

WNEWS

Wentworth Community Housing
Tenant Newsletter

Issue 16 January/February 2013



Message from the Chief Executive Officer

I hope you had an enjoyable and safe festive season and welcome to 2013! 2012 was a big year for Wentworth and we anticipate that 2013 will be equally as eventful.

2013 has started off with a bang already with a visit from the Minister for Family and Community Services, Pru Goward and Member for the Blue Mountains, Roza Sage to our Katoomba branch office on Tuesday 12th February 2013. The visit gave us the opportunity to discuss critical topics with the Minister including the outcomes of the Project 40 program and the implementation of homelessness reform initiatives in the local area. Wentworth were able present the Minister with the results of the Quality of Life survey that indicated 31% of Project 40 participants have entered paid employment, training

or volunteering. Ms Goward said she was delighted to speak with staff and agencies involved with the project.

You will notice a new format for this newsletter – part of our plan to make it more interesting and informative for you. There are lots of tips and reminders as well as updates of what has been happening and what to expect.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *WNews*!



Nick Sabel | Chief Executive Officer

Wentworth Community Housing 2011/12 Annual General Meeting Summary

Wentworth's 2012 Wentworth AGM was held on Friday 7 December at Penrith Panthers, with close to 100 tenants, staff, partners and community members attending. Uncle Wes Marne led with an Acknowledgement of Country, a warming introduction to this year's theme of "Working together – tenant participation".

Whilst we had a number of formalities to go through, a key part of the event was hearing from an 'Expert Tenant Participation Panel' we established for the day. Each panel member shared their stories and then participated in a discussion about what they saw as the most important things to consider when

providing affordable and social housing services to people who need them. Three key points we heard loud and clear were:

- › The need for more community housing that blends in with the community
- › The importance of community footprints, feeling part of the community which leads to community pride, roots, security, ownership and support for all.
- › Keeping communication channels between Wentworth and our tenants open though things like newsletters, Facebook and website, even the basic things like office opening hours and having a person answer the phone

Wentworth would like to thank all members of the Expert Tenant Participation Panel, Uncle Wes and all staff and stakeholders who attended the 2012 AGM. We are looking forward to seeing you all again at the 2013 AGM.



Tenancy tips and reminders

The following is aimed at helping you and us in managing your tenancy. Each of the areas listed are targeted at. Talk to your Client Service Officer (CSO) if you want to know more.

Who is "the tenant"?

The tenant is the person or persons listed on the residential tenancy agreement and with whom Wentworth has a legal arrangement with for the property. The tips and hints below are targeted at 'The Tenant'.

Paying your rent

Rent should be paid in advance. This is part of the lease agreement we have with you. Please contact us if you are having trouble paying your rent so that we can come to some arrangement.

Rent arrears

Some tenants are always in rent arrears. Sometimes this is only a few dollars, but it's enough to be identified on arrears reports and for you to get calls and letters from staff reminding you to pay. This is administratively cumbersome for us and likely frustrating for you! Talk to your CSO about paying off this small amount so that you are always in front.

Also to avoid rental arrears over Christmas, now is a good time to take action. Many tenants think ahead and pay an extra amount of rent each week or fortnight. This means that, when it comes to Christmas, the rent is already or mostly covered (depending on your balance). This is a great way to make sure that you can have a Christmas free of worry.

Rent Reviews

Every six months, you will be contacted via post by our Rent Review team requesting information regarding your income so that a rent review can be conducted. If you don't respond by the due date your rent could be charged at Market Rent. You should also contact us if your circumstances change so that your rent can be adjusted.

Paying for water

You are responsible for paying for the water you use, if your property is individually metered for water and has water efficiency measures installed. We will provide you with quarterly accounts for water usage. Water Usage Accounts and other non-rent charges should be paid within 21 days of receipt of the account. Talk to your CSO about pay a little extra with your rental payments to assist with quarterly water usage bills.

Smoke detectors

It is law in NSW for all new premises and rental properties to be fitted with smoke detectors. We will inspect the smoke detectors in our own properties once a year to make sure they are working. If you are in a property that does not have a smoke alarm or it is not working, please let your CSO or our maintenance line know immediately.

Absence from dwelling

If you will be away from your home for more than six (6) weeks you must advise us in writing. The absence must be approved by us, even if other members of the household remain in the home while you are away. As the tenant, you are responsible for meeting the tenancy obligations, not other people who live with you. You may apply to be away from your home for up to three (3) months, provided there is a valid reason for going away and arrangements have been made for payment of rent and water, and care of the property. Approvals MUST be given in writing by us in advance. There are also rules around what is considered a valid reason.

Client Service Visits

Wentworth has a commitment of (at minimum) annual visits. Your CSO will contact you to make a time to visit you in your home, to talk about any tenancy related issues or concerns you have. These visits generally won't be about maintenance but of course we can report issues on your behalf.

Did you know?



Wentworth has updated much of its written material, including new fact sheets for tenants covering areas such as signing a tenancy agreement, money and debt, and anti-social behaviour. Call **4777 8000** if you would like copies of these fact sheets.

Reporting maintenance

Our dedicated and experienced maintenance line staff are available to take your calls on 4777 8000. After Hours emergency maintenance can be reported to 1300 761 315. We will then either contact our tradespeople or the agent/owner (for a leasehold property) to get the work completed. We will give your contact details to the trades-person or the agent/owner so they can make an appointment with you to do the work. Our tradespeople are bound by the same code of conduct and ethics as our staff. You should expect a professional and respectful service.

Additional occupants

Wentworth respects your right to have visitors stay with you at your property. You are responsible for ensuring that:

- › Members of your household and visitors to their property meet the standard of behaviour required under the Residential Tenancy Agreement,
- › You get approval from Wentworth before new people join the household or visitors stay more than 4 weeks (28 days),
- › If you receive a rent subsidy, the income of all people living in the household (including visitors who are staying more than 28 days) is declared to Wentworth.

Making a complaint

You can lodge a complaint if you are unhappy or dissatisfied with the services you receive from Wentworth. We encourage you to tell us in the first instance what the problem is so that we can try and resolve it quickly. If you are not comfortable talking with us, or you have tried and are still unhappy or

dissatisfied, then you can make a formal complaint in writing by sending a letter or using our complaint form (available at any of our offices). Your complaint will be investigated and you should expect to receive a written response within 28 days.

If you remain unsatisfied with the outcome of your complaint or the way it has been handled, ask us to refer your complaint to our Board of Directors. They will review your complaint and send you a written response within 28 days.

Appealing a decision – If you disagree with a decision made by us, you have the right to lodge an appeal. The decisions that can be appealed are generally made under Wentworth's housing policies, such as rental subsidy assessment, application for housing transfer (rehousing), property modifications relating to medical needs, absence from a dwelling, offers of accommodation. You can appeal a decision by writing a

letter of appeal or completing an Appeal form. (This is called a first tier appeal). Your appeal will be investigated and you will receive a written response within 28 days. If you remain dissatisfied, you can lodge an appeal with the Housing Appeals Committee, called a second tier appeal. The HAC is an independent body who will review your appeal. For more information call **1800 629 794** or visit **www.hac.nsw.gov.au**

Emergency contact details – Unfortunately we have had some recent experiences where we have needed to use emergency contacts, only to find that they are not available or not up to date. Please make sure your details are current by calling **4777 8000**.

Treatment of staff – Did you know that your residential tenancy agreement may be terminated if you threaten, abuse, intimidate or harass staff or contractors?

Message from your Tenant Representative Panel

As tenants, we are very lucky to be part of this particular housing provider. The staff at Wentworth listen to what we have to say, whether it is regarding maintenance, water rates, rent increases, or just an enquiry that a neighbour or family member have raised and the Staff at Wentworth do get the answers for us. Some take longer than others but there is a solution the Tenant Representative Panel (TRP). The TRP meet fairly regularly and discusses issues that are relevant to tenants including trees, removing debris from gutters and community pathways. We are currently working on these areas and a fact sheet will appear with relevant information.

Pets are another area, whether it is a stand alone house or complex. The size of your pet does matter, as do the exercise needs of said pet and your abilities. 27 flying foxes would not be allowed but perhaps more than one fish or gerbil would be.

What about our needs as we get older and frailer? Or our housing needs change as families expand

and decrease? If you have a four or two bedroom property however do not require the space anymore but want to stay in the area with our community and neighbourhood contacts and groups, what should you do? Is there a need for a carer or exercise equipment or wheelchairs and gofers? Are ramps and rails now needed? How long do they take to be completed? If I have to move out who pays the removal costs, including Foxtel/phone/home security/redirections to post office and businesses we have contact with? What happens if I really cannot stand where I am moved to? Who do I complain to?

These are the sort of topics that our Tenant Representative Panel discuss and come to a compatible solution with Wentworth.

If you have an enquiry or problem please do not hesitate to contact me, Susan Lucock, your tenant representative on the NSW Tenant Network on **02 8807 7932** or **blueemu@optusnet.com.au**

Social Housing Tenant Advisory Council (SHTAC) Survey

The SHTAC committee members have developed a survey that is open to all social housing tenants in NSW. It is a great opportunity for tenants of community housing providers to be able to express their views through a short survey consisting of ten questions.

The SHTAC would love to hear Wentworth Community Housing Tenant's thoughts about the committee and issues that are important to them.

The survey will be open until the end of February and can be found at: **surveymonkey.com/s/S9L8W3D**

Please take the time to complete this survey.

Winners for the 2012 Tenant Survey \$50 Gift Vouchers

All tenants sent the 2012 Tenant Survey to complete had the opportunity to win one of eight \$50 Westfield Gift Vouchers. Congratulations to the following winners: **Iffat Tufail; Karl Carey; Karen Carden; Glen Franklin; Julie Berry; Zdenka Marok; Bernadette Faimanifo;** and **Jan Robinson**.

Wentworth also provided two bonus prizes. Congratulations:

- › **Amanda Carvosso** – Framed Manchester United Jersey
- › **Colline Cross** – NAV Man (Satellite Navigation System)

Did you know?



At the end of December 2012, Wentworth was housing 4000 adults and children in 1968 properties. There were 282 new tenancies registered during the year and 87 tenants were transferred between properties.

HEAD OFFICE

Penrith

Address: Borec House, Suite 1002, Level 1
29-57 Station Street, Penrith 2750
PO Box 4303, Penrith 2750

Phone: 02 4777 8000

Fax: 02 4777 8099

Email: admin@wentworth.org.au

Opening hours:

8:30am–4:30pm Monday to Friday

1:00pm–4:30pm Wednesday

BRANCHES

Hawkesbury

Address: 409A George Street, South Windsor
Phone: 02 4777 8000

Opening Hours: 8:30am–4:30pm Monday,
Tuesday, Thursday, Friday (closed Wednesday)

Blue Mountains

Address: Shop 2, 23-27 Cascade Street, Katoomba
Phone: 02 4777 8000

Opening Hours: 9am–4:30pm Monday, Tuesday,
Thursday, Friday (closed Wednesday)

OUT OF HOURS EMERGENCY MAINTENANCE LINE 1300 761 315

Did you know?



Wentworth's Cultural and Spiritual Adviser, Uncle Dallas Dodd, has developed a nine-week program for young men who are involved with the police or NSW Juvenile Justice, and who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The program incorporates Aboriginal culture and spirituality and helps young men connect with the bush.

NSW Government Home Power Savings Program

The NSW Government has introduced a program to help vulnerable households save power and money on their bills. Every eligible household that joins the program gets a free:

- › Home Power assessment by an energy expert
- › Power Savings Kit
- › Personal Power Savings Action Plan

You are eligible for the program if you pay for the utility bills for your property and hold any of the following:

- › Centrelink Pensioner Concession Card
- › Centrelink Low Income Health Care Card

- › Department of Veterans' Affairs Pensioner Concession Card
- › Department of Veterans' Affairs (Gold or White) Repatriation Health Card

This is a great opportunity for you to learn how you can save electricity so you can reduce the cost of your electricity bill and lessen your household's impact on the environment.

To learn more or book a home power assessment you can call **1300 662 416** or visit savepower.nsw.gov.au

Tenant Satisfaction Survey

As you know we conducted our annual tenant survey in November 2012. A total of 545 surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 29%. However, once blank forms were removed, the usable response rate dropped to 26%. This is lower than previous years.

Overall, you reported a fairly high level of satisfaction with Wentworth's housing services, with a combined satisfaction rating of 75%.

You also told us you were also generally satisfied with communications with Wentworth and with planned maintenance work with a 76% combined satisfaction rating for both of these areas.

However, you have told us that we aren't doing so well, average at best, in a number of key business areas like repairs and maintenance (64%), tenant participation (66%) and complaints/appeals handling (47%).

Whilst we think the timing of conducting the survey had an impact (after a restructure and just before Christmas), we accept the finding and thank you for being so honest in your feedback on our performance. We have a lot of work to do to improve what and how we do things and regain your satisfaction and confidence in Wentworth. We are absolutely committed to lifting our game and will make every attempt to do so in 2013 and ongoing – of this you can be assured.