

THE HOME STORIES

**SUMMER
2021**

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*Fly to Freedom by
Samantha Standaar*

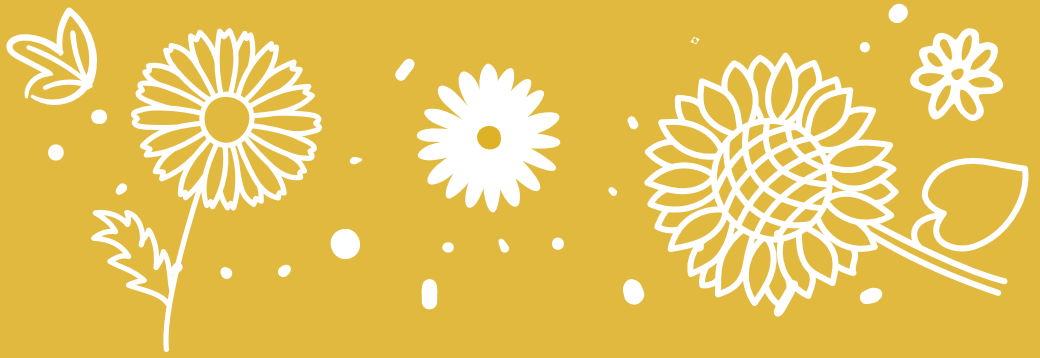
HOUSING
CHOICES
AUSTRALIA

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www.housingchoices.org.au

From the General Manager



Hi Everyone,

Summer is now upon us. I don't know about you, but for me this year has flown by, which is hard to believe given we were in lockdown for so much of it!

Speaking of lockdown, now that it's ended, our teams are keen to see you all again. As you're aware, there have been restrictions on property inspections, non-urgent maintenance and our annual property meetings. With restrictions having now lifted, we are planning to get out and about again to see you and your home. Your Property or Housing Officer will be in touch soon to organise a time to come out. Please be sure to let them know if you have any concerns about your property or tenancy so we can assist you to continue

enjoying your home. I'm also looking forward to getting out and about and meeting residents and visiting our properties.

Now that COVID-19 restrictions have lifted, we are undertaking services again as per the following:

- ✓ **Our Melbourne and Preston offices are now open.** Please ensure you bring a face mask to wear (unless you are exempt) when you visit our office and let us know if you are experiencing any COVID-19 like symptoms.
- ✓ **All maintenance and repairs services have resumed** in metropolitan and regional Victoria.
- ✓ **Property inspections** and home visits will recommence.
- ✗ **Face to face** Community Development and Engagement activities will not recommence just yet.

In this edition, you'll find some wonderful resident contributions. Box Hill resident Cynthia (Cindy) has shared a beautiful poem about her late grandmother.

This newsletter also showcases some of the amazing entries from our annual 'Home is Where the Art is' competition. I hope you all enjoy perusing the artistic creations as much as I did. We have some really talented people in our communities. You'll also find a resident profile on Samantha, who won first prize in the fine arts category of the competition.

With Christmas fast approaching, as well as the end of the school year, it can be a stressful time for some individuals and families. Please remember that we may be able to help you with support or financial assistance. We also continue to encourage you to reach out if you are impacted by COVID-19. Please keep in touch with your Housing Officer or contact us on **1300 312 447** if you find yourself needing additional support.

Happy reading and have a wonderful Summer!

Best,

Melissa Palframan
General Manager,
Housing Choices
Australia

Home is Where the Art is Competition winners

Housing Choices is proud to run our annual 'Home is Where the Art is' competition. The art competition is a wonderful way to showcase the fantastic talent within our resident communities.

This year, we received many skilful, creative and beautiful entries, many of which explored this year's theme of 'Freedom'. After living through extensive lockdowns and the COVID-19 pandemic era, this year's theme

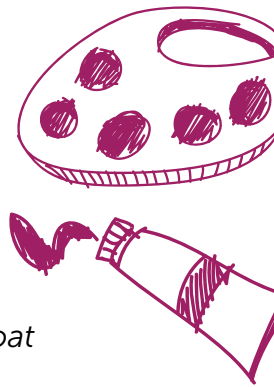
inspired us to remember all the wonderful things we associate with freedom.

Prizes are awarded by a panel of staff and our Victorian Resident Advisory Committee (VRAC) members, who all vote for their favourite entries. Once again, we were spoilt for choice and faced tough decisions in the judging process this year! We hope each of our entrants had fun participating – we loved seeing all the beautiful works!



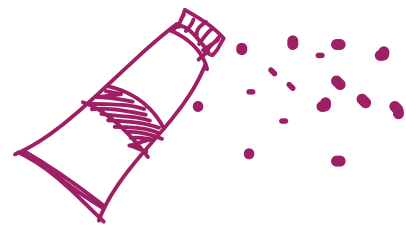
Best Representation of Theme (Freedom) Category

- 1st Ebony Rose Lyons**
– *Freedom, Basking in the Sunshine*
- 2nd Jennifer Keating**
– *Fountain of Freedom*
- 3rd Con Papageorgiou**
– *Zoe (Life) the end of the life of a boat*



Fine Arts Category

- 1st Samantha Standaar**
– *Fly to Freedom*
- 2nd Moon Ramone**
– *All Mind This Matter*



Mixed Media Category

1st Markrit Yaziciyan

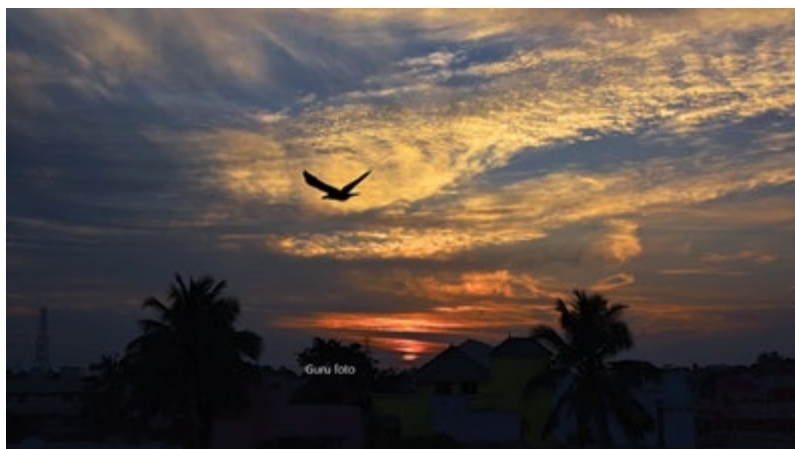
– *Branching Up*

2nd Susan Paxton

– *...My Country is My Whole World*

3rd Emeretta Cross

– *Eyes*



Photography Category

1st Guru Perumal

– *Sunrise from my Home Town*

2nd Juliette Kent

– *Freedom to Visit a Country Town After Lockdown*

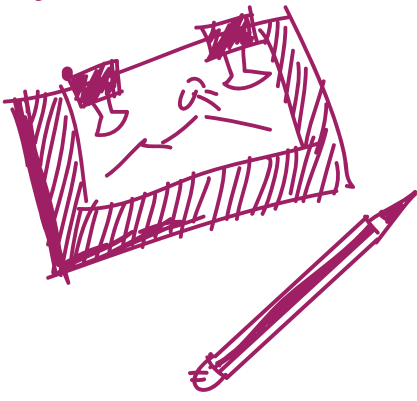
3rd Serif Tuglaci

– *Tranquility at Aireys Inlet*



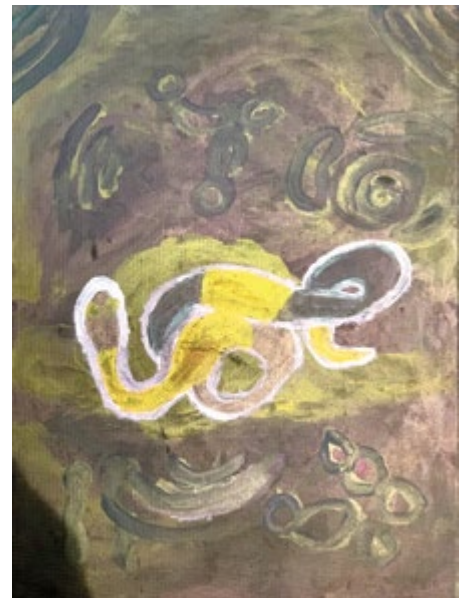
Entry from Margert Fiore

– *Freedom is Going to a Café*



Mindful Expression Category

- 1st Sharon Cunningham**
– *Connected*
- 2nd Angela Harrison**
– *Whirlpool*
- 3rd Sunloch Wilde**
– *Freedom of mind*



Youth Category

- 1st Emma Robinson**
– *Shedding Skin*

Children's Category

- 1st Matthew Haywood**
– *Give a Loving Hand Under Lockdown*
- 2nd Victor**
– *Aboriginal Black Snake*

The Power of Poetry with Cindy



Cindy has been a Housing Choices resident since 2014.

She dreams of being a backing vocalist and competed with Chime Choral Institute Melbourne at the 2008 Choral Olympics in Austria.

Before the COVID-19 lockdowns, Cindy was part of the Box Hill Choir. She is looking forward to rejoining when it starts back up.

Cindy's family, her grandmother in particular, always encouraged her to sing. She'll often start her mornings with a burst of song. Cindy also plays the drums and writes her own songs.

On the right, you will find Cindy's beautiful and heartfelt poem that she wrote about her grandmother and their close relationship. The piece was previously published in an anthology, 'Recollections', in 2016. The poem is Cindy's way of saying goodbye to her beloved Grandmother.



Gar

*There she reclines
hair billowy white,
soft as snow flakes
on this spring afternoon.*

*The sun paints her face,
with powder-pink hues.
Wrinkles criss-cross
Under cookie-brown eyes.*

*Her mouth is lop-sided.
Open.
Twisted by a stroke.*

*As my tears
dampen her pillow.
She turns towards me
tries to speak
to comfort me.*

*Hours tick by,
on the hospital clock
Our family gathers round.
We say our goodbyes,
Tell her we love her.*

*"Let's pop a cheezle into that mouth,"
jokes my Uncle.
She clamps her mouth shut,
shares our laughter.*

*Soon her hand grips mine.
There's a glint in her eyes,
a warmth in our hands,
when I speak of a singer
she fancies somewhat.*

*"sleep well Gar,
he will be in your dreams tonight."
Our hands draw apart.*

*With a final shiver
She is gone from us
My Gar,
My previous grand-mother.*

© Cynthia Hill



New electricity and gas audit process

The recent changes to the Victorian Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) have meant that Housing Choices is required by law to make some changes to our electricity and gas audit process. The amended RTA requires us to:

- undertake gas and electric safety checks on all properties every 24 months
- undertake smoke alarm checks on all properties every 12 months

Housing Choices has chosen *Taskforce* as the contractor to manage the gas and electrical audit. *Taskforce* is conveniently able to provide both gas and electrical checks in one visit, meaning there is less inconvenience for residents.

If *Taskforce* visits your home for an electrical and smoke alarm check only, it will take approximately 30 minutes. If the check includes electrical, smoke alarms and gas, it will take between 45 minutes – one hour to complete.

You will receive an SMS/email from *Taskforce* with a link to book the date and time of the inspection at your home. If you're unable to book through their SMS/email system, please contact **Avanthi De Mel on 1300 312 447**.

If there are any minor defects identified in the audit, they will be resolved on the day of the inspection. Any major defects that are identified will be quoted during the inspection and will require *Taskforce* to come back and complete the works later.

We have already started the electricity and gas audit process and works are being done at 600 properties simultaneously. Please reach out to our Property team on 1300 321 185 if you have any questions.

Gift ideas for this festive season

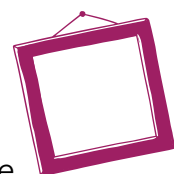


The festive season is upon us and, while there is lots to celebrate, it can also be an expensive time. To help ease some of the financial pressure this time of year can bring, we've come up with a Gift Guide with a range of gift ideas for everyone to enjoy.

1. Cook a delicious meal: Nothing shows a loved one your appreciation more than preparing a hearty, home cooked meal for them that you can enjoy together.



2. A picture says 1000 words: Lots of places like Officeworks and Kmart now offer cheap printing of photos, which you can sync right from your phone. Whether creating a scrapbook, photo album or even just putting a photo in a pretty frame (which you can decorate yourself), it's a perfect gift that is filled with memories.



3. Tasty treats: Everyone loves a sweet treat, right? Buy a cheap glass jar from your local \$2 shop and fill it with treats you know your loved one adores! A mixed candy jar or a delicious trail mix is an affordable gift that can be nibbled on right through the festive period.



4. Garden goodness: Nothing is better than gifts that keep on giving. Even if your gift receiver isn't a green thumb, plants like succulents and cacti are very low maintenance. Bunnings always has some vibrant and affordable plant options.



5. Funky socks: Although inexpensive, getting your loved ones a pair of groovy socks is a fun and thoughtful gift. These days you can find socks with just about any pattern - cute animals, funny phrases, avocados and more. This means you can find a pair that perfectly matches your gift receiver's personality!



Get to know your Property and Housing teams

Ben McDonald Property Team Leader

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Why do you like working in Community Housing?

After living in public housing for almost 10 years, it definitely prepared me and shaped what I do. Growing up in public housing has given me an appreciation for the importance of secure, safe housing and it's also made me want to help someone in the same way my family received help.

How long have you worked at Housing Choices?

I've worked at Housing Choices for nearly 15 years. I was the first Property Officer at Housing Choices and have been the Property Team Leader for about seven years.

What do you do in your role as Property Team Leader?

I lead the wider maintenance team. We have five Property Officers that do the technical stuff and three Coordinators that take maintenance calls. My ethos to my team is that the resident is front and centre, to listen to people without judging and while treating people the way you want to be treated.

How do the Property team help residents?

We have a Maintenance Hotline (**1300 321 185**). Calls to the hotline are answered by our Coordinators. If we miss your call, we will call you back. Coordinators are a very important part of the process and they will always take

your call. Don't worry if you don't know who your Property Officer is – as long as we have your name and address, we will be able to help you.

If the maintenance request is more complex, that's where our Property Officers – who are as important as the Coordinators – step in, as they are the technical experts. They will engage specialised trades if they deem it necessary.

What are you most proud of during your time at Housing Choices?

My passion is our residents and being able to help someone who is in a harder circumstance than myself, who is really trying to do their best. I enjoy what I do and I can go home knowing I've helped someone and made their life a little easier.

Step

1

Call our Property team on



1300 321 185

Step

2

Our Property Coordinators will take your call and process your maintenance request

If we miss your call, leave a voicemail with your name and address and we will call you back.



Step

3

If the maintenance request is more complex, it will be directed to a Property Officer

Property Team Leader, Ben, oversees requests and will step in if there's a more complex issue.



Deb Pask

Housing Team Leader

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How long have you worked at Housing Choices?

I've been working at Housing Choices for almost 18 years. I started as a casual temp on reception before moving into a full-time role at reception. I then moved into the admin side of things, before moving across to being a Housing Officer. I became a Team Leader about 10 years ago.

Why do you like working in Community Housing?

You can achieve life changing outcomes for people by providing affordable / supported housing. During my time as a Housing Officer, I loved working directly with our residents and getting to know them. I find it really rewarding. It didn't matter how hard the week was because, in the end, if you made someone smile or gave them a

home, that was the most amazing thing. I was very fortunate to have been mentored by such passionate colleagues who passed on their passion to me. I hope I'm mentoring in the same way, passing on my passion and empathy and respecting everyone's individuality and needs.

What do you do in your role as Housing Team Leader?

Part of my role is supporting the five Housing Officers in our team to have autonomy over their own portfolios by providing support and guidance in decision making and ensuring that residents are at the forefront of everything we do.

How do the Housing Team help residents?

Your Housing Officer is there to assist you in sustaining your tenancy. If you've got neighbourhood issues, are in financial difficulty or have trouble paying your rent or need to be linked with support services, we are here to help. Please feel comfortable reaching out to them – no question is too small or too big.

What are you most proud of during your time at Housing Choices?

All our residents, some that I've known for such a long time, doing so well. I'm also proud of all the team members I work with and have worked with in the past. I'm proud to see them grow and take what's been instilled in them with them.



The Property team can help with...

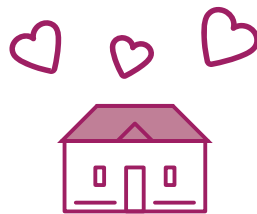
- ✓ Repairs and/or maintenance at your home
- ✓ Modifications to your home
- ✓ Property condition checks
- ✓ Property Coordinators can pass your request on to your Property Officer



The Housing team can help with...

- ✓ Neighbourhood disputes
- ✓ Financial difficulties you may be experiencing, including trouble paying your rent
- ✓ Linking you to support services (e.g. mental health support)

While the Property and Housing teams focus on different parts of your residency with Housing Choices, both teams work closely together to help sustain your tenancy.



Resident stories: **Samantha's Artistic Freedom**

Sam, her partner and their daughter Amber were living in the middle of the forest when they were notified about a Housing Choices property in Wantirna that became available.

"We moved in here two weeks before the first lockdown last year. We were living in Cockatoo up in the hills where I grew up, so it's been a pretty massive change moving to suburbia," Sam said.

Sam's partner is on a permanent disability pension and was on the social housing waitlist for 13 years when they were offered the Wantirna property. While it was quite a transition moving to the suburbs, Sam said it was the right choice for her family.

"I've never ever seen Christmas lights like what I saw here - people don't do it as much in Cockatoo," Sam said.

"We took Amber and went for a huge walk. We walked for about three hours around the entire estate and saw all the Christmas lights. It was amazing!"

Sam said there are benefits to living in Community Housing that are absent in the private rental market.

"It's good to have someone I can call if there's something wrong. It's also nice having four playgrounds in the estate, which are all a close distance from home," she said.

"It's a nice weight off our shoulders, being here, knowing we probably won't have to move again."

Even though the majority of Sam's tenancy with Housing Choices has been through COVID-19 lockdowns, Sam has already started sharing her artistic creations with the Housing Choices community through the annual 'Home is Where the Art is' competition.

Her Housing Officer, Sam Best, referred Sam to the art competition when she and her partner came in for their first interview.

"We had a look at some of the art in the office while in Melbourne and that was exciting to look forward to and work towards," Sam said.

In 2020, Sam won first prize in the art competition for her mixed media piece under the theme 'Connecting Communities.' This year, both Sam and her partner entered pieces into the competition, with this year's theme being 'Freedom'. Sam was awarded first prize in the fine arts category for her watercolour piece, 'Fly to Freedom,' and her partner won third place in the mindful expression category.

"I've never won anything before in my life!" she said.

Sam used her prize voucher to purchase new paints and high-quality watercolour paper, which she said she wouldn't normally be able to afford. With her new materials, she continues building her skills and producing more amazing creations.

"I think the art competition gives people something to look forward to," Sam said.

"There's a lot of creative people out there but, sometimes, they just have trouble getting started. This is a great way because it makes you think 'oh I've got this competition to create for.'"





Tips for staying cool this Summer

As the year draws to a close and the Summer weather creeps in, it's important to stay cool and hydrated. Here are some tips for how to stay cool in these hotter months:

- **Drink lots of water** and carry a water bottle with you when you go out.
- **Take a cold shower or bath** or use cold washcloths on your neck or wrists to cool down.
- **Keep your curtains drawn** during the day to block the sun from heating up your home.
- **Wear light coloured clothes.** While dark colours absorb the sunlight, light colours reflect sunlight and will keep you cooler. Remember to wear sunscreen as light colours are not as effective at blocking out the sun's UV rays. Also wear organic fabrics like cotton and linen, which are more breathable.
- **Another easy way to keep cool is to pay a visit to your local library.** Your libraries often have interesting programs running, are air conditioned and are a great place to relax and read an interesting book!



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.

Artwork by: Jennifer Keating
'Fountain of Freedom'