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From Street To Home.

'I've done it fairly hard by most people's comfort and standards.' John* is 59 years old and has been a Bridge Housing tenant for six years. He was in a regional town, sleeping outside a Centrelink office when someone helped him start the process to move from rough sleeping to a home. In this edition we talk with John about what it was like for him to be homeless. John is a big advocate for social housing and shares his story for people to understand what being homeless is really like. *John is not his real name.

How did you become homeless?

My family. We were homeless from the start. I came from a dysfunctional, violent family. I had suicidal thoughts when I was a child, I didn't want to be myself and I would run away. I lived with extended family and we were all poor, it seemed normal. I had Aboriginal relatives and didn't know that. As I got older and was on my own, I would busk and do some theft to get by. I didn't have a bank account; I didn't have a Medicare card; receiving support from Centrelink was hard to arrange without those things. I don't have a criminal record and I didn't get into drugs.

What are some difficulties you faced when you were homeless?

The most important thing was access to a toilet and access to water. I took care of how I presented myself and didn't eat at the food trucks as a way to not look 'homeless'. There was a time where people would leave you alone and you could find somewhere to sleep. There are rangers now, so you get asked to move, to pick up and go away. I had a tent for a while though that would draw attention from rangers or would freak out the public. For a while I carried a tarp with me which I would put up. At my lowest point, to get out of the wind, I would look for a garbage corral: people wouldn't bother me there.

The general public aren't as friendly as they were in the 70's and 80's. There is a lot of violence towards homeless people and I've lost many friends over the years because of this. Sometimes, you would face two or three threats a day with Friday and Saturday nights being the worst. People would film their friends attacking a homeless person. You would have to decide between running away or staying to protect your things. So we would stay and we would defend each other and end up in hospital many times with injuries. We are far more vulnerable than people know.



Did you ever wish you weren't homeless?

Every time you were beaten up, every time it rained and every time someone stole your gear you wished you weren't homeless. I often had a guitar though at times that was stolen or smashed in front of my eyes. I had quite a good backpack for a while though sometimes I had virtually nothing. Milk crates were my best friend as they kept me off the ground if it was cold or wet.

How do you find it, living in your property?

It took me a while to handle cooking inside, it doesn't seem right. I sometimes forget that I have a shower, the idea that I can just walk in and have a shower. Sometimes I think I isolate myself from the world too much or too often in this place.

Do you worry about your friends who are homeless?

I'm worried about my friends and how they're coping through the pandemic. Many have mental health issues. I'm noticing there are far more women on the streets over the last years than there ever was. And now it seems that people, working people, just can't seem to get it together to even cover the rent. It's a big worry. People who are homeless fall through the cracks, they get lost in the background, they are right there but are not seen. There is not much intervention and not enough social housing, and this is where the government needs to focus and spend funding.

If you know someone who is experiencing homelessness, you or they can call Link2home on 1800 152 152 for help, advice and support.

General Enquiries - 8324 0800
customerservice@bridgehousing.org.au

Repairs - 8324 0886
repairs@bridgehousing.org.au

Community - 8324 0827
community@bridgehousing.org.au

Housing Pathways Applications
8324 0890
pathways@bridgehousing.org.au

Housing Team & Tenancies
8324 0885
customerservice@bridgehousing.org.au

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CEO Update

Welcome to the Spring 2021 Edition of the Our Place Tenant Newsletter, which is sadly my last as the CEO of Bridge Housing. After 15 years and leading Bridge Housing through significant growth as a successful tier one NSW community housing provider, it is time to pass on the baton to someone new. I'm delighted to introduce my successor Rebecca Pinkstone, who many of you will know already during her time as the Chief Operations Officer at Bridge.

It has been my absolute pleasure to meet and work alongside our diverse tenant communities, and to welcome through successive growth transfers and acquisitions, tenants from across the Sydney metropolitan region to the Bridge Housing family.

I am grateful for the opportunities you have provided me to learn about different cultures, experiences and challenges of being a community housing tenant. I thank you all for your effort and input during my time as CEO in providing feedback and input to help us deliver a really tenant-focussed service and keeping me in check! Please keep yourselves and your families safe during these challenging times and don't forget to reach out if you need to.

Become a member of Bridge Housing Limited

Bridge Housing is a company limited by guarantee, which means we are governed by a Board of Directors. Every year in November we hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM). The purpose of the AGM is to give members a report on our performance and finances for the previous year, to allow members to ask questions, and to elect new board members. As a Bridge Housing tenant you can apply to become a company member and vote at the AGM. You need to complete an application form to become a member. You can complete this online by scanning the QR code, or call our Communities Team on **8324 0836** to send you a copy.

John Nicolades, CEO



bridgehousing.org.au

Good Neighbour Champion Winners!

Congratulations to Zorica!

Zorica is a strong advocate for tenant rights and is constantly pushing for multi-language communication and the consideration of people who do not communicate digitally. Zorica is also an engaged member of the Central TAG, West TAG and East TAG and was nominated by her fellow TAG members.



Zorica

Congratulations to Mohamed!



Mohamed

Mohamed is an all-round nice person and was nominated by his neighbours for doing things around the complex to keep the common ground neat and tidy. Neighbours explain that Mohamed is very considerate and regularly washes the bins to ensure they are kept clean.

What is a Good Neighbour Champion?

We want to support and recognise Bridge Housing tenants who look after their blocks, go above and beyond for their neighbours, and help to create positive spaces to live in. Since the launch of Good Neighbour Champions, we've seen

27 people nominated by their neighbours for being a Good Neighbour. We know there are many more out there!

Do you have an awesome neighbour? Someone who keeps the grounds tidy or takes out the bins for everyone and cleans them? Or maybe a neighbour who looks out for people and is often saying hello? Nominate them! Contact us to nominate them and let us know why they should be a Good Neighbour Champion or complete an online form at <https://bridgehousing.snapforms.com.au/form/good-neighbour-application-form>.



Bridge to Work - Meet Natalie

We are excited to introduce the new Employment Support Coordinator, Natalie Billick, to the Bridge Housing team. Natalie joins us for the fourth year of the Bridge to Work program and is keen to help you get job ready by working alongside you to identify goals, come up with a plan and put that plan into action! She can help with accessing training, resumes and cover letters, interview skills training and more. To contact Natalie, you can visit our new website <https://www.bridgetowork.org.au/> and complete the referral form directly. You can also scan the QR code or call Natalie on **0428 240 308**.



Natalie Billick

Mark found study and work through Bridge to Work Program

Mark joined the program in 2020 wanting to work in finance. Together with the Employment Support Coordinator, Mark revised his CV, applied for various roles in finance and explored courses. Today, Mark works part-time as a Financial Planner and is completing a Bachelor of Applied of Commerce and Accounting through TAFE NSW. Mark is very appreciative of the support and coaching since joining the Bridge to Work program.



Your feedback helps us do things better

Every year we look at our complaints and appeals to see how we could do things better. In the last year, we received more complaints than we ever have before. While we don't want to give anyone a reason to complain, we really appreciate you telling us when things haven't gone as well as they could so that we can make sure it doesn't happen again.

Most of the complaints that we received were about our customer service – the way we spoke to you, delays in us providing you with a response to a matter, or us not keeping you updated about an ongoing matter. These customer service complaints were generally related to repairs and planned works, transfers or neighbourhood disputes.

We have come up with some key projects to help us address these findings:

- ▶ We will develop a Customer Experience Strategy, including a new customer service training package for all staff.
- ▶ We will review the communication process for transfers to make sure you know who to contact for an update about your transfer application.
- ▶ We will look at the changes we made to the Good Neighbour Policy last year to make sure they have led to improvements in our response to neighbourhood disputes.

It's ok to complain

We heard through the annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey that many of our tenants don't know how to make a complaint or appeal a decision. We also heard that those of you who have made a complaint or appeal felt there was room for improvement in how we managed your issue.

We want to review the way we manage complaints and appeals at Bridge Housing. We want this review to be informed by our tenants, especially those of you who have recent firsthand experience making a complaint or appealing a decision.

Join our Complaints Scrutiny Panel

We will be asking for volunteers to join our complaints scrutiny panel who will oversee this review. You will need to be able to commit to attending meetings (most likely online), reading documents and providing constructive feedback to help us identify what needs to change. We will show you how the process works from our end, including the system we use to manage complaints and appeals. We will then report back to the panel regularly so that you can keep us accountable.

If you are interested in being considered for the complaints scrutiny panel, please contact Ellis Blaikie, our Manager Service Improvement and Innovation **8324 0859** or **e.blaikie@bridgehousing.org.au**.

Time to Talk - online sessions

Over 16 tenants joined us for the Time to Talk – Online session via zoom in August. Hosted by John Nicolades and Rebecca Pinkstone, tenants had the chance to ask questions about Bridge Housing and have them answered directly by the Senior Executive team. People asked questions about the transfer process, property inspections and support available during the COVID-19 pandemic. You can find the questions saved on our website <https://bridgehousing.org.au/tenants/get-involved/time-to-talk-workshops>

If you missed the last Time to Talk session, we have a few more lined up over the next few months including a session in Arabic and in Vietnamese where an interpreter will be present.



Time to Talk Online sessions	Date	Time
Complaints, Appeals and Compliments	Tuesday 05 October	1.30pm – 3.00pm
Time to Talk – Arabic session	Thursday 28 October	1.00pm – 2.30pm
Repairs and Maintenance	Tuesday 09 November	1.30pm – 3.00pm
Time to Talk – Vietnamese session	Thursday 25 November	1.00pm – 2.30pm

Check out our What's On page

<https://bridgehousing.org.au/tenants/get-involved/what-s-on> for more events and refer to the insert attached to this newsletter.

Getting help and support during this pandemic.

Contact Us

Living through a pandemic presents many challenges such as how to access support and services during a lockdown. Our staff are contacting vulnerable households and connecting people with local organisations who can provide immediate support when needed. If you are struggling in this lockdown and need support, please contact us. You can also contact the following services for support around food and mental wellbeing.

Food Relief

If you're needing food relief throughout lockdown, these organisations can connect you with charities and food hubs in your community who can provide you with fresh food and pantry items.



Food Support 02 9756 3099

Food Support will help you find a charity in your area that can support you. Foodbank operates across NSW & ACT providing food and grocery items to over 660 charities and schools who work in partnership with various charities and schools to distribute food to the community where it's needed the most.

OzHarvest 02 9516 3877

Oz Harvest has a market in Waterloo and can connect you to local food relief too. You can check online at www.ozharvest.org/food/receive-food-individuals/ or by calling 02 9516 3877 to find where you can get a food hamper near you.

Mental Wellbeing

It makes a real difference having someone to talk to who won't judge you and is there to listen and provide support. For personal crisis and mental health support contact Beyond Blue or Lifeline.



Beyond Blue will respond to you with one of their trained mental health professionals to offer initial support and can refer you to get any further help you need. Call 1300 22 4636 24hours/7 days a week or chat online between 1pm-12am/7 days a week. You can also head to <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support> to send an email or join a forum with community members.

Lifeline can provide you with short-term support if you're feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping or staying safe. Speak one-on-one with a trained telephone crisis supporter. Call 13 11 14 24hours/7 days a week or chat online between 12pm and 2am at <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Redcross Telecross. Register for a check in phone call through Telecross. If you're frail and aged, have a disability are housebound or recovering from an illness or accident, Telecross is a service to provide you with a daily telephone call to check on your wellbeing. Contact the Red Cross for more information on 1300 885 698.

Financial Support

If you have been impacted by COVID-19 and you are experiencing financial difficulty, there is support to help you get by.



NSW Government provides financial assistance and support. You can find payment information online at <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/financial-support> or call Service NSW on 137 788 24 hours/7 days a week.

The Salvation Army offers a range of support options to help with financial difficulties, depending on the nature of your problems: from emergency relief to financial counselling. Call the Salvos Assessment Line on 1300 371 288 between 9am - 5pm Monday - Friday.

Claim a travel voucher to get you to your vaccine appointment

Cab Charge are offering \$200,000 in travel vouchers until 09 October

2021 for anyone to use to get to their vaccination appointment. If you're based in NSW and need assistance to get to your appointment, head to <https://www.cabcharge.com.au/covid19-resources> and follow the prompts to claim your voucher.

You'll receive a \$50 travel voucher with a link to add it to your smartphone within 24 hours.



Wellbeing Inspection Prize Draw

We want to recognise the efforts you take to look after your home, so we are starting a monthly prize draw. All tenants who have had a satisfactory wellbeing inspection will have their name put in the draw to win a \$100 voucher and the winners will be published in the newsletter. This is our way of saying thank you for looking after your home.

\$100
Prize
Draw

Bridge Housing Tenant Advisory Groups (TAGs)



What is TAG?

If you enjoy meeting new people, catching up with friends and finding out what's on in your local community then you would enjoy TAG meetings! Tenant Advisory Groups (TAGs) are tenant-organised groups which meet every two months to learn about a wide range of topics such as information on community events or local services, as well as hear an update from us on changes to policies or fun events we have coming up. Sometimes TAG members organise group outings or games too. Most TAGs have a representative and we support the Representatives by making sure the meetings are COVID Safe. A housing manager attends as well as a guest speaker and following the meeting, tenants share a catered lunch and often have a laugh or two as they catch up.

TAG Groups:

Group	Your Tenant Representatives
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander TAG	Rotating Chair
Bankstown TAG	Abdel Rahim Alsayed and Carol Kassabian
Central TAG	Rodney Hollis
East TAG	Julie Bryant
Northern Beaches TAG	Robby MacLaurin and Kathryn Pritchard
Vietnamese TAG	Rotating Chair
West TAG	Danielle Condry and Hugh Miller

How to join a TAG?

All TAG meetings are suspended for the rest of 2021 due to COVID restrictions. You can join the mailing list to receive notification when TAG meetings recommence. If you're interested, contact us on 02 8324 0826 or email community@bridgehousing.org.au and we will add you to the mailing list so you don't miss out. Also remember to keep an eye on our What's On page on the Bridge Housing website where you can find details of fun social events and activities you can join in online until our Covid restrictions are lifted.



TAG TIPS!

Parcel Deliveries - How to stop those parcel deliveries going missing!

During lock-down many of us are having to use home delivery while the shops are closed. Some people who are isolating or staying away from the supermarkets might order groceries online. But have you been left wondering where your delivery is? Here are some top tips to make sure you receive your goods safely and securely:

- ▶ Add a comment in the **Comments Box** when ordering 'To be delivered to addressee only'
- ▶ Use the Australia Post free **Safe Spot** service to choose a safe spot at the delivery address where they can leave your parcel for you
- ▶ If you have a local Post Office think about sending your parcels there, or arranging a free, secure 24/7 **parcel locker**

Visit www.auspost.com.au for more tips on receiving your parcels safely.

Our Maintenance Program

We recognise the importance of maintaining our homes so that they continue to meet your needs and the needs of future tenants. We take a proactive approach and carry out maintenance in three broad categories - responsive, planned and cyclical.

Responsive Maintenance - time-critical repairs to reinstate a property to a safe or functional level of service; as well as routine repairs that cause inconvenience or could become a risk to health and safety if left unattended. We respond to repairs depending on the level of urgency:

Repair type	Description of repair
EMERGENCY REPAIR Respond in 4 hours	Quick action repairs to prevent an immediate threat to a person's health, safety or security or to prevent severe damage to a property. Examples include gas leaks, dangerous electrical faults or burst water pipes.
URGENT REPAIR Respond in 24 hours	Quick action repairs to things which cause great risk to a person's health, safety or security as defined by the Residential Tenancies Act. Examples include a failure or breakdown of any essential service for hot water, cooking, heating, cooling or laundering.
ROUTINE 1 REPAIR Respond in 5 days	Repairs and maintenance that cause inconvenience and could become a risk to health and safety if left unattended. Examples include unsecure handrails and unsafe floorboards.
ROUTINE 2 REPAIR Respond in 21 days	Repairs and maintenance that cannot wait for planned maintenance works and do not pose a great threat to a tenant's health and safety. Examples include sticking doors, windows or gates.

Planned Maintenance - replacement, upgrade or renovation of major items in a property, such as painting, carpets, kitchen replacements and bathroom upgrades. Works are scheduled based on the age and condition of the property. An independent building surveyor will assess the property condition and we schedule works in accordance with the assessed condition. We inform tenants of the works that we intend to carry out in a letter and where we can, we will provide tenants with a set of choices for materials and colours.

In 2021/22 we will focus our planned maintenance on bringing properties in the Northern Beaches up to standard. With the amount of work needed, we think this will take us three years to complete. We will start with properties that are in the worst condition until all have been upgraded.

Cyclical Maintenance - regular maintenance to ensure properties comply with health and safety, legislative and duty of care obligations. This includes fire safety/smoke detector inspections, electric reports as well as ongoing grounds and internal cleaning maintenance.

How you can help

You are also responsible for keeping your property maintained by ensuring it is clean and tidy and your garden is maintained. Whilst we do undertake regular inspections, we rely on you to report any problems with your home as soon as possible, so that we can address them promptly. Report maintenance issues to **8324 0800** (dial 1 for repairs), or to **repairs@bridgehousing.org.au**.

BHL Opening Hours & Location

Our offices are open for matters that can't be resolved over the phone. You will need to be COVID-safe if you come into the office.

Goulburn Street Office

You can find our Head Office at Level 9, 59 Goulburn Street Haymarket. When visiting the Goulburn Street office, please use the lifts that face the street to get to Level 9.

We are open 9am - 4.30pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and 1pm - 4.30pm on Wednesday

Brookvale Office

You can find our Brookvale Office at Level 1, 660-664 Pittwater Road, and Brookvale. When visiting the Brookvale office, you can take the lift or the stairs from outside Centrelink.

We are open 9am - 4:30pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and 1pm - 4.30pm on Wednesday.

Outreach Details: All outreach sites are temporarily closed.

Contact Us

If you wanted more information about anything you've read in the newsletter, contact us!
Email: community@bridgehousing.org.au Ph: **8324 0836**