

STORIES FROM HOUSING CHOICES

Spring
2021



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HOUSING
CHOICES
AUSTRALIA

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www.housingchoices.org.au



From the General Manager



Welcome to the Spring edition of Home Stories

Hi Everyone,

I hope that everyone has been able to keep warm during the colder months and that we can all make the most of the longer and brighter days ahead.

In this edition, we are pleased to share the findings of our Annual Resident Satisfaction Survey with you. I would like to thank each and every resident who took the time to complete the survey and provide us with feedback. We are fully committed to making improvements to our service based on the comments and answers you gave us.

In addition to the survey results, we are thrilled to share a wonderful feature story with you about one of our many talented residents, Juliette. Juliette is an illustrator, photographer and keen gardener. You may recognise some of her work, which featured in many successful children's books throughout the 1980s and 90s.

A quick word on COVID-19

As we all continue to face challenges related to COVID-19, I would like to provide you with some information about how Housing Choices is working through the obstacles we, as a company, are facing.

We know the current COVID-19 restrictions in Victoria are difficult for many people and we want to assure you that we are still here providing a service. Our office remains closed during this time, but all of our staff are working remotely and are still available to assist you. Please continue to get in touch with us either via telephone by calling **1300 312 447** or via email at **info@hcau.org.au**.

Current COVID-19 restrictions are impacting our services as per the following:

- Our offices in Melbourne and Preston remain closed.
- We are limited to providing only **essential** maintenance and repairs services in metropolitan and regional Victoria. You can still notify us of non-essential maintenance issues, but we will not be able to address them until restrictions are lifted.

In the unfortunate circumstance of there possibly being a positive case of COVID-19 in your building, or if we learn it is a COVID-19 exposure site, Housing Choices will:

- Endeavour to inform all residents in the building via text messages and/or phone calls within the hour of Housing Choices being notified of the building being an exposure site.
 - *We will never disclose the person or family affected or a particular property in the building. We will, however, inform you that there is (or possibly is) a positive case in your building and assess what support you may need to support your wellbeing.*
- Liaise and work with Government departments such as the Department of Health and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (*previously called the Department of Human Services*).
- Conduct deep cleans at exposure sites if they are required in buildings that we own or solely manage.
- Encourage residents to notify Housing Choices if they are being tested for COVID-19 or have tested positive to COVID-19.

We want to thank all of our residents for their support in adopting COVIDsafe practices to help keep our buildings, communities, staff and residents safe and well. Many of our residents have also been checking on their neighbours

and offering assistance to others and we would like to acknowledge their contribution to their communities. Let's keep working together to help keep you, your neighbours and the community safe.

Please remember that we may be able to help you with food, supplies or other assistance while you are self-isolating. We also encourage you to reach out if you are experiencing financial hardship or are otherwise impacted by COVID-19 (e.g. losing employment). Please keep in touch with your Housing Officer or contact us on **1300 312 447** if you find yourself needing additional support.

As always, we strongly suggest you continue to access COVID-19 updates and advice from:

www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/
www.australia.gov.au/

I hope you can find some joy within this edition of Home Stories!

Melissa Palframan
General Manager, Housing Services

 **communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au**

 **1300 312 447**

Resident Satisfaction Survey results



Housing Choices conducted its ninth Annual Resident Satisfaction Survey in June.

More than **40%** of our residents responded to the survey, including **30%** of our Transitional Housing Program residents.

We thank each and every one of you who took time to complete the survey and submit feedback. We greatly appreciate each of your responses and we will address the identified opportunities for service enhancement and improvement.

Based on your feedback, our main areas of focus for the coming year will include:

- Continuing our review of, and improvements to, our customer service provision
- Considering ways in which we can increase safety and security for residents and supporting residents when they have neighbourhood concerns

- Enhancing our responses to maintenance requests
- Working with residents to build awareness of Housing Choices' roles and responsibilities as a landlord.

We will work closely with the Housing Choices Australia Resident Advisory Committee, along with other interested residents, to ensure any changes we do make will be in line with resident expectations and needs. We want all our processes to be meaningful and fit for purpose for all residents.

We will continue to update you on the progress of these improvements and enhancements to our service via future editions of Home Stories.



Illustrations by Juliette

A Life in Pictures

Housing Choices is lucky to have many talented people in our community of residents and one of them is illustrator, photographer and keen gardener, Juliette.

Juliette created illustrations for many successful children's books in the 1980s and 90s. These days, she continues to draw and paint for enjoyment; selling cards at a local gift shop and exhibiting back in her hometown in regional Victoria.

Juliette's artistic career was impacted when she received a serious cancer diagnosis. Her health battles forced her to give up work, which then had an impact on her housing.

"I was living in a quite rundown place and couldn't afford the rent," Juliette said.

"I moved back to Kyabram to stay with family and then stayed with my cousin in Sydney until I regained strength."

Two years later, Juliette was back in Melbourne and heard a Housing Choices property was available:

"I expected to see something under construction but it was nearly finished..... I couldn't believe it. My only request was that I not be on the ground floor and to have good natural light for my art."

"It was great to be given a choice."

Juliette's home is her refuge and studio – a place she can tap into memories and dreams for inspiration. She does a lot of her work at the kitchen table and can often be found in the garden sketching or taking photos.

Having spent a decade in her apartment, Juliette is well-connected with her local Housing Choices community. The garden club has put her in touch with many supportive neighbours.

"I'm really glad I joined the garden club – it's a great bunch of people and we help each other out," she said.



'Fairy' by Juliette

Nominations now open for the 2021 Good Neighbour Awards!

We hold our annual Good Neighbour Award competition to join with our residents to recognise and reward neighbours who make positive contributions to the community.

Do you know a Housing Choices Australia resident who:

- is friendly and helpful?
- provides assistance to others?
- contributes to the local community?
- is mindful of others?
- has performed a good deed?
- is respectful of others?
- maintains their property?
- alerts others to danger?

If you do, here is your chance to see them recognised and rewarded for being a Good Neighbour!

Housing Choices will select **12** Good Neighbour Award winners, who will each receive a **\$250** gift voucher.

Nominations close Friday 3 December 2021. Winners will be announced before the end of the year.

You can place a nomination by contacting Housing Choices' Community Development team via the details shown below. Remember to tell us:

- who you want to nominate (name and address)
- what makes them a Good Neighbour

✉ communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au

☎ **1300 312 447**

✉ **Community Development team
Housing Choices Australia
Level 3, 350 Queen Street
Melbourne 3000**



The Victorian Government's Power Saving Bonus is still available



The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is currently offering a one-off **\$250 Power Savings Bonus** to eligible households through the **Vic Energy Compare** website to assist with energy bill stress during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eligible households are those that have a Victorian residential electricity account and a household member has at least one of the following:

- Centrelink Pension Concession Card
- Department of Veterans Affairs Pensioner Concession Card
- Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card

Recipients of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Abstudy or Austudy are also eligible.

If you are part of an eligible household, you can apply online by visiting:

<https://compare.energy.vic.gov.au/>

Once there, click on the grey button labelled 'Submit a Power Saving Bonus Application' and follow the prompts.

To assist with your application, you will need your:

- Centrelink Customer Reference Number
- a copy of one of your recent electricity bills. You can choose to either upload a copy of your electricity bill to your application or enter the details from the bill manually into the online form.

If you need any assistance completing your application, please contact our Community Development team via the details below. The team can lodge your application on your behalf if you don't have regular or reliable access to the internet, an email address or are unfamiliar with online forms. We just need a copy of your recent electricity bill and we can obtain your consent over the phone to apply on your behalf.

✉ communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au

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Our Keeping Connected Program is back!



We have brought back our Keeping Connected Program to assist residents to remain digitally connected while COVID-19 restrictions are in effect.

Residents can apply for grants of up to \$100 towards either:

1. Maintaining Your Digital Connection

e.g. financial support towards internet or phone bills

2. Improving Your Digital Connection

e.g. financial assistance to set up the internet at your home, upgrade to a smart phone

3. Accessing Technology

e.g. financial assistance to purchase devices and/or accessories

Grant applications are limited to one per household and to households that have not received assistance from this program since 1 July 2021.

Digital Education Lessons

We have extended our partnership with **ReadyTechGo** and are offering referrals for **FREE** one-on-one digital education sessions for all our Victorian residents. You can access expert assistance over the phone or via your mobile / smart device at a time that suits you.

Some of our residents have already had lessons with **ReadyTechGo** technicians. This is what they had to say:

"Excellent tuition."

"The technician was very helpful and patient."


"This was a marvellous opportunity."

"I would recommend this program to others."

If you are interested in applying for financial support under one of the three streams of funding available above, or if you would like a referral to **ReadyTechGo** for a free digital education lesson, please contact our Community Development team via the details below.

 communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au

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Melbourne 3000



Victoria in Bloom garden competition now open

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's annual *Victoria in Bloom* garden competition is now accepting entries from gardening enthusiasts living in public or Community Housing.

Registrations for the *Victoria in Bloom* garden competition close on Friday 26 November 2021.

Residents can enter all garden types, including community gardens. No garden is too big or small!

How to Register Your Garden for the Competition

You can register your garden for the Victorian In Bloom competition by calling the DFFH on **8633 4357** or emailing vicbloom@dffh.vic.gov.au

Alternatively, you can contact the Community Development Team at Housing Choices Australia and we can assist you with registering your garden for the competition. Call us on **1300 312 447** or email: communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au

For more information about the competition please visit <https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/victoria-bloom-garden-competition>





2021 Home is Where the Art is Competition update

Thank you to all our creative residents who entered our Home is Where the Art is Competition for 2021.

We received many beautiful entries and will advise competition winners of their success in October. We will share the winners and their stunning pieces with you in our next newsletter!

Jobs Victoria Job Advocates

Do you need help looking for work in lockdown?

If you are:

- unsure of your next step
- considering employment
- working and want more hours
- considering a change in career
- not sure what support is available, or
- thinking of returning to the workforce

You may be interested in seeking some advice from a Jobs Victoria Advocate!

Jobs Victoria Advocates are hosted by a network of Jobs Victoria Advocate partners across the state. In the St Kilda and Prahran areas they are hosted by Inner Eastern Local Learning and Employment Network (IELLEN).

Contact Job Advocates by emailing manager@jobadvocates.org.au to arrange a free online appointment and let their friendly staff answer all your questions. Virtual appointments are available between 10am and 4pm, Monday to Thursday.

Alternatively, you can contact the Community Development Team at Housing Choices Australia on ph: **1300 312 447** and we can help you get in touch with a Jobs Victoria Advocate.

For more information about Jobs Victoria Job Advocates, you can visit <https://jobs.vic.gov.au/about-jobs-victoria/our-programs/advocates>.



Register for your end of year gift



The Housing Choices team is disappointed that we may, once again, not be able to proceed with our usual end of year gatherings and parties due to COVID-19 restrictions that may be in place later in the year.

Housing Choices is working on alternative ways to connect with residents to spread some festive cheer and wish everyone a happy new year. One way we are planning to do this is through providing a small gift.

If you would like to register your household to receive an end of year gift from Housing Choices, please contact our Community Development team and provide your name, address, contact details and advise of any dietary requirements we should know about. We may engage a third-party courier to deliver the gifts for us, so we will need this information to pass across to the courier so they can deliver your gift.

-  communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au
-  **1300 312 447**
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You've Got Talent!

We know there are so many talented and creative people in our communities and we are on the search for story ideas as well as for people who want to contribute articles or pictures to Home Stories.

If you're a photographer, a writer, a cook, a gardener, a knitter, a film buff, a model builder, a painter, a poet – a hobbyist of some kind – let us know! We'd love to write a story about you and/or commission one from you about your area of passion and expertise!

Please contact us at:
communications@hcau.org.au
for more information.

*Pictured: HCA resident artist Moon and her furry companion Lunar.
Image credit: Fiona Salomons*

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