

\$2,000 youth scholarships on offer for 2012

Scholarships of \$2,000 are again being offered by Housing NSW to assist students living in social housing to successfully complete the Higher School Certificate (HSC) or TAFE equivalent.

The one-off payment of \$2,000 must be spent on items related to education, such as books, computer equipment and tuition.

Young people living in social housing (such as public, community or Aboriginal housing), aged under 25 years and studying for the HSC or TAFE equivalent are eligible to apply for these scholarships.

The scholarship will help young people enter higher education and move into a successful, rewarding career.

Applications for the 2012 scholarships open on 20 June 2011 and close on 29 July 2011.

Entry forms and guidelines are available on the Housing NSW website www.housing.nsw.gov.au or at your local Housing NSW office.

The selection process will be completed by the end of November 2011, with the funds available to the school or TAFE college to manage on behalf of the student at the beginning of the 2012 academic year.

New redevelopments boost housing for older people

Six new projects in Abbotsford and Concord, consisting of 90 units for older people at a total cost of \$29 million, were recently completed and handed over to community housing providers Community Housing Limited and St George Community Housing.

The projects, part of the New Direction in Affordable Housing for the Inner West, are a mix of one and two bedroom units with generous living areas and modern finishes.

The properties include a number of units specifically designed for people with a disability and have energy efficient and sustainable features such as roof rainwater harvesting and photovoltaic panels for common area lighting.

Chief Executive's Message

Since the NSW State Election in March this year, two Ministers are now responsible for the Housing portfolio – the Hon. Pru Goward, Minister for Family and Community Services and the Hon. Greg Pearce, Minister for Finance.

I look forward to working with both Ministers to ensure that Housing NSW continues to provide the best possible standard of housing services for tenants across the state.

As part of the change in government, the Department responsible for Housing NSW has changed its name from the Department of Human Services to the Department of Family and Community Services.

Applications are again open for the Housing NSW Youth Scholarship Program.

This program helps young people living in social housing to complete their Higher School Certificate (or TAFE equivalent).

Scholarships provide \$2,000 for students to spend on education-related items such as computers, private tuition or textbooks.

Past recipients have included a student living in a family refuge aiming for a career in the hospitality industry and twin brothers from Sierra Leone.

I encourage tenants aged under 25 years to take advantage of this great opportunity.

With the colder weather upon us, I urge you to follow the fire safety advice in this edition of Your Home to make sure that you and your family are safe over the winter months.

Mike Allen
Chief Executive
Housing NSW

Housing Contact Centre 1300 Housing (1300 468 746) – maintenance requests

All requests for repairs should be reported to the Housing Contact Centre.

When you report your repair, staff will ask you a few questions to see if a work order should be raised straight away or if the repair should be included in future planned work for your property.

The Housing Contact Centre raises orders for repairs that can't wait until your next program of planned work, and will provide you with a timeframe for the work to be undertaken.

Repairs for problems such as torn flyscreens, or minor issues with internal door handles or locks, or kitchen exhaust fans are not considered urgent and may be included in future planned works.

An urgent repair involves the failure of equipment in your home, which will cause a health and safety risk or a security threat such as a gas leak, overflowing toilet or electrical failure. All other repairs are considered non-urgent.

For urgent repairs, the Housing Contact Centre will arrange for a maintenance contractor to visit your home from between four hours to 72 hours, depending on the urgency of the repair.

The Housing Contact Centre sometimes receives calls for maintenance items that are considered the tenant's responsibility such as changing light globes, lost keys, blocked gutters and pest control in a single storey dwelling, as well as mould in wet areas like bathrooms.

Our staff will advise you if the repair is a tenant responsibility as the Housing Contact Centre is unlikely to be able to raise orders for these types of repairs.

The Housing Contact Centre is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and you can call 1300 HOUSING (1300 468 746).

If you are reporting a repair that is not urgent your call may be answered quicker if you call outside of peak times – try calling before 9.00am, between 11.00am – 3.00pm, and after 10.00pm.

Above all, please be patient and remember that we have to be fair to all our tenants. Housing NSW has around 130,000 homes to service and we need to attend the most urgent repairs first.

There may also be times when a contractor is running late.

It may be that there was more work involved at their previous job than expected.

Sometimes this cannot be helped and means that the contractor may be late for other appointments.

Homelessness Plan takes action

The first report card on the NSW Homelessness Action Plan highlights the many achievements made during the plan's first year of implementation including:

- 295 rough sleepers receiving support through two new outreach services
- 569 people leaving care or custody have been supported through housing and support initiatives

- 2,320 people receiving priority assistance to access and/or maintain tenancies
- 40,571 people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness receiving financial and legal services.

In addition, homeless people are being helped through the National Partnership Agreement on Social Housing and the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Program with:

- 2,500 new properties available for homeless people
- 600 more properties specifically for Aboriginal families
- around 40 percent of houses under the Social Housing Growth Fund targeted for homeless people.

Housing NSW is committed to reducing Homelessness across NSW and it's pleasing to see the impact the plan is making during its first year of implementation.

For further information on the Homelessness Action Plan please visit www.housing.nsw.gov.au.

Property transfer expands the community housing sector

The Housing NSW property transfer program will see a further 500 public housing properties transferred to community housing providers before the end of June.

As part of the program, a tenant information forum was held in Woolgoolga, north of Coffs Harbour on 22 February and in Satwell, south of Coffs Harbour, on 1 March 2011.

The properties in these areas will be transferred to community housing provider Community Housing Limited (CHL), which has been managing properties in the Coffs Harbour area for a number of years and provide subsidised, secure, affordable, long-term housing.

At the information forum a current CHL tenant recounted her positive experiences with CHL staff, explaining that they are very helpful and ready to assist tenants.

After the first week of consultations, over 90 percent of tenants in Woolgoolga and 85 percent in Sawtell agreed to the transfer.

Tenants in both locations value the services being delivered by a local community housing provider, further demonstrating the

interest of existing tenants to take up this opportunity within the growing community housing sector.

Housing NSW helps Queensland disaster victims

On 6 February 2011, six Housing NSW staff travelled to Queensland to assist with the disaster recovery effort, following the floods and Tropical Cyclone Yasi.

Staff member Amanda Murray recounts their journey.

On arrival in Brisbane, we were briefed on the current situation then sent to the Cassowary region in Far North Queensland, where the team was split between the recovery centres in the worst hit areas of Cardwell, Tully and Mission Beach.

The devastation in these areas was breathtaking.

There was no mains power or uncontaminated tap water available, making it a very difficult for residents and relief workers.

Our main role was to assess resident's eligibility for immediate emergency grants for food, medicine and other essentials.

We were also responsible for identifying where further assistance could be given in the areas of clothing, structural damage and electricity reconnection for uninsured low-income households.

It was amazing to see how such small communities in this region pulled together in this time of need.

The Cassowary region's community welcomed Housing NSW staff and were willing to share their experiences with us.

They were also quite accepting of this incredible situation and the challenges that faced them as they started to rebuild their homes and livelihoods.

We were privileged to have played a part in the community's recovery and we'll take with us the memories of their experience.

Digital television switchover

Housing NSW is getting its multi-unit apartment blocks ready for the switchover to digital signals in country NSW areas in 2012 and Sydney in 2013.

Six specialist contractors have been selected to inspect TV antennae and cabling systems and carry out upgrading work where required.

Inspections and upgrades started in April 2011 and will continue over the next three years until December 2013.

Tenants living in multi-unit apartment blocks will be notified in writing before any work is carried out at their property.

For freestanding homes and cottages where you have provided your own antennae, you may need to arrange to purchase a new aerial to receive digital television.

A household assistance scheme for eligible tenants in freestanding homes and cottages will be provided by the Digital Taskforce six months before the changeover date.

Centrelink will send out letters to all eligible participants.

For more information on this scheme, please visit

www.digitalready.gov.au or phone 1800 201 013.

Free power savings program

Housing NSW has joined forces with the Office of Environment and Heritage to offer you this free program to help you to become more energy efficient and save money at the same time.

Housing NSW tenants who join the program will receive a free power savings kit worth around \$100 which includes a stand-by saving powerboard to reduce power waste from TVs and DVD players, four energy efficient light bulbs, a shower timer and two door snakes.

The program also provides a free one hour home visit by an energy expert who will point out your top four power users, tell you how much your appliances cost to run and show you how to save energy and reduce your bills.

Cholladda, a Housing NSW tenant from Sydney's Inner West, was one of the first to have a free home power assessment and energy saving kit installed as part of this NSW Government program.

Cholladda and her husband Bill can expect to save at least \$129 a year by using their free energy saving items, and even more by following the advice from the energy expert.

"I joined the program because my electricity bill is becoming very hard to pay and I am interested in anything that can help me reduce my bills," said Cholladda.

"The bill I got after I joined the program was about 20 percent cheaper than the one before and I think I'll save even more on the next one as I am really trying to follow what the energy expert told me.

"I'm very happy with the program.

"It was really good to understand how to save electricity," said Cholladda.

The Home Power Savings Program is managed by the Office of Environment and Heritage and is available until 30 June 2013.

Housing NSW is committed to helping all tenants become more energy efficient.

Over the coming months you will receive a letter inviting you to take part in this free program.

In the meantime, please phone 1300 662 416 if you would like to make a booking for a free home power assessment, or visit www.savepower.nsw.gov.au for more free and low-cost tips to save power around the home.

TENANT NEWS

Community garden – a tasty delight for residents

A group of tenants in small complex in Lismore had a wonderful idea to create a space for a community garden.

Although that doesn't sound too difficult, these residents are older, most in their 70's, many with a disability.

This meant much thought needed to go into the design of the garden beds to allow access for all as well as deciding the types of fruit and vegetables to plant.

All the residents were involved in planning and a wish list of plants was put together.

In January 2010 group member Don Browning set about manually digging the first garden bed with planting beginning in soon after.

Now the garden contains a large variety of fruit and vegetables including beetroot, cabbages, broccoli, zucchini, carrots, tomato, snow peas, beans, spring onion and squash as well as passionfruit vines, berries and paw-paw trees.

The tenants then formed the Avonliegh Garden Committee and entered their first competition winning \$1,000 worth of garden items, allowing them to expand further.

It's amazing what a small group of older residents can achieve.

The garden provides food all year around and provides a place where they can all work together.

Congratulations!

Looking back and remembering 50 years in our homes

Your Home received a wonderful letter from residents Marie Atkinson, Jeanette Skuse and Diana Day remembering their 50 years together living in the same street.

It was Christmas week, after years of waiting for our homes, we finally moved in to our new street in Cabramatta West and we all moved in within days of one another.

We didn't have much furniture and used wooden crates to sit on and put old sheets in the windows.

There were originally 11 homes in the group – only five remain, as big homes surround us now.

We have 46 children between us, who played cricket and football on the road as there weren't many cars.

Christmas morning there wasn't much sleep for anyone as the children were up bright and early riding their second-hand bikes and shouting off the goodies that Santa had left them.

Our husbands used to travel by the old rattle trains all the way to Botany and spend most of their time either working or travelling, so the wives did most of the rearing of the family.

Sadly we have all lost our husbands now but have the joy of being grandmothers and great-grandmothers.

We have always looked after each other and our friendships have grown stronger over the years.

Some of us still do volunteer work in the neighbourhood and for other charities.

We go to the movies and outings and have our morning teas together, and Christmas parties to keep up our laughter.

We have had a lot of ups and downs but still manage to laugh.

We have been blessed with a good life for our 50 years in our homes.

LIFESTYLE - Health tips for your family

How you can keep healthy this winter

From Population Health, Sydney South West Area Health Service

The colder weather often brings more coughs, colds and even the flu.

Older people and those with existing health conditions are more likely to get very sick if they get the flu and may take longer to recover.

Keep healthy this winter by eating well, being active, and following these tips:

- Wash your hands regularly

- Get your flu vaccination before winter starts. Free flu vaccine is available for people over 65 years or for people with chronic disease like heart or lung conditions. Ask your doctor for more information
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze as this stops the spread of germs
- Avoid close contact with sick people
- Stay at home if you are sick and avoid visiting older people and those in hospital who may get very sick if they get the flu
- Keep sick children at home from school and other activities
- Teach your kids to wash their hands and to cover their mouth and nose for coughs and sneezes
- Keep an eye on older neighbours or relatives and give them your number to call if they are sick
- Check that your heaters and electric blankets don't have any damaged electrical cords or broken parts before you use them.

How to be fire safe in winter

Each year Fire and Rescue NSW attends over 4,500 residential fires, with nearly 30 per cent occurring in winter.

As people start to use heaters, electric blankets and cook more at home, the number of fires increases.

Winter is traditionally the most dangerous time of the year for home fires, which can take hold in just minutes, but taking simple fire prevention measures takes only seconds.

Here are some quick, easy steps you can take to reduce the risk of fires in your home.

Fire and Rescue NSW winter fire safety advice:

- Turn off the stove before leaving the kitchen
- Ensure portable heaters are at least one metre away from curtains, clothing, tablecloths and bedding. Switch them off when going to bed
- Consider placing a fire extinguisher and fire blanket in the kitchen
- Make sure power points aren't overloaded
- Put out candles and naked flames before leaving the room

- Clean the lint filter in your clothes dryer each time before use. Synthetic clothes can produce static electricity and the heat generated from the drying process can ignite built-up lint
- Check your smoke alarm and make sure there is a green light visible and a blinking red light. Report any faults or missing detectors to 1300 HOUSING (1300 468 746)
- Practice your escape plan regularly with the whole family
- Keep matches and lighters out of reach of children
- Ensure cigarettes are fully extinguished, especially before going to bed

For more fire tips please visit the Fire and Rescue NSW website on www.fire.nsw.gov.au.

How to teach children to care for pets

Being responsible for an animal's wellbeing helps children develop a healthy respect for all animals.

RSPCA's Dr Robert Stabler offers some great tips and advice.

Choosing the right pet - It's important to match your children's personality with the pet.

Just like us, animals are different from each other and there are many types of personalities even within the same breed.

Talk with your family about what sort of pet best suits your lifestyle and do your research.

Think about whether you have the yard and the time for a dog?

Would a bird be more suitable?

Or what about a pocket pet such as a rabbit or guinea pig?

All these animals have different needs.

Food and water - Having your children check their pet's water supply twice daily teaches them the importance of fresh clean water.

Also, having the correct food for the type of pet and providing a varied diet is vital.

Getting your children involved in the process teaches compassion, responsibility and helps them to value relationships.

Health and wellbeing - Caring for your pet includes providing a weather-proof shelter, toys, playtime and exercise, safety from predators, as well as monitoring their health and wellbeing.

It also includes teaching children how to treat animals in a kind and respectful way.

If possible, draw up a daily and weekly schedule of tasks such as feeding and walking the dog.

Diseases - Scientific research shows children with pets have a better resistance to some diseases as they have a more highly-tuned immune system.

Teach your children to wash their hands after touching animals and again before eating.

Hygiene is also important for our pets so please remove urine and faeces daily and ensure their bedding is cleaned regularly.

Training and handling - Kids can start training animals very early.

All children must be supervised and taught safe animal-handling principles early on which include:

- approach the animal from the side
- face in the same direction as the animal, hold the animal to your side
- keep your face away from the animal's face.

There are lots of lessons that can be learnt by looking after the health and welfare of a pet.

Best wishes with finding the right pet for you and your family, and most of all, have fun.

Safe Beds for Pets program - for animals caught up in domestic violence

The Safe Beds for Pets program was established to provide temporary housing for pets of people who are seeking refuge from domestic violence.

The program gives domestic violence victims peace of mind and allows them to secure their own safety and make arrangements for the future, while their pets are safely cared for.

Recent research has shown that it is common practice for the person behind the domestic violence to lure family members back home by threatening to harm their pet.

With the Safe Beds for Pets Program, families can now leave domestic violence situations and not fear for the safety of their pets.

Please contact your local RSPCA office for further information.

Keep children safe near windows

Every child is precious.

Several recent incidents of children falling out of windows have highlighted how quickly kids can get themselves into dangerous situations.

Here are some simple tips to keep them safe near windows:

- Keep unopened windows locked – kids can sometimes wriggle through an opening of just centimetres
- Fit window latches and locks to stop windows opening more than 10cm
- Don't rely on fly screens to prevent a child from falling out of a window
- Teach children to play away from windows
- Move furniture away from windows and tie drapery cords at the top of windows to stop children from climbing up

As situations can happen very quickly it's wise to always supervise children near windows to help keep them safe.

YOUR PAGES

Green thumb clinic: Gardening can bring health benefits

Gardening is a unique form of exercise that allows you to do something calming, creative and fun while you work various muscle groups and get a moderate level of exercise.

We certainly feel like we've put in a good day's work after gardening for hours on end, and according to the University of Virginia, gardening rates up there with other moderate forms of exercise, like walking and bicycling.

It depends on what gardening task you are doing and for how long.

What makes gardening good exercise?

While gardening, you are using major muscle groups such as your legs, buttocks, arms, shoulders, neck, back and abdomen.

Gardening tasks that use these muscles build strength and burn calories.

Besides the effort involved, gardening has other benefits that make it a good form of exercise and calorie burning.

There can be a great deal of stretching involved, like reaching for weeds or tall branches, bending to plant and extending a rake.

Lifting bags of mulch, pushing wheelbarrows and shovelling all provide resistance training similar to weightlifting, which leads to healthier bones and joints.

Yet while doing all this, there is minimal jarring and stress on the body, unlike aerobics or jogging.

Research is showing that gardening for just 30 minutes daily will help:

- increase flexibility
- strengthen joints
- decrease blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- lower your risk for diabetes
- slow osteoporosis.

According to Virginia Tech university, there are many beneficial emotional effects of working with plants and flowers such as feeling less stressed, pain relief, enhanced self-esteem, improved mood and feelings of accomplishment.

So why not get out and enjoy your garden today and reap the health benefits!

Have your say

If you would like to share your handy tips or recipes, email yourhome@dhs.nsw.gov.au, fax 8753 8196, or write to us at:

Your Home

Media and Communications, Housing NSW

Locked Bag 4001, Ashfield BC 1800

Please include your full name, address and telephone number.

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KIDS' CORNER

Spot the difference competition

Congratulations to 8-year-old Sumaya Hagra from Belfield, who is the winner of the connect the dots competition.

In this edition we have a spot the difference competition with six changes in the bottom image.

Circle all six changes to go into the draw to win a \$25 voucher.

Send your entries to:

Kids' Corner

Media and Communications, Housing NSW

Locked Bag 4001, Ashfield BC 1800

Don't forget to include your name, age, address and telephone number so that we can contact you.

Handy hints

Mrs Goodyear from Bligh Park has a clever way to get rid of small ants in the kitchen.

Use a pastry brush to paint cooking oil around the wall joints and on the bottom of tiles where the ants are.

The ants get stuck in the oil and you can wipe them away.

Lorraine has emailed in a handy hint to keep your garbage bag liner from falling in the tidy bin; tie a piece of elastic around the bin.

Congratulations Mrs Goodyear, you have won a \$25 voucher.

TENANT INFORMATION

Free online IT training tools for job-seekers launched

A new free online training program to help migrant and refugee job-seekers learn how to use common software and gain the basic IT skills that are needed to find work, has been launched.

The free online training include IT skills, English language lessons, and information for recently arrived residents about living in Australia, including how to access Housing NSW and Centrelink Online services.

The online training will be available from June this year at www.isettlewithit.com.

While these tools are aimed at migrants and refugees, they can be accessed by anyone who wants to learn IT skills from their home and at their own pace.

The great thing about the IT training is that at the end of it, you can choose to take the online assessment which will give you a nationally recognised Statement of Attainment in units from a Certificate in Information Technology.

The program, called 'i.settle.with.IT!' has been developed by not-for-profit organisation WorkVentures, with support from Microsoft Australia.

Check out these free online learning tools at www.isettlewithit.com, or visit the WorkVentures website at www.workventures.com.au.

School for Social Entrepreneurs Australia

The School for Social Entrepreneurs Australia (SSE) is a non-profit venture that runs a nine month learning program to give students the personal and business support they need to be more effective in their ventures.

Unlike a traditional school, SSE is based on a 'learning by doing' approach. Students gain practical business and life skills that they can apply directly to their ventures.

Some social housing tenants may qualify for a bursary to cover the full cost of the program if their business idea benefits social housing communities.

The learning programs are run twice each year.

If you're interested in finding out more, please contact Janine at SSE on 9687 0346 or sydney@sse.org.au or visit www.sse.org.au.

YOUR CONTACTS

New hours for Client Feedback Line

The Client Feedback Line, which gives tenants the opportunity to provide feedback on Housing NSW services, was receiving very few calls outside of regular business hours.

As a result, the Client Feedback Line will be open Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm.

Our 1300 HOUSING (1300 468 746) line is still open on a 24-hour basis to cover emergencies and other services.

1300 HOUSING (1300 468 746) for:

- Maintenance (24 hours, 7 days)
- General enquiries (24 hours, 7 days)
- Home Purchase Advisory Service (24 hours, 7 days)
- Feedback – suggestions, compliments and complaints (Monday to Friday, 8.30 am – 4.30 pm) or
 - fax 9612 6099
 - email feedback@dhs.nsw.gov.au
 - post PO Box 7150, Liverpool BC, NSW 1871
- Rentstart (Monday to Friday, 8.00 am – 6.00 pm and Saturday, 10.00 am – 3.00 pm)
- Mortgage Assistance (Monday to Friday, 8.30 am – 4.30 pm)

- Reports of fraud or corruption (Monday to Friday, 8.30 am – 4.30 pm)

Note: If you are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, you can request to speak to an Aboriginal staff member (Monday to Friday, 8.30 am – 4.30 pm).

Housing Appeals Committee:

An independent appeal system for public housing clients 1800 629 794 (Monday to Friday 8.30 am – 4.30 pm) fax 9715 7966

www.hac.nsw.gov.au

Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS):

131 450 (you can call TIS if you need help understanding English, and they will phone Housing NSW for you at no cost)

Website:

www.housing.nsw.gov.au

Your Home is translated into five community languages (Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese and Arabic) and is available in accessible versions (large print and audio) on the Housing NSW website.

To order a CD of *Your Home*, call 1300 HOUSING (1300 468 746) or email feedback@dhs.nsw.gov.au.

Tenant Participation Resource Services (TPRS):

Central Sydney North TPRS

Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development
Inc.

Contact David White on 9698 6558

Central Sydney South TPRS

Riverwood Community Centre

Contact Sandra Russell on 9584 8473

Hunter Central Coast TPRS

Samaritans Foundation

Contact Bronwyn McIntosh on (toll-free) 1800 786 466

Illawarra & South East TPRS

Illawarra Forum Inc.

Contact Jill Coleman on (toll-free) 1300 559 557

North Coast New England TPRS

Northern Links NSW Incorporated

Contact Wendy LeBlanc on (toll-free) 1800 088 592 or
6771 3236

South West Sydney TPRS

South Western Regional Tenants Association

Contact Janet Davies on 9821 1700

Western Sydney TPRS

Western Sydney Regional Public Tenants Council Inc.

Contact Jean Cinis on 9676 5200

Riverina Murray TPRS

Intereach

Contact Howard Hillam on (toll-free) 1300 488 226

Western NSW TPRS

Centacare Wilcannia – Forbes

Contact Susan Wilson on (toll-free) 1300 488 076

Making payments has never been easier!

You can now pay your Housing NSW accounts (rent, water, repairs, former debt) using BPAY or the internet 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Internet:

Make your payments via the internet using a secure online page.

Visit www.housing.nsw.gov.au and you will be linked to a secure site to make your transaction.

You will need your rent payment reference number (PRN) for all payments

BPAY:

To use BPAY, first contact your financial institution.

Give your bank the Housing NSW Biller Code (334292) and the relevant payment reference number (PRN) found on your quarterly statement (ie. rent, water etc) and choose what you want to pay from which accounts.

In person:

You can pay accounts in person at any Australia Post Office with your Rent Payment Card.

You can pay by cash or EFTPOS.

Rent Deduction Scheme (RDS):

If you receive an income from Centrelink, you can have your Housing NSW payments automatically deducted from your pension/allowance.

The scheme is voluntary and completely free and you can withdraw from the scheme at any time.

Simply complete an Authority for Rent Deduction form available at your local Housing NSW office.

If you need assistance with any of these payment methods, please phone 1300 HOUSING (1300 468 746).

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Editor, Your Home

Housing NSW

Locked Bag 4001, Ashfield BC 1800

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