

Last week I watched every moment of the memorial service for Gough Whitlam. If like me you listened to the speeches honouring him and the work of his government you'll know what was said related to caring for the needs of ALL people of this country - the young, the elderly, the newly married, of all colours, creeds and beliefs, was his government's priority.

Other people listening, and maybe disagreeing, could have been thinking "but what did he do for roads, and city freeways and traffic smoothing, etc." Those are the priorities today for both Federal and State governments. And yes people drive cars and use roads and continually whinge about being held up in traffic snarls but that's NOT the majority of people who need support these days. It's not the young seeking education nor the senior aged population seeking respect, dignity, and most of all affordable shelter - the right of us all.

The workers at Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) know all about this. The State Government considers private rental accommodation appropriate for pensioners though it is neither secure nor affordable and landlords are under no obligation by law to allow for modifications where necessary. Appropriate! How? Where? Too bad if the once able working tenant now is retired and has need of a walking frame. They are the same person, just older but now apparently easily targeted as disposable.

The wonderful workers here who steer HAAG to the needs of older people on fixed incomes daily strive to fill a massive gap left by the lack of government attention to planning needs that impacts on senior citizens. Government cuts, state or federal, to the homelessness sector certainly affect older people who are being forced out of private rental situations, which in some cases has been their home for up to 30 years. (In my case 26 years).

HOW DARE ANY GOVERNMENT IN THIS WONDERFUL COUNTRY UNCARINGLY PUT OLDER PEOPLE AT RISK OF BEING HOMELESS!? HOW DARE THEY STAND FOR ELECTION SPOUTING OFF ON WHAT THEY DID, NOW DO, AND PROMISE THEY WILL DO FOR THIS STATE! WHO AMONG THEM, LIBERALS OR LABORS, IN THEIR SPEECHES HAVE SPOKEN OF RETIREMENT VILLAGES, PUBLIC HOUSING, SOCIAL HOUSING, NOT FOR PROFIT HOUSING LIKE INDEPENDENT LIVING UNITS OR CARAVAN & RESIDENTIAL

PARKS HOUSING? HOW DARE THEY TAKE OUR VOTES FOR GRANTED? You here today

all know what I mean, I'm sure. If I'm right you already live in any such arrangements.

I am a member of the HAAG Independent Living Unit (ILU) Working Group and also a resident of a Not for Profit (NFP) ILU complex owned by Catholic Homes Inc. The major aim of our ILU working group is to strongly prod state government to review the retirement village sector overall and the Retirement Villages Act 1986. (RVA) in particular. Many, if not most, NFP retirement villages (so called) house approximately 60%, NFP residents who pay lowered ingoing contributions - if any at all - from their fixed incomes (the OAP). They are also usually without assets; all of which, you'd think, would allow an expectation of support and assistance via the Act. Instead, it's plain that the RVA focuses on protecting only the financial interests of residents and this almost completely excludes the interests of NFP residents and remains in the realm of privately owned retirement villages.

You and I know the election date is looming for this state government. Under Shanny's excellent leadership the ILU Working Group first set out a log of claims earlier this year. With that in hand we went off to interview, inform and involve as many politicians as possible. For several weeks past in groups of 3 to 5 we met them on their turf - Sally doing a stalwart job alone up in Kyneton capturing the attention of local country polities. Shanny, Vicky and other ILU regulars even met up with polities in Parliament House. Some days we went out in freezing cold mornings to catch trains that didn't arrive (another area of neglect of this Vic government). Of the sessions where I was involved my feeling is the only one who responded with a suggestion of ways to increase political involvement is Colleen Hartland, for the Greens, but that could just be my perception. It remains to be seen if she will be re-elected and if she can get any co-operation from other polities.

We needed them all to hear and know that we, on behalf of all older people, wish to be key stakeholders. That whatever the government - whichever Party - after this November we want to know what are their intentions, AND we all want to be involved! We don't wish to hear rhetoric or weasel words from any of them either. And if you're thinking 'Not me' I am thinking 'Why not me,

or you, or any other older person who may need support' Who else knows our situations and feelings better?.

Consumer Affairs under Liberal have dropped off in process and operation. They ceased to engage to see compliance measures keep operating well and successfully. They've lost interest, apparently, in the needs of older people (HAAG's foundation operations). Are we prepared to see this behaviour continue after the election?

The focus at Consumer Affairs changed. Why? Has half the staff gone off on maternity leave? Were the remaining staff there told to cut costs (Did some boss say old people won't kick up a fuss anyway)? Did they never look at the stats produced from this organisation on the many increasing number of older people threatened with homelessness these last few years, AND those housed by HAAG worker's efforts in record time. Consumer Affairs is a state government department; Don't they care about people at risk? are we prepared to just look forward to this decline in their due process after the election...no matter which Party gains government; are we to just expect and accept this type of treatment? Will we all be happy to be dismissed as non consumers not needing their care and attention?

How long can we expect these people of HAAG to battle small minded political rulings and risky piecemeal funding on behalf of us, and all other aged people. People like us who are forced out of their now totally unaffordable housing to hope for a place in a retirement village, a NFP complex, a Caravan &/or Residential park, Public Housing, Social Housing, even a Boarding House situation.

All of you here today know, as do I, that there's plenty times we think we've had our day, fought other battles before now, maybe feel our old bones can do with a rest, let others can take my place now, etc etc. (Are you listening Molly?) And as we also know there's not one worker at HAAG who would complain on their own behalf, or would EVER judge us for not doing our bit. But it's time we did.

The ILU Group is small. We have been active for a several years now and sometimes people attend for a short while and then go back to sitting on their own couch I imagine. This Victorian

government needs to know what's needed next for our older people in relation to shelter and that we aren't just about couch sitting from now on. On days when we do promotion at railway stations, or in Bourke St Mall or such, and hand pamphlets to (mainly older) women who brush us off with 'oh no I own my own place', I think they are not so much sounding smug in a well groomed looking way as more amazed that anyone my age is spreading the word on protection from homelessness. In the main I feel they don't think there's any such risk to people our age and they imagine it is only pot smoking young males sleeping rough.

As volunteers we all need to use a bigger voice - not more volume just more voices; the voice of residents who will never get a truly fair deal while government ignores the need to clean up the RVA; while they ignore the need for intervention and training of residence managers, particularly in some ILUs and Caravan places; ignores the value of organisations like HAAG and the truth of the numbers of older people who are now Home At Last thanks to the good work of HAAG; ignores the lack of legal clarity and the need for ongoing specialist training for such legal people to exhibit skills relating to disputes resolution and advocacy.

Whichever Party government minister gets Aged Care, Human Services, or Consumer Affairs after November - and I URGE you all to be informed as to who he or she is when all the counting is done - we could challenge him/her to enshrine rights in the Act, the RVA. Really challenge the person to move beyond just monetary protection for cashed up residents and look at real concerns such as unsafe conditions due to the lack of maintenance, repairs and general living rights. Particularly look at neglected and aging establishments.

To get any state government interested and engaged we need to work at getting informed first ourselves and then by swelling the numbers in the various work groups at HAAG. Spreading information where we live, not to complain that paths are not swept, or people don't follow the rules in the communal laundry. The tsk tsk stuff that mounts up. Instead getting stuck into the big stuff, which is the rights of people not to be disregarded or at risk because they're older.

This is 2014, not blitz shattered London in 1940s. Homelessness then was a problem suffered by

many. Shamefully, shamefully, it is now a growing problem in this land of plenty and this beautiful state because the Victorian Government doesn't provide enough affordable housing. Many Victorians do not even know of this mounting housing crisis for many of the aged of the population. This election and the right to vote gives us an opportunity to be heard. It's up to us to make them listen on election day and beyond.

Phyll Williams

AGM Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2014