



HOMES FOUR STORIES

**SUMMER
2021**

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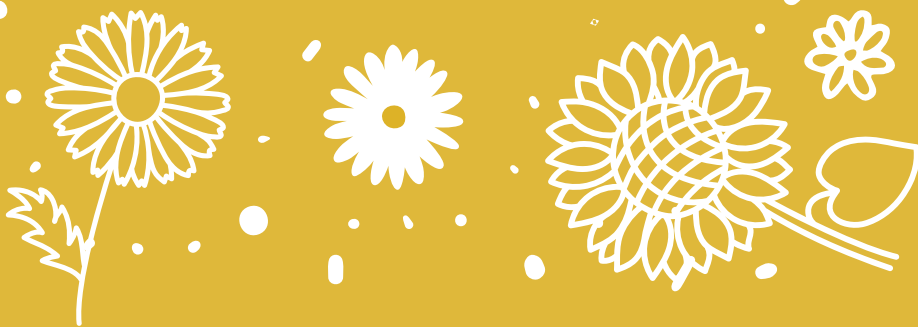
**HOUSING
CHOICES**
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Find us online



www.housingchoices.org.au

From the General Manager



It seems like only yesterday that I was wishing everyone a safe and happy festive season last year and here we are again. The year has flown by, hasn't it!

It has been such a big year for Housing Choices Western Australia. We rebranded from Access Housing to become Housing Choices WA in February, navigated the bumpy COVID-19 road and operated in a challenging WA housing environment. Through it all, our staff proudly continued to ensure that our tenants were front of mind and central to everything we do.

A real highlight of the year was the launch of our Reconciliation Action Plan. Housing Choices WA staff celebrated this milestone in

October with a Noongar bush food lunch. We took a walk along the Derbarl Yerrigan (Swan River) as we learned more about Noongar culture and local fauna thanks to our guide, Marissa Verma from Bindi Bindi Dreaming (see images on next page). This was a beautiful opportunity for us to see the world around us from a different and meaningful perspective and grow our appreciation of the diversity and richness of Noongar culture.

We also took the opportunity to talk about the service improvements we have made based on feedback we received from the 2020 Annual Tenant Survey. The survey was an important part of business

improvement for us, so we are now working on a whole new raft of activities, in consultation with the Advisory Committee of Tenants, based on the feedback and the outcomes of the 2021 survey.

It is with great pleasure that we bring you a newsletter full of good news – from the winners of our Spring Garden Competition to Luul, our fabulous ACT Secretary, who is making a positive impact in her local community. Please also take note of our office closure times over the Christmas / New Year period. Our Maintenance Hotline will, of course, still be taking calls and will be available to assist you with any urgent or emergency maintenance issues at your home while our offices are closed.

I wish you and your loved ones a safe and relaxing break and, on behalf of the team at Housing Choices WA, we look forward to seeing you in 2022.

Natalie Sangalli
General Manager
Housing Choices
Western Australia





Housing Choices WA Holiday Office Closure Details

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Our offices will be closed over the Christmas / New Year period from 4pm Friday 24 December 2021 through until 8.30am Tuesday 4 January 2022.

Our offices will also be closed on Wednesday 26 January 2022 for the Australia Day public holiday and Tuesday 1 March 2022 for the Labour Day public holiday.

Reporting Maintenance During Office Closures

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

Please only report emergency during our office closure period, such as a burst water pipe or gas leak.

If you request non-emergency maintenance during our office closure period, you could be charged a contractor call out fee. Our Maintenance Hotline staff will do their best to advise you if what you are reporting is an emergency repair.

**Maintenance Hotline:
1800 203 383**

Eligibility and Rent Reviews



Following an influx of questions from tenants about Eligibility and Rent Reviews, we have started a new column outlining our processes.

Why are Rent Reviews and Eligibility checks necessary?

Completing an Eligibility and Rent Review form helps us ensure you are within the income limits to live in Community Housing.

We also review your rent to ensure it aligns with your household income.

We will ask you to complete an Eligibility and Rent Review form annually or if there is a change in your household circumstances e.g. people are moving in or out of your home. Please remember to notify your Tenancy Officer within 14 days of any household or income changes.

If you are a tenant under the National Rent Affordability Scheme (NRAS), we will also ask you for additional information when your annual NRAS assessment is due.

What information do I need to provide for a Rent Review?

We ask you to provide details about who is living in your home and proof of income for everyone aged over 16 years living within the property.

This proof includes Centrelink statements, six weeks of payslips (if applicable) and other income sources you may have e.g. interest on savings or an overseas pension.

What happens after the Rent Review?

We will always notify you in writing of the outcome of your Rent Review and if there will be any changes to your rent. We will send you a letter:

- confirming your eligibility for affordable housing
- explaining your rent calculation formula and if it has changed
- confirming your rent amount and any cost changes
- detailing the date your new rent starts, and
- detailing how much Commonwealth Rent Assistance is included.

How can this process be made easier?

There are some Centrelink services we can set up with your authorisation that can make the rent review process easier for you.

These include:

- Centrelink Income Confirmation Service: This free, confidential service can authorise Centrelink to provide your income details directly to Housing Choices WA. This allows us to carry out your Eligibility and Rent Review without you having to obtain an Income Statement from Centrelink.

- Centrelink Electronic Verification of Rent (EVoR): This free, confidential service authorises Housing Choices WA to tell Centrelink if your rent has increased. As a result, you will automatically receive the correct amount of Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

Please note that if your rent has decreased, we are unable to update your rent with Centrelink. If this happens, you will need to notify Centrelink of your new rent amount immediately.

Need some help with this?

If you have difficulty completing forms, problems with providing proof of income or think your rent amount is incorrect, please contact your local Housing Choices WA office or email rentreview-wa@hcau.org.au.





Financial Tips for Tenants from Tenants

In the Spring edition of Home Stories, we promised to share some financial tips provided by tenants at our Managing on a Low Income tenant groups. Some of the most popular tips include:



The Emergency Relief and Food Access Service

is a free phone service that can connect you to local services who can support you, including referrals to the mobile food bank.

Call 1800 979 777 Monday - Friday.



Make your own personal handmade gifts

and cards for unique, low-cost Christmas presents.



Check out the discounted shelf at supermarkets

at the end of the day and freeze items that are near their sell by date.



When cooking home meals, make extra portions to freeze

in take away containers for quick, cheap meals. This can help avoid the temptation of take away or junk food when hungry or short on fresh food.



Look at your local council website and library for information on free events,

concerts and activities in your local area.



Use blackout curtains

in Summer to stay cool and in Winter to stay warm.



Housing Choices Western Australia Tenant Leads Mental Health Act Review

Housing Choices WA recently received funding from the Mental Health Commission to consult with tenants about their experiences dealing with the current Mental Health Act.

This project will be led by Housing Choices WA tenant and lived experience advocate Trish Owen. You may recognise Trish as the 2020-21 Chairperson of our Advisory Committee of Tenants (ACT).

Trish will be facilitating small focus groups and some one-on-one interviews to ensure social and community housing tenants with lived experience are heard and can have input into improving legislation that impacts them.

We look forward to reporting on the project findings in the Autumn newsletter next year.





Left: Luul and Ali.

Luul Steps Up



Housing Choices WA resident Luul is passionate about amplifying migrant voices in the community and is leading by example as the Housing Choices WA Advisory Committee of Tenants (ACT) Secretary.

Luul was born in Solamia and moved with her family to New Zealand as a refugee when she was eight. In 2003, she migrated to Australia where she met her husband, Ali. The pair began renting a two-bedroom private property but, over the years, the family

grew and so did the need for more space.

Moving into a four-bedroom private rental house, Luul lived with the fear of eviction.

"We couldn't find housing when you have seven children ... people have assumptions of properties being damaged," she said.

"They only focus on how many kids you have ... even though we are both average income earners, it was still very, very difficult to get a house."

Luul was working in early childhood and Ali worked in construction, but they struggled to find a suitable home in their price range. They enquired with the WA Housing Authority and

were placed on the waitlist. After five years, the family of nine moved into their Housing Choices WA home.

Luul said her six daughters Faduma (15), Zainab (14), Riyana (13), Ruqiya (11), Zahra (6), Safia (3) and one son, Mohamed (8), had been thriving with more room to move.

"They all play together. My son especially loves soccer, so we all play that," she said.

"The kids all have chores. One tidies the shoes, one does the rooms, they help with cooking and we change the schedule monthly.

"It's generally a pretty chilled household but every day is different. Sometimes it's quiet and sometimes it's noisy."

After connecting with Housing Choices WA, Luul joined the ACT. The committee, which is comprised of tenants from a range of age groups and backgrounds, discusses broad issues that affect residents through bi-monthly meetings. The committee also aims to encourage community development through programs and initiatives. Recently, Luul was made ACT Secretary.



Above: Luul, Zainab and Riyana.

Right: Ali, Luul and their family of seven children.

"I didn't know about the ACT until one of the Tenancy Officers asked me to apply," she said.

"The ACT is wonderful, and I'd like to thank them ... throughout the year we bond as a family. It's about family and values and that's what Housing Choices is all about."

Luul's participation in the ACT has not only involved taking meeting minutes as Secretary, it has also seen her remove barriers for culturally and linguistically diverse peoples by ensuring interpreting systems are available to residents wherever possible and that simple language was used in committee projects.

Luul's passion for growing community connection stems from the tragic loss of her three-year-old brother, Maud, who died in the 2019 Christchurch, New Zealand Mosque terrorist attack. The devastating event became the catalyst for Luul to get more deeply involved in her community.

"I realised that I needed to step up," she said.



"I wanted to be a positive change, because when something happens you can go out there with fear or you can try to change whatever you can - and that's what I've been doing.

"I've been around for 18 years in WA and I was afraid to be out. I was afraid to get outside my house. It's about taking a risk and thinking: 'Hey, we all need to be here, we all need to work together.' And that's what I've done."

She said being an active ACT member was just one of the ways she was trying to make an impact on her local community since her brother's death and that she had also thrown herself into volunteering for a range of other organisations.

"I hope to inspire other tenants to get involved in the ACT. I think I'm the only African or immigrant ACT member in my area and getting those voices heard is vital and important to what the ACT needs," she said.

"Having multicultural advocacy in the ACT is important as it offers a broader range of opportunities and services. We're all different and we all live in different ways but having that voice is the key to changing things.

"I used to be too afraid to even be outside with others and now I'm like: 'I'm here.'"



Update from the Advisory Committee of Tenants

Luul shares what the committee has been working on over the past few months.

At our last meeting, we reviewed the Housing Choices WA Business Unit Plan for the coming year. We all agreed that Housing Choices WA had some exciting projects ahead, but we thought tenants should have more information about what projects Housing Choices WA were working on in order to have more say in our planning. We also gave

feedback on what should be included in a new Tenant Handbook, which Housing Choices WA is developing with tenants. We look forward to seeing the first draft! Lastly, we helped finalise the messaging that has replaced the on-hold music on the Housing Choices WA telephone system.

It has been a great year for the committee and we look forward to what next year brings!

Spring Gardening Competition Winners



We had more than 30 entries that featured an incredibly diverse range of plants and garden styles. Looking through the images of the beautiful flowers, plants and trees, it was clear to see the love so many tenants have for their gardens.

Nine winners were selected, with each winner receiving a \$100 Bunnings voucher. All entrants received a seed packet and personalised letter acknowledging their participation.

We can't wait to see your gardens in Spring 2022!

Indoor Garden / Plants Winner – Junichiro from Cockburn (below)

"I wanted to share that you can still have plants in a small space."



Flower Garden Winner – Jeffrey and Virginita from Kwinana (below)

Jeffrey and Virginita have been in their home for 18 months and have transformed their front yard into a stunning flower garden.



Overall Garden (Metro Region) Winner – Jason from Hilton (above)

"My garden brings me peace and wellbeing. It keeps me going in this troubled world."



Unique Garden Winner – Denise from Hilton (above)

Denise's garden is a creative and fun space, featuring many recycled items.



Balcony Garden Winner – Ronnice from Nollamara (above)

"My garden is my sanctuary. It grounds me and brings peace and joy. A place I can be present and tranquil."

Front Garden Winner

– **John and Cassie** from Bertram (below middle)

“Through COVID-19 I spent more time at home and the garden really does feel like part of a home.”



Overall Garden (South West Region) Winner

– **John** from Bunbury (left)

John is an 86-year-old who has enjoyed dedicating time to his garden over the past decade.

Courtyard Garden Winner

– **Anita** from Melville (below)

“My garden brings joy and sunshine into my life. My garden makes me happy, and I feel proud of what I have accomplished.”



Overall Garden (Peel Region) Winner

– **Anna and Ted** from Baldivis (above)

Anna and Ted work together daily in their garden and feel great joy in watching it grow.

HIGHLY COMMENDABLE GARDENS

- **Feilsa** from Kelmscott for her colourful flower garden
- **Arthur and Diane** from Mundijong for their unique garden featuring an avery and fernery
- **Roslyn** from Kenwick for her beautiful courtyard garden
- **Maria** from Leda for her striking rose garden



Staying Safe This Summer



Are you bushfire ready? Bushfires happen every Summer. They can start suddenly, without warning and can occur in regional and suburban areas.

If your home is threatened by a bushfire, please take yourself and your family to a safe place and let your Tenancy Officer know where you are. If you have been impacted by a bushfire, please contact us. But, in an emergency, remember to call 000.



How Housing Choices WA Can Help

If you notice your gutters are full of leaf litter or there are overhanging branches causing a fire hazard, contact our Maintenance team on 1800 203 383. We will inspect the problem and undertake any necessary works to ensure there is no fire risk.

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services provides detailed information on bushfire risks, fire safety in the home, emergency evacuation planning and total fire bans. For more information, you can call their emergency information hotline on 133 337 or visit their website www.dfes.wa.gov.au/ for fact sheets and other resources.



Quick Tips to Make Your Home Bushfire Ready

- Mow the lawns regularly and remove weeds.
- Rake up leaf litter and twigs and remove shrubs from under large trees.
- If using a barbecue this Summer, make sure it is kept away from flammable materials, you do not leave it unattended and it is turned off after use.



Total Fire Bans

A total fire ban is declared on days when fires are most likely to threaten lives and property and the bans apply to everyone. On Total Fire Ban days, it is illegal to light an open-air fire or conduct any activity that could start a fire. People who breach the ban could receive a fine of up to \$25,000.



Swimming Pools and Ponds

Tenants are reminded that, in the interest of safety, Housing Choices WA does not approve the installation of swimming pools, ponds or water features at any of our properties. This includes temporary, portable and inflatable pools or spas.



Water Bill Discounts

The Water Corporation can provide eligible tenants with a water bill concession.

Even if you live in a strata complex where there are no individual water meters, you may still be eligible for a concession. If you think you are eligible for a concession it is your responsibility to call the Water Corporation and request a concession be applied to your water bill.

For more information, visit the Water Corporation website www.watercorporation.com.au or call **13 13 85**.

Year in Review: Actioning Tenant Feedback



Throughout 2021, Housing Choices WA and the Advisory Committee of Tenants (ACT) has worked hard to respond to tenant feedback. Below is a summary of tenant priorities in 2021 and how we addressed these priorities.

You asked for more ways to get information and provide feedback about our maintenance services.

- The ACT and Housing Choices WA worked together to develop a new online maintenance feedback form, which is available on our website.
- Housing Choices WA ran Maintenance Matters information sessions in Rockingham and Fremantle with input from the ACT. We plan to run more of these sessions in 2022.
- Based on tenant feedback from our Maintenance Matters sessions, Housing Choices WA and the ACT developed a new maintenance services fridge magnet with information about our maintenance response timeframes.

You asked us to improve how we provide information and communicate with you.

- Housing Choices WA implemented an automated phone menu system across our offices to ensure you can get hold of the right department and staff member quickly. We also replaced our on-hold music with up-to-date voices messages about our services as well as information about your rights and responsibilities.
- The ACT reviewed our inspection letters and cleaning check list to ensure they are friendly, clear and informative.
- The ACT provided feedback on what training they think would be beneficial for staff to better communicate and understand tenants. We have incorporated that feedback into our staff training plan for 2022.
- We consulted with tenants and the ACT about how we can improve information in our tenant handbook and the information given to tenants when they sign up with Housing Choices WA.

You asked us to improve how we handle complaints, including how we keep tenants informed and the speed in which complaints are dealt with.

- We developed a new complaints fact sheet to provide more information about our complaints process.
- We began providing reference numbers to tenants who lodged complaints. Reference numbers enable tenants to track how their complaint is progressing.
- We have a newly dedicated staff member to record, assign and track complaints and quicken handling of complaints about staff, contractors and our services.





Home Stories Summer Puzzle

Win a \$50 Bunnings Voucher!

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.

S	U	M	M	E	R	W	Q	F	S	S	B	C	Y	O
W	R	W	Q	S	D	N	E	W	V	A	N	H	I	B
I	Y	I	H	S	V	N	M	S	Q	N	T	R	D	U
M	F	C	L	O	S	U	R	E	U	D	Y	I	S	S
Z	K	L	P	O	U	T	W	F	G	I	O	S	Y	H
X	H	C	B	V	O	F	F	I	C	E	B	T	V	F
R	E	A	D	Y	F	G	H	J	K	H	L	M	N	I
Q	A	W	E	R	T	Y	U	I	O	O	S	A	X	R
K	T	O	I	Y	B	E	A	C	H	L	E	S	Q	E
R	G	V	S	D	R	G	B	C	P	I	T	U	O	I
Z	F	K	L	H	E	A	D	X	U	D	Y	E	A	R
A	B	A	R	B	E	C	U	E	B	A	U	O	P	F
Q	E	F	H	X	F	W	U	X	L	Y	Y	U	N	R
O	P	I	C	N	I	C	Z	S	I	S	Q	D	G	U
W	A	V	E	Z	H	Q	E	R	C	Y	N	N	U	S

FIND THESE WORDS IN THE GRID

- | | | | |
|----------|-------|-----------|--------|
| SUMMER | SWIM | PUBLIC | NEW |
| SUNNY | SURF | HOLIDAYS | YEAR |
| BUSHFIRE | SAND | OFFICE | PICNIC |
| READY | RELAX | CLOSURE | HEAT |
| BARBECUE | BEACH | CHRISTMAS | WAVE |

Tell us the remaining word by emailing info-wa@hcau.org.au or posting it in to us **Home Stories Summer Puzzle, Housing Choices Western Australia, PO Box 105, Burswood WA 6100.**

Also include your full name, address and contact number. The competition **closes Friday 18 February 2022**, with all of the correct entries going into a draw for a \$50 Bunnings voucher. Only one entry per household. Good luck!

Congratulations to Ozkan, last edition's puzzle prize winner.



ILP Pot Painting



Housing Choices WA held a series of pot painting and consultation workshops for Independent Living Program (ILP) tenants in Fremantle, Mandurah and Armadale in the past few months.

Tenants were led in the pot painting workshop by local artist and Housing Choices WA tenant Sharon before taking part in a consultation session to improve the tenancy support planning process.

As a result of the consultation feedback, Housing Choices WA's tenancy support plan will be simplified. Additional thought will be put into how carers are involved and consideration will be made of the impact of inspections on people's mental health.

We look forward to holding similar consultations in combination with art activities in the future.



Perth Metro Office

Level 7, 25 Rowe Avenue
Rivervale WA 6103
PO Box 105
Burswood WA 6100
P (08) 9430 0900

Peel Office

4 Stevenson Street
PO Box 1200
Mandurah WA 6210
P (08) 9534 0400

South West Office

1st Floor, 25 Victoria Street
PO Box 1539
Bunbury WA 6230
P (08) 9722 7200

info-wa@hcau.org.au housingchoices.org.au

Maintenance Hotline: 1800 203 383