



Your Home issue 63 March 2013

Your Home is a quarterly magazine published by the Department of Family and Community Services and distributed to Housing NSW tenants.

We welcome your feedback and encourage you to share your handy tips and recipes.

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Your Home

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Amnesty 2013 on unauthorised additional people living in public housing

Do you have extra people living in your home that Housing NSW is not aware of? If someone lives in your home for longer than 28 days, you need to declare them and obtain approval for them to live in your public housing property.

Housing NSW is currently holding an amnesty to encourage tenants to declare unauthorised additional people living in public housing properties without risk of penalty, like having to pay back rent or eviction. This commenced on 21 January 2013 and will run until 17 March 2013.

If you declare additional occupants during the amnesty you will not be charged back rent or face eviction or prosecution for any unauthorised additional occupants you may have living with you.

If you know someone who has extra people living with them in a public housing

property, you can also make an anonymous report to Housing NSW.

To report or declare additional unauthorised occupants living in public housing you can:

- phone 1300 468 746
- submit details online at www.housing.nsw.gov.au
- email amnesty2013@fac.s.nsw.gov.au
- fax 02 8753 9877

Housing NSW will assess all declarations to make sure the additional occupant/s should be allowed to stay living in public housing and rental payments will be reassessed to take into consideration the new household income.

The amnesty applies only to tenants of public housing or Aboriginal Housing Office properties. It does not apply to properties owned or managed by registered community housing providers.

Minister's Message

Public housing allows eligible people access to safe and secure homes. However, as I'm sure you know, the number of properties available is limited. To ensure public housing is available to those most in need, and that the system is as fair as possible, there are rules around who a tenant can have living with them.

With that in mind, I have recently initiated an amnesty to encourage tenants to declare unauthorised people living with them in their public housing property.

Public housing rent is calculated as a proportion of the total income of a household. If Housing NSW doesn't know the number of people living in a property, tenants may not be paying the right amount of rent.

It is only fair that the rent paid by tenants takes into consideration the income of every occupant in the house.

The amnesty gives tenants who are doing the wrong thing an opportunity to do the right thing and tell Housing NSW about any additional occupants without the risk of penalty, like having to pay a large amount of back rent. Tenants can declare up until 17 March.

If you are found to have unauthorised people living with you after the amnesty has ended you may be prosecuted, have your rent subsidy removed or reduced and have a debt to repay. You could even be evicted.

To avoid all this, I encourage you to contact Housing NSW as soon as possible.

For details on how to declare or report unauthorised additional occupants, please see the article on page one or visit the Housing NSW website www.housing.nsw.gov.au.

I am committed to making the public housing system as fair, transparent and efficient as possible and Housing NSW needs your help to make the system better and fairer for everyone.

Pru Goward MP

Minister for Family and Community Services, Minister for Women

Helping you pay your rent on time – the Rent Deduction Scheme

It is very important that you stay up-to-date with your rent payments to avoid falling into arrears and be at risk of losing your home.

One of the easiest and most stress-free ways to stay on top of your payments is to join the Centrelink Rent Deduction Scheme (RDS).

The RDS allows you to automatically pay your rent, arrears, water usage and other tenancy charges from your Centrelink pension, benefit or allowance.

The benefits of using the RDS:

- saves you a trip to the post office to pay rent or other tenancy charges
- gives you peace of mind that your rent is already paid when you receive your Centrelink or Family Assistance Office payment
- any household member who receives a Centrelink or Family Assistance Office payment can also contribute to payments.

For more information on the RDS please speak with your client service team.

eRepair online service

Tenants across NSW have embraced the new eRepair service with over 4,000 online requests received since its launch in June 2012. Feedback about the new system is that it is very quick and easy to use.

One tenant wrote, “I have hearing problems and couldn’t use the phone, but I can now access eRepair through the computers at the local library. What surprised me the most was the speed at which things were fixed. The taps in the kitchen were seen to by

workmen a few hours after using eRepair and the front light was repaired two days later. Excellent job, Housing NSW gets a score of 12 out of 10 – thank you for going electronic.”

You can lodge your non-urgent requests online with eRepair 24 hours a day, seven days a week at www.housing.nsw.gov.au. We have included an eRepair magnet for your fridge in this edition of Your Home.

Tenant social clubs

Tenant social clubs create a safe and supportive place for people to come together and take part in community-based activities, and that is exactly what the members of the recently formed East Maitland Social Club do.

The social club was formed by a group of Housing NSW tenants from the East Maitland area and surrounds who found that many people do not have family or friends locally, and don't have opportunities to be actively involved in their community. The East Maitland Social Club, like other tenant social clubs across NSW helps bring people together.

As Housing NSW tenant Jude Oliver, says, “We wanted to make our community a better place by giving people an activity that would allow them to make friends and bring the community closer.”

“We started by putting a flyer together and placing these in letterboxes,” Jude explains, “and people came to see what it was about.”

With a calendar of activities ranging from bonsai lessons, a lending library of books and magazines, movie viewings, art classes, basic computer skill classes and social trips to Sydney markets and gardens, the East Maitland Social Club aims to have something for everyone.

“The social club has worked for us,” says Jude, “and I encourage anyone who wants to start a group in their area to give it a go.”

If you would like to form your own social club, why not start by getting some fellow tenants together and talking about the sorts of things you could do as a group; you'll be surprised how quickly ideas grow and people get involved. If you live in the East Maitland area or surrounds and would like to join the East Maitland Social Club, please call Judy Williams on 4936 6665.

Healthy lunchbox tips

By Belinda Crawford, Population Health, Sydney and South Western Sydney Local Health Districts

Now that school has returned it's good to think about some healthy choices for kid's snacks and lunches, to help them stay alert, focused and active through the day.

Unfortunately our busy lifestyles mean that we sometimes turn to convenience foods like chocolates, biscuits bars and chips, which are high in fat, salt and calories.

Packing a healthy lunch doesn't have to be time consuming but does take a little preparation! Here are some simple ideas:

Throw in some crunchy vegetables and fresh fruit. Carrot sticks and cucumber are easy to pack and can be snacks or used in sandwiches. Fruit is delicious fresh or canned.

Include a mix of foods with grains like bread, pasta, rice and potatoes.

Try some lean, protein-rich foods like tinned tuna, baked beans, boiled eggs or sliced meat. Some schools may be nut free due to allergies – check with your child's teacher.

Add some dairy products like reduced fat milk, yoghurt or cheese sticks. Avoid dairy desserts like chocolate pudding and flavoured milks as they are high in sugar.

For healthy snacks try rice cakes, dried fruit and unsalted popcorn. Avoid muesli bars as they are expensive and full of sugar.

Remember to give your child lots of water! Avoid sweet drinks like fruit juice or soft drinks as they are high in sugar and can increase the risk of tooth decay.

Canterbury Council garden competition

As told by tenant Matt Hay

I have been a public housing tenant for nine years in a second floor unit in Riverwood, Sydney.

Two years ago Housing NSW installed a fence around our block which has allowed us to grow secure gardens.

My downstairs neighbour Greta and I have been building a garden for the past 18 months. Last September we entered the Canterbury Council's Annual Spring Garden competition and were very surprised and happy to win first prize in the 'Flat/Villa/Townhouse or Balcony' section. We were also really pleased that our neighbour Albert won third prize.

Not only do we take great joy in growing our own flowers and produce but the garden has helped increase the harmony in our community too. We now hold our regular tenants' meetings under the pergola, I've built raised beds so older residents can have access and we've also received a grant to put in a bike shed which is now full of bikes. So if you are interested in building your own community garden please contact the Community Greening Coordinator at the Royal Botanic Gardens Trust on 9231 8363.