



older tenants voice

Housing for the Aged Action Groups Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2021



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP
FIGHTING FOR HOUSING JUSTICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE SINCE 1983





Hello dear members

I know many of you , like me, have been experiencing lockdown - and it may be there's more to come. We can manage it with patience. We'll maybe need a little TLC now and then but we can do it. We love to hear from you so remember to be in touch on phone or Zoom meetings too. We hope to see you at the At Risk event on Friday the 17th!

I am old enough to remember other health scares in Australia like polio, or Sars, Aids and eventually they all seem to be resolved through the miracles of modern scientific discoveries. Now the buzz word is vaccination and I ask you please get vaccinated as soon as possible. I did and I carry a piece of paper endorsed by Medicare to say so, which I can produce as proof if necessary. I hope you all do the same.

Still HAAG daily work goes on and congratulations to Fiona and Christine plus all the staff for everything they accomplish in each working day, against sometimes great difficulties. There's no shortage of the risk of homelessness for older folk or the need for some to move from overpriced private dwellings - whether by choice or by eviction, which is another result of these difficult times.

HAAG has come a long way from it's beginning in 1983 when a small group of people began advocating for more care and attention on government housing - or the lack of it. They had just one worker for one day a week then. We now have 25 staff, but HAAG remains as the only organisation of its kind in Australia.

We're excited about the newest initiative , which is the HAAG Shepparton pilot project. As the second regional district for HAAG services after Barwon, Shepparton, Hume and Goulbourn Valley regions are the major steps on HAAG's national development. We welcome Teresa to the team as our Regional Housing Support Worker in Shepparton and wish her every success.

There is much information in this newsletter to give you a good idea of just how much is being accomplished in lockdown circumstances by HAAG people so I know you will enjoy reading it all. For instance some important submissions have been sent off to the government of late in the hope that more attention may result from the efforts.

As a member of HAAG I know you too will be interested to read about the advocacy that is done in the name of fairness for aged persons. Lockdown or not it doesn't stop being the right thing to do. Please join any of our working groups sharing knowledge and information of what might be happening where you live. You are welcome.

Sincerely Phyll Williams,

Chairperson

Although we were hopeful to be able to have a face-to-face General Meeting in August, unfortunately the COVID-19 pandemic had other ideas. After holding our first “hybrid” General meeting in May, we went back to online only for this meeting, which was our fifth online members meeting since the start of the pandemic.

Phyll Williams, our chairperson, welcomed 18 members and 14 workers, with three members joining by phone. One of the advantages of meeting this way is that it allows people from regional areas to join, and we were delighted to have a long-time member from Yarrawonga join us to hear about our new pilot project in Shepparton region.

The meeting heard updates about our LGBTI project, our new advocacy worker in Sydney, the Shepparton regional pilot project and what's happening in the Home at Last service (all things you can read about in the newsletters).

Lois Knight updated the members on the “Client Voice and Member Participation” strategy, where she has been talking to members about the ways they engage with HAAG, what's working well, what's not working well and what issues people want to hear about. Members have said that they enjoy in-person General meetings when they can be held, and appreciate the online options and social media to keep informed. Some suggested that there be training on technology. The Participation strategy will be finalised soon, and Lois thanked all the members who had shared their experiences.

Reuben Endean demonstrated our new House on Fire website, which is an online space where people can share their stories, resources and ideas for action. The forum came out of the discussion that took place during the first “At Risk” forum, where people from all over the country connected to discuss housing justice. You can join in the conversation on the website at houseonfire.older tenants.org.au

Fiona York talked about the new Social Housing Regulations Review which is open for public comment at the moment. There are three discussion papers – HAAG has already made a submission to the Background paper which is on our website. There is a paper about how to better involve social housing tenants – and this includes public housing, community housing, people on the waitlist, and people who are eligible for public housing but don't apply because it's too hard or they think the wait is too long.

There is a survey for public housing tenants, as well as the general public here

engage.vic.gov.au/social-housing-regulation-review

HAAG is very pleased to report that we have achieved accreditation! Most excitingly, we have passed our Rainbow Tick accreditation, which demonstrates our commitment to safe and inclusive services for LGBTI older people. We are one of only two homelessness services in the country to have achieved this milestone, and its testimony to the dedication and hardwork of our staff and members.

The Assessment Team were provided with evidence that showed HAAG had many strengths. Here are some highlights from the report:

- being a very significant organisation, providing much needed & high-quality services to its communities
- demonstrating a clear commitment to remaining true to its history, values & mission. Embedded firmly in the DNA of the organisation is: being a member organisation, activism, advocacy, peers, voice of lived experience, & inclusion.
- having a very good lens on diversity. Commitment to providing safe & culturally appropriate space & services. This allows the organisation to have already incorporated LGBTI inclusive practice before almost seamlessly moving formally to accreditation against the RT standards.
- being very aware of intersectionality.
- continuing to provide an advocacy/activist focus makes real HAAG's "client focus/centred work"; authenticity about what they do
- focus on immediate needs & systematic change. Finding the right balance, managing the risks that maintaining activism & advocacy have on funding.
- moving to taking a national role, with considerable thought & consideration.
- making good use of data to identify needs & follow up by strategically reaching out to diverse & marginalized people & communities. Appropriate communication for target communities.
- having services are led, run & staffed by people who are committed, competent, passionate, innovative, knowledgeable, flexible & dedicated. Clients spoke very highly of them.
- having more than 50 percent multilingual staff.
- taking a broad range of approaches to getting feedback from clients & the communities & to providing follow-up.
- using a student placement pathway into working at HAAG

- collaborating & networking is widespread & very effective
- taking a strong outcome/results focus, where the outcome is generally housing which can make a critical difference in health and wellbeing of clients
- being agile, responsive, flexible in response to need – very evident in the response to COVID-19. Good communication about COVID-19 measures & lots of service provision using electronic methods.
- demonstrating a commitment to research & evaluation. New Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Framework.

We are so proud of this achievement, and the acknowledgement of our commitment to diversity, inclusion, advocacy and activism. Big thanks to all the staff, our Committee, our partners, members of our reference groups and our clients who contributed to this, despite the delays and difficulties caused by the pandemic.



HAAG staff and family enjoy a pizza to celebrate during a rare moment between lockdowns

Embedded Network Submission

Many older people living in retirement villages, residential parks, caravan parks and other forms of retirement housing receive their energy through an embedded network system. This means that the village or park operator chooses the energy provider, and then on sells the energy to the residents that live there. Some say this set up is beneficial as the park can get a good deal on energy and pass those savings on to the residents, and that it means residents do not have to worry about connecting their energy when they move in. In reality, many older people who speak with HAAG have said that often savings are not passed on to residents with some operators trying to make a profit by overcharging people, and that the lack of choice in their energy provider increases their worries when they move into retirement housing!

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) are undertaking a review of embedded networks, are committed to no new embedded networks being built unless they are renewable energy, and are making sure that existing embedded network customers are afforded the same rights, protections and choices as all other energy customers. HAAG consulted with members of the Retirement Accommodation Action Group (RAAG), and their networks to gain insights from residents who are embedded network customers on what feedback DELWP needed to hear to ensure retirement of

retirement housing are not forgotten.

HAAG provided feedback on: renewable clean energy exemptions, consumer protections, retail market access, bundled services, compliance and licensing, consultation processes, concessions, meter upgrades, disclosure of embedded networks and exit processes, and provider upgrades. DELWP aims to release the final report in December 2021, and anticipates the ban on embedded networks to be implemented by June 2022.

Here is the link to the review process if you want to stay in the loop: <https://engage.vic.gov.au/embedded-networks-review>

Here is the link to HAAG's submission: <https://www.oldertenants.org.au/embedded>



\$250
Government
help for households.

Telephone support for the over 55s from Council of the Ageing (COTA) and Energy Info Hub.

Am I eligible?
You can apply for the one-off \$250 Power Saving Bonus if you get one of these payments:

- Centrelink Pensioner Concession
- JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Austudy or Abstudy
- Department of Veterans Affairs Pensioner Concession

What do I need to apply?

- Your concession card
- A recent electricity bill (not a reminder notice)
- BSB and account number (if you don't want to receive a cheque)

Call 9607 7107

(9.30am - 4.30pm, Mon - Fri)

RETIREMENT HOUSING

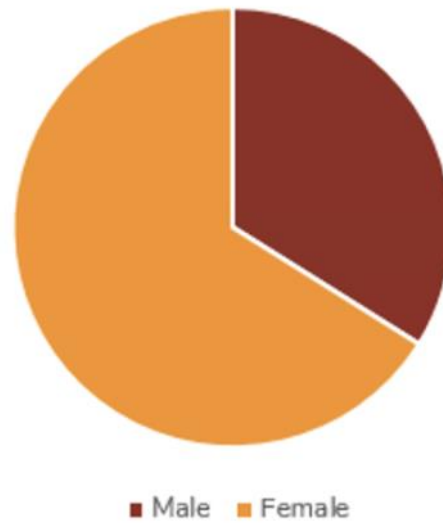
From April to June this year, the Retirement service assisted 116 older people with retirement housing inquiries. Of these, the large majority were women – 76, with only 39 men contacting the service! That’s a bigger difference than usual.

There are more women than men living in retirement housing (for example, 64% of retirement village residents are women according to the Property Council’s most recent census).

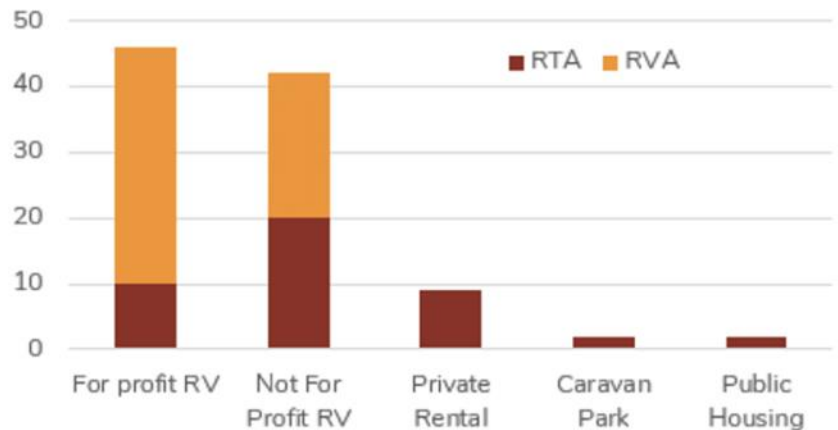
The main reason people called us was for information about housing options (47 clients). The next biggest categories were fees and charges (28 clients) and contractual disputes (15). We also helped clients with repair and maintenance issues, problems with managers, and termination notices.

Most of our clients this quarter were retirement village residents, including 46 in for-profit villages and 47 in not-for-profit villages or ILUs. The rest were divided mainly between private tenancies and caravan and residential parks.

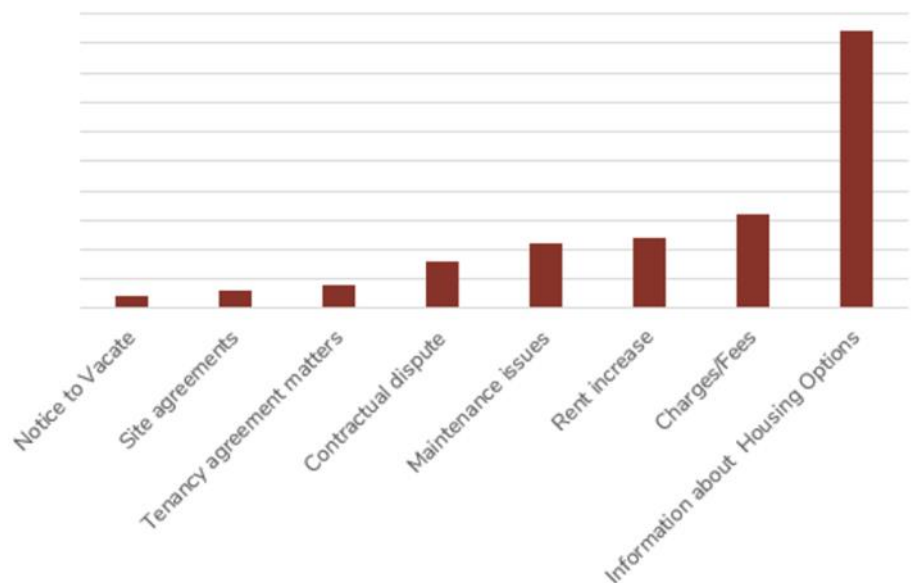
Clients by gender



Clients by Housing Type and Legislation



Tenancy Matter



Elevating Older Women's Voices

This is an abridged version of an article first published in Parity June 2021 by Lois Knight

"I'd never used welfare or housing services before, I didn't know how to approach them. Who else is in this position? Older women don't come forward, it's the shame of feeling that after all these years of work and care, you should have a place. I've only recently told some members of my family and they hardly believe it".

Jenny, 66 is a Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) member and peer educator and shares her experience to raise awareness and encourage others in a similar position to come forward and access help.

After a lifetime of work and caring for family, Jenny did not expect to find herself couch surfing and living out of her car. Jenny had been a single parent since she was young, she'd raised a family and worked in administration. She'd always made ends meet.

Jenny gave up work to care for a family member and could no longer rent privately. The landlord put the rent up, and it was more than she could afford on Centrelink. With her reserves run down, she started couch surfing between friends and family. It was a precarious time. The shame of being a burden to others was too much and she began sleeping in her car, an experience she describes as terrifying.

Jenny connected with HAAG at a community meeting in Laverton. Within a week, an outreach worker had visited Jenny and assessed her as being suitable for the

public housing priority waiting list. At last there was a plan, but for the next eight months, Jenny continued living on the edge. Finally, she received news that a public housing unit in Laverton had become available – and she was home.

Within most organisations, there's an absence of older people's lived experience. Jenny says

"services think they know what they're doing, but they're not out here living it and experiences like mine are not their focus."

Jenny got involved with HAAG's peer and community education program to

"bridge the gap between those who are struggling and those who can help, to be part of finding solutions. It's a rewarding thing to get involved with HAAG. For me, if you've been helped, you want to help others and be part of the solution."

HAAG's peer educator program, currently partially funded by the Melbourne Women's Fund, aims to prevent homelessness amongst older women by providing community education delivered by people with lived experience of homelessness. This reduces stigma and raises awareness of the factors that place people at risk. The program has evolved organically – from HAAG members coming together to share their lived experience, to a more formalised role with position descriptions, training, and ongoing support.

Peer educators come from all walks of life, but they share first-hand experience of homelessness, a desire to have their voices heard, and to help others at risk. They learn about the unique factors that place older people at risk of homelessness and

pathways to support. HAAG provides training in media and public speaking to empower peer educators to share their story with a wider audience.

Elevating the voices of older people is in HAAG’s activist roots. However, it takes effort and commitment to continue this legacy. Channeling client voice to shape our service, engage with the community, raise awareness, and in policy and advocacy requires intentional systems and processes. To help embed this work, we are capturing our client voice and member participation in a framework that maps each activity, records challenges, strengths, and lessons learned. It also captures communication and feedback loops with clients and members.

HAAG’s Committee of Management is elected by the member base of the organisation. This means, that older people and people with a diverse range of lived experience make strategic level decisions.

We discuss openly with the Committee, the ongoing challenge of balancing our grass roots history with increasing compliance and governance requirements. Striking a balance between external pressure for a "skills-based" board, with HAAG’s commitment to community representation has been a challenge. To manage this, we have implemented training, engaged outside expertise, and updated our constitution.

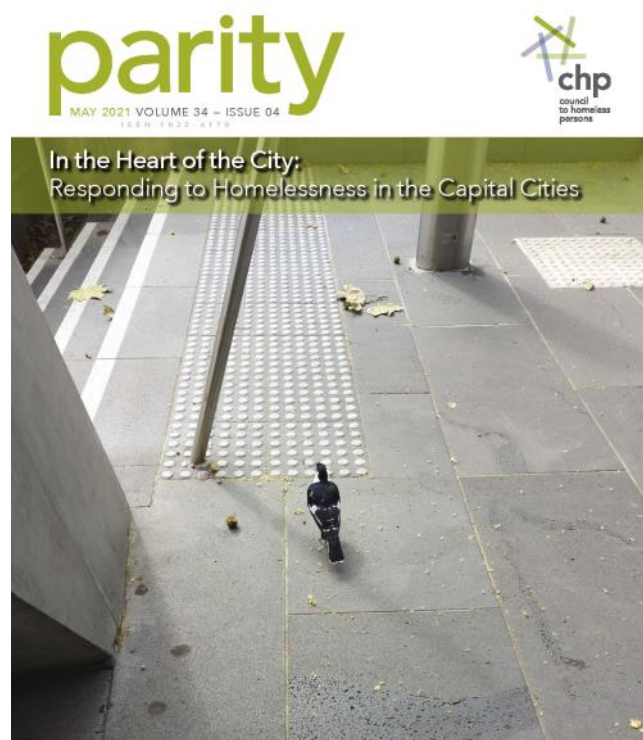
HAAG also draws insight from our Retirement Accommodation Action Group, the Cultural Diversity Reference Group, LGBTI Reference Group, and the National Alliance for Senior’s Housing. These groups include members and former clients. They meet regularly to share their experiences,

discuss HAAG’s service delivery, provide input to submissions, review policy and legislation and work on advocacy and campaigns. HAAG regularly adjusts services based on feedback from our peer educators and other community reference groups.

The silencing of older people’s voices, accepted by much of society, is one of the most serious outcomes of age discrimination. We can all do more to elevate the voices of older people to influence government, policy and services. The homelessness sector needs to think differently to include older people, women in particular, as a priority in their policies and programs.

According to Jenny, HAAG member and peer educator, older people have the right to housing justice – for secure, safe and affordable housing, but it’s just not on the mainstream agenda. She believes

“more people like me need to tell our stories, otherwise we’re invisible. You have to have a voice, people should take notice





405,000 women over 45 are at risk of homelessness. Awareness has been raised but policy responses are silent. Join politicians, journalists, change makers and women who have experienced homelessness at this online forum on Friday 17th and be part of the campaign turning awareness into action.

houseonfire.older tenants.org.au/at-risk-forum/

Dini prepared a submission to the Federal Parliamentary inquiry into purpose, intent and adequacy of the Disability Support Pension (DSP). The submission recommends that the government increase DSP and other associated payments as a matter of priority.

The AOTE NSW forum also made a

submission to the NSW inquiry into options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage. The submission recommended establishing a service similar to the Home at Last model in NSW, lower the age of priority for social housing from 80 years and increase social and affordable housing stock with 20% of new builds earmarked for older people.

Kobi presented at a workshop on Housing Older Women convened by the Queensland Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy (DCHDE). Following the workshop, DCHDE is looking to identify initiatives to take forward as potential housing responses for older women consistent with the the Queensland 2021–2025 Housing and Homelessness Action Plan.



Joining the team all the way from the Shepparton / Goulbourn Valley Region is Regional Housing Support Worker Teresa Jasper! We hope to have some more people joining her soon.

Welcome aboard Stephanie Agius, who is joining us as the new Aged Care Systems Navigator Coordinator, her wealth of experience in Aged Care will be really welcome to continue the ACSN project!

Claire Hurren, who worked at HAAG on a student placement, and whose research on Social Housing has been making waves, has returned to HAAG as an intake worker, welcome back!



So many changes!

Rebecca Walters and Lois Knight are moving on to jobs in policy work.

Anez Barnes is having twins Congratulations Anez!!

James Bell is moving on to another job in the homelessness sector.

Wishing all of them all of the best, and stay in touch!



This is a story of two of our Home at Last clients, sisters, Khanma, 63, and Rishwina, 60, from Assyrian background and came to Australia from Syria as refugees. They have very limited English therefore we used an Assyrian interpreter. They have been living in a privately rented property since arriving in Australia, assisted by the Refugee Settlement Program.

Khanma and Rishwina are both on Centrelink Jobseeker allowance which does not cover the cost of their essentials. They had been paying almost 75% of their allowance to cover their rent which left them with very little for other living expenses. They were referred to HAAG, to the Home at Last program, for urgent housing assistance. Our initial intake assessment and support workers encountered difficulties communicating with Khanma and Rishwina. Even with an interpreter on the telephone line, communication was a major barrier in assessing their needs and developing a case plan. They were so unfamiliar with all of the processes including how to communicate with an interpreter on the telephone, what a housing assessment involved, reading application forms, and so on. These are just some of the many barriers people from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background experience when they need assistance from the community sector.

We decided to seek assistance from our CALD Community Liaison Volunteer, Vivian, who played a significant role in overcoming the systemic barriers Khanma and Rishwina experienced in accessing housing services. Vivian and I conducted several home visits until we were sure that they were informed enough to identify their needs and work with us to develop an action plan. Vivian was very influential in assisting them in establishing a rapport with myself and other workers.

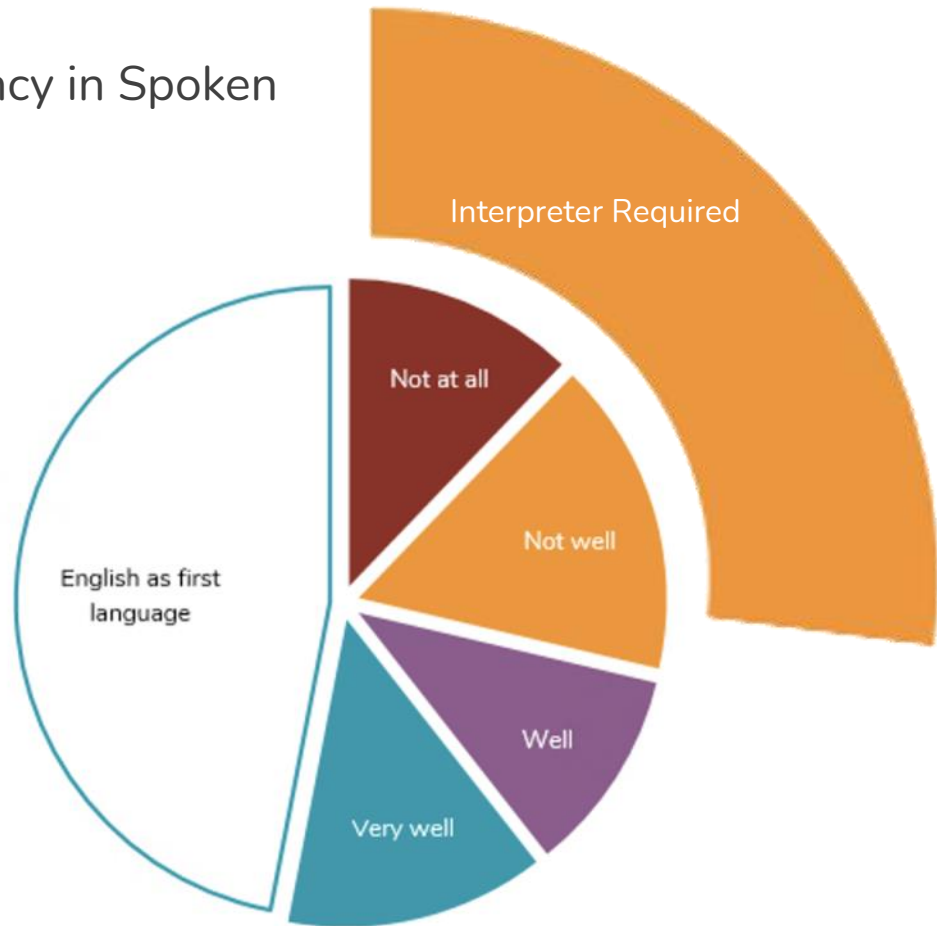
We were very clear how urgent Khanma and Rishwina's housing need were, however, due to renting privately and being assisted with bond payment from the Department, they did not qualify on the Victorian Housing Register - Homeless with Support category. I therefore began approaching some social housing providers on a regular basis and advocated on their behalf. I stressed, how both Khanma and Rishwina urgently needed affordable housing to achieve their full potential and re-engage with their new lives here in Melbourne. I also pointed out how their housing situation causing them severe anxiety and stress, in particular, the worry of not being able to get any affordable and appropriate housing, plus the possibility of becoming homeless.

In the end I secured a property offer for them, a brand-new town house, in a suburb of their preference from Women's Housing Limited. The sign-up process also took quite a few telephone calls with an interpreter, a few extra home visits, but we did not mind how long it would take as we wanted to make sure they were happy with the outcome. They moved into their new town house and are only paying 25 percent of their income and remain eligible for rent assistance.

Working with Khanma and Elisha reminded me important our value of diversity and implementation of cultural inclusion strategies is to ensure our organisation is accessible across cultural boundaries. We are also so very grateful to Vivian and all the CALD Community Liaison Volunteers who played a significant role in overcoming the systemic barriers that the various CALD communities experience in accessing housing services here in Melbourne.

Melis Cevik, Outreach support worker

Clients Proficiency in Spoken English



Khanma and Rishwina with the keys to their new home

Accompanying our At Risk online forum mentioned on page 11, HAAG has made a major leap into the 21st century and the COVID era 'new normal' by launching the 'House on Fire' online discussion forum houseonfire.older tenants.org.au

The forum is a place for people to connect, share and take action for older people's housing across Australia. Topics range from serious discussions of ideas for action to war stories about horror housemates and dodgy rentals.

This forum is an important part of HAAGs strategy to 'Elevate Older Peoples Voices', so we really want to hear more from you there. Anyone can sign up and join in the conversation at houseonfire.older tenants.org.au. Call us on 03 9654 7389 or email forum@oldertenant.org.au if you have any issues joining the forum. We hope that forum allows us all to keep connected and keep campaigning for older peoples housing despite all the challenges of technology and pandemic!

Our latest podcast episode also discusses the House on Fire forum. Recent shows have also covered the Bendigo St protests, the Save Public Housing campaign, and the 'Homes For All Australians' campaign. Make sure to tune in and subscribe at 3cr.org.au/haag



[Forums](#) [Event](#) [Calendar](#) [Sign Up](#) [Log In](#)



Ideas for ACTION

Letters to the Editor

Dear readers,

We don't have any letters to the editor in this edition. This makes me, your editor, quite sad and lonely. Always, but especially during this ongoing lockdown, we love to hear from you with your feedback, ideas, messages of support, or disgruntlement.

We don't call this newsletter 'Older Tenants Voice' for nothing.

Also I'm very sad to report that old friends at CopyPlace on Bourke St, who for many years have been printing this newsletter had to close after the pandemic made their business in the city unprofitable. I hope our new printers have produced this newsletter to the same excellent quality.

If you prefer to receive newsletters via email remember to update your details at oldertenant.org.au/join-us

Attending a cinema screening of the wonderful, Oscar winning 'Nomadland' which I reviewed in our last newsletter, I was incredibly excited to see a trailer for ANOTHER MOVIE ABOUT OLDER PEOPLE AND HOUSING. There aren't a great deal of movies on the topic folks, let alone those that make it to our big screens. It felt like perhaps its finally our time in the limelight.

The trailer for 'Some Kind of Heaven' (Lance Oppenheim) promises a spectacular look at 'The Villages', the world's largest retirement village, also known as "The Disney World for Retirees" in Florida, U.S.A. We see retirees living their life of "permanent vacation", and honestly it looks kind of fun – line dancing, volleyball, golf carts, flying costumes. And also, genuinely creepy. Clubs for people who all share the same name, synchronised swimming, cheerleaders, an all too 'perfect' vision of America which we know to be rotten at its core.



The filmmakers encourage this unsettling feeling that something is wrong, along with the 'cringe' factor, for younger audiences to be appalled by their grandparents' behaviours. The real fun, positive sides of the older people's activities, friendships, and community, get lined up in montages of oddities, and blurred in with the dark side of the social experiment.

The actual issues that make The Villages not the "Nirvana" that they promise to be, are left unexplored. The glaring 'Whiteness' and lack of diversity is very obvious, but the montage allow us to see one, older Black jogger, who doesn't get any lines. How does he feel in this American Dream? The heteronormativity of American suburbia is taken for granted.

Who can afford to live in The Village, and who is excluded? This theme isn't addressed directly, but we do follow an older man who is living in his van, trying desperately to 'pick up' a wealthy lady. When things get desperate for him, though, he does have a place to go to, which he then chooses to leave. So homelessness is presented more as a 'choice' than the product of a system of over-inflated house prices. He just needs to stop being a player and settle down with a good "godly" woman. Another couples problems are caused by illegal drug use. The discontent, loneliness and mental health issues that could drive one to drugs are suggested but not explored.

Who works in these villages? Can they afford to retire there? With the American health system the way it is, who can afford to survive there? What are the Deferred Management Fees like? Is it like the Hotel California?

For film screening in 2021, bigger issues are also missing. How did The Village deal with covid? God help them to survive Hurricane Ida, and climate change in low-lying Florida. Still, two stars for begging all these questions, even though the movie didn't actually ask them. At least we aren't missing out too badly on this film with the cinema being closed. ★★ - Reuben Endean

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



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

Business Support Worker Laura's flowers. Cover photo spring flowers by Outreach worker Anne