

T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers

South Yarra – Tuesday 1 July 2025

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WITNESSES

Sally Hoffmann, Director, Strengthening Communities and Social Impact, and

Ian Symmons, Program Manager, Volunteers, Consumers and Connected Communities, Better Health Network.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the Legal and Social Issues Committee's Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers. I am Joe McCracken; I am Chair of this inquiry. I will pass around, and we will introduce the rest of our members.

Michael GALEA: Good afternoon. Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metro.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Ryan Batchelor, Member for Southern Metropolitan Region.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Good afternoon. Anasina Gray-Barberio, Northern Metro Region.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Hi. Aiv Puglielli, North-Eastern Metro.

Renee HEATH: Renee Heath, Eastern Victoria Region.

Lee TARLAMIS: Lee Tarlamis, South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Ann-Marie Hermans, South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Sally HOFFMANN: Thank you. Lovely to meet you.

The CHAIR: Nice to meet you too. All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information that you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during the hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by that same privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Ultimately transcripts will be put on the website and made public.

For the Hansard record, are you able to just say your full name and the organisation that you are representing?

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes, sure. I am Sally Anne Watson Hoffmann. I am the Director of Strengthening Communities and Social Impact at Better Health Network.

Ian SYMMONS: I am Ian Craig Symmons, the Program Manager of Volunteers, Consumers and Connected Communities at Better Health Network.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. Sally, I will hand over to you to do your opening, and then we will take questions from the committee. Over to you.

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes, sure. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. Better Health Network is sitting in a fairly unique position at the moment, because we have multiple programs funded to support people on the journey from homelessness to secure housing. With this particular project, with 259 Malvern Road, we have been funded to provide awareness-raising, preparation for moving and moving supports, and that has been renamed as the settlement support component of the work that we have been asked to do. In designing the project we have underpinned it with a number of principles which I think are critical to talking about what it has got the capacity to do and the capability to deliver over the life of the project. Basically, we are supporting residents to actively participate in the co-design and consultation processes to support self-determination.

We are encouraging and actively engaging with the residents in the project governance to make sure that we are absolutely hearing the resident voices in a meaningful way and that decisions and processes are not made without absolutely hearing what the impacts will be on those residents. Naturally, any of the work that we are

doing in this space is using a trauma-informed lens and looking at making sure we are using culturally safe practices in the work that we do. What we had anticipated and what we had hoped when we were first engaged in the project is that what that would provide residents with was an opportunity to actually be aware of what was happening and what is planned for the future as the information became available, to try and provide a reliable source of truth for residents and to have residents engaged in the decision-making about what this looks like and how we proceed through the relocation process. It was actually about trying to build stronger linkages between Homes Victoria, residents and the broader sector and to be talking to residents about what the new housing designs looked like, what the opportunities were and what the differences were between living in public housing and living in community housing.

What we did in terms of how we designed this piece of work and how we got started was we actually had been involved in two key academic partnerships prior to taking on this piece of work. We had and have a partnership with Swinburne's Global Centre for Health and Equity, and we had a partnership with Murdoch Children's Research Institute as well. Of those three pieces of research, one was a piece of work that we did during COVID with the high-risk accommodation program and one is still a piece of work we are doing around digital resilience in vulnerable communities, and then the piece of work that we did with Murdoch has resulted in a report called *Better Start*, which goes to some of our recommendations.

We are taking an adaptable, agile and iterative approach. In our mind at the moment there is no right way or wrong way to do this. It is literally about what the residents want, how they are articulating that and what the support needs are that they have, recognising that it is not a homogenous group of people and that we have got diversity within that and therefore people will be at different stages on that journey in terms of readiness and willingness to engage with a relocation process.

The partnerships have been absolutely critical and continue to be incredibly important. The relationship with Homes Victoria is particularly close, and we are talking about what that relationship looks like into the future in terms of co-location potentially down the track. We are co-located at the moment, and that is something that we are looking at as a potential factor for success into the future. It is absolutely really significant and important to acknowledge the inherent complexity of both the physical environment and the social environment in which this work is being undertaken, and we are endeavouring to work both with the residents and with our partners to be designing for a current state but also a future state as part of that.

The critical component for us in this project has been our staff competencies in undertaking that work. We have needed and continue to need staff who recognise the residents' expertise in understanding and determining their journey for what relocation may look like. It is about being willing to walk alongside residents. It is a really, really significant shift in terms of how it is not health professionals coming in and telling people what to do or what it could look like; it is literally about starting where a resident is ready to start and actually engaging at that point. It is actually staff with intersectional skills. We actually have lived-experience staff as part of our project team, and that is one of the critical success factors in terms of building trust and understanding how the system's informal networks as well as the formal structures work. But it actually provides an opportunity for authenticity that those of us who have not lived in public housing cannot offer to our cohort. There is a clinical competency around using the Ophelia methodology, which is a health literacy methodology that has been developed by Swinburne's Global Centre for Health and Equity. So it is actually a process that is replicable and scalable if we find that it works effectively in this particular project.

The learnings so far in terms of our activities to date are about engaging early in co-designing. Before the offer of relocation is placed before a resident, it is actually understanding what the strengths are that person has, what the concerns are and how we address those. It is about acknowledging the grief and loss. A lot of the residents in this building have told us that they have lived here for up to 40 years and so were not looking to move, so inherent in that is a grief-and-loss process that residents are going through. It is about working with that and acknowledging that as part of the process that we go through. It is actually about creating a shared vision, so what could a home look like in 12 months time if you were to relocate? And it is about building trust, so hosting respectful, culturally sensitive social and information sessions that are actually guided by the residents. A very practical example of that is residents having talked about how they do not know what to take and they do not know what to leave behind, so running some Marie Kondo style decluttering workshops is part of what we have actually been doing with residents to help them sort through that and support that preparation.

Ian SYMMONS: Another example of that was supporting residents to have garage sales and really think about what furniture they wanted to keep. One of the residents commented, 'I'm actually going to have new furniture in my new place' – so actually getting people to think through what that would look like, as anyone would when they are moving house.

Sally HOFFMANN: Absolutely. For the communities in partnership it is about recognising and sharing our expertise, so part of it is about recognising what we are each effective at and where our roles and responsibilities sit in that. That diversity of opinion and diversity of views is actually part of the model we are using in terms of problem-solving and thinking outside of the box of how we can support residents more effectively than we have in our traditional roles in the past. It is about harnessing our power of our informal and our formal data and networks. There is lots and lots of grey literature. There is lots of nuance in terms of who knows who and who knows what part of the story in terms of both what the gaps are but what the opportunities are, and it is about providing opportunities and forums for bringing that together. There is the right stakeholders at the right time, so when the residents are telling us they want information about special considerations, that information session has been run as recently as last week with the residents, providing more information about what the process is, what the documentation is and who can help them with which part of that journey so that they are clear about where to go for the information.

The first issue that we brought to the attention of this inquiry was around designing to address safety and security concerns. It is a very live issue. It has very clearly been reflected in our *Better Start* report, the work we did with Murdoch children's institute. That piece of work looked at what were the enablers and barriers for families in succeeding in the first 1000 days, and what very clearly came out of that piece of work was the need to be looking at a gender-based approach to design in terms of safety and security. We are continuing to hear that in residents' feedback right now. That fear is being expressed in two ways. One is about their fear of what will it be like in a new environment but also about the fear and safety and security concern around who is left in the building and what does that look like: as there are less people on the site, how do we ensure that people remain safe and secure as part of that?

The feedback from residents that have started to move is that they are actually telling us that they are feeling safer in the new environments. It is things at a very practical level, and I did hear somebody speak earlier about the social network component. We have got an example of two residents actually articulating that they wanted to move together and they have moved to the same site together, and that is part of what they are reflecting in their feedback as one of the success measures. They feel safer because they have moved with somebody that they know. It is about the design. The secure community garden on the top of Bangs Street, for example, means that children can play safely without the risk of a perpetrator of violence being able to easily access the children and/or the family members. It is about the pass-protected lifts. We are seeing the evidence of the recommendations around the design actually being reflected in residents' feedback, so what we see is that the opportunity to affect generational change in that space is to actually bring that in as an inherent part of the scope of the design for future builds.

The CHAIR: Sally, are you comfortable to explore some of these issues in questions too?

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes, sure. As we go through – absolutely.

The CHAIR: I know that we do not want to take away from time that we might have. I will start off, and then we will go through different members. I note in your submission that you talk about evidence-based resident engagement. In your opening you talked about being, I think it was, a reliable source of truth, which I thought was a really interesting term, because it suggested to me that other sources perhaps were not a reliable source of truth compared to you guys, and there have obviously been instances where people have come to you for information and help and guidance compared to others. Can you talk about why that might be the case? In particular, we heard this morning that the engagement from Housing Victoria has not been ideal.

Ian SYMMONS: We know, for example, that at 259, 75 per cent of the residents we have been engaging with already have relationships with Better Health Network, so they already know us for their health concerns. They come in for their podiatry; we also have all our community health services. They already know us generally, so they go, 'Oh, we know them.' When we did the HRAR research, which we included in the submission, one of the things that that highlighted was that community health is a major source of truth and a reliable source of truth, so that is based on that evidence. We have also our engagement processes – where we

have run community barbecues, we have run really respectful barbecues with really nice foods. So it is not just a piece of white bread and a sawdust sausage, it is actually really nice vegetables. It is really respectful. It is halal. It is culturally appropriate. That tells the residents that they can rely on and trust us. That kind of engagement with our digital health research that we have also been doing with many of the residents, the process of that, has also been, 'Oh, we want you to fill in the survey, but before we fill in the survey, we'll take you to the meals program, and we'll assist you with walking the dog. Oh, you want to bring your friend? We'll go pick them up.' So listening to what the clients need and responding to what the clients need in a respectful manner – they then listen to what we have to say.

The CHAIR: One of the other points you talk about is that there was a commentary about women wanting safe spaces, particularly against domestic violence issues and those sorts of things. Can you talk a bit about that? I am sorry, I have only got about 30 seconds, but can you give me a bit of an idea of the flavour of that?

Ian SYMMONS: For example, we talked briefly about Bangs Street – there is a rooftop garden that is secure so people can actually take their kids onto the garden and hang out and do stuff outdoors. The buildings themselves have balconies, so they have outdoor spaces. They also have multiple entry and exit points. So actually they feel more secure, because they are not relying on one lift well that anyone and anybody can get in and out of, often, and they have to go down multiple floors. Having multiple exits, having pass-protected exits – those kinds of things make it more suitable.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I am going to hand over to Mr Batchelor.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, both of you, for coming and really for the excellent work that Better Health is doing in the community. I think that it speaks volumes to the importance not only of the work that you do but our community health sector more broadly. I think it is a fantastic feature of our broader health and social support system in Victoria, and we should be very proud of it and secure it for the future. But anyway, let us talk about housing. It is very interesting work you are doing. Just to clarify, basically what you call the relocation and settlement support you are providing is being funded by Homes Victoria. Is that right?

Sally HOFFMANN: In part, yes. Part of it, the actual engagement onsite, is being funded by Homes Victoria. The work that we see going into the future will be funded by a range of our existing funding streams, so that is the intersectionality. For example, we are reaching the point in this project where we know what the resident cohorts look like and we know, for example, that we do have homeless people who are living in the building. That work will get picked up by our complex care team, because they are actually funded to do work with homeless populations.

Ryan BATCHELOR: This work you are doing onsite has been funded specifically because of the high-rise relocation program?

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Okay. One of the issues that we are coming up against I think is that Homes Victoria, as an agency doing service delivery on the ground, have been critiqued, let us say, for the work that they are doing. You are obviously doing great work on the ground. I think it is important for the committee to see that your work is a part of that whole work so that it is not a sort of either/or.

Sally HOFFMANN: Absolutely.

Ian SYMMONS: The approach we have taken is that first of all we have a very close working relationship with the DFFH housing relocation team. It is a very close working relationship. The other aspect is we are very clear that we are working prior and in that engagement space and not just waiting until there is a housing offer. We are doing a whole lot of the engagement and preparation with the residents prior to the relocation happening.

Ryan BATCHELOR: We have got obviously some towers like 259 that are scheduled for tranche 2 work but others – this one here at 2 Simmons Street and a lot of others – that are not, so residents are I think a little bit confused and fearful, if they are not in the current tranche, about what the future looks like for them. Any reflections on that element before my time runs out?

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes. There are a couple of things in that. One, we have got a few residents, and Ian can probably comment in more detail, that are actually coming from other sites and coming to the information sessions already. We have also been funded for another piece of work alongside of this with two other housing locations, in terms of then actually engaging with those residents, particularly around the complexity of the issues that they are facing on those particular sites.

Ian SYMMONS: In terms of the other high-rise towers which are in this particular catchment, there are 10 towers. With different sources of funding, we have staff in all of those towers, so that enables us to provide more information more accurately when we can and keep people up to date so we can support that work.

Sally HOFFMANN: I think you raised a really interesting point, and certainly it is something that we reflect on, but I could not quite get it into the presentation at this point in time. But we describe our work as working at a micro, meso and macro level. Our micro-work is working with individual residents to actually effect the change and deliver the outcome that they are wanting in the relocation process. The meso level is those connections and those partnerships, and that is particularly coming into play both in the preparation but also in the settlement support. We have got very practical examples on the ground of residents needing to transfer their medical records, for example, and find a local pharmacy. But there are opportunities for us in terms of the social connection, and one of the things we are learning out of the Towards Zero work and this work is a home is the first step in the settlement process. The need to build those new social connections but maintain social connections with residents that they have lived with for a long period of time is part of the feedback that we are receiving.

Ian SYMMONS: The other opportunity we should also highlight is that we also have existing relationships and strong relationships with community housing providers. We talk about Bangs Street and we talk about New Street in Brighton and we have had opportunities to do joint activities so that residents moving before they have got an offer or before they are going down that process can get a sense of what some new spaces might be like, and it is creating that opportunity for people that I think is also critical. It is allowing them to see what a new housing situation and what a new home could look like as opposed to, 'This is where I've lived for 40 years.' What we want is people to understand and to have the experience of what a new home could look like.

The CHAIR: I might pass on to Ms Gray-Barberio.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you very much, Chair. I just want to follow up on that note. With this close relationship that you have with community housing, residents having an opportunity to go in and have a look at what these houses look like, you mentioned in your submission that residents feel safe, but they are not happy about concerns regarding security of their housing tenure. Are they being told this when they are going to these community housing inspections?

Ian SYMMONS: They are given all the information about the –

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Does that include the housing tenure security?

Ian SYMMONS: Yes, it does. Yes, but in terms of the housing tenure it is understanding – and this is where it is about supporting the community housing sector more effectively, but an element around public housing has a real sense of 'My house is forever'.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: What are they told, Mr Symmons? Are they given a figure when they go? Is it three years, five years housing tenure?

Ian SYMMONS: I do not know the exact figure.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: That is okay. We will move on, because I am pressed for time, so I apologise. I will move on. You can answer the next one. In your submission you mentioned many community housing residents have received notices threatening eviction for being behind in rent by less than a week. Can you tell us more about these examples?

Ian SYMMONS: That was an automated process, and that is where it is that kind of change, but it was an automated process that the residents received a letter going, 'Okay, you're behind in your rent. This is what it could look like.'

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Within a week? Is that what you are hearing from the residents?

Ian SYMMONS: That is what we were hearing from some of the residents, and that was part of that process in that change of going, 'Well, actually, no, that needs to change.' So in terms of our advocacy work that we have also been doing, having those conversations at a macro level was also to advocate around the community housing providers talking through what that can look like.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Have you heard from residents who have been evicted from community housing? What has happened to them?

Ian SYMMONS: In terms of Bangs Street, I have not heard of any residents being evicted, other than one resident who was a private rental, for their behaviour. No other residents that I am aware of have been moved out.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. Does community housing have the same protections against eviction as public housing, and are the residents made aware if there are distinctions to this?

Ian SYMMONS: They would be questions better asked of community housing providers.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Do you hear that coming up in your interactions and engagements with public housing residents?

Ian SYMMONS: The community housing providers have to follow the same legislation that is being followed. It is more I think a feeling of 'When I'm in public housing it feels more secure than when I'm in community housing'.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: So is that a yes or a no that they do have the same protections in community housing?

Ian SYMMONS: They should have the same protections, yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you very much.

Sally HOFFMANN: The other thing that we –

The CHAIR: Sorry. We are just on time. I am terribly sorry. I will pass it over now to Mrs Hermans.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Number one, thank you so much for the advocacy and the work that you are doing at BHN. It is very much needed, and I do appreciate what it is doing for individuals as well as small communities. I think the bridge of what you talked about is incredibly important, of getting people ready, but I do want to bring up something that could be highly contentious, and you have been very sensitive in the way that you have discussed it. My background is I have also done some work as a housing support worker, so I understand this myself. Gender-sensitive design in social housing – as a person that spent a lot of time working with young women, I wondered if you could talk. Obviously it is a highly contentious area in the political domain today, but there are specific needs that become apparent in this particular type of work. Could you please speak a little bit more on this of what are some of the things that you have noted and that people have been requesting because of their own circumstances and needs that would actually make it more insightful for us to understand what things we could put in as recommendations?

Sally HOFFMANN: I guess the *Better Start* report highlights the needs. It is the residents' voices speaking. The interviews were conducted in a public housing setting, and I do not think that it is anything more than – some of it in some ways feels quite simplistic, as in, if we increase safety for women and children we actually increase safety for everybody in the building. So there is a part for me philosophically where I kind of go, we already know safety and security is a significant concern for multiple residents in public housing. If we have the opportunity to design that out, and the voice that is being heard and the voice that is driving that is women and children but actually it is better for everybody living in that environment –

Ann-Marie HERMANS: What are some of the specific needs? You mentioned the rooftop gardens. I am all for rooftop gardens – always have been.

Ian SYMMONS: There are elements which are about specific design in terms of physical design. There are also elements in terms of design of service and engagement. To give you an example, not from this catchment but about a community housing service, there were a number of older women who were in that space, and in that space downstairs we ran a sewing group. There were also a lot of young African men who were engaged who also lived in that space. We separately ran music programs for the young men. So the young African men and the older women were in the shared community space at the same time, doing completely different things. One of the women reported to us at the time, 'I used to walk down the street and feel afraid. Now I walk down the street and say hello.' It is that community building that is really critical in terms of there being a physical design in terms of secure passes, rooftop gardens or that kind of aspect, outdoor spaces that are secure, like balconies et cetera; it is also the service design models that enable community building so that diverse community groups and diverse populations can connect in a safe and appropriate way, and that makes it safer.

Sally HOFFMANN: The other element to that which is not necessarily in scope and has not been provided in our answer is that New Street is a lovely example where you have got a social enterprise cafe that was built onsite. In terms of improving safety and security and, again, the opportunity to transform lives, it is about providing pathways to employment as part of the design of a new site. Again, it is not necessarily a direct correlation between 'If you physically create this environment, then there is an outcome'. It is actually about the opportunity that the right design provides, both in terms of an immediate sense of safety and a longer-term sense of safety, empowerment and self-determination. And again, yes, that is speaking with a gendered lens right at the moment, but again, if we inherently build that in, there are better outcomes potentially for anybody who lives in that environment.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I am going to pass it over to Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Good afternoon. Can I ask: are you aware of any difficulties or pushback that has occurred from housing providers when moving lower income residents into community housing?

Ian SYMMONS: No.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: No pushback at all? No issues at all?

Ian SYMMONS: I have not heard any.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. So you are not aware of any instances where community housing providers are not taking people on who are on youth allowance payments, for example?

Sally HOFFMANN: Not specifically on youth allowance. What we are seeing, and it is informal at the moment, is that to increase the likelihood of success of housing security, providers are asking for a plan that actually supports somebody in the transition and in the settlement phase, and to the point that was raised earlier, that certainly is where community health is bringing multiple programs and multiple funding streams to support that opportunity. It is slightly different in this space, moving from secure housing in public housing to community housing, but more broadly speaking, particularly across the towards-zero work, yes, we are seeing that we are needing and looking to – along with other providers, not just ourselves – actually have a comprehensive plan and be talking about what success looks like in a new housing environment.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. I am going to raise another matter – I am limited for time, so sorry. Workers in the homelessness sector have reported that there are women on partner visas who are fleeing domestic violence who are not being accepted for community housing because the payments are lower than other potential tenants. What happens when public housing as we know it is converted into community housing and these women have nowhere to go? What happens?

Sally HOFFMANN: I cannot answer that directly. We do know that there is an emerging issue in one of our local government areas, where there is an increasing population of women 50 to 55 that are homeless, and they are struggling because there are providers with nominal rights but they do not kick in until they are 55. We have heard that. We are working with that local government provider. They are designing their new 10-year housing strategy, and we are working with them around how to articulate that in a 10-year strategy and –

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay.

Sally HOFFMANN: I am looking to try and answer the question that you are asking on what needs to change in the system, but we do not have the direct answer right at the moment.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I appreciate it. Can I ask in regard to relocation what happens if a public housing resident does not want to accept a community home?

Sally HOFFMANN: I cannot answer that question.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: To your awareness, you cannot answer the question?

Sally HOFFMANN: I cannot answer the question directly.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay.

Ian SYMMONS: The process has not been a case of 'You've been offered housing and you've said no'. What we have had experience of is when the person has been offered a house and it has not been suitable and they have gone, 'No, that's not what I want.' There have been further conversations around what actually is the appropriate house and then a further offer has been provided that is more appropriate for that person. So it has been a process to work with the resident all the way through to work out what they actually need.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Can I ask –

The CHAIR: Sorry, we are out of time, I am afraid.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you so much.

The CHAIR: Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you both for the discussion so far. I actually also want to touch on gender-sensitive design, and you have answered part of my question already. But in terms of what has already been done in these projects to accommodate gender-sensitive design, are there any particular aspects that you can call out? Ian, I really appreciated the example of the different groups coming together and actually finding that connection through that. In terms of the physical structure of these new builds, what sorts of principles of gender-sensitive design are you seeing implemented, and are there any that you are still keen to advocate to government to see included as well?

Sally HOFFMANN: One of the features of New Street is the increase in passive surveillance, and it has been reported on to us by the provider, the residents and the members of local government as well. For example, the actual physical location of that space is alongside the bike track, so again there are opportunities for more passive surveillance, for want of a better word, by just creating more traffic. There is the actual design of being able to walk through a housing estate. When I think about Bluff Road before it came down, for example, it did not provide those opportunities for people to wander through. The combination of private and public housing – the partnership mix and the blend of social models et cetera built into that – is certainly another element that is contributing to the destigmatisation of public housing. That would certainly be one of my observations. But quite genuinely opportunities to engage – one of the conversations that has been happening in that advisory group, for example, is the development of a bike repair cafe in that space and what that would look like, given that community are avid bike riders, if anybody looks at Beach Road on a Saturday morning. How do you connect mainstream community into these new builds to actually provide opportunity to work effectively but also build those connections?

Ian SYMMONS: The other element I just want to quickly add is around scale. If we think about accessing upstairs in these buildings, you have got one or two lift shafts and hundreds of people. If you compare that to some of the other newer sites that are being built, the buildings are at a smaller scale, which makes them feel safer. As I also said earlier, just to reiterate, multiple exit points also make it safer. If you look in these buildings, you are coming into the one lift shaft in the one space. It is very hard to get away if you are not feeling safe.

Sally HOFFMANN: Food security is another one that I would also talk about. We saw that out of the HRAR research as well. It is an ongoing issue, particularly for women who are fleeing domestic violence. There are some really fundamental needs – connecting the children to the local schools. There is a whole lot of infrastructure work and partnership work. You know, our upcycling, sewing – the ladies sewing cafe ran ‘Making recyclable homewares for your new home’. So it is literally about those connections to community that start to build that sense of safety and security. But the physical design is about having the space. It is about having a community space that actually facilitates that. It is about having the space for community gardens. You know, the community gardens are feeding into the social enterprise cafe, an opportunity for repurposing, reusing and recycling. So a circular economy principle is in there.

The CHAIR: I am going to hand over now to Mr Tarlamis.

Lee TARLAMIS: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your contributions to the inquiry and for the important work that you are doing as that reliable source of truth. In terms of that, along with the partnership work, the engagement you have with the relocation teams, do you find that there is a lot of misinformation and fear out there about what may or may not be happening or be going to happen and that because you are in that trusted environment with them and have that relationship with them, once you work through the processes a lot of these are overcome and they start to look at what the positive outcomes could be or the upside of things?

Ian SYMMONS: Yes. And what we have also done in those spaces is made sure that – we invited Southside legal, for example, to come and talk to the residents and create those spaces as well. So it is not just us providing the information, it is, ‘Okay, here is a community housing provider coming to talk about what that looks like’, ‘Here is the legal service to make sure that you have actually got independent legal support around that information that you might be wanting.’ We are aware of examples where there have been leaflet drops under people’s doors that have had false information in them. So when that happens, (a) we try to address it but also then provide ‘Here is the right information’ and work closely with Homes Victoria around making sure that this is the accurate information as much as there is information available.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Sorry, just to clarify: you are not talking about Homes Vic leaflets with false information.

Sally HOFFMANN: No.

Ian SYMMONS: No.

Ryan BATCHELOR: You are talking about a third party –

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: someone – putting false information under the doors of residents.

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes.

Ian SYMMONS: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Spreading misinformation inside the towers?

Ian SYMMONS: Yes.

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes. And we have heard of people sort of loitering and waiting until the doors are opened to follow people into the building –

Ryan BATCHELOR: To follow people into the building in order to spread false information.

Sally HOFFMANN: which contributes to the sense of the fear of safety and security as part of that as well.

Ian SYMMONS: Yes. And so when we have become aware of that, we have challenged that, and we have then actually made sure residents have the correct information.

Sally HOFFMANN: So some of our role at a very local level is myth busting – is there a piece of information? Is it fact, is it fiction? – and actually, again, providing residents an opportunity to ask the agencies directly the questions that they need to be answered for them to feel more comfortable with the process.

Ian SYMMONS: And we are making sure they have access to the right agencies with the right information, such as Southside – making sure that is available for people.

Michael GALEA: Sorry to jump in, Mr Tarlamis. Do you have any copies of some of these pamphlets that have been distributed that you could supply to us?

Sally HOFFMANN: I do not.

The CHAIR: We did hear it earlier this morning that it happened.

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes. We could take it on notice and see if we can, absolutely, but I am not sure.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

Lee TARLAMIS: I was going to say, in terms of your advocacy role that you spoke about as well, have you found that – and again, you mentioned that your staffing had to kind of modify their learnings and how they do their job, given the different circumstances that they are finding themselves in and issues that they are facing as well.

The CHAIR: You have only got around 30 seconds.

Lee TARLAMIS: Yes. No worries. That is all right. Have you found that Homes Vic have been responsive when you have raised issues with them about modifying their practices to address some of those issues?

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes. Part of our governance is a monthly project advisory group. It is a very open and transparent process. One of the things that happened as a result of COVID was we had to get very clear very quickly around roles and boundaries and who could do what part and use our data to iteratively learn. That is a practice that we have continued across multiple pieces of work, and that is the premise and the learnings that we share in the advisory group.

The CHAIR: Okay. That brings an end to the questions. Thank you very much for your time and the very thorough responses that you provided. As I said before, you will have an opportunity to look through the transcript to see if there are any slight errors that you need to correct. But apart from that, thanks very much. We will bring this session to a close.

Witnesses withdrew.