

Accreditation Status Report

The Report

This report provides an overview of Toowoomba Community Housing Service Inc'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

Toowoomba Community Housing Service Inc. has met the required standards and has been awarded three year accreditation for the period 22 July 2008 to 21 July 2011.

Summary of Feedback from Tenants and Other Stakeholders

The organisation provided the results of the tenant and external stakeholder surveys that it conducted prior to the accreditation evaluation. The evaluation team also interviewed tenants and community agencies and the funding body.

Tenants were very positive about all aspects of their contact with the organisation. The Tenant Kit provided them with adequate information. Requests for repairs were attended to quickly and staff always followed up to check repairs were done and were satisfactory. The tenants agreed that the staff are polite, approachable and helpful. No-one interviewed had made a complaint but all said they knew what to do and would feel comfortable to complain to staff. Tenants said they were encouraged to participate in activities and become members of the organisation or express interest in being a tenant representative on committee. One tenant said that the owner of the house was slow to respond to requests for repairs.

External agencies also reported positive relationships with TCHS. One primarily referred applicants and was aware of referral and sharing of information protocols developed by TCHS. It was commented that TCHS works tirelessly to ensure the safety and well being of its client base as well as the neighbours. One organisation said that TCHS's set working hours sometimes slowed down the working regime for community organisations. The TAAS(Q) service said it has no issues with the organisation and is aware that if it has anything to discuss with them staff are very approachable. TAAS (Q) said it often referred clients for housing to TCHS. All the community agencies interviewed said there is a shortage of crisis and transitional housing in Toowoomba and clients are then forced to seek very expensive alternatives.

The funding body reported that the staff and committee are approachable and flexible and open to suggestions and ideas. The organisation complies with all reporting requirements prior to the required date and adheres to the Assistance Agreement, Service Schedule and Program Specifications. Policies and Procedures established by staff and management have resulted in low vacancy rates, low maintenance and very few complaints. The CRS service is well known in the Toowoomba and South West Queensland region due to a good rapport with other stakeholders, service providers, and real estate agents.

Overall Summary of Major Achievements including Areas of Excellence

Areas of Excellence

TCHS's is commended for the work done with tenants and external agencies to ensure sustainable tenancies and positive outcomes for tenants.

The Tenant Kit is highly informative and welcoming. All key areas are covered, and there is an emphasis on prevention and empowering tenants to manage issues such as disputes, tenancy breaches, resolving complaints, etc. The Kit is tenant focussed and covers all key points in simple language and easy to follow steps.

Areas of Achievement

The tenancy management policies and practices demonstrate a good balance between providing positive outcomes for applicants and tenants and meeting organisational requirements and viability.

To enhance the ability of tenants to understand and exercise their rights, the organisation supports tenants to link to appropriate services for their specific needs, for example, interpreter services, cultural groups, advocacy or support.

Tenants are provided with information about their rights and responsibilities and what they can expect from the organisation as users of its services.

Private lessors are encouraged to participate in annual property inspections and to identify and negotiate strategies for cyclical maintenance. The renewal of a head lease is dependent on the outcomes of a review by TCHS which includes the owner's demonstrated willingness to undertake cyclical maintenance and responsiveness to repairs and maintenance.

Workers have strong networks in the community and actively participate in the Regional Housing Council, Department of Housing Planning Forum, CRSAQ, the local branch of Shelter, and Toowoomba Inter-agency networks. In addition, both staff and management committee actively contribute to community forums which are locally based, and seek to contribute to debate on service related issues.

The committee identified gaps in the skill base of its members and sent invitations to peak accounting groups and the Queensland Law Society. This innovative strategy was successful and the organisation now has a local solicitor and a local accountant on its committee.

TCHS has a fire safety audit annually. Exits and evacuation processes are clear, smoke alarms and extinguishers are checked for currency and fire safety procedures are reviewed. Provision is made for responding to critical incidents, including attention to health and wellbeing, debriefing and follow up. Staff can access a counsellor of their choice following any critical incident. A register is kept of all incidents, including outcomes.

Overall Summary of Strategic Recommendations

Planning and Development

Include risk assessment process for key planning strategies.

Further develop planning processes to include:

- Action plans to operationalise strategies including responsibilities and timeframes.

- A reporting framework that aligns with measurement of key performance indicators.
- Delegation of responsibility for annual planning process.

Organisational Review

Expand the review process to ensure that reviews happen within designated time frames and include key areas of operations using the measuring outcomes section of the Standards Manual as a guide.

Develop appropriate targets and performance measures that committee can use to manage against.

Document review outcomes and improvements and store as evidence/tools for future internal and external evaluation processes.

2005 Accreditation Evaluation Report

TCHS responded to all recommendations in the 2005 Evaluation Report.

Background information about the organisation

History, location and community served

Toowoomba Community Housing Service (TCHS) was established by a local housing group in 1992. It was the first interim housing provider in the region, receiving funding from the Queensland Government under the Community Rent Scheme Program. Initial funding provided for 40 housing units.

It has now grown to 80 housing units and expanded to provide housing in the wider region, with housing in Dalby and providing housing management services in Warwick.

The organisation developed its first Strategic Plan in 2003 and achieved accreditation under the National Standards in 2005.

Services provided by the Organisation

TCHS is responsible for delivery of:

- Community Rent Scheme
- Housing Management services for complementary non profit community services
- Home Assist
- Home Secure
- Home Modifications (Major and Minor).

Number of staff employed In Community Housing

Housing Manager (full time)

Housing worker (full time)

Administrative worker (full time)

Property Portfolio

TCHS manages 80 properties including a mix of 10 Queensland Housing properties and 70 private lease properties. This includes a mix of 3 and 4 bedroom houses and

1 and 2 bedroom duplex properties. Two properties have modified disability access. All of the above properties are located in Toowoomba and Dalby.

In addition TCHS manages the fully modified disability housing in Warwick on behalf of a local disability support service.

Target group / s

In addition to the CRS Program target groups, the TCHS also:

- works with the Humanitarian Refugee Program in providing housing for clients placed in Toowoomba
- works closely with the Toowoomba Mental Health Services in housing people with mental health support needs
- Works closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support services for Indigenous clients who may otherwise be at risk in their tenancies.

Income sources

Program funding from Department of Housing

Management/Governance structure

Committee of management

Key issues over the past 12 months

During the inter censal period of 2001-2006, the population of Toowoomba grew by some 4% with an 10% increase in the Indigenous population and 18% increase in overseas born population. This is reflected in the nature of applicants to the CRS program.

The medium rental price increased by 26% over this period, while the median household income increased by only 21%, reflecting an increasing differential between housing costs and income.

Some 18% of all households are one parent families, and 31% of all families with children have one parent.

In terms of stability, less than three quarters of the population resided in the same place the year before the census and only two fifths of the population had been in the same residence 5 years prior. This suggests a relatively mobile population which was not previously characteristic of the region.

Based on demand for housing assistance, indicators are that there has been an increase in the number of single homeless women (not escaping domestic violence) as well as large families requiring 4 or 5 bedroom housing, which is not easily accessed in the private market.

Accessing suitable private rentals has become more difficult. There is a growing reticence to let properties where the landlord is aware that the tenants will be social housing tenants.

Clients being referred to the service have increasingly complex problems and support needs which makes maintenance of tenancies more challenging for them, for support services who are stretched and the housing managers.

Increased rental costs (in part due to increased interest rates) has significantly decreased the availability of affordable housing, and increased the number of people experiencing financial stress.

There would appear to be a decrease in the number of students requiring student housing, with an increase in distance and online study. This may make available some housing owned by the university and this is a potential opportunity to access larger properties.

The Evaluation Team

Coordinator: Carmel Sakrzewski (Standards & Accreditation Unit)

Peer Evaluator: Tracey Jones (Charters Towers Neighbourhood Centre)

Trainee Peer Evaluator: Jackie Richards (Bundaberg Housing Services)

Methodology

Prior to the evaluation the service had evaluated its own performance by the use of a Self-study Report. 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 pre-evaluation questionnaire and other documentation 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.