



500th
person
Housed and counting

volume 1, 2017

HOME & HOUSED

A special edition HAAG Newsletter celebrating the immense achievement of the Home at Last Service. Home at Last has housed 500 clients in long term, affordable, public and social housing since July 2012.



THE HAL SERVICE AND WHY IT WORKS

ONE STOP SHOP

Older people in housing stress need not go service to service seeking the help they need. We are well integrated with other services and continue to expand our networks so that people don't have to repeat their story or navigate a complex system alone. The unique structure of Home At Last means that new clients have access not only to housing information but also to specialist in-house services such as Tenancy Advice and Retirement Housing Information. This complete package can be the difference between a person maintaining their tenancy long enough to move into alternative accommodation and a person ending up on the street. Once a property is found, the client can be assisted to pack, move and set up their new home.

The Home at Last model is unique; integrated, personalised and holistic. And that's why it works.

FACE TO FACE SUPPORT

A lot of services are moving to providing information and access online, yet many older people do not have access to the internet or a computer or they find it difficult. People with additional barriers such as low income, disability or language find it even harder to access the support they need. Home at Last provides face-to-face drop-in and outreach support for older people. We understand that a friendly and familiar face for a person in housing stress is invaluable.

WE KNOW THE SYSTEM

Finding appropriate housing is complex and the last thing a person needs to navigate when in housing stress. Home at Last has over 30 years' experience in the field. We do all the hard work in searching, applying and advocating for each person. By knowing the eligibility criteria of different housing options and the general wait lists of areas, workers can work very effectively with people on what they want to ensure no time is wasted and no option is overlooked.

NO TIME LIMITS

Everyone's situation is unique and comes with its own set of constraints to work through if a suitable, long lasting housing outcome is to be found. There is therefore no limit to the time workers are able to spend with each person. Furthermore, people are invited to recontact the service if they experience problems in their new accommodation or need to relocate again.

BETTER HEALTH

Research recognises that secure and affordable housing is critical to the health & wellbeing of older people. Alan Morris in The Australian Dream - Housing Experiences of Older Australians, states "If an older person is in adequate, affordable and secure housing they have far greater capacity to maintain their health". Home at Last also understands that a person's health can limit their housing options, so this is always considered when making housing applications.

HALS UNIQUE HOLISTIC SERVICE



RELOCATION AND ONGOING SUPPORT

HAAG helps people physically move and set up their new home links them to local services and invites them to call back if needed.

OUTREACH HOUSING SUPPORT

One to One support through the Housing application process, attending offer interviews and providing support during relocation.



TENANCY ADVICE & SUPPORT

Specialist assistance available for renters who need to maintain their tenancy whilst they find alternate accommodation with HAL Outreach.



RETIREMENT HOUSING INFORMATION

Information and support available from a specialist worker for people in, or interested in various forms of retirement housing



INTAKE AND REFERRAL

One to One appointment to discuss client's unique circumstances and applicable options. Referrals for further support are made if required.



COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Targeted community ed. to CALD communities via bilingual workers in partnership with ethno-specific community groups & leaders



500TH CLIENT HOUSED



CASE STUDY: PELULALE FITU

Pelulale is 68 years old and was referred to our service for housing assistance by the Office of Housing, Sunshine. At the time of referral Pelulale had been on the public housing waiting list for 23 years.

Pelulale was living in a bungalow at the rear of a family member's home. He had been there for many years but as his health was beginning to fade this accommodation was becoming increasingly unsuitable, it was also too far from his medical services and the situation was negatively impacting on his health.

Due to his age, low income and health issues, notably requirement of a hip replacement, it was difficult for Pelulale to find alternative housing without any support. Our outreach service started working with Pelulale in September 2016 and we are pleased to say he moved into his new home in November 2016. Here are some of his comments on his journey to long term housing.



THE EMOTIONAL TOLL

When I lived in the bungalow I was always worried about what was going to happen to me if my family were forced to move from their private rental accommodation. I was also worried that I might be impacting on my son and daughter in law's relationship, whilst it is a cultural practice in Samoa to have generations living together it isn't in Australia and I wanted to respect my children's relationship by giving them space without me.

This worry led to a lot of health problems and I was always at the Doctor's, almost certainly once a week but often twice. Since moving my health has improved dramatically, so much so I haven't had the need to go to the Doctor's in over two months.



AT A GLANCE

Age: 68

Housing before: Bungalow

Housing after: Public Housing

EDITORS NOTE

Lengthy waitlists for public housing is a well-known problem across the country, with many eligible people waiting for decades to be housed. Our service can assist older people access public housing more quickly thanks to the Victorian priority system and our worker's advocacy, skills and knowledge

'Thank you for everything, having a home of my own has been life changing, the only thing I have to worry about here is what tomorrow's weather will be like'.



WHAT SECURE HOUSING MEANS TO ME

Having my new home means I can finally settle and never have to worry about being forced to move on again. It also means being charged a reasonable rent that I am able to pay from my pension. As I am getting older, being independent is very important to me and for the first time in my life I have a place on my own where I am in complete control of my life. Being securely housed is a wonderful feeling of freedom.

WHAT WAS THE HARDEST THING TO DEAL WITH?

My family and I came from Samoa to Australia in 1993. At first getting a private rental place was not too hard because I was always able to find work. Then the down turn in employment happened and this forced us to move many times. Each time seemed to get worse in terms of more expensive rent, and the properties were always in poor condition. During this time my health also deteriorated to the point that I could no longer work and in 2009 we were eventually evicted. The eviction led to me being black listed by landlords, and my son and I were forced to live in all kinds of unsafe and insecure situations, This was just terrible and it affected me very badly. When I first came to Australia I was advised to apply for a Ministry of Housing property and every year I would check in with them to see if they had anything for me, They always said no and that I would just have to keep waiting.



HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW?

I am so very happy here, **every day I breathe easier**. Since coming from Samoa in 1993, this is the first time I have had a permanent home on my own. Living here means I don't have any more worries. I love the unit, it is very modern, clean and the rooms are very spacious. The estate is very quiet and close to public transport and shops. My neighbors are all friendly and everyone looks out for each other, I couldn't have wished for anything better.

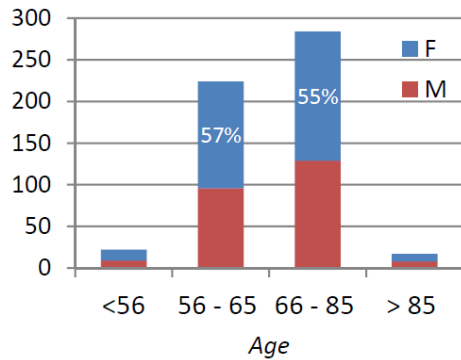


WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEONE IN YOUR SITUATION?

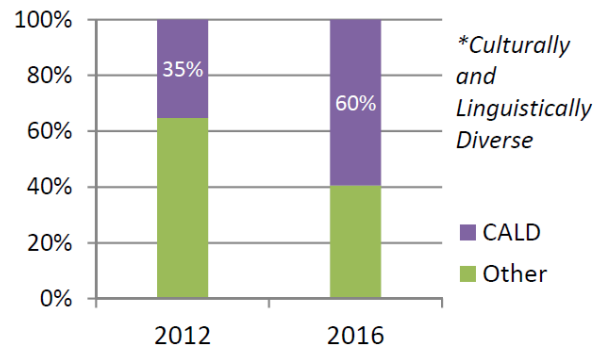
I see many people at my local shopping center who don't have anywhere to go so I now hand out the Home at Last brochures and tell them to get in touch as help is available. When I talk to people about their situation they don't believe there is help out there but I tell them I was on the public housing waiting list for 23 years and finally with help I was housed. Hopefully they take my advice and Home at Last get more and more calls!

DATA FOR ALL CLIENTS HOUSED JULY 2012 - JANUARY 2017

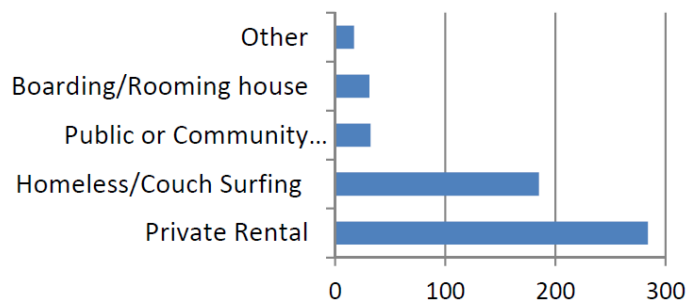
Age & sex of housed clients



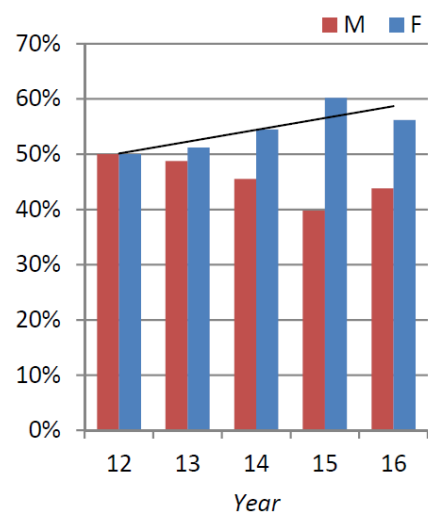
Ratio of total CALD* clients by year



Clients living situation before housing



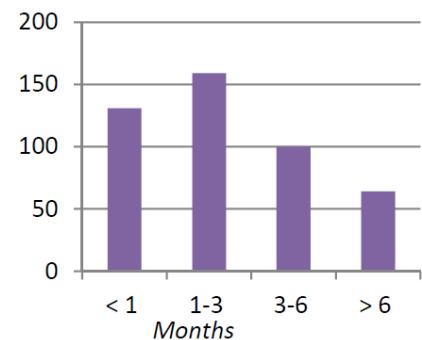
Gender of housed clients



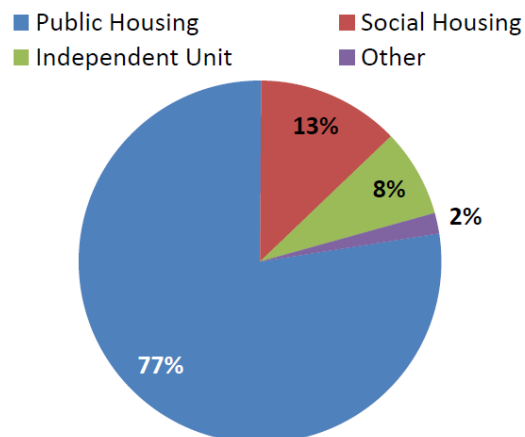
Source of Income for housed clients

Age pension	262
Disability support pension (Centrelink)	113
Newstart allowance	93
Carer Payments	19
Other government pensions and allowances	18
Nil income or pension	12
Service/Disability pensions (DVA)	12
Employment income	10
Other income	10

Time to rehouse clients



Client living situation after rehousing



Clients' main reason for seeking housing assistance

Housing Crisis	200
Inappropriate dwelling conditions	141
Housing affordability stress	119
All other (9)	89

*data for all CALD clients for period, not just those housed.



LJUBA JOVANOVSKA

Age: 62

Language: Macedonian (interpreter used)

Housing before: Rooming House **Housing after:** Public Housing

Ljuba is 62 years old and was referred to us by a family violence worker at In Touch Multicultural Family Violence service. Ljuba came from overseas in 2011 and spoke little English, she was experiencing family violence perpetrated

by her husband. In Touch assisted her with intervention orders and temporary accommodation. However, she was placed in a rooming house which was unsuitable for her both because of the accommodation type and because of the behavior of a number of other residents. During this time she also had to deal with her income being suspended by Centrelink. After 2 months of working with Ljuba she was housed in her new home. Here are some of her comments on her journey to safe housing.

WHAT WAS THE HARDEST THING TO DEAL WITH?

Having to leave my home and then live in a shared situation with strangers. The whole time I stayed there I didn't feel safe and I barely slept. The rooming house I was placed in was on the outskirts of Melbourne and I found this very difficult. I really missed the supports I had in my local area and found it difficult to get to the many appointments I needed to have at this time. I was very worried about how long I would have to stay in that temporary arrangement and this only added to the health problems I was experiencing.

HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW?

I think I have a long way to go to recover from the trauma I have experienced but I am feeling very happy and safe in my new home. Moving to my unit I feel like I have a new start at life. My unit is very nice and I have been able to set it up just as I like. I have been able to establish a garden out the front and back of the unit, I have planted it out with vegetables and flowers and it is now looking very attractive. Many people stop out the front and comment on how wonderful it looks. This has been a nice way of meeting neighbours. I work in my garden everyday and I am finding this very therapeutic.

EDITORS NOTE

Home at Last receives around 7 referrals a month for people experiencing elder abuse/family violence. Temporary or refuge accommodation is often the only choice for women fleeing family violence, however, it is often unsuitable for older women. Ljuba's story illustrates how important long-term and secure accommodation is to enable women to recover from traumatic family violence and begin to rebuild their lives in safety. It also demonstrates the importance of services working together to assist people, especially those from CALD backgrounds, who may need additional support to access services.



QINHUI XUE

Age: 70

Language: Mandarin (Interpreter used)

Housing before: Rooming House **Housing after:** Public Housing

Qinhui is 70 years old and was referred to us by Chinese Social Services for housing support due to end of private rental lease and inability to secure alternative accommodation. Qinhui came from China in 2014 and

speaks little English. She had been transient for a while following a relationship breakdown with family who she originally lived with when she came to Australia. Qinhui moved between friends and family members' homes until she found private rental. At the time of referral Qinhui's lease had ended and she had been couch surfing before securing what she describes as a dangerous rooming house. Her income is a Widow's Allowance as she has not been in Australia long enough to claim age pension, and she has only fair health and mobility. Qinhui moved into her new home five months after being referred to us. Below are some of her comments on what she experienced on the way to being housed.

WHAT WAS THE HARDEST THING TO DEAL WITH?

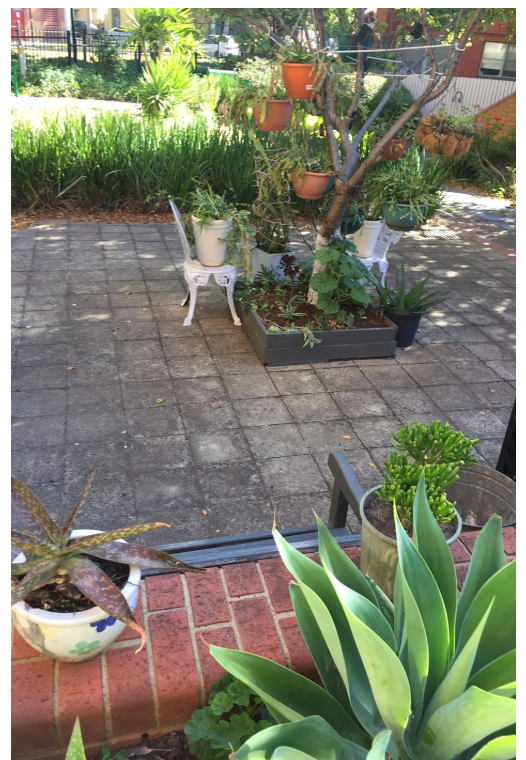
The insecurity of not having a place of my own and having to rely on other people for shelter, some days I did not know where I was going to sleep that night. Since arriving in Australia in 2014 I have needed to move many times and every time the situation I ended up in was worse than the time before. The last place I stayed in was a rooming house, I never felt safe there particularly as there were younger men living there. I was so stressed about my housing and would cry all the time; I could not see how I would ever be safe and happy again. My despair led to me having many health problems and my doctor put me on many medications, something I never thought would happen to me as I am a strong person.

HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW?

I am very happy in my new home and now feel I have a future. My flat is lovely and I really like the area, it is very close to public transport, shopping and other services I need. Many people on the estate are Mandarin speaking and I have made new friends. The thing I cherish most is being completely independent and not relying on any one else for somewhere to sleep at night, this is a great relief and for the first time in 3 years I am completely happy.

EDITORS NOTE

HAL attempt to find homes for people in areas where they have social supports. This is even more important in communities where people have migrated recently to Australia. Having somewhere to live that is safe and secure and where there are people who speak your language is essential to the well-being of many of our CALD clients.





DON WOLLARD

Age: 58

Language: English

Housing before: Air B&B **Housing after:** Public Housing

Don is 58 years old and self referred into the service after looking on the internet for help. Don found himself living in temporary accommodation after a number of mental

health episodes. He had previously lived with his family but his continuing ill health caused him to leave. Don tried to sustain himself in private rental for a while, and even jumped around hotel rooms selling his belongings to pay the room charges. As Dons health continued to deteriorate he found himself homeless.

WHAT WAS THE HARDEST THING TO DEAL WITH?

Due to my ill health I could not access any form of permanent and less expensive accommodation than the bed & breakfast. It was so very expensive and took up practically all of my income. I was terrified of ending up on the streets if I could not keep paying. It was all so unrealistic and the stress further compounded my health issues.

HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW?

I can't really believe I am here and this is on two fronts; the first is, I couldn't have imagined my life would spiral out of control to the point where I was homeless and would have ever ended up in public housing. But the second is, I have been so pleasantly surprised at the standard of accommodation and I am really pleased to be living here.

The flat is spacious enough for me to make it a home, and even though I live in a hi-rise the environment is really nice, all the people I have met here are friendly and helpful. There is another resident here who has taken it upon himself to create the most beautiful garden. It gives me and the other tenants a real sense of peace sitting down there. It gives me peace of mind knowing that I have a place I can afford and a home that supports me, particularly when I am unwell.



EDITORS NOTE

Many older people are struggling in private rental paying ever-increasing rents and leaving little money left over to live on, forcing people to live day to day. When a private tenancy can't be sustained, people may find themselves having to rely on friends, family or temporary accommodation. This is problematic if there are also mental health or other health issues impacting on a person's life, and this may unexpectedly lead to a housing crisis.

Public housing provides a secure place to live where rent is only 25% of income, giving peace of mind and an improved quality of life which contributes to mental and physical well being.

PIN CAO & KEI REN SHI

Age: 79 & 80

Language: Mandarin (Interpreter used)

Housing before: Homeless **Housing after:** Public Housing

Pin is 79 & her husband Kei is 80. Pin & Kei were referred to our service by Royal District Nursing homelessness program. Pin and Kei required access to both transitional accommodation and long-term housing. The couple had been living in Australia for a few years and had limited supports in place as well as not understanding how the housing system in Victoria worked. Neither of them spoke any English adding to their barriers to accessing appropriate services. Once supported by our service we successfully secured transitional housing, however it was a bedsit and the transitional housing manager would only allow one of them to stay there. Kia moved into the bed sit and Pin stayed at a refuge where she was volunteering. Pin did not have a room of her own at the refuge and slept on a fold up bed in the Nun's office. The couple received their permanent housing offer some ten months after commencing support. These are Pin's comments on their housing journey.

WHAT WAS THE HARDEST THING TO DEAL WITH?

Before coming to our new home we were separated a lot of the time as we could not find accommodation for two people. I was volunteering at a refuge the Nun's were running, mainly cooking and cleaning, in exchange for this work they let me sleep in their office. As it was a refuge, Kia could not stay there and he stayed at a couple of rooming houses run by people in the Chinese community. One of the really terrible things that happened during his stay was someone assaulted him and he was badly injured. I was very fearful of him being on his own and us not being able to look out for each other, we were both constantly worried about the future and if we would ever have any where to be safe and secure.

HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW?

I am so glad we have our own home and that we will never be forced to live apart again. We are both so happy here, even though it is an older flat we have two bedrooms and it is very spacious. We live within a large Chinese community which makes everything for us much easier. We are enjoying our independence and feel we have a very secure future.

EDITORS NOTE

Home at Last consistently has 50-60% of clients from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, many of whom have very low levels of English and find it difficult to get information about where to go for help. The Home at Last workers are very experienced in using interpreters and helping older people from CALD backgrounds navigate the complex service system. This story also highlights the need for more two bedroom housing stock. Pin and Kei needed two bedrooms for health reasons - this is very common for older couples- and so they had to wait longer to be housed before something was available for them.



TERENCE THOMAS

Age group: 55-65

Language: English

Housing before: Private Rental **Housing after:** Public Housing

Terrence presented to service with an eviction notice for rent arrears. He was on a low income (due to personal reasons) which was not enough to cover his high rent. Our tenancy worker Shane advocated for Terrence over a period of 1.5 years to help him maintain his tenancy, whilst our

outreach team worked with Terrence to find alternative housing. Over this period Shane represented Terrence at VCAT 3 times over attempts to evict him and also during a change over of real estate agents. HAAG paid a portion of Terrence's arrears to ensure he was not evicted until he had somewhere to go. After Terrence had spent all his super paying his rent he was then eligible for social/public housing. Anne worked with Terrence over 7 months and made three housing applications. Due to Terrence's fluctuating income, his eligibility for public housing changed and Anne had to work to have Terrence's early housing status appealed. This was successful and Terrence was eventually offered a public housing unit where he could stay for life and only ever pay 25% of his income in rent. Shane and Anne both helped Terrence move into his new property with the assistance of a removalist and purchased whitegoods to set him up.

WHAT WAS THE HARDEST THING TO DEAL WITH?

The hardest thing was probably being in this silly grey area – a black hole- where I didn't earn enough to keep up with the rent but earnt too much to be eligible for public housing. I had to pay the rent somehow or else I'd be homeless, so I had to access and use up all of my superannuation. That was scary- that is meant to be your lifeline not for a landlord! Still, even as I did this they kept trying to evict me. Once I wasted all of that I was then eligible for Public Housing and Anne could step in and start helping with that. It seems so ridiculous that I couldn't just apply sooner.

HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW?

I have certainty. I am here for good. I can pay the rent. I don't have bullying real estate agents sending me notice after notice. HAAG has worked tirelessly to get me a good accommodation to improve my lifestyle and my health. This was a tremendous achievement from Shane and Anne and all of the staff at HAAG who have supported me unconditionally. HAAG was constantly in touch with me to ensure I was in good shape during this stressful time.

Now I'm on a super highway!

EDITORS NOTE

Having an in-house tenancy service working along side our housing service -and the brokerage to help Terrence with rent arrears- kept Terrence off the street whilst his housing applications were processed. This had a significant impact of course on Terrence but also on services that would have otherwise had to support him had he become homeless.

“Terence always believes that you can't keep a good man down”.

If you or someone you know needs housing support or housing information for older people call Home at Last on 1300 765 178



THE ENTIRE HAAG TEAM*

L-R: Melis, Tegan, Fiona, Anne, Gemma, April, Jeff, Maria, Naomi, Crystal, Aoife. *Absent: Ani, Shanny, Shane, Chloe.

Housing for the Aged Action Group is the only Australian organisation specialised in the housing needs of older people.

HAAG is committed to finding long term solutions to the housing crisis facing older Australians and are actively involved in the review of government legislation.

Home at Last -HAAGs client service program- provides practical support to those seeking an appropriate, affordable home and those having issues with their current tenancy, across all housing types.

In 2015 HAAG won the Victorian Homelessness Achievement Award for Excellence in Ending Homelessness Among Older People.

HAAG would like to recognise the generous client brokerage funders: StreetSmart Australia, Lord Mayors Charitable Foundation & the Department of Health & Human Services. HAAG commend these funders for recognising the importance of financial assistance in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

The Services of Home at Last and Housing for the Aged Action Group are funded by the Department of Health & Human Services, Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Commonwealth Department of Health.

Housing for the Aged Action Group

1st Floor, Ross House
247-251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000
www.older tenants.org.au
03 9654 7389 OR 1300 765 178

