

INNER SYDNEY VOICE

The Journal of the Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development Inc | Spring 2012



The battle to save Rozelle

Dancing in the streets for equal pay

On the politics of income management

More buses, more trips for community transport

Up, up and away: Lift Redfern

Bringing into focus tenant engagement

Junction Neighbourhood Centre opens in Randwick

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About

Inner Sydney Voice is the journal of the Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development Inc; a non-profit organisation committed to the idea of information as a tool for community development. The organisation defines inner Sydney as being the local government areas of Botany Bay, Leichhardt, Randwick, City of Sydney, Waverley and Woollahra.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the traditional owners of the lands across the areas we service, particularly the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, traditional owners of the land on which our office is located. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

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EDITORIAL

Participation. Connection. Engagement. No, we are not ticking off objectives from the Federal Government's Social Inclusion agenda, but rather the principles of community development. Perusing old issues of *Inner Sydney Voice*, the thin foolscap pages bound for prosperity, what remains constant in the publication's approach is this commitment to building stronger communities in the inner city and eastern suburbs. When the ink runs discontent, it is discontent that a decision has been made without the best interests of the community in mind, but rather in the best interests of party politics, of developers, of big business, of agendas that forget the community.

Communities, real and imagined, anchor us and give us a sense of connectedness. Communities are built, maintained, destroyed, irreparably damaged and as *Inner Sydney Voice* has shown, vehemently fought for. In this Spring 2012 issue, we continue this tradition. We feature articles about the battle to save Rozelle from a high-rise development, the campaign to make Redfern station accessible and the spread of income management throughout the country. We look at the issues facing tenants and bilingual community workers and question the push towards increased volunteerism. Alongside the challenges, we celebrate the historic equal pay decision, the opening of a Randwick hub for the Junction Neighbourhood Centre and consider City of Sydney's plan to extend the reach of community transport.

To educate and inform has been one of the key objectives of the Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development since it emerged out of the resident action groups of the 1970s. Over the decades, we have acted as an information exchange for residents, community organisations, groups and others in the inner city and eastern suburbs through workshops, training, political lobbying and, of course, publications such as *Inner Sydney Voice*.

We want to make sure the voices we publish continue to be heard by as many people as possible. For this reason, we have joined the world of social media and will soon launch the online version of *Inner Sydney Voice*. We will continue with the print issue, but having an online presence will enable us to source and distribute news and information more widely and quickly. It will also provide an opportunity for people to share and comment on articles.

While we are finalising the new *Inner Sydney Voice* website (<http://www.innersydneyvoice.org.au>), keep in mind that we have recently redeveloped the website for our organisation (<http://www.innersydneyrcsd.org.au>). This website will keep you in the loop about our various activities and events in the community, such as hosting the upcoming Annual Marg Barry Memorial Lecture on Thursday, 6 December 2012 at Redfern Town Hall.

We encourage our readers to visit the website when it is launched and send us news, articles and even videos to publish. The continuation of the publication, both in print form and online, is dependent on such contributions. After all, *Inner Sydney Voice* is about participation, connection and engagement.

– Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development

WANT TO HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD?

We are looking for letters to the editors, opinion pieces, investigative articles, profiles of community organisations, interviews and more. Contributions welcome from individuals, community organisations, groups and others about the inner Sydney, eastern suburbs or broader political and social landscapes. Email contribute@innersydneyvoice.org.au or ring 9698 7690.

Deadline for contributions: Monday, 17 December 2012.





THE BATTLE TO SAVE ROZELLE

Residents achieve a win over the redevelopment of the Balmain Tigers site

BY CHANTEL COTTERELL

WALKING UP Waterloo Street in Rozelle, you would be struck by a few things: the relative quietness, considering the street is a couple of minutes walk away from the main shopping strip of Darling Street; the quaint weatherboard workers' cottages that have weathered (and benefited from) the storm of gentrification that first engulfed the suburb in the 1960s, and if you looked a little closer, you would notice the signs of protest against what has become an all-too-familiar experience of inner Sydney living: a group of residents battling developers over an unsympathetic development.

"Don't let big business destroy Rozelle!" is scrawled in black marker on a cardboard sign hung from a tree, while flyers from a public rally that attracted six hundred people earlier this year are affixed to windows and doors, demanding "SAY NO! to 32 storeys in low-rise Rozelle". On one fence, the neatly painted words "saverozelle.com" direct passers-by to the Rozelle Resident Action Group (Rozelle RAG) website. Mimicking the impact of the development on the suburb, the double l's in Rozelle extend upwards, towering over the other letters.

The development in question – named Rozelle Village – is on the prized Balmain Leagues Club site, bounded by Darling Street, Victoria Road and Waterloo Street. A perusal of the proposal reveals that the plan is to knock down the dilapidated clubhouse and build two or three towers, with a proposed height of between 25 to 32 storeys. The towers cater for 304 apartments with none set aside for affordable housing, 834 car spaces and 13,971 square metres of retail space.

Placing these numbers in context, you start to understand the opposition from local residents. Picture the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the much-maligned, yet architecturally designed Blues Point Tower in McMahon's Point, variously described as an "eyesore" and an "ancient railway carriage, stood on its end". At 32 storeys, this development is bigger than both. Meanwhile, the 13,971 square metres of retail space is greater than the existing Darling Street shopping strip.

If you turn left after leaving Waterloo Street, you will come to the old clubhouse – surrounded by a chain wire fence and covered with a banner bearing the words "HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS: Bring the Tigers back home"; the Balmain Leagues Club logo with the tiger's mouth ready to attack is snug inside a love heart. In truth, however, there is no love lost between many Tigers supporters and the developers.

"I am ashamed of the propaganda emblazoned over my Club. I am not sold on the development, despite what the football celebrities say. There are many questions unanswered - like whether there is a legal arrangement to bring the Club back", says Lisa Smajlov, Community Development Officer at Rozelle Neighbourhood Centre and lifelong Tigers supporter.

Founder of Tigers Against the Towers and recently elected Leichhardt Council Mayor, Darcy Byrne, has also been a vocal opponent, “We are desperate to see our Club return to its spiritual home, but we will not stay silent while Rozelle Village turns our neighbourhood into Bondi Junction”.

How the home of the Tigers came to be in the hands of developers is mired in controversy, with all the alleged wheelings and dealings by the developers and former Tiger of lore, Benny Elias, well-documented in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) earlier this year. The end result is that many Tigers supporters like Lisa and Tigers Against the Towers have been left feeling cheated, unaware that Benny Elias, as the SMH alleges, was set to financially benefit from the proposed development, while the Club continues to struggle with mounting debts, some from the relocation costs. After all, the sale was meant to improve the Club’s financial position.

“The area is Tigers and that has been used to get support for the development. Benny Elias was going to marches earlier in the year, getting people to sign a petition to support the development – people weren’t told about his financial interest”, David Anderson, spokesperson for the Rozelle RAG and resident of Waterloo Street explains before outlining the position of local residents, “The development is completely out of proportion for Rozelle; the area is low-rise. This will bring overshadowing and a loss of privacy for local residents. The towers will also bring more people, more cars and effectively gridlock the traffic. How’s the area to cope? We already live in one of the densest LGAs in the country”.

The overwhelming majority of local residents and community groups who made submissions to the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure vehemently opposed the development. When the exhibition period closed in June, 2,539 public submissions had been made, some typed, some even handwritten – only 115 were in support.

Submissions were also received from public authorities. Leichhardt Council paid a reported \$100,000 plus to independent consultants with expertise in urban planning, design and architecture, social impact, transport and traffic management to write their submission. The submission was damning on all accounts, concluding that it was “in essence... an overdevelopment”. Other public authorities expressed their concerns. Roads and Maritime Services wrote that “significant changes” would need to be made before it would grant approval, while Sydney Buses noted that there was no plan for how traffic would be managed during construction. Sydney Airport said development would protrude into the airspace.

In many submissions, residents expressed the concern that there was inadequate community consultation. Howard Packer, President of the Parents and Citizens’ Association at Rozelle Public School says, “From the start, there have been concerns about the dust and noise during excavation, and the privacy and safety of the school children; the towers look directly into the school playground. What we would like is to speak with the developers about this – it feels like we’re talking to a void”. David from Rozelle RAG echoed similar sentiments, “The developers held around five consultations. It seemed a box ticking exercise. The proposal that went up didn’t take into account the concerns raised by the Rozelle RAG”.

These voices have recently been given extra resonance. After sifting through the submissions from the public exhibition, the Director-General of Planning and Infrastructure, Sam Haddad, wrote to the developers in August

this year, saying the proposal was “unacceptable” and cited a litany of issues that needed to be addressed, including the building height and scale, the density and the impact on traffic, parking and the existing retail precinct of Darling Street.

The conclusion reached about the development, however, is far from new. Back in 2009, before the Balmain Leagues Club sold the site to the developers, the Club submitted a development application to Leichhardt Council for a much smaller development; the proposal took the shape of towers between 5 to 11 storeys high, accommodating 145 new dwellings and 467 cars. Considering the development had a capital investment value hovering at \$98 million, the Joint Regional Planning Panel (JRPP) made the final decision.

The development was refused. Multiple reasons were given that would come to be repeated by successive decision-makers: the development exceeded the floor space ratio and the number of storeys allowed in the Local Environmental Plan, the negative impact on traffic in surrounding streets such as Waterloo Street and the quality of the architectural design, which was considered lacking.

After the Balmain Leagues Club sold the site, the developers bypassed the JRPP’s decision and successfully applied to have the development declared a Part 3A project – a controversial (and now repealed) part of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (NSW) that allowed developers to sidestep local councils and regional decision-makers and apply to have the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure appointed as the decision-maker, if a development was deemed of State significance. All sides of politics have levelled criticism at Part 3A, with claims it is underpinned by a ‘government knows best’ philosophy and is open to corruption.

When declaring Rozelle Village as a development of State significance, the then Minister, Tony Kelly, expressed similar comments to the JRPP, noting that the height of the towers – then around 18 storeys – needed to be reduced. The developers, however, went bigger to 32 storeys – ignoring the recommendations of both the JRPP and the then Minister.

Considering this manoeuvring around previous objections, the question begs: what will happen next now that the development has come under a barrage of more criticism? The developers need to go back to the drawing board and make changes that take into account both the public submissions and the Department’s assessment. The clock is ticking; the developers have 60 days to submit their revisions, as the NSW Government seeks to speed up the assessment of the remaining Part 3A projects. Once the revision has been received in the form of a Preferred Project Report, the proposal will be formally re-exhibited to the community for comment.

Rozelle RAG is waiting to see if a more appropriate development will, finally, take shape. Reflecting on the site, David said, “We’re not against development of the Balmain Leagues Club site, we’re against *this* development. The interesting thing is, this development is called Rozelle Village, yet the proposal on exhibition would kill what village actually exists in the area. This isn’t what the community wants”. ■

GET INVOLVED

For updates, you can ‘like’ the Rozelle RAG’s Facebook page or visit the website: <http://www.saverozelle.com>

LOOKING FOR A PANACEA

Volunteers to pick up the slack of less funding to the community sector

BY CHANTEL COTTERELL

WHAT DOES a community legal centre, a community transport provider and an organisation dedicated to working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities have in common? Besides being recognised at the Redfern and Waterloo Neighbourhood Advisory Boards' annual Volunteer Community Participation Awards, all three organisations rely on a combination of paid staff and volunteers to deliver vital services to vulnerable clients with complex needs.

Held during National Volunteer Week, this year's Awards coincided with the release of the NSW Government's first-ever *Volunteering Strategy*. Aptly, valuing volunteers and celebrating their contributions was identified as a key strategic direction. Other key strategic directions identified were making it easier to volunteer, positioning volunteering as a pathway to paid employment, improving incentives for corporate volunteering and finding ways to expand the demographic profile to include, for example, a greater number of younger people.

As a serial volunteer who has benefited professionally from volunteering, I find myself agreeing with most of the initiatives, particularly those focussed on supporting organisations to train volunteers. Imagine how many people have started volunteering without any induction or training. Sometimes, volunteers are lucky if they are shown the nearest bathroom; let alone given the chance to learn about policies and procedures that ultimately make them more confident and competent.

Praising the *Strategy*, Lynne Dalton, Chief Executive Officer of The Centre for Volunteering, reflected on the growing need to better support volunteers, "The issue of volunteers' rights and their expectation to be treated with fairness, equity and respect is an issue that is growing daily, as volunteers these days are now expecting appropriate management and supervision of their work in their roles as volunteers".

Clearly, the *Strategy* is good for volunteers and will build the capacity of community organisations and groups that rely on unpaid contributions. But, should the community sector also be concerned about the NSW Government's trumpeting of volunteerism? Is this really an altruistic gesture or is there an underlying agenda motivated by dollar signs?

When launching the *Strategy*, the NSW Minister for Citizenship, Communities and Aboriginal Affairs, Victor Dominello, hinted at an economic impetus: "Volunteering is certainly about doing good," he acknowledged, "but it also really adds to our community's triple bottom line with clear benefits for the economy, society and the environment".

With economy at the top of the list, I cannot help but question whether the primary motivator is the triple bottom line or the bottom line – that is, the economic contribution of volunteers. As noted by the Minister, this contribution is estimated to be worth \$5 billion to the NSW economy per year.

Shortly after the *Strategy* was released, the State budget came

out, and Treasurer Mike Baird took medical metaphors to new heights when he advised us that, "We must take our medicine today, if we're to be healthy tomorrow".

The medicine prescribed was a concerning lack of increase in funding to the community sector, with the possibility of cuts throughout the financial year. This, despite community organisations who completed the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) *Community Sector Survey 2012* reporting that they could not meet the existing demand for their services, particularly from vulnerable people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and/or mental illness.

The question is: how are community organisations expected to meet this unabating need if funding levels stay the same or worse still, are cut? Is more volunteering the NSW Government's answer? From the politicians' perspective, why fund community organisations to employ additional paid staff, when volunteers can do the work for free? It is a reductionist viewpoint, but one that appears to be gaining traction.

Let's take the comments from the NSW Minister for Family, Community Services and Women, Pru Goward, on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's weekly hotbed of hot-headed panellists and tweeters, *Q&A*, in August 2012. When talking about how to deal with the big issues facing Australian society such as meeting the needs of the ageing population, Minister Goward said we need to promote volunteerism in our communities, as if this was the cure-all.

With the Chief Executive Officer of ACOSS, Cassandra Goldie, sitting a few metres away, it was an opportune time for the Minister to acknowledge that a more holistic and nuanced approach to addressing these needs was required; an approach that acknowledges the valuable contributions made by volunteers, while recognising the concomitant need to adequately fund the very community organisations that assist vulnerable people. Even though the head of ACOSS was quick to flag the risks of promoting volunteering as "the glue of society" if it results in a withdrawal of funding from the community sector, this point seemed to be lost on the other panellists.

Again, similar rhetoric were espoused at one of the NSW Government's Community Cabinet meetings attended by a colleague in the sector. For those who are unfamiliar, these meetings provide an opportunity for community organisations and groups to request a 15 minute meeting with at least one Minister. When my colleague's organisation spoke about having to turn clients away and how more funding would help employ more staff to meet this need, the senior Minister they met with responded: "But, don't you have volunteers?" Like most community organisations, the answer was "yes".

Yet, volunteers alone are not the answer. When Ministers promote increased volunteerism as the panacea to the funding shortfall in the NSW community sector, they need to look back to their own *Strategy* and remember that volunteers require training, supervision and recognition to be committed and effective. Who is going to provide this if paid staff are stretched to capacity attempting to meet the needs of clients?

If the NSW Government wants to increase the benefits volunteers provide to the bottom line – the economy – they will need to invest more funding into the community sector. Think about it from a cost benefit analysis – more funding will allow for more paid staff who can supervise more volunteers.

After all, sometimes you have got to give a little to get a little. Even a serial volunteer will tell you that. ■



DANCING IN THE STREETS

Capturing the final moments in the history-making equal pay case and campaign

BY EMILY MAYO

EARLIER THIS YEAR, Barry O'Farrell made me give \$88 to Clover Moore. It's a bit of a long story, and it has all got to do with the equal pay case and campaign run by the Australian Services Union (ASU). It goes a little like this:

In 2010, women in Australia earned, on average, 18 percent less than men. The gender pay gap had stagnated since the 1970s, and all the equal pay cases run in the Howard years had failed in the courts. The community didn't really 'get' the gap. People thought the struggle for pay equity was won: men and women got paid the same for doing the same job.

The introduction of the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) saw a small change in the provisions relating to equal remuneration, with the concept of 'comparable work' appearing for the first time in the legislation.

The non-government community services sector, born out of volunteerism and the desire of groups and individuals to 'do-good', had over the years been increasingly contracted by governments to provide essential community services. The sector took over more and more of the work of the State. After all, they were the cheap alternative.

The workers in the sector were, and still are, employed to care for those down on their luck: the homeless, kids gone off the rails, victims of domestic violence, those tangled up in the criminal justice and child protection systems, and people with drug and alcohol issues; those who are isolated, alone.

The work is often invisible, behind closed doors, and with outcomes, perhaps, intangible. Workers in the sector are largely female – the work itself is feminised – and so, the blokes who do it, get paid poorly too.

I used to work in the community services sector. I couldn't count the number of times when people asked me what I did for a living. "Wow, that must be so rewarding", they'd say. The upward inflection at the end of their sentence would let me know the only answer they wanted to hear was: "yes, yes, it is." And yes, yes, it was. But, while it's rewarding to say you do something 'good' for a living, that you go to work to 'care', that doesn't mean you should be paid very badly to do it.

To cut a long story short, in 2010, off the back of an extraordinary win for a group of Queensland community workers; the introduction of the Fair Work Act; the community services sector facing a workforce crisis and the workers working with the poor facing poverty themselves, ASU members launched an equal pay case and campaign.

They rallied, they danced, they petitioned, they lobbied, they educated the community, they outed themselves and their work, they demanded attention, they ran a superb case in Fair Work Australia (FWA) and, in February this year, they won.

The Full Bench of FWA, in a majority decision, found the work was feminised; they found the work was undervalued and they found the value of the work to be comparable to similar work done in the public sector.

They decided the remedy: pay increases of something in the order of 19 to 40 percent to be delivered in nine equal instalments over eight years. They said pay increases were to start on 1 December 2012.

The ASU worked for months to make an order – to give effect to the decision – that could be supported by the funding bodies (governments) and employers, at the same time as delivering significant pay increases to workers – and achieving, as the court had decided, equal pay.

The order went back into the court and the case concluded, but, not before there was one last flurry of campaigning – as the NSW Government and big business ran a last ditch effort to try and stop NSW workers' increases until the rest of the country caught up – and ASU members saved the last dance for Barry. What a week it was! The deadline for support for the order was 4.30pm on Monday. The deadline for opposition was 4.30pm on Wednesday. ASU members got their dancing shoes on big style – launching a last ditch round of actions targeting those who they believed were going to oppose.

The NSW Government was bombarded with messages. In Lismore, Newcastle, the Blue Mountains and Wollongong hundreds of ASU members took action to call for the NSW Government's support. In Lismore, they danced outside National MP, Thomas George's office. In the Blue Mountains, Liberal MP, Roza Sage, was very 'nice' but, could not confirm that the NSW Government supported community workers getting pay increases now. And, with that the opponents made their submissions. Big business representatives, who have little to no representation in the sector, and the NSW Government stood together – failing to show support for NSW workers.

There was no sign of Barry at 6am on that Thursday morning, the day before our last day in court, at the Matthew Talbot when I went to meet with the workers there. The Matthew Talbot is a large hostel for men who are homeless in Kings Cross. It's located under the shadows of FWA; an irony not missed on me. There was no sign of him at 2.30pm either, when I returned to meet with the afternoon shift workers.

As I walked back down the Talbot lane, the meeting done, seeing all the men sitting along the sunny bit of the gutters, I imagined all of those lawyers from big business and the government, up above in FWA, looking down at the Talbot the next day as they stood to speak in opposition to the pay rises, and as I did, I imagined shadows taking away the sunny spots below and the lawyers not noticing, let alone caring.

And, it was at this moment I got my \$88 parking ticket.

FWA sat the next morning. And, by 1pm, it was all done. The bench heard from both sides. And then we had to wait to see if the dancing was really done and wage justice won.

On June 22, FWA ruled in favour of community workers' pay rises. It's done. We won. That day I smiled. I had a small cry. I took a deep breath and thought, right, now what? ■

NOTE

Originally posted on Emily's blog, *Say It On Sunday – a week's worth of words* (<http://www.sayitonsunday.com>).

Emily works for the ASU NSW and ACT (Services) Branch. Views expressed on the blog and republished in *Inner Sydney Voice* are personal and do not necessarily reflect the views of the ASU.

ON THE POLITICS OF INCOME MANAGEMENT

Questioning the spread of quarantining welfare payments throughout Australia

BY EVA COX



Street art protest outside Redfern Centrelink © Chantel Cotterell

THIS ARTICLE describes some recent changes which may radically alter the basis of our welfare payments system. The introduction of a series of policies and programs labelled ‘income management’ as part of the Northern Territory (NT) Intervention, was the start of a major shift in the delivery of income support (welfare) payments.

In the past, the Australian welfare state was based on the assumption that people had a right to receive public non-contributory income support payments when other forms of income were not available. While there have been many debates about eligibility and levels, once the payments were made it was without conditions on how the money was spent. The amounts paid were usually quite frugal, but it was left to the recipient to manage as they could.

Income Management (IM), introduced by the Howard Government in 2007 in the NT, involved quarantining 50% of fortnightly payments and 100% of lump sums paid to welfare recipients. It was compulsorily applied to all Commonwealth income recipients, including age pensioners and veterans, in 73 specific Aboriginal communities – thus, requiring the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) (RDA).

It banned the purchase of grog, porn and cigarettes, and required the purchasing of food and other goods only from participating stores such as Woolworths, Coles and Kmart that would monitor the proscribed goods. Later came the BasicsCard, which identified people on IM and functioned as a debit card for spending the quarantined income.

There were many documented difficulties and objections to the compulsory nature of IM, as well as some support. The United Nations criticised its racist focus; the government responded by extending the program to non-Aboriginal welfare recipients, which meant the RDA could be reinstated. This extended version was introduced despite the lack of valid evidence that IM had been of benefit to the original communities.

The Labor Government extended IM across the NT, making it compulsory for anyone on unemployment, sole parent and similar benefits for a specified length of time. The more respectable or valued categories of welfare recipients were excluded, such as veterans, aged pensioners, carers and people with disabilities.

The latest change is five new IM pilot programs: at Bankstown (New South Wales), Shepparton (Victoria), Playford (South Australia), Logan (Queensland) and Rockhampton (Queensland), expected to cost \$173 million in administration over five years. These started operating on July 1 2012. Two other programs, which have been running in Western Australia and North Queensland, will also continue. The new sites were chosen because they have high unemployment; some have rural challenges, others have high refugee and other culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

This version of IM is based on the Western Australian model with certain changes. It is claimed to be a five year pilot program, with an estimated 1000 participants each per annum, but can be extended to further sites or applied more generally at any time. Thus, the government has already extended IM, before completing an evaluation of the amended NT model. Indications are that the program is almost certain to be universalised, despite the lack of debate and evaluation.

The version of IM applied in the five pilot projects has three components, but no indication of how many clients are expected for each. The components are:

Compulsory Income Management Scheme 50% – applies to people deemed by Centrelink to be financially vulnerable. That is, not paying their rent or bills or showing other forms of financial stress, including seeking emergency relief. Many recipients will fall into this category, simply because their income is too low to cover the cost of living.

Voluntary Income Management Scheme 50% – is being marketed by Centrelink to prove that people want to have

their income managed. It includes a bonus (100% managed) of \$250 after six months. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some people are being pressured to sign on or stay on IM when they are released from the compulsory version.

Child Protection Scheme – certain clients selected by State welfare officials are automatically put onto 70-100% income management, ostensibly as a case management tool. However, State-based child welfare workers have no experience in income support and little in financial management. Clients who want to challenge their referral to IM cannot use the Social Security Appeals mechanism; there is only the state complaints system, which raises issues of due process.

These categories are not the same as the NT version which includes all income recipients in particular payment categories. This change suggests that universal compulsion, still operating in the NT, is not seen as appropriate in other areas of the country. Why the difference? Are there in-built prejudices in the NT that need to be explored?

Public discussions on IM are often confused, because people may not realise they are talking about different versions of the policies. The key question to ask is, “Who are the IM clients?” Genuinely voluntary participants or seriously impaired people who need to be compelled for their own good versus people with no serious difficulties who are unfairly compelled to take part in the process. The NT versions included all people in a category. First all income recipients, then longer term unemployed, plus voluntary people, usually ex-compulsory categories. The other versions start with a mix of voluntary and those officially defined to have particular issues requiring compulsory participation.

Taking away people’s ability to decide how to spend even a limited government payment should require a clear, legally defined, individual form of due process with built-in protection of their rights. Assumptions based on category of payment or presumed vulnerabilities may reduce rights without any evidence that the results benefit the individuals concerned. If people really choose to be managed on a voluntary basis, this process should ensure the choice is genuinely free, not pressured, and they are informed of its implications.

Some income recipients can already make the free choice to have some of their income put aside for certain payments through a program, Centrepay, which has been offered by Centrelink for some time. Similarly, recipients of income support with serious difficulties in managing their money because of mental health issues are already covered by appropriate legal processes for assistance. Neither of these has the same punitive, stigmatising overtones as IM.

The Federal Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, and some others argue that IM is necessary to protect women and children from gender threats that operate in some Aboriginal communities.

The Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara women have publicly supported compulsory IM as a protection against male humbugging and recently asked for it to be imposed in the South Australian areas where they live. These local gender issues require more complex solutions than IM can offer, but communities should be given the ability to ask to be put on IM – using a collective version of the basic voluntary model. However, the needs of specific communities does not justify the wider imposition of compulsory IM on other communities or individuals who do not choose to be part of the process.

What is the evidence base? Measuring the effect of a complex set of policies is not easy so claims about what works require a degree of scepticism about cause and effect. I examined a range of studies and found only two offered some credible evidence. One was the Equality Rights Alliance study, whose 180 respondents expressed clear negative attitudes to IM; the other was The Menzies School of Health Research study of The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation shops before and after IM, which showed no improvement in food purchasing patterns. Some wider social indicators such as school attendance, crime and health status have failed to show improved social indicators.

The Parliamentary Library, which provides objective policy advice to the Federal Government, has confirmed the lack of evidence that IM is working. The final paragraph of its June 2012 parliamentary briefing note says:

In none of the locations in which it operates is there unambiguous evidence for or against the effectiveness of income management.

One likely explanation for the lack of public debate is a kind of casual racism: since the program started as a targeted Aboriginal program, other sectors of the population assumed it had nothing to do with ‘people like us’. We need to have the debate we should have had before the government made the changes. Is this really the social security system we want?

Or, can we work out how to have social security that recognises questions of race and gender as well as structural and individual problems? As a wealthy country, can we have income support that offers decent pay, support, social wellbeing and mutual respect for those who are not well served by our current economic models? ■

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

For Eva Cox’s article in the September 2011 issue of the *Journal of Indigenous Policy* titled ‘Evidence-Free Policy Making? The Case of IM’: <http://www.jumbunna.uts.edu.au/researchareas/newmedia/JIP12online2011.pdf>

The Parliamentary Library’s report released this June can be downloaded here: http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2011-2012/IncomeManagementOverview

To read the Equality Rights Alliance report from June 2011 documenting women’s experiences access: <http://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/projects/womens-experience-income-management-northern-territory>

GET INVOLVED

Originally published on the website for The F Collective, a multi-generational and diverse group of Sydney-based feminist activists who work towards social change. To visit the website go to: <http://fcollective.wordpress.com>

You can also ‘join’ the collective’s Facebook page or follow them on Twitter (@the_fcollective).

MORE TRIPS, MORE BUSES

A look at City of Sydney's plan to make community transport more efficient

BY CHANTEL COTTERELL

MORE TRIPS, more buses and more people with transport needs met. That is essentially the aim of the City of Sydney's ambitious plan to take a lead role in revamping the community transport system in the inner city.

Re-elected Lord Mayor, Clover Moore, believes, "Through improved organisation, we can provide over 80,000 trips each year once services are fully up and running – almost double the number of trips we now provide". Using its own fleet of buses and through purchasing services from community transport providers, including the popular Village to Village shuttles, the City currently funds around 44,000 trips per year.

The revamp is a result of recommendations from a review of community transport undertaken by consultants, Transport Planning and Management, in 2010-11 for the City.

A cornerstone of the revamp is to pilot what is known as 'mobility management'. At present, this seems to be taking the shape of a central information and coordination service. Currently, there are multiple community transport providers in the City, such as South East Sydney Community Transport and South East Neighbourhood Centre, but no central service that can give out information about community transport options and allocate trips, depending on passenger needs.

In the focus groups conducted by the consultants, participants repeatedly mentioned the difficulty in locating information about community transport. The pilot attempts to address this, and has been compared by some in the industry to a mix of the 131 500 Transport Infoline and the centralised private taxi booking service.

The City has been in discussions with the NSW Government and is looking to garner its support to pilot mobility management. It is intended that the State would conduct an evaluation of the pilot once it is up and running to determine whether it can be rolled out elsewhere. The cost is anticipated to be shared between the local and State governments.

The logistics of how mobility management will work on the ground are yet to be announced. The pilot has budgeted for a Coordinator position, which will be responsible, in part, for allocating client trips, depending on the destinations or purposes of the trips. It is envisioned that the success of the pilot will hinge on the computer database for coordinating trips, and this is also reflected within the City's budget.

With the City intending to auspice the mobility management pilot, existing community transport providers will be invited to work with the City to realise this revamp. In the proposal that was approved by the City's Cultural and Community Services Committee back in March, the City foreshadowed benefits for community transport providers, including increased operational efficiencies and economies of scale through a larger passenger base. As the proposal elaborated:

Clients from different service providers can be carried on one bus to one destination, rather than each service operating its own mostly empty bus to the same destination. Accumulating clients onto a single vehicle then releases others buses to provide trips to other destinations.



For community transport providers, it seems the revamp might involve relinquishing some control over coordination in exchange for the predicted benefits. As one community transport provider commented, “It has to be implemented gently, so trust can be built among service providers opting in and between services providers and the City. Getting this trust is imperative to getting the trust of passengers”.

Ensuring that clients do benefit from the revamp and are not inadvertently disadvantaged in any way was important to existing community transport providers. “If there is a move to centralisation, it’s important clients can still get a say as to what buses they travel on and with whom. Sometimes the transport is secondary to the socialisation that happens on a trip”, said Gregory Stevens, Community Transport Coordinator at South East Neighbourhood Centre, which provides community transport for shopping, day care and social trips.

Community transport providers contacted by *Inner Sydney Voice* were open to the overhaul and agreed that there was a need for greater efficiency. As Jane Rogers, Manager of South East Sydney Community Transport commented, “The bottom line is: if the City puts a good plan together and we find out more information, then we would consider trying it – we want to make transport easier to access for disadvantaged groups”.

With some community service providers stating that their buses are currently booked to capacity, the City might need to look elsewhere, if it wants to double the number of trips provided. One option that has been discussed is to encourage community-based organisations such as sporting associations and RSLs to opt-in to mobility management.

For example, an RSL could put up its bus to be used for community transport on those days it is not ferrying members to and from the club. The RSL, like all operators delivering community transport, would need to be accredited under the *Transport Administration Act 1998* (NSW). Accreditation would mean the operator could collect a fare.

Besides the mobility management pilot, the approved proposal also earmarked funds for a Transport Training program, which is already been run with success across Northern Sydney. “The whole purpose of travel training is to increase the skills, knowledge and confidence of people to use public transport independently”, explains Kristine Pedler, Travel Training Project Officer with Easy Transport.

Easy Transport has been offering individualised and group travel training since early 2011 to a range of clients across Northern Sydney, including older people, people with a disability and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, who have to overcome language barriers.

As Kristine elaborates, “It’s about more than showing someone how to read a bus timetable. It can be very practical support. For someone in a wheelchair, we might arrange a visit to the nearest depot, so they can practise getting on and off the bus, using one of the out-of-service buses. That way the person knows what to expect when they try and use public transport”.

Other initiatives that the City hopes will get more people using community transport are: expanding the free Village to Village shuttle bus routes, introducing shopping services for people who are not eligible for funding through the Home and Community Care program, expanding community transport provided to young people, and creating a pool of funding that can be used to provide dedicated transport options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. ■



Travel training in Northern Sydney © Easy Transport

DID YOU KNOW...?

As part of the revamp, the free Village to Village shuttle buses from Redfern to Broadway and Woolloomooloo to Redfern will be expanding from two to three days per week.

Free shuttle buses running three days a week will also start running two new routes between Dawes Point and Camperdown as well as Rosebery, Alexandria and Erskineville. In the review, Rosebery was classed as one of the least “walkable” suburbs in the City, with the longest distance between residences and amenities such as shops. It is anticipated that the introduction of these new routes will reduce transport disadvantage for residents.

For more information about the expansion and when the new routes will start, call 9319 4439 or visit: <http://www.villagetovillage.com.au>

You can also ‘like’ the Village to Village Facebook page or follow the service on Twitter (@Bus_V2V).

UP, UP & AWAY: LIFT REDFERN TAKES OFF

What the People's Petition to make Redfern station accessible asked for

BY LIFT REDFERN GROUP/COMMITTEE

STATEMENT PRIOR TO THE DEBATE: On Monday, 16 July 2012 representatives of the NSW Minister for Transport, Transport NSW and the Lift Redfern: Make Redfern Station Accessible community campaign met to discuss the request contained in our petition to the NSW Parliament.

As a result of this meeting, Lift Redfern believes the Minister's office and Transport NSW now fully understand that our community campaign, regarding a matter of significant public concern, is a very 'broad church' with wide community support.

Lift Redfern has respectfully requested that the Minister takes positive steps to end the futile twenty odd year blame game that has been used as an excuse to avoid substantially progressing the planning process for the upgrade of Redfern station.

As the second most important station for interchange opportunities within the rail network used by an ever increasing number of patrons in an area of significant actual and projected population growth through urban and economic renewal, the upgrade of Redfern station must be firmly placed above party politics.

By addressing Redfern station's significant access issues an annual loss of economic opportunity for our State economy of many tens of millions of dollars can be reversed. Over time a substantial investment in the redevelopment of Redfern station will reap many returns on a variety of socioeconomic levels, substantially increase 'the size of the economic pie', and grow the taxable entity and GST base.

The redevelopment of Redfern station would also provide some relief to other stations on the City Circle, and the wide range of interchange possibilities at Redfern station could be fully exploited.

The upgrading of Redfern station is a very large and costly project that will take a number of years to deliver. As Sydney is our nation's global city and Redfern station is the major gateway onto the City Circle and into the Central Business District, Lift Redfern urges that the development of Redfern station be a major fast-track priority project in the NSW Government's soon-to-be released Transport Master Plan.

In discussing interim cost-effective possibilities to provide access to at least one platform, while proper planning for the redevelopment of the station occurs, our representatives put to the Minister's office a scenario whereby lift access could be provided to platforms 11 and 12.

Platforms 11 and 12 are known locally as the Eastern Suburbs Line and were developed some ninety years later than the other ten platforms. The line is underground and is physically distinct from the rest of the station. As an interim

access measure, persons with access needs could change at Central to the Eastern Suburbs Line for access to and from Redfern station.

Any Treasury funds applied to providing access to platforms 11 and 12 as an immediate measure to provide a lift access point at Redfern station to the rest of the network would not be funds wasted over the longer term.

Turning to the Parliamentary debate on Redfern station which will likely occur round 4.30pm on 23 August 2012, Lift Redfern has invited the Minister to attend a media opportunity either prior to or just after the debate. ■

** While the debate about Redfern station has passed (see Postscript), the statement has been reprinted in full for the historical record.*



DID YOU KNOW... ?

In NSW, a parliamentary debate such as what occurred as part of the Lift Redfern campaign is triggered when 10,000 signatures are presented to Parliament.

Introduced in 2011 by the NSW Government, Premier Barry O'Farrell claimed that these People's Petitions would "restore accountability and re-empower local communities".

By forcing the Parliament to discuss a matter important to a substantial number of people, petitioning is another form of democracy in action, just like voting.

Of course, collecting 10,000 plus signatures requires work. For the campaign, this meant people volunteering their time to petition for signatures at Redfern station from sunrise to sunset and walking the streets, door knocking, in the nearby residential areas. Petitions were also coordinated with local schools, community organisations and shops.

The photo above features volunteers of the Lift Redfern community campaign handing over the People's Petition to former Premier and Heffron MP, Kristina Keneally, with local and State politicians present.

GET INVOLVED

The campaign continues! To get the latest information about the campaign, visit the Lift Redfern website:
<http://liftredfernstation.wordpress.com>

You can also 'like' the campaign's Facebook page or follow the campaign on Twitter (@liftredfern).

FROM THE GALLERY

POSTSCRIPT: Sitting in the public gallery, awaiting the debate on the People's Petition to make Redfern station accessible, I had hope that perhaps there would be movement (at the station, for the word had passed around) on this community need; a community need that has remained constant in Redfern over the last twenty years, through the demographic shifts and new developments.

I still had hope after Independent MP for Sydney, Clover Moore, who had to step down following her recent re-election to the mayoralty of the City of Sydney, led the debate. Ticking off the benefits an upgrade would bring, including providing relief to other stations on the City Circle line and making the station an option for people with access needs, Moore called on the NSW Government to install lifts on platforms 11 and 12.

"The need for equitable access to Redfern station is urgent. It should be included in the first round of upgrades under the Transport Access Program", Moore stated.

Shortly thereafter, hope was quickly replaced in the public gallery with disappointment, as politician after politician from the major political parties politicised this important community need. I imagine the 10,000 plus people who signed the petition did not put their names to the campaign to hear the debate reduced to political point scoring over previous governments' inaction; rather, I daresay, they wanted to hear how the government of the day was going to 'get on with the job' and take action.

The Minister for Transport, Gladys Berejiklian, acknowledged Redfern's unofficial position on the City Circle line, referring to the high number of commuters who access it daily, yet stopped short of committing to an upgrade. She indicated that an upgrade would be too complex and costly, so the government was still "reviewing" what to do with Redfern station. Basically, this meant Redfern will not be benefiting from the updates under the Transport Access Program.

Greens MP, Jamie Parker, pushed the government for a review date, "Let us look at a timeline. Will it be this year, next year, or the year after? The community needs an assurance that there will be progress on the matter".

Post-debate, the NSW Government released its Draft Transport Master Plan, flagging major interchanges, including Redfern as receiving potential updates. Of Redfern, the Master Plan notes: "A comprehensive and multi-modal upgrade would address station access and connectivity issues, including access within and to the station, safe and convenient interchange with bus, pedestrian and cycle routes, and accommodating a corridor for expansion of the CBD rail network". No timeframe was given. We wait, still.

- Chantel

** Views expressed are of the individual, not necessarily Lift Redfern.*

BRINGING INTO FOCUS TENANT ENGAGEMENT

Some lessons Housing NSW can learn from other government agencies

BY JOEL PRINGLE

IN MID-2011, Housing NSW released a consultation draft of its *Tenant Engagement Framework*. Public submissions were invited. The document contained high level statements about engaging with tenants, but little information on the steps that will be taken to ensure that these principles are implemented.

At around the same time, the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW (IPART), a markedly different type of government agency to Housing NSW, released a discussion paper, as part of a review of consumer engagement.

Although the two agencies have different functions, it is worth comparing the approaches to consider what government agencies could learn from each other.

To provide some background, Housing NSW is the public housing provider of the NSW Government. The purpose of the Tenant Engagement Framework, as outlined in the consultation draft, is to enable: “applicants, tenants and residents of public and Aboriginal housing properties to know what sort of contributions they can make to the management of their housing services, their tenancies and their communities” and to “help clarify to Housing NSW staff why, when and how they can engage public and Aboriginal housing applicants, tenants and residents in the provision of housing services, undertaking asset redevelopments and estate renewal, and in building community capacity”.

The document, however, provides little to assure the community that the strategies and principles for community engagement will be put into practice, and there is no evidence in the document that alternate approaches were considered and how the final choices were made. The consultation draft was presented as a finalised document, without allowing the reader into the deliberations and decision-making processes. In this way, the ability of stakeholders to engage with the consultation draft was inevitably limited from the outset.

It should be noted that after the period of consultation and up until the writing of this article, nothing further has been released in response to this consultation draft.

To the contrary, the approach of IPART has historically been very different. IPART is the economic regulation body of the NSW Government, and has responsibility for regulating prices and licensing of various monopolies that fall under government responsibility; this includes utilities such as energy and water, public transport and Council rates.

In outlining why consumer engagement is important, the IPART-commissioned report states that direct engagement by government with customers of monopoly and regulated

services is required, because consumers are unable to freely choose their supplier, unlike the competitive market, which gives consumers the option of shopping around.

This statement is also clearly applicable to services provided by the State to people unable to participate in markets for reasons of affordability or other disadvantage. For people on fixed and low-incomes, Housing NSW is *the* monopoly provider of housing to people who are cut off from the expensive private housing market, and who would otherwise be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

This justifies the comparison between Housing NSW and IPART’s approaches to community development. Housing NSW residents are unable to self-impose higher standards of landlord services by exercising market choice, therefore it is imperative that other approaches are substituted to ensure that public housing tenants are provided the dignity of housing at a standard acceptable and available to the rest of the community, above general, bare minimum tenancy regulations.

The approach of IPART is influenced by an understanding of the impact on the community in failing to adequately consult them in regulating monopoly services such as water and energy. Significantly for this comparison, IPART regulatory decisions do not have an impact on its budget and it has at least nominal independence from the government of the day.

In contrast, Housing NSW faces the challenge of its policy decisions directly influencing its own budget, which is already under-resourced and increasingly more so in this time of austerity. Housing NSW also faces the political risk of failing to meet its self-defined service benchmarks, not to mention the added pressure of having to answer directly to a Minister.

These reasons are likely to explain, at least in part, the apparent willingness of IPART to approach engagement through a much more consumer-focused framework, and for Housing NSW to operate in a much more cautious and risk-adverse framework. Rather than being a criticism of Housing NSW, this highlights the additional pressures faced by internal policy makers, who are tasked with developing community engagement principles targeted at tenants.

But, let’s talk more about the IPART discussion paper. IPART commissioned an external consultant, Cambridge Economic Policy Associates Ltd, to produce the discussion paper that canvassed interaction approaches to community engagement. Different options and case studies were provided, with the pros and cons of each approach presented for consideration. The IPART paper provides four forms of consumer engagement appropriate to IPART’s context, and proffers that these approaches fit on a continuum of tools appropriate for the circumstances. These tools are public consultation, consumer panels, surveys and constructive engagement.

These tools are concrete examples of how Housing NSW could have shown the community that it was willing and able to put its strategies and principles into practice in a way that respects and encourages tenant participation.

Further, the IPART paper provides a list of preconditions that Ofgem, an energy regulator in the United Kingdom, consider important for effective engagement. These preconditions include understanding consumer needs (for third party advocates), understanding the regulatory regime, and having the resources and willingness to engage. The paper goes further to explain that willingness to participate will be higher when the parties believe they can influence decisions. This might be otherwise stated as a need for trust to be

developed between consumers and the agency consulting.

An important theme to Ofgem's approach is that consulting bodies are required to ensure that the community has the knowledge and resources to engage, and that the consulting body has to work to build the trust of the community. Transparency in decision-making is therefore critically important, a lesson that many NSW State agencies could take on board. Without these preconditions, community engagement will merely meet the short-term needs of the agency and not the needs of the community. This is often referred to as tokenistic; a box ticking exercise.

Of course, it's not enough to have a well-considered discussion paper if it is not followed through. And here, IPART's reputation is heartening and lauded by stakeholders, including the independent Energy and Water Ombudsman.

IPART has used its energy regulation determinations to recommend that the government ensure that consumers and their representatives are adequately resourced, including through the extension of assistance with technical knowledge not otherwise available to those outside the industry. This is an acknowledgement of information imbalance, which is sought to be redressed.

IPART staff work very closely with all stakeholders in their regulatory processes, and engagement is flexible to meet the needs of all parties. In a measure of respect for stakeholders and to promote transparency, IPART uses its reports to publish the range of views offered, and the reasons that certain options were chosen over others.

The shame is that the *Tenant Engagement Framework* discussion paper does not reflect the good engagement practices that Housing NSW itself has shown in certain circumstances. For example, the processes behind the development of *Community Actions Plans* has shown that Housing NSW is capable of being creative and responsive to tenant needs, rather than ignoring them.

Where this has been done well, it is in Housing NSW's interest to make public any evaluations of these processes, and to ensure that these become part of the broader understanding of how community engagement can and has been done.

Those of us with an interest in tenant engagement can only hope that the now over twelve month delay in responding to submissions indicates that Housing NSW is considering these exclusions to its draft *Tenant Engagement Framework*. ■

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

IPART released its final report of the review in August 2012. To read the final report and the associated background documents, visit the agency's website:
http://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/Home/Industries/Research/Reviews/Customer_Engagement/Customer_Engagement_on_Prices_for_Monopoly_Services_2011

You can find out more about the *Tenant Engagement Framework* and read the consultation draft discussed in this article by visiting the Housing NSW website:
<http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/Living+in+Public+Housing/Get+Involved/Tenant+Engagement+Framework.htm>

NOT THE ELECTRICITY!

DO YOU dread the electricity bill more than any other? Investment in power infrastructure in NSW has led to an increase of over 60% in average electricity bills over the last six years. The good news is that some tenants have found ways to bring their power usage and bills down.

When Northcott Towers, a public housing estate in Surry Hills, was renovated a few years ago tenants were delighted with their shiny new kitchens and bathrooms. But, they were soon noticing and complaining about their unexpectedly much higher electricity bills.

Northcott had gone modern and mainstream, but at a price. The clanking old water heaters had been instant, while the new ones were storage heaters and this meant more electricity usage. The storage heaters bubbled away day and night to provide gallons of piping hot water as needed, while at the same time tenants were using more of it; electricity itself was becoming increasingly expensive.

Canny tenants started taking advantage of the off-peak rates. They did their laundry on the weekend and switched water heaters off during the day. It only takes about half an hour to heat the whole storage tank, giving you a day's careful use. If you can start that half hour at 10pm, when the much cheaper off-peak rate starts, you will save more. Careful use of hot water meant some used a small bowl for washing up. Others were able to wash up using almost no hot water, except for rinsing.

Tenants also started turning appliances off at the wall. Apparently, much more electricity than you'd expect goes into keeping these appliances on standby. Think about your electricity usage – only have the television on for shows you want to sit down and watch, not playing in the background. When making a cup of tea, do not boil more water than you need. When you can, use a microwave rather than the stove-top. Do not turn the oven on for just one thing – follow a casserole with a cake. Keep showers brief. Use shorter cycles on the washing machine and avoid having clothes in the dryer for longer than necessary.

Of course, then there's the issue of climate control within your home. Apparently, climate control appliances such as air conditioners and heaters are the reason for all the expenditure on infrastructure, so as to avoid power failures when extremely hot or cold weather causes a giant spike in demand. Draw your curtains or blinds to reduce heat loss through the windows, while a 'snake' under the front door will stop it rattling and keep out cold winds. Rug up. In summer, draw the same blinds to block out heat on the sunny side of your unit or house, while letting any cooler air in from the shaded side. Change sides in the afternoon.

So, with all these tips, who is up for a dainty carbon footprint and even smaller electricity bills?

Ali G

NOT JUST PREMISES, BUT HOMES

The rights of Housing NSW tenants to get repairs done in their homes

BY PHOENIX VAN DYKE

MOST DAYS, the Inner Sydney Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service (ISTAAS) at Redfern Legal Centre is being contacted by despairing tenants, who just can't get their landlord, Housing NSW, to do necessary repairs in their homes.

And, we are not just talking about dripping taps, but serious issues, such as roof leaks that have sometimes gone on for years. One client had to cook holding an umbrella every time it rained, as water was leaking from her kitchen ceiling.

From our experience, tenants often give up after calling the Contact Centre to report the repairs over a number of months, or sometimes even years, and resign themselves to living in sub-standard and sometimes unsafe conditions.

"All I want is to come back to a home where I can relax and feel safe", said one tenant, who has been trying to reach Housing NSW. And yes, this is your right.

The *Residential Tenancies Act 2010* (NSW) (RTA) says: a landlord must provide and maintain the residential premises in a reasonable state of repair, having regard to the age of, rent payable for and prospective life of the premises.

Housing NSW is the largest landlord in the State. Although there are some different requirements in the RTA for private landlords and social housing landlords, the duty to do repairs is the same for all these housing providers.

"We have put the repair on our schedule of maintenance to be done in the next financial year" or even "in 2014" are common messages heard by tenants. But no, if it is a repair, you do not have to wait until 2014 to have it done. Scheduled maintenance is for things like painting walls, or maybe, if you are lucky, a new kitchen – in short, anything that would fall under the heading of 'renovation'.

If something is broken, leaking or no longer works, it is a repair and Housing NSW is required by law to fix it.

So, what can Housing NSW tenants do, if they have asked for repairs to be done and nothing is happening? Well, like any other tenant, they can put in an application to the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal (CTTT) and ask for an order that repairs will be done. For some people, this sounds scary, however, in actual fact, it is not that complicated. The CTTT is set up so that people can represent themselves and solicitors are only allowed in special circumstances.

To help Housing NSW tenants complete the necessary applications, ISTAAS has a drop-in session on the first Tuesday of every month from 10am to 12pm at 73 Pitt Street, Redfern.

We also publish *The Repair Kit*, a how-to guide for public tenants. You can call us for a copy of the guide on 9698 5975 or download it (<http://www.rlc.org.au/publications.html>).

We encourage Housing NSW tenants to contact their local politician and tell them about their repair problems. ■

MOVING CLOSER TO PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF BOARDERS AND LODGERS

Boarders and lodgers (known as 'marginal renters') comprise some of the most vulnerable groups within the community – older people, people with disabilities and international students – yet are afforded limited protection under the law. Recent proposed reforms seek to improve the position of marginal renters.

While a recent Private Members Bill by outgoing Independent MP, Clover Moore, was opposed, there is still hope that the NSW Government's draft *Boarding Houses Bill 2012* (NSW) can become, to quote the popular blog of the Tenants' Union (TU), "an effective piece of legislation", providing defects in the Bill are addressed.

The Bill closed for comment in August, with the TU and other community organisations making submissions. During the debate of Clover Moore's Bill, the Minister for Ageing and Disability, Andrew Constance, hinted at an openness to amending the NSW Government's draft Bill.

To learn about the defects and recommendations for change, such as expanding the applicability of the legislation and the need to introduce occupancy principles that require the depositing of bonds with NSW Fair Trading, read the TU's submission: <http://intranet.tenants.org.au/print/policy-papers/draft-boarding-houses-bill-submission.pdf> and follow The Brown Couch for updates: <http://tunswblog.blogspot.com.au>

DID YOU KNOW...?

Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Services can help tenants with common problems, including rent increases, getting bond money returned or repairs done and ending a tenancy. Assistance can range from advice over the phone through to sometimes, representation at the CTTT.

Funded by the interest NSW Fair Trading collects on rental bonds, these important services assist some of the most vulnerable members of the community. Despite the increasing demand from private and public housing tenants, baseline funding has not increased in over ten years. In Queensland, the situation has reached a critical point, with funding for these services recently jeopardised.

Show your support for NSW services and contact your local Member for Parliament. A sample letter can also be downloaded from the Tenants' NSW website: <http://tenants.org.au/publish/about-us/increase-tenants-advice-funding-now.php>

NEEDING HELP?

- Inner Sydney TAAS
Ph: 9698 5975
- Eastern Suburbs TAAS
Ph: 9386 9147
- Inner West TAAS
Ph: 9559 2899
- Greater Sydney Aboriginal TAAS
Ph: 9569 0222

For an interpreter, call 131 450 and ask to be put through.

THE EROSION OF TENANTS' VOICES

The clawing back of tenant participation since its implementation

BY ROSS SMITH

IN 1984, the then NSW Minister for Housing, Frank Walker, gave an undertaking to put the principle of tenant participation into practice. A year later he launched the then NSW Department of Housing's *Tenant Participation Policy* to give public housing tenants in NSW a greater say in the planning and management of their homes and communities.

Underlying and motivating the push for tenant participation was the almost intangible concept of social capital; a concept that was starting to shape government policies in the 1980s.

Social capital is about the connections and networks that form among individuals who share a similar identity (e.g., public housing tenants), and how these connections and networks give rise to trust and reciprocity among individuals. It's also about creating access to and linkages between disparate individuals and social networks. For example, bridging the divide between public housing tenants and the bureaucratic web that was, and now is, Housing NSW.

This desire to bridge the social chasm resulted in the then Minister arranging for a conference to be held where face-to-face discussion between senior bureaucrats and the tenants occurred – for the first time.

Arising from this, the Minister formed the Public Tenants' Steering Committee to develop recommendations on an appropriate tenant participation structure. These recommendations were subsequently incorporated into the first ever *Tenant Participation Policy*.

The recommended goals were:

1. to increase tenants' knowledge of the Department of Housing's policies and practices to enable better use on their part of an intricate bureaucratic system;
2. to inform tenants of the ways public housing resources are utilised and of the financial constraints placed on the Department when making its decisions, with the aim that this would minimise tenants' misunderstandings;
3. to give tenants' associations an advocacy role, to assist tenants who are unable or unwilling to request necessary assistance, or to act on behalf of multiple tenants requesting the same service or facility;
4. to open and expand lines of communication between tenants and Departmental staff with a view to improving management's knowledge of problems and their cause;
5. to foster more effective management techniques in preventing and dealing with tenants' problems;
6. to promote the use of existing and potential neighbourhood support networks as an alternative to seeking costly, often inappropriate State welfare assistance;
7. to help tenants' groups organise social activities to reduce the isolation and boredom many tenants experience;

8. to involve tenants in planning and providing essential neighbourhood facilities; and
9. to recognise tenants' rights as housing consumers by giving them a say in broad public housing issues and more specifically, in decisions affecting their homes.

Ambitious as these goals were, they were long overdue, and gave a sense of hope to public housing tenants that finally they would have a say in decisions that affected their homes, their communities and, ultimately, their lives.

While the Minister changed, the bureaucracy charged with implementing the new policy did not. The British television program, *Yes, Minister*, may well have been based on the beginning of the clawing back of control from tenants by the bureaucracy, under the very nose of the new Minister.

How the control claw-back was achieved by the Housing NSW bureaucracy is an interesting study. It started by what I see as the deliberate breaking of undertakings, such as undertakings to repair premises; this resulted in tenants saying, "Why bother? They do not do anything; they are not trustworthy". Unfortunately, this led to what I call Apathy Generation, with the tenant body disengaging. Whenever it looked like some tenants may consider re-engagement, Housing NSW had another lapse in delivering on its undertakings to reinforce the tenants' past experiences.

Then in 2008, a near fatal blow was delivered to tenant participation in the State, with Housing NSW implementing a unilateral decision to defund the tenant-driven Regional Tenant Resource Services and the Public Tenant Councils.

Nowadays, the sole Housing NSW funded voice for the tenant body are the Tenant Participation Resource Services (TPRS). The TPRS contracts provide for eight workers to meet the community development needs of the whole NSW tenant body – some 140,000 households. This works out to 17,500 households per worker. Besides the disproportionate worker to household ratio, service providers are only awarded two year contracts; this makes long-term planning impossible. When contracts are up for renewal, Housing NSW is the sole arbiter of who will be awarded the next contract.

And, what are workers meant to achieve for this staggering number of households? The TPRS goals, as outlined by Housing NSW, are to ensure public housing tenants:

1. are engaged in communities;
2. have their needs and priorities identified and considered in planning and service delivery;
3. are informed about their rights and responsibilities;
4. are supported with their housing needs;
5. have resources to participate in community life; and
6. receive services that are coordinated, flexible and responsive to their needs.

This is a much shortened list when compared with the original nine point list. Casualties include the removal of advocacy for tenant benefit, plus the removal of fostering a relationship between Housing NSW and tenants. With the removal of these two key goals from the original *Tenant Participation Policy*, the aim to bridge social capital was lost.

Twenty eight years later, Housing NSW has succeeded in denying itself the benefits of forming a functional two-way relationship with its tenant body. The bureaucrats have succeeded in denying the wisdom and foresight of their former Minister. They have isolated themselves from those that they are meant to be serving and the cause of their employment – the public housing tenants. ■

NEW SERVICE FOR RANDWICK

Junction Neighbourhood Centre opens its doors to the Randwick community

FOR OVER 30 YEARS, the Junction Neighbourhood Centre (JNC) has been building and strengthening the capacity of individuals, families and groups in the Randwick local government area through a variety of programs and activities.

As Janet Green, Manager of JNC explains, “We’re a well-established community hub for people living in the eastern suburbs. JNC is often the first point of contact for people and other organisations calling on behalf of clients, who are seeking community information, referrals and support”.

Located in Maroubra Junction, JNC operates specialist services for families, older people, people with disabilities and their carers; facilitates the recruitment, training and referral of volunteers for home and community care services in the eastern suburbs; runs social inclusion groups for people who are socially isolated; and organises practical assistance with outreach services providing financial counselling, immigration support, tax help, legal advice as well as hearing aid checks.

Earlier this year, with funding from the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, JNC was able to open a new community hub on Albert Street, Randwick. Besides extending the reach of the Maroubra programs and offering another location for outreach services, the new hub will focus on building the capacity of people who are financially and socially disadvantaged in Randwick and Kingsford through the JNC’s Indigenous Community Capacity Building (CCB) project at Maroubra and another CCB project, run in partnership with South East Neighbourhood Centre in Eastlakes.

“In Randwick, we know there are socially isolated groups – older people and international students, among others. Through morning teas, craft workshops and outings, we have been building up connections amongst people who were previously very isolated. We hope to see this grow”, explains Anna Hartree, Community Information Coordinator at JNC.

For community groups looking for facilities, the JNC Randwick and Maroubra hubs also each have a meeting room and interview rooms available.

JNC encourages people and organisations wanting to know more about the new Randwick hub to call or drop-in, have a chat and see what programs and activities are running. ■

NEEDING HELP?

JNC Maroubra | Ph: 9398 8620

Located at Shop 2, 669-673, Anzac Parade, Maroubra Junction. Street level of Bowen Library Building.
Opening hours are Monday-Friday, 9am-4.30pm.

JNC Randwick | Ph: 9349 8200

Located at 2 Albert Street, Randwick. Albert Street runs off Avoca St, between Alison and Milford Roads.
Opening hours are Tuesday-Thursday, 10am-4pm.
Closed for lunch between 1-1.30pm.



DEADLY HEALTHY BUBS

A new parenting book for Aboriginal families and workers in south east Sydney was launched by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) in conjunction with the Junction Neighbourhood Centre (JNC) at an Aboriginal family day held in Maroubra. *Deadly Healthy Bubs* is the latest in a series of practical parenting books published by FaCS to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children.

Katrina Ross, Healthy Bubs Project Officer and Community Capacity Building Coordinator for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at the JNC organised this event, which was attended by Aboriginal families and workers from the area.

The day included cultural performances by Soldiers Settlement primary schools, Koori dancers and an amazing Didgeridoo performance by Brenden Moore. There were lots of cultural activities for children, including a local favourite, shell work; Koori painting on rocks and canvases; face painting; airbrush tattoos, using Aboriginal art; Didgeridoo painting and workshops; sand art and a colouring corner complete with animals that were drawn as Aboriginal art. There were also yarning circles run by local services for parents. It is not often days like this are available for families, so the JNC was dedicated to providing a great cultural day out for families.

Families involved in the book’s development were presented with a copy and a canvas photographic print of their child as a ‘thank you’ for their participation.

Katrina, who is also a young Aboriginal mum from the area, wanted to highlight the importance of making culturally appropriate information available.

“We wanted to produce something that helps Aboriginal families in south east Sydney connect with their local community and ultimately provide a happier and healthier environment for their children. The books have been a great success, because they were developed locally by local people and have been tailored to suit the cultural differences of each community,” says Katrina.

- Junction Neighbourhood Centre

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

To download a copy of *Deadly Healthy Bubs*, visit: http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/par_deadly_healthy_bubs.pdf

THE 'CON' IN CONFERENCE

It's a wild, wild west for cowboy conference convenors. How to avoid being lassoed.

BY CHARMAINE JONES

LET ME PREFACE this piece with how I witness, on a daily basis, non-government organisations (NGOs) large and small, providing innovative services at great value to the tax payer.

These organisations know how to get bang for your buck, in a world where they are faced with ever-increasing demand.

I have worked in the community sector for a number of years now and whilst I may not know everything, I wouldn't have called myself naïve. I thought I understood the system, the bureaucracy and the funding streams attached to them.

I used to think the links were thus: people worked hard and paid taxes to the government; the government collected the taxes and divvied up some of the monies to fund NGOs who would then provide a service back to the people.

Recently though, I have become aware of another link in the chain, wherein the monies are given to service providers, who, in turn, pass it on to conference convenors charging astronomical rates for attendance.

Let me make it clear: most conference organisers are legitimate companies doing a good job at a reasonable rate.

I do not want to name the offenders (as a community sector worker, my lowly paid job does not allow for the hiring of lawyers), but I can let you how to tell the difference between the real companies and the cowboys: the degree by which your jaw drops when sighting the conference fees.

You may think it would be easy enough to just ignore the promotional material for these types of conferences. Once you have seen the cost, you simply bin the flyer, but these convenors are far more devious than one would think. They use techniques not far removed from those utilised by electricity and telecommunication providers.

That said, electricity and telecommunications companies are at least honest about the fact they are selling you something. Their marketing techniques might be less than reputable, bamboozling us with special rates and deals, and hiding the nasty bits in the small print, but at least they are upfront that they have something they want you to buy; these cowboy conference convenors, however, are not.

They spend half an hour on the phone commending your expertise in your field, and this prompts an aside about an upcoming conference they will be holding, a promise of an email and a barrage of follow-up phone calls. Methinks I smell the work of a commission-based pay system.

I believe in the value of a good conference. It gives workers the chance to hear about the latest research and innovative programs, the opportunity to network and in a sector where a meeting with Tim Tams is seen as an extreme extravagance, it is often a chance to spoil ourselves with a night away.

But, surely most of us would prefer seedier venues and plainer biscuits if it gives the whole sector, not just the large organisations with surplus funds, the chance to attend, learn, network and share. ■



THE MARG BARRY LECTURE

The Marg Barry Memorial Lecture is held annually to celebrate and continue the work of an outstanding south Sydney community activist, politician, networker, provocateur and former Coordinator of Inner Sydney Regional Council, Marg Barry (1934-2001).

Since 2001, the lecture has educated and engaged local residents, community activists and community organisations on topics such as the changing nature of neighbourhoods and the importance of building electronic communities, the global financial crisis and its negative impacts on social inclusion, and the importance and power of preserving social history.

This year the lecture will be held on Thursday, 6 December at Redfern Town Hall. The focus? Community engagement: the real stuff. Please visit our website (<http://www.innersydneyrcsd.org.au>) to receive updates about the lecture and other community events.

CONFERENCES AS THEY SHOULD BE

Listening to older clients and respecting their wishes was an important message impressed upon me at the National Community Care Conference in Adelaide.

During the panel discussion with older people, it became clear that older people wanted to stay independent as long as possible, that they wanted to choose who comes into their homes and to be able to tailor their packages according to their needs at the time, with enough flexibility to make changes as needs vary.

When asked to identify what is most important to them as they grow older, most older people said that it is staying socially connected. Some people differed and expressed the view that being able to drive is most important, as this allowed them to meet with family and friends, and continue with their regular social activities.

The people on the panel emphasised the point that they wanted to experience and learn new things, and not just be passive recipients of services.

In order to allow older people the chance to be active consumers and tailor appropriate packages, older people need to be better educated to better understand their options. This needs to be a priority.

Enis Jusufspahic

CROSSING CULTURES

Report reveals the challenges facing bilingual community care workers

BY ENIS JUSUFSPAHC

Bilingual workers at the forum © Ellen Gore

THROUGH FUNDING received from the NSW Department of Human Services – Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development and the Ethnic Child Care, Family and Community Services Co-op developed a project focussed on identifying and addressing the unique needs of bilingual community care workers; these are workers who speak languages other than English and make use of these languages to communicate with clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD).

As part of the project, surveys were given to bilingual workers asking for information on entry into the sector, the kinds of work undertaken and what bilingual workers needed in terms of professional development. Fifteen responses were received, with the bilingual workers having worked in the sector from less than a year right through to twenty years plus. Nearly half the respondents spoke Cantonese or Mandarin; other languages spoken ranged from Afrikaans to Spanish. Alongside the survey, we held a forum in partnership with our colleagues in Western and Northern Sydney where issues affecting bilingual workers were workshopped.

Using the information gathered, a report was prepared. The report looked at what distinguishes bilingual workers from other community care workers. While the obvious difference is that a bilingual worker can communicate and connect more effectively with clients who share the same CALD background, the information revealed how bilingual workers play a role in helping to acculturate and acclimatise clients at an important time of transition, when they are seeking assistance from the wider community. Bilingual workers are also skilled at managing client expectations based on one culture within the framework of another, and teach CALD clients advocacy and self-care skills, which, in turn, empowers clients to apply these principles to other aspects of their lives.

Along with what distinguishes bilingual workers, the report looked at the challenges inherent in service provision. For

example, bilingual workers reported finding it challenging to establish and maintain professional boundaries with isolated clients, with many bilingual workers participating in community life together with their current and potential clients. The workers spoke about the importance of striking a balance between their formal role and their ability to participate freely in community life.

Bilingual workers found that clients require additional advocacy support when accessing services from other agencies and that clients often ask for legal help, interpreting at medical appointments and assisting in liaising with government agencies such as Centrelink and Housing NSW.

The request to interpret and translate is problematic and can potentially disadvantage the client, as most bilingual workers are not accredited to provide this service; this means their language skills might be insufficient to accurately translate and interpret for the client, particularly when legal or medical words are used. This reliance on bilingual workers is a significant issue as interpreting and translating services are a right of prospective and current clients.

In order to help bilingual workers navigate the complexities of their roles, a follow-up forum was held. Facilitated by independent consultant, Judi Apty, who has a Doctorate in Education and a background in workforce development, mentoring and professional supervision, the forum focussed on building professional development skills in leadership, learning as a team and communication. ■

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

To download a copy of the report, visit: http://www.innersydney.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/hacc_bilingual_report_2012.pdf



Inner Sydney Voice, Summer 2002, Issue 93

Words: Martine Brieger, Drawing: Michelle Thomas



GREEN SQUARE GROWERS

From the space-limited lifestyle of the inner city of Sydney, a local community of food growing enthusiasts, the Green Square Growers, has emerged.

Imagine just needing to step outside to pick fresh ingredients for dinner at one of the numerous, local garden patches. This is the vision of the Green Square Growers.

Besides supporting each other and the wider community in growing their own food, the Green Square Growers are focused on creating public, community garden patches. There is currently one patch outside the Tote Library (100 Joynton Avenue, Zetland) and another one in Joynton Park, near the barbeques (Gadigal Avenue, Zetland).

✕ **When do the Green Square Growers meet?** 2nd Sunday of the month at 10.30am.

✕ **Where?** For details, visit: <http://www.facebook.com/GreenSquareGrowers>

✕ **Who can join?** Absolutely anyone! Even those without any green growing knowledge.