

Accreditation Status Report

The Report

This report provides an overview of Community Housing & Information Centre Inc's (CHIC) 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

The Community Housing & Information Centre Inc has been awarded full three year accreditation from 2 June 2009 to 1 June 2012.

Summary of Feedback from Tenants and Other Stakeholders

The organisation provided the results of a tenant survey conducted in November 2008 and February 2009. Prior to the evaluation in February 2009, tenants were given the option of completing the Meeting with Tenants Interview questions or attending an interview with the evaluation team. Twenty tenants completed the survey and the evaluation team interviewed one tenant.

Tenants were very positive about all aspects of their contact with the organisation particularly the staff. Comments included very friendly and helpful, professional, approachable, caring and courteous, enthusiastic, the personal touch and willing to help.

Tenants indicated repairs were responded to quickly and they were happy with the choice of rent payment methods. Almost all tenants knew how to make a complaint although only one tenant had done so and he was satisfied with the outcome.

Tenants were asked if they were provided with opportunities to participate in the activities of the organisation if they chose to. Sixteen tenants responded in the affirmative commenting they were told about joining the Management Committee at sign up. Four tenants were not aware of opportunities for participation.

In response to the question where tenants could access help with their tenancy, almost half the respondents didn't answer the question, or were unsure or didn't know.

Feedback from Referral Agencies ranged from very positive to minimal contact depending on the agencies interviewed.

Overall Summary of Major Achievements including Areas of Excellence

CHIC's office is located in the main street of Mackay and is accessible by the major bus route and is close to other services. Staff also provide outreach services to tenants, including holding meetings in disability accessible locations, through phone contact where suitable and preferred by the tenant and after hours visits negotiated by appointment. Carers and advocates are encouraged to participate in interviews and provision is made to accommodate/assist them where necessary

The organisation provides intensive tenancy management and works tirelessly to assist tenants to maintain their tenancies. There is a need to acknowledge the hard work of the staff under difficult and changing circumstances. The continuing commitment over many years to the tenants, the organisation and the wider housing sector through housing networks at local, state and national levels is to be commended. The tenancy management practices ensure sustainable tenancies and positive outcomes for tenants.

The recently elected Management Committee is enthusiastic and committed to quality improvement and is to be commended for pursuing accreditation so early in their term. The Housing Manager had commenced the accreditation process a number of years ago but owing to a number of factors, CHIC was not able to progress this at the time.

The President has been involved with the organisation in various capacities over a number of years and the new secretary has been a committee member for three to four years. The organisation has had a busy year recovering from the floods, managing homeless tenants and retrieving flood damaged financial records.

The organisation has established a good base from which to move forward even though the CRS program is experiencing financial constraints with a tight housing market, minimal vacancies and an uncertain future.

Overall Summary of Strategic Recommendations

Tenant Participation

That CHIC uses a tenant focus group to research ways that tenants would best respond to participation in the organisation.

That CHIC develops a broader range of strategies to address tenant participation and ensure avenues for tenant participation are continually pursued.

Building Community Capacity

That CHIC provides more information on how the organisation will and can demonstrate that work undertaken contributes to sustainable improvements in the well-being of tenants and the community.

Organisational Review

That CHIC implements tools to measure performance against all of the standards as described in the policy and procedures and organisational report.

Financial Systems

- That CHIC develops a budget and monthly cash flow projections to guide the work of the organisation.
- That CHIC develops a policy for debt prevention, recovery and write-off.
- That CHIC develops a policy for an internal review of CHIC's financial system each year and an external review every 3 – 5 years, as outlined in the standards manual.
- That the Treasurer presents a Treasurer's report to the Management Committee every month.

Background information about the organisation

History, location and community served

Community Housing & Information Centre Inc (CHIC) was officially formed in 1991 to auspice the Queensland State Government's funding for the Community Rent Scheme (CRS) and (the then) Housing Resource Service – now the tenant Advice and Advocacy Service (TAAS(Q)). CHIC is incorporated under the Associations Incorporated Act of 1981.

Since this time, CHIC has become a major stakeholder in the housing sector in the Mackay region and supports its workers to network within their sector and with any relevant support agencies to enhance the services they provide to their clients.

A community based Management Committee that is made up of a pool of very dedicated community focused and supportive members of the region is responsible for the management of CHIC. Their backgrounds are varied with areas of interest in disabilities, domestic violence, youth, acquired brain injuries, low-income tenants and accounting.

Both programs auspiced by CHIC carry a wage component and staff have been employed to manage the programs.

The CRS program currently manages 59 properties under the CRS program and is looking into the broader housing sphere to form partnerships with support agencies to supply tenancy and property management services for support agencies.

CRS has worked very closely with the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services of the region and has been a supplier of many exit points for their clients over the years.

The TAAS(Q) program covers a very large geographical area for tenancy law advice and advocacy services. Community education forms part of the role of the workers providing information to school students on renting in Queensland. They have also developed an information pack that is distributed during information sessions. Phone advice and appointment hours have been set to allow maximum client access time along with their other community awareness activities.

Mackay is located half way between Brisbane & Cairns, with its boundaries extending from Alligator Creek in the south to the O'Connell River in the north.

Mackay is the largest sugar producing area in Australia and is home to several sugar mills and the largest bulk sugar terminal in the world. The sugar industry is a large provider of seasonal work for the regions community members.

The nearby coalfields of the Bowen basin rely on Mackay as a service centre and provide much of the seasonal employment (shut downs) to the region. In the past, many investment properties were owned by the permanent mine workers, but due to cut backs in the industry, many rental properties were sold to owner-occupiers. Along with the sale of rental properties, mine workers were taking up a majority of the private rental market. The impact of these situations on the rental market was and is reflected in the very low vacancy rates Mackay has always experienced, and the hike in the cost of weekly rental.

The current trend of southern investors buying up properties at extraordinary prices has spread to Mackay – housing prices have escalated some \$35,000 in two months and are still rising. This has driven the affordability issues for home purchase and private rental even further away from the grasp of the average Mackay citizen.

Mackay's statistics for income per capita has always been distorted by the very high incomes of the sugar and coal industry workers. This has also reflected on the region not being recognised as an area of need, which attracts larger funding and Government support.

The tourist industry is attracted to the Mackay region but the down side of this is that caravan parks and hostels which were once considered an immediate option for homeless households are now unaffordable and non-accessible -the tourist trade takes preference.

The sugar, coal and fishing industries have been the backbone of Mackay's community, which draws a large percentage of its employment under the seasonal workers category. The impact on householders' abilities to pay their rent during the off-season can be quite destructive to the household's dynamics. Mackay has been experiencing many years of drought and this has a huge impact on employment for the region. The fishing industry claims it is in dire straits also and now with re-zoning of more green areas, the employment factor will again change.

Services provided by the Organisation

CHIC auspice and support the CRS and TAAS(Q) programs in their:

- provision of independent self contained accommodation for low income households with a severe and immediate housing need;

- development of housing options targeted to the needs of local communities and specific population groups;
- management of local, private and or Government owned housing through community based organisations or in some circumstances Local Government;
- provision of information and advocacy services to people in housing need to help them establish and or maintain housing in the private rental housing, boarding houses and caravans;
- response to identifying trends and needs in housing on a local basis;
- desire to grow the organisation utilising government funding and or external sources of funding outside of Department of Housing.

Number of staff employed

Community Rent Scheme

Housing Manager	full time	37.5 hrs per week:
Administrative Assistant	none	
General Inspections Officer	part time	20 hrs per week
Bookkeeper	contract	4hrs per week +

Tenancy Advice & Advocacy Service

TAAS Worker	full time	37.5 hrs per week
TAAS Worker	part time	16 hrs per week:
Relief worker	casual	
Bookkeeper	contract	4 hrs per week +

Property Portfolio

Community Rent Scheme

Leasehold	head leased, transitional housing
quota	64 properties (53 headleased, 4 x residential services, 7 departmental leases)

South Mackay, East Mackay, West Mackay, North Mackay, Northern Beaches/Bucasia, Andergrove, Beaconsfield, Paget, Mackay City, Cannonvale, Proserpine and Bowen.

Target Group/s

CRS

Single parent families, South Sea Islanders, low income two parent families, extended families, large families, non-english speaking backgrounds, refugees, migrants, New Zealand immigrants; low income households, + statewide target groups - singles, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders, disabilities, youth (under 25), women and children escaping domestic violence.

Target Groups under special programs and agreements - Mental Health Transitional Housing Project – 1 x share house

TAAS(Q) program:

Any tenants, future tenants or ex-tenants in any identified or unidentified target group.

Income sources

Funding source – Department of Housing, Community Housing Division

Number of tenants by target group	58
households identify with disabilities	16
households identify with Domestic Violence	11

households identify with single people	14
households identify with Non-English speaking backgrounds	1
households identify with youth – under 25	7
households identify with ATSI	6
sole parents with no other target group	3

Management/Governance structure

The governance structure is a community based Management Committee.

Key issues over the past 12 months

CRS

- The impact of the CRS program review.
- Finding and keeping relief worker/s & volunteers
- Having to drop an extra 10 properties funded by previous year's surplus. The surplus is now fully expended
- Standards & Accreditation – getting started and finishing the self study and organisational report.
- Housing tenants with multiple problems increases the load on the workers
- Signing up for Centrepay has helped the rent arrears
- Centrepay has impacted on the level of administrative work involved
- Identified the need for more disability friendly accommodation
- Identified the need for single self contained accommodation (1 x bedroom) extremely scarce
- Merger talks hinder a clear future vision
- Unable to make long term plans due to the uncertain future of CRS, funding shortages and not knowing the impact of One Social Housing System on the service.
- The investment boom has meant the sale of head-leased properties has impacted on the Housing Manager's hours of work. Approximately 19 houses have changed hands since the boom in residential house/investment prices.

TAAS(Q)

- Responding to the growing numbers of clients who access the service looking for affordable housing and or immediate housing.
- Assisting clients with TICA listing information, advocating for clients in small claims hearings, responding to real estate agents' claims for bonds for clients,
- Gained extra hours, so increased the part time worker's component.
- Training a new relief worker.
- Due to increased number of people accessing the service, appointments have to be made, not just drop in sessions.

The Evaluation Team

Coordinator: Pat Rickard

Peer Evaluator: Helen Collins

Methodology

Prior to the evaluation the service had evaluated its own performance by the use of a Self-Evaluation Workbook. The Evaluation team then visited the organisation. The process of

external evaluation involved an intensive process of information gathering. Information gathered may have included:

- reviewing the organisation report and other documentation and evidence of various kinds
- conducting a range of interviews with management members and staff
- inspection of office facilities and equipment
- assessing policies and procedures
- reviewing the tenancy and property record audit reports
- interviewing tenants
- review of reports of tenant and other organisation questionnaires undertaken by organisation
- interviews with key referral organisations and the funding body.

