

Social Change Symposium

Candidate: Abigail Lewis

School: Global, Urban and Social Studies

Presentation: Third Milestone Review, May 2023

Title: A Conflict between Care and Commerce: Managing Tenancies in Social Housing

Abstract: Social housing providers in Victoria are required to remain financially viable while meeting a duty of care to their tenants. When tenants struggle to meet the obligations of their housing, providers are caught between these competing demands. Little is known about the experiences of tenancy managers who manage this conflict in their day-to-day role, expected to both support tenants and protect income. Drawing on doctoral research conducted with tenancy managers at Unison Housing, this paper asks what this conflict between caring and commercial imperatives means for tenancy management practice in the social housing sector. It employs sociological theories of care to argue that although tenancy managers understand their role and their sector to be driven by a social mission to care, commercial pressures act as a barrier to the enactment of that mission.