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Message from Executive Director

Ms Maureen Sheehan

Dear Tenants

Welcome to the summer edition of *Home Front* a newsletter to let you know about matters of interest to you as tenants of Housing ACT.

I hope you have had a happy and peaceful time over the holiday period and have caught up with relatives and friends or just enjoyed a rest. This edition has information about the year ahead and what will be happening in Housing ACT to improve our services to you.

First, Housing ACT will continue to build new 'age friendly' homes this year under the Housing Choice for Older Public Housing Tenants program. This will help senior tenants to 'age in place' by moving into new homes while remaining in their local area close to shops and services they use. We have also started Helping Our Senior Tenants (HOST) program where housing managers will visit senior tenants to discuss and assess their particular needs, future housing requirements and any other help or assistance they may need.

There is also information about the operation of the new Social Housing Register, which was introduced in September last year to enable Housing ACT to better manage the application process for both public and community housing applicants. It also gives applicants more housing choices and a greater opportunity to be housed in either public or community housing.

To help us to deliver better services to you we are seeking your comments, ideas and suggestions for the new contract for the delivery of maintenance services which will start from 1 July 2012. Your help will assist us tell the future maintenance service provider what services and assistance you need.

I hope we can all work together over the coming year to support our Canberra community and assist the team at Housing ACT provide necessary services to the people of Canberra.

Executive Director
Housing and Community Services

Joint Champions Group ignores the rain for end of year function

The Joint Champions Tenants Group braved a rainy day at Glebe Park to celebrate at their end of year function and chat with the Minister and the team at Housing ACT.

By all accounts the function was successful despite the rain and members of the group enjoyed the lunch and the chance to discuss matters of interest and tell a few jokes or stories about their lives.

The Joint Champions Group have provided invaluable assistance to the team at Housing ACT providing input into developing new policies and procedures etc. If you are interested in joining the Joint Champions Group applications for members will be sought in May 2011.

New rehabilitation policy for respite care

Changes to Housing ACT Rehabilitation Policy — assistance for tenants in respite care services

The Chief Executive recently approved changes to the 'rehabilitation' policy.

What does the change deliver?

Housing ACT tenants who receive respite care within a recognised residential program or service will now receive the same income exemptions and benefits provided to people in residential rehabilitation programs for mental health, alcohol or other drugs of dependence, or gambling addiction. These changes recognise the additional financial burden many tenants face when they access these important services.

When did the change come into effect?

Changes to the policy became effective from 21 December 2010 and has the effect of exempting the income of the tenant or non tenant resident while they are in respite care.

For this exemption, a period of respite care of three days or more but not exceeding seven days shall be treated as one week; the exemption for respite care is limited to 28 days in any financial year.

How to apply.

Contact your housing manager and advise them of details of the program. You should obtain written confirmation from the recognised residential program or service confirming your attendance at the program and the inclusive dates.

A new choice for older public housing tenants

Older tenants are now moving into new two bedrooms, six star energy rated homes that have been constructed across Canberra.

Further older persons units will be completed and allocated this year. More than 421 new homes are being built with the help of the Commonwealth Government's Nation Building and Jobs Plan funding.

This is freeing up larger dwellings for allocation to tenants seeking larger homes or families on the High Priority Waiting List.

In the next issue we will see if we can obtain comments and feedback from the older persons who have moved into their new units.

Kids Section

Competition for kids

Win a family pass for your family to the Royal Canberra Show. We are running a drawing competition and a writing competition for children of Housing ACT tenants.

The competition is to draw or write a story (or both) about what you would like to see or do at the Canberra Show.

The winners of different age groups will receive free family passes to the show.

Please include your full name, address and telephone number and a parents or guardians permission to enter.

Send your entries addressed to:

Home Front
Business Development
Housing ACT
Locked Bag 3000
Belconnen ACT 2616

or drop it in to our office at:

Nature Conservation House
Cnr Emu Bank and Benjamin Way, Belconnen

Entries close

15 February 2011

ACT Nation Building and Jobs Stimulus Package

As part of the Commonwealth Government's Nation Building and Jobs Plan, the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services has been provided with more than \$87 million to construct new social housing dwellings (public and community housing).

The ACT was the first state or territory to meet its construction target under the National Partnership Agreement for Social Housing for construction of dwellings as at 30 September 2010.

We have been busy!

It is back to school time! — just a reminder school starts on:

7 February if you are a new student

8 February for all students.

ACT School term dates for 2011:

Term 1:

Friday 4 February to Friday 15 April

Please note: Staff commence Friday 4 February; new students commence Monday 7 February; classes for all students commence: Tuesday 8 February

Term 2:

Monday 2 May to Friday 8 July

Term 3:

Monday 25 July to Friday 30 September

Term 4:

Monday 17 October to

Wednesday 21 December

Let's celebrate upcoming events

It's on again — Royal Canberra Show

26 – 28 February 2011

Skyfire

Saturday 19th March 2011

Come to the National Multicultural Festival

- Try food from different countries
- Enjoy dances from other nations
- Learn about other cultures
- You are sure to have a good time

Signature events

Food and Dance Spectacular

12 February | 11am to midnight

Garema Place | Petrie Plaza | Akuna St

Share the tastes, sounds and traditions of an array of cultures at this iconic festival event. Some 100 food stalls and the sounds of the planet, presented on three stages and two performance arts zones.

Europe Street

Saturday 12 February | Ainslie Avenue

Eighteen Member States and the European Union Delegation will form Europe Street at the Festival

Pacific Island Showcase

Saturday 12 February | 11am–4pm

Akuna Street Stage

Featuring live performers from Samoa, Tonga, Aotearoa, Niue, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Fiji.

Carnival in the City

Saturday 12 February | 4pm–midnight

Garema Place

A celebration of Latin song and dance explodes into Garema Place the evening of the Food and Dance Spectacular.

Have your say! — Total Facilities Management Tender

The current total facilities management contract with Spotless expires on 30 June 2012.

To ensure there is a smooth transition to the new contract, Housing and Community Services has already begun the procurement process for services to be delivered from 1 July 2012.

Advertisements in major newspapers commenced on 10 December 2010 seeking expressions of interest from suitable companies to supply total facilities management services to Housing and Community Services properties.

Although HACS has sought input from the Joint Champions Group as your representatives and advocates, Housing and Community Services welcomes all feedback to consider for the contract.

I would like to encourage you to forward your comments or input to Ms Gemma Davis,
Locked Bag 3000
Belconnen ACT 2616
or email gemma.davis@act.gov.au so that all ideas and suggestions can be considered.

Your input will provide invaluable assistance to Housing and Community Services in developing the new contract and improve overall delivery of high quality maintenance services to the public housing community.

What to do if you need Housing ACT maintenance help

Housing maintenance enquiries

For Housing ACT Maintenance needs, including:

- requests for work
- updates on existing work requests
- maintenance complaints

Please call 6207 1500 (24 hours, 7 days a week).

Your call will be answered by a client service professional, who will:

- discuss your issue
- ascertain the requirements
- determine a priority

- provide you with a work order number or status update
- arrange for your request to be actioned.

If after the above has occurred and the issue is not resolved to your satisfaction please advise Spotless of the problem on 6207 1500.

Where you are still unable to achieve a satisfactory outcome after advising Spotless of the issue and given them time to resolve the matter, please call:

- The Housing ACT Complaints Management Unit on 6207 1515 during business hours.

All tenancy and non-maintenance enquiries

For non-maintenance needs, including:

- tenancy matters
- where Housing ACT properties appear abandoned
- where you want to install a non standard item
- where you request to modify a property
- where you require disability modifications etc.

Please call your housing manager direct.

Alternatively, if you do not know their number, you can receive assistance by phoning 13 34 27.

Sale to Tenant Shared Equity Scheme

The Shared Equity Scheme is an alternative home purchase opportunity for public housing tenants.

The scheme began operating in May 2010 and has been made possible through a partnership between Housing ACT and IMB Limited.

The scheme provides for eligible head tenants to purchase 70% of their Housing ACT property upfront, with IMB providing the finance. The remaining 30% equity of the property remains with Housing ACT. The purchaser agrees to progressively purchase this equity from Housing ACT over a maximum 15 year period.

To receive further information contact Ms Rosemary Higgins, Housing ACT 6207 4529.

Bushfire season — PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

Summer brings the bushfire season to Canberra and it is important now for all of us to be prepared and think ahead about what to do in case of a bushfire.

We all need to familiarise ourselves with fire danger ratings and bushfire warnings — information is available from ACT Emergency Services Agency or Canberra Connect.

The most important tool for surviving a bushfire in your suburb is to know what to do ahead of time.

The ACT Emergency Services Agency strongly recommends all Canberra households prepare a Bushfire Survival Plan to make sure everyone is prepared.

Prepare a Bushfire Survival Plan: It's time to:

- be aware of the daily fire danger rating and be alert for signs of fire
- decide whether to leave early or stay. (Advice from the ACT Emergency Services Agency is that leaving is

always the safest option)

- prepare a bushfire survival plan and have a bushfire emergency kit. (You can get brochures and guides from ACT Emergency Services Agency or Canberra Connect)
- make sure gutters and yards are cleared of fallen leaves or excess vegetation to reduce fuel and other hazards outside our homes
- for those tenants whose homes are flats or units, please ensure public hallways, stairways or other common areas are clear — report any problems to your housing manager

Fire services throughout Australia produce a Fire Danger Rating (FDR) for each day during the bushfire season. This rating is based on how fire is expected to behave if one should start on any given day. The FDR is represented by the different words and colours that appear on the fire danger meter — see right.

The FDR is determined by the Fire Danger Index (FDI) and is a combination of air temperature, relative humidity, wind speed and drought conditions. The FDI is represented by the numbers in the black band across the top of the meter.

The relationship between the FDR and FDI are also represented in the fire danger meter. The higher the FDI, the higher the FDR and the more Prepared and Active you need to be.

The FDR and the FDI are published daily on the ACT Emergency Services Agency website www.esa.act.gov.au.

The website also provides further information about interpreting the fire danger meter and associated warnings. The FDR and FDI are also provided daily to the ACT local media outlets for broadcast and publication.

The ACT Emergency Services Agency fire danger ratings information is divided into six levels:

- Level 1 Low/moderate
- Level 2 High
- Level 3 Very high
- Level 4 Severe
- Level 5 Extreme
- Level 6 Catastrophic (code red).

Looking after grassed areas of unit complexes

It is very important in view of the bushfire season that common and grassed areas of Housing ACT Complexes are adequately maintained.

In the last newsletter we advised that the ACT has been enjoying above average rainfall over the past few months and combined with the warmer weather it was important to reduce fuel loads, hazards and grass around your homes.

As you are aware, Spotless maintain common areas and grassed areas at Housing ACT Complexes. Of late, it is becoming extremely difficult to service the grassed areas at some complexes due to motor vehicles being parked on these grassed areas.

This obviously complicates access for mowing machinery and delays our ability to complete works. We ask you to assist us in servicing these areas by not parking on these grassed areas to enable the completion of grass mowing and other maintenance activities.

Motor vehicles should not be driven or parked on any area at a complex other than on defined roads and nominated parking areas.

So please help – and advise any of your visitors of the need to keep off these areas.

Do you need a job? Employment opportunities at Spotless

Applicants are wanted for a variety of roles.

As the current Total Facility Management provider for Housing ACT Spotless along with our subcontractors, strive to deliver a high quality of service to all Housing ACT tenants.

Spotless is currently looking at opportunities to expand its work force and that of our subcontractors. A variety of roles including apprenticeships, traineeships and general labour based roles could require filling.

These roles are potentially available in a number of trade industries including:

- carpentry
- electrical
- cleaning
- horticulture
- office administration
- carpet laying

Spotless prides itself on providing a safe workplace and this philosophy is mirrored by all our sub contractors. Full induction and OHS training will be provided.

If you would like to register your interest please contact Kelly Reeves on 6290 4715 or kelly.reeves@spotless.com.au to discuss.

Handy tips or recipes? Send them to Home Front

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

Home front
Business Development
Housing ACT
Locked Bag 3000
Belconnen ACT 2616

Please include your full name, address and telephone number.

Note: Inclusion in the newsletter does not imply endorsement of any group, product or service. Housing ACT accepts no liability for losses of any nature resulting from the use of information contained in these articles.

Healthy beautiful gardens

If you want to ensure that your garden is healthy and sustainable, don't worry — free, expert advice is on hand thanks to the ACT Government's GardenSmart program.

A qualified horticulturist will visit your home, assess your garden, then demonstrate practical ways you can use less water in the garden. The horticulturist will advise you on how to make your garden more water-efficient through clever plant choice and garden design, and give you practical maintenance and watering advice.

What's more, after the visit participants are able to apply for a rebate to a maximum of \$50 for the purchase of approved water-saving products.

Other initiatives that can help people make the most of their gardens include the Canberra Plant Selector and WaterRight Gardens tool. These tools and further information on GardenSmart can be found at www.actsmart.act.gov.au, or by calling Canberra Connect on 13 22 81.

Summer safety checklist from ActewAGL

To help you stay safe when using electricity and natural gas, ActewAGL has compiled this summer safety checklist for inside and outside your home.

Home safety checks

- Clean fans by removing any dust or dirt.
- Check that there is clear access to water, gas and electricity meters and infrastructure.
- When planning summer projects in the yard like building a deck, pergola, shed or landscaping, call Dial Before You Dig on 1100 or go to 1100.com.au to find out what services are on your block.
- Trim trees so they are at least 1.5 metres clear of powerlines.
- In the event of an emergency, such as a gas leak or bushfire, leave the area and turn off the natural gas supply at the meter.

Decorative lights safety checks

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Check old lights for fraying cords and broken sockets.
- Only use lights that have an Australian Standard or approval mark.
- Check that lights are suitable for outdoor use and have weatherproof connections.
- Never install lights near a pool or spa.

For more electrical and natural gas safety tips go to actewagl.com.au/safety

Recipe Corner

Sweet Impossible Pie

Submitted by Helen Merritt member of the Joint Champions Group

Ingredients

4 eggs

1 cup coconut

2 teaspoons vanilla

1 cup sugar

¼ cup butter or margarine

½ cup plain flour

2 cups milk

Method

Blend all ingredients together.

Pour mixture into a 25cm greased pie plate. (I actually make this in a small casserole and especially liked using a glass one, so you can see the different layers!)

Bake in moderate oven for approx 20 minutes (depending on oven) until it goes golden on top

The flour settles to form a crust, the centre is an egg custard and the coconut forms a topping.

Serve warm with cream or icecream — delicious!

Thanks Helen — we have tried it and it is absolutely delicious.

Contact details

Housing ACT General Enquiries

Phone 13 34 27

www.dhcs.act.gov.au

Spotless Maintenance line

Phone 6207 1500 (24 hours, 7 days)

Housing ACT Complaints Unit

Phone 6207 1515

Joint Champions Group

Secretariat

Phone 6207 1507

A note from a member of Joint Champions Group

2010 was a busy and productive year for JCG. One of the highlights was the launch of the new Tenants' Handbook, a concise, easy to read and practical publication for all tenants. The publication clearly indicates the wonderful working relationship which has developed between Housing ACT staff and tenant members of JCG. It is important that tenants work closely with Housing ACT to identify matters which may be of concern to either tenants or Housing ACT and which may have a broad impact across many tenancies.

The other major discussions revolved around the establishment of new older persons' units and consultation by Housing ACT with the JCG Working Group, Supporting Older Persons, was extensive, resulting in some very good outcomes. My involvement with JCG has been very satisfying and I have found it enlightening to work with a diverse group of tenants as well as working constructively with staff from Housing ACT. It is certainly a forum which has developed a feeling of camaraderie and is open and honest in all interactions and discussions.

I certainly hope that it will remain an integral and ongoing forum for tenants in 2011 and for many years to come.

Helen Merritt (JCG Member)

Social Housing Register — a common waiting list for housing

A centralised waiting list for public and community housing was introduced in September 2010. There is now a single entry point for people applying to enter the social housing system.

People seeking public and community housing only have to fill out one form and engage in one assessment process to be registered for multiple housing providers.

The Social Housing Register is making it a simpler and fairer way to access housing assistance, provide greater housing choice and present a clearer understanding of housing demand. This is creating a more efficient and responsive social housing system.

Accessibility

ACT Government is committed to making information, services, events and venues, accessible to as many people as possible.

If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like to receive this publication in an alternative format — such as large print or audio — please telephone 6205 0619.

If English is not your first language and you require the translating and interpreting service — please telephone 13 14 50.

If you are deaf or hearing impaired and require the TTY typewriter service — please telephone 6205 0888.

ACT Interpreter Service — for the deaf and blind — please telephone 6287 4391.