



## Spirits high at End of Year Celebration!

Tenants and Housing Choices Western Australia (Housing Choices WA) staff came together in December last year to enjoy each other's company over a catered lunch to celebrate the end of 2020.

Our first ever *End of Year Celebration for Tenants* was held at Fremantle PCYC in Hilton and brought together more than 100 tenants and Housing Choices WA staff for an enjoyable day that included a two-course meal, games, prizes and presentations from Housing Choices WA senior managers and Advisory Committee of Tenants (ACT) Chairperson Trish Owen.

Housing Choices WA General Manager Community Housing Natalie Sangalli said the inaugural event was a great way for tenants and staff to reflect on 2020, share stories and celebrate the end of the year.

"This year was obviously one of the more challenging years in recent memory because of the COVID-19 pandemic, so it was great to be able to host an event like this to close out the year by bringing people together," Natalie said.

"It was very important to us that we were able to celebrate with tenants in a relaxed, enjoyable setting and the feedback we received tells us we did that.

"COVID restrictions this year meant we had to cap the number of attendees at this event, but we look forward to hosting more tenants at future *End of Year Celebration for Tenants* events in 2021."

Housing Choices WA extends its thanks to the tenants who attended the inaugural event. We hope you had a great time!



## Words from our Community Housing General Manager Natalie Sangalli

Well, it is April already and the year is galloping along with lots happening at Housing Choices WA.

I am incredibly pleased to say that the Housing Choices Australia Group of Companies' national Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) has been submitted to Reconciliation Australia for endorsement.

Our Reflect RAP will provide a strategic plan with a well defined set of deliverables to guide the Housing Choices Australia Group on its journey toward reconciliation.

The Housing Choices Australia Group RAP aims to build and enhance the Group's cultural competency, accessibility and safety. It also aims to assist the Group to deliver culturally appropriate homes and services and develop and refine robust partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations.

In January, we undertook a national competition in search for an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander tenant artist to create artwork for the cover of our national RAP. We had three submissions from tenant artists in WA. I extend a big thank you to the fabulous artists who contributed to this competition.

The other big news is, of course, our change of name to Housing Choices WA. Please take a moment to read the below article for the most up to date information on how to contact us and how to access our website.

The Housing Choices WA team is now working through the merger of key policies and procedures and we look forward to consulting the Housing Choices WA Advisory Committee of Tenants on this work where appropriate.

Lastly, there are several public holidays coming up. Please remember that, as with weekends, the Maintenance Hotline is only for reporting emergency maintenance jobs on public holidays.

Please enjoy the contents of our first *At Home with Housing Choices WA* tenant newsletter!

## RE-BRAND RECAP

As you know, Access Housing changed its name to Housing Choices WA on 18 February 2021. This name change further assisted with our integration into the Housing Choices Australia Group following the merger of Access Housing and Housing Choices Australia in July 2020. It also aligned us with Housing Choices Australia's other state-based operations from a naming perspective.



As a reminder, our local office locations, contact phone numbers, bank details for rent payments and overall service provision to each of our highly valued tenants have not changed.

### Email addresses

Our staff now have Housing Choices email addresses. These addresses look like:

**firstname.lastname@hcau.org.au**

If you send an email to a staff member's old Access Housing email address they will receive it, but when they reply to you or send you a new email it will come from their Housing Choices email address.

### Here are some important email addresses Housing Choices WA tenants can use to contact staff!

Advisory Committee of Tenants: **act@hcau.org.au**

Complaints: **complaints-wa@hcau.org.au**

General Enquiries: **info-wa@hcau.org.au**

Maintenance Services: **maintenance-wa@hcau.org.au**

Rent Enquiries: **rents-wa@hcau.org.au**

Rent Review: **rentreview-wa@hcau.org.au**

Tenant Payments: **tenantpayments-wa@hcau.org.au**

### Website

For now, our website remains accessible via **accesshousing.org.au**. In the coming months, we will move content from this website across to the Housing Choices Australia website.

 **housingchoices.org.au**

Once this is complete, we will retire the **accesshousing.org.au** website. Tenants will be advised before this happens. In the meantime, you can continue to visit **accesshousing.org.au** for Housing Choices WA specific information.

If you have any queries about any of this information, please contact your Tenancy Officer.

# INFORMATION FOR TENANTS



## END OF COVID-19 RENTAL EMERGENCY MEASURES

In April 2020, the WA Government passed the Residential Tenancies (COVID-19 Response) Act 2020, which brought into law a range of measures to deliver protections for tenants suffering rental stress as a result of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 Response Act meant that between 30/3/20 - 28/3/21;

- No rent increases could be actioned.
- No terminations of tenancies could take place except in particular circumstances i.e. family and domestic violence, mutual agreement or refusal to pay rent.
- Fixed term tenancies would become periodic tenancies if they were not renewed during the emergency COVID-19 period.

**The COVID-19 emergency period ended on Sunday 28 March 2021. This means that ordinary tenancy laws now apply.**

Housing Choices WA staff continued to complete annual eligibility and rent reviews as they become due during the COVID-19 emergency period. If a rent review resulted in a rent decrease, the decrease was implemented immediately. If a rent review resulted in a rent increase, the increase was postponed.

In line with the end of the Residential Tenancies (COVID-19 Response) Act 2020, increases to rent that were postponed during the emergency period will become effective on the first rent due date on or after 28 March 2021.

## RENTAL REMINDERS

- If you are experiencing difficulties paying your rent, please contact our Tenant Accounts Team on 9534 0425. They will work with you to arrange a repayment plan that is right for you.
- Please ensure you complete all relevant sections of your Rent Review and Eligibility forms. If forms are not completed, we cannot confirm your eligibility for housing.



## HOW WE CALCULATE YOUR RENT

Housing Choices WA calculates your rent based on the net assessable income and assets of your household. We will review your rent and eligibility annually or each time you notify us of a change in your household income or circumstances.



Your assessable household income is the total net (after tax) income of all people over the age of 16 living in your home.

Assessable income is income from a regular or continuous source e.g. wages, salaries, pensions, benefits and allowances.



You will pay a percentage of your household income as base rent.

Very Low Income Households pay no more than **25%** and Low Income Households pay no more than **30%** of their total net assessable household income as rent.



100% of the rent assistance you are entitled to will be added to your base rent.\*

*\*We tell you the amount of rent assistance you are eligible for in your Eligibility and Rent Review outcome letter.*



Your base rent combined with 100% of your rent assistance will equal your total rent payment up to Housing Choices WA's Maximum Rent.\*

*\*We will ensure the rent you are charged is less than 75% of market rent for your property.*



# TENANT ENGAGEMENT UPDATE



**From ACT  
Chairperson**  
Trish Owen

I'm excited to announce that the ACT has finally had our second face to face meeting. After a year of challenges, it was great to be back at the Rivervale office for our first 2021 meeting.

We have welcomed three new members onto the committee this year from Rockingham, Fremantle and Mandurah. It is great to see the increased interest in the ACT from tenants across the Perth and Peel regions.

Also, a congratulations to Luul who will be taking on the secretarial role for 2021 and a thank you to Joan who filled this position for the past year.

Our first meeting of the year was jam packed and we were all relieved to get through the topics we had to discuss. We began discussions around tenant safety and what role the ACT could play in assisting tenants to feel more secure in their homes and better prepared for a fire. The outcome of these discussions resulted in our first tenant-led initiative! An ACT member will be liaising with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and Housing Choices WA to get more information for tenants about fire safety strategies.

The ACT also reviewed the letters tenants receive about inspections. ACT members had the chance to share their perspectives on these letters and Housing Choices WA will incorporate our feedback and bring them to the next ACT meeting for our review.

We also put forward ideas about how Housing Choices WA could involve tenants in the development of a new tenant handbook.

Overall, it was a hugely successful meeting and I am looking forward to continuing the work of the ACT next month!



## Mandurah staff help tenants in crisis at Christmas

Our Mandurah team pulled together to arrange the donation of 10 food hampers and one toy hamper for families living in our crisis accommodation homes at Christmas.

The team reached out to crisis accommodation partner organisations WestAus Crisis, Calvary Youth Services, Cyrenian House and Anglicare to deliver the hampers to families in greatest need.

Tenancy Officer Emma Hammond led the drive for donations.

"Last year we raised six and this year we raised 10. We know that these hampers would have made a big difference for many people on Christmas Day," Emma said.

## BILL BUDDY PILOT PROGRAM

Bill Buddy is a new website and mobile app designed to help you reduce your utility bills and cost of living, as well as your environmental impact.



Housing Choices WA has worked with other Community Housing Providers, the Financial Counselling Network and tenants to develop this bill saving app.

**As part of the pilot program, you can now sign up and use Bill Buddy for free!**

For more information, please contact Housing Choices WA Tenant Engagement and Capacity Building Officer Alex Kepes on **0437 887 675** or via email on [alex.kepes@hcau.org.au](mailto:alex.kepes@hcau.org.au).

# TENANT ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Housing Choices WA welcomes new artists to our Tenant Art Display in our Rivervale office.

## GLEN

Housing Choices WA staff discovered a wonderland of tracks, buildings, bridges, lights and moving race cars when visiting Glen's home.

Glen completed his first hand made moving toy more than 30 years ago for his grandchild (see below). Six years ago he took up model building as a hobby.

Glen crafts his models from recycled materials where possible and takes great pride in his unique creations.

His village (featured on the right) includes a clubhouse, a church with handmade mock stain glass windows and intersections that are engineered to run smoothly using cardboard and curtain wire.



## MARGARET

Margaret took up painting only 18 months ago and, in that time, has created 74 paintings! A collection of these paintings are now in our art display (see bottom right).

She devotes two to three hours a day to practicing and developing her skills. Margaret finds that creating beautiful paintings has improved her mental and physical wellbeing and has a very positive impact on her life.

She now is looking forward to learning new techniques, trying new mediums and joining local art classes.

## SUSAN

Susan's father is a 94 year old artist and during COVID-19 lockdown last year he suggested that Susan try painting. This inspired Susan to put paintbrush to canvas and she has not looked back since.

Susan says painting gives her peace of mind in stressful times.

Susan is happy to be following in her father's footsteps and he is very proud of her and her work.

Susan's work Countryside Cottage (see above) is now showing in our art display.



## CALLING ALL CREATIVES!

Housing Choices WA will be holding a Tenant Art Showcase event in the community to highlight the talents of our tenants.

We are now seeking Expressions of Interest from tenants who would like to display their creativity at our art showcase event.

All forms of creative expression are welcome, be it photography, poetry, painting, sculptures, ceramics, short stories, drawings, knitting or jewellery.

Tenants who participate will also go in the running to win prizes!

Please contact our Tenant Engagement and Capacity Building Officer Alex Kepes on 0437 887 675 to register your interest.

If you have a creative hobby or are an aspiring artist – we want to hear from you!

# MAINTENANCE MATTERS



## TENANT LIABILITY CHARGES

During our maintenance information session in Fremantle last year, tenants asked for more information about tenant liability.

When items in the home have to be repaired or replaced because they have been damaged by a tenant, member of the household or a visitor, this is called *tenant liability*. Tenant liability damage may be caused deliberately, by accident or through neglect.

Tenant liability is different to *fair wear and tear*.

Fair wear and tear is the term used to describe deterioration of items over time through normal use. Examples of this are having to replace a hot water system that is no longer working because of its age, replacing washers on taps and replacing blinds that have become brittle and broken due to use and sun exposure.

When you report damages to our Maintenance Hotline, where possible, we will advise you if you are likely to be charged tenant liability for the repair.

Once tenant liability has been established, you will receive an invoice telling you what work was done, how much it was and how much you need to pay. Your Tenancy Officer will also be advised of any work that is going to be charged to you as tenant liability.

If you can't pay the charged amount in full, you can ring our Tenant Accounts team on **9534 0425** to make arrangements to pay the debt in fortnightly instalments.



## AVOIDING TENANT LIABILITY

Many tenant liability charges are avoidable. Here are some examples of when tenant liability is charged:

- Call-out fees due to no-one being home when the contractor attends your property on the agreed day and time.
- Re-keying a property because the tenant has forgotten or lost their key.
- Fumigation for cockroaches or other pests due to lack of cleanliness or not storing food properly.
- Benchtop surfaces damaged by hot pans leaving scorch marks or knife marks caused by not using a chopping board.
- Cleaning mould from ceilings and walls due to rooms not being ventilated or aired or the exhaust fan not being used.

## WHAT DO I DO IF THE DAMAGE WAS NOT MY FAULT?

If damage is caused by someone you did not invite into your property, such as someone breaking in or due to a family and domestic violence incident, you must contact the Police and report the incident. They will give you a Police Report Number (PRN), which you must give to us when you report the damage.

If a PRN is provided, you will not be charged for the cost of repair, but we may take legal action to recover costs from the person who caused the damage.

If you believe you have been charged for damage that was not your fault, you can dispute the charges by using our Appeals process. You can ask your Tenancy Officer for an appeal form or email [info-wa@hcau.org.au](mailto:info-wa@hcau.org.au).

We will investigate the charges, the costs and the reason for the repair or replacement and advise you of the outcome within 28 days.

# ELECTRICAL SAFETY IN THE HOME

We all know electricity is dangerous, but do you know how to ensure your home is safe from electrical risks? Below are some reminders about how to use electricity safely.



## DEVICES THAT KEEP YOU SAFE

### Residual Current Devices

A Residual Current Device (RCD) is a safety device that prevents electrical shock by automatically cutting off the power. At least once a year, we will test your RCDs to make sure they are working. You can also check your RCDs yourself.

1. Turn off all your electronic equipment (computers, TV's etc.)
2. Find your RCDs. They are usually located in the outside meter box or in the switch board inside. All the RCDs should be in the ON position.
3. Press the TEST (T) button on each RCD and release. You should hear a click.
4. Each of the RCD levers should flip to the OFF position. This means the RCDs are working.
5. If any of the RCD levers don't flip to the off position, there is a fault. Immediately report it to the Maintenance Hotline on 1800 203 383.
6. When finished, flip the levers upwards to ON.



### Earth Stakes

An Earth Stake protects you from electrocution if there is an overflow of electricity.



The Earth Stake is usually located next to an outside water tap. If the property is a unit or apartment that is part of a complex, and there is no individual Earth Stake, there will

be one that covers the whole complex.

Periodically check that your earth wire is securely attached to the stake and is not damaged or broken.

### What should I do if I have an electrical issue in my property?

If you have an issue like a faulty power point, please call the Maintenance Hotline on 1800 203 383.

If you experience a loss of power, and before you call our Maintenance Hotline, check your RCDs to see if the power loss was caused by a faulty appliance. A faulty appliance can make an RCD trip to the off position and cut the power supply.

If you experience an electric shock or tingle, please call Western Power on 13 13 51.

## ELECTRICAL SAFETY AROUND THE HOME

### 1 APPLIANCES

- ⚠ Always switch appliances off at the power point before unplugging them.
- ⚠ Have only one major appliance plugged into each outlet.

### 2 OUTLETS

- ⚠ Avoid overloading electrical outlets with multiple devices.
- ⚠ Report power points that are faulty or broken. This includes power points that are cracked, damaged or feel hot.

### 3 CORDS

- ⚠ Never connect multiple extension cables together.
- ⚠ Avoid putting extension cables under a rug or carpet.
- ⚠ Never run indoor extension cables outside.

## AUTUMN PUZZLE - WIN A \$50 BUNNINGS VOUCHER!

R	E	A	R	T	H	W	D	R	S	E	V	A	E	L
E	A	W	E	T	U	I	G	E	D	G	U	T	W	A
C	F	J	G	W	Q	N	Y	N	C	S	J	G	R	F
O	H	J	K	S	A	D	W	T	O	T	R	A	I	N
N	Y	S	P	A	R	K	S	U	N	A	I	I	O	P
C	G	D	S	Z	X	C	V	B	T	K	N	N	M	K
I	E	R	I	B	V	Y	N	H	E	E	S	Y	T	H
L	I	A	B	I	L	I	T	Y	N	T	U	J	G	D
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FIND THESE WORDS IN THE GRID - GOOD LUCK!

AUTUMN  
LEAVES  
WIND  
RAIN  
TENANT  
LIABILITY  
CONTENTS  
INSURANCE  
REFLECT  
RECONCILIATION  
ACTION  
PLAN  
BILL  
BUDDY  
EARTH  
STAKE  
RCD  
SPARKS  
RENT  
REVIEW

Find all the words in the word search except for one, which is not actually in the grid. Words may be forward, backward, up, down or diagonal. Write this leftover word on a postcard or piece of paper with your full name, address and contact number and post it to *At Home Autumn Puzzle, Housing Choices Western Australia, PO Box 105, Burswood WA 6100* or hand it in at your local office. Competition closes Friday 4 June 2021. The winner of a \$50 Bunnings voucher will be drawn from all the correct entries after this date. Only one entry per household. Good luck!

Congratulations to Carole from Greenfields, last edition's puzzle prize winner.

### CONTENTS INSURANCE

Have you thought about what could happen to your belongings after a fire, storm or burglary?

Housing Choices WA building insurance does not cover tenant possessions.

We recommend tenants obtain contents insurance to cover the financial cost of replacing personal possessions if unfortunate circumstances like a fire or burglary were to take place.

### REPORTING RAISED PAVERS

If you notice any raised pavers on your property or in common areas that could present a tripping hazard, please call our Maintenance Hotline on **1800 203 383**.

### HOLIDAY OFFICE CLOSURES

All Housing Choices WA offices will be closed over the Easter period from 4pm on **Thursday 1 April** until reopening at **8.30am on Tuesday 6 April**.

Offices will also be closed on **Monday 26 April** for the ANZAC Day public holiday.

All calls to our maintenance team will be diverted to the Emergency Maintenance Hotline during the office closure period.

We ask that tenants only call the maintenance number during the closure period if there is a maintenance emergency.

**Perth Metro Office**  
Level 7, 25 Rowe Avenue  
Rivervale WA 6103  
PO Box 105  
Burswood WA 6100  
P (08) 9430 0900  
F (08) 9430 5583

ABN 67 128 888 157

**Peel Office**  
4 Stevenson Street  
PO Box 1200  
Mandurah WA 6210

P (08) 9534 0400  
F (08) 9583 5173

housingchoices.org.au

**South West Office**  
1st Floor, 25 Victoria Street  
PO Box 1539  
Bunbury WA 6230

P (08) 9722 7200  
F (08) 9721 7222

info-wa@hcau.org.au