescribed IAP data system- and creating Home at Lasts’ own ‘HALSHIP’, which now ensures no figures are left behind; the unique situation of every single person is quantified and their outcomes clearly recorded. These figures now inform the projects of researchers, and provide a solid foundation for the conception of an older persons housing strategy. The stats generated outline HALs outstanding contribution to the sector, displaying to *the gods* the need for granting HAL -in service of its vulnerable cohort- life beyond the IAPs.

Ode to Data Entry

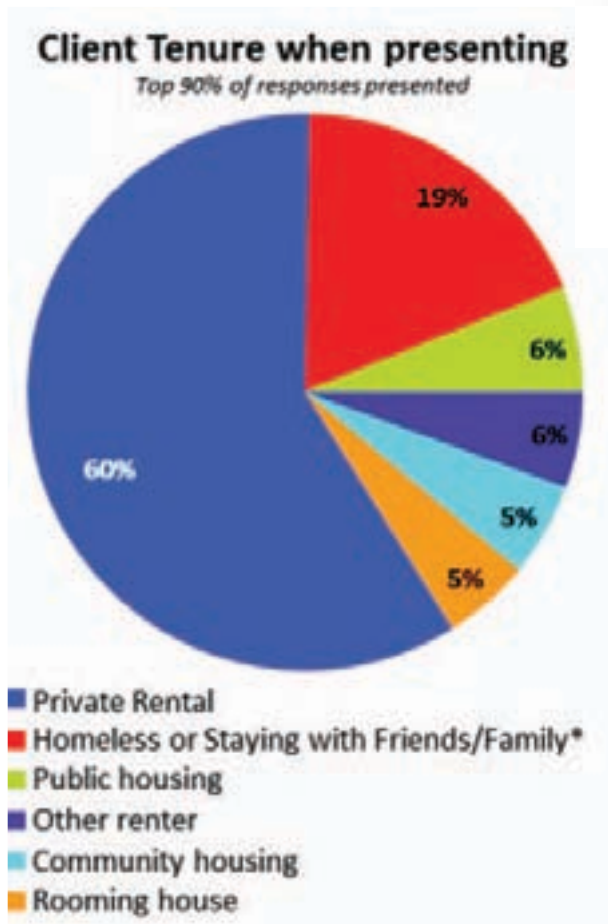
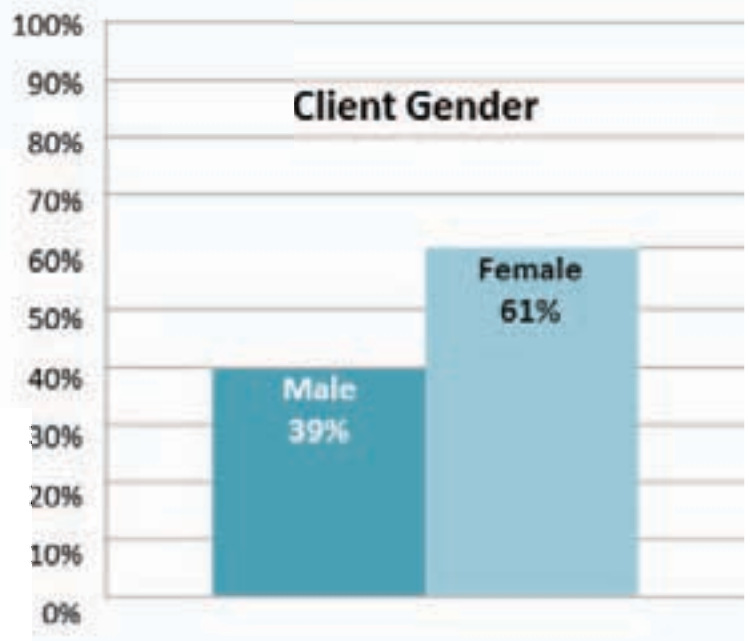
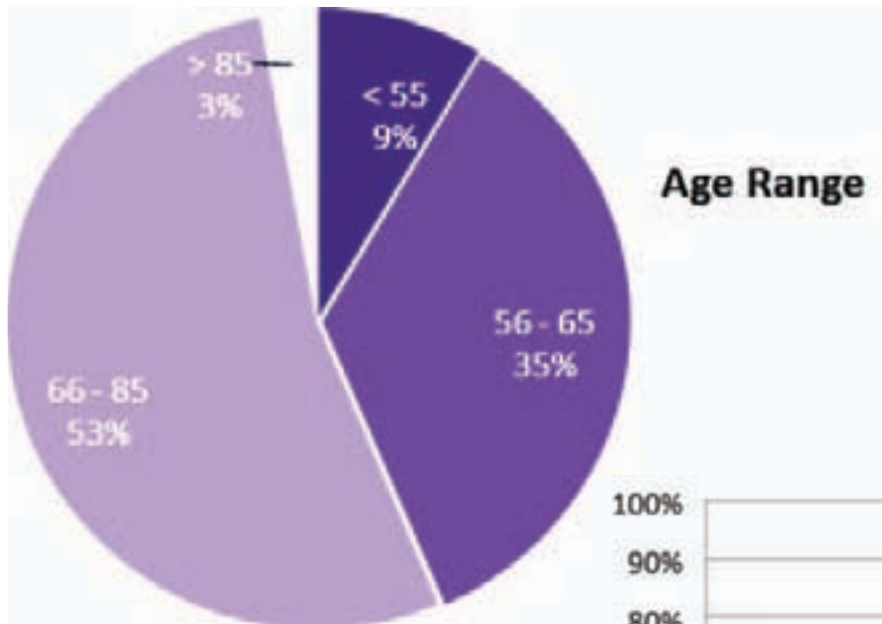
This has been one of those years that will go down in HAAG history as ‘One Of Those Years’. As uncertainty peaks about the future of HAL, so too do the data requirements placed on Housing Support Workers. As they trudge through days of job insecurity, their lack of moral is not reflected in their daily outputs; each housing worker remains as dedicated to the data requirements placed upon them as they are to their clients. Are stats equal to people? Well No. And Yes. Certainly placing a roof over the head of an elderly rough sleeper is the pinnacle of the Housing Support Worker. But placing little notes in databases is the bread and butter of the agency dedicated to realizing solutions for Elderly Housing Stress. For it is only with stats that the ears of power pay attention. And if they don’t hear that, there is Campaigning.

Reasons I enjoy my job

Although I no longer work on the front line with clients, I still get quite a kick from being able to support such work from behind the scenes. I’m also very fortunate to have the opportunity to attend conferences, training and courses of my choosing which add to my skill set and keep me in touch with the sector. As a stand-alone data worker, who works often from home, it can feel like your working in a bubble where no one can hear you because they don’t speak Data. So to work with minds such as Anthony’s at Info Exchange probably helped to keep me sharp. Probably. HALSHIP is the product of 6 months of work with Anthony who’s conceptual skills made Thoughts into Forms and who’s patience is still standing in spite of the post-project queries. I have also found working with KPMG and their data genius to be relatively enjoyable, considering no one likes an Evaluation!

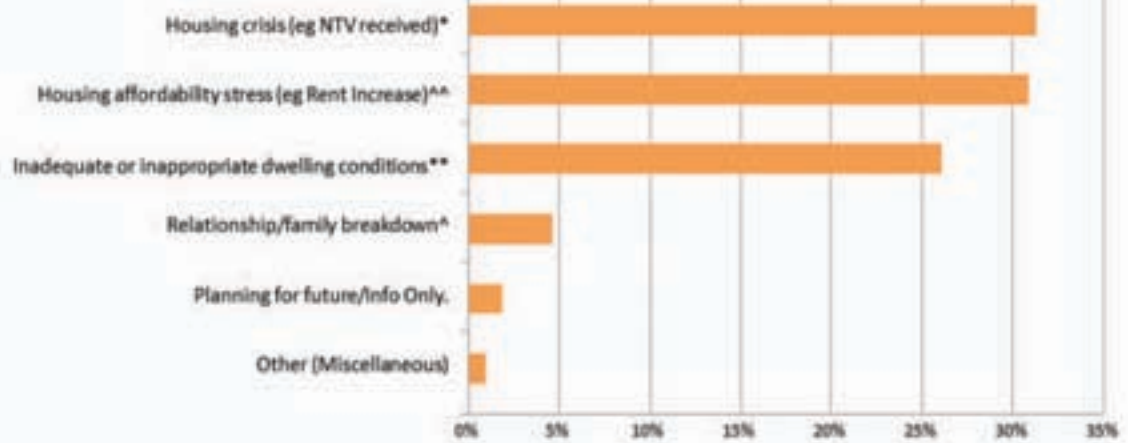
But most of all, I have to pay homage to the place that makes it all happen with humanity, morality, enthusiasm, and oh so much love. HAAG is a workplace with heart, a Service with spirit and force to be reckoned with!

Some key statistics for the first two years of Home at Last up to June 2014



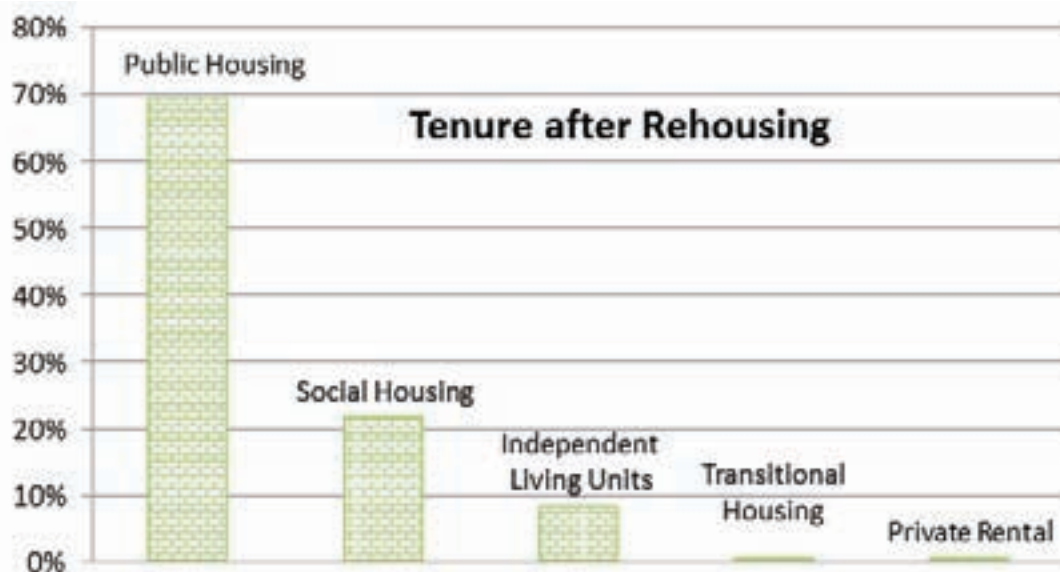
Main Reason for Seeking Assistance

Only Values over 1.0% have been presented



Time to Re-House

Period: 1/2/13 - 31/05/14



Housing Information & Referral

The aim of the Information & Referral component of the Home at Last service is to provide accessible and effective assistance to older people who have a housing problem. Our centralised phone service operates across Victoria from 10am -4pm week days.

A drop in service is also provided at our office in Ross House, in Flinders Lane Melbourne. The drop in service also operates weekdays from 10am-4pm.

The service is structured to facilitate initial contact via phone or drop in and at this point a full assessment of someone's housing and support needs is undertaken. Where a person requires intensive support to find alternate housing a referral is made into their local service and this includes both Home at Last internal referrals, or a referral to an external support service.

The Housing Information & Referral team at HAAG has undergone many changes during the 2013-2014 financial year. With the departure of Megan Baker and the move of Shane McGrath into the tenancy position, two new intake positions have been filled recently. The team is now comprised of Tegan Leeder, Naomi Gebert and Paola Posso in the locum position in late June. Additional support from Maria Cozzi, April Bragg and our social work students was provided during busy periods or staff absences.

Working in the intake team is a useful experience for students as it gives them a large amount of client contact and problem solving opportunities. And in return, the involvement of students helps the intake staff to manage their ever increasing workload.

A new initiative has been implemented to ensure that the intake team works as efficiently as possible. It involves a streamlined call back process for all messages left on voicemail or sent via email. This new process has also allowed for smoother communication between intake workers and other Home at Last workers in terms of referrals.

With our volume of calls for housing assistance always growing, it has been extremely worthwhile to implement a system for managing the load. The Housing Information & Referral team, as well as the other client support teams, has spent the last two months adapting to our new data collection system. While this was challenging at first, considering the effort involved in updating our data, the new system is now up and running smoothly, and our data entry skills are all the better for it.



Naomi Gebert and Paola Posso began with Home at Last as Social Work students on placement. They then transitioned to become permanent staff when they finished their studies and positions became available at Home at Last.

Housing Information & Referral Service Case Study

Robert's Story

Robert aged 55 was referred to the Home at Last Service Housing Information & Referral (HI&R) Service by a not for profit organisation which could not assist him as he did not fit their eligibility criteria. Robert was in private rental and at risk of eviction as he could not afford his rent any longer. Robert was separated and had exhausted all of his Work Cover Payout following an incident occurred on the job over a decade ago. At the time of the call Robert had no money and was ineligible for Centrelink payments until 2017 as, in accord to Centrelink policies, his Work Cover Payout was enough to sustain him up until the above mentioned date.

Robert was raised in a single parent home; he never met his father and was very fond of his mother. Following her death which occurred shortly before the Work Cover Payout, Robert fell in a depressed state for quite long time and reported "not caring about the pay out", with serious repercussion to his health and financial situation. Moreover, being separated from his wife Robert used the Work Cover Compensation to pay Child Support and his 2 children's medical expenses as well as assisting with school fees and other education associated expenses.

Robert stated that being raised without a father he swore to himself that he would always be there to support his children. Honouring such a promise became the beginning of his financial problems to the point of facing homelessness and being without a cent. In spite of this dire situation Robert showed a willingness to seek and accept help.

He reported self medicating with drugs and alcohol, feeling suicidal and presented at emergency to receive psychiatric help as he "could not do that" to his children. Robert could not be referred to our own Outreach Program as he lived in regional Victoria therefore HI&R Intake worker proceeded in making a series of calls to find an organisation that could support Robert during these trialling moments.

The current Government cuts to mental health organisation made the referral process almost impossible as the majority of organisations providing mental health assistance were severely under-resourced and under stuffed. It took considerable time and hard advocacy to finally find an organisation that was willing to assist Robert in resolving his financial, housing and psychological issues. It was established a case coordination amongst mental health, housing and financial counselling providers, Robert self admitted to psychiatric hospital and cooperated with the above mentioned organisations which to date are still involved. Robert is currently still receiving care coordinated assistance, it is envisaged that he will soon exit the care coordinated program into his own public housing and he reports that his future is starting to look much brighter.

Outreach Housing Support Program

The Home at Last service's Outreach Program is funded by the Department of Social Services through the Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA) Program, 38 hours per week, and the Department of Human Services through the Victorian Government's Homelessness Action Plan, 38 hours per week.

The Outreach Program's target group includes older or prematurely aged low income people who:

- Are homeless; or
- May be at risk of becoming homeless as a result of:
 - Experiencing housing stress; or
 - Not having secure housing

The outreach program has a focus on intensive assistance and support over a short period of time, generally up to three months, with ongoing support if necessary over a much longer period. The outreach nature of the program enables the workers to be appropriately flexible to meet the needs of the target group.

The outreach workers' role is to access a range of services, housing, health, legal and financial and is the strength of the program. Many people seen in the outreach program are experiencing multiple health problems which are exacerbated by age, frailty, insecure and inappropriate housing, isolation and loneliness, combined with a low income and high housing cost their health often quickly deteriorates, an increasing number of people seen throughout the year were diagnosed with severe depression as a result of the hardship they are living under.

Inappropriate and expensive housing has inevitable health consequences for older people, especially frail older people. It is crucial that, once the older person has been assisted into alternative accommodation, information, advice, and support is given in contacting local health and community services and assisting in breaking down the isolation experienced when a person is forced to move into unfamiliar surroundings. Without this support (and often without support from family and friends) at such a crucial time, an older person's health can deteriorate at such a rate that they are no longer able to live independently. It is part of the outreach workers' role to ensure that older people in this difficult position are assisted and encouraged to become familiar with, and utilise, local support services.

The Outreach Housing Support Program again achieved outstanding re-housing outcomes for clients this year and some 123 people were housed in long term affordable housing during the year. Further, all of these people were assisted financially to establish their new home through client brokerage funds and as already reported on earlier 98% of people have remained happily housed.

Outreach Case Study

Case study: physical, financial, psychological, social and verbal abuse of older person

Bob's Story:

Bob lives in the family home, with his daughter, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In a house that he formally owned but transferred the title to his daughter and didn't receive any funds for this.

Bob is 89 years old and a World War 2 veteran. Bob's family members are abusive towards him. They often scream and swear at him. Bob has put a padlock on his bedroom door as family members enter his bedroom and steal items including money. On pension day they pressure Bob to hand over his pension money.

Bob's grandson sometimes hits him and has attempted to strangle Bob. Bob is very distressed and often cries, he also has bad dreams about his war experiences. He feels isolated and he can't invite his friends to the house or have relatives stay from overseas.

The social worker at Centrelink told Bob about the Home at Last service after she had found out about it through one of our Community Education sessions for workers. The social worker contacted the intake worker at Home at Last and the worker contacted Bob. After completing initial assessment over telephone a referral was made to one of our Outreach Housing Support Program workers.

The Outreach worker and her colleague visited Bob at his home in northern suburbs of Melbourne. The Outreach worker completed housing applications for public housing and VASEY RSL independent living units. The worker informed Bob of his rights and provided him with information on Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV). Bob did not give his consent to be referred to SRV. Bob just wanted to find suitable alternative housing as quickly as possible.

The worker advised Bob of supports available including home care and linkages into social activities within the community including counselling for war veterans. Bob declined all services and explained to worker that he was very fit and demonstrated his daily exercise program and stated that he was still driving a car.

The worker met with Bob several times at his local shopping centre to keep Bob informed of progress with housing applications.

The worker advocated on behalf of Bob with the Office of Housing and VASEY RSL. The worker assisted Bob to get documents from his bank and Centrelink to support his housing applications. Bob was offered an age-appropriate property (independent living unit, ground floor) through VASEY RSL and was rehoused within two months of application. The worker arranged for a removalist to move Bob's belongings into his new home.

The ILU is located close to Bob's medical supports and supportive family members who assist him with shopping and to get to medical appointments.

Bob has happily settled into his unit and recently two of his relatives from overseas stayed at his home and he has friends and family members dropping in. Bob contacted the worker at Home at Last program to thank her for her assistance and stated he was very happy and felt that he was starting his life over again.



Attractive public housing including renovations that introduced front verandahs to provide shelter and shade (right)



Betty Donegan happily about to enter her new home after being

Retirement Housing Service

Over the course of the last financial year the Retirement Housing Information Service has become increasingly busy.

Unfortunately because of the way data is collated for Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) it is not easy to retrieve the number of cases and matters addressed. This is also the result of many residents staying with the service for longer periods, often overlapping data periods, and therefore appearing twice making the manual count harder to examine.

What can be said though is that the time spent working on cases has increased significantly and the complexity of matters, and need for in-depth support in some cases, has been felt by the service.

In the trend of past reports, the largest group represented were residents living in **caravan and residential parks and villages**. In particular Part 4A matters were particularly prevalent.

Some of the themes arising over the period were:

- Operators not allowing residents to sell their older dwellings on site in order to replace it with a new dwelling they can sell for a much higher price. Unfortunately it is difficult to advise on as a 'No Reason' Notice to Vacate (NTV) will generally be used by operators, which by law they have every right to utilise.
- The risk for residents without tenure continues to be great as highlighted above. It also emphasises the inappropriateness of the No Reason NTV and how operators can use their power to disadvantage those more vulnerable.
- Residents on Crown land who were never made aware they were living on Crown land. They are unable to sell their units on-site, even though they bought theirs on-site, due to the restrictions now in place limiting the time someone can spend on a Crown land site.
- Negotiation hours increased over this period, as has the interest of residents to take matters further, whether through negotiation, mediation, CAV conciliation or the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).



Independent Living Units at Judge Book Village in Eltham where 80% of the dwellings are vacant due to neglect

It has been expressed especially by newer clients of the service they wish they had known about HAAG much earlier. This is an obstacle the service will be looking at working on into 2014 so that more residents are aware of HAAG and the support that is available to them.

There has been significant interest in relation to Deferred Management Fees (DMFs) this period. A majority of residents making contact with the service from residential villages asked about DMFs amongst their queries and concerns.

Issues with units seem to be another concern for residents, whether related to units splitting, cracking and moving or whether in relation to external appearance and design.

Concerns about the village environment and regulations have also begun to arise more during this period. Issues around lighting, roads and village access, and speed limits are some of the concerns residents have tried to work through with management.

Concerns for residents within **Independent Living Units (ILUs) and Not for Profit retirement villages** also continue to be noted in the data.

Some of the themes arising this period were:

- The many flaws in the sector, such as unfair contractual terms giving operators substantial discretionary power and putting the resident at great disadvantage, continue to dominate the matters coming to the service.
- Lack of knowledge of rights continues to show up all too often, which calls for a more proactive approach to engage with residents through the retirement service to let them know that there is support available.
- Breach notices, followed by notices to vacate, within the retirement village setting. This has confirmed there is a lack of clear procedure, process and difficulty accessing justice which has made it difficult for residents.
- Many residents called to alert the retirement service of empty units in their villages. Some villages being only a quarter to a half full leaving residents feeling insecure and sometimes isolated. This has also resulted in relocation processes being initiated by operators in some instances.
- One relocation in particular related to residents living in the Bayside area, has proven to be very stressful and overwhelming for the residents. This is a matter that the retirement service only began working on at the end of May 2014 but it has already begun an intensive process that looks as though it will continue for a number of months. The manager of the units is Mecwacare and so far their approach towards the relocation and the residents themselves has been uncoordinated. Some of Mecwa's representatives have also displayed bullying behaviour and the service is building relationships with some of the residents to ensure they are properly considered in the move.

Housing options advice is a growing area for the retirement housing service. 25% of all cases in the January to July 2014 period related to providing in-depth retirement housing options information and advice to older people in various housing situations, such as: their own home, private rental and rooming houses.

There are no other services that provide the kind of information and advice that the retirement housing service does, with such a tailored, case by case approach. This has been recognised as a growing area of need which the service will need to consider more into the future.

Information sessions

During this period several meetings and information sessions were conducted with residents living in

caravan and residential parks and villages, whether it was to inform them about Part 4A or to assist them to form a residents committee.

In conjunction with Community Education housing options talks were also undertaken, such as one to Casey residents, in conjunction with Casey Council, around retirement housing options or speaking to a Chinese seniors group about their retirement housing options.

Policy advocacy

Retirement Villages

There is much work that needs to be undertaken in this area to ensure that rights are improved for residents, such as greater clarity and detail in the Retirement Villages Act 1986 (RVA), as well as improved avenues towards access to justice and a review of the link between consumer law and the RVA.

The retirement housing service continued to meet with Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC) and Residents of Retirement Villages Victoria (RRVV) 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.

Council on the Ageing (COTA) also joined the discussion at the beginning of 2014 where the work evolved into a policy platform that could be used to lobby politicians. Preparations for lobbying as a group also began during this period.

CALC, RRVV and HAAG met with Will Frost (CAV minister advisor) and Doug Campbell (CAV minister chief of staff) this period about the RVA amendments and future review of the RVA.

Retirement Villages Act research proposal

The work above also progressed into a meeting with Justice Connect and CALC to propose a project with a law firm, engaged on a pro bono basis, to provide us with the legal responses we might need if a review of the Act and sector were to take place after the State election this year.

Justice Connect joined the project as a key stakeholder. Attempts were made during the period to find a law firm willing to assist us with this project. As yet no takers have come forward.

Building relationships with other services

The Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Program (TAAP) advocates met twice this period.

The retirement Housing service was included in a meeting with Victoria Legal Aid explaining HAAG's services, including and focusing on CAV funded services.

HAAG's TAAP advocates, which includes the retirement service, met with the Tenants Union of Victoria's (TUV) policy and legal team to discuss whether we had any shared policy directions and how we could better work together in this space. The retirement housing service met with Justice Connect in order to improve referrals between the services.

The retirement housing service also met with Peter Sibly, Housing and Social Justice Officer of Mornington Peninsula Shire, regarding continued support and resourcing of park and village residents on the Peninsula, as well as possible future policy work related to parks and villages.

Tenancy Advice Service

For the 2013/14 financial year, there have been 289 open tenancy files (due to the changeover of tenancy workers during the period this number may include some duplication, but gives a general idea of the number of clients). The tenancy service supported clients at 39 VCAT hearings, most of them to prevent evictions – either landlords applying for possession, or tenants applying to restrain their landlords from unlawfully evicting them. Tenancy is also increasingly assisting people to proactively assert other tenancy rights, such as seeking repairs or compensation, in addition to fighting evictions. The service remains focused on encouraging people to exercise their rights as tenants by providing paralegal advice, advocacy, and tribunal support, and developing policies that allow Home At Last to provide this assistance as effectively as possible.

Case study

If any one individual sums up the issues that make tenancy work – and HAAG's work in general – so important, it's a guy who I'll call Dougie. Dougie is 70 and has been renting the same house for the last six years. The house was pretty rundown, but he had reached the same arrangement with his landlord that many low-income renters do: Dougie wouldn't ask for repairs, and the landlord wouldn't put the rent up – at least, not too much. This changed when Dougie was diagnosed with motor-neurone disease, a degenerative condition that meant he started having problems with mobility. He began using a cane, and got in touch with an occupational therapist (OT) at a local council service to help him maintain his independence.

The OT recommended a number of changes to his home, and wrote to the real estate agent to ask about them. She wanted permission for Dougie to install a number of safety rails at his own expense, and also asked the landlord to think about upgrading the heater and oven – both of which were old and unreliable, and to use them Dougie to bend down in a way that had become dangerous. At first, the agent agreed – but then the landlord changed his mind, and sent a no-reason Notice to Vacate.

That's when Dougie called HAAG.

The legal issues

The Equal Opportunity Act says that if you ask for legitimate disability modifications, your landlord has to agree. Of course, this won't help you if your landlord says yes, but kicks you out anyway.

Very few governments allow landlords to evict tenants for no reason – we think Australia may be the only country with tenancy laws that allow this. It is a glaring example of how baldly Victoria's tenancy laws favour landlords that they can evict us without a reason, almost any time they feel like it. And indeed, this is barely even considered a political issue – just the way things are.

While there are very few grounds for tenants to challenge a no-reason notice to vacate, you can do so if you believe you got it because you exercised your rights as a tenant. The classic example is, you ask for repairs and the landlord just says no way, get out, here's your notice to vacate. But it's generally very difficult for a tenant to prove why their landlord sent them a particular notice.

The hearing

As he lived in Langwarrin, I referred Dougie to Liz, a tenant advocate at Peninsula Community Legal Centre while I continued to provide assistance and support. Liz helped Dougie apply to the Victorian Civil and

Administrative Tribunal for an order that the Notice to Vacate was not valid because it was given in retaliation because he exercised his rights. His landlord – who didn't bother to turn up, even after the hearing was adjourned so they could attend – sent the tribunal a letter saying the notice to vacate had nothing to do with the requested disability modifications and it just happened that the landlord decided to renovate the place right after Dougie asked for the changes. Dougie and Liz did a fantastic job arguing that this was not the case and that it was too much to believe that it was all just a coincidence. The tribunal agreed, and ruled that the Notice to Vacate could not be used to evict Dougie. I can't emphasise enough what a hard-fought and important win this was – not only because the tribunal found in his favour, but because they accepted that a tenant has a legitimate right to request disability modifications and that it's unlawful to evict someone in response.

One thing that was particularly incredible to me at the hearing was that when challenged, the real estate agents said, "Well, it's the landlord's house and he's going to get it back one way or another, if this notice to vacate is knocked out we'll just send another one." They implied that it didn't matter whether the notice to vacate was valid, because sooner or later they'd get the house back anyway. This is the exact *opposite* of what we should expect – that the tenant is entitled to stay in their home until the landlord can prove there's a valid reason to make them leave. But the agents' assumption – that landlords are entitled to make tenants leave and a valid notice to vacate is a mere formality – is deeply engrained in Victorian law, and the everyday operation of the tribunal and the rental market.

The outcome

While the first notice to vacate was dismissed, Dougie has now received a different notice to vacate – this one giving him 60 days to vacate because the landlord says he intends to sell. Dougie is still keen to fight, but the same rules don't apply to this notice – it doesn't matter if the landlord's giving the notice because Dougie exercised his rights. They're allowed to do that! If Dougie's public housing offer doesn't come through before the notice expires, he will face a difficult situation – there is very little transitional or crisis housing that would be appropriate, even temporarily, for someone with motor-neurone disease.

The implications

Most of you will know HAAG's Housing Justice for the Aged Manifesto. The Manifesto sets out a series of older persons' housing benchmarks: security of tenure, affordability, availability, accessibility/adaptability, and proper maintenance. It's hard to imagine one person showing more clearly why these are important than Dougie does. He made do in a poorly maintained property, and as soon as he sought to have it adapted to his needs he was confronted by the lack of security of tenure that affects every Victorian tenant. Now that he needs new housing, he also has to deal with the severe lack of affordable housing available to him.

Dougie's a great guy – funny, optimistic, with a long history of volunteer work; the kind of person who's enriched the lives of those around him, and someone I feel lucky to have met. I'm sure that you know people just like him – the human faces of policy decisions that probably feel abstract to ministers and MPs, but have huge impacts on actual people and communities all around us.

Campaigns and Policy Action

Surviving or Thriving—Older Victorians at Risk of Homelessness Statewide Forum

The Surviving or Thriving - Older Victorians at Risk of Homelessness Forum was held on Thursday 5th June 2014. The event was organised to provide information and discuss the current state of older persons housing and the needs of older people who are at risk of homelessness. A major focus of the day was the worrying trends showing the following: Significant increases in older people just surviving in the private rental market; no new affordable housing supply after the completion of Nation Building funds; poor connections between older persons housing needs and aged care services in the home; and only 1% of homelessness service funds directed to the needs of a vulnerable ageing population.

Over 200 HAAG members and representatives from community agencies came along on the day. The event began with a very moving Welcome to Country provided by Graham Briggs from the Wurundjeri-balluk & Wurundjeri-willam tribe of the Kulin Nation. HAAG Chairperson Pauline Williamson opened the day and introduced the keynote speakers and prepared the forum delegates for a day of learning and interaction.

This was followed by an opening address by the Minister for Housing, the Hon. Wendy Lovell. As well as reflecting on the legacy of Molly Hadfield, in whose name the Minister has dedicated an annual award for services to older people in public housing communities, the Minister spoke about the need for assistance to older people on low incomes and specifically called for a strategic approach to addressing the problem.

April Bragg and Jeff Fiedler, Co-Managers of **Home at Last**, presented a progress report on **Home at Last** and informed the audience that, over the first 20 months of the service, over 500 older people have been assisted to move out of precarious private rental housing and into long term, affordable housing. A further 500 are on the road to achieving a similar housing outcome and can expect a result within the next 3-6 months, based on average times to accommodate clients of the service.

Keynote speakers Dr. Wendy Stone from Swinburne University and Dr. Maree Petersen from the University of Queensland presented the latest research on private rental housing and the needs of older people.

Dr. Stone spoke about the increasing numbers of people reliant on the private rental market for their main long term form of housing. This has mainly been caused by a drop in the rate of public and social housing. Long-term renting was described by Wendy as precarious, under-regulated and associated with poor shelter & non-shelter outcomes as she described the market tensions between private landlords seeking to maximise investment outcomes and the needs of tenants looking for long term sustainable housing. There has been a significant shift in the tenure of renters over the past 10 years. In 2001 there were more people in public housing than private rental but in 2011 6.7% of the population were public tenants and 7.2% private tenants. Other findings of her research were that households with main source of income being a pension or benefit are over-represented among long-term renters; a third of all long-term private renters are single person households; 30% of long-term renter households include dependent children.

Surviving or Thriving—Older People at Risk of Homelessness



(20% couple, 10% sole parent); close to half of all long-term renters are aged 30-44, with 30 per cent aged 45-64 years. Wendy also found that households with their main source of income being a pension or benefit are over-represented among long-term renters.

Dr Maree Petersen provided a more older persons' focused presentation with some of her most recent research involving an understanding of the housing and life circumstances of 561 clients of Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA) services as well as interviews with workers and managers in the ACHA field.

Maree's study identified three pathways into homelessness for older Australians:

1. People with a history of conventional housing.
2. People who live with ongoing housing disruption.
3. People with a transient housing history.

The focus of Maree's research was people in the first category, those with a conventional housing history who presented to ACHA with a range of critical housing incidents. The main reason she found for older people facing a housing crisis were: The impact of a breakdown in intergenerational housing arrangements and resulting homelessness risk for older people; the inability of Australia's housing, particularly the private rental market, to facilitate older people ageing in place; physical access issues were also a dominant reason for older people to be in housing crisis. Notice to Vacate (NTV) and lack of affordability were common critical housing incidents.

After a hearty lunch the forum moved into HAAG members mode with a focus on the direct experience of older people. The focus of this part of the day was the launch of HAAG's state election platform and presentations were heard from HAAG working group members Kelvin O'Shea, Sally Stabback and Max Penaluna about their own housing experience in the private rental market, independent living units and residential parks and villages. This segment also included a two minute film interview from 2009 of Molly Hadfield talking about private rental housing and a dedication to Molly and election platform launch by long term HAAG member and former chairperson Dalene Salisbury. The state election platform will be widely distributed to politicians and housing agencies to lobby for significant improvement to older persons housing over the next four years.

The final segment of the day was an attempt to do a first in housing forums: Send an immediate email message to all Victorian members of parliament about the housing needs of older people. This involved a workshop session where delegates were encouraged to bring forward their main housing concerns and these were documented on the over head screen for all to see. However, as often happens in open forums, the wide variation and detail of issues raised, whilst all very important, were difficult to capture in a few points. It was agreed by the audience that HAAG would condense all the comments and send the email, with photo of the 200 strong crowd, to the politicians the next day.

2nd National ACHA meeting and Aged Care Reforms Consultation

In May 2014 the Department of Social Service (DSS) released a discussion paper on the key directions of the Commonwealth Home Support Program. In the discussion paper the Department sought advice from ACHA providers on how the ACHA Program should be positioned within the Home and Community Care Program.

The release of the discussion paper was particularly appreciated by HAAG as for the first time since the programs inception in 1995, the program is being acknowledged for the contribution it makes to aged care sector.

Whilst the program delivers excellent outcome for clients, it really struggles to provide the level of support and care its vulnerable target group requires. Since the program's inception in 1993 there has been no core funding increase, and the program expenditure at \$6 million nationally represents a tiny 2% of the total budget for homelessness services in Australia. The inclusion of ACHA into the Home and Community Care Program provides the opportunity for desperately needed growth and structure of the program.

With the release of the discussion paper HAAG convened a National ACHA Forum on June 4th in Melbourne. ACHA providers from Victoria, New South Wales, Northern Territory and South Australia attended the forum and HAAG further resourced the Victorian ACHA network by participating in two teleconferences, one for New South Wales providers and the other a National teleconference. The New South Wales providers also held a forum specific to their state.

From these discussions a national submission was developed, with facilitation from Corey Irlam, Principal Policy Officer, Aged Care Reform, COTA Vic that primarily outlined the program principles that must be retained in the ACHA Program regardless of what it was to be called in the future and where it sits within the Home and Community Care Program.

HAAG along with some 15 other agencies endorsed the national submission and we are eagerly awaiting the next stage of consultation.



HAAG staff on way to the ACHA Forum

HAAG's State Election Policies

At HAAG's Surviving or Thriving? Forum held on June 5 2014 HAAG launched our State Election Policy Platform for 2014. Entitled A Plan towards Housing Justice for Older People in Victoria, HAAG's policy platform presents information on the key housing issues facing older people, especially those on pensions and low incomes.

HAAG's policy platform has been developed by our members, for our members and also represents the expressed views of many older people in housing need across the community. The platform also represents the hard work of our three key working groups in the following areas: Private rental housing, Independent Living Units and Caravan and Residential Parks and Villages. In addition the views of HAAG's membership were collected at our General Meeting held on Thursday 13th March 2014. We sincerely thank our members for their hard work in producing the document.

The key recommendations in the policy platform are:

A plan, housing and services

1. The Victorian Government must establish an Older Persons Housing Strategy to plan for solutions to the dynamic changes to older persons housing that are rapidly emerging.
The Strategy will include factors such as affordable housing supply, support for specialist housing and homelessness support services, reforms in current housing as well as research and development of new housing models including service integrated housing.
2. The Victorian Government must protect current levels of public housing stock and expand the supply of public housing for older people through joint capital investment with the Commonwealth Government and construction on identified surplus government land.
3. The Victorian Government must work with HAAG and other specialist older persons housing agencies to develop and fund an Older Persons Homelessness Support Program that would ensure appropriate services for older people at risk of homelessness are available across the state.

Older people in private rental housing

4. The Victorian Government must ensure that older people have access to housing that provides security of tenure.
5. The Victorian Government must ensure that older people are able to rent accommodation that is affordable on the aged pension.
6. The Victorian government must introduce legislation that ensures new housing complies with universal design principles. Further, all landlords must allow modifications recommended by aged care services for older people in rental accommodation.
7. The Victorian Government must introduce minimum housing standards into the Residential Tenancies Act.

Older people in Independent Living Units

8. The Victorian Government must ensure retirement housing legislation appropriately reflects the diversity of the retirement village sector by including proper protection for not-for-profit retirement village residents.
9. The Victorian Government must ensure there are clear dispute resolution procedures prescribed within legislation that outline the path a retirement village resident must take to have an issue resolved, including appropriate and affordable access to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).
10. The Victorian Government must ensure the legislation governing the Independent Living Unit and retirement village sector is streamlined to provide clear, protective rights especially for more vulnerable residents.
11. The Victorian Government must introduce effective management standards in retirement housing law to ensure consistency across the retirement village sector.

Older people in caravan, residential parks and villages

12. The Victorian Government must ensure that security of tenure is embedded in residential parks legislation as it is the key consideration towards improving the rights of residents in parks and villages.
13. The Victorian Government must prescribe effective management standards within parks and villages to ensure consistency across the sector.
14. The Victorian Government must improve protections for residents in relation to utility charges. Prescribed avenues are required to challenge and investigate charges, such as the accessibility of the Ombudsman scheme for residents and improved powers for Consumer Affairs Victoria to act in such matters.
15. The Victorian Government must outline clear lines of accountability, and appropriateness within building and design, as well as clear lines of liability when it comes to structural and site issues, within residential parks and villages.

Better housing and support options

16. The Victorian Government must develop pilot housing developments for older people that offer a range of accommodation options based on the diversity of needs of individuals and communities with a particular focus on expanding the range and availability of service integrated housing.

Retirement Village disclosure reforms

In July 2013 the retirement service submitted a response to the Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) for Retirement Villages Amendment (Records and Notices) Regulations 2013 and Retirement Villages Amendment (Contractual Arrangements) Regulations 2013. The submission was compiled with input from the ILU working group. Feedback provided from the group clearly indicated the need for in-depth, information disclosure when choosing to live in a retirement village, no matter what stage of the process.

The reforms specifically dealt with disclosure prior to moving into a village. HAAG's preferred options based on the proposals outlined by the RIS highlighted it is imperative that each stage of disclosure builds on the last, providing for further detailed information as the process progresses.

A retirement village contract should reflect the information provided in each stage of disclosure, and vice versa, to ensure that at every step a prospective residents' decision is clear and validated. Upon entry into a retirement village information given to a resident should replicate the documents provided in previous stages of disclosure, albeit in more detail.

At all times throughout the decision making process an older person should understand what their rights are, that independent advice is available to them and they are entitled to full disclosure at no cost.

Australian Taxation Office (ATO) Goods and Services Tax (GST) reforms for moveable dwellings

At the end of 2013 the ATO released a draft ruling proposing to change the way GST is charged for residential villages. This would have increased costs for operators which would have potentially been passed on to residents in their site fees.

The retirement housing service submitted in response to this ruling, with significant feedback provided by residents from around the State. In general there was significant response from residents groups undertaking their own submission and lobbying, and others contributing to HAAG's submissions.

During the submission process HAAG also engaged with the Victorian industry body to ensure we showed a united front in relation to the response.

Due to the hard work carried out by people across the State, including the industry body and operators, the ATO announced they would not be going ahead with the proposed ruling. It really highlighted what can be achieved with a synchronised effort taken up by a large number of people, as well as what collaborative work can achieve.

As the proposed changes would have affected residents all over Australia this process also allowed the service to engage with the residents associations from around Australia through the national alliance to work together to pressure the ATO. This highlighted how important it is to have a national alliance when matters of National significance pop up.

Peninsula Residential Parks and Villages Group (PRPVG)

HAAG also became the auspice for a grant provided to the PRPVG by the Mornington Peninsula Shire and therefore the retirement housing service is the direct support for the group. It is a 12 month grant.

Since January 2014 the group has been working intensively, and meeting monthly, to organise newsletters and events that will engage residents from across the Peninsula, and provide avenues for social connectedness and information sharing. Their first event was organised to take place in July 2013.

Partnerships with Local Government

City of Darebin and Mornington Peninsula Projects

An important aspect of the Home at Last project has been to develop strong links between our housing service and agencies that can assist older people to make contact and receive help from Home at Last. Local government plays a key role in this strategy due to their many networks in their local community and also provision of important services, such as Home and Community Care, that can identify older people in housing need and refer them to our organisation. Over the year important links were developed with the City of Darebin and the Mornington Peninsula Shire. These strategies had the following aspects:

Four main strategies were conducted in each municipality:

1. Creating community awareness about services provided at Home at Last

Publicity over a three month period in publications such as Leader Newspapers, Council News, other local media

Community events were conducted by our Community Education, Retirement Housing and Housing Support staff in key locations.

- Promotion in local communities with leaflet drop and poster placement in focused areas, information distribution to local community shopping areas including doctors, hairdressers, milk bars, fish and chip shops, pharmacies, op shops
- Contacted a range of agencies such as neighbourhood houses, senior citizens centres, ethno-specific older persons groups
- Information stalls in major community hubs

2. Creating support agency awareness about Home at Last

- Link with housing services such as Specialist Homelessness Services and Office of Housing
- Link with aged care services such as Home and Community Care (HACC) and Aged Care Assessment Services (ACAS)
- Health services such as GPs, Community health centres, MRC, Divisions of General Practice
- Agency networks such as Primary Care Partnerships

3. Establishing referral pathways and protocols with housing and other relevant agencies or referral of vulnerable older renters

4. Create linkages with Home and Community Care (HACC) and Aged Care Assessment Services (ACAS) to provide information and support to a high need group of older people: Vulnerable renters with increasing health frailty and high need for stable, affordable, adaptable housing in good condition.

HAAG Working Groups

Private Renters Working Group

Report by Sue Leigh, working group member

The Older Private Renters Working Group (OPRWG) consists of those of us who are, or who have been living in private rental accommodation so we have collective experience of what needs to be done to improve the situation for renters. We've been meeting on a regular basis and have come up with various ideas for future action.

I think our biggest focus has been to lobby for more public housing.

So far letters have been sent to the Minister, Wendy Lovell and the Shadow Minister, Richard Wynne. We also had a meeting with Richard Wynne where members of the working group expressed their concerns about the problems of living in private rental accommodation. We hope to meet with the Greens in the near future. I think it's very important that politicians hear from older renters about what it's really like to live in insecure and expensive rental accommodation and the effects this can have on their wellbeing.

Because we want to focus on lobbying politicians before the next election we have formed a sub-committee to produce a log of claims to add force to our argument. We have begun to map out the most important issues that private renters face.

The major concerns that the group have brought up have been about security of tenure and the spiralling cost of private rental but they are also concerned about the lack of efficient and affordable heating and cooling, dodgy estate agents and landlords and the difficulty of getting public housing.

Members of OPRWG have also volunteered to help on Home at Last stalls including one at the Survival Concert, and one at Flinders Street Station.



Members of the Private Renters Working Group

The retirement service continued to facilitate and support the Independent Living Unit (ILU) working group and the Caravan and Residential Parks and Villages (CARPAV) working group

This has been a very busy time for the working groups. Both groups began the period focusing on what the key areas of concern were and into 2014 they worked on their State election policy platforms, which are included in the overall HAAG election policy platform document.

Independent Living Units Working Group

The ILU working group was reinstated at the beginning of this period and began with compiling a submission in response to the Regulatory Impact Statement related to proposed retirement village disclosure reforms. The group then began clarifying the differences between ILUs under the Residential Tenancies Act versus the Retirement Villages Act. This evolved into road trips to visit various villages around Victoria which made it easy to then compile the policy platform.



ILU Working Group members Sally, Vicki, Cathy and Bep

The Caravan and Residential Parks and Villages (CARPAV) working group

The CARPAV working group became much more focused during this period and began working more extensively on key issues identified by the group. This naturally evolved into the policy platform that can be used to lobby politicians about the need for reform.

Following the completion of the policies both groups invited the Hon Heidi Victoria, Minister for Consumer Affairs Victoria to meet with them. She has accepted the invitations and confirmed her attendance in July with the ILU group. Request for confirmation will be sent for the CARPAV meeting in August.

Robin Scott, Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs, was also invited to meet with the working groups. He attended a meeting with the ILU working group in June which was very successful and productive. Mr Scott has indicated he supports our policy direction with the ultimate aim of a full review of the retirement village sector and legislation. He has also confirmed his attendance at the CARPAV meeting in July.

Invitations have also been sent out to the Housing Minister, and the Shadow Housing Minister, to meet with the working groups in the context of overall housing supply and options for older Victorians.



CARPAV!

Partnerships with Academia

Melanie Joosten visited HAAG and talked to a General Meeting and a meeting of the Private Renters Working Group. Melanie is a writer and a social worker, working as a research assistant on projects that aim to improve wellbeing of older people. She is writing essays funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Council for the Arts JUMP program.

The essays are about older people and the experience of ageing in Australia. She hopes that the essays will draw attention to the situation of older people, the contributions they make and some of the issues they face, as well as demonstrating that they are no more homogeneous than any other group in society. You can read more about the project on her website here: <http://www.melaniejoosten.com/if-the-young-knew/>. Melanie interviewed some of HAAG's members and clients as part of her research.

Similarly, Patricia Gillespie a PhD Candidate in Sociology at the Melbourne School of Health Sciences at Melbourne University also conducted interviews with a number of HAAG members over 70 years of age for her Doctoral thesis. Patricia was also our guest speaker at our 2013 Annual General Meeting. She is conducting research on the life experience of older people living in public housing. Having a public housing background herself, Patricia told the meeting about her early life and how important public housing has been to her and the cohesive way these communities work together.

Of course our major collaboration was with our great research partner Dr Maree Petersen. Maree's research has been the foundation of the latest learnings on the issues around older people at risk of homelessness in Australia. With colleagues she has recently produced two landmark reports, Addressing Later Life Homelessness and Older Womens' Pathways Out of Homelessness. Maree has also provided HAAG with foundational data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics that shows the real change in Australian society regarding older people living in the private rental market. Maree's research has also linked directly to HAAG's casework and also provides the big picture story about the day to day experience our Home at Last service experiences daily. Maree, along with her inspirational colleague Professor Andrew Jones, has ensured that older persons housing issues are emerging on the political policy agenda.



Dr Maree Petersen speaking at the Surviving or Thriving? Forum June 5

Student Placements

During semester 2, 2013, three RMIT students undertook their social work placements at HAAG – Paola Posso, Naomi Gebert and Anastasia Maligeorges. Students placements provide a great opportunity for up and coming professionals to experience the workplace environment of HAAG and to learn about the housing and homelessness sector. This was also experienced by our Intake and Referral worker, Tegan during her 3 month withdrawal from HAAG to carry out a Social Work placement at Centrelink. Two of our 2013 students have since begun working at HAAG as housing support workers in the intake role during 2014.

During placement in 2013, Paola Posso and Naomi Gebert undertook a research report on the rights of tenants in the private and public market, and how easy it is to enforce these rights. As both students have now become HAAG workers, the knowledge gained through their research on housing legislation and through interviewing former HAAG clients has been invaluable in adapting to work as a housing support worker. This research has also been the basis for discussion at a HAAG general meeting and on two separate radio shows at 3CR. On top of this, the report developed has proven to be useful in informing new students on the questions raised by previous students in learning about the housing and homelessness sector.

Nhuc Liu joined us as a Social Work student on placement from RMIT University for a 70 day period from July to October 2013. Nhuc enjoyed her time at HAAG so and learned a great deal about older Australians and homelessness.

As well as partnering with case workers on direct client work Nhuc also assisted with the planning and facilitation of the Forum and she found it a highly enjoyable and very rewarding experience. Nhuc also worked with the Community Education Team in assisting with the Mornington Peninsula Project, where her role was to research and compile a list of all the relevant community services under the Mornington Peninsula LGA. We are very grateful to Nhuc for her fantastic work at HAAG and we wish her all the best for her future as a Social Worker.



Notes



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