

# mercy foundation<sup>®</sup>

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at the  
service  
of human  
dignity

## Rentwell: A new approach to creating affordable housing in Canberra

In early May, YWCA Canberra launched Rentwell, the first charitable property management service in the ACT to provide affordable rental accommodation to people on low incomes. The initiative was made possible by a grant from the Mercy Foundation's Grants to End Homelessness program.

According to Frances Crimmins, "Everyone has a right to an affordable, appropriate and secure place to call home. We know that Canberrans are proud of our welcoming, inclusive culture and great quality of life. We're excited that Rentwell provides investment property owners in the ACT with an opportunity to change someone's life in a tangible and powerful way."

Anglicare's latest Rental Affordability Snapshot reveals that in the ACT/Queanbeyan region, only 0.4% of dwellings available for rent were affordable for a couple on an Age Pension. None were affordable for a single or couple on Newstart and none

were affordable for a couple with two children on minimum wage.

"Around the country and right here in Canberra, people on low incomes are experiencing a housing crisis. There are virtually no affordable rental properties on offer and the competition for the few that exist is fierce."

Affordable, secure housing is key to helping people get their lives back on track and for children to thrive.

YWCA Canberra worked with the ACT Government to pass legislation to provide land tax exemptions for investment property owners who lease their properties through registered community housing providers at less than 75 per cent market rent.

**"If you own an investment property in the ACT and want to make a lasting difference in the life of a local older woman, single mum or dad, or a family, this is your opportunity."**

**Frances Crimmins,  
CEO YWCA Canberra**

The scheme is in place under a pilot program until 30 June 2021 and is capped to 100 properties across the ACT.

## How Rentwell works:

1. Property owners sign a head lease with YWCA Canberra
2. YWCA Canberra identifies suitable and eligible tenants and sub-leases the property at below 75 per cent market rate.
3. Property owners apply for a land tax exemption through the ACT Revenue Office.
4. YWCA Canberra provides property owners with a tax-deductible gift receipt for any foregone rent (the gap between market rate and the discounted rate).

**"Together, we can build stronger communities and make Canberra even more inclusive, fair and liveable for everyone," Ms Crimmins said.**

To contact Rentwell email [Rentwell@ywca-canberra.org.au](mailto:Rentwell@ywca-canberra.org.au) or visit [www.rentwell.com.au](http://www.rentwell.com.au)





# Social Justice Small Grants

## Social Justice Small Grants Awarded in 2019

The theme for this year's Social Justice Small Grants program was Justice and the Environment, supporting projects that protect, repair and restore the environment. Following the pathway established by Catherine McAuley, Social Justice Small Grants focus on bringing about justice to those marginalised in the community.

**Gunawirra:** A speech and social work project, for Aboriginal children in inner Sydney.

**Liwara Catholic Primary School:** Students will have the opportunity to work on a bush tucker garden and connect with the local Whadjuk/Noongar culture.

**Mount Barker Community Centre:** This project focuses on upcycling and recycling, and is designed to reuse coffee pods.

**Parramatta Diocese Social Justice Office:** This pilot program will encourage the local community to maintain the Blue Gum forest and develop an Environment Walk.

**Refugees and Partners Incorporated:** This project will help create a welcoming centre for mothers and children in the local refugee community.

**Rahamim Ecology Centre:** This project will provide a healing process to address the trauma experienced by asylum seekers in a nurturing atmosphere.

**Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans:** ACRATH will deliver forced marriage education and training to five schools in Queensland and New South Wales.

**Mingaletta Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corporation:** A health and well-being program designed to develop young people as leaders.

**Faith Ecology Network (FEN):** This project will bring together people of diverse faith, traditions and sciences, around an ecological topic of common concern.

## Capacity Building in the Russian/Slavic Community

A Social Justice Small Grant was awarded to the Russian Ethnic Representative Council (RERC) to provide information about family law, the court system, family violence and support available to assist women in the Russian community. The project increased awareness of services and information available regarding domestic violence and worked to break the cultural stigma traditionally associated with these issues.

RERC ran workshops, seminars and events to around 80 women and was able to gain wider awareness of the issues via radio segments on SBS Russian and 3ZZZ. The project provided qualitative insight

into the issue of domestic violence within the Melbourne Russian community. Attendance was lower than expected due to the cultural sensitivities about domestic violence in the Russian community, where these issues are rarely discussed openly. A great sense of gratitude was expressed by women in the community because the issue was now being discussed. Through the Mercy Foundation's funding significant insight has been gained into the nature of the problem within the Russian community, with future projects being designed with a greater understanding of the cultural barriers to be overcome.

## Encouraging Entrepreneurship with Migrant Women

For more than four years, the established SisterWorks Model has successfully supported the most vulnerable migrant women and helped them to move into work by developing their entrepreneurial skills.

In Richmond Victoria, SisterWorks Inc is supporting the entrepreneurial journey of 88 remarkable women. The 2020 strategic goal is to support the pathways of 200 women to move into employment and entrepreneurship in Richmond, and to create another two new regional SisterWorks Homes that will support a further 200 women.

A Social Justice Small Grant from the Mercy Foundation assisted in launching the SisterWorks program in Bendigo.

Nine entrepreneurs attended the first session in May. This program will run every Tuesday, with the objective to achieve 15 entrepreneurs per session and 30 entrepreneurs in participation. This will help women in the Bendigo area overcome significant social and employment challenges, by receiving basic skills training in sewing, cooking, knitting and jewellery making, with a view to the women creating their own product line. SisterWorks will continue to monitor, learn and improve the regional programs.





# Ending Homelessness

## Women, Homelessness, Housing: a community concern

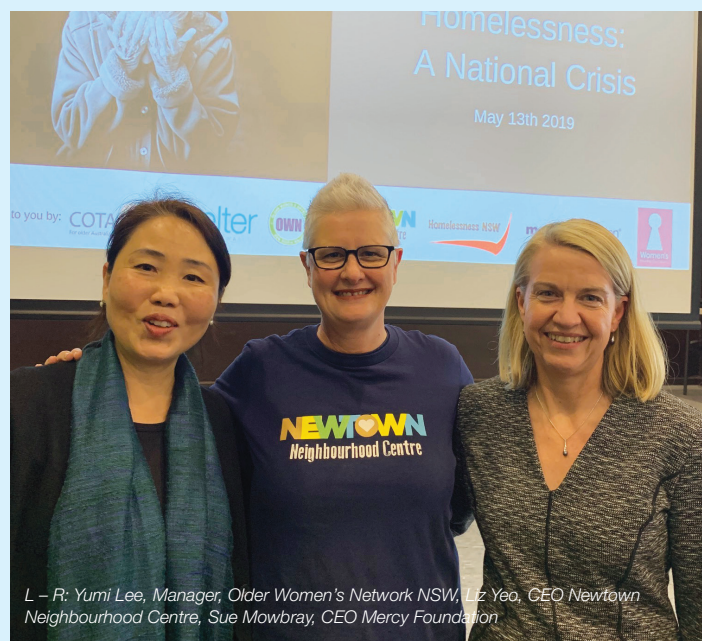
The Mercy Foundation recently joined with Newtown Neighbourhood Centre and the Older Women's Network NSW to host a public forum on older women and homelessness, prior to the Federal election.

The 2016 Census revealed that older women are the fastest growing cohort to experience homelessness, up 31% compared to 2011. The topic generated plenty of interest from the community who were keen to hear what the different parties were offering to address homelessness, especially where older women are concerned.

One speaker at the forum was a retired woman who had experienced homelessness as a result of illness. She spoke about the shame and isolation she felt and her desperation at being unable to find a place she could afford. Beverley Baker, Chair of the Older Women's Network NSW spoke passionately about the discrimination women continue to face in the workforce, the gender pay gap, their lack of superannuation and age discrimination.

Speakers at the forum included Jenny McAllister, Labor Senator for NSW and Mehreen Faruqi, Australian Greens Senator for NSW. Both spoke about their respective policies to address homelessness and discrimination against women.

To end homelessness, we must ultimately address the root causes of poverty and the chronic shortage of affordable housing. These two drivers are creating unrelenting rental stress, insecure housing and homelessness for those most in need in our community. The Mercy Foundation remains committed to ending homelessness in Australia.



L - R: Yumi Lee, Manager, Older Women's Network NSW, Liz Yeo, CEO Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, Sue Mowbray, CEO Mercy Foundation

## Project update: Older Women's Housing Project

The pilot of the Older Women's Housing Project in Melbourne by Women's Property Initiatives (WPI) has taken an enormous step forward with the issue of the planning permit for development of four townhouses. The Mercy Foundation provided seed funding for this project through the Grants to End Homelessness program.

This innovative project will enable four older women on fixed, low incomes who are currently relying on an expensive rental market to each secure their own brand new home.

WPI is in discussions with the Victorian Government to advocate for a wider roll out of the program.

The project provides permanent, appropriate, secure housing for older women with limited funds, who cannot afford to buy their own home. Additionally, it will eliminate housing insecurity from their lives and enable them to live a comfortable and dignified retirement.

## Service or Servitude?

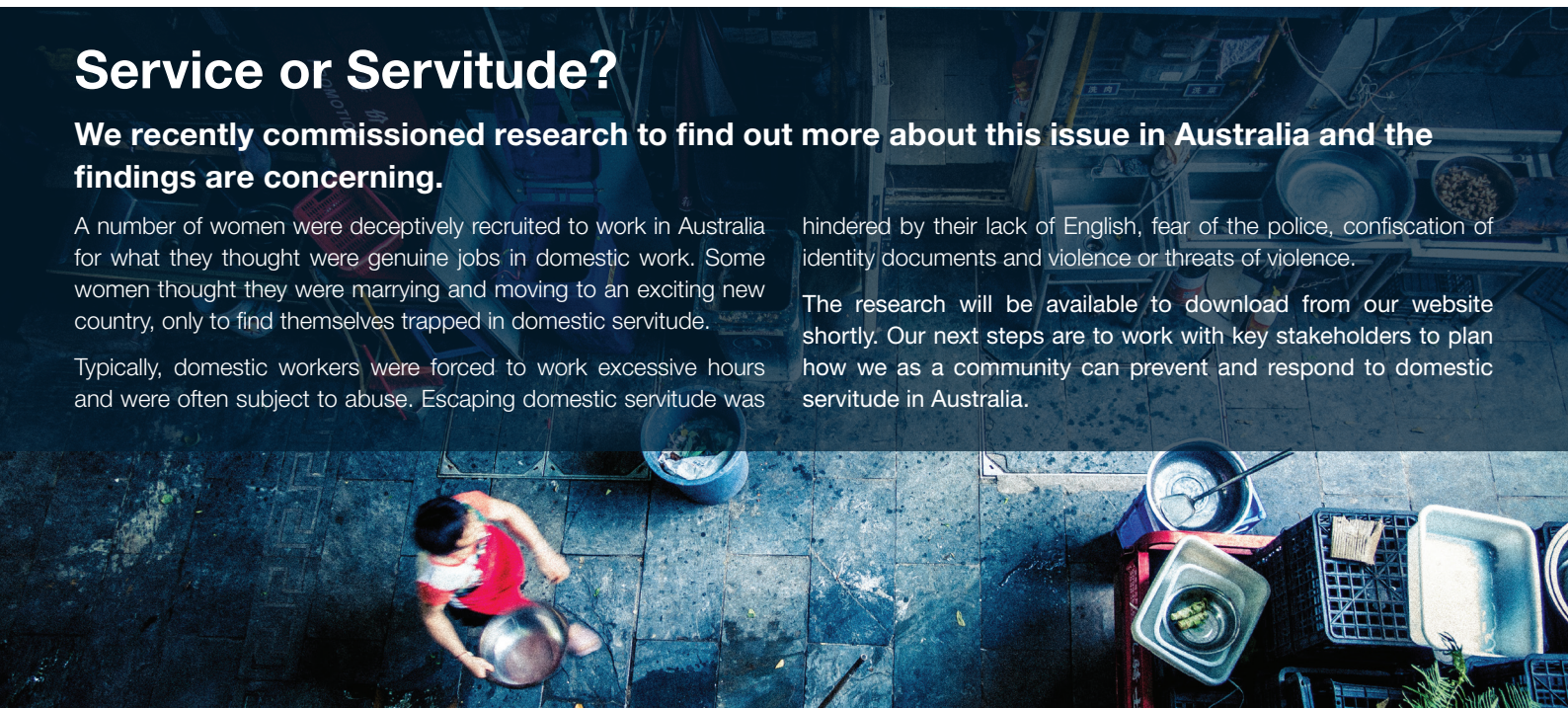
**We recently commissioned research to find out more about this issue in Australia and the findings are concerning.**

A number of women were deceptively recruited to work in Australia for what they thought were genuine jobs in domestic work. Some women thought they were marrying and moving to an exciting new country, only to find themselves trapped in domestic servitude.

Typically, domestic workers were forced to work excessive hours and were often subject to abuse. Escaping domestic servitude was

hindered by their lack of English, fear of the police, confiscation of identity documents and violence or threats of violence.

The research will be available to download from our website shortly. Our next steps are to work with key stakeholders to plan how we as a community can prevent and respond to domestic servitude in Australia.





# Home in a Box Update






Since January 2019 we have delivered 20 Homes in Boxes to people throughout Sydney who have moved into their own safe, secure home after spending a long time homeless. Home in a Box helps to create a home by providing high quality homewares like sheets, towels and pillows, kitchenware and cookware, a toaster and a kettle. It even contains a dustpan and brush.



## How it works:

Service workers who have helped their clients find permanent housing contact us for a Home in a Box. The worker delivers Home in a Box to the client once they are in housing, and helps them unpack. The worker continues to provide whatever support is needed to help the client settle into his or her new home and make a fresh start.

## Recent recipients include:

	A middle aged woman who was couch surfing and sleeping rough for 18 months
	An older man with a long history of street homelessness
	A woman with complex needs who was homeless for 5 years
	A woman who was homeless for 6 years
	A man in his 30's who had experienced homelessness and unstable housing for the last 20 years

## Thank you to our generous suppliers:

My House • Kennards Self Storage • Maxwell and Williams • HC Distributors • Hospitality Products • Sisters of Mercy North Sydney



## Thank you to our generous donors.

Home in a Box helps create a welcoming home, helping people to settle into their new home and start their lives again. Home in a Box is made possible by your generosity.

## Yes, I would like to help bring about an end to homelessness.

Donation Amount  (donations over \$2 are tax deductible)

Name:

Address:

(Please tick) Cheque ☐ Money Order ☐ Master Card ☐ Visa ☐

Card Number:                 Expiry Date:   /

Cardholder's Name:

Signature:

Post this form to Mercy Foundation, 40 Rocklands Rd Crows Nest NSW 2065. You can also donate by phone 02 9911 7390 or online via secure website [www.mercyfoundation.com.au](http://www.mercyfoundation.com.au) and click the Donations tab.

A tax deductible receipt will be mailed to you. **Thank you for your support, it is greatly appreciated.**



 at the service of human dignity