

# From the Chair



As this issue of the magazine goes to press we are emerging from a very cold winter in Melbourne – a winter that has seen an explosion of people sleeping rough in the CBD and in other areas around Melbourne. These people are daily evidence of a much deeper problem in the shortage of social and affordable housing.

Ms Rosanne Haggerty, CEO of Breaking Ground in NYC, recently visited Melbourne to present at the annual Oswald Barnett Oration

and suggested that we need to move from "Housing Reform" to "Housing System Reform". She suggested that the Homelessness System which we have created is leaving the most vulnerable out in the cold. It was interesting to hear that in the US by moving away from "Waiting Lists" to "Name Lists", and by mobilizing communities in just under 4 years, they have managed to get over 100,000 homeless people off the streets. Fundamentally, she challenged us to ask if we - all of us in the "Homelessness industry" - have now become part of the problem with complex systems, programs, eligibility and process requirements, to the extent that we risk losing the primary aim of assisting the human being, the person.

August was also the time for the collection of Census data. Census data is the key piece of data used to determine the extent of homelessness in Australia and is our main tool to advocate for people who are homeless. I would like to acknowledge the great work of housing providers who have actively engaged with ABS field officers assisting tenants and clients completing their Census forms.

Some of you joined me at the small session organised by CHFV to hear Michael Lennon, Managing Director of Housing Choices Australia, sharing his views on "The Way Forward with our Housing Affordability Crisis". Michael described how people are expressing anger resulting from a sense of powerlessness in political systems everywhere, and that housing disadvantage contributes to this frustration. We are witnessing the decline in home ownership and its consequences, the rise in insecure tenures and the decline in public housing. He, like Rosanne, suggested system reforms such as harnessing private capital, reforming the Commonwealth's Social Housing Funds through competition policy and encouraging innovation.

I would like to also take this opportunity to acknowledge the huge contribution Karen Barnett has made to Port Phillip Housing Association (PPHA), to CHFV as a founding member and to social housing in this country more broadly. Karen is retiring after a stellar career, turning PPHA from a one person organisation in a back office in St Kilda to a large well respected Housing Association in Victoria. Good luck and thank you Karen!

*Haleh Homaei*  
CHFV Chair

# In Brief

## Moving on Up

While former CHFV Chair Brett Wake embraces the elevated role of National manager at CHL, we welcome Shari McPhail into the ensuing vacancy, as Victorian State Manager of CHL. At the same time our current CHFV supremo Haleh Homaei is to be congratulated for her appointment to the position of CEO at Port Phillip Community Housing. This position has had "one driver only" for nigh on 30 years in the shape of Karen Barnett, lifelong housing activist and CHFV stalwart. She emphatically denies rumours that she is now planning to create a new housing empire in her second home, Bali.

## Food for Thought

Well you gotta hand it to Community Housing Limited. Not content with conquering the world (it now has developments in Timor Leste, Chile and more recently, India) it is conquering the minds of those much closer to home. Its latest project, called the 'Fridge for Fruit' Program, is in partnership with the Ravenswood Heights Primary School in Tassie and has seen CHL purchase 16 fridges for every classroom at the school. Apparently each class utilises the fridges differently, but the main objective is to encourage healthy eating and a healthy diet. "I love the fridge, we store our fruit, vegies, soup and more healthy food. I like keeping my drink bottle and lunch nice and cold", says Lilly, a student at Ravenswood Primary. Remember summer schooldays? Wouldn't we have loved that!

## Congratulations on Being 9th

Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) has recently joined the exalted ranks of Housing Associations, having been officially promoted to that status in late July. After a comprehensive assessment, the Registrar of Housing Agencies announced it was satisfied that AHV met the criteria to become an Association, making it the ninth in Victoria. AHV is the largest Aboriginal housing organisation in Australia, managing 1525 properties in Melbourne and regional Victoria, and providing affordable housing to over 4000 low income Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants. AHV owns 73 of the properties in its portfolio, with the remainder leased from the Victorian Government.

Three cheers to AHV on achieving its new status.

# Shooting the Breeze with Shari



**Shari McPhail came to community housing via the restaurant that she ran with her husband. Seems like an unlikely route, but the story does have its own logic! Shari is the newly appointed Victorian State Manager at Community Housing Limited.**

Shari is a very busy woman – she is literally on the move from morning till night, and you suspect that this is probably the story of her life. These days she is committed to completing 11,000 steps a day with her 'team' at CHL. They, and 22 other groups of 7 within CHL are participating in the international 'Global Corporate Challenge', which sees teams from around the world competing to 'walk' the most steps each day (this can also include swimming, gym work, cycling and so on). So strong is this imperative that walking meetings have even become the order of the day. Shari explains with enthusiasm that the tally of each participant and team is added to the worldwide table on a daily basis, via a fit-bit app. Her team is currently 12,160th in the world.

But wind back the clock 20 years and Shari could be found talking through the problems faced by the young people employed in her restaurant. Although her impulse to help them was strong, she says she was keenly aware that she lacked the qualifications to offer them the advice and assistance they needed. But instead of leaving this task to someone 'more qualified', Shari enrolled in a Certificate 4 in Youth Work in order to learn the ropes herself. However it was actually after completion of this credential

that she was offered the "greatest learning experience" of her life. This was a day/night position in a residential unit for young women at risk. Here she was exposed to stories of great trauma, sadness and personal danger.

By now a mother of two boys, the die was cast for Shari. The hospitality industry was a thing of the past, as her now clearly defined sense of social justice propelled her into the homeless sector – as a case manager with Uniting Care Connections. This was followed by a lengthy term with Hanover; in the course of ten years Shari moved from co-ordination to management, ultimately becoming the Manager of Youth Families and Children.

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Shari recently participated in the East Gippsland Winter Sleepout with young people from the Nungurra Youth Refuge. She says that spending time chatting around the fire with these kids in the cold of night reminded her about why she entered the sector in the first place – to ensure that, despite the many challenges faced by people experiencing marginalisation and disadvantage, they have equal access to opportunities. She later slept in her car overnight, which provided a stark reminder of the many women (and children) escaping domestic violence, who are forced to live in this way. The recent Family Violence Housing Blitz which will enable CHL to provide 37 families with new housing opportunities in the City of Casey, Latrobe and East Gippsland Shire, is a move in the right direction.

When not on the job, Shari says that travel with her family is one of her great pleasures – she's thrilled by the food, the language, the

smells, the architecture, the cultural differences peculiar to each country. But her observation that there are whole families sleeping rough in Europe suggests that her professional eye is ever alert to injustice. She admits that part of CHL's 'appeal' for her is that it's brief is not just confined to Australia but takes in impoverished communities across the world.

This new recruit is also impressed with CHL's care in ensuring that the values and qualities of community housing are not lost in the face of continuing growth. She says that wherever a new development is taking shape, the organisation acknowledges the importance of reinforcing a "strong sense of place", and cultivates this by establishing locally based teams who operate in partnership with existing neighbourhood networks.

Many would applaud Shari for becoming a senior manager in a sector which sees women under-represented at management level. She urges women working in community housing to aspire to achieve management status and recommends that they seek a mentor or coach (she has learnt this from her own experience, where "luckily things just turned out that way"). The role of the mentor shouldn't be to give advice on managing 'tasks' as such, but should assist you to define who you are as leader. This capacity can then be applied across a range of scenarios.

In 2015 Shari finished a Master of Public Policy and Management, an achievement that she (modestly) lets slip as an afterthought. Completing this 'intense period' of study means that she now has time to devote to her new mission – boosting her tally of steps. Driven? Perhaps a little, she confesses.

Shari also confesses to being a passionate Hawthorn supporter, and adds that the family likes to spend weekends at Bonnie Doon, taking the boat out on Lake Eildon. Perhaps the sign of a true optimist, she's undaunted by the low water levels in the lake and laughingly insists that, when it comes to launching the vessel, "there's always a ramp somewhere".