

# BEYOND THE LETTERBOX

ISSUE 2: JUNE 2012

## Welcome to the winter edition of Beyond the Letterbox



In this issue we learn of the progress being made in Roebourne through the rejuvenation program and how tenants have successfully engaged with the Department with the House 2 Home Program.

Our Housing Direct contact centre is also featured in this issue, with some tips on the best times to call, and details of our call back service if you're having to wait longer than a few minutes to report faults or maintenance issues.

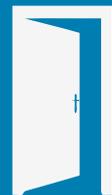
We also discuss a program that allows you to have your home declared 'dry', preventing visitors from bringing alcohol on to your property. This program might help you to control the behaviour of visitors if they're causing problems for your tenancy.

Enjoy the cool weather!

## HOUSING PATHWAYS UNIT

OPENING DOORS  
100 years of Affordable Housing

1912-2012



You may have noticed some recent advertising promoting affordable housing.

Last year the State Government announced a long-term strategy to provide more housing that is affordable, available and appropriate for both families and singles. The aim is to make a bigger range of housing choices available more quickly for low-to-moderate income earners.

The Housing Pathways Unit (HPU) has been created to provide over-income tenants with a range of pathways into the relatively complex world of private rental or home ownership.

A member of the HPU team will meet with over-income tenants to discuss the options available to them after leaving public housing and how they can access their chosen option.

Current schemes that over-income tenants may be able to access include the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS), the Rental Pathways Scheme (RPS), Community Housing and Keystart. The HPU can also assist over-income tenants access bond assistance loans and the Keystart education scheme, and provide a rental reference if eligible.



# Department of Housing turns 100

The Department of Housing is celebrating a significant milestone in its history this year – 100 years of providing affordable housing for Western Australians.

Director General Grahame Searle said the Workers' Homes Board, which was established on 20 February 1912, was the forerunner of today's Department.

"At the time rents and building materials were expensive and this, coupled with 9,562 government-assisted British immigrants arriving in 1911, resulted in a lack of affordable housing," Mr Searle said.

"In response Parliament established the Board along with a scheme to reduce the cost of housing for those who had jobs but who still struggled to afford to buy or rent a house."

The Workers' Homes board was later replaced by the State Housing Commission after World War Two, and later became known as Homeswest before the current Department was formed in 2001.

Mr Searle said the agency had made an enormous contribution to the development of Western Australia and ensuring that those most in need have a roof over their heads.

"We've built thousands of houses across Western Australia for both home ownership and public rental," he said.

"Housing affordability still remains a real problem for those on low to medium incomes and will only increase with the State's rapid population growth.

"In 2011 the State Affordable Housing Strategy was launched where at least 20,000 additional affordable rental and home ownership opportunities will be provided to people on low to moderate incomes by 2020."

In February Mr Searle visited the first house built by the Workers' Homes Board in 1913, a property on Forrest Street in Fremantle.



## New Look

The Department introduced the Roebourne Rejuvenation Program to revitalise local public housing stock.

Housing Project Officer Emma Rigby, from the Karratha office, said the program is having a positive impact on the town.

"Many families in the Roebourne area travel between the areas of South Hedland, Onslow, Tom Price and Roebourne," Emma said.

"Some of the families can at any one time have 15 to 20 people living in their home which places immense pressure on all concerned."

Pilbara Regional Manager, Anne-Marie McLaughlin, said the program has delivered 21 new houses to-date for social housing tenants and GROH employees.

"In addition, a further eight properties are being built in a new sub-division next to the Roebourne township, where the Department has purchased 50 blocks to address long-term housing needs and overcrowding," Anne-Marie said.



The home is currently owned by Doug and Michele Shaw who purchased it in 1986. The Shaws live in the property with their two teenage daughters and dog Buffy. Although the house looks relatively modest from the front, a large extension to the rear nine years ago expanded the living area substantially.

Mrs Shaw said it was pretty special that they owned such a historical property.

"We love living in the property and the historical significance is just an added bonus," she said.

The Department is encouraging tenants to get involved in centenary celebrations. You may have noticed the flyer for our children's centenary competition in the last edition of BTL. Children are asked to present their interpretation of 'what home means to me' in any way they like.

Some suggestions include a drawing or painting, a poem, a video or a song – the options are limitless! The competition closes at 5pm WST on Friday 27 July 2012. For further details visit our website [www.housing.wa.gov.au](http://www.housing.wa.gov.au)

Tenants are also encouraged to share stories and photographs of their time in public housing. These can be submitted via [centenary@housing.wa.gov.au](mailto:centenary@housing.wa.gov.au) or by calling 9222 4927.



## Roebourne

"With the collaboration of the House 2 Home (H2H) program and the significant investment by the Department, the attitude of tenants and quality of life are improving in Roebourne."

The H2H Program is an innovative concept developed by the Department of Housing in collaboration with the Department of Child Protection.

The program provides intensive tenancy support focusing on building the capacity of tenants through training to develop their skills as a homemaker and increasing their social awareness and responsibility to the rest of the community.

"A series of 12 pictorial training modules were provided to each tenant on a variety of subjects, including - keeping the kitchen clean, managing pests and food storage, kitchen safety and conserving water," Karen Burgess, Tenancy Support Coordinator said.

"As we progressed through each of the modules I would explain to the tenants what was expected, and then demonstrate how to apply this in their home, such as how to maintain a healthy environment in the kitchen when preparing and storing food preparation."



## TRANSITIONING INTO HOME OWNERSHIP

Kununurra couple Michelle Coucaud and Todd McKenna recently finalised the settlement of their first home.

Todd and Michelle occupied their Department of Housing home in 2005, but their family has since expanded and their circumstances changed.

"When Todd was successful in gaining permanent employment at the Kununurra airport it meant our eligibility for public housing had to be reviewed, and we needed to consider our options," Michelle Coucaud said.

"It was hard at first as we had to make several decisions. It was determined by the Department that our gross assessable weekly income exceeded the income eligibility limit.

"We were given two options: to purchase the house we were living in under the rental sales scheme using a Keystart loan, or to look for alternative accommodation.

As Michelle is a stay-at-home mum

and the couple was expecting their third child, they decided to proceed with an application to purchase.

"There was a lengthy process to follow, but the help we received along the way from several staff at the Department of Housing was just fantastic," Michelle said.

"We received finance pre-approval, and lodged our deposit of \$150, and before we knew it we were granted approval and an evaluator was arranged to make an assessment on our house."

"While waiting we took the opportunity to look at other properties for sale in town, but to be honest we liked our house so much, we really hoped we would be able to afford this house."

Once the approvals were granted, and the evaluation was received, Margaret Pearce from the Urban Renewal – Rental Sales team at the Department's head office became the couple's liaison officer.



"Margaret kept in contact through our journey and helped us with any queries," Michelle said.

"Everything went so smoothly, none of this would have been possible without the assistance of some great people at the Department of Housing and Keystart."

Robert Bowe, Senior Project Manager, Urban Renewal said the outcome was an excellent example of the Department's positive customer service ethic, helping our customers obtain access to affordable housing. "The family is an inspiration for other public housing tenants in demonstrating that they too can own their own home," Robert said.

## Liquor Restricted Premises

Last year's changes to the State liquor control Act allow tenants and homeowners to have their premises declared liquor-restricted premises, which means visitors can be prohibited from consuming alcohol.

This Act enables an owner or occupier of residential or non-residential premises to apply in writing to the Director of Liquor Licensing to have their premises declared a liquor restricted premises for a specific period, therefore prohibiting the consumption of alcohol.

For the purposes of deciding whether to declare premises to be liquor restricted premises the Director of Liquor Licensing may consult with all or any of the following persons –

- (a) Owners or occupiers of the premises which is the subject of the application;
- (b) Owners or occupiers of premises near the premises which are the subject of application;
- (c) The Commissioner of Police;

(d) The relevant local government; and

(e) Any other person, body or authority the Director considers may be able to provide information relevant to the application.

To date 10 homes across the state, mainly in the Kimberley and Pilbara, have been declared 'restricted premises' by occupants since the law was introduced late last year.

"Our tenants can now choose to prohibit the consumption of alcohol in their tenancy, and thereby have better control of the behaviour of people in their homes," Executive Director Client Services South Steve Altham said.

In one case in the north of our state a man was charged with breaching the legislation. The Department of Housing property was rented by an elderly tenant who was facing eviction for anti-social behaviour on the part of visitors to her property. The tenant was informed by police she could have her house declared 'alcohol free'. By making this request and having her property declared a liquor-restricted premise the tenant avoided being evicted.

## TELL US ABOUT HOUSING DIRECT?



of contact for numerous other initiatives such as Homeless Advice, Disruptive Behaviour complaints, the Joint Wait List Amalgamation and the Affordable Housing Strategy.

Housing Direct commenced operations in July 2009 as the Department's one-stop shop for maintenance, allowing all tenants to contact one number to request maintenance for their properties.

At that time there were 15 officers located in one place, available to deal with the calls and e-mails received. Since then Housing Direct has grown to become the Department's main point

of contact for numerous other initiatives such as Homeless Advice, Disruptive Behaviour complaints, the Joint Wait List Amalgamation and the Affordable Housing Strategy. These additional services have resulted in an increase of over 7500 calls and e-mails to Housing Direct per month and the team has grown to 36 Customer Service Officers across two offices. Splitting its staff across two locations ensures Housing Direct will always be able to take your calls even if there is an unforeseen emergency that results in the closure of one office.

### HOW CAN WE HELP?

Despite the extra staff and new systems, Housing Direct is still a very busy place, especially on Mondays, after public holidays and first thing in the morning. You are encouraged to call later in the day or in the week (unless you are reporting an urgent health or safety issue) to experience a much shorter wait time than in peak periods.

Housing Direct also provides additional assistance to tenants in circumstances such as the heat wave which was experienced during the summer. The Department had previously identified older tenants who had

no family or next of kin to help them cope in such situations. These tenants were contacted by telephone and provided with the relevant information from the Health Department, and encouraged to call a friend or Housing Direct if they were experiencing any major health concerns.

We are here to offer you a service and the only way we know if you are happy with that service is from the feedback we receive. Please let us know what we are doing well or more importantly, what we could be doing better, either by calling us on 1300 137 677 or by using the Departments feedback page on the website.

## DO YOU HAVE AN UNSTERILISED CAT - BUT CAN'T AFFORD THE STERILISATION FEES?



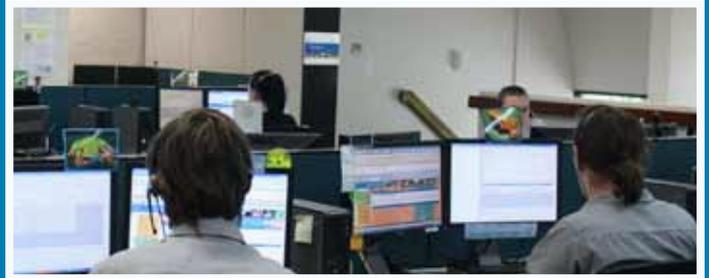
The **CAT STERILISATION SOCIETY** offers financial help to sterilise your cat (conditions apply). It could make the cost as low as \$50 for a male and \$60 for a female, including microchipping. This complies with the new State cat laws recently passed for compulsory sterilisation and microchipping of domestic cats.

As well as reducing the large numbers of unwanted kittens, sterilising cats makes them healthier, more companionable, less likely to stray or get into fights and annoy the neighbours, or wander and get killed on the roads

Please ring the Cat Sterilisation Society on 9397 5062 Monday to Wednesday, 9.00 am to 4.00 pm for information and assistance.

Website – [www.catsterilisation.com.au](http://www.catsterilisation.com.au)

## Virtual hold at Housing Direct



Always looking to improve both service and customer satisfaction, Housing Direct has replaced the old voicemail service with a new "Virtual Hold" function. After a few initial glitches and a little fine-tuning, Virtual Hold is proving to be a great success.

### SO, HOW DOES IT WORK?

If you've been holding on the phone for a few minutes, a recorded message will offer you the option of a "Call Back". Simply enter your phone number, follow the prompts and then you can hang up the phone. Your place in the queue has now been reserved and as soon as your number reaches the front of the queue, a Housing Direct agent will call you straight back.

Remember to keep the phone close by though. If you do not answer or are on the phone when your call is returned, you will miss your Call Back and need to call again when you are available. During peak periods this may take a little while but at other times you may receive a Call Back almost immediately!

The Department of Housing has installed a number of safety devices in your home.

These are Residual Current Devices (RCDs) and Smoke Alarms.

It is important for the safety of your family that you know how to check these devices.

### Residual Current Devices (RCDs)

In the past 17 years, 29 people including eight children have been electrocuted in homes in Western Australia. (Energy Safety WA)

23 of these deaths could have been prevented if Residual Current Devices (RCDs) had been fitted to the power and lighting circuits.

An **RCD** is a safety device that disconnects a circuit when it detects an imbalance of the electric circuit which connects to your switchboard.

To give an example, your child pops a couple of slices of bread in the toaster; the bread curls over and gets stuck. Your child uses a knife to poke into the toaster.

The knife touches the live elements, and in less than one third of a second the RCD will switch the power off preventing your child from being electrocuted.

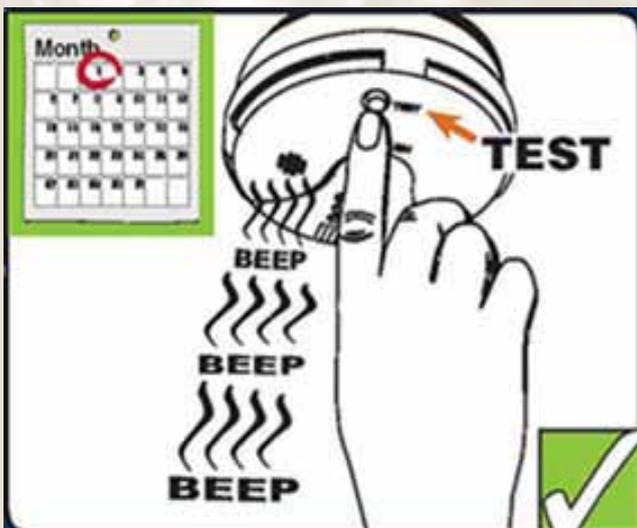
### RCD TESTING

- Press the **TEST** button on the RCD; you should hear a click.
- The lever will flip downwards in the 'off' position.
- If the RCD doesn't flip downwards, you need to contact Housing Direct on **1300 137 677**.
- If the lever does flip downwards, then it works.
- Flip the lever upwards to 'on' and this will turn the power on.

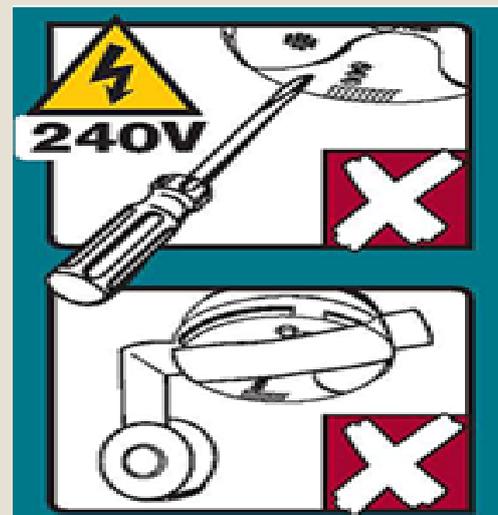


## DO YOUR PART - ONLY WORKING SMOKE ALARMS SAVE LIVES

DO TEST



DO NOT REMOVE OR COVER UP



If you notice a problem with your smoke alarm or RCD please call **HOUSING DIRECT** on **1300 137 677**