


Rec 16/6/16

Victoria Gutsjahr


The Secretary
 Legal and Social Issues Committee
 Parliament House, Spring Street
 EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

SUBMISSION TO LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

My name is Victoria Gutsjahr. I am an age pensioner and live in a not-for-profit Independent Living Unit (ILU). Since 2006 I have lived in a unit run by Catholic Homes Inc. In 2015 this body merged with Villa Maria and is now known as Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH). These were independent one bedroom units in an ideal location for pensioners, about half of whom had paid ingoing fees for a permanent home. My issue is with the way in which relocations are handled and the apparent lack of procedures or protocols to handle this situation.

Late in 2015 a letter was sent to residents informing us that the units would be closed at the end of 2016 and naming a list of six other villages for us to select a place to move to. The letter was received on a Thursday, by some residents, but not all. On Monday morning two staff members from VMCH arrived at our units to ask "Where do you want to move to". As some residents had not yet received the letter it came as a shock. As most of them did not know anything about the new locations offered, it was difficult to make a choice. The idea of relocation was not well received by most of us, and the older residents reacted in the classic grieving processes... anger, fear, trauma depression. This had not been anticipated by VMCH who seemed surprised that some of us complained. They seemed to expect us to be grateful

As the length of residency ranged from one to 20 years, the long term residents had expected to live there for the rest of their independent lives. This caused excessive trauma and even fear of the future for some of the residents. The staff members were polite and helpful but they had no idea of the effect this abrupt approach had on many of the older residents.

They also did not give enough indication of the time frame' as vacancies occur 'does not explain much. Now, more than six months later, some are still waiting to be relocated, some to a place which is not completely built yet. Some began packing and have been living in a state of limbo for months. The loss of local amenities, transport systems and local friendships all added to the trauma. Moving house is a traumatic experience for anyone, but more so when you don't want to move. Because I was angry and upset I accepted the alternative unit offered even though it was not in my best interests. The manner in which it was offered was condescending and patronising.

I would ask for several things.

* Firstly, that staff who work in positions where they deal with the day to day life of older people have adequate training in the job. It should not be "learned on the job". Our lives are too precious to be treated so lightly. Those of us who live independently are not "aged care patients who don't get care" Like me, most of them have voluntary jobs, study courses and part time employment where we can get it.

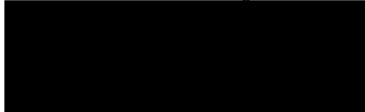
* Secondly, that protocols are set in place for handling relocations with great empathy and awareness of the insecurities and fears of many older people, to avoid the misunderstandings and trauma of having to move yet again, when they thought they were set for life.

* Thirdly, a reasonable time frame is necessary. To be hanging on in limbo for up to a year is pretty awful when you don't have all that many years left.

* Finally, assistance with packing, moving, notification of address change to the multitude of contacts and **REPLACEMENT OF THOSE ITEMS OF FURNITURE WHICH WILL NOT FIT IN THE NEW UNIT**, eg, queen bed, 3 seater sofa, fridge. Not too many of us have the spare cash to replace these. VMCH gave \$1000 each to assist with moving expenses. With no family to help move this does not cover costs of uplift, leaving a pensioner with more debt to pay off.

I have no objection to appearing at the public hearing.

Yours sincerely



Victoria Gutsjahr
14th June 2016