

National Awards for Excellence in Community Housing 2000

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme

Winning entry (best achievement) for National Award for Excellence in Service to Tenants & Communities

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme Inc wish to enter in the category of Award for Excellence in Service to Tenants and Communities as we believe our organisation demonstrates an excellent example of service to our tenants and community:

Background

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme commenced operations in 1983 under the auspice of Narrabri Shire Council and became an incorporated body in 1990. Included under this incorporation now, is the Narrabri Special Purpose Housing Scheme, Host Family Service and a Group Home.

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme is pro-active in initiating responses to housing need in the local area and we have demonstrated a clear commitment to self-evaluation and continuous quality improvement as can be seen from our granting of Accreditation.

The Scheme was one of the first organisations to achieve full three-year Accreditation status on 14th January 2000.

The Narrabri Shire has a population of approximately 16,000 people who are predominantly Anglo-Australian. There is high unemployment in this predominantly farming based economy. The town is 560kms from Sydney in north-western NSW. Unemployment and lack of skills and work opportunities are a huge problem and we have one of the highest youth suicide rates in the country.

Unlike many rural towns, Narrabri is not seeing a decline in population. Indications are that new and expanding industries will bring further growth, compounding the already high housing stress Narrabri is currently experiencing, where there is a lack of available housing options and a low tenancy turnover.

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme offers secure, low cost accommodation to eligible low to middle income earners within the Narrabri Shire. The main activity of the Scheme is tenancy management and referral to other housing and support services. The Scheme has a commitment to the provision of affordable housing, consistent with our Mission Statement.

Over the years the Scheme has acquired 12 capital properties comprising 4 x 3 bedroom houses and 8 x 2 bedroom units as well as managing 39 leasehold properties, two of which are supported accommodation for people with intellectual disabilities.

In 1994, the Scheme commenced negotiations with the Department of Housing to provide purpose built accommodation for people with intellectual disabilities. In May 1998, the Scheme took possession of 3 units, under the supported housing initiatives program, to house people with an intellectual disability. This program enables these clients to live independently with the assistance of a support agreement with Narrabri Special Purpose Housing. The support service provides living skills support while Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme provides the housing management.

In March 2000, the Scheme successfully applied for crisis accommodation for women and children under the Crisis Accommodation Program. The Scheme acquired a 3-bedroom house for this project and have a formal support agreement with Narrabri Family Crisis Centre providing support services to the tenants while Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme is responsible for the management of the property.

The staff of Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme currently consists of 1 full time Housing Manager and a casual Clerical Assistant/relief worker. The Management Committee is very active and there is excellent cooperation in the organisation between the Management Committee and staff. The organisation interacts well with other agencies at a local level and maintains strong linkages.

Sustained benefit to tenants and the local community

Narrabri Community Tenancy Schemes tenancy management is efficient and professional with clear, written policies and procedures in place. The focus of our work is to house those most in need including providing advice and referral to agencies, which may assist tenants, create and maintain successful tenancies.

The organisation is based in the Neighbourhood Centre building with other community service providers with whom we have excellent working relationships eg Home Care, Community Options, Community Aid Service, Special Purpose Housing, Homeless Persons Support Team and New England Carer Respite Centre.

Under Narrabri Community Tenancy Schemes incorporation are Narrabri Special Purpose Housing, Host Family Service and a Group Home. All these services enrich and benefit a significant section of the community, many of whom could not sustain an independent tenancy without the assistance of the organisation.

The Scheme houses a number of tenants with intellectual disabilities and has in place formal support agreements with Narrabri Special Purpose Housing which offers support services to these tenants enabling them to live independently in the community.

There are two tenant representatives on the Management Committee who are supported by the Housing Manager to maximise their participation. We have produced a Tenants Reps brochure to inform tenants of the role and existence of, the tenant representatives, is distributed.

A tenant's newsletter is produced monthly and tenants are encouraged to contribute. We encourage tenants to attend Management Committee meeting and become members of the organisation. We presently have five tenants on the Management Committee.

Through our support agreement with Narrabri Family Crisis Centre we are able to create secure, long-term affordable housing for women with children and assist them with many aspects of living skills they may need, thus empowering and building their confidence and presence in the community.

Staff are involved in a number of local and state committees including, at a local level; member of the Narrabri Interagency Group, Co-Chair of Early Intervention, Vice Chair of Narrabri Community Aid Service, Homeless Persons Advisory Panel, Narrabri Domestic Violence Liaison Committee, which also entails being involved in facilitation of Domestic Violence issues being taken into local schools. In the wider social housing sector the Scheme is involved in the Office of Community Housing Rural and Remote Strategy Reference Group

The Scheme works collaboratively with other agencies to maximise social housing. Examples of this are the Supported Housing Initiatives Program with ADD, the Supported Housing leasehold program with Special Purpose Housing and the Crisis Accommodation Program with the Narrabri Family Crisis Centre and DoCS.

Evidence of tenant satisfaction

Evidence of tenant satisfaction is seen by the recent tenant survey and interviews carried out by the Accreditation Unit. Tenants reported to the Accreditation team that maintenance was done promptly with urgent repairs carried out within 24 hours and non-urgent repairs with 7 days. Tenants also said they felt they were treated with respect and were well informed about their rights and responsibilities and would be able to make a complaint if needed. Most tenants thought that it would be good if the service could expand and provide housing for more people.

The Scheme obtains quotes for large repairs and maintenance jobs and all work is carried out in consultation with tenants. All capital and SHIP properties have a cyclical maintenance and upgrade plan incorporated into the Business Plan for the next 5 years, including costings. A computerised profit and loss statement is kept for each property.

We also conduct tenant surveys and ask all tenants leaving the service to complete a Tenant Exit Form. The information gained from this form helps us to identify gaps in our service and to target and improve those identified areas.

Good linkages with support services assist tenants to achieve successful housing outcomes and ensure that tenants needs are met. Regular contact with the support services together with written support agreements assists the tenant, Scheme and support agency to all work together in achieving positive goals.

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme is responsive to local housing needs within the restrictions of a small organisation, funding constraints and limited housing stock.. We have been successful in negotiating reasonable rents with local private landlords and real estate agents. All properties are inspected prior to acquisition and rejected if they are not of a suitable standard. Most of our properties are situated close to the CBD, schools and transport. We are keen to expand and investigate the feasibility of accessing additional funds to acquire a more diverse range of housing stock to further meet the needs of both tenants and applicants.

We believe that successful housing outcomes are best achieved by matching people to properties and our allocation policies and procedures have prevented problems occurring with tenants not being appropriately housed because of inappropriate allocation.

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme provides all tenants with a Tenant Handbook, Tenants Rights booklet that includes contact numbers for advice and advocacy and a local Directory of Services. We are keen to empower tenants and applicants and have organised workshops and information days for tenants and applicants about their rights and responsibilities as tenants. We are in the process of arranging, in partnership with the Domestic Violence Liaison Committee, information sessions on how to deal with and what to do in domestic violence situations.

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme's success lies in the fact that we are a team with tenant, committee and staff all working together in creating and maintaining successful tenancies and providing secure and appropriate housing. Team involvement in the decision making processes of the Scheme ensure tenant satisfaction is maintained.

Effective referral and support links with relevant agencies

Effective referral and support links with relevant agencies was highlighted by the Accreditation team as one of the things Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme does well.

Below are excerpts from the Accreditation Evaluation Report:

- ‘External stakeholders spoke glowingly of how Narrabri CTS was accessible, its humane approach, its professionalism and the energy and commitment of the Housing Manager and the Management Committee.’
- ‘All the agencies had regular contact with the Narrabri CTS at least once a month or more frequently, to daily.’
- ‘The general comments were that the service was very accessible, flexible in supporting clients, respects clients, deals well with aboriginal people and is very professional.’

Under our incorporation, we have Special Purpose Housing, Host Family Service and a Group Home which enhances and compliments our housing management services and means that we have the capacity to assist many more people with complex housing needs.

Our Policies and Procedures Manual includes a policy on referrals, stating that we accept referrals from other agencies and we have actively promoted our service to other agencies in many ways to ensure that these agencies know of our service and can encourage their clients to access Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme.

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme has a comprehensive resource directory and as stated is located in a building with many other services and very involved in local committees including the local Interagency Group where service providers and agencies meet on a bi-monthly basis.

We have formed linkages with Department of Housing, Ageing and Disability, Department of Community Services, Family Crisis Centre, Community Aid, Homeless Person Support Team, Youth Service, Family Crisis Centre and Community Health.

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme advertises its service widely, with brochures distributed throughout the local area through doctor's surgeries, real estate agents, government departments and support and referral agencies.

A wide cross section of the community is represented on our committee including Docs, Community Aid Service, Red Cross, Lions Club and Namoi Enterprises - employment agency for people with disabilities. We also liaise with local government.

Involvement with the local community

Involvement with the local community is at the centre of any successful community based organisation and ongoing networking within the community by committee and staff helps to promote and enhance our service.

Evidence of Narrabri Community Tenancy Schemes involvement with the local community was noted in the Accreditation teams overall summary of achievements;

‘The Management Committee members are very active and there is excellent cooperation in the organisation between Management Committee and staff. The organisation interacts well with other agencies at a local level and maintains linkages. The organisation has been proactive in initiating response to housing need in the local area. It has demonstrated a clear commitment to self-evaluation and continuous quality improvement.’

We are also a member of the NSW Federation of Housing Associations which provides valuable advice and assistance and keeps the Scheme up to date with housing issues which can be passed on to assist with local community needs.

In some respects, being a small organisation in a small community makes it easier to network and consult with the local community, however, our policy of yearly performance monitoring ensures that we are and continue to be involved in our local community. This policy states that we produce a comprehensive Business and Strategic Plan, which is reviewed and monitored regularly by staff and committee.

The Plan is revised and updated each year to ensure that all of its objectives are fulfilled and any new developmental targets are included each year. As part of our Business Plan we also undertake a formal risk and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the local community.

The committee and staff are all proactive within the community as can be seen by the number of committees and organisations committee and staff are involved with:

- Red Cross
- Lions Club
- Interagency Group

- Community Aid Service – includes Youth Service, Occasional Care, Newcomers Group, Homeless Persons Support Team and Toy Library
- New England Area Health Services
- Early Intervention Committee
- Domestic Violence Liaison Committee
- Rural & Remote Strategy Reference Group

Active promotion of social housing

Active promotion of social housing is the focus behind our Business and Strategic Plan and both staff and committee are proactive and committed to the professional expansion of social housing locally and nationally.

Evidence of this can be seen in our Business Plan whereby we have processes in place to develop our activities and services, with strategies on how to improve and promote our service.

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme has a written, comprehensive Policy and Procedure Manual, which is publicly available and includes policies which promote the service. The formulation and ongoing revision of the Policies and Procedures actively involves tenants, management and staff.

We have purchased the NSW Federation of Housing Associations Good Practice Guides which have become an invaluable reference for ideas on improving and promoting our service.

As well, we have identified training and development goals that relate to the aims of the organisation and have used this training to promote the service, such as the Housing Manager becoming a facilitator of the Domestic Violence Workshops and accepting invitations to speak about the service at community functions.

The Housing Manager has been trained as a peer evaluator which enables her to assist the organisation with ideas about how to improve the service.

Nominations for Management Committee are canvassed through the local press and by staff and committee networking to promote our service. We currently have a committee of 17 members drawn from a diverse range of backgrounds and interests. These include

- DoCS disability worker (President)
- Retired councillor, Red Cross NSW Divisional Councillor, Board member of New England area Health Services and holder of an OAM (Vice President)
- Primary Producer and President of local Sheltered Workshop (Vice President)
- Retired bookkeeper and active community worker (Vice President)

- Community Aid Co-ordinator (Secretary)
- Retired councillor and active Lions Club President (Treasurer)
- Practicing Solicitor (Patron)
- Five tenants hold committee positions, including two tenant representatives. All of these tenants are actively involved in the local community as well as Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme.

In conclusion, Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme has a range of brochures and literature that are regularly distributed to local businesses, service providers and other agencies. As stated previously, staff and committee are directly involved in many community committees which in turn promotes this service. Situated in the Neighbourhood Centre, adjacent to the Shire Library, close to the CBD, Community health and a Doctors Surgery, provides easy access for those who could best benefit by our service and referral linkages with a diversity of community support services.