



FESTIVALS FOR THE WINTER

Winter
2023

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HOUSING
CHOICES
AUSTRALIA

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From the General Manager



Hi All,

**Welcome to the
Winter edition
of *Home Stories*.**



As the weather cools down, please make sure you're keeping warm and staying connected. Our Community Development and Engagement Team have included some great resources in this newsletter for creative ways you can beat the winter blues.

Please also remember to keep your balconies clean and tidy, as this can pose a fire hazard even in the cool and wet weather.

This newsletter includes a staff profile introducing Alex, our new Community Development and Engagement Officer to you. We're so excited to have Alex on board and she can't wait to meet you all.

I loved reading resident Susan's story about her amazing artworks, and how she's connecting with community through her art. You can do the same through our 2023 Home is Where the Art is Competition and Exhibition!

Whether you're thinking of applying for a scholarship for your studies, or creating a piece of art, there's heaps of ways to connect with the Housing Choices community over the coming months. Featured also in this edition is some valuable information on NAIDOC Week.

Best,

Melissa Palframan
General Manager of
Housing Services

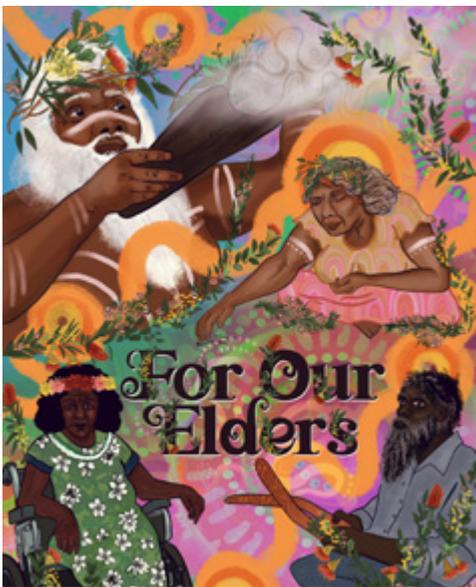
Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation Housing Choices Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Victoria and their connections to land, sea and community.

We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Cover: Susan at Association of Ukrainians.



National NAIDOC Week - 2 to 9 July

NAIDOC stands for the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee.

National NAIDOC Week celebrations are held across Australia during the first week of July every year (Sunday to Sunday), to recognise and celebrate the history, culture, and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

NAIDOC Week is an opportunity for all Australians, including Housing Choices staff and residents, to learn about First Nations cultures and histories and participate in celebrations of the oldest, continuous living cultures on earth.

There are different ways we can support and get to know our local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities: through activities and events held across the country (listings on the NAIDOC Week website <https://www.naidoc.org.au/local-events/local-naidoc-week-events>); as well as choosing your own activity, like watching a film about First Peoples' history, song and culture and the Stolen Generations, or watching and listening to powerful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists dance, music and storytelling.

Our Community and Development and Engagement Team Head Regional



Throughout May and June, Housing Choices Housing, Property and Community Development and Engagement teams are taking to the road to meet up with residents who live regionally.

These events bring together staff and resident neighbours who've not seen much of one another due to the impacts of COVID-19. Staff are using these visits to provide residents with information and flyers,

question time, and time to reconnect over nice food.

We kicked off by spending a wonderful day in the Mornington Peninsula, followed by a visit to Eastbourne Rd Rosebud, followed by a second visit to Geelong residents, and a third visit planned in Ballarat. Housing Choices values all residents from all parts of Victoria and continues to be touched by the connections made and stories shared.

If you would like to know more about the team's upcoming regional visits, please contact the **Community Development and Engagement Team** via phone on **0427 308 006** or email communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au.

Give your feedback for your chance of a \$50 MOVIE PASS



Thank you to residents who attended our 2022 Resident End of Year event at the Drill Hall. The Victorian Community Development and Engagement Team have now started planning the 2023 event.

So that we can plan and run an even better event, we're seeking residents to provide feedback on last year's festivities. We invite residents who attended last year's event to share their experiences with us for a chance to receive a \$50 movie pass.

To participate in the survey and a chance to receive the voucher, please contact the **Community Development and Engagement Team** via phone on **0427 308 006** or email communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au.



Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) Compliance

Housing Choices would like to thank all our residents who provided us access to complete the compulsory RTA gas and electrical and smoke detector checks.

Rental providers who entered into a new agreement after 29 March 2021, or have a fixed term agreement of more than five years which rolled over into a periodic tenancy after 29 March 2021, must ensure that:

- gas and electricity safety checks are conducted every two years
- smoke alarm checks are carried out by contractors on the first year and by the landlord on the second year

This is to ensure residents' safety from carbon monoxide poisoning from faulty cracked heater exchanges, electrical faults and ensuring that there are working smoke detectors.



Scholarships bring a sense of achievement



Above: Previous Housing Choices scholarship recipients Fithawit and Feruz.

Are you currently studying or have an interest to?

Whether you're completing secondary school, TAFE, University or a certificate or course of interest, every Semester, the Housing Choices Scholarship offers residents the chance to apply for grants money which support residents' engagement and participation in studies.

Successful residents can access up to \$500 annually to put towards textbooks, course fees, computers, educational related travel, or any other costs incurred while studying courses, certificates, secondary school studies, and tertiary studies. The Scholarship is open to all household members (i.e. parent, adult).

Single Mum, Jessica, has been a Housing Choices resident since 2008 and is currently completing a Certificate III in Bookkeeping and Accounting

at Swinburne University. This is the second time Jessica has successfully received the \$500 scholarship support from Housing Choices.

"I first got the \$500 scholarship in 2015 when I was studying a Bachelor of Business at Melbourne Institute of Technology. If I'd have known that I could've applied every year, I would have," she said.

Jessica then went on to complete her Master of Business Administration at Monash University. After working full-time for a year, she realised she wasn't doing what she set out to do, which was to be a Certified Accountant. That's when Jessica decided to start the Certificate III in Bookkeeping and Accounting at Swinburne.

She applied for the Housing Choices Scholarship in Semester 1 2023 and has successfully received the

scholarship, which she's using to support her studies.

"It's paid for some of my fees and my books. The books are quite expensive, they're about 100 dollars a pop."

Since starting her Certificate, Jessica has learned how to use accounting software MYOB and Xero.

"I'm a divorced single mother who has a 16-year-old child whose father left me when I was eight months pregnant. Anything you want to do in life, you can, and Housing Choices supports that. So go for the \$500 support, everything helps."

Leah is another Housing Choices resident who has accessed the Housing Choices Scholarship twice.

"I first got the scholarship when I was still in high school... High school's really expensive," she said.

"I used the scholarship to do admissions tests for university... I was in the 94th percentile (top 6%). A lot of that was due to that scholarship, because it helped me get access to more resources."

Now Leah is in her second year of a Bachelor of Biomedical Science at Monash University. This year, she again received the \$500 scholarship, which is

supporting her through her tertiary education.

"I mainly used it to pay for school fees and for my Myki. I travel about an hour to university, from Dandenong to Monash, so that was really helpful because travel costs were a concern for me.

"Biomed is such a fulltime degree that I don't really have time to work...so it took a big weight off my shoulders. The money put towards the Myki will cover me for many years."

Leah likes that both times she's received the Housing Choices Scholarship, she's been checked up on several times throughout the process.

"I was given a lot of support in figuring out how the scholarship can work and what I can use it for. Even when I first got the scholarship, they went and ordered the textbooks also.

"The thing with Housing Choices is they're always there to help. Any questions I had were immediately answered...it's important to remember Housing Choices are there to help you and you can take your time with it."

Now, Leah is also a member of Housing Choices' Victorian Resident Advisory Committee (VRAC), and we're thrilled to have her join the Committee and hear her insights.



Calling all resident writers!

Housing Choices is on the hunt for any residents who enjoy writing from across the country to feature in our 2023 Annual Report and other Housing Choices communications.

We're looking for all kinds of stories, including subjects of your choosing for instance; a short tale, a story of your life, interviews, or pieces highlighting a particular hobby, interest or a passion of yours. Stories need to be between either 150-200 words or 350-500 words, with selected writers' pieces receiving vouchers for \$100 for 150-200 words or \$200 for 350-500 words.

Submissions close 31 July 2023.

To submit your story, or if you have an idea you'd like to discuss or would like more information, please contact **communications@hcau.org.au**

To find out more about the funds, see if you're eligible or to apply, contact the **Community Development and Engagement Team** on **communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au** or **0427 308 006**.




Making Art not War

Our Annual 'Home Is Where the Art Is Competition and Exhibition' is here!



Home is Where the Art is returns for another year and promises to be greater than ever!

The Housing Choices team and resident artists have started planning this year's annual competition, and also a first of its kind art exhibition. So far, we've connected with resident artists to see whether they would like to participate again or help plan this year's events. We held a lunch where residents shared valuable experiences and ideas, and another meet up is being held soon.

Competition and Exhibition

Whether you're a beginner, a professional artist or something in between, our competition and exhibition has something for everyone! Whatever your creative passion, there's a place for you.

Getting involved with the arts can have powerful and positive effects on mental and physical well-being and be a way to express our individuality and emotions.

Our 2023 competition categories include: children, young adults, fine art, painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, an open category, and a people's choice award.

Residents' artworks need to be submitted by **15 August 2023**, and will be judged by Housing Choices staff and our Resident Advisory Committee. In October, we will hold our first state-wide art exhibition in the City of Melbourne to showcase your beautiful art. Exhibition date and venue will soon be announced.

For the past 13 years, painting has been a source of meditation for Housing Choices resident Susan. She took up the hobby while working as a public health consultant, providing research and training on human rights and HIV across the globe.

"I don't paint for any reason other than I find it really calms me. I find it's a place I can go where I'm really at peace," she said.

While Susan has found painting from her two-bedroom Fitzroy North home relaxing, her most recent work of oil paint on acrylic is having a far-reaching impact.

The mother of one's works often reflect devastations occurring throughout the world and her most recent painting is no different.

Titled Mariupol 2022, the work depicts a damaged building in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast. Mariupol was decimated in a Russian siege, as part of the war on Ukraine, that lasted for more than 80 days and left the port city in ruins.

"Every year or so there is an issue or two that happens, and I feel very passionately about it, and I have to do a painting about it," she said.

"Having been a young woman when the Vietnam War was ending, I think we thought in those days, there would be no more wars and the world would get better. And it really hasn't. Wars continue and we now have this insane war in Europe and

To find out more, contact the **Community Development and Engagement Team** on **0427 308 006** or **communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au**.



Above: Susan and Ukrainian Association's Victorian Ops Manager Irene Stawiski.

"Some of them want to stay here and some want to go back and they need to know what their options are," she said.

It is a matter the Ukrainian Association is currently lobbying the Federal Government to provide greater support on.

The Essendon-based organisation was founded after World War Two by refugees who wanted to make Australia feel more like home by building community spaces where they could hold cultural events, weddings, parties and other community activities.

"We have continued the cultural and community side of it, so Ukrainians still have a place to come. We still have Ukrainian dancing and events here so it's just the continuing of keeping people together," Irene explained.

"Now, of course, with the war it serves another purpose because we've become the centre place for refugees.

"They find us and come here asking about visas, asking about education for their children, how we can help them with accommodation, employment and English classes.

"Some will come and say, we don't have money for food and so we've organised food drops. There are many things we've had to do and learn on the hop."

Irene said the team at the centre were working hard to help refugees and were thankful for all supporters of the centre including Susan and her generous donation.

that's why I did this particular painting.

"It's a way to express my frustration about the world – and the war in Ukraine was so shocking.

"I saw a photograph of a building where it had been blown through ... and that just evoked so much in me. And all the people were just underground."

The mixed media oil and acrylic painting won an award at Housing Choices Victoria's most recent Home is Where the Art is 2022 competition, with Susan donating her financial winnings from the competition to a women's organisation in Ukraine while gifting the artwork to the not-for-profit Association of Ukrainians in Victoria (AUV).

"This is one of the few paintings I've done that will be publicly displayed. I hope people outside the Ukraine support their struggle," Susan said.

It's a struggle that's not close to ending, according to the Association of Ukrainians in Victoria Operations Manager Irene Stawiski.

She said since Russia invaded and began occupying Ukraine in February 2022, Australia had accepted about 5000 refugees, with about 3000 of those spread across Victoria. Every week Irene said more refugees contact the centre.

Irene said as the Ukrainian refugees were on temporary three-year visas they faced an uncertain future.

Beating the Winter Blues and Cost of Living



The cooler months are here again, and for a lot of us this weather, increased cost of living, and staying connected and active in the community can be tough.

Winter Blues get to us all, in many shapes and forms. The chilly days, dark skies and rain can make us feel a little less bright. What's important to know is we're not alone, and to use this time in ways that allow us to shine all the way into spring.

The Community Development and Engagement Team have put together several tips, links to information and services, a scrumptious winter recipe and a word find activity to try.

Tips to turn around those wintery feelings:



Exercise! Regular exercise is a great help depression and the winter blues. Exercise when you can, get a good sleep, eat healthy. Enjoy exercise outside when you can to keep up those endorphins!



Plan for winter! Try making meals in advance and freeze them. This will make it easier for you. Buy activities that will keep you active at home; drawing, knitting, card and board games.



Make the most of natural light! Extra sunshine is great. Put a chair near the window, move your work desk closer to the sun, eat lunch outdoors or go for a walk, keep the curtains open to let the light in! If it's not raining, potter around the garden for some fresh air.



Keep social! Talk to a family member, friend, or neighbour. Go to the movies, have a cup of tea, take a nice walk, do a free social activity like a walking group. Socialising and getting out and about with others makes us feel better.



The Community Development and Engagement Team have also developed a resources sheet with useful links and information about:

- where to access food and material aid
- low cost and free services
- free financial counselling and legal advice
- paying bills and fines
- a community support directory
- a local government guide to Councils and services
- Good Shepherd and their No Interest Loans Scheme (NIL's) and support services
- Foodbank Australia.

If you would like to access this resource sheet or need help with making enquiries to the listed services, please reach out to **Community Development and Engagement Team** on **communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au** or **0427 308 006**.



Hearty soup recipe



Ingredients

8 cups of water.
 4 stock cubes – chicken, beef, or vegetable.
 3 medium onions thinly sliced or diced.
 2 stalks of celery thinly sliced.
 4 garlic cloves, diced.
 6 carrots, peeled and cut into round shapes.
 Salt and pepper to taste.

Additions

200g pasta/noodles **OR**
 200g lentils/chickpeas **OR**
 400g protein – whole chicken, lamb shanks, tofu.

Steps

1. Bring protein (chicken or lamb), water and stock to the boil in a large pot.
2. With a spoon, skim any foam that appears on top of the water and put in the bin. The foam will look a little cloudy.
3. Add the onions, celery and garlic and simmer, with a lid on top to cover it partially, for 30 minutes.
4. If you have used chicken or lamb, remove it from the pot carefully.
5. Add the carrot and simmer for 40 minutes.
6. If you are using lentils, add them now.
7. When there's 5 minutes left on the timer, add in your pasta or noodles or tofu if you are using them.
8. With two forks, or gloved hands, shred the chicken or lamb, and add back to the soup, or use for another dish.
9. Season the soup to taste with salt and pepper, ladle into bowls, and enjoy!

Home Stories Wellbeing Puzzle

Your chance to receive a \$50 Bunnings voucher

Find all the words in the word search except for one, which is not actually in the grid. Words may be forward, backward, up, down or diagonal.

FIND THESE WORDS

Sunshine
 Wellbeing
 Exercise
 Health
 Social
 Outdoors
 Hobbies
 Activities
 Nutrition
 Fitness
 Garden
 Community
 Drawing
 Sleep

N	Y	P	W	A	J	D	P	B	J	J	Y	H	E	C
U	T	J	E	C	B	R	E	C	Z	X	T	P	G	S
T	I	S	L	T	V	A	E	C	O	L	O	Q	G	O
R	N	U	L	I	R	W	L	S	A	U	S	A	T	C
I	U	N	B	V	W	I	S	E	X	Z	R	F	F	I
T	M	S	E	I	T	N	H	M	T	D	E	L	Z	A
I	M	H	I	T	C	G	P	I	E	D	L	A	E	L
O	O	I	N	I	F	I	T	N	E	S	S	I	G	J
N	C	N	G	E	E	P	S	E	I	B	B	O	H	X
G	L	E	G	S	E	S	I	C	R	E	X	E	G	W

Please tell us the remaining word before **Friday 28 July 2023** by emailing communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au or posting your answer to: **Level 3, 350 Queen Street, Melbourne VIC 3000**. Only one entry is allowed per household and only correct entries will go in the prize draw for a \$50 Bunnings voucher. Good Luck!

Staff profile: Alex Collins



**Below: Housing Choices
new Community
Development and
Engagement Officer, Alex.**

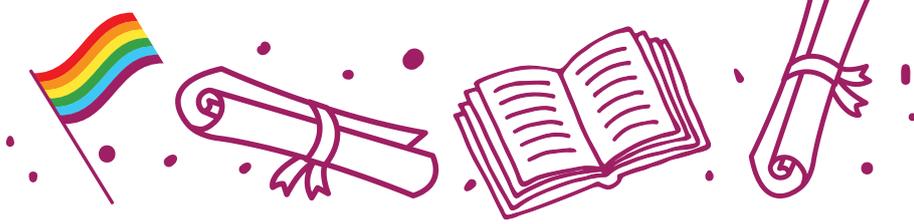


What was your role and experience before Housing Choices?

My previous stint was in aged care, I worked in Doncaster and I got that job in March 2020. It was right when everything shut down because of lockdown and I was extremely lucky to have work the whole time. It was a really good job and I was very passionate about the residents and making them laugh. I worked in the kitchen, did lifestyle work, admin, lots of different things. I try and visit them every few weeks, I was a part of their lives, and they were a part of my life for a while. I couldn't visit my grandparents because everything was locked down and so I became sort of their surrogate granddaughter for a while. Now my sister also works there, so they've always got a bit of Collins flavour in their life.

What did you study at university while you were working there?

I finished two degrees while I was in that job. I finished my undergrad in Politics, Philosophy and Economics in 2020. And then mid-last year, I finished my Master of International Development and I did those both at Latrobe University. I love studying and learning and when the pandemic came along, I thought you know, might as well keep going. I did a thesis and did my placement at the Humanitarian Advisory Group, and I researched the effects of climate change on countries around the Indo Pacific.



What made you want to work at Housing Choices?

I always try and do a good amount of research about the organisation or something that I'm looking to apply for. I was thinking, okay, what could I do to bring some change into people's lives? And I think having that experience in aged care, being able to chat to people and make them feel comfortable and welcomed, that's something I've tried to do so I thought, I'll apply. I could see *Home Stories* and I had a look at resident output and input into the newsletter and thought, well, that's awesome. Resident voice is something I've always been passionate about, especially during my time working in aged care.

Now that you've settled in, what's something you hope to introduce at Housing Choices?

We're doing some Pride stuff, which is really exciting. We've got some new builds coming up in Preston with our Thorne Harbour Health partnership and Pride is an important factor when it comes to social and community housing. I think it's important we champion pride within the organisation, it's something that's very personal. Residents might feel safer knowing that we affiliate with the LGBTQIA+ community and could then feel more comfortable. That's what I want to do in my role, make people feel comfortable and safe and achieve things that we can do in partnership.

What does Pride mean to you?

Pride is an everyday action for me. While there are incredible moments in the year when it's more prominent, such as Pride Month or World Pride, it's embedded into who I am. Pride empowers me to feel most like myself, whether that's wearing what I feel most comfortable in, shaving my head, or using different pronouns. It brings people together and creates a safe community for those that identify as LGBTQIA+. In saying this, it's also something to be celebrated. Pride Month, which is every year in June, gives us the opportunity to show up and say "hey, I'm happy to be who I am; this is me" at various events throughout the month, such as the Pride March.

What's something fun residents don't know about you?

I'm a fan of home haircuts. Over the pandemic, my hair got shorter and shorter, and I'd be dyeing it purple, pink, blue, whatever. It was like two weeks into this job and I'd already shaved my head. So you never know, you'll see me one day and maybe you'll see me a couple months down the track and I'll look completely different, but inside I'm still the same.



Get Involved in Safety, Fire and Crime Prevention

Housing Choices is hosting Fire Rescue Victoria and Victoria Police to hold an interactive Fire and Crime Prevention and Safety Activity.

A great day is being planned for residents, residents' carers, and support workers to interactively participate and hear about what *Fire Rescue VIC – Community Resilience Program*, and *Victorian Police – Community Policing* do in our communities, and to help keep us and our homes safe.

Helpful information and resources will be available in English, other languages and for children too. The presentation will be followed by a lunch for residents and staff.

Housing Choices will notify residents of the date. In the meantime, interested residents can register their interest with the **Community Development and Engagement Team** on communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au or call **0427 308 006**.

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