Final grant report: Residential Parks Law Education Project

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<tr>
<th>Grant recipient</th>
<th>Tenants’ Union of NSW</th>
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<td>Position</td>
<td>Residential Parks Officer</td>
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<td>Law and Justice Foundation awarded amount</td>
<td>$46,688.94</td>
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<td>Date of this report</td>
<td>15 September 2016</td>
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1. Description of the project

Describe the project in just enough detail so that anyone can understand it. What was the aim of the project, who was the intended audience and what strategies did you implement to achieve the aim?

Purpose: To provide information and resources about the new Residential (Land Lease) Communities Act 2013 (the Act).

Audience: People who live in land lease communities and organisations working with land lease community residents.

Strategies: Free information sessions, visits to land lease communities, newsletter, factsheets, a website, training for key workers and resident groups.

2. The project – what happened?

How did the project come about?
In 2011 the State Government began a review of residential parks law. The new Act commenced on 1 November 2015.

The Tenants’ Union (TU) is a Community Legal Centre and Registered Training Organisation specialising in tenancy law, including residential parks law. We wanted to ensure that those affected by the change had access to high quality information about the new Act.
Briefly set out the project stages and what happened in each stage.

Factsheets: Through consultation with Tenant Advocates and resident representatives a list of topics for factsheets was drawn up. The factsheets were then drafted and the legal content checked by the Residential Parks Legal Officer at the TU. A group of Tenant Advocates and resident representatives were consulted and some changes made. The final stage, prior to publication was design.

Newsletter (Outasite): Articles were drafted on various provisions in the Act and the legal content checked. The design and printing were then completed.

Website https://thenoticeboard.org.au/factsheets: The TU entered into a partnership with design students from the UTS for the website design. A TU Resource Development Officer built the site and it was then user tested by some residents before being launched. The website was launched at the Tenant Union’s 40th Birthday celebration in February 2016.

Fridge magnet, flyer and poster: In order to promote the new website we had a fridge magnet designed, based on the work done by the UTS students. We had 5000 printed for distribution during the project.

We also had a poster and flyer designed that we were able to use to promote our information sessions. Again the design was based on the work of the UTS students.

Information sessions and visits: Planning was extensive and undertaken in conjunction with Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services and resident groups. The planning stage involved identifying which land lease communities to visit and where to hold information sessions.

The content of the information sessions provided an overview of the new Act plus detail on key provisions, for example site fee increases. The presentation lasted for an hour and then there was at least 30 minutes for questions.

Tenant Advocates from the local service were present at all land lease community visits and information sessions. They advertised their services for residents and advised how to access those services.

NSW Fair Trading also became a partner and attended a number of information sessions where they spoke about the services they provide for land lease community residents.

In total we visited 107 land lease communities and held 17 formal and two informal information sessions attended by approximately 950 people.

Training: More extensive training on the new Act has been delivered to around 40 Tenant Advocates and 10 resident representatives.
If grant materials were produced as part of the project:

How were they distributed?

Factheets: The factsheets are available on our website: www.thenoticeboard.org.au. They have been promoted at information sessions, in Outasite and Outasite Lite (our bi-monthly e-publication). They will also be promoted by the Legal Information Access Centre (LIAC, a service of the State Library of NSW) in their e-newsletters for public library staff and community service providers.

Outasite: Initially copies of Outasite were distributed through our contacts mailing list. Additional copies were distributed through visits to land lease communities and information sessions. The remainder have been sent out via request.

LIAC sent a copy of Outasite to all 367 libraries and branches and three of the libraries called the TU for extra copies because some of their members lived in residential parks and requested copies through the library.

Fridge magnet: 2500 were distributed during visits to land lease communities and information sessions. LIAC distributed 1250 magnets to 18 public libraries situated close to land lease communities.

What was the extent of the distribution?

Approximately 4,000 copies of Outasite went out via our mailing list, 4,800 were distributed through land lease community visits and information sessions and the remainder have been sent out on request. Altogether 10,000 copies have been distributed across the state.

If applicable, at the time of this report, what has been the extent of use of your publication?

We have only been collecting data from www.thenoticeboard.org.au since February 2016. Between February and July there were 3,000 sessions from 2,053 users and 7,342 page views.

Now that the project has concluded, how did the implementation and/or the outcome differ from what was originally intended? Did anything surprise you? Were there any unintended outcomes?

On the negative side, access to land lease communities was sometimes refused by operators. We always introduced ourselves and explained why we wanted to enter the community. While some operators welcomed us, some did not. In most cases where access was refused we were able to leave copies of Outasite and flyers advertising our information sessions.

We also learned that the information we had from the Residential Parks Register (NSW Fair Trading) was out of date. The number of residents in some communities was inaccurate in many cases and the names and operators of some communities had changed.

Originally we planned to conduct 10 information sessions, however once we began detailed planning we realised that we had to offer more than one venue to ensure broad access. We delivered 17 organised and two impromptu sessions.
By visiting the communities we got to see the extent of upgrading and gentrification that is taking place in land lease communities across the state. Although we were aware of this, we were not aware of the scale of it.

NSW Fair Trading (FT) coming on board with the project was a surprise. The TU has not previously worked with Fair Trading in this way and it led to an improved understanding of the work we each do, how we undertake that work and a better working relationship.

Our relationships with Tenant Advice and Advocacy Services and resident groups also benefited in a similar way.

Most of the Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services involved in the project have reported better relationships with home owners in some of the communities in their area. They have run additional information sessions, and are providing more advice and assistance to residents.

We were pleasantly surprised by the attendance at some of our sessions. Residents in land lease communities are generally engaged but Fair Trading had conducted information sessions in many areas before us. However, we had excellent attendance at most sessions with an average of around 50, and over 100 at two.

Another surprise is the big increase in Outasite subscriptions. We have approximately 700 new subscribers to the printed publication and some have requested extra copies for friends and neighbours.

3. Evaluation

What questions did you ask to evaluate whether you had achieved your aim?

What we wanted to know was:

- Did we produce high quality accessible information about the new law?
- Were we successful in getting information about the new law to our target audience?
- Were people better informed about the new law as a result of this project?

What data did you gather to answer your questions?

Indicators included:

Attendance at information sessions; visits to the website; requests for Outasite; the number of communities visited.

Informal feedback at the end of information sessions.
Did you achieve your aim? What did you find out?
Attendance at the information sessions met or surpassed our expectations. We anticipated 30 – 40 people at each session but the average was 55 with the highest being 130. This confirmed that residents are active and engaged. We also found that when we conducted sessions within land lease communities the attendance was very high (averaging around 100).

Internet use in residential parks has traditionally been low (estimates are generally around 20% of residents) so originally we did not include a website in the project. 3000 sessions in three months indicates that it is useful and these numbers are what we would expect.

The distribution of 10,000 copies of Outasite, many on request is a fantastic achievement. That is almost 1 copy for every three residents in NSW. We cannot guarantee that they have all found a home but 600 new subscriptions takes our total to almost 1,100 people and 5,000 copies (many residents receive multiple copies to distribute in their community).

We visited more land lease communities than we anticipated and we met some residents at information sessions who were disappointed that we didn’t visit their community. We had some interesting discussions with residents and also with some operators. Through these informal discussions we learned about the communities, the people who live in them, and how they are managed. It was very enlightening, particularly for Tenant Advocates who don’t often get the opportunity to visit communities.

Feedback on Outasite and the information sessions has been very positive. We had lots of people coming up to us at the end of sessions saying how useful the information was and that it was well presented an easy to understand. Here are four quotes from home owners:

“Dear TUNSW,
Your latest Outasite newsletter (Nov 2015) contains more information and advice than anything Fair Trading, the responsible government authority, has distributed on the new Act, etc.
John Douglas, Tweed Billabong Holiday Park.”

“May I also state that I thoroughly enjoyed your coverage on the new Act and Regs at the South Tweed Sports Club last week. I was glad to see that the many people who attended were also interested.
Thanks Julie, keep up the good work
Barry “

“Unfortunately I didn’t attend any meeting, but I am very impressed with your magazine “Outasite”. I have requested that my name be added to you mailing list and would dearly love to receive a few more copies if you have them available. Regards Junette Chaloner (Talltimbers)”
“Hi Julie,
There were about 100 residents at the session at Gateway Lifestyle Stanhope Gardens. The feedback I received was very good. The subjects were well chosen as they pertained to the majority of residents. You both did an excellent presentation. In the future if possible, more time would allow for additional questions. Kind Regards,
Mary “

We also sent out a survey by email but unfortunately this was not successful. The response rate was negligible.

Overall we are satisfied that we achieved our aim.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

What is your conclusion?
The project was successful because we produced good quality, informative and accessible information that we were able to distribute to large numbers of home owners. We believe that our strategy of visiting land lease communities and providing local education sessions was the right approach. Personal contact with home owners was an important part of this project, as were our partnerships.

What are your recommendations for improvements both for the intended audience of your project, and for the strategy you used to achieve your aim? What would you do differently next time?
Visits to land lease communities: If we undertook a similar project in the future we would try to negotiate access to communities in advance. By doing this we could provide operators with more information about the TU and the purpose of our visit and hopefully facilitate access to all communities.

Information sessions: The best venues for numbers were in land lease communities so we would try and do more of that next time. Home owners from other communities did attend those sessions so that is not an issue.

For other venues, local knowledge is essential. Home owners in the area know which venues work best for people so we would try to get advice from someone in every area.

Evaluation: We didn’t ask people to complete evaluation forms at the information sessions but with hindsight we should have had that option available. Our attempt to collect this information electronically was unsuccessful and we now therefore have only anecdotal data.