

# BRIDGE HOUSING newsletter

nov 09

## What's New from the Executive Officer

2008-2009 has been a busy period for Bridge Housing Limited and is a testament to the growing strength of the organisation which is emerging as one of the major housing providers in the Sydney metropolitan region.

We have doubled in size through absorbing the operations of Burwood Area Community Housing and merging with the Eastern Suburbs Rental Housing Association in April 2009. We now manage 1182 properties. I would like to welcome all the new tenants from BACH and ESRHA who have joined Bridge Housing.

Further growth is expected through the Property Transfer Program; this involves the transfer of 200 Housing NSW properties between December 2009 and March 2010. In addition BHL is the successful recipient of 50 properties through the Economic Stimulus Package.

Bridge Housing Limited has also moved its office from 619 Elizabeth St, Redfern to Level 9 Tower 1 Lawson Square, Redfern (opposite the train station). This has allowed us to consolidate all Bridge Housing staff in one office and provide better access for tenants.

I am very pleased with results of the Tenant Survey 2009 as it reflects Bridge Housing's staff commitment to providing high quality service delivery while the organisation is undergoing significant change. Our Annual General Meeting to be held on 19 November 2009 will provide you with an opportunity to review our activities over the past year and our future plans. I look forward to meeting you at the 2009 AGM.

## Tenant Survey 2009 Report

The 2009 Tenant Survey results are now in. A big thank you to everyone whom took the time to complete and return a survey. These annual questionnaires are a valuable way for Bridge Housing to monitor satisfaction levels among tenants, across all our areas of work. They provide us with an insight as to where we are performing well and how we can improve in particular areas.

This year showed an overall improvement in satisfaction with Bridge Housing services with 96% of tenants stating they are happy with their overall housing services. There were also increases in satisfaction with customer service, happiness with current housing and repairs and maintenance.

There was a decrease in awareness around rent rebate calculations and on some of our policies which means we need to look at how we currently distribute information and how we can improve this.

The full report can be viewed at [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) and we would welcome any comments from tenants about the results. We will now feed these results into the organisation's planning processes to ensure we continue to deliver a high quality housing service which is responsive to tenant's needs.

We are also pleased to announce the two winners of the \$150.00 prizes for returning the survey are:

Annemaree from Dulwich Hill and Gumad from Dulwich Hill.



Greenacre property development

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# NSW Fridge Buy-back scheme

Have an old fridge? Live in metropolitan Sydney or Wollongong? The NSW government is supporting a programme to buy back your old fridge! Old fridges use up lots more energy than newer ones. Running a second fridge adds around \$190 to your electricity bill per year, as well as contributing 1 tonne of greenhouse gases into the environment. If you have an old fridge that you want to get rid of, experienced removalists will remove it and dispose of it safely for you (if removal involves 20 stairs or less – a fee applies if there are more than 21 stairs) AND pay you a \$35 rebate if the removal involves 6 stairs or less. The fridges will then be disposed of safely and the metals recycled. The fridge must be a working second fridge, be at least 10 years old and be at least 250 litres in volume.

For more information and full conditions please see [www.fridgebuyback.com.au](http://www.fridgebuyback.com.au) or call 1800 708 401.

## What is Centrepay?

Centrepay is a free direct bill-paying service offered to customers receiving qualifying payments from Centrelink.

Customers subject to Income Management can choose to pay their non 'priority need' bills using Centrepay. These amounts will be deducted directly from the discretionary part of their Centrelink payment every fortnight.

Centrepay was developed to provide Centrelink customers with a free bill paying service that allows for voluntary deductions direct from customers' Centrelink payments for ongoing expenses. These deductions are forwarded directly to the Third Party Organisation (TPO) as full or part payment for services. Participation in the scheme is entirely voluntary and customers may withdraw from the scheme at any time without having to give a reason to either Centrelink or the TPO.

Organisations who offer Centrepay as a payment option are charged a transaction fee for each customer deduction they receive. This fee must not be passed onto the customer.

The minimum payment amount for Centrepay deductions is \$10 per fortnight. However, there are some organisations that require a higher minimum amount and customers need to contact the organisation to discuss what amount is required.

The easiest way for a customer to start a Centrepay deduction is by phoning Centrelink using their normal payment number. Alternatively, they can complete a Centrepay deduction form or use Centrelink's Online Service and do their own deductions on-line.

In some instances customers are able to arrange a Centrepay deduction by directly contacting the organisation. This service is mainly offered by large utilities, community housing organisations and fine recovery agencies in conjunction with relevant State/Territory Courts.

### How does Centrepay work?

An agreed amount is deducted from the customer's Centrelink payment before the payment is deposited into their bank account.

Once a customer notifies Centrelink to pay deductions to an organisation, the organisation will receive a Centrepay report advising of their request. When the deduction request is processed, Centrelink will send the customer a confirmation letter.

Organisations receive a report when the Centrepay deduction is paid into their bank account. The report will also advise the organisation when the customer's deduction is varied, suspended or cancelled. Organisations are required to itemise all Centrepay deduction payments on the customer's bill or account statement.

The organisations must resolve any payment error or underpayment directly with the customer.

### Centrelink customers can use Centrepay to pay:

- Private rent – including hostels, nursing homes, community housing, etc.
- Electricity
- Gas
- Water
- Telecommunications
- Rental of household goods
- Home care services
- Court fines and legal fees
- Education fees
- Medical services and equipment.
- Nil or Low interest community loans
- Child Care

NOTE: Currently, deductions to pay court fines cannot be taken from a Family Tax Benefit payment

### Customers can start a Centrepay deduction by:

- Calling Centrelink using their normal payment number.
- Logging on to the Centrelink website at [www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au) and using Centrelink's online services
- Completing a Centrepay deduction form (SA325) and post to Centrelink using the free post envelope or by lodging the form at a Centrelink office.

## Notice of Annual General Meeting

Bridge Housing Limited's AGM will be held on Thursday 19th November 2009, 11.00am, at Platform 10 Conference Centre, Level 10, 1 Lawson Square, Redfern (above BHL offices). All tenants are welcome but please ensure you RSVP to reception on 9699 6055 if you would like to attend.



# Contents Insurance

Are you aware that in the event of a flood, fire or theft your personal possessions are not automatically covered under Bridge Housing's buildings insurance? It is often only when disaster strikes that people realise they do not have sufficient, or any cover for their possessions. Contents insurance protects you for financial loss if your home's contents are lost due to theft or damage.

Check out [www.fido.gov.au](http://www.fido.gov.au) and click on insurance, or call **1300 300 630** to find out more about different policies and how they work. You can also look up members the Insurance Council of Australia on their website [www.insurancecouncil.com.au](http://www.insurancecouncil.com.au).

## 'A Tenant's Story...'

**May 09**

Many years ago I began volunteering at the YWCA in the city, and I noticed women who were waiting for their children to finish pre-school were sitting round doing nothing. The women were from many different countries and cultures but shared one thing – they were from non-English speaking backgrounds and had some spare time on their hands.

I decided to start an informal English language club for these women. The programme was very popular and over time developed into a paid language tuition class. It was very exciting being able to do voluntary work which linked my two passions – languages and people!

It was very rewarding to be able to give something back to the community. I feel it would have been almost impossible to carry out this work if I had not been housed by Bridge (then SWISH) and that I have been able to give something back to the community in return for being housed. Having secure and stable accommodation gave me the opportunity to do something I love and without community housing I think it would have been very difficult.

I am still volunteering today and feel I have gained enormous benefits from doing so. To help people develop English skills is about more than just practical assistance. In my experience, it allowed the women I worked with to build their confidence, self-esteem and to be able to apply for jobs and participate in the community.

Volunteering is rewarding because you are not only giving something back, but you can choose what you want to do and offer people your skills, whatever they may be. Everyone has a talent, or a passion for something. Think about how you could use that to help others and yourself as well. Volunteering is an offering, not a sacrifice!

Thank you for your story and if anyone is interested in finding out more, please contact Sarah on **9699 6055** ext. 217 or call NSW Volunteering on 9261 3600.

More information can be found on the following websites: [www.volunteering.com.au](http://www.volunteering.com.au) or [www.govolunteer.com.au](http://www.govolunteer.com.au).

## Water Leaks

Leaks at home can waste hundreds of litres of water and can add to your water bill. Help save this precious resource and ensure you are not paying too much for your bill.

To check for leaks:

- Make sure taps, hot water systems and other appliances are not dripping
- Check toilet cisterns are not leaking
- Ensure pipes and joints are not rusty or damaged
- Check your usage against the same period as last year (this is shown on every bill). If consumption has noticeably increased think about why this might be and ask your housing manager to investigate if needs be.

For more water saving tips and to find out more please visit [www.sydneywater.com.au](http://www.sydneywater.com.au)

## Mutual Exchanges

The Mutual Exchange Program helps Bridge Housing tenants who might want to exchange their Bridge Housing dwellings with other Bridge Housing tenants. It can provide a way for tenants to move to a different location or find more suitable accommodation through property exchange. Please note people seeking a mutual exchange must meet the requirements of the Mutual Exchange policy which can be found on our website. You can also telephone the office and speak to your Housing Manager.

Current exchanges:

1. For exchange - 4 bed house in Concord, 15 mins to station & shops.

Looking to swap for a 3 bed property, any area, close to public transport. Please call Fred on **0449 105 709**.

2. For exchange - 1 bedroom unit in Chippendale

This flat is light and breezy, has a separate bedroom, is newly carpeted and has a veranda facing a quiet lane. Within this block quiet block of units there is communal washing facility and security gates.

Chippendale is situated in the inner city, close to Broadway shopping centre. It is close to many of the universities and TAFE (Sydney University, UTS, Notre Dame Uni, Ultimo Tafe etc...) and is therefore a very convenient place to live if you want to study. It also has great access to public transport (Central, Redfern station and buses). It is a 20 minute walk into the middle of the city, Darling Harbour, the Fish Markets, Paddy's Markets, the Art Gallery etc... Alternatively, if you have a car you may be entitled to a parking permit through the local council.

Looking to swap for a one bedroom unit out of the city. If you are interested please contact Tracey Hughes, Housing Manager at Bridge Housing. Phone: 02 9699 6055

# Rent Incentive Scheme

## Your Chance to Win \$150

Bridge Housing has a rent incentive scheme for tenants who keep their rent and non rent (this includes water bills) accounts up-to-date.

At the end of, March, June and September and December one tenant will win \$150. All tenants who are up-to-date with their rent (that is, two weeks in advance) will be entered into the draw.

The lucky tenant will be contacted by Bridge Housing then sent a cheque within two weeks of the draw. It's that simple.

**Congratulations to Joanne from Leichhardt, who was the most recent winner of the \$150. On finding out she had won, Joanne said she was thrilled and surprised!**

## Tenant Participation at Bridge Housing

Tenant Participation – where 'tenants contribute to and participate in the decision-making of the organisation' (definition from National Community Housing Standards Manual 2003)

We are developing our Tenant Participation program this year and this involves you! We are looking at a number of ways to consult and involve you in decision making processes on issues that affect you. You are the people living in our properties and therefore you are in the best position to tell us how we can improve our housing services.

There are lots of ways we can consult and work with tenants – arranging meetings, forums, monitoring panels, social events and activities. We want to hear from you about how Bridge Housing can develop these ideas for participation. We want to be able to listen to, consult with and involve you in planning better services.



Tenants at the St. George TAG meeting

In our Tenants Survey 2009 over 37% of tenants indicated they would like to get involved in some way. The most popular choices for getting involved are surveys, meetings and forums. We have therefore decided to start a Tenant Advisory Group. The aim of the group is to create a link between Bridge Housing and our tenants, to build stronger communities in the areas when you, our tenants live, and to develop a structure for more formal participation where appropriate.

We began this process by holding a planning meeting with tenants in April. We were invited to a TAG meeting with St. George Community Housing where four Bridge Housing tenants went along to see how the St George TAG works and get some inspiration. The meeting was really interesting and we learned a lot, especially about roles and decision-making for the group.

We held our first full meeting in August and had over 80 tenants in attendance which was fantastic – a big thank you to everyone who came along. We had a great lively morning of discussion and worked out some good ideas for moving forward with the group. Please see below some of the things we discussed, and for future plans for the group.

- We held elections for Tenant Network Representatives and Pam Pryor (Rep) and John Evans (Deputy) were elected. The tenant network meets every two months to discuss issues for community housing tenants and promote tenant participation across the sector. If you have any issues you wish Pam to raise on your behalf at the tenant network, or if you would like to join please contact Sarah Barclay on 9699 6055 ext. 217, M: 0434 336 974 or email [s.barclay@bridgehousing.org.au](mailto:s.barclay@bridgehousing.org.au).
- The talent survey completed by everyone was an excellent example of the diverse skills tenants have to contribute to the TAG. Sarah will be working with the Regional Tenants Resource Service to develop some free training for the group,



Sarah, John and Pam and the BHL TAG meeting in August

and also identifying tenants who are happy to use their skills to help out at TAG meetings (such as language skills).

- We asked for a focus group to form, and meet before the next TAG meeting, to work over some of the administrative tasks such as membership of the group, terms of reference, and roles within the TAG. The ideas will then be presented to the next full TAG meeting for feedback. If anyone else wishes to join this smaller group to meet, please call Sarah (date to be confirmed).

A big thank you to everyone who came along to the meeting and helped make the first TAG meeting such a success. We look forward to seeing you at the next meeting and also the AGM (please watch out for your invite to the AGM). The next TAG meeting will have a Christmas theme and will be held in December. Watch out for a flyer and more details to follow.

If you have any questions, ideas or feedback about this flyer, or any other aspect of Tenant Participation at BHL, please call Sarah Barclay on 9699 6055 ext. 217, M: 0434 336 974 or email [s.barclay@bridgehousing.org.au](mailto:s.barclay@bridgehousing.org.au). You can also complete a feedback form, which can be found in reception and also on our website at [www.bridgehousing.org.au/form/feedback.html](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au/form/feedback.html).