

Part 3

Seeking Support and Navigating Services as an Older LGBTQIA+ Person

Georgie Yovanovic and the Housing for the Aged Action Group

It's extremely hard for older people on low incomes to find affordable rentals. It's even harder for LGBTQIA+ older people.

When 62-year-old Georgie, who identifies as trans and intersex, was searching for a rental, it wasn't until she de-identified from female to male that she was able to find a home.

'I was rejected by a lot of real estate agencies and their workers, being a non-binary person and not passing as a cis woman,' she explains.

'I was told to leave. Dismissed. It's pure discrimination. My age and experience of life (told me) to tone the whole female thing down.'

'Appear as masculine as possible externally. And when I got into that mindset, in terms of what I needed to do for myself in order to find a home, that's what got me here in my little abode.'

Georgie's little abode is in the inner suburbs of Melbourne where median rents rose

15 per cent in the 12 months from December 2022 to December 2023.¹ During that period the rent for Georgie's apartment rose by \$50 per week.

'I just manage to cover rent from fortnight to fortnight with rent and basically living costs,' she says.

'I subsidise my income with a bit of volunteer work. Occasionally I get a voucher for doing that, or a food parcel. Otherwise, I use community services, the foodbank.'



Georgie painting



'I make sure the rent is paid and some money is put away for bills. But everything else needs to be subsidised.'

Seeking support for housing crisis as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community presents a number of challenges, Georgie explains.

'It's challenging for trans, intersex and non-binary people. There are no real existing services for us generally.'

'Using mainstream services is hard. You've got to have your armour on. Especially someone like myself. I experience a lot of discrimination, even just looks and attitude, and you get that uncomfortable feeling in certain surroundings.'

'Many of us, because of our past situations and experiences of homelessness, carry mental illness. Things like anxiety, depression.'

'Then you've got issues around bathrooms, toilets. A lot of us won't use those services because we know the repercussions. So, there is a huge gap.'

A recent survey conducted by Housing for the Aged Action Group, which gathered responses from 295 older LGBTQIA+ people, found rates of home ownership among over 55s in this group was less than half of the national average of 58 per cent.²

Almost half of those surveyed over 65 had no superannuation. Those that did said it was insufficient to fund their retirement. Of the 33 per cent of respondents who were living in private rental, almost all — 89 per cent — said they had future concerns about their housing situations.

'I can only just afford to pay rent but struggle to buy food when faced with other bills to pay,' one respondent said.

'I secured it when I was working so it was affordable. I became unwell and lost my job, so it is not affordable now,' remarked another.

Georgie is all too familiar with those feelings of insecurity, thanks to her own battles finding safe, secure, affordable housing.

'I was at the edge of being homeless. Within days. And I was so lucky I had my mother to help me out in that moment,' she says.

'The most important thing for me, from my past experiences of being left on the street, is having a safe home, a safe place. So rent is the most important thing.'

'Sitting at the end of every fortnight, making sure that rent is paid, it's number one. But it also comes with

fear. Who knows when Centrelink is going to decide to review you and cut your benefit. Because they've done that to me in the past, and then it's fight for months to try and get back on benefits.'

One part of seeking support, and the broader debate around housing, that frustrates Georgie is how reductive it can be.

'We have our personal lives as well. People think when you're a trans woman you're just a crazy queen.'

'I'm not just a trans woman and advocate. I'm a homemaker and artist. I've got a mother who's ill and who I look after a few days a week. A 90-year-old woman who is dying from cancer slowly.'

'I've got to look after myself. I've got to protect myself when I go out. Put food in the fridge. I cook and clean.'

'I live day to day, week to week, pension to pension. I've got to have somewhere safe to come home to.'

Endnotes

1. Homes Victoria 2023, Homes Victoria Rental Report, December Quarter.
2. Housing for the Aged Action Group 2024, Out of the Closet, Into The Future. https://www.older tenants.org.au/sites/default/files/out_of_the_closet_into_the_future_2024_web.pdf