

# Single Parent'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.

I am the sole parent of three beautiful girls aged 13, 9 and 7 years old. I left my ex-husband 6 years ago due to family violence. We also left the security of our family home of 10 years and financial stability and supports.

If I had known how difficult it was to secure housing at the time, I may not have left. This is the reality of family violence. Since leaving 6 years ago we have had to move 4 times and each time we were given the same reason we had to vacate - the owner relocating back into the property.

I moved to Castlemaine over 5 years ago as I needed to seek refuge in a supportive community and one of my oldest friends lived here. I have no family support and she told me how wonderful and supportive this community is for single parents such as myself and it has been the best move I've made.



However, the uncertainty of secure and affordable housing has increased dramatically over the past 5 years that I have lived here. The first house we moved into was \$270 per week with solar panels. We had to move after 12 months as the owners returned and we applied for over 20 properties competing with 50 other people basically in the same situation as myself. Things felt very grim and I was very stressed by the uncertainty of where we were going to move and how I was going to financially and physically relocate again.

We eventually got to know the real estate agent by viewing and applying for so many properties. My credentials didn't look great despite paying my rent on time each week.

The agent could see the desperation in my eyes and we finally got a house. We lived there happily for 12 months and the same thing happened again. The lease was not renewed as the owner wanted to move into the property. This was 2 and a half years ago and at the time there was not a single 3 bedroom house available under the price of \$450, I was afraid. My children have built strong friendship networks here and I have built strong friendships, and the continuity of a good psychologist and GP and actively engaging in community groups and initiatives.

I suffer from chronic daily headaches/migraines, PTSD and generalised anxiety disorder so these supports are vital. I did not want to move my children again, we have all been through enough. Every move financially, physically and emotionally drained me and set my recovery back.

We eventually secured our fourth house. The agent found it for us before advertising it and we got priority as we had a good rental history. We currently pay \$360 per week rent and this price will increase annually and is nearly \$100/week more than what we paid in our first rental 5 years ago.

Unfortunately, not everybody is so lucky. Many people are being forced to move to Bendigo due to the lack of available affordable and secure housing in Castlemaine. Some people in our community are homeless and although it is a hard reality it is hidden with many individual and families rough-sleeping day to day.

**"mental health...financial hardship... addiction... housing... we cannot address these issues separately as they are intrinsically connected"**

Without secure and affordable housing, people exist in survival mode and it is difficult to maintain employment, community supports and friendships. Mental health, financial hardship and addiction are the ripple effects of unaffordable housing, a basic fundamental Human Right. We cannot address these issues separately as they are intrinsically connected.

It is one of the most distressing things to experience and I certainly never thought that I could possibly be homeless with 3 children. This could never happen to us.

Last year I experienced my worst fears. My parenting payment changed over to Newstart and I was not in a position to work full time due to health issues and I was in the long and difficult process of applying for the disability pension and I was terrified I would not be able to pay rent.

Michael from Castlemaine housing, Haven; Home Safe, the Salvation Army and St Vincent DePaul helped me cover the rent for 3 months which helped me stay in the house we have lived in for over 2 years and I am so very grateful for the support.

It took 12 months and an appeal and I was successful in my pension application in January. During this time my health has increased dramatically, my anxiety has reduced, and there is no way I could have got up and shared my story 12 months ago.

The reality is that our lease is year to year, it can be broken or not renewed at any time. I have been on waiting lists for long term social housing for years and the fear of our future housing stability lingers.

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Many changes need to happen- and I look forward to sharing ideas about how our community can improve the housing crisis that we are currently experiencing and exploring what can we do together to take action - such as lobbying to Government to address the increasing lack of affordable and secure housing within the private rental sector such as 5 year leases, increased social housing and co-op initiatives, continue to regulate air BnB and monitor up to date statistics on its impact on long term rental decline.

We also need rapid Government investment in safe and affordable public and social housing

