

**Submission
No 24**

**INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AMONGST OLDER
PEOPLE AGED OVER 55 IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Mrs Marie Sillars

Date Received: 30 May 2022

INQUIRY SUBMISSION – IN SUPPORT OF SENIOR HOUSING (OVER 55s)

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit my thoughts and hopes to you all.

My name is Marie Sillars, and I am 68 years old, I live in West Ryde in the North West of Sydney.

Nineteen years ago, I was in the middle of a marriage breakup and in extreme distress I found myself living on the couch of my best friend Mary in very overcrowded conditions, so I found a unit in St Marys and my Friend's Partner gave me furniture and I settled there. It was very difficult as I was on "Widows Allowance" and the Rent was always paid first and food was really the last thing to be bought. I was suffering from a serious illness at that stage and had many hospital stays so I thought that I should move away from Sydney and ended up living in Woy Woy in a small one bedroom unit. I quickly realised that I was too far away from my Grandchildren, and I was starting to suffer extreme mental health issues. I was on the Public Housing List but had no hope of getting a home for a long time, so I decided to end my life. I was rushed to Gosford Hospital and whilst there was no physical damage, I felt like I just did not want to go on with this isolation. My Mental Health Team started to contact Housing and the local MP stepped in as well and I felt very fortunate when a one-bedroom unit in the Ivanhoe Estate was secured for me and I finally moved to a place where I had access to my Grandchildren.

Living on the Ivanhoe Estate turned out to be one of the highlights of my life as I quickly realised that we needed a "Community" there and Housing NSW agreed. I lived on the part of the Estate that was for over 55s and with others formed an Incorporated Tenant Group and we opened a Community Centre with a library, Community Gardens, regular Meetings and 100% support from Housing NSW, my Housing NSW CSO encouraged me as she felt that I had a distinct feeling for Community and I have to say that my mental health improved as I had others to care for and care about. Housing NSW had designated over 55s areas and whilst we joined in at other Community events, we essentially looked after each other. Our regular Meetings had Guest Speakers to help Seniors to be safe with talks about avoiding falls, how to eat correctly and we had cooking demonstrations. Our Saturday Oz Harvest deliveries ensured that our Seniors had all nutritional assistance. Our Volunteers delivered bags of groceries to every Senior with staple foods of bread, vegetables, milk and sometimes meat as well. The benefit from all of this was feeling like I belonged which always benefits Seniors and why we need to be housed is a safe & happy environment. Although we lost our beloved Community, the battle to be rehoused and the need to be safe almost destroyed many Seniors of Ivanhoe.





This is how Senior Communities work together

In 2014 the decision was made by the Government to sell off Ivanhoe Estate and move us all away and I went into action to try to save my Community. I attended Meetings with Politicians and spent all of my time trying to help others around me who were suffering with anxiety about the future. I sat every day at the Inquiry into Public, Social & Affordable Housing and was on the Committee with Sophie Cotsis to try to make sense of what would happen in the future. You may remember this Inquiry Mr Primrose and I met many incredible people on this journey and had 100% support from a dear friend named Ross Smith (Waterloo) and visited there and Millers Point to stand with each other. My health suffered with all of this but I kept going and I stood up to all of the people trying to tear our Community to pieces. In the end, they tried to force me to take down our Incorporation and I refused, the pressure was terrible but we tried to stand firm so I took the decision to move over to Community Housing (Link Housing) as I had met with them at Ivanhoe and I was moved (with help from LAHC) and I was then banned from Ivanhoe even though I was Public Officer of our Group) and serious pressure was placed on me as I tried to help the other Tenants (many of them Seniors). Soon after moving to Link Housing the pressure became too much and I tried to suicide again, I felt lost and that I had let my people down and whilst Community Housing is good they simply did not understand the need to have a close Community and eventually I had to transfer from that unit (26 stairs) meant that I could not go out very much and had to be helped down the stairs by Family. Link Housing found me a lovely 2 bedroom unit nearby and moved me here three years ago, at that stage my tenant Group had received Volunteer of the Year Award, I was personal runner up, I had been nominated as a Woman of the Year and I now try to help my Community in this Area and joined Link Wentworth TAG, Tenant Assessor and I am now a Member of Link Wentworth so whilst being busy I started to feel SECURE. The road to this home of mine has been paved with terror, fear & anxiety and I do not want others to suffer this way when a caring Government could change things.

I attended a Tenant Advisory Group Meeting with Link Housing where I met a lady named Greta Angel and she has told me that she "recognised my ability & enthusiasm to assist Tenants" and she encouraged me to attend Ageing on the Edge, we became close friends and together we started to attend Housing for the Aged (Vic) and helped form the National Alliance of Seniors for Housing and finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel with HOME AT LAST and I finally found somewhere that I belong and started to feel that as one voice, I can make a difference. Home at Last sums up the situation I find myself in after a long hard & torrid experience. We need a "Home at Last" Service here in NSW urgently, a place where Seniors can turn to when their lives change for the worst, a place where they can feel heard instead of falling down a rabbit hole into anxiety and loss. A fully funded Service that can act as a buffer from the harsh reality of having nowhere to go. Also, as you may be aware, Priority Housing for Seniors in NSW is over 80 years old and this needs to be changed in line with other States as soon as possible. A lot of very serious things can happen before you reach

80 and I feel that many Seniors who live in housing stress do not get the privilege of reaching 80 years old.

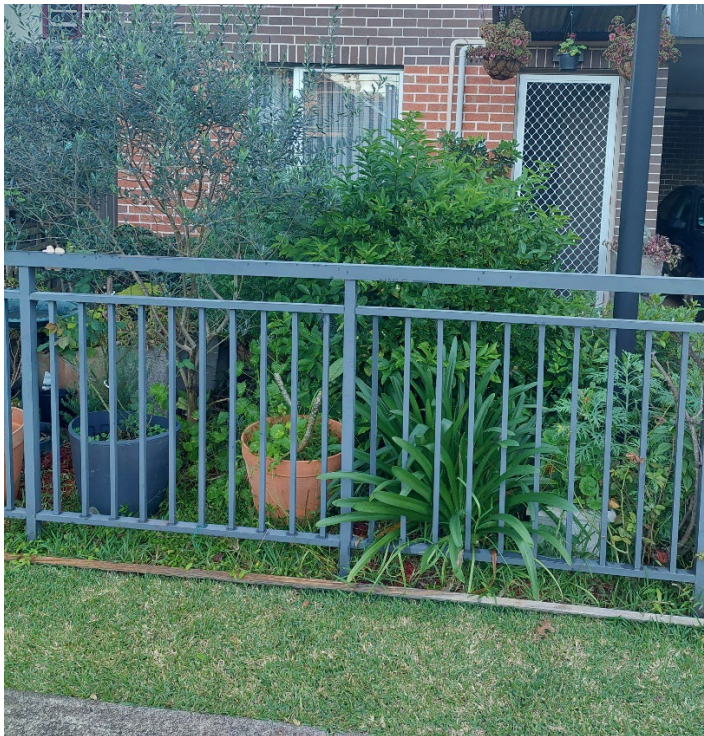
I have 3 different auto immune conditions and my health is not too good sometimes, but I have an absolute conviction to reach out to help others, I have been involved also in the Labor Party so realise that changes must be made to protect Seniors and keep them from being our most ignored & invisible people. I am also involved in Action for Public Housing as I feel that both Public & Community Housing will be required to have all Seniors in safe housing, the over 55s system worked very well, there is nothing better than a Community of Senior people working together in friendship.

I do a lot of social media for HAAG (Vic) and I am witnessing firsthand the terrible situations that Seniors are finding themselves in, couch surfing, living in vans, housing sitting and living in fear constantly. I would like to say here that, as a Senior I would like everyone to get up in the morning and feel a sense of peace, knowing that this is my home until I pass away. I want others to tend their garden & take pride in their surroundings. My home keeps me safe; I have been undergoing intense therapy for PTSD and my health is improving, I feel content & happy in my surroundings, and I have this absolute conviction that I will continue to advocate for others so that they can feel this security & pleasure in living.

As Seniors, we have raised families, given our all to Society and taken part in Community usually volunteering our time, we have sacrificed ourselves with little thought to the future and never thinking that we would end up being out there alone and living in fear, surely being in secure housing generally ends up being a gain for Society as we become more healthy (mentally & physically) we can again take part in Communities and we can stay out of hospitals & nursing homes. I have also experienced the "minefield" that starts with My Age Care as I reached 65 and found that I may need some extra help at home. This has also been a situation where I find myself wondering how Seniors find their way through this maze and I have been collating information to share with other Seniors to help them through this. Finding a Provider, being aware of hidden charges and exit fees has taken up much of my time and it is another hurdle for Seniors to jump over, let alone trying to deal with lack of housing. We Seniors still have a lot to give but the main thing we need to do this is a safe secure home where we can enjoy life again.

I would like to share with you my favourite quote:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead



“Dreaming of better times

A place that is safe & secure

Somewhere we can age in place

Ageing safely, ageing in peace

A time of wellbeing

I make these hopes for all of us

Please make this wish come true” Marie Sillars



Thank you for accepting and reading my Submission, lived experience is so very important to share to help the Seniors to come.

I consent to my name being published regarding this Submission.

Marie Sillars