



older tenants voice

Housing for the Aged Action Groups Quarterly Newsletter Summer 2020



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP

FIGHTING FOR HOUSING JUSTICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE SINCE 1983





Dear members,

Welcome to the final HAAG newsletter for 2020 and what a year it has been.

Obviously our year has been dominated by COVID-19, but its now been more than a month with no more reported infections or deaths from that dreaded virus. Well done to all our members, and everyone else who did Victoria proud with compliance and helping where needed. To the front line workers and all who continued to be of service in whatever role requested of them we say,

CONGRATULATIONS! We will never be able to thank you all enough.

End of year also brought us to the HAAG Annual General Meeting (AGM). How wonderful it was to see so many people at our first ever Online AGM . There was no lovely afternoon tea afterwards but smiling faces made up for that. To the 52 people who attended - and the kind apologies from others unavoidably detained - THANK YOU!

We covered a lot of ground on the day including farewelling two of our well respected, long term Committee of Management (CoM) members, Vicki Gutsjahr and Sue Marino, who will stay to help as a Community Advisor. Vicki will continue to attend sub committee meetings as a committed attendee. Two new committee members, Hoda Nahal and Andrew Rogers have stepped up as the new CoM members and will share their admirable background experience and knowledge. Another asset to the CoM will be Margaret O'Loughlin as a second Community Advisor, again with a wealth of knowledge and working experience in matters of Aged Care and Housing.

We also introduced two of HAAG's people who presented their written research papers. Leonie Bessant, a busy HAAG NASH coordinator has produced a well presented work of the voices of older persons at risk of homelessness, mainly older women. This document shows the resilience of women who are too often ignored in their need and beset with ongoing neglect.

Claire Hurren, as an academic research student at HAAG produced a most readable document comparing public housing and community housing. Her findings show that there are significant differences between both types of social housing for tenants needing to exercise their rights

The recent announcement of the Big Housing Build by the State Government is a great investment long overdue. The media jumped on Social Housing Builds as a headline without going into too much research. Claire's document and other researcher's writings point to a need for more analysis of details for transparency of exactly what is to be built.

We rounded this year off to date with a most comprehensive Annual Report of the HAAG activities 2019 - 2020. Well done to all the staff,volunteers, students that keep HAAG running and achieving so much during this difficult year.

Merry Christmas and a safe NEW Year to all. Phyll Williams



Thankfully, due to changing our constitution last year, our rules allow us to meet “virtually” using technology which means for the first time we held our Annual General Meeting online, on the 25 November 2020.

Before the meeting, we asked our members what prevents them from joining online meetings, and offered assistance to people who may be unfamiliar with Zoom or not own a smart phone. Luckily, even with a landline, you can still join the meeting and it was great to see a number of people dialing in.

We had 55 people attend the meeting, 27 members, 8 non-members and 18 staff. Our chairperson Phyll Williams did a fantastic job of chairing the meeting, and Kris Spark presented the Treasurer’s Report on behalf of our treasurer Peter Sibly who was an apology (due to the Big Housing Stimulus announcement made by the State Government that week). We re-appointed our auditor and were pleased to see we are in a strong financial position.

We farewelled two of our Committee members – Vicky Gutsjhar and Sue Marino. Vicky Gutsjhar has been a member of HAAG since 2009 and has served as both Chairperson and Secretary at various times. We thanked her for her service and Vicky will remain involved in the Retirement Accommodation Action Group (formerly ILU and CARPAV). Sue Marino is the daughter of founding HAAG member Molly Hadfield and joined the Committee in 2017. She will remain involved as a Committee Advisor on the finance sub-Committee.

As well as the official business of the AGM, we released two new reports – one comparing the rights of tenants in public and community housing and the other a selection of stories from our National Alliance of Seniors for Housing. You can read more about those reports in this newsletter.

INTRODUCING NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

We filled the two casual vacancies on the Committee and welcomed a new Committee advisor into the group.



Andrew Rogers is a semi-retired educator and trainer who currently works in the field of diversity and inclusion. He is also active in his commitment to improving the wellbeing of older LGBTIQ people. As a trainer with Val's LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care, Andrew has a developed understanding of the needs and supports necessary to ensure the healthy ageing of older people in the LGBTI community.

Andrew is a volunteer speaker for Beyond Blue, which allows him to speak of his lived experiences of suicidality and mental health conditions. He is also a member of the Thorne Harbour Suicide Prevention Project consumer advisory group and a participant in this year's Victorian Government/Leadership Victoria LGBTIQ Emerging Leaders program.

Andrew's prior professional experience as a banker and as a university lecturer adds to his capacity to contribute to the direction and activities of community organizations such as HAAG.

Hoda Nahal is a qualified mental health social worker with over 30 years experience. She joined HAAG as a bilingual community education volunteer and delivered information sessions to older people in Arabic speaking and Assyrian and Chaldean groups. Her understanding of and links to the Arabic speaking communities has been invaluable in providing housing information to them.



In 2018, Hoda joined the Cultural Diversity Working Group at HAAG and has made a significant contribution to this group. She continued to volunteer for HAAG in the Aged Care System Navigator project, conducting home visits and delivering information in Arabic and English, and providing support and debriefing to other volunteers.



Margaret O'Loughlin has worked in the Commonwealth and Victorian public service as a senior manager. Her roles have covered statistical consultancy, strategic planning and program management including Aged Care planning and community programs. She became a Social Worker for the last 12 years of her working life and worked in the homeless sector as a housing worker and case manager. Her professional qualifications are Bachelor of Economics and Politics, Graduate Diploma in Urban Sociology and Master of Social Work.

Since retiring she has done volunteer work at Sacred Heart Mission, ASRC, West Welcome Wagon and HAAG, and been on the Committee of Management of Yarraville Community Centre, the City of Maribyrnong Older Persons Reference Group and COTA's Policy Committee.

She is passionate about social justice and the rights of Older Australians including members of the LGBTIQ community.

At our AGM we released a report comparing the experiences of tenants who live in public housing with those who live in community housing. This research was based on 18 interviews with members and clients of HAAG. Many thanks for those who volunteered their time for this research.

We compared the regulatory frameworks of housing owned and managed by the State Government, with housing managed by not-for-profit community housing providers.

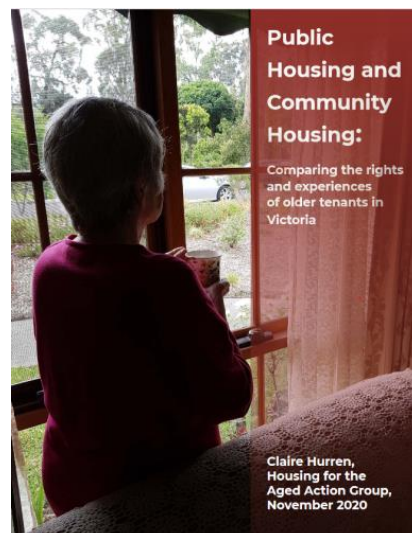
Key findings included:

- Community Housing Providers often lack fairness and transparency in their allocation processes, and appear to discriminate against prospective tenants on the basis of income, health requirements, accessibility needs and assumptions about a person's character.
- Community Housing Providers rent setting policy and amounts can be unclear and poorly understood by tenants
- Inconsistent and unclear communication of rights and responsibilities regarding rent, maintenance and modifications in community housing compared with public housing
- A reluctance by community housing providers to allow modifications for accessibility and needs due to costs
- Chronic lack of housing supply across the board.
- Overall gratitude for securing social housing that leads to a fear of making complaints

This report follows the recent announcement of significant Victorian State government funding for social housing. The announcement includes funding for community housing providers to manage state-owned housing, and building of new community housing on state-owned land.

We welcome the recognition of the need for serious investment in housing both as an economic stimulus and as a long-term health solution for older Victorians. However our report demonstrates that the decision to transfer existing Public Housing to Community Housing not based on evidence of better outcomes for tenants.

The full report is available online at oldertenants.org.au/sites/default/files/comparing_the_rights_and_experiences_of_older_tenants_in_victoria.pdf



We are drawing to the end of this project. Our funding from the Wicking Trust concludes on 31 December 2020. With Wicking's support over the last five years, we have:

- grown awareness of the increasing number of older people facing homelessness in Australia – there is broader community awareness now than there was 5 years ago;
- built the evidence base – working with Dr Debbie Faulkner, now at the University of South Australia, we have produced research on homelessness trends for older people and the service system in each State and Territory;
- established networks of older people with lived experience and coalitions of service providers and other stakeholders around the country; and,
- we've established HAAG as the go-to organisation on older people and homelessness in Australia.

We have applied for further funding from Wicking to continue this work with a focus on establishing specialist services for older people in each State and Territory informed by people with lived experience of homelessness. We await the outcome of this funding application.

Since the last newsletter, we have launched research on homelessness trends for older people in Victoria and Tasmania. Kobi presented at the *Women in Super Roadshow: The Housing Crisis facing Australian Women* and the *Shadow Ministers Older Women's Homelessness Forum*, on behalf of the Ageing on the Edge NSW Forum.

The Ageing on the Edge NSW Forum now comprises 30 people and organisations advocating for the housing needs of low-income older people. The Forum met in October to discuss advocacy tactics for the next 12 months and to hear sector updates from Homelessness NSW and Sue Cripps about the *CHIA NSW Working with Older Tenants Toolkit*.

The Housing Older Women Movement, convened by Queensland Shelter, continues to meet regularly. The movement has two active working groups, focusing on housing supply and establishing a specialist service for older women based on the HAAG Home at Last model. Letters were sent to most candidates in the Queensland election requesting urgent action on behalf of older women at risk of and experiencing homelessness. Focus is now being placed on following up with the relevant newly appointed Ministers.

The Ageing on the Edge coordination group in Western Australia met in late November and confirmed its continued commitment to working together for the purposes of sharing information and advocating for the housing needs of older people in Western Australia. The COTA South Australia Housing Roundtable was also held in late November and similarly renewed commitment to advocating to the housing needs of low income older people.





The National Alliance of Seniors for Housing is waiting for the announcement of the continuation of the Ageing on the Edge project to see what shape NASH will take in 2021. Meanwhile Kobi Maglen is taking the reins from Leonie Bessant. Here are the latest stories from there members who have lived experiences of housing stress and homelessness.

Mary's Story*

Mary's story collected by Western Australian NASH member Wendy Morris as part of her involvement with the Connect with Home" project).*

Mary married in 2005. During her marriage she worked in her husband's business without pay. Mary also experienced domestic violence during this period. Mary's contribution to the business, allowed them to save for a deposit and they eventually bought a house. The house was in her husband's name as Mary was still in the process of applying for permanent residence and Australian citizenship. She has now been successful and is an Australian citizen.

In 2016 her husband started a relationship with another woman. Mary left the family home to live in a rented room and the other woman moved into the home. Eventually the home was sold at a loss and Mary did not receive any financial benefit. Mary's husband moved into a rental and became very ill. His relationship with the woman also broke down. Mary became his carer for 18 months, although not living with him. He eventually moved interstate in February this year to live with family.

After living on a Carer's Pension, Mary is now living on Job Search. She is aged 64 and her knees are injured from all the lifting she had to do caring for her husband. She is still living in a single room as this is all she can afford on Job Search. The landlord's family frequently have grandchildren to stay which creates a lot of noise, forcing Mary to leave to get some peace and quiet. She does not have access to a fridge, therefore she cannot keep her food fresh. Mary says she "has a lot of restrictions as to the usage of water,

power etc and she has to eat in her room.”

During this time Mary’s mental health has suffered significantly and she has been diagnosed and treated for deep depression.

Mary is involved with the “Connect with Home” project which is funded by a grant from the WA Government’s Department of Communities. The project is run by Connect Victoria Park, a not for profit affordable housing organisation. Through this project Mary has received help to prepare her application for priority listing with the State Housing Authority. Although the priority list is long (some 2,000 applicants), Mary is hopeful she will be successful soon and have a safe, secure affordable place to live.

Mary says she, “hopes the government will do more for older vulnerable women trying so hard to secure affordable and secure housing.” She is very keen to have her story communicated to government and to the wider community in the hope that it will contribute to much needed policy changes in the affordable housing sector and the Job Search payment scheme.

Postscript; Mary has just been offered and accepted a public housing unit in a seniors’ complex. This was a direct result of her involvement in the “Connect with Home” project.

Carol’s Story

Seventy-three-year-old Carol * has moved five times in four years, shifting from one ‘studio’ to another in her idyllic township in costal northern NSW. Apart from being famous for Bryon Bay, her region is well known for a range of illegal dwellings, additions, sub-divisions, and converted garages (Shand, 2020), with tiny illegal conversions under houses being euphemistically called ‘studios’ where tenants often cannot claim government rent allowance as landlords will not declare the income or the dwelling, and few people have leases. Airbnb is another factor that affects the rental market, by increasing prices and removing properties from long term rental.

Carol loves her current studio; it is the roomiest she has had and has a beautiful garden and views. The owner said she could stay for a couple of years but Carol hopes that will be longer as there is another studio on the property were the tenant has been for 9 years. Carol pays \$600 a fortnight rent from her \$1085 pension, which is 55% of her income. The landlady does not declare rent she receives which means Carol cannot claim rent allowance. “As long as I shut my mouth and be as invisible as possible, I might hang on here”.

Carol must run a car as she is ten minutes’ drive from the nearest shop. As she has no superannuation or savings, Carol is very careful with money. Gardening is very



important to Carol; a low expense and the inspiration for her artwork. She never eats out or has coffee. One thing that she really enjoys that is free is the numerous festivals and markets in her region, but because of COVID all these things were on hold. She was at times extremely lonely, not seeing anyone, apart from her daughter, for weeks. Her daughter, who works full time and is a single mother, rents in town and has just been given notice for the end of the COVID eviction moratorium, the owners keen to cash in on the real estate boom that is being experienced by their town and the region. Since COVID restrictions have eased there has been a strong resurgence of demand for holiday rentals. Byron Shire holiday rentals were up 150 per cent reaching pre-COVID levels, and prices for holiday rentals across Australia had increased by 60 per cent since the beginning of the pandemic (Kelly, 2020). “Everyone is talking about how every house that is for sale is snapped up by someone from Melbourne or Sydney for a holiday house or an Airbnb, sight unseen. My daughter and I have both looked for rentals and there is simply nothing, not a thing for local renters”.

Carol was keen to tell me about a new Facebook page for local women renters that has just sprung up in response to this latest housing crisis; Women’s Village Northern Rivers FB page has gotten over 600 members in a couple of days. “We have to do something. No one else is helping us”.

*Names are pseudonyms

Kelly, M. (July 9th, 2020). Special Report – short term rentals bounce back, Byron Bay leads the way. Travel Trends . <https://www.traveltrends.biz/ttn55-Special+Report+-+decimated%2C+smashed+and+challenged+during+the+COVID+crisis%2C+short+term+rentals+bounce+back%2C+Byron+Bay+leads+the+way>

Shand, A. (2020). Exploring the risks of illegal dwellings. Echo. <https://www.echo.net.au/2020/09/exploring-the-risks-of-illegal-dwellings/>

Australian Government (2019). Domestic and sexual violence. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Family. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence>

National Shelter (2018). *Disrupted: The consumer experience of renting in Australia*. National Shelter, The National Association of Tenant Organisations (NATO) and Choice.

Get in touch with NASH by email at leonie.bessant@oldertenants.org.au, write to us at HAAG, 247-251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000, and find the previous editions of our newsletter at oldertenants.org.au/nash



Welcome Rebecca Cook, who's taken on the unenviable task of filling in for Gemma in the Community Development Worker role while Gemma is on...



Maternity leave! Huge congratulations for Gemma White on the birth of her new baby Matteo!

We had news from our former Retirement Housing worker Shanny Gordon, who is now working on a project called 'Compassionate Communities'.

A compassionate community is one where community members support each other through terminal and life limiting illness, grief, bereavement, ageing and caregiving at the end of life.

Shanny is inviting people to share what matters most to them as a community member when it comes to ageing, dying, caregiving and grieving.

They want to hear about your experiences accessing and using end of life supports and services in the City of Melbourne, the City of Yarra, or the City of Hume. These can be

formal or informal networks and supports you have experienced.

Whether you are living with a terminal or life limiting illness yourself, you are a caregiver, a support group or service, whether you are grieving or are interested in planning well for this life stage - they want to hear from you.

What end of life supports and services are available?

What informal social networks have you engaged with to receive support?

To find out more or share your story, get in touch with Shanny at

info@thegroundswellproject.com



December



17

Volunteers and Members Christmas Party!

Despite not being able to meet in person, we can still let our hair down and party, celebrating the end of a very long year! Come with your most festive hair arrangement or head-wear, and join in the trivia quiz starting at 11:30

17th of December

11-12:30 pm

To join the meeting, download Zoom on your device and go to

oldertenants.org.au/party

Or join in on your phone by calling

03 7018 2005

End of year opening hours

Our office in Ross House remains closed for the moment. We are still working from home, but can be reached during business hours on 96547389, and at haag@oldertenants.org.au.

We're taking a holiday break from Christmas Day on the 25th until the 4th of January. Wishing everyone a fun and safe summer and a happy new year!

If you're having a housing crisis during this period you can call 1800 825 955 to get in touch with your local homelessness service .

With the easing of restrictions, we are looking forward for the office to open up again as soon as possible in the New Year.

December



25

ANOTHER 'HOME AT LAST'

Vesna became homeless after her private rental property became far too expensive on her income and it was no longer a viable option as a single person. Private rental was far too unaffordable even with the part-time employment she had at the time.

She had little choice but to leave her tenancy and live between the homes of friends and relatives on a temporary basis. Many of the properties she was couchsurfing at were public housing properties, meaning she could only stay for a maximum of 2/3 days to avoid jeopardising the tenancies of her friends and family.

Vesna was exhausted and anxious all the time – worrying about where she will be staying next and stressed about her health issues which were becoming worse as a result of moving around so much.

The future of her housing was unpredictable – and at the age of 53 years old, she was not considered eligible for elderly housing stock which is reserved for those aged 55 and over.

Vesna soon got in touch with Home At Last service where she was assisted with upgrading her existing application on the Victorian Housing Register to Homeless with Support category. She was also supported with a letter to be considered for elderly housing, due to her health issues. Her application was approved soon after and she was placed on the priority housing list.

As Vesna's mother was already residing in public housing, where she wished to be

close to her to provide practical and social support. The housing worker who was responsible for the units she was residing at was contacted and advised that Vesna has a current housing application and in urgent need for housing in the local area to be close to her mother.

After 12 months of waiting for housing, Vesna received a housing offer – on the same block of units as her mother. Vesna said that as soon as she was advised of the news of the housing offer she cried tears of relief and happiness.

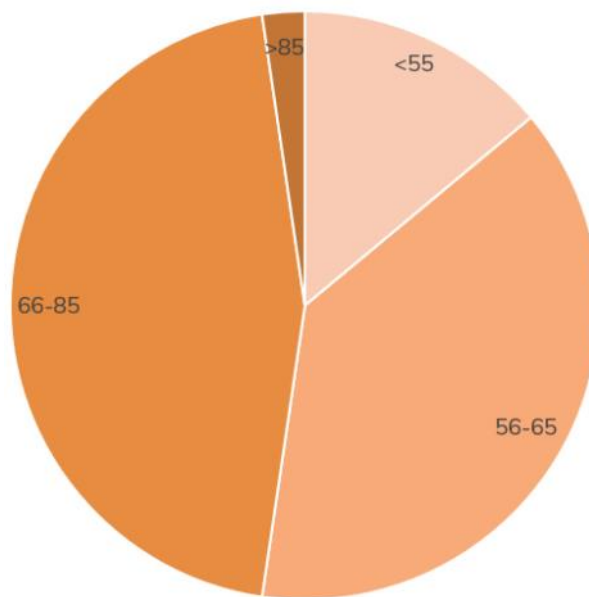
Vesna is now housed in a lovely block of elderly units in Melbourne's north and couldn't be happier – quoted: 'It's like I've won the Lotto'.

Vesna moved in last month and is very house proud and has settled into her new home well with some household items provided with the support of Home At Last. She

Her next goal is to work on the small patch of garden at her property and plant a lemon tree and some veggies!



Age of Clients we support



Although most clients are between the ages of 55 and 85, we are sometimes able to assist people like Vesna who are under the age of 55.

AGED CARE SERVICE NAVIGATOR TRIAL

The Navigator Pilot is a nationwide program initiated by the federal government to provide easy to understand information on supports available that enable older people to continue to live independently in their own homes for longer.

It provides information, explains the process, and sits with or supports people to contact My Aged Care to apply. If required, the Navigator can submit the request to My Aged Care for you.

Navigators can speak to you, your community group, or group of friends in the following languages:

- Arabic
- Assyrian
- Bosnian
- Cantonese
- Croatian
- English
- Hindi
- Mandarin
- Punjabi

If you want to know more about it, please call us on (03) 9654 7389 at HAAG (Housing Assistance for the Aged Action Group). We'd love to hear from you!

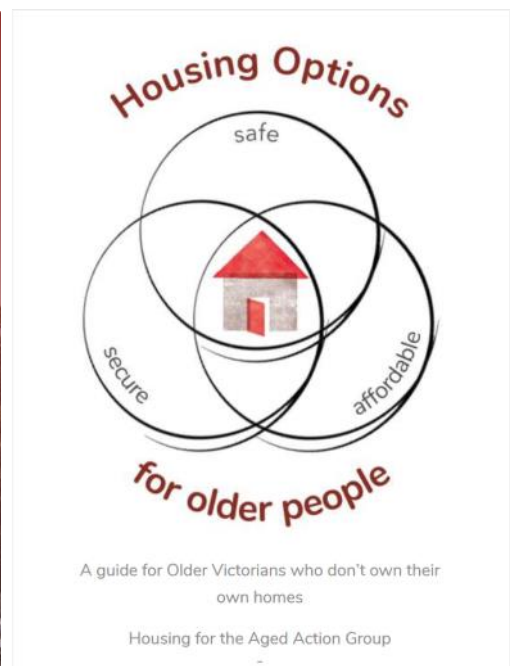
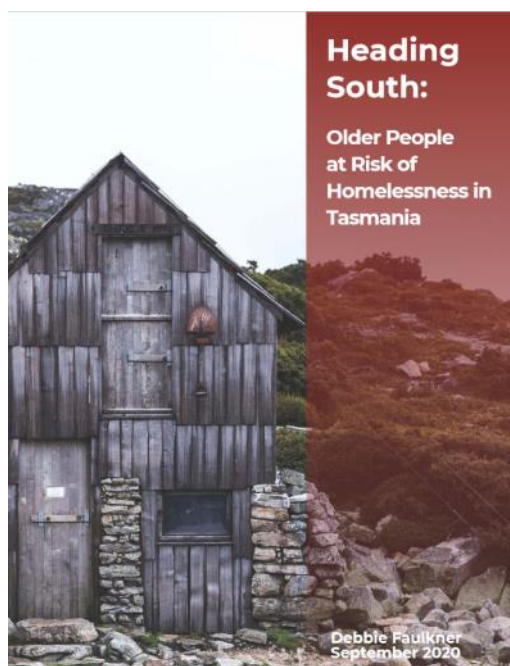
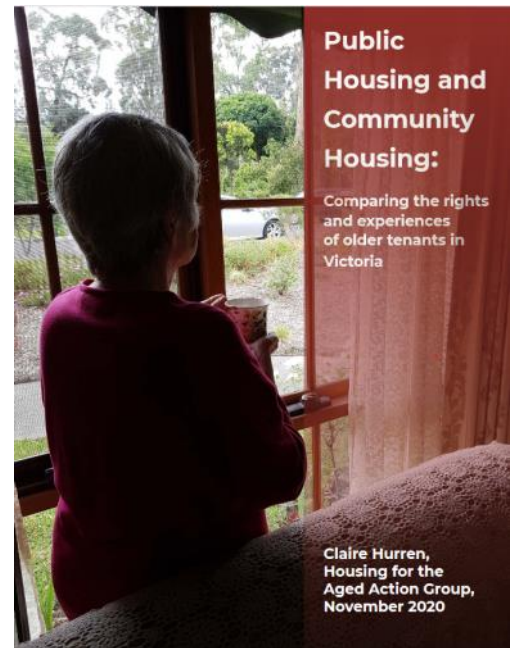
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

It's been a busy time for our communications worker and staff, putting out 5 publications since the last newsletter!

These reports, along with all our newsletters, submissions and brochures are all available online at oldertenants.org.au/publications

Our updated Housing Options Booklet is also available in a new and easier to understand format.

We haven't been printing them since the office is closed, but if you'd like to request a printed copy of a particular report we can send them to you.



Since I started this column I have been asking people for suggestions for movies about older people's housing to include, and many suggested *Up*, which I'd never seen. From talking to friends and looking online, I know lots of people love this movie and consider it one of the best movies from Pixar, the studio that produced classics like *Finding Nemo* and *Toy Story*.

Well, sorry to be a downer, but I hated *Up*! I have tried to stay positive in this column as I looked at different movies about older people's housing. I've praised tragic arthouse classics and light comedies, documentaries and sitcoms, great art and middling entertainment. But this animated feature has broken me. This movie sucks!

Up is about Carl Fredricksen (Ed Asner), an older man who feels lost in a rapidly changing neighbourhood after the death of his wife, Ellie. Rather than move into residential care, he decides instead to fulfil a lifelong dream by travelling to South America. To do this, he attaches thousands of helium balloons to his roof and flies his whole house there – giving new meaning to the phrase 'moveable unit'. Assisted by a boy scout who is truly going above and beyond to earn his 'Assisting the Elderly' merit badge, a (cute!) talking dog and a colourful bird, he has to drag his house the last few miles while dealing with a moustachioed villain who'll do anything for the glory he feels entitled to.

All that's fine, I guess. It's a perfectly serviceable plot for a family cartoon.

However. However! The movie – about the ways our past can drag us down – is itself weighed down with cloying sentimentality, especially in an excruciating opening stretch that tells the life stories of Ellie and Carl over about 15 dialogue-free minutes. Many fans of the movie consider this an incredible artistic achievement. Personally, I could do without miscarriage scenes in my cartoon comedies. Carl himself alternates between being an ageist stereotype of a cranky old man and a seemingly fit and healthy superhero who can achieve incredible physical feats.

In my opinion, if you'd like to see a movie about an older man who sets out on a ridiculous action quest after his wife's death leaves him bereft, you should watch *Remember*, with Christopher Plummer avenging his wife by hunting nazis.

But who am I kidding? I know lots of you would like this movie! More power to you. But if you have any suggestions for better movies on the theme of older people and housing, please send them in! ★★☆☆☆



Housing for the Aged Action Group

Level 1, Ross House 247-251 Flinders Lane,

Melbourne 3000

ADMIN: 9654 7389

Print Post Approved

100002348

SURFACE

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA

www.older tenants.org.au 1300 765 178 haag@older tenants.org.au



Fighting for Housing Justice for older people since 1983

HAAG offers FREE confidential advice, housing and support to over-55's



RAAG members Phyll, Dennis and Kathy at last years end of year volunteer's lunch.

- Housing Options Information
- Outreach Housing Support
- Retirement Housing Advice & Support
- Research & Policy Development