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Christine O'Neill's lonely death sparks investigation by NSW housing, plus NDIS commission



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📷 Christine O'Neill, earlier known as Christine Maresch, and pictures of the flat where he body was found.



An investigation has been launched by the public housing agency into the tragic end of Christine O'Neill, who died alone of hypothermia in a Warrawong flat and wasn't found for up to a week.

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Ms O'Neill was an author whose book *Hostage - My own story* (written as Christine Maresch) - detailed how she survived years as the captive wife of a neo-Nazi bank robber and violent sadist.

She died some time between April 3 and 11, [her death certificate reads](#), aged 64, her apartment in a state of squalor.

Her daughter Amanda has sparked an investigation after lodging a complaint with the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Her mother had been receiving services from multiple NDIS providers but it was not enough to prevent her death or notice it until one good-hearted care worker suspected something was wrong and entered the property to check.

Read more: [Rats making themselves at home in Cliff Rd public housing](#)

Amanda Maresch, who lives in Perth, said her mother's care had been declining, said a broken window at the Kully Way flat went a long time boarded up and unfixed, and believed a heater may have saved her mother's life.



Christine's last weeks or months were spent in squalor, as pictures her daughter took inside the flat show.

After the *Mercury* asked questions of the Department of Communities and Justice, the NSW Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC), which looks after public housing, said it would conduct an internal investigation.

"The NSW Land and Housing Corporation is saddened about the tragic death of Christine O'Neill," a spokesman said in a statement.

"We extend our sincere condolences to Christine's family, loved ones and first responders involved at the time.

"NSW Police have advised the Department of Communities and Justice that Ms O'Neill's death was not suspicious. This does not detract from the severity of this situation, the department will be conducting an internal investigation."

The spokesman said a broken window had been fixed in 2021.

"There was an order raised for the bedroom window to be fixed and it was boarded up the following day as a temporary solution. Works on the window were completed in February 2021," he said.

"We acknowledge the lead time on this is not ideal, works were hindered by lack of access to the apartment. No orders for the repair of any broken windows at the property were raised after February 2021.

ensuring any damaged windows and doors are repaired and where possible have properties that have heating/cooling options."



📷 Christine with Amanda in a real-life photo, featured in the film *Hostage*, by Frontier Films.

Amanda Maresch said a complaint had been raised in the weeks before Christine's death about the declining level of care she appeared to be receiving. She said her mother had mental health problems and may have been difficult, but still deserved appropriate care.

The *Mercury* has also been told the [National Disability Insurance Agency](#) was informed in January that Christine had not had a "[recovery coach](#)" working with her for many months, and asked the NDIA to contact her to arrange a new one.

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only that it had expressed sympathies to the family.

A "recovery coach" supports participants to "better manage the complex challenges of day-to-day living", the [NDIS website states](#).

"Recovery coaches will work collaboratively with participants, their families, carers and other services to design, plan and implement a recovery plan, and assist with the coordination of NDIS and other supports."

Read more: [She survived a sadistic Nazi bank robber to die alone in a Warrawong flat](#)

Amanda Maresch asks whether this level of co-ordination was missing in her mother's care.

Ms O'Neill's local area co-ordinator under the NDIS came from Uniting, the name for the service provider formerly known as Uniting Care.

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A Uniting spokeswoman said it "does not provide support co-ordination or personal support services in the Illawarra Shoalhaven area".



📷 The bedroom window boarded up at 21 Kully Way.

Uniting is a "partner of the National Disability Insurance Agency, delivering the NDIS in your local community", [its website](#) states.

The difference can be hard for the untrained eye to pinpoint.

The [NDIS website says](#) local area co-ordinators "support people with disability to create and work towards their goals, build capacity to make their own decisions and choices and access the supports they need to live the life they choose".

But this does not mean "providing support co-ordination".

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"Your local area coordinator can check-in with you during your plan, to see how you are going and if the plan is working well for you," the NDIS website says of its Local Area Co-ordinators (LAC).

participant to check if they are OK, but neither the LAC or the NDIA said they were responsible for checking whether overall care is adequate.

"An NDIS plan is set up in collaboration with the participant, the LAC representative and the NDIA delegate," she said.

"When the plan is in place, as an LAC provider we act as a linker to help the participant access the services and supports in their area.

"We will check in from time to time with a participant to see how their plan is going.

"Once a plan is in place, there is a function by which it can be automatically renewed. If that happens, this is not a time when we would automatically contact the participant, as the plan remains the same and the same supports and services will be in place."

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📷 Christine Maresch, pictured leaving Wollongong court, was charged with assault in 2008 after an incident in Thirroul.

The NDIA referred questions to the NDIS Quality and Assurance Commission, which said it was investigating.

Warrawong-based NDIS provider Honest Care expressed condolences but said it could not comment. Ms O'Neill's family expressed their appreciation of the Honest Care worker, who would take Ms O'Neill for medication fortnightly.

Another NDIS provider Ability Links, headquartered in Newcastle and with an office in Yallah, said it had been involved with Ms O'Neill for a brief period only, more than a year ago.

Ms O'Neill's NDIS service payments were managed by a Melbourne-based payment plan manager.

death may find ways that NDIS care can be better managed for people who were losing the ability to work it through themselves.

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Between the plan manager, the absent recovery coach, the Honest Care medical assistance, the Uniting Care local area co-ordination, its partner the National Disability Insurance Agency, the NDIS Quality and Assurance Commission, and now the NSW Land and Housing Corporation, Ms O'Neill's family are hoping there may soon be answers about who could actually have been responsible for trying to prevent this death.

After all she did to survive years of abuse in a "hostage" marriage to a Nazi sadist, Christine's end did not have to happen like this.

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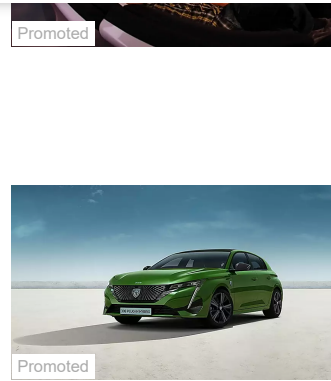
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