

Public housing looks into Christine's death

BY BEN LANGFORD

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.

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.

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

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, earlier known as Christine Maresch, and pictures of the flat where her body was found.

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.

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. The NDIA did not comment when asked if this had happened.

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

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.

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

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.



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

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