

Gilda's Story

We acknowledge the courage and generosity of local people with lived experience of homelessness and housing crisis in the sharing of their stories so that we can improve housing outcomes for our community.

Gilda Blacher, 52, was born into a privileged, middleclass family in South Africa. She went on to gain two degrees, build a career in the community arts sector, run a successful television production company, and buy a large home.

Ten years ago, she and her husband and daughter immigrated to Australia. They started out renting a large home in Sydney while they worked to establish a new business, after which they would buy their own home. Life was looking good.

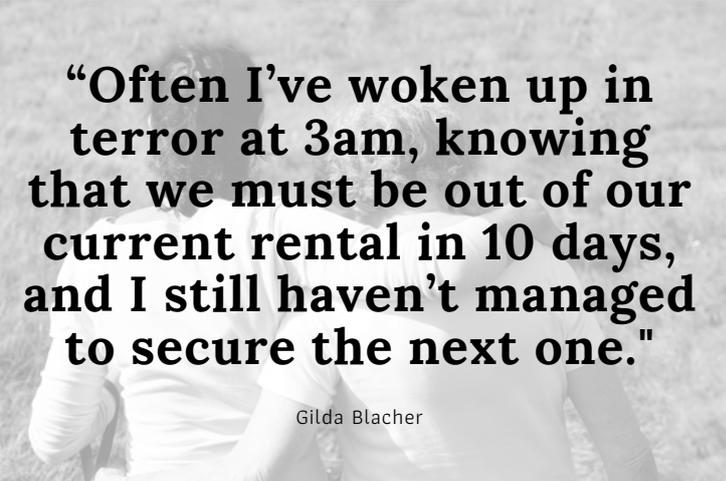
But within a few years, it was all gone. Unlucky ventures, a marriage collapse and bankruptcy wiped it all out. Suddenly, she found herself a single parent, thrown into the battle of the region's gruelling, dog-eat-dog rental market. She picks up whatever work she can, mostly only casual and part-time – nothing ongoing or stable.

Over the past 10 years, Ms Blacher and her daughter have moved home eight times. They have couch-surfed at friends' homes for months on end. Her daughter has attended nine schools.

"I always say that all it takes is a series of unfortunate events," Ms Blacher said. "I never for one second of my life, imagined that I would be in this situation. Not in a million years – it was simply something that never, ever crossed my mind."

Ms Blacher is speaking out and sharing her story because "people don't know who we are".

"There is a very real blanket view of what type of people become homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless," Ms Blacher said "and there is always an undercurrent of people thinking that you must have done something wrong, or that you are somehow to blame for your situation."



"Often I've woken up in terror at 3am, knowing that we must be out of our current rental in 10 days, and I still haven't managed to secure the next one."

Gilda Blacher

But how many pay cheques are you away from not being able to pay your mortgage or rent? How many circumstances need to tilt out of your favour for you to find yourself without a home? Anything can happen to anyone, but no one is listening to us".

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"The real housing crisis is about sleeping on friends' couches with your child because there just aren't enough rentals and of the five affordable rental properties on the market, there will be more than 20 people at each viewing. You can't establish a community around you because you are always moving, always packing and unpacking boxes and boxes filled with your life".

"It's incredibly fatiguing, stressful and humiliating – it just wears you down". Throughout it all, Ms Blacher has managed to complete her Masters in Documentary Film at VCA, Melbourne University, and her daughter, now 18, has just been accepted into RMIT to study fashion design.

Recently the pair moved into a friend's house – their fourth move in Castlemaine over the past five years. It is comfortable and feels good. Does she think it will be long term? "Who knows?" she said. "Anything could happen."