

# Housing Insecurity – the lived experience of the LGBTIQ+ community

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One of the best ways to learn about housing insecurity is to talk to people who have been homeless. So, let's do that by chatting with K. K is a 52-year-old trans woman who has lived in the ACT for just over 2 years. For over 12 months of that time she has experienced homelessness and housing insecurity.

M: When did you first start having issues with housing?

K: It began just as winter started last year. I had been living in a share house with another trans woman, then we moved to another share house, where we each sublet a room from another person. Our names weren't on the lease. The person whose name was on the lease decided that she didn't like me and gave me 24 hours' notice to remove myself, my puppy and all my property from the premises.

M: What happened then?

K: With that much notice, I ended up sleeping in my car. I remember those nights clearly. It was so stressful to try and find a safe place to be, in the middle of winter. The nights were hitting minus eight. And when you sleep in a car you have to leave one of the windows open or otherwise you can't breathe. It's just too enclosed. I was so worried about the puppy – he was only 4 or 5 months old. And I was worried about my own safety. And it was bitterly cold.

M: What was going on with work?

K: I had to take time off work – I couldn't bring the dog in to work with me and I had to find some accommodation.

M: And what happened next?

K: After about 5 days a friend of a friend offered me and the dog a space on her sofa bed. I was so grateful to be out of the cold, sleeping inside, sleeping safely. Being able to sleep behind a locked door and knowing that nobody could get in. And the house had a dog door, so the dog could toilet during the night. But this couldn't be a long-term solution – this person who became my friend had two dogs of her own in a small townhouse. I was sleeping on the sofa bed in the spare room. While I was staying there, I applied to ACT Housing for priority assistance.

M: And then?

K: Another friend of a friend – this time a friend of the person whose sofa bed I was sleeping on. And this time there was a room and I could bring in some of my property. Sleeping on my own bed – bliss! It's amazing how having space for your own belongings improves your well-being. There was space for some of my clothes and jewellery and my computer, and the people I was living with

became my friends. While I was living there I had an interview with OneLink – the housing support people in the ACT government. He took certified copies of my paperwork and my application form.

M: So how long did you stay there?

K: I stayed in this house until early September, when I moved to Adelaide to start a new relationship. Unfortunately, that relationship didn't work out and so I was back to my friend's spare room in Canberra at the end of October until early December. I had to move again in December because my friend's daughter needed to move home. I moved to Aranda in December, but again my name wasn't on the lease. Things went pear shaped again, and I was sleeping in the lounge room in a household of 3 adults, and up to 4 children.

M: And now?

K: I signed the lease for my current share house at the start of August and moved in there straight away.

M: For the first time in over 2 years, you are living in a house where your name is on the lease?

K: Yes.

M: And what about ACT Housing?

K: I have never had an offer of housing from ACT Housing. OneLink lost my application, and I spent heaps of time on the phone trying to sort things out, but never had a result.

M: What about a women's refuge?

K: None of the women's refuges were able to provide any accommodation. They either couldn't house the dog, or there was the time when one person at a women's refuge told me that I had to go to a men's refuge. And that's hardly a safe option, even if they would take the dog, which they won't.

M: When you add it all up, what has your experience of homelessness and housing insecurity been like?

K: Mostly scary – physically, mentally and emotionally. Just talking about it now has made me tear up. It's a truly horrible experience.

I've never had this type of experience before. Before transitioning I owned houses, both here and in the UK. I think that the process of transitioning increased the risk of housing insecurity for me – I went from secure housing with my wife and family to being reliant on other people's good will for somewhere to live. My identity, my self-worth, they are all tied up in the security thing. Before I transitioned I never thought about housing insecurity – there were two of us, we always had income, we could always pay our bills. But then I lost all of that, and eventually reached the point when I was sleeping in my car.

People need to understand how traumatic this is. Homelessness and housing insecurity aren't just about people sleeping in parks. I was working full-time in aged care and sleeping in my car because there were no emergency housing opportunities available to a trans woman with a dog. Animals are

important components of people's identity, and stability and mental health. My dog kept me from committing suicide because he needed me. He was reliant on me. Things need to change in the way that our society deals with pets and homeless people.

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What can we learn from K's experience about managing homelessness and housing insecurity? Her advice for you if you are looking for security in housing:

1. Don't be trans.
2. Don't have a dog.
3. Don't expect any help from refuges or ACT Housing.
4. Make sure your name is on the lease.
5. Make sure that you are part of a community that looks after its own, or you too could end up sleeping in your car in a Canberra winter.

Given K's experience, perhaps there's some changes that need to be made to the way that the ACT deals with homelessness and housing insecurity? Diversity ACT is keen to work with any agencies and organisations that provide emergency and social housing to ensure that no-one else in the LGBTIQ+ community experiences the kind of trauma that K went through. Surely, we can do better!



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