

Home for Mohammed

By Mohammed and Erika Altmann

The sign in the window says 'Rooms 4 Rent \$70 pw'. It is a long time since rooms have been \$70 per week. My countrymen and I pay \$100 per week each. The owner collects \$300 each week for our room. It is cheaper to be here than the \$30 per night I paid when I first left detention. The window next to the sign is broken and covered with cardboard to keep the rain and light out. This room is my home now, the one with the broken window. I am telling my story to an Australian who is writing it down. She visited me in Pontville. I do not wish to be identified in this story because I am unsure how it will affect my case for asylum. So please call me Mohammed. There are many Mohammeds in my country. Of one thing I am sure, and that is that if my case for asylum is refused, and I am sent back to my birth country (Afghanistan), I will be killed. It is the dread that I live with every day along with fear for my family still there.

But I was telling you about my home here in Australia. Most of the people who stay here come for a few days or weeks only. They are backpackers or fruit pickers with right to work visas. We have no right to work which makes finding the rent money difficult, but God willing, we will always meet our obligations. The house is close to almost everything and I can walk to shops, beach, park and of course to Red Cross to see my case worker. The Red Cross has given me money since I was released from detention, but that is not the same for everyone here. The owner gets cross when we have someone stay over and threatens to throw us all out – but they have no money from Red Cross or the Australian government because they are in the appeals process so we must share with our poorer countrymen – that is also our way.

The house itself contains more than twenty rooms. There is one kitchen and two bathrooms. One for the women and one for the men. It is good to be segregated in this way to ease embarrassment. Inside each room there are between two and eight beds. Our room is on the ground floor. I share it with two of my countrymen, also asylum seekers - so there are three beds in in here. I have been arguing with the owner who I now know well since I have been here for more than six months now. The argument is over moving extra beds into our room. He wants to but two more beds in here but honestly, there is no room. There is room to walk between the beds but there is no room to spread out a prayer mat, and since we all want to pray at the same time, there is definitely no room; certainly not enough to face the correct orientation as required in the Koran. This is very important to us and causes distress.

Also in the room is one chair. It is for our Australian visitors who come to teach us English and share tea. We are not allowed to go to TAFE or use the Migrant Resource Centre to learn English. We sit on the floor always but we need to ask our visitors to our room. It is very strange to invite a woman into our room. In the room we also have a small fridge, a computer that was given to us and some shelves for food. We cannot keep the food in the kitchen because it goes missing. Also it gets very dirty with so many people using it. I feel sorry for the people who take our food because their need must be very great, but still we are three people in one room and we also need to eat. We also need to save money for emergencies, some of us still owe money from our journey and we have families to support back in Afghanistan.

The best thing about living here is that I have formed a community with my countrymen whom I did not know before. But there are also bad things as well. It is noisy, especially in the summer and on the weekend. There is drinking and fighting, and the shouting and anger make us very afraid. We have located safe places within the house. Places to hide if we need to. Also we only have one key to the room between us. That takes a lot of organisation to make sure that we can always enter our room. We thought we had found a safe place to hide the key but somebody found it and took our belongings – toothpaste, clothes and things. But the thing that annoys me more than anything is the state of the kitchen. It costs nothing to be clean but always, it is a mess. I said to the noisy ones, I said ‘this my home. Why you make mess in my home?’

I miss my home and my family. I do not know when I will see them and yearn for something that is familiar. Some of the guys are very sad and talk of hurting or killing themselves. I have seen it in detention. At least I have an uncle here and this keeps me busy. The solution? The solution is the right to work and refugee status. It would give us back our manhood and sense of who we are.

7. Who provides the services to support and assist homeless asylum seekers and how is this support and assistance provided?

Section 3 –

3. What are some examples of programs and services that have succeeded in providing accommodation and housing support to asylum seekers who have become homeless or who have been at risk of homelessness?