Tenants’ experiences of the Carlton Housing Estate Redevelopment Project, Stage 1

Between 2011 and 2013 researchers from Flinders University spoke to people about what it was like to live in the new public housing building on Drummond Street and the new private buildings nearby. They also asked about life in the old walk-ups before they were demolished. They talked to:

- people who used to live in the walk-ups and moved back, and others who did not move back
- people living in public housing who did not previously live in the walk-ups
- homeowners and renters living in the private buildings
- staff of local agencies.

What people told us

Living in the new building

Most tenants liked the new building and its modern design:

*The building is great, you know, it’s beautiful, it’s made people with more self-esteem. Overall I can see the majority of the people, they can’t believe they can afford to live in a place like this* (female, 30+).

They said they felt fortunate to live there and were also happy with the new landscaping.

Most but not all tenants felt the building was safer than the old walk-ups. Some people suggested adding security screen doors and peep-holes to unit entrance doors, and a more secure main entrance, to improve security even further.

While some tenants thought that outsiders still looked at the estate negatively, most were pleased that the estate’s reputation had improved:

*People outside of here don’t look at us in this building as part of the high rise,*

they look at it as private because that building there is private and they think this is all private, so … if I was looking for a job or something it sits better on a résumé too (male, 50+).

Most people felt that moving into the new building was good for their health:

*It’s just one of those things but my mental health has improved heaps. Just*
waking up in a nice, clean, beautiful joint … It’s definitely good, yeah. I’ve got major depression and the rest of it and since I moved here it’s been a hell of a lot better (male, 30+).

Public tenants and private residents were disappointed that there was not a shared space like a community hall or garden to meet and interact in the new building: …this area has nothing where people can get together whereas 530, 510, 480 [Lygon St, the high-rise towers] have a community hall. [Since then, at] the new building on Elgin Street, we fought, we took up a petition and we got approval in the new buildings to go in there, that the community hall be put there. We think it’s important (male, 50+).

Moving away and moving back
Most people from the old walk-ups had been able to continue living near friends and family while the new building was built. A small number of people had lost touch with friends and neighbours after moving away.

Some tenants found it distressing to move out of the old walk-ups, while others were happy to move away from the old buildings.

Some people who used to live in the walk-ups did not to come back to the new building because they were not offered a unit with the number of bedrooms they felt they needed. For example, some single parents wanted a spare room for when their children came to stay. These people had found the redevelopment process more difficult than others because they did not return to the estate.

Making decisions about the redevelopment
Most tenants and service providers felt that there was no real public consultation about the redevelopment. They felt people were simply given information rather than having a say about what would happen: I’m no Philadelphia lawyer but I reckon that then they can say ‘Well, we consulted the residents’. They can say ‘Well, we had a meeting once a month with the residents—sorry, ex-residents—and they know what we’re building, so it’s all above board’ (male, 50+).

It was noted that the Office of Housing had worked hard to rehouse tenants locally while the redevelopment was completed. These research findings have been given to policy makers to consider in their future redevelopment projects.

The project was funded by the Australian Research Council with partners VicHealth and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The research team, based at Flinders University in South Australia, included Associate Professors Kathy Arthurson and Anna Ziersch, and Dr Iris Levin who was hosted by the Brotherhood’s Research and Policy Centre in Melbourne.

To find out more
If you would like to know more about the research, please contact: Iris Levin (03) 9483 1385 ilevin@bsl.org.au or Kathy Arthurson Kathy.arthurson@flinders.edu.au.
You can see the full research report on the VicHealth website (http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/).