

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
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Chair,
Standing Committee on Social Issues,
NSW Parliamentary House,
6 Macquarie Street,
Sydney NSW 2000
Via email: socialissues@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear committee

I'm [redacted] and I live in Illawarra area. I worked full time as a support worker for the [redacted] in [redacted] for four years. I left there and I worked for [redacted] in the Illawarra as a support worker. I got very sick and had blood clots, I still have, blood clots in my lungs. I have asthma and COPD from years of smoking so I had to leave work. I was physically unable to work at all.

I had to go on unemployment benefits because according to Centrelink I wasn't sick enough to get Disability Support Pension and I wasn't old enough at the time to go onto aged pension. They put me on Centrelink benefits - unemployment benefit - and I was trying to pay rent, groceries, petrol, and medications.

I was really, really struggling going from a wage to unemployment benefits. So, I started selling things from my home to put roof over my head till it got to the point where I had what I was sitting on in the living room, the television, the fridge, bed, table and chairs and then pots and pans or like kitchenware and my clothes. I've got nothing left. This is it. If I sell this, I have nothing. So, I went to the doctors because I was really stressed out. He sent me to a psychologist, to see if they could help me in any way. Then it opened a can of worms of my old past and why I was feeling the depths of what I was feeling now of abandonment and loneliness and worry and concerns about my future. All those things were embedded in me all my life. And now if my life was out of control again and I'm now in the hands of someone else. So, they put me on some medication.

There were too many steps to go into my place. The shower was too small, there was no ventilation, no back door and no smoke alarms. There were lots of things that should have been in place but weren't. Probably because while I was working, I didn't worry about it too much, but when you're not and you're ill, all those things are very important. It was also getting too expensive on my pension. I ended up putting what I had in a storage shed.

That's when I started my journey through refuges in the Illawarra. I was very, very grateful not to have to sleep in my car. I know a lot of people have different situations, I understand that.

I got offered a place to stay with a gentleman within my budget. Well, with a male. He said, as long as I provided him with sex, I could stay with him and then I wouldn't be homeless, and that was the pattern of my abuse in my life when I was younger. I'm thinking here I am at the end of my life and still the situations are going on and I've got no one I can turn to. I

can't. What do I do? Where do I go? And so, I spoke to my psychologist. I went into a refuge instead of taking this person's offer, obviously.

Even though I was grateful at the refuge, I've never seen anything in such bad shape and so cockroach ridden in all my life. It was scary to even stand up because they` would crawl over the shoes. No one woman and no man, no human, no animal should have to live in those circumstances. The next refuge I went to, they dropped me off at the door. They told me that that's where I was going. I opened the door. There were holes in the walls. It was just filthy. I bought products to try to clean, but I've got to be careful of what cleaning products I get because they defuse of different chemicals that affect my breathing. One day I was making myself a cup of tea and I got to the bottom of my cup. I picked up the cup to drink, the last little bit, there was a cockroach. Obviously, there was a cockroach in the kettle, and I didn't see it and I poured it out to make myself a cup of tea.

There were people there that had started drinking really, really heavily. There were people using drugs. There were people gambling and so I joined them in the gambling because I needed an output and something to do and so that created a problem. Fortunately for me, now I haven't gambled for two years. But that hasn't been an easy journey, and so it's not only finding a place for people in my situation to go to, I think it's very important that a person's life journey is understood which will help the placement being correct for that person. We're not going to be moved into a place where there's a big drug addicting problem. Addictions that we may acquire or already have. We might have someone that we could talk to about them. The state of the refuges needs to be looked at. Someone to tell us what we might expect.

The drama that I had with Centrelink are unnecessary. I asked to speak to a social worker and this woman at the counter of Centrelink asked, 'what about?' And so, I found myself standing in front of everyone, essentially explaining a little bit, not in depth like I just told you, but enough to say to her that could I please speak to somebody – a social worker. She listened and said 'all your circumstances don't warrant a social worker, I'm sorry' and she just left me standing there until I walked away. Another time I've gone there, and I said, 'you know, I can't work again and I'm 65 in January. You know what can I do about that?' And I asked, 'can I apply for a disability pension?' And this lady laughed – chuckling kind of a laugh. And she said 'no way, by the time you apply for your disability pension and go through all the channels and back, by then you'll be 65 and half years old and you'll be on a normal pension'. This is somebody telling me all of the dramas with the process that I'm going to go through. Where do you go? You know who is there to just listen to what you say?

I said to my counsellor and my psychologist, I don't want to see you and tell you my life story. And then you tell me that you're moving to another town, another state, another country. I need a guideline of where I'm going, what I'm doing. I don't like new things. I like to know that this is happening this day and this happened that day and I can organise myself around that.

My psychologist asked 'have you heard of people called MyAgedCare?' And I said 'no, who are they?' He explained briefly, and said, I'll do it right now. So, he wrote something on a piece of paper and faxed it off to them. Then it was my age matters, MyAgedCare, Warrigal and Two independent people- I had people coming from all directions- came to see the situation that I was in and to listen to me a little bit and that's how it all came about. It certainly was not anything from Centrelink. Nobody said to me that there is this a pamphlet here or there is someone here that you can make an appointment to talk to about your particular situation.

We've all got our stories. We all have our life and situations, and we all need individual care. With Centrelink, I have no idea where these people come from. I have no idea why they are in the jobs that they're in because to me, 'link' means to join up. It joins with another link and another one and another one and if the centre folks appoint all these things coming together, i.e., Centrelink. And that does not happen. Well, it didn't happen for me at the Shell Harbour office. No chance that they did it. It makes you feel worse – I've got to be honest; I've thought about suicide. I will be honest. I thought 'what's the point?' You know, I've had a bloody crap life, crap childhood, situations in my life and throughout my life and now I've come to the end and now what am I worth? I'm taking up space here. Fortunately, I spoke to my psychologist and that's when the medication started. Now I'm on very strong, very, very, very strong medication and to get me by and to get me going. I can honestly say I am; I know I am not 100% in control of my emotions because of the medication is doing that job.

Right now, I'm grateful to have Aged Care. They come and help me with my cleaning domestic duties. I get a lady for two hours a week and I also have a social visit from one hour a week. Even though I have my two children near me, because of my life and situations that have happened, it's not a strange relationship, but it could be better. If I didn't see the lady comes to help me on a Tuesday for the domestic and a personal and lady comes personally to help me on a Thursday to just chat with me for an hour, then I wouldn't see anybody. I'm okay with my own company but I don't like feeling lonely. I think that is a shocking scene that lot of people feel lost.

I got put here. The lady that helped me get here, is a lovely lady. She went over and above and beyond to get me this place. I'm sure she did. But now I'm here. I'm in a place here where I'm 70 next January and the youngest person next to me is 78. And then the others are a lot older than that. I don't have a social life here because I'm not in that age bracket where I want to get on a bus and go to bus trips. Because I've got a gambling problem, I don't want to put myself in a situation where I'm in a pub or club. They have a men's shed but they don't have a women's shed. I have different groups call me – about three people call me ' , we're getting together at the community hall, but I have to tell you, I think the youngest lady that comes is 82'. I love these people you know, but that's not the age bracket that are my social mix of people. I'm grateful- you have no idea how grateful I am to have a lovely, clean home I can call my own. Nobody's harassing me. No one is giving me a hard time. They look after me. I can't work physically. But I'm sure that I still have plenty

that I could offer a in a job where if I was sitting down on the phone talking to someone, I'm sure that I have plenty to offer. Absolutely. And I'm sure I'm not the only person.

The prices of food, the prices of petrol are all going up. The government gives you an increase to pension in one hand. Before that increase came into effect, I had a letter from the housing provider telling me that my rent is going up because of the increase that we were going to get. You don't win, you don't get in front. The prices go up, petrol goes up. That's not just for me but for everybody. Things like this increase sounds great on the news and looks great on paper, but it's absolute garbage because it's not happening. We're not being told the truth and just idle promises. It doesn't vote for a good existing life.

Recommendations

Make the access for older people and the information that is relevant to that particular situation available. I mean, what you say to a young male person and where you would channel that person's needs is completely different to mine. So, understanding me and my situation and then guiding to speak with the right people to get some help.

If you are doing a census form, you know how many people are living where and you know in time the age process, surely to God, you can have something already in place for perspective needs of those people.

Listen to me and people like me and treat us with respect.

Thank you,