



Southern Cross Housing

Tenant Newsletter

Summer 2022



CEO MESSAGE

Welcome everyone to our Summer Newsletter. It's hard to believe that another year has come and almost gone.

Christmas for most is a time of joy and family, for some however it can be a stressful time. Family and financial pressures can mount up. SCH is providing several free Christmas events where no preparation or cost is involved, all you need do is turn up, information about these events can be found in the newsletter. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon during this time for some to cancel their rent payments. While we fully understand the financial pressures of those on fixed low incomes, however that pressure is only multiplied when having to catch up after Christmas. If you are struggling financially, please speak to your Housing Officer who can provide referrals for assistance and financial counselling.

This year SCH has provided over \$20,000 worth of scholarships, I would like to congratulate all of the recipients of the program and would encourage our readers to take time to read the stories of how these funds have benefited those who have received them. Information about the scholarship program can be obtained from our Communities Assist team or from our website "scch.org.au".

Finally, I would like to thank all SCH tenants who have made a difference to your community this year, whether you have volunteered in some way, looked in your neighbours during tough times or just taken pride in your yard care to the benefit of your street. Your contribution helps to build a community to which people feel connected and want to belong.

Merry Christmas and Happy New year everyone. I look forward to, building stronger community futures, together in 2023.

Kind regards,
Alex Pontello
Chief Executive Officer



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TALK TO US

Southern Cross Housing is always looking to improve its service to customers and appreciates any feedback you can provide. Get in contact with us today by calling 1300 757 885 for all of your queries and for direction to any of our regional offices. You can also reach us by email at info@scch.org.au. SCH has also launched its new website (scch.org.au) where you can access plenty of great information about our services.

IN THE NEWS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Southern Cross Housing acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land in which we operate. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them, their culture and to Elders past, present and emerging in the spirit of reconciliation.

PROPERTY CARE PROGRAM

Congratulations to Karen and William Dowd for winning the August 2022 Property Care Award! Southern Cross Housing wants to recognise and celebrate our residents that are doing a great job in looking after their properties, especially their gardens! Karen and William Dowd have been living in Nowra for almost 26 years now and their garden looks like something out of a Better Homes and Gardens magazine!

“We still try and add something new to the gardens every day, it really helps us keep busy and we love working on it” said Karen. William has plenty of experience when it comes to landscaping, working at the local schools as a general hand assisting with their gardens and landscaping over many years.

William and Karen have sourced all their materials from recycled goods, Bunnings and True Value Hardware whilst purchasing their plants from the Red Cross shop. Not only do they put the hard yards into their own garden, but they try help others where they can too. Karen often gives clippings to their neighbours and loved ones when they need it and even landscaped her mother’s garden.



Pictured are Mr & Mrs Dowd

‘STRIVE!’ EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

In August Southern Cross Housing launched our Employment Assistance program ‘STRIVE!’. So far, the program has had over five applicants, three residents from the East Nowra area, one from Bega Valley and one from Batemans Bay. The Communities Assist Team has been busy providing case management support that has included creating resumes and cover letters, linking residents into local employment providers for further assistance and applying for jobs.

The program so far has been a great success with 2 of our residents gaining casual employment! Congratulations to those residents that have secured jobs! The support doesn’t stop once the person has a job either, as they will receive further post-employment support, just in case they need our help with uniforms, transport or training costs.

If you are living in East Nowra and looking for work, the STRIVE program may be of interest to you. A similar program is also available to SCH tenants that live in the Eurobodalla Shire, Bega Valley and Snowy Monaro. If you would like more information about this program, please call our Communities Assist Team on 1300 757 885 or email communities@scch.org.au to book in your first consultation.

FLORIADE VISIT FOR FIRE AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

On Saturday 15 October 2022, a couple of our tenants were able to enjoy a day out in Canberra to visit the annual Floriade event in Canberra. Thanks to the Anglicare Bushfire Recovery Team, residents of the Bega Valley and Eurobodalla Shires were invited to attend Floriade, offering a free bus ride and goody bag on the day. The SCH Cobargo residents thoroughly enjoyed the event, with plenty of attractions and activities across the day.

Thank you to Anglicare for providing this great service!



IN THE NEWS

SNOWY MONARO TENANT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The first meeting of the Snowy Monaro Tenant Advisory Committee (TAC) was held on Monday 10th October at the Cooma Library with some robust discussion about topics that are important to tenants of the Cooma area. The meeting was an opportunity for members to meet each other and talk about some of the changes they want to see in their community, such as reducing the stigma that is often associated with living in social housing.

Tenants provided advice about the upcoming Tenant Christmas party to be held on 9th of December at the Cooma Bowling Club. All suggestions have assisted in preparations for what will be a great day! The Snowy Monaro TAC is still looking for new members so if you'd like to get involved, please contact the Communities Assist Team on 1300 757 885.

CLIPPER ROAD SAFETY AUDIT

Southern Cross Housing, the NSW Police and tenants that live at Clipper Road, Nowra have been working closely together to complete a safety audit of the complex and the surrounding areas. This safety audit was conducted using a crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) approach. CPTED aims to empower individuals with knowledge about factors (both in the built and natural environment) that can increase the likelihood of crime. As a result of the safety audit, a number of recommendations have been made to SCH Executive Management for their consideration. When implemented it is hoped that the changes will result in improved safety within the Clipper Road Housing complex.



Pictured are residents from Clipper Rd in Nowra & Southern Cross Housing staff

FEEDBACK FROM YOU!

In October, two workshops were held with Social Housing Management Transfer (SHMT) tenants that live in Nowra.

Participants at the workshops were able to provide feedback about what is and what isn't going well. Participants also worked with SCH staff to identify how we can do things better. A range of great suggestions were made and these have been passed onto SCH Executive Management for their consideration. A big thank you to everyone that took time out of their day to come and talk to us, we really appreciate the effort that you made.

EMBER PROGRAM

In light of the floods that the South Coast has experienced, having an emergency bushfire or flood evacuation plan is something everybody needs.

In October, Southern Cross Housing in conjunction with Flagstaff (a local organisation that provides a range of services to assist people with disability) invited residents from the Nowra and the Bomaderry area to a workshop to provide them with tools to help prepare for a natural disaster or emergency situation. Residents were able to learn about Flagstaff's new disaster preparedness App called 'EMBER' that uses simple language, formats and resources to support people with disability to be more confident about how to react during times of natural disasters.

The workshop covered the following key areas:

- Identifying a disaster or emergency situations
- Creating a communication plan for if you need to evacuate
- Understanding what possessions you should and shouldn't take with you in an emergency
- Locating local safe shelters and evacuation centres
- Utilising tools and resources

At the conclusion of the workshop, each participant was given an emergency backpack resource kit. The kit will help them to be better prepared in the event of an emergency or natural disaster. If you are interested in learning more about disaster preparedness or would like more information about the EMBER App please visit emberapp.com.au.

IN THE NEWS

SCHOLARSHIP

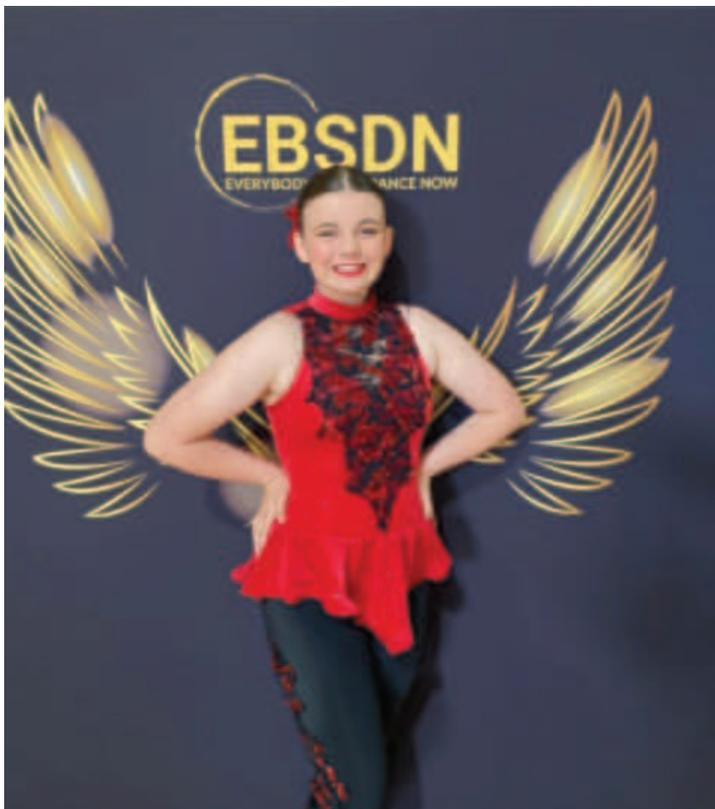
The 2022 scholarship program has officially closed. \$19,000 was distributed to 28 tenants within the Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla, Bega Valley and Snowy Monaro areas. The recipients' backgrounds varied with many completing studies at Primary School, High School, TAFE or University.

Here is what some of our 2022 recipients had to say:

“The scholarship program is fantastic. It supports people of any age, gender, race etc. It changes people’s lives. I believe knowledge is power. Education is the key to successful careers and lifts people out of poverty. From personal experience, without the support of the scholarship program, many people would not be able to access the educational requirements needed to continue or further their study. The scholarship has assisted me to continue studying and completing my units in law. The textbooks I purchased with the scholarship have been invaluable and have assisted me with research and exams. This has enabled me to be accepted into a second university which will help me progress in my chosen field of Law.” – **Karen**



Mckayla and Tilly-Rose in their school uniform



Pictured is Estella at her dancing competition

“Being homeschooled, I found that maths was very difficult. My tutor advised me that getting to know my times tables will help with future math problems. By gaining the scholarship, I was able to have access to my tutor for longer and I got to build my confidence around math. When you solve a maths problem it makes you feel good. Cat my tutor, is a nice lady I worked with her well.” – **Tahlia**

“The scholarship has helped Estella compete in dance competitions, buy costumes, and succeed in obtaining her goals of being able to compete in a national competition by furthering her skills through extra private and group dance lessons. The scholarship has assisted Estella to achieve her goals a lot easier due to receiving the scholarship. It has relieved a financial burden to my family as we may not have been able to supply these lessons for her.” – **Jacqueline**

“The scholarship has really helped me to purchase my children new school uniforms which has resulted in them dressing well for school and building their self-confidence. The scholarship program has uplifted my children’s self-esteem and they have enjoyed going to school more.” – **Katrina**

Policy News

MAKING ALTERATIONS, ADDITIONS AND MODIFICATIONS TO A PROPERTY

If you are wanting to make some changes to improve your home such as letting in a little extra natural light or starting that veggie garden you always wanted, it is important to know what does and doesn't require approval from SCH before starting.

Minor alterations do not need written approval, and include:

- Installing curtain rods, removable blinds or curtains
- Installing up to four picture hooks per room
- Installing a child proof gate latch, window safety device, or child safety gate
- Securing furniture to a non-tiled wall for safety reasons
- Inserting fly screens on windows
- Building a garden bed more than 1 metre away from the property
- Laying or planting lawn
- Planting trees or shrubs that will grow no more than 3 metres in height

All other additions, alterations and modifications require approval before commencing. A modifications form must be completed and sent to SCH's Maintenance Manager. Simply ask your Housing Officer for a form when needed.

After submitting your request you will be provided a written response that provides details of the outcome of SCH's decision. In the event your request is rejected, SCH will provide reasons for this decision. If you disagree with the decision, you are able to appeal the decision.

Should your modification be recommended by an Occupational Therapist, and if you are unable to afford the cost of the modification, SCH may agree to pay the cost. You may be asked to contribute towards the cost or apply for NDIS funding if you are eligible.

It is important to understand that a modification will only be considered if the property is structurally able to support the modification.

Where a modification request cannot be approved, SCH may assist the tenant to apply for a transfer to an alternative property which better suits their needs.

If you'd like to find out more, please read the Alterations and Additions Policy on our website.

Supporting YOU

RENT CHOICE YOUTH

Rent Choice Youth is a program that helps young people aged 16 to 24 years to:

- Find a place to live (in a private rental unit, flat or house)
- Get approved for a lease
- Pay the rent for up to 3 years
- Stay in a current rental property if it's affordable and help is needed to pay the rent

The program also provides eligible applicants with access to a personal support worker that assists young people to achieve their training and employment goals

How does it work?

For the first 12 months of your rental agreement, you will pay 25% of your weekly income plus 100% of any Commonwealth Rent Assistance that you may be entitled to from Centrelink. Once you have paid your part of the rent directly to the landlord or real estate agent, Southern Cross Housing will pay a subsidy directly to your landlord or real estate agent for the balance of your rent. The amount you will have to pay in rent will go up gradually after 12 months, but we'll chat to you about that closer to the time.

Am I eligible?

You can apply for Rent Choice Youth if you:

- Are aged 16 to 24 years
- Don't have your own place to live (you might be sleeping on a couch at a friend's place, in a shelter or boarding house or at risk of homelessness)
- Are an Australian Citizen or Australian permanent resident
- Are motivated to work or complete study or training to help get a job
- Are willing to engage with a support provider, who will help you to achieve your training, education and employment goals
- Are on a low income or studying

How to apply?

To apply for support through the Rent Choice Youth Program please contact the Southern Cross Housing Access and Demand Team on 1300 757 885.

Team Update

PROPERTY AND ASSETS

All contractors who are engaged by Southern Cross Housing to carry out property maintenance undergo an induction before they are allowed on site.

Completing their induction, contractors are provided with an identification card which shows their photo, name and the company that they work for.

As part of our quality control process, many tenants will receive a phone call from the SCH Maintenance Team asking about their experience with a contractor.

Questions that will be asked include:

- Did the contractor show you their identification?
- Was the contractor courteous and polite?
- Rate the contractor quality of work (1-5)
- Rate Southern Cross Housing's customer service performance (1-5)

It is important to answer these questions as your feedback helps us to know if the contractors are performing well or if there are areas for improvement.

Don't forget that we welcome your feedback. Feedback can be submitted online via the SCH website.

WAYS TO SAVE ON YOUR ENERGY COSTS THIS SUMMER!

Being energy efficient can help you to save you money on your energy bills. There are lots of ways you can reduce the amount of energy you use around the home.

During the summer months, keep cool by using fans instead of air conditioners. Make sure your fridge door is firmly closed and that it isn't too full.

Save on water heating by reducing your shower times and ensuring your dishwasher is full before using it.

If you're not happy with your current energy provider you can research other electricity providers using the Energy Made Easy website at energymadeeasy.gov.au. The website allows you to compare electricity and gas prices between services across NSW.

If you're struggling to cover the cost of your energy bill you can speak to your energy provider to set up a payment plan. They must take into account your capacity to pay, what is owed, and how much energy you expect to use over the next year. Your provider may be able to give you more time to pay, waive late fees and give you tips on using less energy or check that your energy plan is right for you.

SUMMER TIPS FOR YOUR HOME

Summer is upon us, time for the beach, some relaxation and to spend time with loved ones. Here are some property care tips for summer.

Open Up Your Home

- Summer is the best time to open up your home and let some fresh air inside
- Fresh air will get rid of any unwanted smells leftover from the cold months where the home has been closed up for warmth
- Wash curtains or rugs for a clean smell in the home
- Use a few drops of eucalyptus oil in a diffuser for a fresh scent

Window /Flyscreen Clean

- Use the warmer weather as an opportunity to wash down the windows so you can enjoy the view outside
- Dust off your flyscreens with a soft bristle brush to get rid of dust and cobwebs

Maintain Your Yards

- Summer is a nice time to get back into your gardening
- Soak up some sunshine and get your daily dose of vitamin D
- Trim the trees and mow the lawns
- Enjoy some time with friends and family over a BBQ in your nice tidy yard



Jobs & Training News

WHY VOLUNTEER?

Volunteering can be a rewarding experience. By giving some of your free time you can make sure your community flourishes, make friends and learn new things.

As you volunteer you will find out that you learn, not just related to the work you're doing, but the way you're doing it and why it matters to the people you're doing it for.

Additionally, whilst you're volunteering you may meet people in your community you never knew, completely outside your social bubble but with the same goals you have. That's how you make social network through meaningful hard work. Volunteering is a great example to show you're willing to put in the work for others, rather than just yourself. Volunteering is a selfless act which helps us to appreciate what we have and be grateful for it.

Check out where you can volunteer at www.seek.com.au/volunteers-jobs/in-Wollongong,-Illawarra-&-South-Coast-NSW or contact the Communities Assist Team on 1300 757 885.



PEER HEALTH EDUCATION FOR SENIORS

Are you 60 or over, retired and looking for a way to give back to your community? The Health Promotion Service for Older People (HPSOP) is looking for volunteers to provide health education sessions to senior people in the community.

Volunteers will be provided with free training. The hours and commitment are flexible and depend on your availability. Training will occur on various dates throughout 2023 and will be conducted online via zoom. This is a great opportunity to learn new skills, give back to your community, and support your peers. If you are interested in becoming an educator please contact the Communities Assist Team on 1300 757 885.



WANT TO WORK IN AGED CARE?

Do you thrive on helping others? Are you caring and empathetic? Then work in the Aged Care Sector might be for you!!

There are lots of job opportunities for people that want to work in the Aged Care Sector. Aged Care Workers provide support to elderly people by assisting with daily activities and personal tasks. Tasks that are undertaken include:

- Engaging with family members to offer observations, instructions and updates.
- Assisting with mobility, providing transport to and from medical appointments and light physiotherapy exercises.
- Providing social support, such as escorting the client on outings to cafes, shops and going on excursions.

Aged Care Workers can work from their client's home or in a residential care facility.

SCH can help you kickstart your career in Aged Care with a local employer! Let us know your interest via the link www.surveymonkey.com/r/66VY5DK

WHAT'S ON Shoalhaven

END OF YEAR TENANT CELEBRATIONS

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas everywhere we go!!!!

This year we are working closely with our Tenant Advisory Committees across the regions to plan and deliver Christmas Celebrations in Nowra, Ulladulla, Cooma, Bega and Batemans Bay. In Nowra we have three parties, one with tenants that live in Bomaderry, one with tenants that live in South Nowra and another one in East Nowra.

The Bega event is looking to be a great one with plant swap activities taking place. All parties will include visitors from some support services that might be of interest, a range of fun activities and lunch. For more information, or to RSVP phone the Communities Assist Team on 1300 757 885.



TUESDAY, 6TH DECEMBER - OLD SOUTHERN RD NOWRA
THURSDAY, 8TH DECEMBER - COOMA
TUESDAY, 13TH DECEMBER - ULADULLA
THURSDAY, 15TH DECEMBER - MORUYA
FRIDAY 16TH DECEMBER - BEGA
WEDNESDAY, 14TH DECEMBER - DALWAH ST NOWRA
WEDNESDAY, 21ST DECEMBER - JAYCEE PARK NOWRA
FREE | ACTIVITIES | FOOD | SERVICES!

 Southern Cross Housing

RSVP!
 COMMUNITIES@SCCH.ORG.AU
 1300 757 885

MUSIC FOR THE MIND

Stella Studioz in Nowra is running its program Music for the Mind for people with mental health issues and drug and alcohol rehabilitation. The program has now been adapted for youth aged 16-24 years old. The program focuses on the healing power of music, with the aim of building stronger connections and community through music.

Also look out for The Big-Stage Band NDIS program which will be running these school holidays. Learn how to drum, play rhythms, experiment with stringed instruments, rock the keyboard and use your amazing voice to create wonderful music in this fun & fully interactive program. Making music has NEVER been so much fun!

To learn more, contact Stella Studioz on 02 4422 9652.

WEAVER PROGRAM

Are you a carer for an older person and currently feeling isolated? Or are you someone that has been the journey of caring and have valuable experiences to share?

The Weavers program in the Shoalhaven is looking to connect current carers with people who have previously been carers aka Weavers.

If you are a current carer you will receive one on one support, a connection with someone that understands, and you will build a sense of control in your life.

If you are a weaver, you will use your unique experience to provide one on one support with assistance from Mission Australia.

If you feel like you need help in your caring or would like to help someone, please contact Sue on 0491 147 153 or email bradysu@missionaustralia.com.au

GROWING HEALTHY EATERS

Do you have a child that is a fussy eater?

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District is running a free session over zoom to help parents navigate mealtime for their children aged 12 months to 3 years. Fussy eating is a normal part of child development, but with the help of this session, you can minimise the stress that goes with it. The session is on Friday, 9th of December at 9:30am. To register for this online session, go to Growing Healthy Eaters Tickets, Multiple Dates | Eventbrite

Topics covered include: what and how much food children need, picky eating, feeding roles and tips to take the stress out of meal times.

WHAT'S ON Shoalhaven

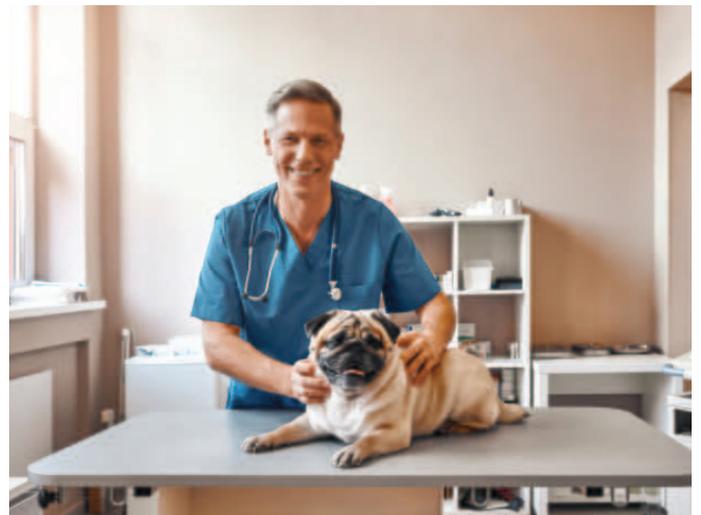
AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM FOR YOUTH

Mission Australia and PCYC Shoalhaven are running free activities on Wednesday's from 2:30pm to 4:30pm for 12–17-year-olds. Come along to 72 Park Road Nowra and enjoy activities including basketball and boxing, and grab a free BBQ dinner. You'll also have access to people from Headspace, Caddyshack and Centrelink at various times over the school term.



CAT DEXEXING AND MICROCHIPPING

RSPCA is offering free cat desexing and microchipping for residents of Nowra and Bomaderry. To book in, contact the Shoalhaven Animal Shelter on (02) 4429 3410. Be quick, spots are limited! For any other help with your furry felines, contact the Shelter.



WHAT'S ON Eurobodulla, Bega & Snowy

CHRISTMAS CRAFT-A-NOON MORUYA

The Moruya Library is hosting a free all-ages Christmas craft session where participants make and decorate DIY Christmas trees from recycled magazines. It's a fun, mindful activity that produces an eye-catching Christmas table centrepiece. Come along for some Christmas cheer and to connect with fellow community members.

When: Thursday 8 December 2022, 4pm – 5pm

Where: Moruya Library, Vulcan Street, Moruya

KNIT AND CROCHET FOR A CAUSE – COOMA

The Cooma Library runs a knitting and crochet morning tea every Friday – all ages and skill levels are invited. Handmade items will be donated to various charity groups, or you can take your creations home. If you have your own work in progress, bring it along and join in the social interaction! For more information, contact the library on (02) 6451 1630.

When: Fridays, 11am -1pm

Where: Cooma Library

MONDAY MORNING MOVIE IN MERIMBULA

The Picture Show Man in Merimbula, screen free history-based movies once a month on Monday mornings. The movie on Monday 5 December is Lincoln at 10am. There's no need to book, just arrive on the day. For any enquiries, contact the South Coast History Society on 0448 160 852.



SCH Staff – Hot Seat

In this edition of our Newsletter, we sat down with two Southern Cross Housing staff members to ask some questions to get to know them a little better! Welcome to, the SCH Staff Hot Seat!

Name: Paddy Harris

How long have you been working at Southern Cross Housing, and what does your role involve?

I have been working at SCH for over 12 months as a Community Development Officer in the Communities Assist Team. My role involves managing projects to support the health and wellbeing of our tenants.

What did you do before SCH?

I previously worked as a personal injury lawyer and at the ABC as a Producer.

What do you do in your spare time?

I like to play drums and guitar, read Stephen King books, participate in local community groups and go camping with my partner and mates.



Name: Brittany Hynes

How long have you been working at Southern Cross Housing, and what does your role involve?

I've been with SCH for 12 months now, I started as a Housing Assistant and am now the Housing Officer in the Snowy Monaro region.

What did you do before SCH?

My main background is in aged care nursing, but I've also had breaks when I had my 3 kids and still occasionally do a shift at Woolworths.

What do you do in your spare time?

You'll always find me googling the nearest poker game or reading a book. Occasionally I spend time with the husband and kids, but I prefer poker.

TENANT NEWS

OUR NEW HOME

Luke Boyd has been a tenant with SCH for 13 years and is now excited to start the next chapter of his life with his partner, Lonia, in a private rental.

While Luke has enjoyed his time in social housing, he needed a bigger place and he and Lonia are excited about having space to grow as a couple.

Luke and Lonia moved into their new property in early November, and the pair have been busy unpacking and setting up their new home. Luke says the property is great because it is in the same area, which Luke enjoys for its quietness. They have a dog park nearby and Lonia is looking to buy a dog as an addition to the family.

Luke and Lonia’s Housing Officer Jessica, praised their efforts in maintaining a home, “During their time with SCH, they have always been a pleasure to work with and they really take pride in their home as if it were their own.”

“Being in social housing has given them stability and really assisted them in now being able to branch out and secure another property in the private rental market”, she said.

SCH would like to congratulate Luke and Lonia for all their work as excellent tenants and wishes them well in their new home.



COMING HOME TO COBARGO

Cobargo is a small country town in the Bega Valley, known widely for its resolve during the 2019-20 Black Summer Bushfires. But for Susan, when she moved to Cobargo it felt like coming home.

Susan first visited the Bega Valley in 2009 after the Victorian Bushfires and immediately fell in love with the area. She loved it so much that she moved to the area in March that year.

Susan rented at various properties, most recently at a farmer’s property in Angeldale where she lived for 6 years before she was required to leave so that farmer could house one of his workers. Susan then spent the next 3 months looking for houses in the area, but all were above her rental limit. In the meantime, she had to live in a caravan near Cobargo. Susan has now found a home with SCH in Cobargo.

For Susan, living in Cobargo allows her to be close to nature, “the great outdoors to me is god” she says.

An avid camper, Susan’s hot tip for a great camp site is Jigamy Farm, located on the coast between Pambula and Eden.

Outside of camping, Susan spends her time with her two cats, Foxy and April, and enjoys tinkering with old clocks. She estimates having 12-13 clocks in her house which bring her peace and help ground her.

SCH welcomes Susan to the community and we hope you enjoy your new home.

PROFILE PEICE 

MY HOME AT ERAMBIE HILL



Helen is a proud Aboriginal Elder of the Wiradjuri nation and a SCH tenant residing in Nowra. Her life story has seen her establish strong family connections between country and coast in NSW.

She was born in 1952 on the Erambie Mission, a collection of housing for Aboriginal people which was situated on the banks of the Lachlan River just outside of the town of Cowra.

Over the years these houses transformed from old red huts, in the 20s, to fibro homes in the 40s to brick homes in the 70s. Helen has detailed these changes in her project she calls “My Home at Erambie Hill”

Helen speaks about what life was like growing up on the Mission.

“Life on the Mission was happy because we were together, everyone looked out for each other”

There was however the constant reminder that their community was under the control of the Aboriginal Protection Board.

“The Board was in charge of people’s lives. We couldn’t do anything without their permission. They took the children away”

Helen’s family was part of the Stolen Generations with her two aunts taken to the Cootamundra Girls’ Home and her four uncles taken to the Kinchela Boys’ Home. Despite their removal, all of Helen’s aunts and uncles returned to the Cowra Mission.

Helen’s mum was 16 when she gave birth to Helen and the Board forced her to the coast where they ended up at Bomaderry Aboriginal Children’s Home. After a while Helen and her mother were moved on to Wallaga Lake, in the Bega Valley, where a family took her mother on, working to collect fruit and vegetable crops. Helen’s mother would take her out into the field and lay her in the bean vines while she collected the crop throughout the day. This was how they lived throughout the 1950s up until 1960 when Helen’s mother decided to return to the Erambie mission to be with her people.

Helen recalls that she was eight when she returned with her mother, “It was great returning to family and friends”.

Up until this point in her life Helen believed her grandfather was her father but when she returned, she was introduced to her real father and his side of the family.

“I became very close with that side of the family”.

Now that she was settled in at home, Helen began primary school in Cowra.

“I did primary school and high school in Cowra. I left school in year eight to look after my mother and my grandfather who had both become sick.”

Helen discovered an interest in working with children and found a position at the local preschool.

“We had a preschool on the Mission run by Save the Children and I worked there for four years”

“I then worked at Cowra High School as an Aboriginal Education Assistant and then transferred to Cowra Public School where I worked for nearly 10 years”

“I loved helping all the kids, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal and I became very well known to all the families.”

After the death of her Grandfather in 1973, Helen travelled around before settling in Nowra which she now calls home. Since moving to the area, Helen has established herself in the community, having 20 grandchildren and being known to many as Nanny Helen or Auntie Helen.

Helen is active in a number of Aboriginal Elders groups and loves to get involved where she can.

“I join in whatever is interesting. It’s always interesting meeting new people”

Thank you, Helen for sharing your life journey, we are grateful to have you part of our community.

If you have a life story that you would like to share, please get in touch with the Communities Assist Team on 1300 757 885. In Helen’s own words, “Everyone has their own story to tell”.