

## Anne Wright

suburbs reporter

A DESPERATE working mother has told how she is enduring her worst nightmare — living with her two young children in the back seat of her car.

Tonight Michelle will tuck her children, Connor, 11, and Mikayla, 6, into her Holden Barina parked in a vulnerable open space such as a train station or shopping centre car park in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs.

Michelle estimates she has put in up to 60 applications for rental homes in the past six weeks and says she can afford to pay up to \$300 a week in rent from her part-time job at a doctor's surgery.

But in a competitive market, prospective landlords keep finding more preferable tenants, she says.

So for the past two weeks — since the tenancy in her previous home expired — Michelle and her children have been on the streets.

"I didn't think it would get

### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF MICHELLE

- Wakes up and uses bathrooms at a shopping centre
- Eats breakfast in her car from takeaway cafe
- Drives children to school
- Goes to and from storage facility to access belongings or clothes
- Washes laundry at laundrette or friends' houses
- Showers in swimming pool changerooms or friends' houses
- Eats takeaway dinners in car
- Parks in car park and family talks together to pass the time
- Tucks children into doonas in the back seat. Michelle falls asleep in the front seat

to this. I just feel like the worst mother ever. You've got nowhere to turn, you've got nowhere to go," she said.

"I thought it would only be a night or two in the car. I never thought it would be this long."

With no room at family or friends' houses for them to stay, and their belongings in storage, Michelle said the family was sleeping in public car parks, bathing in swimming pool changing rooms

and eating takeaway food, with no end in sight unless they received help.

"You miss the normal things people do. I took it for granted, definitely," she said.

"We can't eat properly. I miss cooking, we eat a lot of takeaway because it's all we can do.

"For people to just keep knocking it back, but even more so when they know the situation, I tell them the situ-

### WHAT \$300-A-WEEK RENT WILL GET YOU

- Three-bedroom, two-bathroom brick veneer house with double lock-up garage in Pakenham
- One-bedroom flat with car space and communal laundry in South Yarra
- Two-bedroom furnished flat with car space in Essendon



Video: Watch Michelle's heartbreaking account of living with her children in a car

[heraldsun.com.au](http://heraldsun.com.au)

If you can help Michelle and her two children find a home email the Herald Sun at [news@heraldsun.com.au](mailto:news@heraldsun.com.au)

"It's very hard. It's hard because you've got to try and put on this face and present yourself in a certain way, and you feel half ready when you're there."

But sleeping in public at night is the scariest thing for the mum of two, who asked not to have her full name published. "I don't sleep at all. The littlest noise I hear I think it's someone trying to get into the car," she said.

"The only reason I go to the train station is because they run until a certain time at night but on the weekend it can get really rough.

"What else am I going to do? I've tried everything, I can't do anything."

The Dandenong family's dire situation came about after the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal ruled her previous rental home of 16 months was unsafe to live in.