

# HOUSES STORIES

Winter  
2021



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**HOUSING**  
**CHOICES**  
AUSTRALIA

Find us online

[www.housingchoices.org.au](http://www.housingchoices.org.au)



# From the General Manager



## Welcome to the Winter edition of Home Stories

Hello everyone!

I hope all residents have settled into the colder months and are managing to stay warm on those frosty mornings.

Since the previous edition of Home Stories, life in Victoria has been impacted by some COVID-19 outbreaks. As a company, we will continue to adjust to the COVID-19 situation as it evolves. As always, the health and safety of our residents, contractors, staff and the wider community remains our first and foremost priority.

**We strongly suggest you continue to access COVID-19 updates from:**

<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/>

<https://www.australia.gov.au>

As part of our COVIDsafe Plan, we will continue with the following measures to help prevent the spread of the virus:

- We will ask you some health related questions when staff / contractors require access to your home. Please let us know if you are feeling unwell before we visit.
- If you or a member of your household have tested positive for COVID-19, **we need you to tell us as soon as possible.**
- Our staff will continue to practice social distancing and wear as required personal protective equipment (e.g. masks, gloves, eye gear) when attending our offices and when they meet with residents. In addition to this, staff have been instructed to stay home if they are feeling unwell or have potentially been exposed to a confirmed COVID-19 case.
- We will continue the very robust cleaning regime we implemented at the start of the pandemic at our medium and high-density residential properties, specifically in the common areas. More frequently touched surfaces and high traffic areas will continue to be sanitised regularly.

### COVID-19 vaccine eligibility

As residents of Community Housing in Victoria, Housing Choices Australia residents are part of Priority Group 1 identified for vaccination against COVID-19. Housing Choices Australia residents and members of their immediate household (i.e. people who live with you) aged 16 years and older are now eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. **I strongly recommend you check the Victorian Government's coronavirus website for more information: [www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/who-can-get-vaccinated](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/who-can-get-vaccinated).**

### From Homelessness to A Home

The Victorian Government released a \$150 million package called *From Homelessness to a Home* in November 2020 for Registered Housing Agencies and Support Agencies to work in partnership to enable access to approximately 1,700 homes for people experiencing homelessness. I am pleased to announce Housing Choices Australia was successful in tendering for the program and is now participating with three support partners – NEAMI, Star Health and Greenlight Plus (an initiative of Sacred Heart Mission and the Salvation Army). It has been very rewarding to assist people in this program into homes and work closely with our support partners.

### Policy Updates

We have recently updated some company policies, which are available to read on our website. The policy updates relate to our Rent Setting Policy, Eligibility and Allocation Policy and our Financial Hardship and Temporary Absence Policy.

Housing Choices Australia is committed to supporting residents to sustain their tenancies and prevent homelessness. Further to this, we believe residents and their household members who experience family violence have a right to expect our support in a way that ensures their safety. As of April this year, Housing Choices Australia now has obligations as an Information Sharing Agency (ISA) under the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework to safely support residents and their household members that may be at risk of family violence. Over the coming months, we will be issuing new policy that outlines our new obligations.

### Thank you and farewell to Jane Crombie

It is with great sadness that we bid farewell to Community Development Officer Jane Crombie. As some of you may already know, Jane's time with Housing Choices Australia will come to an end in July.



Many of you will know Jane from the various events and resident initiatives she has coordinated over the years. Whether it be helping in community gardens or sporting a spectacular pair of antlers at the Resident Christmas Party, Jane's positivity and vibrance has made her an invaluable asset to the Community Development Team.

I would like to thank Jane for all her hard work and wish her nothing but the best for what is to come!

**Melissa Palframan**  
General Manager, Housing Services

 [communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au](mailto:communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au)

 1300 312 447

# Home is Where the Art is competition is now open



## Theme: Freedom

Freedom is an interesting concept to explore, particularly in the COVID-19 impacted world. Especially in Victoria, our homes took on a dual role in our lives – a secure sanctuary as well as a space of confinement.

Victorians worked together as a community and were able to not only flatten the COVID-19 curve on several occasions, but also eliminate community transmissions, which allowed us, as a State, to enjoy a sense of freedom again.

It is important to reflect on what freedom means to us, as well as explore ways to feel and express freedom within our homes and neighbourhoods.

Naturally, 'freedom' has a much broader meaning for people and is not limited to our COVID-19 experiences for the purpose of this competition. The theme is entirely open to your interpretation as an artist!

## Categories:

- Children (14 years and younger)
- Youth (14-25 years)
- Fine Arts
- Mixed Media
- Mindful Expressions: Exploring Wellness Through Art
- Best Representation of Theme

## Prizes:

1. First Prize: \$200 voucher to an art store of your choice
2. Second: \$50 Coles / Myer gift card
3. Third: \$25 Coles / Myer gift card

## In addition, our winners will receive an offer:

- to have their work professionally framed when it is safe to do so (i.e. post COVID)
- to have their piece included in the Home is Where the Art is Exhibition (post COVID)
- to have their artwork used in Housing Choices Australia promotional materials and internal publications (i.e. Home Stories, Annual Report, Board Report etc)
- to have their artwork hung in our Melbourne Office foyer for a period of 12 months (this offer is reserved for the First Prize winner).

**Entries must be received by Tuesday 31 August 2021.**

For more information about the Home is Where the Art is competition, please contact us via the details shown below:

 [communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au](mailto:communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au)

 **1300 312 447**



Photograph taken by Taylor Phoenix



## FriYAYs at the Preston Hub


Prior to the 'circuit breaker' COVID-19 lockdown in May, our Community Development Team resumed activities at our Preston Hub. FriYAY activities include:

**Artists in Action:** We provide a studio space for aspiring artists and offer a simple craft activity for interested residents, with all craft supplies provided free to residents.

**Game Gobblers:** Come down, meet your neighbours and join us as we play a board or card game! All games and card sets provided.

When restrictions are lifted to an appropriate level, and we receive advice from our Workplace Health and Safety Manager that enables the safe resumption of FriYAY activities, we will be in touch with residents who have expressed an interest in attending.

To register your interest, please contact our Community Development Team via the details shown below:

 **Housing Choices Australia  
ATT: Community Development Team  
3/350 Queen Street  
Melbourne 3000**

 [communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au](mailto:communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au)

 **1300 312 447**

## COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility

Community Housing residents in Victoria are part of Priority Group 1 identified for vaccination against COVID-19.

As mentioned in General Manager, Housing Services Melissa Palframan's column on page two, Housing Choices Australia residents and members of their immediate household (i.e.

people who live with you) aged 16 years and older are now eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

You can book a vaccination appointment by visiting <https://portal.cvms.vic.gov.au/> or by calling the Victorian Coronavirus Hotline on **1800 675 398**.



## Resident Profile Meet Guru

In this issue of Home Stories, we begin a series profiling the people who live in our communities.

In the Autumn edition of Home Stories, we put the call out to all our residents to find out who wanted to share their creative talents with us. Soon after, we received an email from Guruswamy (Guru for short). Guru is a passionate photographer with more than 60 years' experience in the field.

In India, Guru had a very successful photography career. He photographed an extensive list of



One of Guru's photographs.

notable figures including Indian Prime Ministers and Presidents, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela and many other prominent figures.

After joining the Army Postal Service in 1971, Guru went on to work for two branches of the Indian Government as an independent photographer. He served as the official photographer for Kerala House in New Delhi for 16 years and worked for the Tamil Nadu Government.

Guru and his wife, Kokila, travelled to Melbourne in the mid-2000s to be by their eldest daughter's side when she was diagnosed with a brain tumour. In 2008, they permanently relocated to Melbourne.

"We came here again because my daughter said she needed us for moral support...we settled here and became citizens," Guru said.

Guru and Kokila lived with their daughter and her husband for a year at their Glenroy home before they found their own accommodation through the private rental market.

Guru said he and his wife "suffered like anything" to keep up with rental payments while living in a small place in Richmond.

"After that, we shifted to a small house in Broadmeadows and, while there, I met the people from Housing for the Aged Action Group and they helped me to get this house," Guru said.

Housing for the Aged Action Group put Guru in touch with Housing Choices Australia, which was able to offer him and Kokila a two-bedroom



Guru and Kokila as a young married couple in New Delhi. The couple migrated to Australia in 2008 to be with their daughter.



One of the many photographs taken by Guru during gardening days at Chetwynd Street.

apartment at North Melbourne. They moved into their new home in October 2012 and love its central location.

"Catching the train, tram and bus is easy. Everything is here," Guru said.

"Housing Choices Australia is fantastic. These people are very helpful. My wife is studying at language school and they have provided us financial support for the duration of her studies."

Kokila attends language school several times each week to improve her English.

Guru emphasises how keeping busy and giving back to his community provides him with a deep level of satisfaction. For nearly 12 years, Guru has been on the Committee of the Northern Region Indian Seniors Association (NRISA), where he helps organise events on every third Sunday of the month. At both NRISA and Housing Choices Australia events, like our annual Resident Christmas Party and community garden working bees, Guru volunteers his time to snap photographs and capture memorable moments.

"I am satisfied when I am doing community service – it makes me very happy. Whatever work I did and whatever credit I got was so many years ago, now it is just about doing what I enjoy. That is very important and I try to give any help I can," Guru said.

## Future Scholarship Program

Our Future Scholarship Program is open now for applicants studying in Semester 2, 2021. We have 10 scholarships available!

This program is part of our commitment to working with our residents to support access to, and engagement with, education and training. Successful applications will receive up to \$500 of financial support towards out-of-pocket expenses associated with their studies. Expenses may include course fees, textbooks, stationery, excursions and tutoring. If awarded, scholarship funds will be supplied direct to the education or training institution or provider.

Scholarship applications can be made by Housing Choices Australia residents and/or their children who will be participating in the following recognised and accredited courses:

- Year 11 or Year 12
- Vocational Educations and Training (VET) Course
- Certificate courses (Levels 1 to 5)
- Diploma certificates
- Bachelor qualifications
- Apprenticeship courses

To apply for a Future Scholarship, eligible Housing Choices Australia residents will need to complete a Future Scholarship application form. This form is available through our Community Development Team, which can be reached by phone or email.

 [communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au](mailto:communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au)

 1300 312 447

## Victorian Resident Advisory Committee applications now open!

The Victorian Resident Advisory Committee (VRAC) is now accepting applications for new members.

The VRAC is the resident voice. Members participate directly in Housing Choices Australia's decision-making processes and provide invaluable feedback and input into our policies, procedures and programming.

Additionally, the VRAC is responsible for the planning and implementation of five annual VRAC meetings and two social events for residents that are paid for by Housing Choices Australia.

If you are interested in joining the VRAC, or have any questions about the Committee, please contact us via the details shown below:

✉ **Housing Choices Australia**  
**ATT: Community Development Team**  
**3/350 Queen Street**  
**Melbourne 3000**

✉ **communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au**

☎ **1300 312 447**

## Customer Service Journey Focus Group and Outcomes



Housing Choices Australia is actively investigating ways to enhance our customer service.

As part of this process, we held a resident focus group where we asked residents:

- what they look for in Housing Choices Australia's service provision
- what they think a good resident experience looks like
- what they think Housing Choices Australia employees need to deliver good customer service

Housing Choices Australia is developing a strategic framework to embed continuous improvement into our service provision and feedback from residents about our services is helping shape our framework.

After the focus group, we consulted with our staff, using the themes and goals established by residents who attended the group and consulted with the Victorian Resident Advisory Committee to further develop our understanding around what residents think about our service provision.

The findings from these groups will be collated into a report, which will be available to read on

our website. The report will also help shape the Housing Choices Australia Group Business Plan 2021-23.

If you would also like to provide feedback about our service provision, please contact your Housing Officer.



## New Program Partake Small Grants Fund



We are pleased to announce the launch of our *Partake* Small Grants Fund.

To help make participating in community programs a little easier, Housing Choices Australia residents who are aged 18 and older can apply for grants valued up to \$100.

Grant funds can be used to help cover out-of-pocket expenses associated with participating in programs run by:

- Neighbourhood House/s
- Rotary Groups / Lions Clubs (and equivalents)
- Recognised sporting organisations
- Recognised Housing Choices Australia partner organisations

Out-of-pocket expenses may include membership / class fees or the purchase of required tools / equipment / uniforms.

If you are interested in applying for a *Partake* grant, or if you have any questions about *Partake*, please contact us via the details shown below:

✉ **Housing Choices Australia**  
**ATT: Community Development Team**  
**3/350 Queen Street**  
**Melbourne 3000**



✉ **communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au**

☎ **1300 312 447**

## Ready to Connect: Digital Inclusion

Housing Choices Australia has been organising digital education workshops for residents in collaboration with the City of Melbourne and our partners at Ready Tech Go.



Earlier this year, we began delivering a six week program called *Ready to Connect* at our Melbourne office. We have since had to postpone the workshops due to COVID-19 restrictions but are aiming to resume them as soon as possible.

If you are interested in participating in the workshop series, please contact the Community Development Team on **1300 312 448** or via **communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au**. We have a couple of spots still available!

# 6 Easy Tips to Stay Warm this Winter!



## Curtains & Blinds

Curtains and blinds can be used for more than decorating! By keeping them open during the day, you let sunlight and heat in through the windows. Once the sun goes down, you can close your curtains and blinds to trap the heat inside.

## Rug it Up

Just like curtains and blinds, rugs can be used for more than decorating! Using a rug to cover your floorboards or tiles will add a layer of insulation to the room and help to keep your feet warm.

## Use Heavy Curtains

Using thicker or heavier curtains adds a layer of insulation to your windows, which helps trap heat in.

## Re-position your furniture

Your home is full of warm and cold areas, so try rearranging furniture so you can spend more time in warmer areas. This might be near windows that receive a lot of natural light and heat or closer to the heating unit on your wall.

## Heaters

A small portable heater can be used in short bursts to quickly warm up a room and can be a cheap and easy solution. Just remember to avoid using them for prolonged periods and to always switch them off once the room has warmed up.

## Cosy Clothes

The simplest and most important tip is to wear your cosy clothes! Rugging up in a warm jumper or some slippers is a great way to retain the heat your body produces naturally.



# Heating and Cooling Upgrades for more than 600 properties!

Housing Choices Australia is working through delivery of an \$8.5 million property upgrade plan aided by a government stimulus package.



The program includes 1,250 improvements across more than 600 properties in Victoria. Most upgrades relate to energy efficient products like solar, split system and hot water heat pump installations.

We have worked in conjunction with Banyule and Moreland Councils to deliver 12 energy efficient upgrades for residents and are currently working with the Shire of Mornington to deliver a further 24.

Different properties require different solutions; solar becomes viable when there's enough roof space to work with and when ageing systems are replaced by modern efficient ones.

Property Condition Surveys allow us to evaluate the condition of a property and plan future upgrades. The stimulus program has allowed us to fast-track some of this work and complete other maintenance work.

### In the coming months, our Assets Team will:

- utilise the Victorian Government's \$1,000 funding opportunity through a four-year Home Heating and Cooling Upgrades program to replace more than 400 gas space heaters with energy efficient split systems for our residents' benefit
- deliver significant common area improvements at our Nation Building apartment complexes
- evaluate a tender to deliver 88 hot water heat pumps to residents across Victoria.

**We look forward to sharing the progress of these projects with you!**

# 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](mailto:communications@hcau.org.au)**  
for more information.

Artwork: *A Galaxy Somewhere Out There* by Stephen Bishop

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*Lotus* by Guru

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