

RRVV

NEWSLETTER

Issue No 40 December 2015

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Residents of Retirement Villages Victoria Inc.
REGISTERED PUBLICATION No. P.P.100018833

Reg No.0048146R ABN 20341655161

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

2014 - 2015



Ten years ago RRVV was created, a Victorian Labor Government initiative. The aim of the group being to represent residents living in retirement villages due to the imbalance of power.

Well, the imbalance of power still exist possibly worse now than it was in 2005 as the big companies are getting greedier and some devising very creative ways to separate you and your money. This is what makes it crucial that our appeal for an Ombudsman for Retirement living is heard. More so now than ever before as the Federal Government 'Ageing in Place' is taking over the low care alternative. It is important that elderly residents in retirement living whether it be in Retirement Villages, Residential Parks, Rental Villages and other retirement housing have access to safe and affordable homes with the proper facilities fitted to enable us to age in place comfortably and securely. This is one of the main reasons why we have joined forces with Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC), Housing Action for the Aged (HAAG) and Council for the Ageing (COTA). This unity increases our bargaining power. However we are still an individual force on our own and still continue to lobby for retirement villages specific needs.

Such as Rates justice for retirement villages. We had a very good meeting with Minister Natalie Hutchins in August, who acknowledged out huge petition and advised us to submit discussion papers on the website called 'www.yourcouncilyourcommunity.vic.gov.au

RRVV will be submitting one for all members however for it to carry weight we need all of the retirement villages in Victoria to speak up about this inequity. This is leading to a revision of the Local Council Act and your right to have a differential rating applied in the legislation. So if the council do not apply it, you then have a case for VCAT or better still an Ombudsman. Please back us up with this it will make all that work on the petition worthwhile.

We held a very successful Forum in Geelong with over 200 residents attending, the theme was 'entering and exiting retirement villages'. We would like to have more forums covering this subject in different areas of the State. It is the most confusing and yet important information we should have, as well as our executors.

RRVV has endeavored to carry out all the village visits that you have requested. This is one of

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our favorite undertakings and we will always be available whenever possible to attend, we have committee members living all over the metro area but unfortunately it's difficult to reach our country members but we are always available on the RRVV phone number and email service.

Aveo Villages are facing a very stressful time and many of the Chair persons have gathered together to form the Aveo Council to enable them to deal with the new reforms presented to them in the form of the 'Aveo Way'. Stocklands formed their group a few years back and have been successful in obtaining fairer outcomes for their residents especially in the exiting process. RRVV is of course always available to give support in the form of advocacy and lobbying for your just causes.

We had a very successful day on 8 October this year, a group of 70 retirement living residents met with the politicians at Parliament house. Our appeal for an Ombudsman and the retirement villages act overhaul was heard in no uncertain way by the politicians attending. We are following up to keep the momentum going with letters to politicians and we would also like you to contact your sitting members and opposition members in both houses to push for an Ombudsman also. The Nari survey which you will have all received will be important in backing our argument, they have received back over 2,000. An excellent result.

I would like to thank the committee for their help and work for the past year, each one has an important role in keeping this committee operational. I would also like to wish them and all our members all the very best for the Festive Season.

Lesley Menzies
President



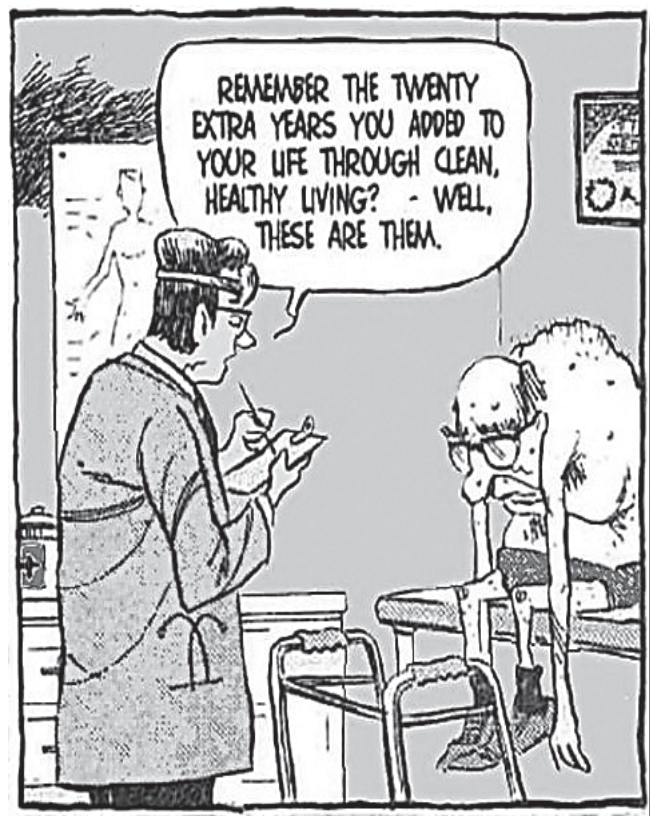
THANKYOU

On behalf of Tania and Rem the founders of Green Gecko Project in Cambodia, I would like to say a big THANKYOU to RRVV and its members and friends at Hunters Green retirement village for your support for the children's refuge at Siam Reap. The \$50.00 that RRVV donated and \$147 from members who attended the AGM along with the \$136.00 from Hunters Green totaled \$333.00, which was sent directly to Green Gecko to purchase 400 pairs of underwear for the Days for Girls Project.

This project is at the heart of the needs of Cambodian girls and allows them to attend school on a regular basis. Our teenage Green Geckos have formed a group based on Rotaract in Australia. They go out to schools and educate Grade 5 and 6 girls on their needs and distribute the packs. You can be sure you have supported a very important initiative.

Again many thanks,

Audrey Mutton



THE ROLE OF YOUR RESIDENTS' COMMITTEE

Members of residents' committees sometimes struggle to understand their committee's role.

Section 36 (1) of the Retirement Villages Act provides "In the case of a retirement village where there is no owners corporation the residents may elect a residents committee to represent the interests of the residents of the village". The ten words in bold type (emphasis added by RRVV) give a residents' committee considerable latitude in developing a role.

The Act also gives a residents' committee some specific powers. For example, a committee may:

1. Determine its own procedures (Section 36 (4))
2. Form sub-committees and determine their procedures (Section 2 36 (5))
3. Call a meeting of all the residents living in the village (Section 36 (6))
4. Act as a mediator in any dispute between residents (Section 36(7)), but not when the manager is dealing with the dispute under Division 3 of Part 6A (Section 36 (7A))

In the case of a retirement village where there is an owners corporation, the owners corporation has the powers of a residents committee in addition to its other powers (Section 36 (8))

Section 36 taken as a whole makes it clear that a residents committee is composed only of residents, notwithstanding anything to the contrary that might be in your residence contract. A committee may invite non-members to attend meetings or parts of meetings as it sees fit.

No two villages are the same so it follows that different committees will develop different roles. Similarly, committee members are volunteers so different committees will have different ideas about how much work is reasonable, and this will also shape the committee's understanding of its role.

Some villages elect to have separate committees for sporting activities, social functions, outings, entertainment and the like. This is OK, but only

the residents' committee can "represent the interests of the residents of the village".

Just what does "represent the interests of the residents of the village" mean in practice? Residents pay money to the owner or operator and expect provision of services in return. Accordingly, residents are customers of the owner or operator and have similar rights to those they have in respect of other businesses with which they deal. For example, residents might be dissatisfied with the standard of building maintenance. The residents' committee could take a proactive approach and make representations on behalf of all the village's customers. Alternatively, you could choose to make representations only when requested to by individual residents or groups of residents.

Typically, the owner or operator appoints a village manager to manage day-to-day village operations. No two village managers are the same. Manager differences, therefore, mean the role of your committee can change with a change of managers. Nevertheless, the committee exists to represent residents so any variation would be more a matter of emphasis than a fundamental change to the role.

Developing a productive relationship with your village manager can be a challenge. The role of the committee and the role of the village manager are different. Some aspects of each role will align, but others might not and so raise the potential for conflict. A few committees report a temptation to put maintaining a good relationship with the village manager ahead of the committee's prime function of representing residents' interests.

Owners and operators occasionally report examples of committee members giving directions to staff and contractors. RRVV believes this goes beyond representing the interests of residents and, in any event, is counterproductive.

Some committees report feeling powerless because the owner or operator ignores most of their representations. Others acknowledge feeling intimidated.

While the Act provides the residents' committee with considerable latitude, it does not require the owner or operator to take any notice of

committee representations. Nevertheless, RRVV believes residents have more power than they appreciate. For example, Section 37 of the Act allows residents who are either part of an association because they are residents of the village or who have a contract that includes matters covered by the definition in Section 3 of the Act, to initiate a by-law or amend an existing by-law. By-laws are binding on the owner or operator as well as residents. The by-law definition is quite broad giving residents scope to address many of their concerns to which the owner or operator is unsympathetic. With the support of residents, a residents committee therefore has considerable influence. For example, residents who are unhappy with their village's pet policy could ask their residents' committee manage the enactment of a by-law to replace that policy.

Committee roles do develop spontaneously, but there is also merit, from time to time, in formally reviewing and documenting the role of your committee.

RRVV suggests committee members consider the following questions. Is your committee:

1. Looking after the interests of residents as customers of the owner or operator?
2. Narrow or broad in focus?
3. Proactive or reactive?
4. Independent, or too cosy with the village manager?
5. Fearful or fearless?
6. United behind a coherent role definition?
7. Powerful or powerless?
8. Making a difference?

Your answers could help you reshape your understanding of your role.

Lawrie Robertson
Deputy Chair



ANOTHER PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ...

I have always thought that language is very powerful.

You move INTO a new house or INTO a block of units – that's an accepted term -but somehow moving INTO a Retirement Village has a different connotation. It's not the "moving into" part that has a different underlying meaning but it is moving INTO A RETIREMENT VILLAGE that's regarded differently.

When you move into a new home or a block of units you move into a broad community which consists of people from:

- Different age groups
- Different nationalities
- Different relationships
- Different stages of life
- Different gender
- Different occupations.

When you move into a Retirement Village you move into a community the majority of whom:

- are ageing – no young people.
- are retired. Some are retired not just from the working world but some from the world itself through circumstances they are unable to control.
- are female
- are single – women live longer than men and remain single longer than men following widowhood or a divorce

A few residents are couples – I often wonder if living in a Retirement Village as a couple makes any difference to the overall experience.

So – moving into a Retirement Village is like moving into a ghetto – albeit a safe and secure ghetto.

It is my experience that when you live in a Retirement Village you are often perceived by the outside community as being old and frail

and in need of the care and security offered by the retirement village style of living.

Sometimes this assumption is accurate.

Sometimes it is not.

However one of the big adjustments I had to manage when I moved into The Beehive just over a year ago was that I was now PERCEIVED as being old in mind and body by the outside community – not overtly stated of course – but implied.

For example: Not long after I moved into The Beehive I went for a walk. I have never had a sense of direction. In fact my son now says: “Mum – when you think you should turn left – turn right! I became very very lost on this walk and was bordering on being distressed when I approached a couple also out walking. When I said I was lost and trying to return to The Beehive they said – “it is a long way away – do you think you are able to walk that far?” This was said very kindly but the implication was if I lived at The Beehive I probably shouldn’t have walked so far away from it. For me that was food for thought.

This attitude is often re-enforced by trades people who come into a retirement village for all sorts of reasons. It is the way you are spoken to - very kindly I must emphasise - but in a tone that infers that you really don’t know what you want and you should be talked to gently and have everything explained in simple language and be helped to make decisions about the costs and timing involved in the project .

Unfortunately this attitude is also often (but not always) re-enforced by Village Managers and staff of retirement villages. It’s as if the village is a kindergarten for old people. If you allow it you can find decisions are taken out of your hands and your opinions are not valued at all.

“If you allow it” is an important phrase. It is only if we allow ourselves to be treated like children (or mushrooms) that the perception residents of a Retirement Village have withdrawn from society will be perpetrated.

The great advantage of living with similarly ageing people is to observe:

- how people manage the ageing process;
- how older people remain independent and feisty;
- how involvement in the retirement village community brings a sense of belonging and self respect;
- how by keeping up with current affairs you remain “IN” the world – not “OUT” of it;
- how as the senior generation you can gracefully hand on the baton to the next generation and just enjoy this time of relaxed responsibility – after all you have earned it.

Reading through what I have written it seems to me I am encouraging me to really settle into this next stage in my life. Like all transition times in our lives eg the transition from employment to retirement there is hidden grief and moving into a retirement village is a very similar process and it takes time.

I congratulate myself that I have now “transitioned” INTO life in a Retirement Village.



ACCESS TO JUSTICE REVIEW

The State Government issued this press release last month.

“We’re looking to improve access to justice for Victorians with an everyday legal problem or dispute. Access to justice can mean many things. We mean making it easier for people to resolve their disputes. We want to ensure that the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our community receive the support they need when engaging with the law and the justice system”.

RRVV will be submitting a paper in support for our appeal for a Retirement Living Ombudsman. We believe an ombudsman could prove to be a much improved method for elderly residents to utilize. A free, fair and effective dispute resolution for residents in retirement villages. VCAT is a costly and lengthy process as well as being extremely stressful. Time and money we do not have.

RRVV believes that VCAT does not work for retirement villages residents.

If you have had problems in the past or even the present with access to VCAT, Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) or with the dispute resolution process within with your village, we ask that you please write down your story and post it to me or email it.

My address is 32/168 Underbank Blvd, Bacchus Marsh, Vic. 3340 and my email address is lesleyowen44@gmail.com

Please forward it with your contact details, however I would like to assure you that your contact details will be undisclosed, RRVV always respects the anonymity of its members.

These stories will make up my submission as proof of the unjust, stressful and expensive process that exists at the moment. But remember to keep it short to enable as many cases as possible can be submitted. Bullet dot sentences always make a point.

Many thanks
Lesley Menzies

RATES JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

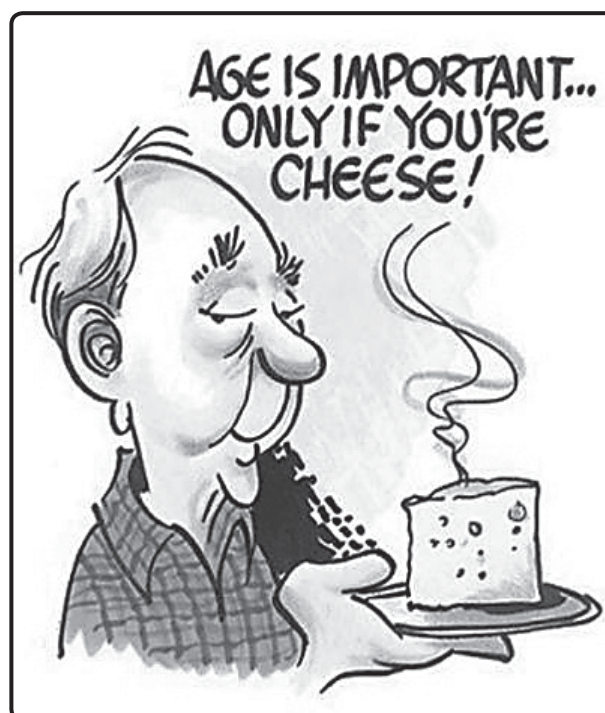
RRVV has put in a submission to the discussion group that is reviewing the Local Government Act. The website is www.yourcouncilyourcommunity.vic.gov.au

We have contacted many Residents Committees and RLO's asking them to put in a submission also. We can only access those with email addresses as it would be too timely to phone or mail every member. The closing date for these submissions is the 18 December 2015. Unfortunately some of those email addresses are incorrect which makes our job very difficult. Could all RLO's please send in correct contact details, their phone numbers, email addresses? It would help to have updated list of a contact within your Resident Committee's also.

RRVV will keep you up to date with the results of this discussion group, it is always good to check our website at www.rrvv.org.au to get details quicker.

My thanks to all of you who have put in a submission.

Lesley Menzies



HELP US TO HELP YOU

RRVV is happy to help residents of retirement villages solve their individual problems. However it is not always as simple as you might think. When you call our 9013 8402 you will not be able to speak to a person. Not many of us like talking to a machine rather than a person however we do not employ full time staff but rely on committee members, who are all volunteers, to service calls as often as they are able. Following up calls can take many hours a week. You can help us by clearly stating your name, telephone number, the village where you reside and a brief reason for your call. Certain committee members are more conversant with specific problems and this helps us to better direct your calls. It can also help if you indicate the most likely time/s when you are available to take our call and if you have any objection to a call early evening. (We wouldn't want to interrupt your Home and Away session!)

We are also happy to have your queries via e-mail.

For various reasons there have been some hiccups in recent times, but we are doing our best. Please accept our apologies and if you have not had a response to your call, please try again.



RRVV RLO'S LUNCHEON MEETING

Monday 9 November 2015 at The Savoy Tavern,
cnr. Spencer /Bourke St., Melbourne.

RRVV would like to thank all the Resident Liaison Officers (RLO's) who attended.

Over all our numbers were down on last year but feedback during the lunch meeting and post meeting was very positive.

Owen Menzies and John Lumley spoke briefly on the importance of RLO's to our organisation and how difficult it would be to operate without their support.

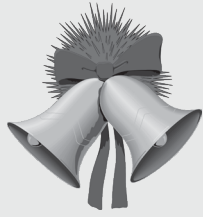
A large iced fruitcake made by a resident with 'Thank You RLO's' written on top and a lovey floral decoration was cut by the RLO with most years of service. Barbara Icelly from Taylors Hill Village who has served for 9 years. Many thanks Barbara. It was a good opportunity for all RLO's to socialise and exchange ideas and also meet with the committee and Edith Chen, RRVV 's only employee in charge of membership and records.

Everyone agreed the venue opposite Southern Cross Railway Station was excellent and we will have the 2016 luncheon again at this venue, at a date to be announced. To the RLO's who have retired this last year please except your committee's gratitude for your wonderful support.

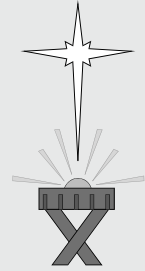
Many thanks,
Owen Menzies



*Merry
Christmas*



RESIDENTS OF RETIREMENT VILLAGES VICTORIA MINUTES AGM 22 OCTOBER 2015



- Meeting was opened at 1pm with a welcome to all 35 members present.
- Apologies were accepted by Lawrie Robinson and 2nd by Jean Dawson and carried by all.
- President Lesley Menzies gave the RRVV Annual report.
- Treasurers report was read by John Lumley who also spoke on the deletion of the credit card facility and explained the other means of payments such as cheque, bank transfer and money order and stressed the importance of sending name and village details with the bank transfer. John also spoke of employing staff in the future to lessen the burden on the volunteers. He also answered questions on the total number of members and explained the process of village membership.
- Audrey Mutton also spoke on the problems of whole village membership, when a resident committee made the decision for all the residents to cancel whole village membership.
- The Treasurer report was passed by John Lumley and 2nd by John Longayroux and carried by all. The report was recorded in the September newsletter.
- Nominations for the committee were presented as follows:
John Lumley, Lesley Menzies, Peter Saalmans, Gail Henderson, Lawrie Robertson, Ewen Wright, Owen Menzies, one position was not filled.
- Lesley Menzies was nominated for President by John Lumley 2nd Lawrie Robinson. Accepted and carried by all.
- John Lumley was nominated for Treasurer and Public Officer by Lesley Menzies 2nd Audrey Mutton. Accepted and carried by all.
- John Lumley nominated Lawrie Robinson for Vice President 2nd by Owen Menzies. Accepted and carried by all.
- Marg McKay spoke and thanked the RRVV committee for its efforts on behalf of the members.
- Audrey Mutton one of RRVV's RLO'S gave a power point presentation about the work of GREEN GECKO, a children's refuge in Cambodia, run by an Australian and her partner. The talk was very inspiring. Audrey works as a volunteer with her daughter raising money for dental and hygiene assistance. RRVV donated \$50.00 other members also gave to this worthy cause.

Meeting closed at 2.20pm