

## **Submission into Homelessness**

20 July 2020

By: Martina Macey

I have been homeless as a teenager and young person and lived in both rooming houses and boarding houses during the 1980's. Depending on the management of them nowadays, some are better managed than others.

I ended up moving into Community Housing in 2000 after a wait of 5 years, my name is still on the Public Housing waiting list for a 1 bedroom from 1985 even though I had an application in 1991 for a 2 bedroom.

The problems that I have had with my provider are as follows:

### **Rent increase – attempt to increase against RTA:**

They tried to raise the rent a month after a rent increase due to my son turning 18 (In a Public Housing property, the 18yo income is included in the next fixed rent period ie 6 monthly) When I handed them the paperwork for VCAT, they laughed and stated I would lose as they had won at VCAT every time. They lost. They are still doing this to other tenants currently 10 years later.

### **Disability Modification:**

When I needed a walk in shower and my occupational therapist phoned them to discuss the issue, my housing provider asked them to find me a property in the Public Housing system. (My provider didn't have an appropriate place for me to transfer into nor wanted to pay for a walk in shower like they did at another property). Eventually I had to agree to contribute towards the cost out of fear of being homeless with a minor child.

Their disability modification policy is so unclear that upon reading it, 2 people could take it as meaning 2 separate ways, either the tenant pays for it or the provider depending on your interpretation.

### **Breach of Privacy:**

At the time of our rent increase, we are requested (rightfully) to either give them permission to access our Centrelink information or give them a Centrelink income statement. On the paperwork, I refused them permission thinking this was adequate enough for them not to. They still electronically obtained an updated information. To obtain it electronically it is simple for them, they put the tenants Centrelink reference number in the system and are asked if they had the tenant's permission, they typed in yes. When informed of this unwittingly by the tenancy officer, Centrelink informed me the only way to stop them doing it this way is to put a block against the name of the provider who has electronic permission.

### Underutilisation:

The week before my son was due to move out into his own home, the tenancy officer informed me that I had to move out as they needed my unit for workers to pay a mortgage.

This is 2 fold due to:

1. There were 2 other 2 bedroom townhouses on the property that had 1 person living in them for over 5 years since their children moved out and they were not informed they had to move out
2. As the land was given to them by the local council. Funding to build was also given to them by council and both the state and federal governments, unless they took out a mortgage, there should not have been one. When quired about the mortgage (as in prove it), the tenancy worker informed me she couldn't under the privacy act.

They then sent a worker from middle management to inform me that as the underutilisation rule was in my lease, I had to abide by it. I then argued that unless they were going to do the same to the other 2 tenants on the property, then they were targeting me. They weren't pressuring those 2 tenants for underutilisation and they were not going to offer me another property as in 1 bedroom. Ito stay here I had to get a medical form filled out that I required a 2 bedroom. (Which I did)

### Transfer applications:

In February 2019, tenants who had a transfer in were sent a letter by the landlord that we would be transferred to the public Housing waiting list and would be contacted by DHHS in relation to this. If we did not want this, we would then be taken off all transfer lists and not get a transfer. I had a transfer in for a 2 bedroom disability unit. I didn't hear from DHHS re the transfer, and the tenant who was in the rare disability unit passed away leaving an able bodied resident in the unit. This is one of the very few disability units that the community housing provider has and they signed a lease with the able bodied resident. As I am unable to use the met buses or the public transport that is around any of the other properties my landlord owns/manages (due to steps of which I can't climb and I have had discussions with the provider on this on many occasions) This property is the only 1 with a disability unit accessible to the community bus which gives me access to the low trams at super stops. T move into any of their other properties leaves me even further financially disadvantaged due to the fact that I should have to pay for taxies etc to get me to appointments/shopping

etc. As it is, as a person on DSP, I am paying 5% that a tenant in Public Housing (this equates to \$19 a week more) . This is on top of the 100% of the CRA that they take.

Policies:

From experience, Community Housing policies change with little to no consultation with tenants and to the detriment of the tenants. As Steve Staikos (who is now mayor of Kensington and used to work for CHIA Vic) has stated that each Community Housing provider is a small business with their own policies. There is no standard across the board as in Public Housing.

This is my experience of a community housing provider and after discussions with other tenants of community housing providers, this is standard way of treating tenants. Tenants are so afraid to talk out for fear of being made homeless by their landlords. While the Public Housing system needs to be overhauled to make it more viable as the community housing sector in reality don't want those on welfare as they don't get as much in rent.

I am willing to "appear" in front of any committee to discuss these issues and to suggest ways of making our Public Housing system work. The land that the Government is selling off was specifically purchased under the "slum reclamation act" for the purpose of Public Housing. These were suburbs that the middle to high income earners at the time did NOT want to live in, but now due to lack of land, the areas have become desirable. The then owners of the properties were only reimbursed 75% of the market value of the property under the act which meant they could not afford to rebuy in the area and the houses on the properties were NOT ALL slums. Some would have been but not all.

If anything, the \$ given to the Community Housing providers should and could be used to build and/or refurbish the public housing on the estates it is demolishing and selling off. The homelessness has risen due to the policies of all governments to privatise at the expense of those who can least afford it or have a voice.

I have no qualms in my name being used.

Regards

Martina Macey

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