

Accreditation Status Report

The Report

This report provides an overview of Access Community Housing Company Ltd's performance in relation to the National Community Housing Standards.

The report consists of two main parts:

- Accreditation Status Report
- Accreditation Evaluation Report

Accreditation Status Report includes:

- Recommended / Current accreditation status
- Background information about the organisation's work and history
- An overview of the Evaluation team's assessment of the organisation's performance, identifying major achievements as well as major areas for improvement.
- Evaluation Team
- Methodology

It is important to note that the Accreditation Status Report, for accredited organisations only, will be made publicly available on the CHSAU Website – <http://www.chsau.qld.gov.au>

The Evaluation Team has assessed the organisation's performance by rating each Standard against a five-point scale, as outlined below:

Surpassed	Performance meets expectations in all of the three categories of evidence (documentation, processes, measuring outcomes), and at least one category has exceeded expectations
Met	Performance meets expectations in all of the three categories of evidence (documentation, processes, measuring outcomes)
Partially Met	Where there are no categories of evidence (documentation, processes, measuring outcomes) not met, and any of the three categories is partially met.
Not Met	Where there is a not met rating in any of the three categories of evidence (documentation, processes, measuring outcomes)
Not Applicable	The standard cannot be met by the organisation because external legislation, organisation definition or funding policy guidelines prevents them from doing so.

Accreditation Status

Access Community Housing Company Ltd has met the required standards and has been awarded full three year accreditation from 21 July 2009 to 20 July 2012.

Summary of Feedback from Tenants and Other Stakeholders

The organisation provided the results of the tenant feedback survey undertaken for the evaluation. The evaluation team also interviewed tenants, a range of community agencies and the funding body.

Tenants' levels of satisfaction with the services and their accommodation were very high, both in the written survey and at interview. Some said they enjoyed having the opportunity to comment on the services provided by Access.

They demonstrated a good level of knowledge regarding their rights and their responsibilities and all said they would contact their housing managers if they had any problems. Tenants said they knew how to make a complaint and that they were comfortable with contacting staff. All indicated they had information about the Tenant Advice Service. Tenants were clear about the process for requesting repairs. One tenant said he had to wait "a while" to get a repair done, but was generally happy with maintenance services. No one had any issues with access to the housing managers or the office.

Community agencies contacted were also very positive regarding Access as an organisation their Board and staff. All had good information about referral protocols, services provided, hours of operation etc. Access is viewed in the local community as a significant stakeholder in the provision of housing and housing related services. The agencies said the organisation has a targeted approach to networking that generally achieves positive outcomes for local people in need of low cost housing. It was also said that the General Manager is highly respected in Cairns and the broader housing sector. The tenant advocate, who is also responsible to the same Board, said that their service had advocated for some Access tenants, and that the housing managers were open to approaches from the service; that privacy protocols were strictly observed during any advocacy work and no information was given to anyone on staff or Board who was not working directly with the case.

The funding body reported that the organisation plays a large part in the local community and was heavily involved in the submission and setting up of the Cairns Homelessness Hub. The organisation has recently accepted the management of the 57 townhouses currently managed by the department. It was also reported that the organisation has handled a number of issues which occurred in recent times with the two Community-managed Housing – Studio units, and had minimised the impact to other tenants in the complex. The organisation has assisted other regional service providers in relation to the policies and procedures of the OSHS. Reporting requirements are met in a timely manner.

Overall Summary of Major Achievements including Areas of Excellence

Areas of excellence (Establishing and Maintaining Tenancies)

There are separate Tenants Kits for each of the housing programs. Each Kit has a strong tenant focus, is easy to read and contains useful information and engaging graphics. Each Kit includes a statement of client's rights including complaints and appeals processes, and outlines the rights and responsibilities of tenancies. The Kits also cover urgent and non-urgent repairs, opportunities for feedback, access to tenant advocates and information on organisational policies that affect tenancies, e.g. rent reviews and property inspections. There is also an invitation from the Board to tenants to participate in the organisation's planning activities in person by phone or in writing.

At sign up the housing managers explains the purpose of each of the documents - the Tenancy Agreement, Tenant Kit, RTA booklet, condition report and contact details, and checks that the tenant understands the information. If the tenant is not clear or the housing

managers considers there might be an issue regarding level of understanding, an interpreter or other appropriate advocate will be engaged.

Areas of excellence (Building Community Capacity)

The Strategic Plan sets out a range of strategies for contributing to sustainable improvements in the well being of its tenants and the broader community.

The organisation is a key stakeholder in housing and tenancy issues in its local community and a key contributor to the success of a number of projects and initiatives such as the viability project which led to a successful submission for the establishment of the Cairns Homelessness Hub. Access was the auspice for the project in its initial stages and continues to have a representative on the Hub Consortium.

The organisation has contributed to the Cairns Plan (Local Government) and has had some success in raising Council awareness of need for affordable housing and opportunities available such as NRAS.

Staff and Board members participate in the regional housing forums, housing network and other appropriate forums, and some are also involved with state wide forums, national initiatives and peak bodies. These contacts and networks are used to keep abreast of local need and local housing issues and local, state and national initiatives which then inform its planning processes.

Staff and Board also seek to contribute to the development of knowledge in the social and community housing sector and seek opportunities to reduce housing stress by offering expertise, advice and comment on state and national housing policy, housing submissions and local housing issues.

The strong relationships and networks formed between staff and local agencies have many benefits for tenants, particularly those experiencing difficulty sustaining a tenancy, and the more vulnerable requiring good advocacy.

Areas of Achievement

- The organisation has quality documentation that substantially supports its ongoing viability and gives strong guidance to its operations and practice.
- There is a strong tenant focus in the operations of the organisations; tenants are kept informed of issues that impact on their tenancies and have a number of opportunities to participate in activities of the organisation.
- The commitment to quality tenant services is reflected in documentation and practice.
- There are clear guidelines for all aspects of maintenance and acquisition of new stock.
- Privacy and maintaining confidentiality are prioritised in a number of procedures and systems, and all staff, Board, volunteers and members are required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement.
- There are clear and effective governance structures in place and the organisation has developed good internal administrative systems to support its work.
- All delegations and accompanying roles are well documented.
- The Board receives adequate information and reports to inform its decisions and follows the documented guidelines for conducting meetings.
- The organisation changed from an association to a Company during the last 12 months, and the Board and staff had an opportunity to reflect on the shape of the organisation in the future and what structures it would need to support the new direction. This has resulted in a number of changes including development of roles and policy and planning.
- Feedback is sought from auditor regarding improvements to financial practices.
- There is a strong emphasis on training and development for Board, staff and volunteers.

- Board and staff all participate in monitoring, review and planning activities.
- The organisation seeks feedback from a range of sources and gathers a broad range of information to guide its planning activities.
- The range of information management systems work effectively for the organisation.
- The organisation employs competent staff who throughout the evaluation process demonstrated a strong commitment to their work and achieving successful outcomes for the organisation.
- Staff confirmed a high level of satisfaction with employment practices.
- There were numerous examples of the organisation's commitment to continuous quality improvement.

The Board and staff are to be congratulated on their level of achievement. Their commitment to the principles of quality improvement and a genuine desire to improve all facets of the organisation is an example of continuous quality improvement and a demonstrated understanding of how these principles should operate in practice.

The recommendations in this report are intended to assist Access to continue to develop as a quality organisation, both in areas where it is already performing well and where through the evaluation process, areas for further improvement have been identified.

Overall Summary of Strategic Recommendations

It is recommended that the organisation consolidate and document its methods for assessing risk and organisational viability in taking on new stock or engaging in other growth strategies (financial impacts, staffing levels, quality of service delivery, operational impacts, local need or target groups, condition of stock, local community attitudes, etc.).

The complaints procedures would be improved by the addition of a flowchart that demonstrates the steps taken in managing simple, complex and serious complaints, and by documenting the process used by the organisation for reviewing the complaints register in the context of continuous improvement

The organisation's plans would benefit from the inclusion of processes for measuring outcomes. This could be done by setting specific performance targets and timeframes - and would both enhance and simplify the monitoring and review process. Performance targets could be linked to the goals and actions in the strategic plan or be developed in a stand alone quality plan.

The Staff Grievance and Discipline procedures should include some further steps and documentation of the levels of responsibility.

Background information about the organisation

History, location and community served

Access Community Housing was established in September 1991, under the auspice of Cairns City Council, through funds provided by the then Queensland Department of Housing, Local government and Planning and the Rental Bond Authority.

In November, 1991 the group incorporated under the Associations Act and managed two programs – Community Rent Scheme and the Housing Resource Service (now TAASQ). Over the years, Access Community Housing Association Inc continued to grow and has auspiced many projects, as well as various programs which continue to be part of its portfolio.

In December 2006 the organisation changed its structure to a Company Limited by Guarantee and on 1 July 2007 all operations of the Association Inc were transferred to the Company.

Services provided by the Organisation

Housing services for eligible persons – transitional housing and long term housing programs.
Tenancy advice and advocacy services.

Number of staff employed

Housing managers x 3 Full time
Housing managers x 1 Part time (22 ½ hrs per week)
Administration Coordinator x 1 Full time
Administration Assistant x 1 Part time (20 hrs per week)
Tenants Advice and Advocacy Worker x 1 Full time
Tenants Advice and Advocacy Worker x 1 Casual
General Manager x 1 Full time)

Property Portfolio and Target Groups

1. COMMUNITY RENT SCHEME provides subsidised, transitional housing for people on low incomes and in need while waiting allocation from the department's Housing Register or to find other secure, affordable housing options. Funding is provided for a minimum of 114 properties in Cairns and surrounds and 28 in Mossman/Port Douglas area.
2. TENANTS ADVICE AND ADVOCACY SERVICE provides tenancy advice, advocacy, housing information and education, for all tenants including those in the One Social Housing System (OSHS) and those housed under the Residential Services Act.
3. CAIRNS COMMUNITY MANAGED STUDIO UNITS (Previously known as Cairns Boarding House Project)
 - a. 124 McLEOD ST CAIRNS provides long term housing for 40 persons in one complex. The main target is single people who are homeless or facing homelessness. There are 16 one bedroom units, 16 bed sits and 8 traditional boarding house style with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. These properties are allocated from the Company's wait list.
 - b. 468 MULGRAVE RD, EARLVILLE provides accommodation for singles that are homeless or facing homelessness. There are 12 rooms with their own bathroom and shared kitchen and laundry facilities. There is also one unit that is wheelchair accessible. This accommodation is identified as transitional under the OSHS and is allocated from the Company's wait list.
 - c. 15-17 HOGAN ST, WESTCOURT provides studio unit accommodation for 26 singles that are homeless or facing homelessness These properties are allocated from the department's Housing Register.
4. LONG TERM HOUSING PROGRAM provides long term housing for persons eligible for assistance under the OSHS and in need a permanent secure housing. There are 26 properties in Cairns and 2 in Babinda. These properties are allocated from the department's Housing Register.
5. LONG TERM HOUSING PROGRAM – SENIORS provides accommodation for persons aged over 55. The six units in Yorkeys Knob are allocated from the department's Housing Register.

6. CAIRNS REGIONAL COUNCIL – SENIORS. Access Community Housing Company Ltd manages properties on behalf of the Cairns Regional Council for persons over 55 years of age.
- a) 63-67 PEAST ST, MANUNDA provides duration of need accommodation under the Long Term Housing program for 24 seniors eligible for assistance under the OSHS. There are 15 one bedroom units and 9 cottages. The one bedroom units are allocated from the department's Housing Register.
- b) 33-37 CHARLES ST, PARRAMATTA PARK provides duration of need accommodation under the Long Term Housing for 6 seniors eligible for assistance under the OSHS and allocations are made from the department's Housing Register.
- c) 1/28D GROVE ST, PARRAMATTA PARK provides accommodation for 8 seniors in cottages. These properties are owned by the Cairns Regional Council and can be allocated from the Company's wait list.

Income sources

Department of Communities (Housing and Homelessness Services)
Fees for property management
Rent Income

Management/Governance structure

As at 14 October 2008

Chair: Lois Wilson
Vice Chair: Judy Barr
Treasurer: Elley Mundraby
Board Members: Damien Lawrence, Michael Healy. Christine Richardson
Company Secretary: Carol Mills

Key issues over the past 12 months

- Changing all business over to the Company.
- Winding up the Association.
- Revising all policies and procedures and having them readopted by the Board
- Continuing negotiation with the Cairns Council regarding the management of 38 seniors units (these were picked up on 6 October).
- Granting of the management of 26 CMSU in Hogan St to be picked up in March and after ordering all the furniture etc. for the property there was a delay in hand over of 4 months which meant finding storage for the furniture and then having it removed to Hogan St. This also had a detrimental effect on the warranties.
- Having to remove the tenants from Babinda Nurses Quarters so that the department could hand the property back to Department of Health. These tenants were originally to go to Hogan St when the first handover date was to be November 2006. The tenants were moved to 468 Mulgrave Rd (a motel turned CMSU) which had been initially proposed to be allocated to Mission Australia for complex needs.
- The changes to the allocations process for CMSU – from the Department's Housing Register.
- Increase demand on the service for housing provision and tenancy advice.
- Having to drop 38 CRS properties to get back in budget because of the increases in rent. This was done by natural attrition but meant that less people were housed over the 2007/08 year.
- Having problems with training in RTA legislation so that we could get more relief TAAS workers.
- To review our staff requirements given the additional properties we will be picking up – 57 units to manage on behalf of the department; up to 25 rent start properties; some properties under the NRAS.
- To ensure that staff are supported with their additional workloads and that appropriate administration assistance is available for them.

The Evaluation Team

Coordinator: Carmel Sakrzewski

Peer Evaluator: Tracey Jones

Trainee Peer: Stewart Abbott

Methodology

Prior to the accreditation evaluation the service used the Self-Evaluation Workbook to evaluate its own performance. The evaluation team then conducted a desk-top assessment of information and documentation provided by the organisation. This was followed by an on-site evaluation.

The external evaluation process involved gathering and assessing an extensive amount of information and documentation and included:

- reviewing the organisation report and other documentation and evidence of various kinds
- conducting a range of interviews with management members and staff
- inspecting office facilities and equipment
- assessing policies and procedures
- reviewing the tenancy and property record audit reports
- interviewing and/or surveying tenants
- reviewing reports on the results of surveys of tenants and other organisations undertaken by the organisation
- interviewing or seeking feedback from key community agencies and the funding body.