

Experiences of relocation in and around the Carlton Redevelopment Project, Stage 1

The Research Project

The redevelopment of the Carlton public housing estate (Stage 1), an area of four-storey walk-up flats, into a mixed tenure estate with one public building and two private buildings, provided the setting for research to investigate experiences of relocation. Between 2011 and 2013, a group of researchers from Flinders University looked at different aspects of life on Carlton Estate before and after redevelopment.



The research project aimed to:

- Investigate key factors in residents' lives that changed when they were relocated as part of a public housing asset improvement project – in order to increase our understanding of the impacts on residents' health and well-being and social inclusion.
- Investigate the experience of living in a mixed tenure estate from the viewpoint of tenants being relocated, public tenants who moved there, private residents and community stakeholders and service providers.

Research participants (in-depth interviews)

Group	Inter-viewed
Public housing tenants at 522 Drummond Street who previously lived in the walk-ups ('returning')	10
Public housing tenants at 522 Drummond Street who did not live in the walk-ups ('new')	11
Public housing tenants who did not return to the redeveloped complex ('non-returning')	10
Private residents in the redeveloped complex ('private')	10
Policy makers and service providers	10
Total	51

The Redevelopment

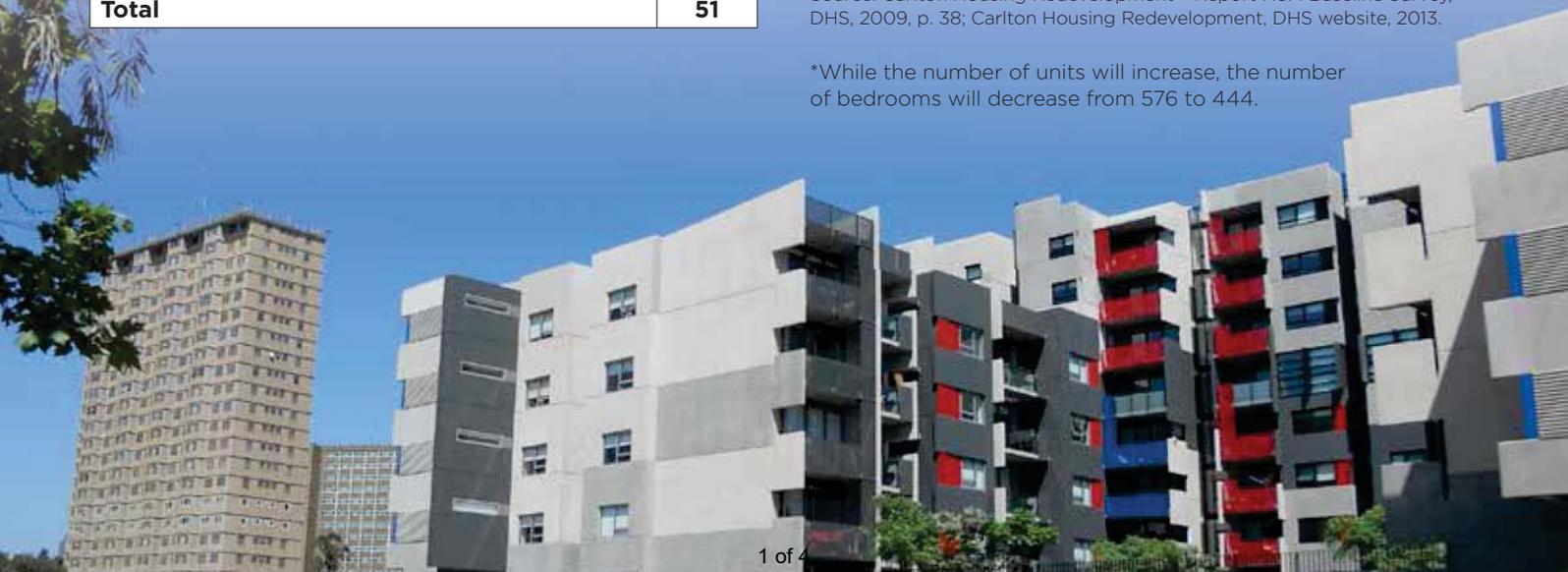
The Carlton Estate Redevelopment project commenced in 2006 and will be completed over three stages by 2017. The project includes redevelopment of both public and private units, construction of a retirement village and an aged-care centre, development of new public parks, gardens and landscaping, and gradual renovation of the existing high-rise public units. This research project examined Stage 1 of the redevelopment.

Number of public and private units pre and post redevelopment*

Housing estate	Pre-redevelopment		Post-redevelopment	
	Public units	Private units	Public units	Private units
Lygon site – stage 1	136	0	84	98
Keppel site – stage 2	0	0	50	98
Nicholson site – stage 3	56	0	112	116
Total Carlton Estate	192	0	246	312

Source: Carlton Housing Redevelopment – Report No. 1 Baseline Survey, DHS, 2009, p. 38; Carlton Housing Redevelopment, DHS website, 2013.

*While the number of units will increase, the number of bedrooms will decrease from 576 to 444.



KEY FINDINGS

Reasons for tenants not returning to Drummond Street

- The main reason people decided not to return was because they were offered units with fewer bedrooms than they felt they needed. For example some single parents wanted a spare bedroom for when their children came to stay. Despite their disappointment, they preferred to stay in a larger unit rather than move back to a brand new but smaller unit.
- Another reason was the significant time lag between moving out and back in again, sometimes up to seven years. Some people had settled into their new place of residence and thus did not want to relocate again.

Housing quality and neighbourhood environment

- Most tenants in the redeveloped building felt fortunate to live there. They rated it and the surrounds as a large improvement on the old walk-ups. Most tenants liked the newness of the housing but also the improved landscaped surrounds and the new playground.

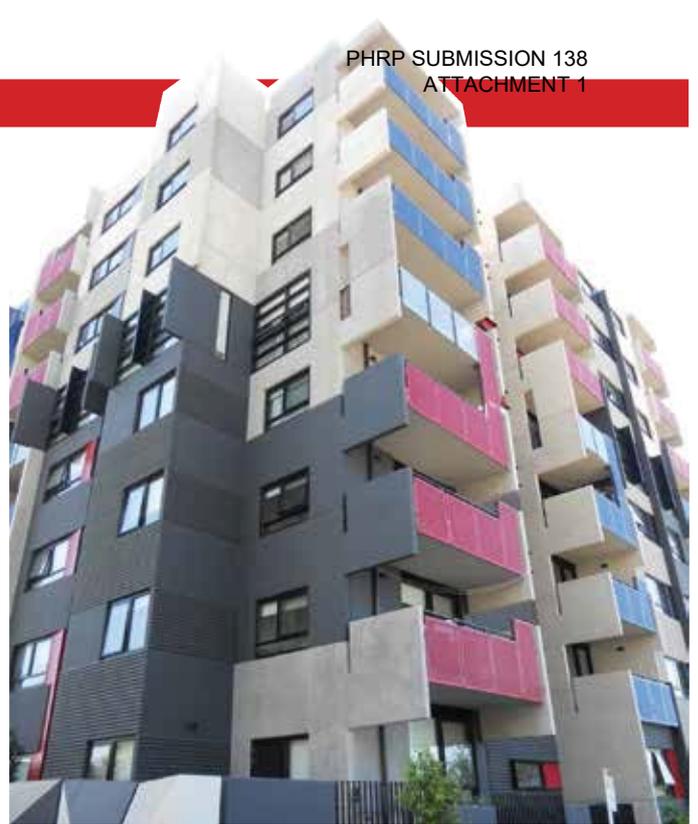
Overall I can see the majority of the people, they can't believe they can afford to live in a place like this (female, 30+, new, living with children).

The change from here - to come back to a place like this is like coming back to a six-star motel in Hawaii, that's how it feels - that's truthfully (male, 50+, returning, living alone).

- The new building's design was also linked by tenants to positive behavioural changes. For example, placing unit entrances along a corridor on each floor means that people using the staircase do not disturb tenants in their units, as was the case in the walk-ups, where staircases led directly to the units.

Social networks

- Tenants, community stakeholders and service providers said that the Office of Housing had worked hard to satisfy the requests of tenants who wanted to stay in the suburb of Carlton or in the estate while the redevelopment occurred - and most who wanted to were able to stay.
- Most tenants did not report major changes to their social networks due to redevelopment. Possibly this is also because many were relocated close by (to other buildings in Carlton Estate or to nearby estates).



- Nevertheless, some tenants did feel cut off from their neighbours and close friends, due to relocation.

Since they left, the old [phone] number is cut off so they can't get in touch with you, you can't get in touch with them. I miss some of them, actually (male, 20+, non-returning, living with friend).

- In addition, the researchers found it difficult to locate tenants who had moved farther away from the Carlton Estate. The social networks of these tenants may have been negatively affected by the relocation.

Safety and security

- Tenants' perceptions about safety and security in the redeveloped building varied.
- Some tenants felt that the new building was much safer than the old walk-ups but others had experienced the walk-ups as very safe. This mainly depended on where their unit was situated within the walk-ups - some blocks were considered quieter and safer than others.
- Suggestions to improve safety in the new building included the addition of security screen doors and peep-holes to unit entrance doors, as existed in the walk-ups, and a more secure main entrance to the building.
- Some tenants emphasised the ongoing reduction in public housing stock and the resultant concentration of tenants most in need with multiple problems. They contended that they had been promised a family-oriented building but instead many occupants had mental health problems and drug abuse issues.

My next door neighbour, oh my God. She's on drugs and she's screaming in the middle of the night ... At my other place we [had] no problem. I move in here maybe one month later from under the car park they steal my car (female, 40+, returning, living with son).

Stigma and reputation

- The majority of tenants reported positive change in how people from outside the estate perceived the new building.

People outside of here don't look at us in this building as part of the high-rise, they look at it as private because that building there is private and they think this is all private. So from a résumé point of view, if I was looking for a job or something, it sits better on a résumé too (male, 50+, new, living alone).

A lot of people don't even know that this is Ministry [housing] here. When I talk to them 'I'm in Drummond Street' [they say] 'Oh you're so lucky, in those new - oh wow!' you know? A lot of them don't realise that it's Ministry unless you say it (female, 30+, returning, living with children).

- A few tenants, however, said the change was minimal:

Just for living in Commission, people know it's Commission and just because you live here doesn't change who you are or what you are, so they still look at you the same. It's definitely better but - what can I say? - yeah people just look at you the same (male, 20+, returning, living with parent).



Mixed tenure and social interaction

- Many public housing tenants and private residents mentioned the lack of a meeting space around the redeveloped building and thus limited opportunities to get to know each other.

This area has nothing where people can get together whereas 530, 510, 480 [Lygon St, the high-rise towers] have a community hall. [Since then, at] the new building on Elgin Street, we fought, we took up a petition and we got approval in the new buildings to go in there, that the community hall be put there. We think it's important (male, 50+, new, living alone).

- Service providers frequently spoke about access to the 'communal' garden between the buildings which was visible to public tenants but open only to private residents. Some public tenants also criticised this aspect of the redevelopment:

...in between the three buildings there's a little park in the middle with barbecues and the rest of it; we don't have access to that (male, 30+, new, living alone).

- Some private owners were annoyed that they had not been told about the housing tenure mix when they purchased their apartment. Other private residents expressed the view that social mix is unlikely to work on the estate because of the disparity between public and private residents in terms of education and social background:

I don't feel bad about living next to people in Commission housing, I just - it is us and them very much so, especially when there's damage to property and you feel that it doesn't hurt them like it hurts you because - I mean, we're invested in this property (female, 30+, private owner, living with partner).

- Private residents also noted that public housing tenants do not have the same rules as private residents regarding the use of balconies and external appearance of their units.

Adding to the insult of not being told about the neighbours, [a concern] I would have is the mounds of unsightly refuse [public tenants] have on their balconies whilst I am not permitted to even leave my broom on my balcony, let alone my washing to dry on a warm sunny day, without receiving a breach notice. My balcony cannot be seen from Rathdowne or Princes Street, but the Commission flat balconies can be seen in all their revolting glory as you walk or drive past (female, private owner, living with partner and daughter).



Office of Housing relocation consultation processes

- The majority of tenants and service providers felt that there was no real public consultation about the relocation but only information provided on what would happen:

I'm no Philadelphia lawyer but I reckon that then they can say 'Well, we consulted the residents'. They can say 'Well we had a meeting once a month with the residents - sorry, ex-residents - and they know what we're building so it's all above board' (male, 50+, non-returning, living alone).

Health and wellbeing

- The effects of relocation on health and wellbeing varied. Some people found relocating to a different unit or estate a difficult experience:

In my block of flats it doesn't have balcony and that's very stressful so at least we have balcony, we can go out and have a coffee and just breathe some fresh air. We're kind of locked in. We're very much locked in and sometimes your mind can play up a bit more because you're kind of - just kind of jail environment sort of thing (male, 50+, non-returning, living alone).



- Others were happy to move out of the walk-ups and to a different environment, such as the experience of a woman who moved to a house with a backyard in a smaller housing estate nearby:

I was quite depressed on the other side [in the walk-ups]. It's amazing, it's only across the road but yet it made such an enormous difference. Quality of life, yeah, I've got more things to do. I probably entertain more now ... Overall for me it's just 110 per cent better, 110 per cent (female, 40+, non-returning, living with child).

- In contrast to those who decided to stay away, most tenants who came back or moved into a new unit in Drummond Street found relocation positive for their health and wellbeing:

I am actually sleeping better than I've slept for a long, long time ... It's the first time I really feel like I've got a home ... Contentment, yeah, more contentment (male, 50+, new, living alone).

It's just one of those things but my mental health has improved heaps. Just waking up in a nice, clean, beautiful joint ... It's definitely good, yeah. I've got major depression and the rest of it and since I moved here it's been a hell of a lot better (male, 30+, new, living alone).

Well the most important one was I am happier here. It's a bigger place for me, it's happier. It's not so much being a new place, it's a better place and I'm happy in myself. Being around friends even more so and it's more convenient also for shopping and other things (male, 50+, returning, living alone).

Policy Implications

In summary, many of the outcomes of the redevelopment are positive, particularly in relation to the quality of the new units and surroundings. Disruptions to social networks were minimised due to major efforts of the Office of Housing to accommodate tenants' locational preferences. Most tenants felt that there have been improvements from the previous stigma associated with the estate.

The main questions arising from the research that remain for discussion between policy makers, tenants, private

residents and service providers for future redevelopment processes are:

- Given that most tenants and service providers expressed disappointment with the consultation processes, how might the structures for consultation be improved?
- How might the mixed tenure component be made more transparent during the sale of units to private buyers?
- How to address the mismatch between tenants' expectations and Office of Housing guidelines about the number of bedrooms tenants are entitled to?
- What can be done to respond to disappointment of some public tenants and some private residents about the lack of a shared space where social interaction could flow but is not forced?
- How can the management and maintenance of public and private buildings be improved to achieve a more consistent physical environment?
- How might perceptions of safety and security in the new building be addressed? For example by the addition of security screen doors and peep-holes to unit entrances.

Further Information

If you would like to know more about the research and its findings, please contact **Iris Levin** on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED], or **Kathy Arthurson** at [REDACTED]. Please see the VicHealth website for a full research report (<http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/>).

The project was funded by the Australian Research Council with partners VicHealth and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The research team based at Flinders University's Southgate Institute for Health, Society and Equity includes A/Prof Kathy Arthurson and A/Prof Anna Ziersch, and Dr Iris Levin who was hosted by the Brotherhood's Research and Policy Centre in Melbourne.

