

Media Release

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Safe and affordable housing a human right

Brian Devenish has spent a lifetime volunteering with marginalised people across the globe, witnessing first-hand life's inequities, including access to housing.

Today, the 75-year-old finds himself the grateful recipient of secure, affordable housing; joining a growing number of older people seeking housing support.

Thursday 20 February is World Day of Social Justice, focusing on the need for a fair and equitable division of resources, opportunities and privileges in society, including housing.

It follows a recent [Grattan Institute report](#) that found two in three retirees who rent in the private market live in poverty.

[Government data](#) also shows the number of older people (aged 55+) seeking specialist homelessness services (SHS) is rising. In 2023–24, SHS agencies assisted around 29,500 older clients, an increase from 27,300 clients in the previous year.

For-purpose Catholic organisation VMCH provides affordable homes to 421 people across 22 communities in Victoria. Brian has lived in VMCH's Balwyn community for two years, following the closure of his former housing development.

"I think the man upstairs was looking after me when he's given me this beautiful front unit at Balwyn," Brian says. "It's just been wonderful – the people here are wonderful too."

When you learn about Brian's life of service, it's easy to see how private rental is out of reach. The great-grandfather of seven has devoted 30 of his working years to supporting some of society's most vulnerable.

His Christian missionary work includes building orphanages, rebuilding communities after natural disasters, working with people experiencing homelessness, and running programs in remote Aboriginal communities.

However, it was Brian's army service, and struggles with mental health following a marriage breakdown, that shaped his life's passion, running a charity for disengaged kids.

"Following time in psychiatric care, I got into voluntary work and went back to school to study community service and youth work.

"I started Friendship on the Move 30 years ago. We've helped put 5,000 kids with challenging behaviours back into education and employment, helping to instill discipline in kids so they can contribute to society."

Brian, who continues to work one day each week at his charity, is grateful having a roof over his head is something he no longer needs to worry about. It leaves him time to get on with helping others.

"It's great there are organisations like VMCH providing homes like this. In a country as prosperous as ours, there shouldn't be people without a home."

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart says the organisation is humbled to support older people like Brian.

"Our nation's older generation deserves access to safe and secure housing. These individuals have worked their whole lives to provide for their families and make such rich and positive contributions to our society."

Ms Smart said the organisation would continue to invest in affordable housing as an important part of its Mission.

If you are interested in learning more VMCH's affordable homes, visit: <https://vmch.com.au/retirement-living-affordable-homes/>

Media enquiries

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About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic, for-purpose organisation, love, joy, hospitality and courage aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and compassionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.