



**older
tenants
voice**



JUNE 2016 | WINTER EDITION

HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP - 03 9654 7389



CHAIRPERSONS WELCOME

I wish to take this opportunity to thank April our co-manager whose volume of work increased significantly during transition and restructure of the workplace during these past few months.

April continues to provide empathy, caring, and a professional approach to staff and clients always. April's work is exemplary, much valued and appreciated by Committee, Staff and Clients.

Fiona, our new co-manager has made a positive impact on our organisational planning and development and has commenced work on our strategic plan. HAAG's National 5 year Older Persons Prevention Project is now underway. Jeff has now taken up the role as National

Project Manager and will provide the community development role in the project to conduct an Australia-wide Older Persons Homelessness Prevention Project with Debbie Faulkner from the University of Adelaide Center for Housing Urban and Regional Planning. Debbie will be responsible for conducting research to gather and build the evidence needed to encourage government action.

The Committee of Management are working through a major strategy review of our roles and responsibilities and to better use the skills and expertise of our committee members, appointing sub-committees /standing committees and short task working groups to help manage the workload of the Committee of Management.

The committee are continuing to take measures to ensure HAAG has access

to the resources it needs to carry out its work, and staff and clients are well supported.

A sub-committee is currently reviewing HAAG'S Constitution and Good Governance practices to accurately reflect how the organisation is governed and meets the requirements of the law to reflect any changes to meet the overall goals of the HAAG.

Molly Hadfield and the Committees of Management who came before built the bridges and laid the foundations of HAAG. Your current committee is dedicated to ensuring those bridges and foundations are made even more secure and stronger. Furthermore, HAAG remains true to the vision and mission that older people have secure, safe and affordable housing, and we will continue through community activism and advocacy to achieve social change and housing justice for older people in our community now and in the future. We are indebted to Molly Hadfield to carry on the legacy she left behind. Thus, the HAAG meeting room has been renamed: The Molly Hadfield Room.

I encourage all members to consider coming along and joining one of our Working Groups. We need your expertise and skills. Details of these groups can be found on our website and on pages 13 & 15 of this newsletter. Please call the office or drop in if you are interested.

Till Next Time, Stay safe and warm

- Daisy

NEW PHONE SYSTEM

In order to combat the very high number of Home at Last intake calls coming through the administration line HAAG have introduced a new phone system, this ensures that calls go through to the right place and means that someone calling with a housing issue on the admin line doesn't fall through the cracks.

If you call the 9654 7389 number now you'll notice the lovely voice of Tegan prompts you to press one to be transferred through to a Home at Last intake worker, or two where it's a HAAG enquiry or you know who you need to speak to. So far it's been working very well with most calls ending up going through to the right place, and we really appreciate everyone's patience with this change.

If you have any questions about it please feel free to contact Tegan.



RADIO 3CR:

City limits

3rd Wed/Month - 9am

Raise the Roof

4th Wed/Month - 6pm

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

ALICIA STROBBE



Four years ago I went to Victoria university in Flinders Street to a HAAG seminar about affordable housing for seniors. I liked the concept and I became a member.

Since then I volunteer my time to help with mail outs and the Home at Last Service— Sometimes I help with CALD clients because I am a Spanish-speaking member.

I also work with April in 2014/15 and after this I became part of the Committee of Management and I am an active member.

We love sharing our members stories. Want to be our next member in the spotlight? Or do you have something to say on radio?

Contact Shane on 03 9654 7389

WELCOME FIONA

My name is Fiona York and I started here at HAAG in April this year as one of the co-managers, working alongside April Bragg. I have worked in the community sector for many years, mainly with older people, in Melbourne and East Gippsland. Most recently, I have worked in the area of elder abuse for four years, both for Seniors Rights Victoria and the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria. This is where I first came across Housing for the Aged Action Group, as there is a strong link between elder abuse and risk of homelessness for older people.



In my role at ECCV, I worked with Gemma White on the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) homelessness project, and I have built strong connections with many CALD communities in Melbourne which I hope to be able to maintain. I am passionate about working with all communities, and have always been impressed with the community member-driven ethos of HAAG.

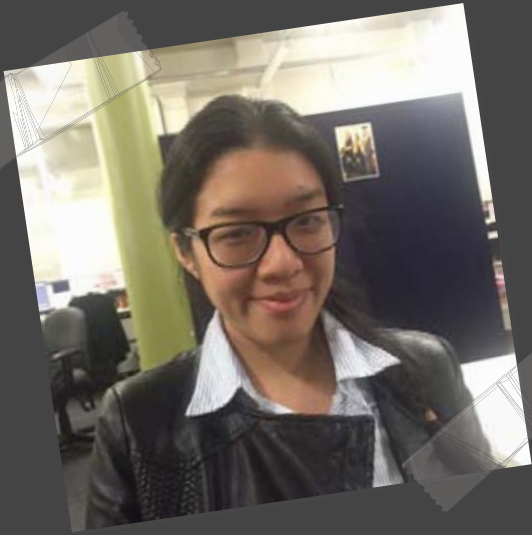
I have also been involved in various community groups, mainly in East Gippsland, where I lived for 15 years. I know how important it is to listen to the community, and make sure the service is flexible to meet people's needs. With the Home at Last funding secured, thanks to the hard work of staff, members and supporters, we can now concentrate on improving our systems. Luckily we have a friendly workplace with a great team of experienced workers, as well as a fantastically supportive Committee of Management.

In the coming year, I will be working on the Older Person's Housing strategy and looking at ways to further develop the service. HAAG has a unique knowledge of what works for older people, and has had remarkable success over the years in finding housing and supporting older people. I have always been impressed at how brilliant HAAG is at presenting housing issues through personal stories backed by solid data. This is something I hope we can continue.

I'm looking forward to seeing the service develop nationally, and to develop partnerships with other agencies. As the population ages, and the cost of living rises, we anticipate that the need for services such as Home at Last will only increase.

I have come to HAAG at a time of change for the organisation as it grows from a community-based organisation to a fully fledged service provider. These changes are both challenging and exciting! Since I arrived, I could not have been made to feel more welcome by staff and the Committee, and I am really looking forward to working with you all in the coming years.

WELCOME TRANG



Hello, my name is Trang Le. I am the new social work student from RMIT currently undertaking my final placement of my Bachelor of Social Work program. I am excited to undertake my final placement at HAAG .

During my placement, I will be working on my main project 'Assistance with Care and Housing' (ACH) Program Development' with the guidance of Jeff. My project involves interviewing 12 past HAL clients to find out the service delivery of the ACH program. This will be collated into a report.

I will also be working under the close supervision of my field educator Gemma. Personally, I am excited to learn more about the housing sector from a macro level and gain my own political perspective regarding housing. I am looking forward for my journey with HAAG .

Save money on electricity and gas with Victorian Energy Compare

Do you think you're paying too much for energy? Victorian Energy Compare can help.

Launched on 17 October 2015 by the Victorian Government, Victorian Energy Compare has already helped more than 125,000 Victorians compare energy offers. Nine out of 10 users have found offers that could save them money, with half of users finding offers that could save them more than \$700 per year across gas and electricity.

Because Victorian Energy Compare is run by the Government, it is completely independent and is the only comparison tool in the market that has every generally available electricity, gas and solar tariff.

To use Victorian Energy Compare, all you need is your latest electricity or gas bill and a few minutes of time. Why pay more than you have to?

Visit www.vic.gov.au/victorianenergycompare to compare, switch and save.

ILU PROJECT UPDATE

Independent Living Units, or ILUs, are usually groups of cottages in a village environment, located in neighbourhoods with good amenities. There may be other services like a meeting room, personal alarm systems or an on-site manager – but the key feature is that older people live independently. ILU villages can support people's wellbeing in simple but significant ways. But many people don't have a positive experience.

I've been talking to residents of ILUs in Victoria to see what's really important,. It was difficult to set up interviews because people were afraid. One woman asked 'What kind of questions are you going to ask me? Because I wouldn't want to say anything against the management. They might tell me to get out of here. Get me to leave.' A man asked: 'I don't want to make them angry. You won't use my name?'

I found that the most significant issues for residents are about fundamental housing justice. Some examples of stories told to me:

- Not being able to afford healthy food
- Waiting two years for simple repairs
- An atmosphere of intimidation
- Unexpected evictions and closures of ILUs

These are housing justice issues, and an essential part of what we need for older people into the future.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO RETIREMENT HOUSING

The first phase of the parliamentary inquiry has been completed with submissions due on 15 June 2016.

Thank you to all of you who contributed your thoughtful and important experiences, as well as your amazing submissions. Most of the submissions will be made public and will be available on the inquiry website at: <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/lpic/article/2970>

In the second half of this year it is expected that public hearings will take place where the legal and social issues committee in charge of the inquiry will invite people to attend and speak to their submissions. These will be open to the public and if you have provided the inquiry with a submission you may be invited to attend.

As soon as we receive information about when the hearings will take place we will let HAAG members know.

TOWARDS AN OLDER PERSONS HOUSING STRATEGY

In February this year, Housing for the Aged Action Group formed a coalition of groups who have an interest in working together on the issue of affordable housing for older people. The members of the coalition are HAAG, Council on the Aged, Fair Go for Pensioners, Australian Universal Housing Design, Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, Seniors Rights Victoria, Elder Rights Advocacy and Wintringham.

The coalition is hoping to work with government to develop an older person's housing strategy to address the housing crisis for older people and to plan for a future without housing stress and homelessness.

Why do we need an older person's housing strategy?

As the population ages, we need to make a plan to address long-term housing needs.

Relying on private rental or assuming that all older people will all own their own homes is unrealistic.

"The most important indicator [of well being in older people]- the one that influences everything else – is housing. It is difficult to understate the importance of building comprehensive strategies to address housing affordability among current and future generations of older people." *Benevolent Society's Index of Wellbeing for older Australians*

Housing affordability is not just an issue that affects younger people. Every day, the Home at Last service is assisting people who are in housing stress, often in unaffordable and insecure private rental, sometimes paying up to 75% of their pension on rent. We know that more and more older people are renting, and more people are retiring with a mortgage, yet investment in public housing is reducing every year. There is a lack of age-friendly housing options and it is difficult to age in place. People are unaware of the options available and unsure of where to get information about housing.

Governments need to partner with the community sector to develop a long-term vision for the housing futures of our older population, and start to address these issues.

What do older people want?

To develop a strategy, we wanted to make sure that the views of older people were heard. In April 2016 HAAG joined forces with Council on the Aged (COTA) Victoria to hold a community consultation forum called "A Home to Age Well: Towards an Older Person's Housing Strategy".

It was attended by almost 100 people, many of them members of HAAG or COTA. A panel of speakers addressed some of the key issues regarding housing for older people and what organisations are doing to address them. These speakers included:

- Caroline Owen, Director Western Region, Department of Health and Human Services
- Bryan Lippman, 2015 Melbournian of the year, CEO and founder of Wintringham
- Janet Wood, former long-term president of COTA and strong community advocate
- Jeff Fiedler, Housing for the Aged Action Group

The people at the forum broke into smaller groups for a workshop discussion on various housing issues. Key points raised were:

- investing in more public housing in appropriate locations that have access to transport, shopping, health care and social connections
- increasing rent assistance, bond assistance, and providing assistance with rates and utilities
- we need creative housing solutions like home sharing, co-housing for seniors, village type community living, with a mix of generations
- concerns about the My Aged Care system being difficult to access and navigate, and a lack of knowledge about the impact of consumer-directed care.
- People want to stay at home as long as possible in familiar surroundings, in age-friendly housing with assisted living and personal care. If high care accommodation becomes necessary, then there was strong support for smaller, less institutionalised options that allow privacy and dignity.
- Having a service such as Home at Last was strongly supported, to provide information and advice on a range of housing options, assistance to find housing (often prior to crisis point) and support with the costs of moving. There was also support for an early intervention approach, to avoid homelessness.
- Need to mandate initial and retrospective universal housing design, starting with social and public housing, and promoting the benefits for all people at all stages of life. This would make housing accessible to all.
- Age-friendly communities should be adopted by all councils.

Where to from here?

The Older Person's Housing Coalition is continuing to work on developing a strategy to take to government, to address the housing affordability crisis facing our older population. It should be completed by September this year.

For more information, contact Fiona York on 03 9654 7389

Comments from participants:

"It is so hard to navigate your way through systems, don't even know which ones exist? I try hard in rented accommodation paying 60% of my pension. Then I have to move all the time because the property is sold or the owners come back from overseas. Looks like I will have to move again, twelve - fifteen months after I moved into this place. I am 72 years old. I have chronic fatigue and osteoporosis and cannot physically do this much longer. I am at the giving up point. What can the system do for me?"

"Been given run around with services!!! Constantly! Often 5 phone calls before older person gets help"

"Not all aged have a computer to access information."



IMPORTANT CHANGES TO TENANCY LAW

There are a lot of recent and forthcoming changes to Residential Tenancies law that are important to understand if you are currently renting a home. Here is our quick summary:

- The government has recently “clarified” that notices to vacate under the Residential Tenancies Act can be served by email – but only if the tenant consents. Even if you’ve never discussed this, you may be found to have “implied” consent if you have emailed your landlord or real estate agent about other matters. This may not matter if you check your email daily and have no problems opening attachments, but if your internet access is irregular it may be important to let your landlord know you do not consent to receive notices that way. Please call HAAG and talk to Shane if you need more information about how this could effect you.
- The changes at Australia Post that mean letters take longer to deliver also effect how much notice you have to give your landlord or agent, if you post them a notice. Don’t forget to add the expected mail period to the minimum notice period if you are posting them something like a breach notice, or notice of your intention to vacate.
- The review of the Residential Tenancies Act is ongoing, with HAAG continuing to submit on each issues paper. So far we’ve prepared submissions representing your views on security of tenure and rents, bonds, and other charges, and by the time you receive this newsletter we’ll also have made a submission about rights and responsibilities. There will be several more submissions before the process is done and we hope to see some really positive changes for older renters.
- The current paper is about Dispute Resolution and we encourage anyone who has – or hasn’t – tried to deal with tenancy problems through VCAT, Consumer Affairs, or other formal avenues to contribute.

If you are interested in the review process please get in touch with Shane or Shanny at HAAG for more information, or you can read the paper at:

<http://fairersaferhousing.vic.gov.au/renting>.



THE 2016 FEDERAL ELECTION

With only a couple of weeks of election campaigning left we are urging all HAAG members to lobby their local Members of Parliament about Australia's housing and homelessness crisis.

HAAG is calling for the introduction of an Older Persons Housing Strategy and to achieve this we need to ensure all political candidates are aware of the issues that are facing all older low income renters.

What are the issues to be raised?

Ageing Population. Australia has an ageing population that is expected to increase to 6.2 million people in 2042

Homelessness. Older people make up a significant portion of the homeless population in Australia

Housing Affordability. Housing is the major cost facing all low income households. Less than 1% of rental properties are affordable for a single person on a Newstart allowance, many older people are on a Newstart payment until they are 67 years old. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that almost 1 million household are paying more than 30% of their income in rent or mortgage repayments

2016 Budget. The budget ignored the issue of housing affordability. There is no increase for public housing funding or any other affordable housing incentives announced.

What HAAG is calling for?

An older persons housing strategy that will:

- Ensure there is an adequate housing supply for older Australians
- Provide a range of housing options that allow people to 'age in place'
- Better regulate the private rental sector
- Provide comprehensive housing services to prevent older people falling into homelessness

In this edition we have included two fact sheets that provide you with more detailed information on the issues and action you can participate in. We also have additional information on our website so please check this out.

If you require any assistance with your lobbying please don't hesitate to contact the office on 9654 7389.

VALE PATRICIA GILLESPIE

The writer and academic Patricia Gillespie passed away on May 2, 2016.

Patricia became a good friend of HAAG during 2013-14 when she interviewed a number of our members for her Ph.D research at Melbourne University. Patricia also was the guest speaker at our annual general meeting in 2014 and many members will recall the heart-felt talk Patricia gave about her experience growing up in public housing and the research she was doing that demonstrated the value public housing provided for older people to age-in-place.

Patricia was in the final weeks of finishing her Ph.D research when she suddenly passed away. She is greatly missed by people close to her and her legacy of care for the needs of people as they age will live on in those who knew her.

REGIONAL FORUMS WITH AGED CARE AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Over the past year HAAG has been working on improving the way housing and homelessness services and the aged care sector work together. This is important because HAAG believes housing plays an integral part in the aged care system as we all need a good home to keep us healthy and well designed to enable us to age-in-place. For example, it is a problem if housing is in poor condition, or has design faults such as too many steps, a shower over the bath, doorways that are not wide enough for entry with a walking frame, inaccessible power points, the list is endless.

Also, because aged care services are visiting older people in their homes to provide cleaning, meals and other assistance they are in a perfect position to identify if an older person is having trouble with their accommodation. Most importantly these services can help older people who are in insecure housing such as the private rental market. A home care worker may find out that the tenant is having trouble paying a high rent, or they need repairs, or if the landlord is treating them badly and even threatening them with eviction.

The general homelessness sector also needs to significantly improve the way it helps older people. Very few older people go to homelessness services because they just do not see themselves fitting into that stereotype of 'the homeless'. Also, the homelessness sector does not offer the long term housing assistance that older people are looking for. At best they provide a few days accommodation in a small hotel or rooming house and many older people feel intimidated in such places.

So HAAG has been working with Home and Community Care (HACC) Advisors across Victoria to raise awareness in these areas. Activities have included holding forums, street stalls, information sessions to older people, media stories in local papers and the development of agreements between local aged care and homelessness services on how they will work better together. Areas we have worked in lately include the Grampians region, Swan Hill-Mildura and the southern suburban region of Melbourne. Future projects are planned for the Barwon and Gippsland regions.

ILU AND CARPAV WORKING GROUPS

This quarter the working groups have continued to work diligently on the various reviews currently open to response, such as the Residential Tenancies Act review and the parliamentary inquiry.

Various members of both the ILU and CARPAV working groups even attended a workshop facilitated by Consumer Action Law Centre about how to write individual submissions for the parliamentary inquiry. Most of the active working group members are writing individual submissions based on their experiences living in their various forms of retirement housing.

The idea is to have as many submissions as possible sent in to the inquiry to have them take notice of the significance and impact to residents that poor regulation and poor dispute resolution can have.

Along with this work members have been visiting their local Members of Parliament to chat about their experiences and to let them know about the work being done at HAAG in relation to the various reviews. This has proven very effective and supports the submissions being provided.

If you are a resident of an independent living unit or a residential park and would like to attend a working group meeting please contact Shanny Gordon on 9654 7389.

- ILU working group meets on the 2nd Tuesday of each month
- CARPAV working group meets on the 3rd Thursday of each month

POLICY AND CAMPAIGNS WORKING GROUP

Tegan and Shane have taken over the running of the Campaign and Policy working group since Jeff has moved to working full-time on the national project. It was a bit bumpy for a while but we've since gotten back on track by re-evaluating our aims and objectives and where we fit within HAAG and its strategic direction. Our work recently has focused on the creation of the new HAAG leaflet and coming up with ideas for new campaign action, especially in relation to the upcoming Federal Election. Our biggest project at the moment is creating a fact sheet for members and clients to take to their local Federal Election candidates, which we're hoping will get older persons' housing issues into their minds and hopefully give people an idea of where the candidates stand on these issues, we're linking closely with the Communications Working Group on this and hope to have it finished very soon so keep an eye out for it!

CASE WORK SUMMARIES

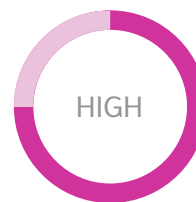
RETIREMENT HOUSING ADVICE SUMMARY

Greatest Success

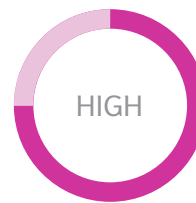
Success at VCAT assisting a residential park resident to achieve repairs to her site fence.

Greatest Challenge

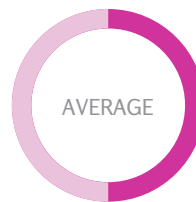
Balancing case work, policy submissions and data completion.



CASE LOAD



PAPER WORK



CASE COMPLEXITY

HOUSING SUPPORT SUMMARY

Greatest Success

Proud to report during the quarter we received 49 long term property offers and housed 35 people during the period.

Greatest Challenge

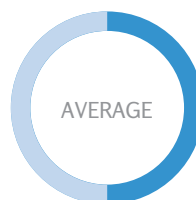
Co-ordinating our resources to ensure we don't have a waiting list for intake and outreach response.



CASE LOAD



PAPER WORK



CASE COMPLEXITY

TENANCY ADVICE SUMMARY

Greatest Success

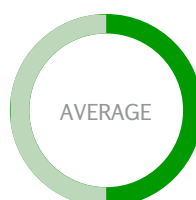
Preventing the eviction of a disabled 63-year-old who had not left her home in two years, after a 30 year tenancy.

Greatest Challenge

Resolving a complex rental dispute where the rent had been paid in cash with no receipts and the landlord was lying about the amounts paid.



CASE LOAD



PAPER WORK



CASE COMPLEXITY

Communications

Some recent happenings in the Communications department have been the design of a new HAAG brochure, a fact sheet to assist our members to lobby in preparation for the election and the launch of a new-look website – check it out www.older tenants.org.au.

Some changes have also been made to the way HAAGs contacts - inc members- are recorded. This may result in a few couples *each* receiving documents by mail. Until we implement a new system in the new year this is a tricky thing to monitor. However if it does happen to you, please let the office know. We'd all like to save a few trees!

The Communications Working Group will be facilitated by Tegan and Darwin until the new year whilst Crystal is on Mat leave. The last meeting was an important one where the groups purpose and future were discussed. It was decided that the group would now meet Quarterly and re-focus its attention on the 'bigger-picture', keeping our overall strategic plan in mind.

Crystal would like to thank all members of this group for their valued input and will bid farwell to you all until October.



HAAG SERVICE DATA 01/3/16 - 31/05/16	
Total new Clients	285
Needing Housing support	193
Needing Information Only	92

Main reason for seeking assistance (top

Inappropriate/Inad. Housing	115
Housing Crisis eg: NTV	77
Housing Affordability Stress	42

Client Demographics

Average Age	66
Predominate Gender	Female

Referrals to Housing Support/Information

HAAG Services	119
External Services	123

HAAG Housing Outcomes

Clients Housed	35
Offers made	49
Average time to Rehouse	1-3 months

Tenancy Service data

Tenancy Clients	8
Top issue (19%)	Arrears
VCAT representations	4

Retirement Info Service data[^]

Retirement Info Clients	96
Average Age	70-79
Predominate Gender	female
Residents at Info. sessions	150

Secondary Consultations*

Total	92
Total hours spent on SC	11
Consult. requested by other agency	36

*Cannot be counted as clients due to eligibility etc.

[^]Retirement Info data 01/01/16-31/03/2016

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 Options Information

Outreach care and housing support

Private renters assistance and tenancy advice

Retirement housing advice and support