

Submission
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**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,
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Via email: socialissues@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear committee members,

I'll start from the very beginning. My mum had two children, myself and my brother. My brother's older. She had my brother when she was 19, she was very young. She had me around 20. So we're very close together in age. Over time my father ended up leaving my mother. I don't really remember him living with us at all. I think I was three when he left, so wasn't around very long. From the age of four to 14, mum went downhill for whatever reason and she turned her focus, instead of looking after her children, she turned her focus on drugs, alcohol and men. I grew up in a very neglected, dysfunctional family. We didn't have a lot of food. I used to steal, a lot. I knew where mum would get her pension I guess and she would have cash in her purse so I'd go and steal that just so my brother and I could eat.

We used to move around probably six to 12 months. Maybe one month was the longest I'd ever stayed in one place growing up. Mum couldn't afford to pay the rent, so we had borders living with us. Wherever we went we had to take the borders with us, just for the extra money. They used to live in either a granny-flat at the back of a property, or in a spare bedroom and so forth. These men were extremely scary looking. After a while I was sexually abused by these borders and Mum's boyfriends, because we couldn't afford to pay rent. My job was to do what these men said, so then Mum could afford to keep a roof over our head. It was just really disgraceful.

Every six months we would either do a midnight runner when she hadn't paid the rent or just move. One of Mum's boyfriends was a manager in lots of hotels around Botany Road, so I used to stay there. We just jumped all the time.

I can't even count how many times I've moved in my life. I know it's over 40 times and each time I move, it's quite damaging to your mental health. Just being amongst the system and falling through the cracks. It's extremely difficult to get permanent housing now, as well as trying to get somewhere to live, I've also got to deal with my mental health and my diabetes and so forth.

I've slept in cars, I've slept in my daughter's car. I've slept on many lounges. I've slept at my children's father's place. I've slept in the office I worked at. I'd just wait for them to go out and leave work, and I'd just get back half an hour later, open up the office and just sleep in the kitchen. Then I'd get up and leave early and it would be like I was starting the day, I'd walk in and no one would know.

I just always thought I'd own a home, have the grandkids over and things like that. Now at my age, 55, here I'm packing up again. I haven't cried yet. It not only affects me mentally, spiritually, physically, emotionally, it also plays up on my sugar levels. Having Type 1 diabetes, and my sugars are actually out of control, because I don't know what the next step is because I don't know what's happening. I don't know where I'm going, what I'm doing.

To be honest, I'm scared I'm going to die on my own. I don't know where it's going to be, in a house, in a car. I need that security. When I don't have that security, my health, my sugars go to the extreme,

where I had to call an ambulance a couple of times and it's just a vicious circle. There needs to be greater awareness of homelessness in women my age.

My mum's side of the family is Aboriginal. Her family comes from [redacted] which is [redacted] south-west of Brisbane. I have a really strong maternal bloodline. I think that's the reason I've kept going. I've just got that strength and you've just got to get up and move. My great-aunt is part of the Stolen Generation. When they came to get my mum, my grandmother jumped over the border from Queensland to NSW, to [redacted] where they could start a new life. She would just tell them she's a gypsy and they've got the wrong black person. I'm very grateful to have that strength of my grandmother.

It's just tough and I'm a bit angry because this is my land and I'm struggling. My great-aunt [redacted] they took one of her children from her, she also translated the [redacted] language into English for [redacted] University, and there's a street named after her in [redacted] She lived in a humpy and so forth, and just picturing this woman, really old that's done this wonderful thing and they're just still trying to kick her off her own land. So homelessness goes right back for Aboriginal women.

There's nothing out there for the average Jo to walk past and go, oh I didn't know about that service. There are some charities out there like St Vinnies and the Salvos, Red Cross et cetera et cetera, I contacted the St Vinnies last week, at this stage they are just overloaded. So overloaded, I couldn't even get a hamper. This is the thing, it's not just being homeless, it's the actual affect that it has mentally, physically and I need to make sure my health's okay so I can move forward and actually do things.

When I first went to the doctors like I said, I didn't know where to go for help. There's that app AskLzzy. That's not public knowledge. Where do you go? It's really, really hard and the only way that I found out about those different organisations was through word of mouth. I was lucky enough to know a woman who took me to WAGEC. Mind you I'd just been evicted from the same place twice. It's just overwhelming. Like where do you go seriously, what do you look up online?

What annoys me is when I walk around and I see all these empty houses in different areas, why are these not being used? The actual building is there, just get people in. The services are so busy, no one has the actual time to just give you a call and see if everything's okay. They're swamped trying to help people.

Clover Moore was telling me about in Oxford Street they were building some accommodation by using the empty buildings. Downstairs of the building will have a nurse and a doctor in mental health. It does not work for everyone. A place like that with others going through mental health issues could be a trigger. The ripple effect and it could explode, hearing people go off for whatever reason, I wouldn't want to live in a place like that. I just want my own home.

Fortunately, I'm mostly okay, but for people that need that reassurance when they've had to move because of domestic violence, just to have someone to check in on them you know, and just see if there's anything else that needs doing, if they're safe is also important.

Imagine what happened to me. The real estate agent rung up one day and said "hey, the owners are selling the house, we are arranging an open house because buyers are coming." That's the added pressure too, you have to run around and tidy up. My place is usually okay, but then I thought why am I doing this? Why isn't it allocated to social housing permanently?

Someone I know is going through a tough time now and she's drinking really heavily, so I said to her, first thing, go to the doctor. Ask your doctor for help. Having said that, my doctor, I had for 22 years told me to sleep on the floor.

Homelessness is such a dirty word. As soon as you say it, people start judging you as someone laying in the gutter, shooting up drugs. People just go to the worst don't they. It is a dirty word and it just drums up all this negativity on other people. The shame. It's hard enough to ask for help. There's got to be online support and in person.

Older women might be on JobSeeker, they can't get a job or still looking but you need food, you have no money, you need transport to get to places. I get \$516 a fortnight. I've also found that because I don't have enough money to go out for lunch with girlfriends. It's my girlfriend's birthday in two days and they get sick of asking, it really does affect you socially. Then they slowly back off and it's just a matter of time to being on your own. My fear is dying on my own. I've got a terrible phobia about death. That's my biggest fear and then I'm by myself. I start to worry then I'm thinking all this stuff, I don't even know where I'm going to live next week.

I'm one of the lucky ones, because even though I've had a terrible upbringing, I've turned it around so I can be someone. I've been in therapy for such a long time, since I was 30, so if I didn't have that, that knowledge, that understanding, that focus and I know what works for me and what doesn't, I don't know where I'd be now. A lot of people that are experiencing homelessness, they don't even have that. Just the mentality, how you just fight with your own mind and that's debilitating in itself, and people just spiral down.

The parliamentarians really need to listen to lived experience. Hear how it really, really affects your mental health and how degrading it is.