

# DRINK COFFEE, DO GOOD



SCAN TO DONATE \$5, THE COST OF A COFFEE, TO HELP VULNERABLE PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN YOUR LOCAL AREA



CafeSmart raises funds to provide vital grants for grassroots homeless charities supporting some of society's most disadvantaged people, including women's refuges, medical outreach teams and youth services. This is your opportunity to help end homelessness in your neighbourhood.

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"I sleep where I work – right out the front of 7-Eleven," says *Big Issue* vendor Nathan from Brisbane. "As a homeless person, male or female, it's safety first. And because I work there as well during the day, it's a lot more plausible for me to actually sleep there. Because you never know, someone might actually turn up and say 'Hey, I've got a room available here. You can stay here, or here's a feed.' It's little things."

When I call Nathan, he's just checked into a hotel room. They charge a weekly rate of \$300 a room, and he springs for it when he can. He's been on the waiting list for social housing for 10-plus years. In that time, he's slept rough, on couches, and in a boarding house. When Brisbane locked down earlier this year, he was put up in a hotel by Micah Projects, but when lockdown finished, he no longer had a roof over his head, and he was back to sleeping on his pitch.

"It's more stressful than anything else, you know?" says Nathan of living homeless. "And when you're stressed out like that, and you're trying to get a place, it does take it out of you – you're exhausted."

It's clear, Australia's housing system isn't working for everyone. With real-estate prices soaring to record highs, it's locking people out of home ownership. Just 50 per cent of households aged 25-55 are expected to own a home by 2040, compared to 60 per cent in 1981, according to the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. For young people, the news is even worse: for those in the 25-to-34 bracket, home ownership dropped by 28 per cent between 2002 and 2015, to around 45 per cent.



"We're seeing a wealth-creation event for the haves who can afford to buy another property at the moment," says Jenny Smith. "But for people on low incomes, it's a difference between being able to just put a roof over your head, and not."

With more than a third of us now renting, demand has meant rental properties are less affordable than ever. Across the country, the median rent of houses and units has increased 6.6 per cent over the last 12 months. In regional areas, it's even more extreme: rents have surged by 11.3 per cent – the biggest hike on record – as tree-changers flee the city during the pandemic. In Perth, where Jannah and her daughter live, the median rent jumped 16.7 per cent. It's perhaps unsurprising that Anglicare Australia's latest Rental Affordability Snapshot found that of the 74,226 rental listings across the country on a given weekend in March, only three were affordable for a single person on JobSeeker (\$620.80 per fortnight). For those on Youth Allowance (\$512.50 per fortnight), there were none.

Without more affordable homes, the options are limited for those struggling to afford private rents. Over 1.5 million Australians are living with housing stress, stretched by rent or mortgage payments totalling more than 30 per cent of their income. It's why housing bodies and homelessness providers are calling on all levels of government to invest in affordable and social housing to meet the shortfall of 600,000 homes needed to satisfy national demand.

"[Social housing] is an asset to the community and it provides jobs," adds Smith. "Providing social housing and increasing the JobSeeker payment [means] people can live, and we're not all just bouncing people around temporary outcomes."

The pandemic has prompted governments to consider long-term housing solutions. At the end of last year, the Victorian state government announced its \$5.3 billion "Big Housing Build", which aims to create 12,000 homes in four years, with 9300 of these being social housing. New South Wales has allocated \$812 million to social housing and homelessness services, including a pledge to build 800 social housing dwellings.

Meanwhile, back at Jannah and Dakota's place, they've been sleeping better, getting up early and starting to build a routine, alive to all the simple pleasures that come with a stable home. "It's so good to cook a meal again!" says Jannah. "Like last night, I could use an oven instead of a fry pan." She made Dakota's favourite Dino snacks. "I'm looking forward to stability, getting back on track. Hopefully we can get some pets here – Dakota's asked our Salvation Army caseworker if we can get a chicken coop and some chickens." Dakota's recovering well and is happy to be back at school, and Jannah's looking forward to getting back to her studies too – she's working towards Certificate III in Social Work, Community Services and Domestic and Family Violence. "This is for real now," says Jannah. "I've got my little humble home. A place to call home, I call it." ■

\* Name changed.