

# AROUND THE HOUSE

## From the editor's desk



*Hello Unity tenants and readers,*

*I'm back as the tenant editor, working on my second edition of Around the house. Thanks for tuning in.*

May I say first that 87% readership among the tenant readers is AMAZING. I hope you like this edition – and PLEASE let me know if you have any story ideas or feedback. You can reach me at [aroundthehouseed@gmail.com](mailto:aroundthehouseed@gmail.com)

My first tenancy with Unity was at a boarding house and I've since moved into Unity's Community Housing Program. So, I think I have a good idea about the different aspects of the organisation and the different tenant perspectives.

See you next time,

Anthony

## 2014/15 tenant survey results

*By Karen Johnston, Unity's Quality Assurance Officer*



Late last year Unity conducted its tenant survey – we do this every two years. Many thanks to all of you who participated.

Of the 1318 households surveyed, we received an overall response rate of 32%. That's a good response, and certainly enough to draw thorough conclusions, but we would like to see even more tenants participate in the 2016 survey. The more tenants who complete the survey, the

better information we have to make improvements.

### Tenant priorities

According to the respondents, the top three priorities for tenants are:

- Repairs and maintenance
- Value for money for the rent they pay
- Overall condition of the home

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### A snapshot of the responses

What we asked	What you told us
How satisfied are you with the way Unity respects your privacy and confidentiality?	<b>95%</b> are satisfied to very satisfied
How satisfied are you that you were treated respectfully and fairly when Unity staff visited your property?	<b>95%</b> are satisfied to very satisfied
How satisfied are you with the location of your home?	<b>91%</b> are satisfied to very satisfied
How satisfied are you with the services provided by Unity?	<b>90%</b> are satisfied to very satisfied
How satisfied are you with the condition of your home?	<b>90%</b> are satisfied to very satisfied
How satisfied are you with the value for money for the rent you pay?	<b>89%</b> are satisfied to very satisfied
How satisfied are you with communication with Unity?	<b>89%</b> are satisfied to very satisfied
How satisfied are you that your rights as a tenant are upheld by Unity?	<b>89%</b> are satisfied to very satisfied

# Erin: A story about caring

By *Around the house* and Erin

*Erin lives on the Fleurieu Peninsula in Victor Harbor. For a number of years Erin worked in respite care in Victor and Strathalbyn assisting individuals and families with disability, and with many other activities supporting people with disabilities.*

"Over the years I gained more and more experience and my most recent role was as a team leader at a respite house I was a part of setting up in Victor Harbor," Erin told *Around the house*. "I loved working in the area and helping people with disabilities. Providing respite care is a very demanding job and takes a great deal of commitment and care."

Erin is a very warm spirited woman and very easy to talk to. Her interview for the newsletter took about an hour, but the 'get to know you' session was much longer. We could have talked for hours. Her engaging, relaxed and friendly manner would put anyone at ease. Not one for small talk, she comfortably discussed the nature of loss and acceptance – things everyone faces at some point.

Caring for people in the respite house was only one aspect of Erin's generosity. "I cared for three children from infancy and toddler age through to adulthood (and many more children, short-term) and now have five grandchildren. I loved caring for the kids and I'm glad the youngest, I now consider to be my daughter, lives near me. I get to see her and her new baby."

After writing a play about street kids called "Only to be Noticed", Erin cast the play with youth at risk; a project that they were able to own and perform.

Several years ago Erin was hospitalised and given injections for six weeks despite having a very bad reaction to the medication. Over the brief time following this hospitalisation she developed ataxia, which is a

neurological or brain condition that causes a loss of balance and control over the muscles. Erin needs to use a wheelchair most of the time now and has in-home care and support each morning.

Aside from seeing her daughter and granddaughter, Erin has been a member of an all-female Barber Shop choral group for 18 years. The Rainbow Connection Harmony Chorus is made up of over 20 women and they perform at festivals, nursing homes and churches.

Erin explained "I don't really perform with the group anymore, but I assist by offering to have some practices at my place and by putting each person's part on the keyboard for them to learn during their practices." "Being able to hear themselves helps the members of the chorus to fine tune the arrangements and harmonies to make them perfect."

Erin told *Around the house* that she plans to continue with the chorus and explore other ways to spend her time, including reading, in particular studying mindfulness, "I would like to be more able to put what I learn into practice."



# 2014/15 tenant survey results

*Continued from page 1*

## COMMUNICATION, REPAIRS AND COMPLAINTS

### Communication

Overall tenant satisfaction with communication is very good and respondents expressed some very positive comments about staff.

Improvements following the previous tenant survey have been implemented; for example, Unity produces the tenant newsletter three times a year and 87% of tenants read it. 90% of tenants have made contact with Unity in the last 12 months and:

- 85% found it easy to find/speak to the right person
- 89% found the staff helpful
- 82% were satisfied with the final outcome

### Repairs and maintenance

Repairs and maintenance is the single most important issue for tenants when it comes to tenant satisfaction and Unity goes beyond the national standards.

- 82% of tenants were satisfied to very satisfied with overall satisfaction with repairs
- 86% combined satisfied and very satisfied rating for quality of repairs

What is really important, and where Unity does have room for improvement, is communicating with tenants about when repairs will be made and if there are delays, keeping tenants informed about the delays.

- 77% combined satisfied and very satisfied for being advised on how long the repair would take to be completed
- 68% combined satisfied and very satisfied for being kept informed of any delays

**THANKS TO ALL WHO PARTICIPATED AND WE HOPE TO HEAR FROM YOU IN 2016.**

### Complaints and appeals

While there is room for improvement, Unity performs better than most other housing organisations around Australia in the category.

- 69% of respondents reported that they knew how to make a complaint to Unity
- 18% have made a complaint to Unity in the last 12 months
- Of the people making a complaint, 63% were satisfied with the way their complaint was dealt with overall and 22% were dissatisfied

### Tenant prizes



Ten tenants' names were drawn from those who completed the survey and Unity sent a \$50 store voucher to each winner in time for Christmas last year.



# Angas Lodge tenants: *where are they now?*



By Mel Allsop, Unity's Community Development Worker

**When Unity closed the Angas Lodge boarding house everyone was re-housed. This included 11 people moving into alternative boarding house accommodation and 17 others moving into community housing.**

The move has been significant for each person... in very different ways.

For some it has meant moving into accommodation with better facilities and resources. For others it has meant they have a space of their own that allows them to pursue their studies and personal development.

One former Angas Lodge tenant, who is now living in community housing with extra room, has his brother stay with him when he and his family come to Adelaide to receive treatment for an illness.

Another has moved into a private rental share house with a friend/housemate sharing bills, support and companionship.

Having a space for kids to visit has been very meaningful for a handful of previous Angas Lodge tenants.

Mark Schaffer tells his personal experience below.

***What has changed for you since moving into your own place?***

"Getting fulltime custody of my children. Even though it's exhausting and challenging, at the end of the day, I got the place for them. My kids don't live with their dad, their dad lives with them."

***How have you found adjusting to a new area?***

"It took a couple of weeks to figure out where everything is and meet some of the locals, but I have settled in well and find my way around easily."

***Is there anything you miss about living at Angas Lodge?***

"The staff and having a laugh with adults."

***What is your advice to anyone moving into their own place?***

"Preparation is the key. Know what you've got and what you need. Do a budget and stick to it."

***Asking the kids if there were any others comments they would like to add...***

Mark's son, Tre, said, "I like Transformers!"





# Stay warm and **SAFE** this winter

**The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has issued simple tips to ensure consumers stay safe when warming up this winter.**

As the cooler weather sets in, hot water bottles, wheat packs, electric blankets, winter pyjamas and heaters come out. These products pose safety risks if not used properly or if they are faulty and have been recalled.

The most common injuries associated with these products involve burns, with other risks from faulty electrical products including overheating, electric shock and fire.

Hot water bottles can cause burns if placed directly on the skin when not wrapped in a towel or fabric cover. These types of burns are serious and happen gradually. Also, when hot water bottles are not made or used properly, they can burst or leak, potentially scalding the user.

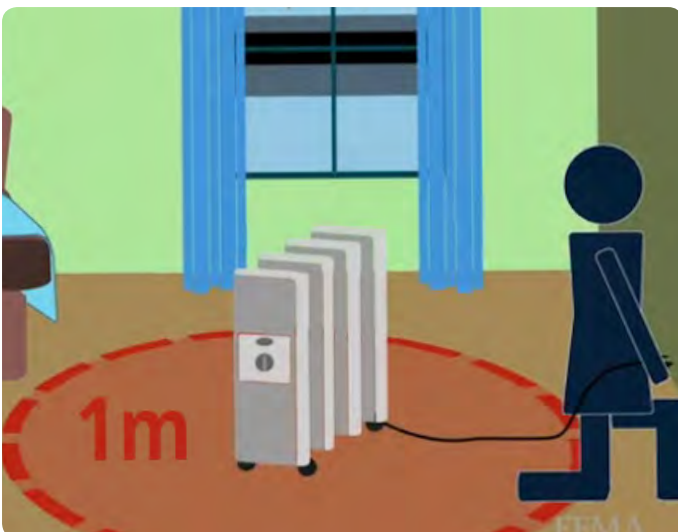
Children's nightwear is regulated and should have a mandatory safety standard, which requires garments to have a fire danger label. This is a very important warning because children can suffer severe burns if their nightwear catches fire. Parents and carers need to be aware that children's clothing with a 'low fire danger' label is still flammable. Always keep children away from open heat sources, such as fireplaces and gas stoves.

Faulty heaters can overheat, cause an electric shock, spark and potentially cause a fire. Additionally, if heaters are placed too close to furniture or if clothes or other

items are placed on a heater, the heat could cause the item to ignite. Over 41,000 potentially faulty heaters were recalled last year so check to make sure yours isn't one of them. Top winter product safety tips from the ACCC:

- Do not place heaters too close to furniture in your home, or place clothes on your heater
- Never use boiling water to fill your hot water bottle and replace it as soon as it starts to look cracked or worn. The ACCC has a hot water bottle safety video on the Product Safety Australia website and on YouTube
- Only buy wheat bags or other heat packs that come with clear heating instructions, and never overheat your bag as this could cause the bag to ignite and start a fire
- Before winter starts, carefully check that your electric blanket is in good condition
- Children's clothing with a 'low fire danger' label is still flammable so always keep children away from open heat sources

Any electrical items brought into Unity's boarding houses must be presented to staff for testing before using them. All items must be tested at the beginning of a tenancy and any subsequent items brought in during a tenancy must be checked by staff for safety. The boarding house also conducts annual electrical testing by an outside contractor over a three day period whereby every electrical appliance, extension cord, double adaptor, phone charger power board and the like are tested – all for your safety.



# Boarding houses: from dodgy and dangerous to helpful and secure



By Anthony Stokes

## Who lives in boarding houses?

People turn to boarding houses, often from the streets, in many different frames of mind and with many different attitudes. Being homeless can take its toll: sleeping rough can be harsh, conditioning people and altering their outlooks. These people can be of any age group and from any cultural background.

People need a place to live, and a boarding house is often their best hope. It is the attitude these people go into a boarding house tenancy with, that best demonstrates their future outlook.

Their perspectives are complicated. Usually viewing their situation as temporary, a boarding house is not their first choice for accommodation, though some (usually older people) planned to remain within the boarding house sector for as long as it would allow. There are even some who prefer living on the streets.

I read a study called "It's No Palace" which talked about boarding house tenants loosely falling into four categories. (If you're interested in reading more about this see the sidebar on the right.) This study matches my experience of meeting and living with other people in boarding houses – in the private rental sector and in the not-for-profit sector.

I've met desperate people who have no choice and no 'street skills', so they often end up in the worst places. I've also met people who have been on life's roller coaster and have learned how to look after themselves; things like how to navigate the system and find emergency accommodation and support to help them through tough times.

1. The downward spiral: tenants who through tragedy or mischance are forced to take a "step down" from their previous, more "respectable" accommodation, usually leaving them despondent.
2. The upward spiral: tenants who have improved on their previous, "rough" living standards, often needing assistance from welfare agencies to maintain their boarding house tenancy.
3. The immobile group: those who are dedicated to living in boarding houses, possibly for many years, and who don't see themselves as living in any other type of accommodation.
4. The travellers: people who need only temporary accommodation, perhaps while they work close by or need somewhere while they are waiting to move somewhere else.

## <sup>1</sup>It's No Palace

Boarding Houses: the sector, its clientele and its future by Peter Anderson, Arthur Hume, Nancy Rogers and Tracey Stephenson  
Australian Department of Human Services 2003

<sup>1</sup>It's No Palace Boarding Houses: the sector, its clientele and its future by Peter Anderson, Arthur Hume, Nancy Rogers and Tracey Stephenson Australian Department of Human Services 2003

### *What are boarding houses like?*

Boarding houses differ significantly, from dodgy and dangerous to helpful and secure. I can tell you that not all boarding houses are as well maintained as Unity's. I know because I've tried many and I lived at Unity's Angas Lodge until December 2014.

People cannot be expected to live in an unsafe environment, although many have and continue to, living with third-rate kitchens, lack of sufficient bathrooms, unsafe building structure or even general over-crowding. How can people be expected to live with even a some of pride if owners/landlords of these lack-lustre properties don't provide reasonable living conditions?

But a boarding house can also be a blessing and many clients are happy to have such a place to call home, like Barree, who has been a Unity tenant for the past 14 years, "Unity has certainly looked after me. I'm content

to be here [at the Terrace], and I only have praise for their efforts."

What makes a good boarding house?

- A secure tenancy where you can't get kicked out for no reason
- Value for money on the rent you pay
- Safety, safety, safety
- On site services like someone to go to about repairs and maintenance and information
- A clean environment

With many tenants living in boarding houses, there are probably thousands of different points of view... and different needs that must be addressed. Not a simple task, but one Unity is very capable of handling. They offer safe, well appointed, secure housing – temporarily or longer term.

## DO YOU LIVE IN ADELAIDE'S SOUTH?

### **By Mel Allsop, South Project Worker**

There are some exciting programs planned, including a CPR training session. Learn how to administer First Aid CPR. A certificate will be issued on successful completion of the three hour session. 23rd July, 12:30-4:30. A sandwich lunch will be included.



### **Other programs**

Tour of Renewal SA's Tonsley Precinct July 28th at 1pm.

Marion Historic Village, guided tour, sandwich lunch included: 11th August, 12:30 – 3:30.

Bookings are essential, all programs are **FREE**.

All Unity tenants living in and near the City of Marion are also invited to contact Melissa if they have a community-based idea or activity they would like to explore. **Call Melissa on 8198 1666.**



## ARE WET WIPES REALLY BIODEGRADABLE?

There are many different brands of wet 'tissue' or 'towel' type products out there claiming to be flushable and biodegradable. But are they really? How long do they take to break down?

If the answer is that they take more than about 30 seconds to biodegrade, then they should NOT be flushed down the toilet.

In recent times Unity has had to call out plumbers to fix problems caused by these products. We understand

how tenants could be confused – people read the label that says they can be flushed and they flush them.

However, the packaging isn't always accurate.

So, if you find yourself needing a plumber and Unity discovers that the cause is one of these products, that's OK the first time. We'll discuss it with you and let you know. But if it happens a second time, Unity will need to charge the tenant for the plumbing fees.

If you use these products, please be aware!



Hey! If you are a community housing tenant with Unity and have a genuine maintenance emergency after normal business hours, please use this number **8237 8799** to report the problem.



### CENTRAL

Opening hours  
Mon - Fri 9am - 5pm

81 Osmond Terrace,  
Norwood 5067

Phone: (08) 8237 8777

Fax: (08) 8237 8700

admin@unityhousing.org.au

Emergency after hours  
maintenance: 8237 8799

### SOUTH

Opening hours  
Mon - Fri 9am - 5pm

1/506 Brighton Road,  
Brighton 5048

Phone: (08) 8198 1666

Fax: (08) 8296 7705

south@unityhousing.org.au

Emergency after hours  
maintenance: 8237 8799

### NORTH

Opening hours  
Mon - Fri 9am - 5pm

179B Philip Hwy,  
Elizabeth South 5112

PO Box 1195

Elizabeth Vale 5112

Phone: (08) 8287 8600

Fax: (08) 8287 6155

north@unityhousing.org.au

Emergency after hours  
maintenance: 8237 8799

### PORT AUGUSTA

Opening hours  
Mon and Thurs  
by appointment only

36 Stirling Road,  
Port Augusta SA 5700

PO Box 322,  
Port Augusta SA 5700

Phone: (08) 8642 6412

ledwards@unityhousing.org.au

### THE TERRACE

#### BOARDING HOUSE

Opening hours  
Mon - Fri 9am - 5pm

South Terrace,  
Adelaide 5000

Phone: (08) 8232 5459

Fax: (08) 8232 4582

theterrace@unityhousing.org.au