

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 10 June 2022

Partially
Confidential

Case study

is a 69 year old woman at risk of homelessness in NSW who has been struggling to access housing. She was made redundant in 2015. She was unable to find suitable employment and was discriminated against due to her age. She has been drawing on her superannuation to manage her expenses including medical costs. She was forced to leave Sydney as she could not afford housing. She currently lives in a caravan in a regional area despite all her social networks and medical supports are based around Sydney. As she can only live in the caravan for 180 days a year, she house-sits in Sydney the rest of the year. She has no social networks in the South Coast, is isolated and fears for her safety living in the caravan park by herself.

She applied for social housing in April 2018. She application highlighted the urgency of her need and the fact that she has been living off her superannuation. On multiple occasions she was asked by the department to provide additional evidence, which she furnished. On some occasions these documents were sent via email and some in person. On many occasions when followed up, the authorities would inform her that the evidence was insufficient despite her checking with the staff accepting the documents whether they were satisfactory (a timeline of correspondence attached).

She was also informed that she is able to access housing through private rental market. Correspondence from the department also indicated that there are properties available within the range of \$300. It is unclear from the Department's letter whether this amount is per week or per fortnight. It is highly unlikely that would be able to find any property that would charge \$150 a week. If the department was indicating paying \$300 a week, that would put under significant housing stress as the current rate of Age Pension.

Despite the evidence to demonstrate her precarious and unsuitable housing situation for over 3 years, the Housing authority determined that she did not meet the criteria to be on the priority housing list. In July 2020, she submitted a change of circumstances form. When she inquired in September 2020 and again in May 2021, she was informed that the form has not been assessed yet. The Department officials are also unable to inform her where she is on the housing waiting list.

During the pandemic, the caravan park overlooked the requirement to leave after 180 days. However, she is concerned that with the restrictions easing, she would be required to look online for house sitting options that has a significant impact on her physical and mental health.

*Name has been changed for privacy.

Timeline

Date	Action and correspondence
20 April 2018	Applied for social housing with evidence of financial position, medical issues and living situation.
9 May 2018	Letter from the Department requesting additional information by 28 May 2018
10 May 2018	A text message from the Department notifying the deadline for further evidence.
12- 25 May 2018	Submitted requisite evidence at a Centrelink office – evidence was examined and accepted by staff.
28 May 2018	A text message notifying that ‘evidence was required by 15 June 2018 – with a letter to follow’
28 May 2018	An email noting ‘we have a letter with important information about your application. Please click the link to view your letter’
8 June 2018	A text message ‘Final reminder: Your Housing Pathways application may be closed if you do not provide evidence or call by 15 June’.
18 February 2019	email saying ‘You have successfully registered for an online Application for Social Housing. Please make sure you complete and submit your form before 20 March 2019 or it will expire.’
20 February 2019	Form was completed online.
16 March 2019	A letter stating ‘Previous account closed and reg date for clt 20/8/2018. Ms [xxxx] applied for housing on the 20/4/2018 and is currently residing in South Coast living in her caravan for 180 day a year. Client has indicated preferred allocation zone CS3 (Leichhardt/Marrickville) and is in receipt of Centrelink. Client has stated she has difficulty climbing stairs. ID confirmed and ICS consent given. Unable to complete income calculator due to client’s CL statement showing \$xx,xxx cash/investment/savings. Application updated to ‘incomplete’.
1 April 2019	An email with an attached letter asking for further evidence. Letter was dated 16 th March 2019 and with a deadline on 4 th April.
3 April 2019	A text message noting that evidence is required by 23 April 2019.
3 April 2019	An email with a link to ‘important information’ about my application.
3 April 2019	A text message saying ‘Evidence is required by 3 April 2019 for your Housing Pathways application. Call if you do not receive a letter in 4 days’.
10 April 2019	Email from Department asking to ‘Provide you details to complete registration’.
16 April 2019	Received a text message saying ‘Final reminder: Your application may be closed if you do not provide evidence or call by 23 April 2019.’
16 April 2019	Emailed the Department with supporting evidence requested including financial, medical evidence as well as a detailed breakdown of current cost of accommodation.
25 April 2019	Email from Housing Department indicating they cannot open the document provided by the superannuation provider.
25 April 2019	Follow up with superannuation provider to reissue the document in requested format.
1 May 2019	Confirmation text message from the Housing Department receipt of the additional information.
20 August 2019	Letter advising that ‘We have been unable to assess your application as you have not provided sufficient evidence or responded to our attempts to contact you’. Invited to reapply.
25 August 2019	Another letter from the Department saying ‘We have been unable to assess your application as you have not provided sufficient evidence or responded to our attempts to contact you’. Again, invited to reapply.

10 September 2019	Visited the Housing office in Redfern in person (as attempts to address the issues over the phone were not successful) to submit requested paperwork. The staff accepted evidence after careful examination, informed that it was not necessary to provide evidence of attempts to secure housing in the private rental market and informed that the application would get looked as an 'urgent request'.
18 September 2019	Letter from Housing Department stating that the housing application has been cancelled because of failure to provide additional information despite submission on 10 September.
18 September 2019	Rang the Department to follow up on the letter and was informed that the evidence submitted did not meet the requirements. The Department has cancelled the application without contacting to provide another opportunity to provide evidence.
23 September 2019	The Housing Department emailed asking to contact them regarding application.
23 September 2019	Rang the Housing Department as requested. They indicated that there have been 2 requests for evidence that were not completed and therefore the application was cancelled. Indicated that the department tried to contact on 20 September (there were no missed calls on 20 September in the call log or text messages). Upon informing that every request for information was met, the staff member on the phone informed that 'the admin assistant had just put them on the file rather than getting them (the materials) looked at'.
25 September 2019	Attended Redfern office to resubmit the documents. New evidence was accepted by staff member at the counter. Followed up with Housing Department after submitting documents by phone (as instructed by the staff member at the counter).
3 October 2019	Rang Housing department to inform them of the submission of the documents. Was asked to provide bank statements as the once that were sent via email were not what the department wanted.
3 – 7 October 2019	Went to the Redfern office to hand in new bank records that were verified and accepted by the staff member at the counter.
21 October 2019	Received a text message from the Housing Department indicating that the application has been approved for General Waiting List for Social Housing.
21 October 2019	Received a letter dated 12 October 2019 advising that – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Application been approved for social housing 2. Application was not approved for priority housing for following reasons - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. You have not demonstrated that you have an urgent need for housing and b. You have not demonstrated that you are unable to meet your housing need in the private rental market <p>The reason given for their decision was: 'Our recent search of properties in your area on Realestate.com show there are plenty of suitable accommodation available within your affordability of \$302.32.'</p> <p>There are no suitable properties available that charge \$302 a fortnight. If this is per week – she would be under significant housing stress after paying rent.</p>

16 July 2020	<p>Contacted by a housing agency in Sydney about a women's only housing complex. The offer was withdrawn later that day because the property was unsuitable considering health issues and needs.</p> <p>Asked to complete a FACS Change of Circumstances Form.</p>
21 July 2020	Submitted the change of circumstances form.
21 July 2020	Received an autogenerated email acknowledging receipt of the form.
31 May 2021	<p>Visited Housing office in Burwood to seek an update on the application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The staff members were unable to inform current position on the waiting list. • The Change of Circumstances form has not been assessed since lodgement in 21 July 2020. <p>Was asked to furnish additional evidence to support the priority application (unable to do this as house sitting arrangement ended the following day and had to return to South Coast.</p>
General update	<p>Since lodging the priority application,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The caravan park fees had increased, • Electricity is being charged as an additional amount over and above park fees instead of as part of the fees, • The 180 day limit of living in the caravan is almost exhausted, and • With travel restrictions for domestic and international travel, the house-sitting options are minimal to none-existent.