



November 2016

[View this email in your browser](#)

News from the Tenants' Union of Tasmania

## In this issue:

- **TUT Updates.** *What we did since we last wrote to you*
- **Renting and the National Broadband Network.** *What tenants (and landlords) need to be aware of*
- **Our Volunteer Program.** *What you can do*
- **Rental Statistics.** *What we learn from our callers*
- **The Reintegration of Ex-Offenders Program.** *What accommodation options are available for people exiting prison*
- **Tenants' Union Services.** *How to get in touch with us*

---

## TUT Updates

*Training Day and changes in our Management Committee*

It's already been six months since our last newsletter and we've been busy. In late June we gathered all our staff and volunteers together for a Training Day to update our knowledge on residential tenancy legislation. We invited Aneita Browning, a former Tenants' Union volunteer, now a barrister and colleague to retired Chief Magistrate Michael Hill to talk about court advocacy. Also invited to speak was Anna Hughes, who shared her perspectives working for the Residential Tenancy Commissioners office.

We held our Annual General Meeting (AGM) in October and wrapped up the past financial year, in which despite funding uncertainties and staff changes we were able to celebrate a number of wins. First and foremost the introduction of minimum standards to the Residential Tenancy Act, but also consistently high numbers of client assistance.

At the AGM we sadly farewelled two members of our Management Committee, who held important positions over many years. We thank Sue Chapple, who led the committee as Convenor and provided invaluable assistance and support to staff since September 2011. We are also extremely grateful for Michael Kennett's support with our finances. Without Michael's accounting skills we would be in a

financially difficult position rather than our position of relative financial security. Michael has been our Treasurer since 2009/10. We wish Sue and Michael all the very best for their next adventures.

Finally, we warmly welcome Tim Walter to his new role as Convenor. Tim filled in as Principle Solicitor when Meredith was on maternity leave in 2014. We are also excited to welcome Paul Kelly as a new committee member and in the role of Treasurer.

---

## Renting and the National Broadband Network

*What tenants (and landlords) need to be aware of*

In Tasmania along with the rest of the country has been introducing the roll out of the National Broadband Network (NBN) to households and businesses. This network is to provide faster and more efficient internet access. The NBN will replace the old copper system. Once the copper system is turned off, without the NBN to a property, that property would need to go wireless for internet and phone access.

It's important for tenants to be aware of this process, and indeed it is becoming a more common question on the Tenants' Union advice line as to what a tenants rights are in Tasmania for the NBN.



There are two stages to the NBN. The first is the attachment of the NBN box to the external part of the premises. This is in no way a tenants' responsibility and a tenant should not interfere with this installation. This is a free program for the properties until the copper system is turned off. If a property has not transferred after this has occurred there would be an additional cost associated at the owner's expense.

The second part of the process is the internal installation through an internet provider. This is where a tenants responsibilities and/or liabilities step in.

As a tenant, the internet provider and the cost of such will be your responsibility. You will need to seek the owner's permission about the installation and where the box will be positioned in the property. Some issues to consider.

- If a working telephone was provided with the tenancy, this must be maintained by the owner. This would mean that the installation cost would be the owner's responsibility.
- If there was no phone access to the premises at the beginning of a tenancy, there is no obligation for the owner to provide this into the future. Therefore the owner cannot be held responsible for the cost of installation.
- A tenant must seek the owner's consent prior to installing an internal NBN box as the installation may damage the property and the owner may require it to be installed at a specific point in the premises.

Having a rental premises rolled over onto the NBN is a good advertisement for the property and an advantage for the owner and future tenants.



Photo: Bob Mical: uplink down, 2012 CC BY-NC 2.0

---

## Our Volunteer Program

For over 40 years the Tenants' Union of Tasmania has been defending tenants rights by providing face to face and telephone advice throughout Tasmania. This free service would not be possible without the expertise of our dedicated team of volunteers who give up their time to assist people with tenancy related issues.

Recently, TUT has further developed the volunteer training program, which provides the necessary knowledge on the *Residential Tenancy Act* and the communication skills required to provide information and advice to tenants about their rights and responsibilities during a tenancy. This has been made possible thanks to a dedicated Training and Development Officer position funded by the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund.



We are always looking for enthusiastic and committed volunteers to help TUT continue to provide this essential service. You do not need to have a legal background or experience in the not-for-profit sector as online and on the job training will be provided. If you have a personable phone manner, enjoy helping people and believe in the values of human rights and social justice we would love to hear from you.

Photo: Dave Catchpole: BT ArtBox Phone Head, 2012 CC BY 2.0

---

## Rental Statistics

*What we learn from our callers*

Over the course of a year our staff and volunteers advise around 2800 tenants over the telephone. And while the main focus of these calls is to help people solve their tenancy issues, we take the opportunity to find out more about tenants and residential tenancy leases in Tasmania while we have them on the phone. This information helps us to understand the rental market in Tasmania and identify issues that may need to be addressed.

So here is what we found out about the people we gave advise to and their leases in 2015/16.

As you would expect most people who call us are tenants (89%), 8% are third parties to the lease, most often relatives or friends of tenants facing trouble in their tenancy. Landlords make up 3% of our callers. We give general information, like those available in fact sheets on our website to landlords, but will not advise them.

An overwhelming 69% of the people who called in the past financial year were women, this number sounds high, but it is actually on a (very) slow decline. Callers will most likely have been born in the 1980s, followed by the 1970s and the 1990s. 5% of people that sought our help identified as Aboriginal or

Torres Strait Islander.

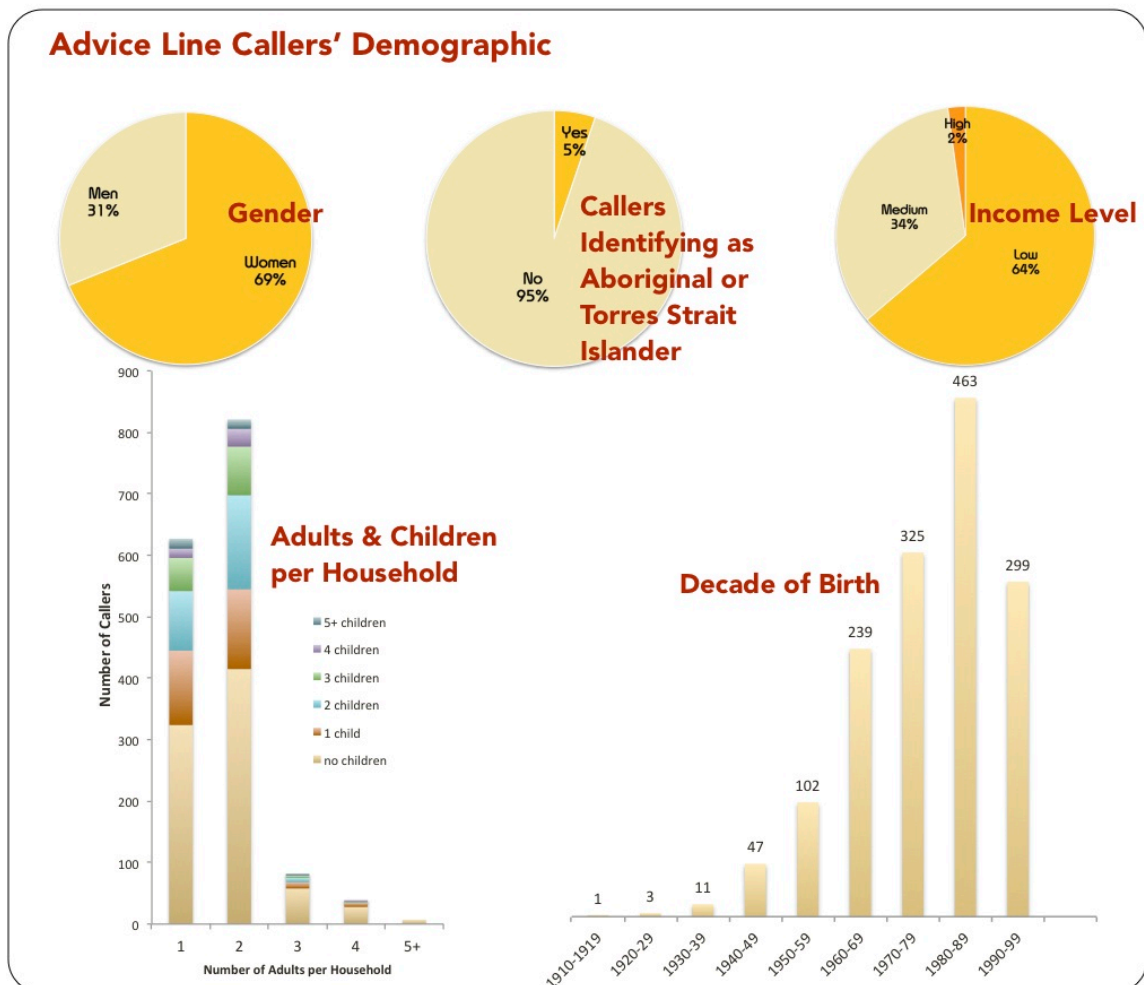
Of the 1575 callers, who informed us of the number of members in their household, 21% lived on their own. 19% were single parents and 26% lived with one other adult and 1 or more children. 8% of our callers shared a household with two or more other adults, a quarter of those household also included children.

Most tenants we talk to rent in the private market. They have written lease agreements and rent their home for a fixed period of time, usually 12 months.

For the 10<sup>th</sup> year we have also been collecting rent information from our callers. The rent prices we drew from our telephone advice line records confirm that rents in Tasmania have remained relatively stable over the past 5 years. The statewide average cost for a 2-bedroom property was \$259 in 2015/16 compared to \$249 in 2011/12. Renters paid on average \$291 for a 3-bedroom property in Tasmania in 2015/16, down from \$298 in 2011/12.

However, we recorded an unusually high growth though for 1 and 2 bedroom properties in the south of the state (inclusive of the 7000-7200 postcodes). Renters paid on average \$310 per week for a 1-bedroom property (compared to a state average of \$203) and \$311 for a 2-bedroom property (compared to a state average of \$259). That brings 1 and 2-bedroom properties almost level with 3-bedroom properties, in which renters paid \$315 per week for in the south (state average: \$291).

Whether this trend is a glitch due to our relatively small data size or a rather alarming trend is yet to be seen by comparing our results with *Tasmanian Rents* (which uses Bond information collected by the Rental Deposit Authority), new census data and next year's analysis of our Telephone Advise Data.



## The Reintegration of Ex-Offenders Program

*What accommodation options are available for people exiting prison*

Eighteen months ago a coalition of community groups including Shelter Tasmania, the CPSU and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre wrote to the State Government calling for the continued funding of a program that provided access to transitional housing and pre- and post-release support for ex-prisoners, remandees and parolees. The Reintegration of Ex-Offenders Program (the REO program) run through the Salvation Army had been operational for seven years providing specialist support to assist prisoners with housing and to allow them to reintegrate into their local communities by re-engaging with families, education, training and employment.

The program was a proven success with a review conducted for the Department of Health and Human Services in 2013 finding that 93.5 per cent of all ex-offenders who had engaged with the program had been successfully re-integrated in to their communities. As well, an independent evaluation carried out for the DHHS found that for every dollar spent on the REO program, the community saved four dollars. In other words, the \$257,761 invested in the REO program saved the community more than \$1,000,000 every year.

Sadly, our advocacy for the Program was unsuccessful with the REO program being subsumed at the end of August 2015 into Housing Connect, a one-stop shop model that is meant to ensure that all applicants for public or community housing are assessed on a level playing field.



In August 2016, in an attempt to find out whether the new model was working, we sought to find out how many prisoners had been re-housed through Housing Connect by making a Right to Information application. Our application asked how many parolees and prisoners coming to the end of their sentence had applied for housing through Housing Connect and how many had been housed either as part of their parole or because they were exiting prison. The response from Housing Connect was that 109 prisoners had applied for housing in the timeframe December 2015 – August 2016 and noted “as far as we are aware, none of the prisoner applicants have been allocated a property yet...”

In our opinion, a specialist program such as the REO program must be in place to assist prisoners with housing and to allow them to reintegrate into their local communities. By failing to provide a specialist program, we run the risk of releasing prisoners into homelessness and the very real likelihood of those ex-offenders re-offending. Expressed in another way, for as little as \$250,000 the Government can guarantee a safer community by granting ex-offenders the time they need to reconnect with family, friends and employment/training opportunities by providing them with a home and the specialist assistance they need.

Photo: Fred Dunn: Stay Out, Stay In, 2012 CC BY-NC 2.0



## TELEPHONE ADVICE LINE

Monday to Friday\*

9.30am to 4pm

1300 652 641

6223 2641

## FACE-TO-FACE SERVICE

### **Hobart**

166 Macquarie St

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday\*

9.30am to 12.30pm



### **Launceston**

By appointment

Call 1800 066 019 or 6334 1577



### **Devonport**

By appointment

Call 6434 8720



*\*except public holidays.*

## ONLINE

[www.tutas.org.au](http://www.tutas.org.au)

The information in this newsletter is not legal advice. For information regarding a specific tenancy problem, please phone the Tenants' Union on (03) 6223 2641 or 1300 652 641. The Tenants' Union of Tasmania Inc accepts no responsibility for actions based on this information, nor for actions based on electronic translations of this.

---

*Creative Commons (CC\_ 2016 Tenants' Union of Tasmania, BY-NC-ND*

[unsubscribe from this list](#)   [update subscription preferences](#)

---

This email was sent to <<Email Address>>  
[why did I get this?](#) [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)  
Tenants' Union of Tasmania · 166 Macquarie St · Hobart, Tas 7000 · Australia

The MailChimp logo is centered within a red rounded rectangle. The text "MailChimp." is written in a white, cursive script font.