

Older Tenant's Voice - Since 1988



Housing for the Aged Action Group



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.



HOME
at last

September 2014 Spring edition



Housing - a right not a privilege!



Hello again HAAG members and friends. Welcome to the Spring edition of our newsletter.

“Spring has sprung” (so we are told) and most of us are glad to see the end of what was a very cold Winter. As usual though we kept on the move here at HAAG, dealing with our ever increasing workload of enquiries and assistance to those needing help with housing problems.

With the State election coming up in November we have also been very busy further developing our strategies and preparing submissions to both sides of politics.

Our submission ‘Home at Last - working towards an older persons’ homelessness prevention strategy’ sets out our case for continued funding for HAL beyond 2015, and our ideas for expanding HAAG and HAL’s activities. The document also includes a report on the success of the HAL service to date. It is well worth reading! Copies are available from the HAAG office or can be mailed out to you upon request.

With the election in mind April, myself and Shanny, together with representatives from our working groups, met with the Shadow Housing Minister, Richard Wynne, who we expect will be the Housing Minister if Labor is elected in November. Wynne gave us a fair hearing while we stated our concerns and asked our questions, however he gave no details regarding the future provision of public housing. He did indicate though that the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 might be reviewed and amended.

A General meeting was held on Thursday 11 September 2014 and was very well attended. Our guest speaker was Kaz McKay from Eastern Community Legal Centre, Kaz is the elder abuse advocate and she provided us with information about elder abuse and their service. There is growing evidence that elder abuse is on the rise and Kaz gave us some insight into the type of treatment some older people experience at the hands of their family and other trusted people. 2 short films were shown and they were very moving and thought provoking. I like general meetings as they are an opportunity to meet more of you - our members!



**GENERAL
MEETING PHOTOS**
by
Guruswamy Perumal

On the staff side of things Nhuc has finished her student placement with HAAG and left us this month. Thank you Nhuc for all the help you have given us. We now have 2 new students, Nese and Caroline, joining us for their placements. Welcome to you both!

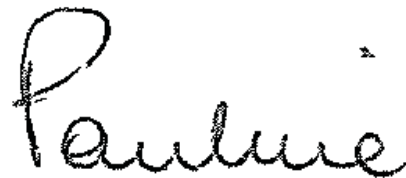
NEWS FLASH:

Good news for us - our long standing member and former chairperson Wyn Stenton is recovering well from her surgery and hopes to re-join us on the Committee of Management this year!

Finally a reminder that our Annual General Meeting (AGM) is scheduled for Thursday 13 November 2014.

Please note this date in your diary or calendar - we would love to see you there! Details will be mailed out to you in October together with nominations for the Committee of Management. All financial members of HAAG are eligible to apply to join the committee.

Until next time - stay well (and Housed)!



My name is Nese (left) and I'm a third year social work student from La Trobe University. I have an interest in housing and working with older people, which lead me to pursue my first placement at HAAG. By the end of the placement, I hope to develop practice knowledge and learn from the wonderful experienced social workers at this organisation.

Hi, my name is Caroline (right) and I'm a student from Sweden on exchange.

At the moment I study social work at RMIT. I have an interest in seeing the Australian culture, especially how social work is practiced here. I'm really glad to have the opportunity to do my placement at HAAG and to be a part of the great work they do with housing for the elderly.

I think this placement will be a fantastic experience. My wish is that I can learn the difference between my culture and the Australian culture and to contribute as well as take something back with me to Sweden.

In conjunction with client work, together we will be working together on an exciting opportunity to research a project comparing the Swedish and Australian social security systems. We are looking forward to the next couple of months at the organisation with some of the great staff and clients.

HOME AT LAST

Time for government to fund the service into the future!

Housing for the Aged Action Group has recently completed the state government's evaluation of our Home at Last service. We are moving into a critical phase of the service as we have only 9 months until our service expires on June 30, 2015. Home at Last has been highly successful and we are now wishing to talk to the state government about the next steps required to ensure that Home at Last can continue to help older people into the future.

We have recently produced a report that we have forwarded to the Minister for Housing, The Hon. Wendy Lovell, for her consideration. Titled Home at Last, Working towards an older persons homelessness prevention strategy for the Victorian Homelessness Action Plan Reform, the report is a summary of the service performance over the two years it has been operating, the learnings of the project and recommendations to government for ongoing action.

Success story:

After the first year of operation in 2012-13, that included substantial time establishing the foundations of the service, Home at Last had assisted 14% of all Victorian homelessness service clients aged 55 years and over and 7% of all older clients across Australia.

Home at Last also had a remarkable record of housing clients in comparison with other homelessness services across Australia. Whilst 42% of older people presenting to homelessness services were living in private rental housing when they made contact with an agency, by the end of the clients' support period almost all clients were still living in that accommodation (a drop of only 2% to 40% of clients still in private rental housing). In comparison, 60% of Home at Last clients were living in private rental accommodation when they first presented to Home at Last. By the end of the overall support periods only 1% of clients were still living in that form of housing and had transitioned into long term public and social housing. Even the 1% outcome represented a desired result for the clients as they had requested that form of housing in country Victoria.

Over 8000 older people have been provided with information and advice and are therefore in a sound position to be able to make decisions to ensure they can plan towards a stable and affordable housing future. They also have the contact details of Home at Last if they wish to have further support and assistance.

Most importantly 550 older people who were at risk of homelessness have transitioned from precarious housing circumstances into long term affordable housing that has enabled them to successfully ageing-in-place. This housing outcomes focused approach has ensured that a large number of older people have avoided the trauma of eviction and homelessness due to Home at Last's successful early intervention and prevention service strategy.

Substantial government resources have been saved by avoiding the need for crisis responses in the housing, health and aged care sectors. These cost savings are associated with the following factors:

- **Assisting the Office of Housing to tenant high turnover properties potentially reducing the cost of vacancies (e.g. lost rent, maintenance/security costs)**
- **Diverting older people from entering residential care prematurely**
- **Reducing hospital bed days (assisting hospitals' ability to discharge into housing rather than homelessness)**
- **Reducing crisis and transitional accommodation costs due to focus on secure and**

stable housing at the outset

- Avoidance of health issues associated with the stress of facing homelessness
- Assisting clients out of poor housing that causes ill health and higher medical costs

The current context:

Successfully evaluated after Stage 1 of the IAPs, Home at Last has continued to expand its service into Stage 2. HAAG looks forward to the opportunity to incorporate the successful Home at Last model within the development of a new sector-wide structure of homelessness services as part of the Victorian Homelessness Action Plan (VHAP) Reform Strategy. There are considerable challenges that lie ahead that can be transformed into great opportunities to restructure the homelessness sector to better meet the community need. More broadly there is great potential for further enhancement of housing support within other current government reviews such as the Commonwealth Aged Care Reform that also provides significant possibilities for older persons housing service integration at the Victorian level. Such investment in the needs of an ageing population that is increasingly reliant on rental accommodation will hopefully provide the structure around a vision for addressing the needs of older people at risk of homelessness for the first time in Australia.

Our overall recommendations are:

- 1 The Victorian Government provide ongoing and adequate funding for the Home at Last service as a statewide central information and referral agency.
- 2 The Victorian Government works with HAAG to develop Home at Last as a central entry point for housing and homelessness assistance for older people at risk of homelessness and integrated with other systems such as Opening Doors, Services Connect and MYAgedCare.
- 3 The Victorian Government develops a two-tiered homelessness service system that provides early intervention and prevention support in addition to crisis housing services.
- 4 The Victorian Government works with HAAG towards the integration of Home at Last within complementary social services that are best placed to identify and support older people at risk of homelessness such as the health and aged care systems.
- 5 The Victorian Government supports the development of an Older Persons Homelessness Support Program, or modified existing model, that can provide a widespread and integrated approach to address the needs of older people at risk of homelessness.
- 6 The Victorian Government to urgently liaise with the Commonwealth Government to support the significant expansion and enhancement of the Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA) Program within the Home Support Program as part of the current Aged Care Reforms.
- 7 The Victorian Government works with HAAG towards an Older Persons Housing Strategy that will formulate a housing and homelessness policy framework based on current research and best practice developments in Australia and overseas.

So the next few months are a critical time for HAAG and our Home at Last service. We will be lobbying to have the service continued and we seek your support to ensure that this vital service to vulnerable older people in the community can continue for many years to come. If you would like a copy of the report please call our office on 0396547389.

Joan's story – the benefits of good housing for older people

Joan Lansbury appeared recently on the front page of The Age newspaper. Her story was also told in a two page feature article in the same edition. What was newsworthy about Joan was that she was presented as 'the new face of homelessness' as she seemed to be typical of many people, particularly women, in the community who have had 'normal' lives consisting of work and family, no history of mental illness or other factors that often contribute to being marginalised in society. Joan could be your mum, sister, aunty or the friendly neighbour in your street.

After recently retiring from work at 65 years of age, Joan found herself struggling to cope with the rent and bills when faced with being reliant on the age pension as her main form of income. Things became more critical when her savings and meagre superannuation dried up which had enabled her to subsidise her living costs up to that point. Joan became very fearful of the consequences of ever losing her rental home by eviction or rent rises that would 'tip her over the edge' of affordability. Joan became afraid to ask for repairs and put up with a hot water service that broke down continually. Joan got used to having cold showers and boiling the kettle to do the dishes. Then, out of the blue the landlord doubled her rent in one hit. Joan was left with less than \$40 a fortnight to live on after the rent and bills. Fortunately a friend told Joan about Home at Last and encouraged her to seek some help.

Within three months of interviews, filling in applications and obtaining medical support information, Joan's life was transformed when she went to Heidelberg, a northern suburb of Melbourne, to see a brand new social housing unit that had been built with Nation Building funds. She fell in love with her new home that is Joan's 'for life', affordable and designed with no steps, a walk-in-shower and open plan living room and kitchen.

Joan's doctor was very impressed too. She has since lost weight, given up smoking and no longer needs medication to control her diabetes. Joan is exercising, having great fun with her new neighbours and has become a vital member of HAAG's Private Rental Working Group campaigning for more affordable housing and improvements to tenancy laws.

The key message here is that good quality, affordable housing has a profound impact on the health and well-being of older people. They go on to live happy, fulfilling lives, engaged in their community in a way that we all deserve to enjoy.

HAAG IS ON RADIO 3CR - 'RAISE THE ROOF'

***Every 4th Wednesday at 6pm:
Next shows =
22 October 2014
26 November 2014***

If you would like to share something with us on our upcoming radio shows please contact the office and have a chat to Shane (our 3CR show co-ordinator)
9654 7389

Diversity statement

The Home at Last Diversity statement is part of the talks that the Community Education team deliver to various groups around the state and you will also find it on the back of the Home at Last leaflet.

Home at Last: We do not discriminate regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender or disability.

Why is it important?

We need to make sure that everyone knows that Home at Last is a place where people can expect to be made welcome irrespective of any group to which they belong. The statement offers protection for all of us, for members of any of the groups named, but also for those of us committed to social justice and the inclusion of all members of our community.

The diversity statement informs our practice in all areas of our work. It challenges us to ensure that any Home at Last activities are done in a spirit that respects the diversity in our community. As volunteers, members and staff we have a responsibility to speak up when someone acts against the diversity statement in connection with our work with Home at Last. Sometimes we'll feel able to challenge a situation, and other times we'll be able to tell someone else who can take action for us.

Housing for the Aged Action Group has signed up to the 'Racism. It stops with me', campaign run by the Australian Human Rights Commission. This campaign aims to ensure more of us recognise that racism is unacceptable, give us tools to take practical action against it and finally it seeks to empower both individuals and organisations to prevent and respond effectively to racism. Housing for the Aged Action Group is a proud supporter of this campaign.



Volunteer's morning tea Thursday 10th July

On Thursday 10th July Housing for the Aged held a Volunteers morning tea to thank and acknowledge the enthusiasm and willingness of our many volunteers. The very lovely Sam Thornton from Ross House kindly agreed to hand out the Certificates of Appreciation to our members. Sam undertook this task with aplomb and she spoke of the value of volunteers to provide assistance in many forms - assistance ranging from the ordinary to the extraordinary tasks and activities that otherwise may not be undertaken. Sam's presence was greatly appreciated. As well as adding a sense of occasion to the event Sam bore witness to the marvellous work done by our dedicated team of volunteers. Here at Housing for the Aged Action Group we value our volunteers and again say 'thank you very much'.



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 title to his daughter and didn't receive any funds for this.

Bob is 89 years old and a world war two 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 and also he 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 Centerlink told Bob about Housing for the Aged Action Group's (HAAG) Home at Last program. The social worker contacted the intake worker at HAAG and the worker contacted Bob. After completing initial assessment over telephone a referral was made to Home at Last Outreach worker.

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 bank and Centerlink 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 removalist and to move Bob's belongings into his new home. (Application completed March 6 2014 for VASEY RSL ILU and rehoused on April 28 2014) This probably identifies client??

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 worker at Home at Last program to thank her for her assistance.

Amateur landlords and informal tenancies – what are your rights?

Real estate agents can be horrible in their own ways, but at least they more or less know what they're doing. 'Amateur' landlords who manage their own properties sometimes think they can do whatever they want – evicting tenants without notice, dropping by any time they feel like it, etc. “But it’s my house!” one landlord yelled at the tribunal, struggling to deal with the idea his tenant had rights.

Worse, some tenants think the same – that it’s not their house so there’s nothing they can do. Don’t believe it!

Recently a 60-year-old man dropped by our office, scared and upset after his landlord told him he had two weeks to get out. He thought that because he was renting a bungalow in the landlord’s backyard and didn’t have a lease he had no rights – and was very happy when I told him that he was entitled to at least 60 days written notice. He’s still there now, waiting till he finds suitable housing before he leaves.

I also helped a 70-year-old woman whose landlord thought it was fine to send contractors to do renovations without any notice – one day, she was surprised to look out her back window and see tradies already at work. I helped her get a restraining order, despite the owner repeating over and over that he’d been “a model landlord”. The tenant didn’t see it that way – he’d never done any repairs in the nine years she’d lived there, and only started doing maintenance when he decided to evict her and sell. But she did have rights, no matter what he thought.

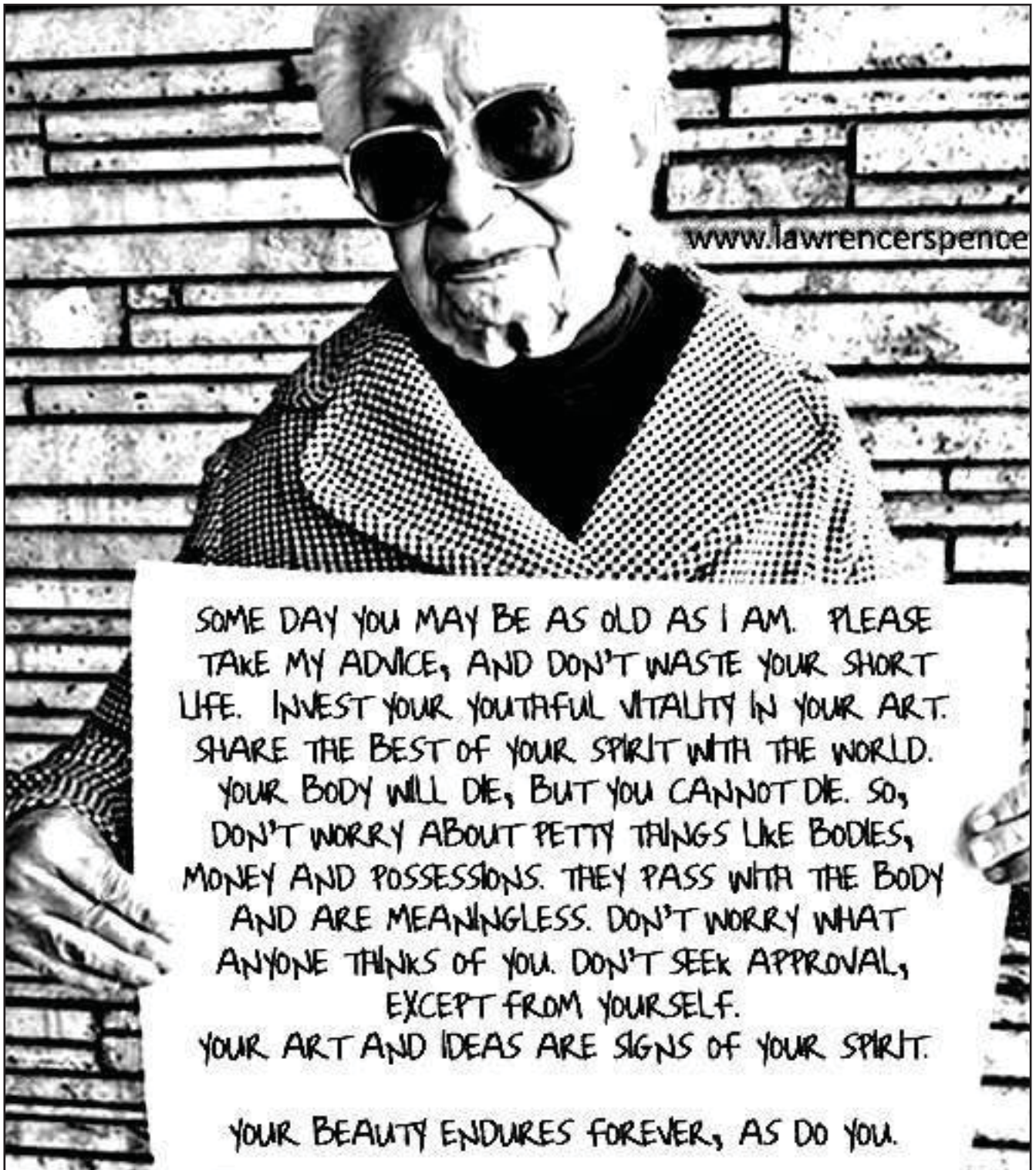
Last week she and I were back at the tribunal as the landlord tried to get an order that he could evict her. But the landlord drove to the wrong tribunal, so his application was dismissed and the tenant can stay. He arrived just as we were leaving – just too late – and could only look sad and complain, again, about what a great landlord he’d been.

The point is: don’t assume you don’t have rights. Amateur landlords can be their own worst enemies, but less-formal tenancies can be complicated, so make sure you get good advice if you have any problems.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights contact HAAG’s tenancy worker Shane McGrath on 9654 7389.



Happy HAAGies after some intensive data training provided by our brilliant data wiz - Crystal McDonald (far left)



SOME DAY YOU MAY BE AS OLD AS I AM. PLEASE
TAKE MY ADVICE, AND DON'T WASTE YOUR SHORT
LIFE. INVEST YOUR YOUTHFUL VITALITY IN YOUR ART.
SHARE THE BEST OF YOUR SPIRIT WITH THE WORLD.
YOUR BODY WILL DIE, BUT YOU CANNOT DIE. SO,
DON'T WORRY ABOUT PETTY THINGS LIKE BODIES,
MONEY AND POSSESSIONS. THEY PASS WITH THE BODY
AND ARE MEANINGLESS. DON'T WORRY WHAT
ANYONE THINKS OF YOU. DON'T SEEK APPROVAL,
EXCEPT FROM YOURSELF.
YOUR ART AND IDEAS ARE SIGNS OF YOUR SPIRIT.

YOUR BEAUTY ENDURES FOREVER, AS DO YOU.

*Remember if you would like to be involved in any of
HAAG's working groups:*

CARPAU

ILU

Private renters

then give us a call on 9654 7389 or email haag@oldertenants.org.au

HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.

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

ADMIN: 9654 7389

Home At Last: 1300 765 178

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**Housing for the Aged Action Group offers
Free and Confidential Advice to older people renting their home.**



**1st floor Ross
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Lane,
Melbourne, 3000**

**Admin: 9654 7389
Intake: 1300 765 178
(cost of a local call)**

Email: haag@oldertenants.org.au

**There are four main aspects
to our service:**

Housing options

**Private renters assistance and tenancy advice
Outreach care and housing support
Retirement housing advice and support**

**Interested tenants and residents are encouraged to join
Housing for the Aged Action Group
Pensioners No Charge**



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.

**We are on the Web:
www.oldertenants.org.au**