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Coming home is a life changing moment

As rental stress and rising housing prices hit, new data shows more people are experiencing homelessness and joining the growing waitlist for housing in the Shepparton area. But for those who secure social housing, it comes with a host of other benefits, such as improvements to employment, education, and health outcomes.

Community housing, like that already owned and supported by BeyondHousing throughout Greater Shepparton, provides a safety net to vulnerable Australians.

BeyondHousing CEO Celia Adams said the organisation assists thousands of people each year who are in a housing crisis, at risk of homelessness, or in financial stress.

“Our homelessness team in Shepparton assisted 1,488 families in 2020-21, a 17 per cent increase on the previous year. We supported 2,266 households across all our client services, which includes people who need help to find and keep a home in the private rental market,” Ms. Adams said.

BeyondHousing fights to address issues leading to homelessness and works with people to find safe and affordable housing. Sadly, the demand for services is growing. However, the impact on people’s lives when they do secure a home is profound.

“Rates of homelessness did not increase because we don’t know how to solve the problem: we do. Having enough housing, in the form people need it is critical.

“We know that our housing changes lives. Our renters tell us what they have been able to achieve because they have a safe, secure affordable home. They gain employment, return to education, focus on improving their health and wellbeing and can provide greater opportunities for themselves and their children,” Ms. Adams said.

BeyondHousing renter Ian said he doesn’t know where he would have been without his new home which he rents from BeyondHousing.

“It’s changed my life, it’s more than just the physical roof over my head. It’s knowing when I go out that I’m returning to a home of my own, it will still be there when I get back. I feel in control of my life, and I can concentrate on doing more than just finding somewhere safe to sleep.

“When you’ve been staying in emergency accommodation and then sleeping on couches for months on end you don’t have time and space to do anything but try to find somewhere to live. And that is so hard to do.”

Ian said he has made new connections in the community and his life is back on track.

“I’ve been working with the Men’s Shed, and it’s been great. I’ve managed to work on things for my house and they have helped me sort out some stuff I needed like an electric lawnmower for my yard.

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“I’ve gone back to footy training which I’m really enjoying and I’m about to start a new part-time job. None of this would have happened for me 6 months ago but it’s the difference housing makes, having a place of my own that is affordable to rent and is just right for what I need.”

Anna* moved into her new community housing property a little over 4 months ago and said finding somewhere that was safe and secure that she could afford wouldn’t have happened without the opportunity provided by BeyondHousing.

“I have never felt safer than I do right now with this new home, I absolutely love it. I get along so well with my neighbours, and we often chat about how great our homes are, beyond what we could have imagined.

“I’ve been able to make the outside space and garden my own. I have somewhere for all my tools and supplies for my little business that I have started.

“I have so much support there to help me make the most of this opportunity. It’s a whole different life. Just stepping through the front door of my home and knowing I’m safe is a life changing moment every day.”

BeyondHousing is continuing to build more than 60 new community homes in Shepparton supported by funding from the Peter & Lyndy White Foundation and through the Victorian Government. Even with these new homes on the horizon there is a substantial gap between what it is funded to build and what public and community housing is needed to end homelessness and ensure there is a home for everyone in the community that needs it.

“There were almost 900 households on the priority access waitlist for housing in Shepparton at the end of last year. There are so many people and families who desperately need a home of their own, who have a right to affordable housing and to the dignity and opportunity it affords them,” Ms. Adams said.

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**Pseudonym used to protect privacy.*

About: BeyondHousing is the largest community housing organisation within the Goulburn and Ovens Murray regions of Victoria. BeyondHousing is the main entry point for the homelessness system and provides a range of supports for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. If you or anyone you know is experiencing or at risk of homelessness, call 1800 825 955.

For more information or to arrange an interview, contact: Chelsea McGrath on 0432 179 178