haag

older tenants voice



MARCH 2016 I AUTUMN EDITION

HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP - 03 9654 7389

CHAIRPERSONS WELCOME

I'd like to open this edition by welcoming two new staff members to HAAG: Aoife Cooke who began with us in February, and Fiona York who will commence her position as co-manager at the beginning of April.

I would also like to thank all staff and members who gave their time to volunteer at HAAGs admin desk . You all worked very hard to keep things moving- it is much appreciated.

This year is going to be a big one, with several new projects already underway: Jeff's National project which aims to build on the work HAAG has done in Victoria, and the development of an Older Persons Housing Strategy in conjunction with COTA Vic. which kicks off this April with a community consultation.



As always, lets continue to fight towards better housing outcomes for older people by demanding more Public Housing, no sell-off's, and better maintenance, as well as better protections for people living in private and retirement tenancies.

- Daisy



RADIO 3CR:
City limits
3rd Wed/Month - 9am
Raise the Roof
4th Wed/Month - 6pm

774 ABC RADIO - 18th February

HAAGs Retirement Housing Information worker, Shanny Gordon featured on 2 morning bulletins speaking of the issues of Independent Living Units. Shanny did a brilliant job conveying the facts that ILU residents covered by rental arrangements do not have legislated security of tenure which leaves them susceptible to relocation and eviction, especially where operators choose to sell, demolish or re-develop ILU stock.

We love sharing our members stories.
Have something to say on radio?
Contact Shane on 03 9654 7389

REFORM FOR RETIREMENT HOUSING!

On 24 February the legislative council, being the upper house of state parliament, debated and passed a motion to hold a parliamentary enquiry into retirement housing.

The motion, put forward by the Greens, asked that the enquiry consider and report on the operation and regulation of the retirement housing sector – including retirement villages, caravan and residential parks and independent living units.

The focus would be on providing recommendations for reform that would reflect matters such as: the diversity of retirement housing options, proper protections, dispute resolution procedures, the appointment of a retirement housing ombudsman and quality of life of retirees (to name but a few).

There was bipartisan support for the enquiry which will be undertaken over 12 months to be completed by 1 March 2017. HAAG was mentioned numerous times by members of parliament during the debate, as were some HAAG members which highlights how successful their lobbying was in the lead up to the debate.

This is an exciting time for retirement housing residents and HAAG can confidently say it played a part in the success of the outcome. Well done everyone!

cover PHOTO

On Wednesday 7th March, HAAG members and staff went along to the Greens Rally for Public Housing.

HAAG does not align itself with any Political party, but when someone holds a rally ior more public housing, shorter wait lists, better maintenance, and no sell-offs, *of course* we're going to get on board that! And get on board we did- look at all those haagies front and centre.

There were some great speaches from various groups, all aimed at getting the urgent atrtention of government to the issues of public housing.



"I applied for commission housing a good 66 years ago, and I finally got called up early this century."

- Home at Last client, 04/02/2016

Volunteer Spotlight

Hi I am Maree, I am a long-term HAAG member and currently serve as treasurer on the committee of Management. I raised 5 children in Melbourne, serving on all school committees and since 1965 have been a Life Governor at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. After many years conducting a post office in Broadmeadows I retired. I attended a steering committee to set up a free and accessible legal service in Broadmeadows where I have served on the management committee.

After my husband died suddenly in 2005, I moved to Docklands where I have since joined the local Probus club, the Lady Mayoress Committee and I am treasurer of my late brother's WW2 regiment. I am also a member of the Astral salon of music to encourage students and to offer scholarships to gifted performers. I was awarded the Community Service Medal in 2003.

I am also part of the Friendly Visiting Program in the City of Melbourne. My commitment today to Community Service is as strong as it was in the early days.



Welcome Aoife!



I'm Aoife and I'm joining HAAG for 6 months to work on a research project, collecting and recording the experiences of older residents of not-for-profit Independent Living Units.

I'm Irish, which is where my unusual name comes from. I've moved back to Melbourne recently, but I did live here in the past for two years.

I'm a community development worker, and I've also been involved in research projects before. In Australia, I've spent time working with Women's Health West in Footscray, and Indigenous Education in Monash University. I'm also a committed volunteer and producer with 3CR community radio.

I'm really enjoying my time with HAAG. I've met so many friendly and interesting members and staff, and it's wonderful to have work that is important. Hopefully when we know more about what happens in ILUs, we'll have the evidence to push for better housing to improve older residents' lives.

New HAAG Project: 'Independent Voices'

Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) is launching a project which seeks the assistance of residents of not-for-profit retirement villages in the northern metropolitan area, and the Loddon Mallee and Grampians regions.

At the end of February, the Victorian parliament passed a motion, brought forward by Ellen Sandell of the Green Party, to look at the legislation surrounding retirement living. The parliamentary committee will inquire into how retirement villages operate and related legal issues including contracts, exploitative terms and conditions, and management culture. They will consider changes that would lead to improvements.

HAAG are supporting residents to have their voices heard by this committee as part of our 'Independent Voices' project. It is being run by new staff member Aoife Cooke, in collaboration with HAAG's ILU Working Group, and supported by Retirement Housing Worker Shanny Gordon. There is a lack of awareness around retirement villages run on a not-for-profit basis. Usually named 'Independent Living Units,' or 'ILUs' these small groups of houses for older people are dotted around Victoria. We want to find out what it's like to live in an ILU and whether older people feel safe, secure, and fairly treated.

HAAG is finding that low-income ILU residents in particular are approaching the organisation with stories of exploitation and mistreatment. But we are also looking to speak to residents who are satisfied with their living situation in ILUs. Older people's housing is of growing interest to the public and we need to tell government what older people need and what's working well.

Aoife is currently contacting local radio stations, local newspapers and HAAG members to spread the word about the project. In April, May and June, she will host group meetings, private interviews, and take photos of some units. All information gathered will be kept anonymous.

The local government areas HAAG will visit for the project are: Darebin; Banyule; Moreland and Yarra in the Northern Metropolitan area, and Macedon Ranges; Ballarat; Hepburn; Moorabool; Greater Bendigo; Campaspe; Mitchell; Mount Alexander and Strathbogie.

If you are living in any of these areas, or have friends or family who are, and would like to get in touch about this project, please contact Aoife Cooke at 0416 476 640; (03) 96547389 or aoife.cooke@oldertenants.org.au

Preventing Homelessness in Older CALD Communities Report Launch December 2015

The launch of the final report for the Preventing Homelessness in Older Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities Project took place at the Melbourne Town Hall on the 4th of December 2015.

The event went off without a hitch, thanks to the assistance of HAAG staff and management committee members on the day. The key speakers were:

- The Hon. Robin Scott, Minister for Multicultural Affairs
- Marion Lau, ECCV Board Member
- Daisy Ellery HAAG Chairperson
- Eddie Micallef, ECCV Chairperson
- Daniel Leighton, Chairperson Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- And Jeff Fiedler from HAAG

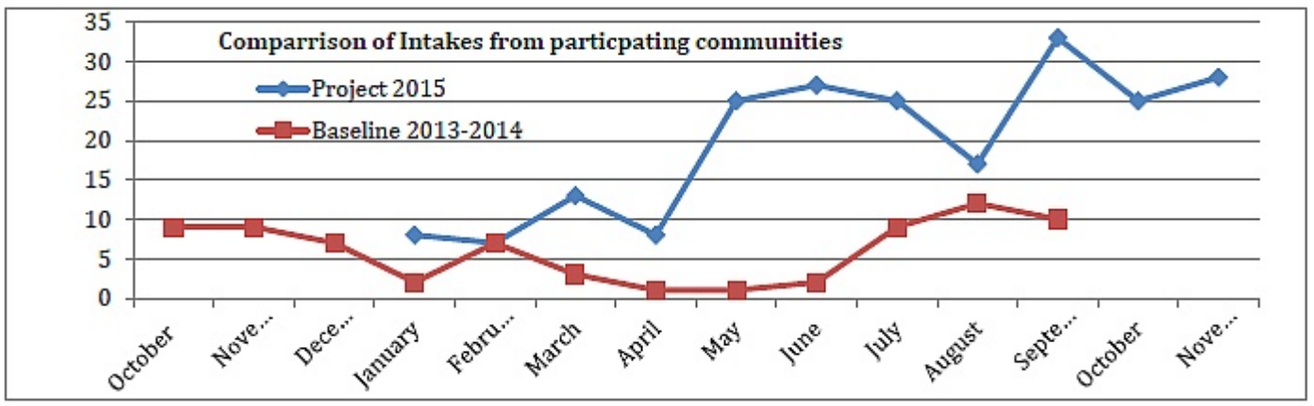
We were also lucky enough to have a journalist from SBS news come to the event and report on the story that one of our generous clients shared with the reporter. The report aired on that evenings' SBS news.

Information Sessions, update:

The below number of information sessions were conducted by bi-lingual workers throughout 2015.

Community/Language	Sessions	Attendees
Chinese	14	318
Arabic	5	84
South Asian	13	202
Mixed Serbo-Croatian	9	282
Serbian	12	441
Bosnia and Herzegovinian	7	157
Croatian	4	127
Total	*64*	*1611*

There were also other project results released in December, including the total number of people assisted through the project (217). Below is a table of the number of people from the participating communities who used Home at Last's services, compared to the baseline year.



Other results can be found in the project report from page 20. Please feel free to grab a copy of the report from the HAAG office or call 9654 7389 for a copy

Thank you to Guruswamy Perumal for kindly photographing another HAAG event.


eccv
The Voice of Multicultural Victoria
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FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.

HAAG National Project kicks off!

HAAG's national 5 year Older Persons Homelessness Prevention Project is now underway, beginning engagement with services across Australia and starting the process of understanding the issues facing older people in other states and territories. Funded by the Wicking Trust, this project is in collaboration with the University of Adelaide's Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning whose representative, Dr. Debbie Faulkner, will be conducting research as a major part of their partnership role.

The main aim of the project is to increase awareness of older persons housing issues across Australia, work towards improving older persons housing and make sure there is better availability of services that can help them obtain affordable housing.
In the first few weeks the project has started the early work that involves getting a picture of the current state of housing for older people across the nation. This is an extensive phase of the project and is expected to take more than one to two years to complete. There are three main areas being worked on at a state by state basis that are framed by three main questions:

1. What are the main housing options available to older people?
2. How do older people apply for the affordable housing that is available?
3. What services exist to help older people find, apply and successfully move into the housing?

Once these questions have been answered for all areas of Australia we will have a better idea of the problems and opportunities that currently exist. The next stage after this work will be developing ways that the housing and service systems can be improved.

The project so far has been quite an eye-opener and to some extent a contrast to the advantages of housing systems in Victoria and is also demonstrating the hard work of HAAG over many years to improve housing and services for older people. For example, two states that have been looked at quite closely, New South Wales and South Australia, are quite fragmented with the availability of housing and services to assist older people. Yet the project is already showing that each state has benefits that can potentially be implemented elsewhere.

Some examples are:

• Unlike Victoria, that has a significant amount of public housing specifically provided for older people, NSW and South Australia have downgraded their older persons public housing stock over many years with sell-offs and mixing the housing so that older people compete, and often co-housed, with younger single people.

• Like Victoria, South Australia has a centralised directory of Independent Living Units (ILUs) managed by Council on the Ageing, but NSW does not. This is most surprising as NSW has the largest stock of ILUs in Australia (more than 12,000) and so a central directory would be most useful for older people seeking affordable housing. >>

<< This problem in NSW is made worse by the fact that their ILUs are not part of the NSW government's main application point for affordable housing they call Housing Pathways. If an older person wants low cost rental housing they are encouraged to apply for public and social housing through Housing Pathways but ILUs are not part of the process so a separate application is needed for each ILU provider. However, it is difficult to know where to start if they do not even have access to an ILU directory that can help.

• No other state has a moveable units (otherwise known as granny flats) program like Victoria. This is quite a small service provided by the Office of Housing in Victoria but very successful. There are 1500 moveable units that house older people where a dwelling can fit into the back year of a family or friend's home.

The government pays for the complete installation including the gas, electricity and sewerage connections and it takes roughly 3-6 months from the date of application to install the unit.

Since the project has been promoting this scheme to governments and community agencies in other states, there has considerable interest in replicating the program elsewhere.

Whilst this is the early stage of the project there are many basic elements that will be developed over the first few months. We will soon be setting up a steering committee of HAAG committee members to advise the project, and also developing a HAAG web page that will provide a communication point for interested people across Australia.

For more information contact Jeff at the office on 03 9654 7389.

Campaign for an Older Persons Housing Strategy

Housing for the Aged Action Group is embarking on an ambitious project to lobby the state government to develop an older persons housing strategy. We have joined together with Council on the Ageing as our major partner, as well as Elder Rights Advocacy, Seniors Rights Victoria, Wintringham, Fair Go For Pensioners and the Ethnic Communities Council to campaign on this issue. We plan to hold a forum on the 19th April for the members of HAAG and COTA and also work over the next few months to develop an action plan we can present to the state government later this year.

HAAG's most critical concern is that the numbers of older people who are at risk of homelessness is rapidly on the rise. There are approximately 100,000 older people living in the precarious private rental market in Victoria with at least 80% relying on the age pension as their main form of income to cope with paying high rents. For example we know that it takes about 65% of the age pension to pay for an average one bedroom flat in Melbourne and tenants can be evicted with just 60 days notice if a landlord wants to sell their home. The number of older people living in rental housing is expected to grow significantly with the current generation of baby boomers now starting to reach retirement, many whom do not own their own home or have other forms of secure housing.

Whilst this kind of idea has been on our radar of action for a very long time there are a few key reasons why we are moving faster on this issue now. >>

The state government has no policies on older persons housing

The Andrews State Government is currently going through a process of consultation with the homelessness sector about improvements to the way people in need can gain access to affordable housing. In particular they are considering establishing a common waiting list for public and social housing so that there is a single access point for all applicants. This is an important reform but there is so much more that needs to be done and it seems somewhat piecemeal to be working on some specific changes rather than putting out a comprehensive vision for housing and homelessness. Of course the major problem is the need for more public housing and both the federal and state governments need to work together to invest billions of dollars in this area. As well as a lack of overall vision on housing, this of course means that there is no specific work being done on the housing needs of older people.

Homelessness services must be better prepared to assist older people at risk of homelessness

JIMMY HAPPY IN HIS NEW GEELONG HOME

As well as the need for government to develop a plan, homelessness services also need to ensure their assistance is more suited and available to older people. In the past very few older people ever contacted a homelessness service for help, but this is changing with numbers increasing by 8% a year. However, very few services have developed expertise on older persons' needs and housing issues to be able to provide the very specialised assistance that HAAG believes is required. At a major policy level from the community sector there is also a lack of vision. For example, the Council to Homeless Persons, the peak body for all homelessness services, recently released a policy and budget proposal to government but has no mention of older people at all.

Interest from aged care agencies on the importance of housing

Housing is being recognised by aged care services more and more as a central issue for older people. Organisations such as Council on the Ageing, the peak body for older people in Victoria, see housing as a major issue affecting the health and wellbeing of their members. HAAG also receives increasing numbers of referrals from aged care agencies concerned about the living conditions of older renters who are being provided aged care in circumstances where their housing is impacting negatively on their health.

So in conclusion, whether we look at this issue from a housing or an aged care perspective, the value of secure, affordable and appropriate housing is fundamental to the health and well being of the increasing numbers of older people in Victoria. It is now time for us to take concerted action and call on governments to respond with a specific plan of action on housing and services for older people.

If you would like more information on our campaign please call us on 9654 7389.



Reviews Reviews Reviews!

It seems to be review season at HAAG. The state government is running reviews of a range of legislation and issues that affect our members – notably, the Access to Justice review and the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) review, but also Consumer Property Acts (which covers real estate agent conduct and owners corporation issues), the proposal to introduce a fit and proper person test for rooming house operators, and changes that may make it easier for landlords to serve notices to vacate by email – a whole range of legal and social issues that are fundamental for older renters. A number of community groups have also contacted us to talk about these issues because they value our perspective and knowledge-base – it's heartening to see the growing recognition of HAAG's expertise in this area.

The RTA Review process is continuing through a series of issues papers – the current one, on Rent and Bonds, follows one on Security of Tenure that we completed earlier this year. This covers questions about how rent increases are assessed, how much rent can be charged in advance, how bonds are paid and paid out, etc. Some aspects of the issues paper give cause for concern, in particular whether landlord's should have greater 'flexibility' to evict tenants who are repeatedly slightly late with their rent (at present, landlords can only give notices to vacate to tenants who are at least 14 days in arrears). You can see the Rent, Bonds and Other Charges issues paper at http://fairersaferhousing.vic.gov.au/renting - please get in touch if you want to share your ideas or experiences to feed into our submission.

Our submission to the Access to Justice Review focused on the difficulties older people face when they try to resolve tenancy and retirement housing issues through formal legal mechanisms such as VCAT. We relayed the concerns many of our members express about using the Tribunal, and the lack of accessible information and support (especially for people who don't frequently use the internet). We also emphasised the potential benefits of introducing a retirement housing ombudsman to resolve complaints and disputes – a proposal that we hope will resonate with the inquiry into retirement housing recently ordered by the Senate.

Our submissions are available on our website www.oldertenants.org.au, or members are welcome to get in touch if you'd like us to post you out a hard copy.

LETTERS

It's almost three months since I had the great privilege of becoming one of the residents in PPHA's lovely new 60 unit community housing development in Mt Alexander Road, Essendon.

These very attractive Wominjeka Apartments are a secure, affordable home to some 60 residents. I can't begin to tell you how very proud, happy and grateful I am to be one of them.

They say 'into each life some rain must fall' and boy, some 11 years ago, how it fell into mine, falling down in bucket loads, destroying everything I had worked for all my life.

My tremendous unbelievable and unfathomable loss resulted in the demise of my dreams, a loved family member, my finances, my health and almost broke my spirit!

I spent the intervening years trying to keep myself together, moving from pillar to post, undergoing medical intervention and many treatments for my failing health - can one mend a broken heart?

Along the way, I was amazed at all the help that was available and freely given to me, I never realised there was such a network for, lack of a better word, the 'unfortunate.'

During this time, I was introduced to Home at Last .They immediately took me under thier wing and for this, I will always be grateful.

Home at Last does an amazing job for so many, they introduced me to the delightful Trang Kim Tham from PPHA who was responsible for housing me in the new community housing development in Essendon - lucky, lucky me!

Home at Last offered me great support with the dreadful job of moving which was truly appreciated.

My heartfelt thanks go out to Home at Last, Trang and PPHA, I consider myself so very blessed to have crossed paths with you all.

I love it here in Wominjeka, delight in my wonderful new home with transport and shops right outside the door - what a blessing, I am eternally grateful, thank you . - **Helen Burgess**

HAAG members' letter to the Age:
Home (not app) delivery

There's something extremely unsettling about the Prime Minister speaking to a homeless man on the street about a new information app on homelessness services ("I never thought it would happen to me", 30/1). The man spoke for thousands of citizens when he said his problem is not information but a desperate need for affordable housing.

Mr Turnbull, please get real and do not humiliate the homeless unless you have an affordable housing plan, rather than an app, to announce. You were speaking to a man whose health, or even life, is at risk because of your lack of policy action.

The Abbott/Turnbull government has cut funds to affordable housing and homelessness services while it delays release of a green paper on homelessness. At this rate, there will no significant policy announcements on housing and homelessness for the term of this government.

Our Home at Last service is inundated with older people who, as the homeless man described, are facing eviction because they cannot afford to pay rent in the private market. For example, the average rent for a one-bedroom flat in Melbourne takes 65per cent of the age pension. We urgently need a national affordable housing strategy.

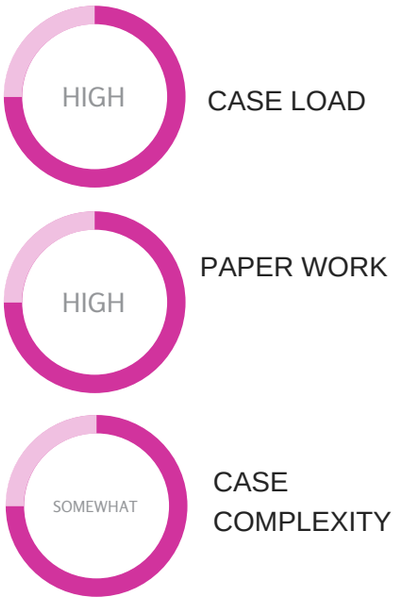
Daisy Ellery, chairperson, Housing for the Aged Action Group, Melbourne

Case work Summaries

Retirement Housing Advice Summary

Greatest Success
There were a number of residents who contacted the retirement housing service from new villages this quarter which is exciting and reflects the visibility of HAAG.

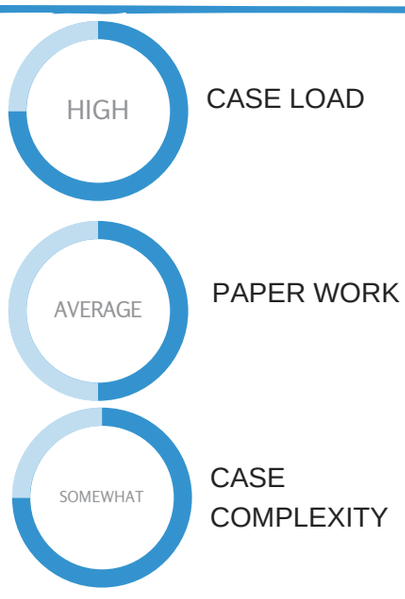
Greatest Challenge
The most challenging part of my work this quarter was balancing case work and policy work.



Housing Support Summary

Greatest Success
Managing to keep on top of ever-increasing numbers of clients whilst at the same time providing everyone we see with exemplary service.

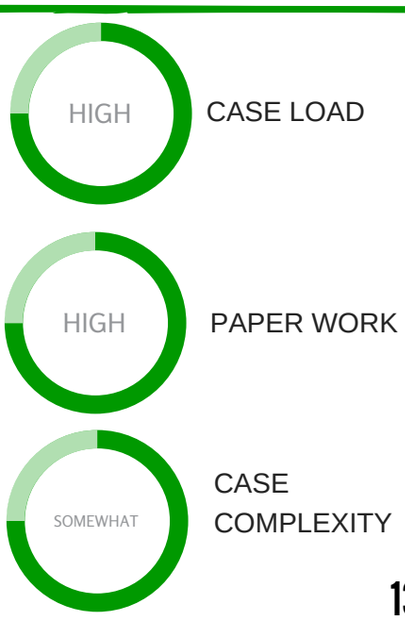
Greatest Challenge
High caseloads, difficulty referring to other ACHA service providers.



Tenancy Advice Summary

Greatest Success
After I told a rooming house operator they were trying to exploit a vulnerable older woman, they complained that I had been rude, abusive, and unprofessional. I had not been nearly as rude or abusive as they deserved.

Greatest Challenge
Untangling the legal and practical difficulties of disputes in residential parks.



ILU and CARPAV working groups

This has been a very busy quarter for the working groups. The ever expanding policy focus of the state government means the working groups have reviews and reform on their mind, which makes this a very exciting and productive time.

The Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) review continues. HAAG's security of tenure response was submitted on 21 January 2016. Now the second of six issues papers has been released about rents, bonds and other charges. These papers are keeping the working groups busy discussing how they feel HAAG should respond in these particular housing areas. All submissions reflect their input and contributions.

The Access to Justice review has also just completed phase one and HAAG provided a response which was submitted on 1 March 2016. This was a very important topic for both working groups and involved a lot of discussion.

Both groups are also working on their 2016 lobbying and campaign strategies. We discussed the importance of not just providing submissions for reviews but of the need to have residents out there speaking to their local Members of Parliament (MP's) about those responses, to ensure we are educating the government about the impact of poor regulation on real people.

CARPAV especially are looking into involving some local and specialised media as well to ensure the community is also aware of the issues and concerns of the retirement housing sector.

CARPAV also continue to work with Swinburne Centre for Design and Innovation on the residential parks project which is coming along beautifully.

The ILU working group are also working hard alongside Aoife Cooke, HAAG's ILU project worker, to steer the project in a direction that will support HAAG's broader policy reform objectives. The group itself has also doubled in size in the last 12 months which is exciting to see after a long road with a small core group.

Working group members are dedicated to working towards true, effective reform.
Whether they attend monthly meetings or contribute from afar HAAG would like to acknowledge the hard work and effort put in by members. The work would be meaningless without your involvement.

HAAG would also like to acknowledge those members that for personal reasons are no longer able to be actively involved but that have put in many years of hard work and commitment to our cause. We hope you know who you are and you will always be welcome!

We would also like to remember, and hold dear to our hearts, those members that have passed, but were an important part of the HAAG family.

In particular CARPAV would like to recognise Marian Lundberg for her contributions over the years. You will be missed.

Communications

Communications is about clear and effective expression. As an organisation we are making an effort to clarify our messages, raise our voices and ensure everyone who needs our services or wants to take action on housing issues, knows who we are and how to get in contact.

The Communications 'portfolio' continues to grow and I am always thankful to the Communications working group for their continued support and advice as we work our way through various projects together. We are currently working on Brochure production, Newsletters, Media relations, Database and website development among a few other things..

The website changes are still underway, and although you won't see any of this until it goes live you may notice the lack of new content. During this period our social media pages continue to keep our audience updated of our news and events.

I'm very relieved to have the newsletter production under control and thanks to staff for their timely contributions. I hope readers enjoy the content- please feel free to share your comments with me at :

crystal.mcdonald@oldertenants.org.au



HAAG SERVICE DATA 01 DEC - 29 FEB 2016

Total new Clients	246
Needing Housing support	141 (57%)
Needing Information Only	54 (22%)

Main reason for seeking assistance (top 3)

Inappropriate/Inad. Housing	76 (31%)
Housing Crisis eg: NTV	53 (22%)
Housing Affordability Stress	30 (12%)

Client Demographics

Average Age	67
Predominate Gender	Female (58%)

Referrals to Housing Support/Information

HAAG Services	88
External Services	64

HAAG Housing Outcomes

Clients Housed	27
Offers made	71
Average time to Rehouse	1-3 months

Tenancy Service data

Tenancy Clients	7
Top issue (19%)	Repairs
VCAT representations	6

Retirement Info Service data^

Retirement Info Clients	144
Average Age	70-79
Predominate Gender	Female
Residents at Info. sessions	60

Secondary Consultations*

Total	51
Total hours spent on SC	5
Consult. requested by other agency	29%

*Cannot be counted as clients due to eligibility etc.

^Retirement Info data Oct-Dec2015

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Fighting for Housing justice
for Older people since 1983

HAAG also offers FREE confidential advice and support to over 55's

- Housing Options Information
- Outreach care and housing support
- Private renters assistance and tenancy advice
- Retirement housing advice and support