Table of contents

1. Executive Summary 3
2. Purpose and Acknowledgements 5
3. Introduction to consumer participation 6
4. Consumer Participation Strategies 10
5. Challenges and Barriers 22
6. Useful Resources 24
7. References 26
8. Appendix (examples)
Executive Summary

Ensuring the presence of an active consumer voice is vitally important for vulnerable populations with specialized needs such as those experiencing homelessness. Effective consumer participation has been demonstrated to improve outcomes for consumers and contribute to improvement in service delivery. There has been some effort and success within the homelessness service sector in developing consumer participation strategies such as the Peer Education Support Program and the establishment of tenant advisory boards in most community housing programs however the sector still lags behind that of the health, mental health and Alcohol and Other Drugs arenas.

There are many excellent resources available to assist health services to involve consumers, however the same cannot be said for the homeless sector. There are also many models of consumer participation and a vast range of potential participation strategies, ranging from the simple to the complex. The principles of consumer participation and reasons why it is important apply equally across all human services. This document then does not seek to reinvent the wheel but rather to gather the theory and principles of consumer participation and bring them together.

The need for consumer participation in homelessness services is no longer questionable and the National Quality Framework will require services to have some form of consumer participation in place. The question then becomes how to develop consumer participation in homelessness services. The first section of this guide provides a brief introduction to the theories supporting participation. The second section provides twenty examples of possible participation strategies (summarized below) and the third a list of resources that agencies can use to explore participation further.

Homelessness NSW hopes that this guide will be used by the sector in the development and implementation of significant and sustainable consumer participation practices.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empower</td>
<td>Consumers have the final say in decision making.</td>
<td>consumer led projects, consumer involvement in organisational governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate</td>
<td>Consumers are looked to for advice and this is taken into account in decision making processes.</td>
<td>client centred case management, consumer consultants, consumer advocates, using social media, consumer involvement in organisational governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve</td>
<td>Consumers are encouraged to take part and raise concerns or issues to help shape service delivery</td>
<td>newsletters, forums and meetings, focus groups, peer education, peer mentoring, consumer academics, consumer advisory boards, consumer volunteers, Using social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult</td>
<td>Consumers are asked what they think of services and what changes they would like made.</td>
<td>surveys and questionnaires, suggestion boxes, exit interviews, focus groups, complaints processes, creative consultation, using social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform</td>
<td>Consumers are provided with information to assist them in understanding how services work, to make choices and be aware of options available.</td>
<td>newsletters, leaflets etc, creative consultation, using social media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the importance of consumer participation and the benefits it can provide to both service providers and consumers. The purpose of the strategies section is to provide ideas for homelessness service providers in New South Wales to implement consumer participation practices, taking into account relevant practice settings and the National Quality Framework service standards.

Acknowledgements

This guide draws upon the work of FEANTSA, David Wilcox, the NSW and Victorian Health Care System and others. A full list of references is provided at the end of the document.
Introduction to consumer participation

What is Consumer Participation?

Definitions of consumer participation can vary, particularly as the word consumer is often used interchangeably with words like, community, public, citizen or user and the word participation with words like involvement and consultation. For the purpose of this document a consumer is considered to be user or potential user of homelessness services. The working definition of consumer participation used in this document is that given by the World Health Organisation (WHO):

“A process by which people are able to become actively and genuinely involved in defining the issues of concern to them; in making decisions about factors that effect their lives; in formulating and implementing polices; in planning, developing and delivering services, and in taking action to achieve change.” (WHO, 2002, p.11)

Consumer participation can take many forms and occur at various levels from simple provision of information through to consumer control of service delivery. In 1969 Arnstein developed the “ladder of participation” (fig.2.) to describe the various levels of participation. Each step on the ladder represents gradations of participation. At the bottom of this ladder are manipulation and therapy which are forms of non–participation. The next three rungs are informing, consultation and placation. These are important steps towards true participation, however ultimate power in decision making remains with the service provider, as a result this level of participation can be seen to be tokenistic. The final rungs on the ladder are partnership, delegated power and citizen control. These represent the ultimate goal of consumer participation as consumers have (to various degrees) a legitimate say in organisational decision making.

Arnstein’s ladder remains one of the most commonly cited references in the consumer participation literature and has been modified and adapted by many researchers and organisation since its inception. Most adaptations such as that developed by the International Association of Public Participation (iap2) remove the lower rungs of non–participation from the ladder. The iap2 have included five levels of participation in their participation spectrum. These are inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower. (fig.3.).
Fig 2. Arnstein’s ladder of participation
Fig 3. IAP 2 Public Participation Spectrum.

This guide will refer to the iap2 spectrum when categorizing the different participation activities presented.

Whilst both of these frameworks place consumer/public/citizen control as an ideal this is not necessarily achievable in homelessness service provision where contact with consumers can be short. Hence it is important when implementing participation that you remember that all types of participation are worthwhile and can be empowering. For example in crisis accommodation consumers are more likely to be interested in getting information and being consulted rather than sharing in power. By contrast consumers in longer term community or transitional housing are more likely to want to take more control of decision making.
The Benefits of Consumer Participation

Research indicates that there are many benefits to consumer participation both for the consumer and the service provider these include:

- Improved outcomes.
- Increased satisfaction level that consumers have with services.
- Improved quality and safety by contributing to the design of services that meet consumer needs.
- Enhanced accountability of services.
- The empowerment of consumers.
- Providing service providers with a direct understanding of local needs and issues.
- Encouraging service planning decisions that reflect the needs and wishes of consumers.
- Increased innovation and creativity in service planning.
- An increase or learning of new skills by consumers.
- The undermining of stereotypes (Barrow et. al. 2007; Consumer Focus Collaboration, 2001; Victorian Auditor General, 2012).
Consumer Participation Strategies

There are a variety of strategies that can be used to promote consumer participation in service delivery. In this guide we outline twenty consumer participation activities that you can implement, highlighting the benefits and potential problems of each activity.

1) Newsletters

Service user newsletters are only a form of participation if consumers are involved in its production.

**Advantages:** Newsletters create an opportunity for consumers to express their opinions and experiences. Another benefit of a service user newsletter is that it can also be used as an opportunity for service users to learn IT skills and the important skills of being able to work to a deadline and teamwork. Newsletters are relatively cheap to produce if printed in house.

**Disadvantages:** Can be time consuming to prepare and could be costly to produce if printing is not done in house.

*Place on the participation spectrum = INFORM/INVOLVE*

2) Surveys and questionnaires

Surveys and questionnaires are a vital way of engaging with consumers to obtain feedback and undertake analysis of service delivery.

**Advantages:** The data from surveys and questionnaires can and should be used to improve service delivery and inform policy development.

**Disadvantages:** Can be tokenistic and essentially a waste of time if they are only done to provide evidence of meeting a standard.

*Place on the participation spectrum = CONSULT*
3) Leaflets, brochures, posters and other print mediums

Giving consumers information is the foundation for all other levels of participation. It is vital that information of importance to consumers is easily available. Information is a necessary step towards empowerment but is seldom enough on its own to qualify as participation. However there are times when informing is appropriate such as when there is a legal requirement to do so or at the start of a participation project. It is also an important means to encourage participation in consultations and feedback activities.

Present information in a clear, user-friendly way avoiding jargon or technical language. Remember that if you provide information you must then be prepared to answer questions about it and it will need to be updated regularly. You should attempt to involve consumers in the design of leaflets etc. if possible. Consideration should be given to providing information in multiple languages.

**Advantages:** They are the most common method of promoting a service and engaging with potential consumers. They provide a good method for feeding back results from participation activities or promoting other participation opportunities.

**Disadvantages:** Printed mediums will need to be updated regularly. If not produced to a high standard they can send a bad message about the competence and quality of your organisation.

*Place on the participation spectrum = INFORM*
4) Suggestion and comment boxes

Suggestion boxes should be placed in an area that protects the anonymity of those leaving feedback. For example a suggestion box placed at a reception desk is unlikely to be used by many service users. Make sure that pens and paper are placed near the box. A sign near the box should indicate how often the box is emptied, which should be regularly. If your service would like specific types of feedback a form can be used instead of blank paper, however any such form should have a place for “any other suggestions or comments.”

**Advantages:** A suggestion box allows for anonymous feedback and is particularly useful as a way to involve clients who may not have the confidence to express themselves in other ways

**Disadvantages:** As with surveys and questionnaires a suggestion box is tokenism if the suggestions received are not taken seriously and not used to improve services.

*Place on the participation spectrum = CONSULT*

5) Exit interviews

Exit interviews allow a consumer to reflect on their time using the service, what was helpful, what was good and what wasn’t. The interview should be voluntary. There is no point in conducting an exit interview only for it to be placed in the back of a file never to be seen again. Exit interviews are only a source of consumer participation if the data from the interviews is collated and used to inform service delivery improvements. Recording suggestions in a database can help identify trends.

**Advantages:** Exit interviews are a cost effective form of participation with the main investment being staff time to conduct the interview. Exit interviews can be a driver for organisational improvement.

**Disadvantages:** Exit interviews can be tokenistic.

*Place on the participation spectrum = CONSULT*
Consumer participation guide

6) Forums and meetings.

Forums and meetings, such as resident meetings, are fairly easy to facilitate. As some consumers may not feel comfortable expressing their opinions in front of large numbers of staff, staff presence should be kept to a minimum. This will also help to ensure a consumer focus. Agendas for meetings should be set in collaboration with consumers. If possible allow consumers to chair the meeting and undertake administration tasks such as minute taking. You may need to teach consumers these skills so meetings and forums can also represent a training opportunity!

**Advantages:** can generate a lot of feedback and also provides an opportunity to invite external agencies to the table for discussion.

**Disadvantages:** Forums and meetings do have some problems. For example, the most marginalized consumers are unlikely to attend and they can also exclude non-English speakers. The group format may prevent some consumers from speaking candidly. For these reasons services should also have other forms of participation (including one on one types) in place to ensure all consumers are involved in participation.

*Place on the participation spectrum = INVOLVE*

7) Focus groups.

Focus groups are an increasingly popular research and information gathering method.

**Advantages:** They are relatively easy to organize and inexpensive. Focus groups are particularly good for people who may find individual participation types intimidating. Focus groups are useful for encouraging participation by individuals who are reluctant to talk about their issues. Focus groups also allow for a wide and thorough discussion and can generate a lot of information (Barbour, 2009).

**Disadvantages:** One potential problem with focus groups is that the information gathered can be difficult to collate and they require a skilled facilitator. There is also the risk that participants will conform to dominant views. Focus groups can be dominated by the more educated and articulate consumers.

*Place on the participation spectrum = CONSULT/INVOLVE*
8) **Complaints processes.**

Consumers should be aware of the right to complain and the process for making a complaint should be accessible. It is worthwhile to have the process displayed and also included in any charter of consumer rights or welcome packs. A complaints procedure should be more than a way to resolve grievances. Types and frequency of complaints should be recorded and used to make improvements to service delivery. A standardized complaint form can help in this regard.

**Advantages:** Complaints deliver direct information from clients about faulty decisions, poor service delivery and defective programs. Complaints can be used to evaluate and improve programs and services and inform decision making about future service delivery.

**Disadvantages:** Some consumers may have difficulty in making a complaint. Some complainants can be difficult to deal with and may be rude or aggressive, exaggerate or be dishonest in explaining a complaint, or be unreasonably persistent with a complaint that has been investigated or closed, and make demands that are unrealistic or disproportionate. (Commonwealth Ombudsman, 2009)

*Place on the participation spectrum = CONSULT*

9) **Client centred case management and care planning.**

Case management is a fundamental mechanism for consumer participation. A client centred approach using a strength based perspective recognizes that consumers have the capacity, knowledge and skills to resolve their issues. Consumers should be involved in discussions about their assessment and support plan.

**Advantages:** Client centred case management and care planning ensures that consumers have the right to make choices that will affect their future.

**Disadvantages:** There are no major disadvantages though it may require staff to be trained in client centred and strength based approaches.

*Place on the participation spectrum = COLLABORATE*
10) Consumer Consultants.

Consultation with consumers underpins nearly all forms of participation listed in this guide. The use of consumer consultants takes this one step further. In mental health, the employment of consumer consultants is one of the main strategies used to implement consumer participation (Middleton et. al., 2004).

Advantages: The role of consumer consultants can be diverse, and include education and training, peer support, leadership, advocacy, and individual and group work. Consumer consultants can also be involved in policy and program development, the development, delivery and evaluation of services (Cleary, Walter & Escott, 2006).

Disadvantages: The employment and use of consumer consultants however can be tricky. Consultants should be paid but this then raises the question of accountability and boundaries which can then negatively impact their effectiveness.

Place on the participation spectrum = COLLABORATE


Consumer advocacy is related to the use of consumer consultants and the term is sometimes used interchangeably. They are however quite different as unlike consumer consultants who may have a broad role, consumer advocates, as the name suggests are only used in an advocacy role.

Advantages: Consumers are more likely to engage with peers and it can be empowering for both the advocate and the service user.

Disadvantages: Like the use of consumer consultants the use of consumer advocates needs a lot of resources to implement. Consumer advocates need to be recruited and fully trained to ensure that there are clear ways of starting and ending advocacy relationships. There can also be problems establishing boundaries and it can be threatening to staff power and perceived autonomy.

Place on the spectrum = COLLABORATE
12) Peer education.

The assumption underpinning the effectiveness of peer education is that educators will have more credibility with their peers. It is well researched that peers are an important influence on health related behavior and peer education has played a vital role in health, youth work and the drug and alcohol sector for many years (Green, 2001).

Several organisations have developed peer education programs and it is probably worthwhile to look at these for ideas. One such program is the Peer Education Support Program (PESP) run by the Council to Homeless Persons in Victoria. Information on that program is available here: - [http://chp.org.au/services/pesp/](http://chp.org.au/services/pesp/)

**Advantages:** Peer education programs have the advantage that a service user or potential service user will be more effectively informed by someone they can identify with as a peer. Peer education also has the advantage of offering considerable volunteering/employment opportunities and personal development opportunities for the peer educators.

**Disadvantages:** There is likely to be considerable cost in terms of finance and time to start up a peer education program. Peer educators will require initial training and ongoing Supervision and support.

*Place on the spectrum = INVOLVE*

13) Peer mentoring.

Peer mentoring has been a cornerstone of self–help groups and education for decades. The underpinning philosophy behind it is that mentors having had similar experiences to the consumer are then likely to have a greater understanding of their issues.

**Advantages:** The consumer will have the chance to share their issues with someone who has experienced similar situations.

**Disadvantages:** Peer mentoring programs like peer education programs will require considerable time and resources to implement and co-ordinate.

*Place on the spectrum = INVOLVE*
14) Peer research/consumer academics.

If your organisation is conducting research then peer research is a good way to implement consumer participation.

**Advantages:** Consumers are more likely to share information with someone they can identify with as a peer and the process can be empowering for all involved.

**Disadvantages:** The need to provide training to peer researchers can be costly and time consuming. There is also the very real possibility that subjectivity of peer researchers can impact on the required objectivity of research.

*Place on the spectrum = INVOLVE*

15) Consumer advisory Boards/councils.

Consumer advisory boards (CABs) can contain current or former consumers though with the latter it is possible that their experiences as a consumer can become less relevant over time. Consumer advisory boards are becoming a common vehicle by which consumer’s interests in program decisions and direction can be communicated to governing boards. Consumer advisory boards are now common among many community housing providers in NSW where they are most often referred to as Tenant Advisory Boards or Councils.

**Advantages:** CABs offer several benefits to service providers. They can closely reflect the views of the communities they represent and ensure systematic evaluation of services. Involvement in CABs also increases self-efficacy, self-sufficiency and self-confidence of the consumers involved.

**Disadvantages:** One problem with CABs is representativeness – often only the most articulate and educated consumers will participate at this level. Consumers from CALD backgrounds are also often unable to participate. There can also be problems around influence and consumers’ expectations (Buck, Rochon, Davidson, & McCurdy, 2004). CABs will also require organisational resources to set up and will require the development of policy and procedures to govern their operation.

*Place on the spectrum = CONSULT*
16) Consumer led projects.

A consumer led project is a stand-alone project which is designed, developed, implemented and run by consumers. Generally only organisations that have had considerable experience of participation or that has consumers who have previously been involved in participation activities should attempt this type of participation. These projects can often form ‘organically’ at the instigation of consumers and could include the development of any of the participation activities outlined in this toolkit. The range of possible projects is vast. What is important is that it be a consumer idea implemented and run by consumers with the role of the organisation being simply to offer support or assistance if asked to do so. Most likely this support will be providing resources for the project.

Advantages: Consumer led projects can be very empowering and since consumers have ownership over the project they are generally enthusiastically delivered and received. Involvement in projects can help service users gain new skills and increase their confidence.

Disadvantages: A potential problem with consumer led projects is that they can be unstable particularly if consumers who started the project leave the service before having time to complete it. Any projects will also require funding and administrative support to work.

*Place on the spectrum = EMPOWER*
17) Consumer Volunteers.

Peer mentoring, and peer education are examples of peer volunteering, however volunteering opportunities present themselves in many different ways. Such as a literacy, numeracy and basic skills volunteer tutor, to simply helping orient a new client to a service. Your agency will need to be committed to the idea of volunteering and will need to develop a volunteering policy and procedure.

Advantages: Volunteering enables consumers to learn new skills and brings a consumer viewpoint to organisational activities. A good volunteering program is not only a great participation initiative but can also bring extra capacity for the organisation to deliver services.

Disadvantages: Some organisations may require consumers to be registered with the agency as volunteers. This may require them to have police checks and attend volunteer orientation sessions. This can present a barrier to volunteering for some consumers.

Place on the spectrum = INVOLVE

18) Consumer involvement in organisational governance.

Since boards or management committees are ultimately accountable for the activities of service provider’s, participation on boards or management committees by consumers is a great way to achieve a high level of consumer participation.

Advantages: Consumer involvement in governance enables consumers to build a range of skills and experience and sends a strong message about your organisation's commitment to consumer participation in decision making.

Disadvantages: This level of participation does come with some caveats. Consumer involvement in governance can be tokenistic if consumers’ views are not genuinely and equally considered on the same level as other committee or board members. This type of participation must be planned and carried out carefully. Consumers must fit ‘job descriptions’ for management committees and boards. Whilst this means you can then avoid tokenism it also means that the most marginalized consumers are unlikely to be involved.

Place on the spectrum = EMPOWER
19) Creative Consultation.

Creative consultation can be used to inform, involve or consult consumers and can take a variety of forms. The use of creative consultation techniques can help people express their thoughts and opinions in a more interesting and meaningful way than questionnaires, exit interviews or other more formal participation strategies. When thinking of using art, drama, music or any other form of creative consultation it is vital to consider the interests of the group you are working with.

Some interesting case studies of creative consultation can be found at http://www.serviceuserinvolvement.co.uk/howTo_creative%20consultationCS.asp?id=16.

Advantages: Creative consultation activities can be relatively inexpensive and easy to organise, they can also be an effective means of involving consumers from CALD backgrounds or those with literacy problems.

Disadvantages: Some consumers may not be comfortable with extroverted type group activities such as drama. If not done with a high level of respective they can seem like “school” activities rather than participation.

Place on the spectrum = INFORM – CONSULT
20) Using social media.

In the last ten years the use of social media as a way to disseminate information, collect feedback and engage with consumers has grown exponentially. Social media can be used as a participation tool simply as a way to inform consumers all the way up the ladder to collaborate with consumers. It is important when using social media that you only share relevant content. Sharing content relevant to your audiences means you can listen to responses and reply and contribute to conversations. This may mean that you need to create more than one profile e.g one for consumers and one for other stakeholders.

Social media is a valuable participation tool but should never entirely replace traditional face to face methods of participation and is likely to be most successful when used to compliment other tools.

**Advantages:** social media is cheap and easy to use.

**Disadvantages:** The major drawback of this participation tool is that it will only reach those who have access to the internet and social media. This figure can be very low when working with consumers with multiple exclusion issues which is often the case with homeless persons. Finally it will require staff time for monitoring and administration.

*Place on the spectrum = INFORM – COLLABORATE*
Challenges and Barriers to Participation

The single biggest barrier to implementing effective consumer participation, particularly on the collaboration and empower levels of the participation spectrum is likely to be staff attitudes towards participation (Happell, 2008; Happell & Roper, 2009). These attitudes are more often than not a result of changing power relationships as the balance of power between user and professional shift as a result of participation. They can also be the result of an “us and them” attitude. Professional views can be challenged by participation. Preparing staff to deal with this through training is important; learning to listen to consumers without defensiveness is critical (NSW Health, 2005). In addition staff may also lack experience in and/or a commitment to consumer participation, or doubt the ability of consumers to contribute effectively.

Apart from these professional barriers services will face several other challenges when implementing effective consumer participation. The first is simply time and money. Organisations will need to ensure that they have the resources to implement a consumer participation program.

Secondly organisations will have to overcome barriers to participation that arise from the consumers themselves. For example participation by CALD communities can be difficult due to language barriers. Consumers may not wish to participate believing that it is ‘not their place’ to get involved or they might simply want to find accommodation and have no interest in participating. Consumers may not feel comfortable giving negative feedback to service providers due to fear of retribution. Consumers may also believe that they won’t be listened to and that if they do provide feedback, nothing will change. The diversity of those willing to participate may also pose a challenge. There is a real possibility that only “the loudest voices” will be heard and those who are more educated and articulate will dominate participation activities. Additionally, some consumers may lack the confidence and skills necessary to participate effectively. Organisations will have to actively promote participation activities to ensure equality and diversity among consumers representation.
A lack of understanding among consumers and organisations as to what exactly consumer participation is can also be a barrier to its effective implementation (NSW health, 2005; Clarke & Brindle, 2010; Participation Works, 2011).

At an administrative level organisations must have clear goals regarding participation and ensure that they have knowledge of successful methods for consumer participation. Clarifying the issue of participation, (i.e what level do we wish to be at, what do we understand it to be) is essential to develop effective strategies to pursue meaningful participation. Without this clarity it will be difficult if not impossible to develop any effective participation strategies (Heikkilä & Julkunen, 2003).
Useful resources

Due to the lack of available research and resources related specifically to homelessness many resources for participation are produced in relation to consumer participation in health, mental health and alcohol and other drug services however the principles of participation and ideas they contain are easily applicable to homelessness service provision. The reference list contains many useful resources in addition to this list.

Guide to successful tenant participation – Scotland

This guide is designed for tenant groups and other tenants to help them have more control over what happens in their estates. It distinguishes between different levels of participation and deals with some methods that may be used by community housing providers to encourage participation.


Developing participation structures within homeless organisations – FEANTSA

Hosts a range of publications aimed specifically on the experience of the homeless sector in relation to participation looking at the issues and challenges that arise in the sector. Examples and guidelines on how to approach participation are provided.


Service user Involvement best practice guide – serviceuserinvolvement.co.uk

This website is devoted to participation and provides many ideas on how to do it, what it is and various other resources. The link below has a range of videos on participation topics.

http://www.serviceuserinvolvement.co.uk/downloads.asp
Consumer participation guide

**Consumer Participation Resources – Health Issues Centre**

This document lists and provides links to dozens of consumer participation resources including a literature review, guides to planning and implementing participation, engagement, recruiting consumers as peer educators etc., participation indicators, consumer advisory board guidelines, monitoring and evaluating participation and much more.

Available from -
www.nepcp.org.au/sites/.../Consumer%20Participation%20Resources.doc

**Consumer participation resource kit – Homeground Services**

This kit is designed specifically for homelessness service providers. It contains information on ways to engage consumers, and to develop strategies based on their advice with the aim of improving services. The tit offers a starting point for organisations looking to develop consumer participation strategies, and provides information about a range of participation strategies.


**The BNPCA consumer participation resource & training kit for service providers – Banyule-Nillumbik Primary Care Alliance**

This Kit provides a resource aimed at building skills and resources on the part of agencies and services to successfully engage with consumers. The Kit is intended as a resource to stimulate discussion, debate and action within agencies around consumer participation. Though focused on healthcare the information and strategies are applicable to homelessness service providers.

Available from –
References


Consumer participation guide


Examples

Practical examples

This appendix contains some practical examples of participation in the homelessness service sector.
Newsletters: The newsletter below is from Hume Community Housing
Consumer participation guide

CEO Message

A warm hello to all of Hume’s Customers. It’s been seven months since I have been able to contribute to our newsletter. I have been away or Maternity leave enjoying all the challenges that having a second child brings. However, I am back now and looking forward to an exciting year with many great new customer programs and initiatives. The results from our 2012 Tenant Survey have been collated and I am pleased to report 97% if you were satisfied with Hume’s overall housing services.

This edition of our newsletter contains lots of helpful information and I draw your attention to the following:

As always we endeavour to provide you with cost effective measures to help reduce your bills so please check out page 3 to discover how you can save on electricity costs.

Hume is driving two workshops in a variety of different topics from Effective Communication to Conflict Resolution thanks to a partnership with Liverpool Volunteer Resource Centre. This opportunity shouldn’t be missed, have a look at page 3 for further information.

If you have been our customers being active, if you read the Fairfield Champion you would have noticed Hume’s fantastic picture for Senior’s Week. We encourage all our customers to be active in their community as if you volunteer drop us a line as we would love to hear about it.

We always encourage our customers to provide us with comments and suggestions. If you would like to get involved come along to our next Tenant’s Voice meeting on 22nd May. It’s a great place to meet new people, share ideas and learn more about how you can get involved with Hume and the Community Housing Sector.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Tenant’s Voice.

Nicola Lane
CEO

HUME COMMUNITY HOUSING ASSOCIATION - WWW.HUMECHCA.COM.AU

2012 TENANT SURVEY RESULTS ARE IN

2012 Tenant Survey results are in...

This has been an exciting year for our 2012 Tenant Survey. Over 440 households took part in our annual survey letting us know what you think of us. There were a lot of highs and few areas we need to work on.

Here are a few of the many statistics we would like to share with you.

- 64% of respondents were from non-English Speaking Background (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds).
- 87% were satisfied with Hume’s overall housing services.
- 84% were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live.
- 82% were satisfied with Hume’s maintenance services.

WINNERS

Congratulations to Frances Stevens and Fetu Psailo who are this year’s Tenant Satisfaction Survey contest winners. Each person received a $300 gift card for Big W.

WHAT’S INSIDE

ARTICLE PAGE

CEO MESSAGE 1
2012 TENANT SURVEY RESULTS ARE IN 1
WANT TO SAVE MONEY? 2
PAYING YOUR RENT AND OTHER BILLS JUST BECAME EASIER 2
GARDENING KEEPING ACTIVE KEEPING FIT 2
MEET YOUR TENTANT DIRECTOR 3
LEARN A NEW SKILL 3
INCENTIVE WINNERS 3
SOCIAL CLUB OUTINGS 4
TENANT’S VOICE 4
WANT TO SAVE MONEY?

HOME ENERGY SAVER SCHEME - HESS

The Australian Government’s Home Energy Saver Scheme is provided through community organisations around Australia and can help you save money.

Hess is being offered by Melanie Walters who works for Salvation Army. She can help you by providing:

- Knowledge on easy and affordable ways to use energy.
- Assistance to understand your energy bills and the energy market.
- Information on rebates and assistance and links to other services.
- One on One budgeting assistance, and support in negotiating energy companies.
- Support to access No Interest Loans (N.I.L.S) to purchase energy efficient appliances.

CALL MELANIE TODAY ON
PHONE: 0419 876 207
HESS HELPLINE: 1800 007 001

GARDENING
KEEPING ACTIVE, KEEPING FIT

As advertised in the Fairfield City Champion Newspaper

Kristina Monirovic is in her 70’s and lives in Cabramatta. She has a strong passion for gardening and is an inspiration to other gardeners in the complex where she lives. People who pass the garden often stop and admire her hard work. She can be found outside most days pruning and weeding. Kristina takes great price in designing and maintaining this space for everyone to enjoy. This has created interest from other gardeners to join in to work together to create a community garden for all people living in the complex.

Hume is interested in hearing from customers who would like to start a community garden in their complex. Please contact 9722 4329 or email: get.involved@humech.ca.com.au subject line “Community Garden.” Don’t forget to leave your details.
MEET YOUR TENANT DIRECTOR

Who are you?
My name is Alex Birou. I am 36 years old and I live in Pendle Hill (Parramatta area). I am currently studying a Bachelor of Arts at Macquarie University majoring in Modern Greek language, culture, ancient Greek language, ancient Greek history along with linguistics.
I would love to teach these subjects at a community level to both Greeks and non-Greeks.

How long have you been a Hume Tenant?
I have been a Hume tenant for over 5 years since 2008. I was living in a refuge at Blacktown when Marie Haider (Hume Worker) went out of her way to find me a home.

Why did you want to be a Director?
I wanted to be a director on the board at Hume so ALL tenant’s views can be fairly conveyed and taken into account and expressed in decision making, planning and future strategies which affect the present and future success of Hume. I think the voice of a tenant’s representative on the board goes a long way.

What experience do you offer?
I have studied accounting, business administration amongst the many courses I have undertaken. However, I believe the best experience I have to offer Hume is that I am a tenant.

How will your work as a Director benefit Hume and the tenants?
I would like to offer Hume my skills in accounting, finance along with business administration to further steer Hume on its constant growing path of success and expansion. Through the Tenth’s Voice I want to be able to convey ideas to the board of directors about what tenants would like to see done to improve current and future tenancies and living conditions.

LEARN A NEW SKILL

WOULD LIKE TO ATTEND A FREE WORKSHOP ON THESE TOPICS?
- Professional Boundaries/Confidentiality – 13 May
- Effective Communication – 14 May
- Cultural Competency – 20 May
- Conflict Resolution – 29 May
- Speak Up! Speak Out! – 11 June
- Living Hope (for people who provide support to family members experiencing a death in the family due to suicide) 25 – 26 June

Liverpool Volunteer Resource Centre is offering training/workshops and Hume is subsidising the cost so they are free to attend. All training and workshops will be held at Liverpool City Library.

SPACES ARE LIMITED!

If you would like to attend any of the courses please call 9722 4329
or email: get.involved@humecha.com.au

The following workshops are already full:
- Professional Boundaries/Confidentiality
- Effective Communication
- Cultural Competency
- Conflict Resolution
- Speak Up! Speak Out!

WINNERS

We would like to congratulate:

The Ugarte household from Bonnyrig
The Wahed household from Bankstown
The Simpson household from Bankstown

“Each household has won $200.”

To enter the quarterly draw your rent must be 2 weeks in advance and have no outstanding debts with Hume. Good luck!
Consumer participation guide

Sydney Royal Easter Show
Thank you to all the Social Club members who purchased Easter Show tickets. All Social Club members were mailed a personal letter informing them of the sale. This was done because the Easter Show group ticket sale deadline did not coincide with the distribution of this newsletter.

Taronga Zoo
The Social Club has not been to Taronga Zoo for over 5 years. Don’t miss out on this exciting trip. Come join us and spend a fun day at the zoo!
Date: 24th April 2013
Buses: Will leave from Fairfield Station (Dale St.) and Warwick Farm Station 8:45am sharp! Buses will return around 6:00pm.
Time at the venue: 10:30 till 4pm
Location: Taronga Zoo – Bradleys Head Rd, Mosman NSW 2000
Tickets on sale: now till Friday 12th April
Price: Adult $10.00 Child $5.00 (4 – 12) Child (0 – 3): Free

Seniors Outing to Sydney Tower Including Lunch
Come join us for lunch at the Sydney Tower and enjoy the 360 degree view of Sydney CBD. You must be 55 of age or over. Limited to 60 spaces so book quickly.
Date: 22 May
Buses: Will leave from Fairfield Station (Dale St.) and Warwick Farm Station 10:30am sharp! Buses will return around 5:00pm.
Time at the venue: 12:00pm till 4:00pm
Location: Sydney Westfield Centre, Pitt & Castle St. Sydney NSW 2000
Tickets on sale: now till 26th April
Price: $20 (includes $60 lunch and transportation)

I love all staff who work there and provide support for us. Thank you for all your hard work.”
- 2013 Tenant Satisfaction Survey

Maintenance Line
If you have maintenance or repair issues please call the Maintenance Number: 9722 4329.
To make a maintenance request online, visit www.humecha.com.au then click on “Repair + Maintenance” located on the right hand side of the page. Here you can learn how maintenance and repairs are handled. The request form is located at the bottom of the page.

We welcome your feedback
Do you have a special family event, a funny joke, a favourite recipe, a great story or a personal comment you would like published in the next newsletter? Please send all information along with your tenant code, name and address to: getinvolved@humecha.com.au If you do not have access to email you can always visit the office. If your entry is selected you could win a $20.00 gift card to Big W. All submitted entries will be reviewed.

Contact us
Hume Community Housing Association
Level 1, 119 The Crescent,
Fairfield NSW 2165
NEW Phone Number: (02) 9722 4300
Email: webenquiry@humecha.com.au
Consumer participation guide

**Leaflets, Brochures and other print mediums**

The below information brochures are from the St Vincent de Paul society and the Council to homeless persons. Though low on the participation scale, informing is vital especially when promoting participation activities.
The Ozanam Learning Centre is located on L/3 of 99 Forbes St Woolloomooloo. Vocational and training classes run daily and cover skills like

- TAFE Computer Courses
- TAFE Digital & Media
- TAFE Screen Printing
- TAFE Photoshop
- TAFE Broadcasting
- Literacy & Numeracy

The Ozanam Learning Centre produces sustainable pathways out of homelessness by providing people with education and employment opportunities. With a strong emphasis on vocational training, education, living skills and activities, the Ozanam Learning Centre (OLC) inspires change and seeks to empower individuals with the skills they need to lead an independent and fulfilling life.

People most at risk of (or experiencing) homelessness don’t have easy access to training and Education. By proving FREE TAFE accredited courses, the OLC is providing options that allow people to empower themselves.

For more information and class times phone (02) 9358 8124.

The Ozanam Learning Centre is part of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Support Services
OLC MEN’S GROUP

A friendly, supportive space to talk about stuff

WEDNESDAYS

2.00pm – 3.30pm
All Men Welcome
Groups run continuously for 7 weeks followed by a 1 week break.
All Men are welcome to join us any week.
Would you like to talk with other men about relationships, how you’re feeling, or anything else on your mind?
Have you lost contact with your kids, your parents, brothers or sisters?
Are you concerned about your health?
How do you handle stress or anger?
Why not come along and share your experiences with others?
You’ll be helping them and they’ll be helping you.

Topics include:

Ozanam Learning Centre, Level 3 - 99 Forbes Street
Woolloomooloo 2011.
Contact: Greg - 0401 103 886 / Richard - 02 9358 8153
Consumer participation guide

Direct program

On-site case management

Consumer houses are accessed by a number of residents in the area. Each consumer house is a resident driven case management program and all residents are assigned a case manager. Case managers work within their case management teams.

Residents work with their case managers to work with them on goals and enhance needs and goals. Residents are given the opportunity to set their own goals and work with their case managers to achieve these goals.

Residents who are interested in making educational changes can work with their case managers to achieve these goals.

The Consumer House is a resident driven case management program and all residents are assigned a case manager. Case managers work within their case management teams. Residents work with their case managers to work with them on goals and enhance needs and goals. Residents are given the opportunity to set their own goals and work with their case managers to achieve these goals.

Residents who are interested in making educational changes can work with their case managers to achieve these goals.

The Consumer House is a resident driven case management program and all residents are assigned a case manager. Case managers work within their case management teams. Residents work with their case managers to work with them on goals and enhance needs and goals. Residents are given the opportunity to set their own goals and work with their case managers to achieve these goals.

Residents who are interested in making educational changes can work with their case managers to achieve these goals.

The Consumer House is a resident driven case management program and all residents are assigned a case manager. Case managers work within their case management teams. Residents work with their case managers to work with them on goals and enhance needs and goals. Residents are given the opportunity to set their own goals and work with their case managers to achieve these goals.

Residents who are interested in making educational changes can work with their case managers to achieve these goals.
Consumer participation guide

Who we can assist

Vincentian House accepts the following groups of people who are experiencing homelessness or are at immediate risk of homelessness:

- Families whose family unit comprises:
- Single parents with accompanying children
- Single parents with a teenage son and any other accompanying children
- Couples with accompanying children
- Single woman who are unaccompanied

Whilst these are our priority groups, Vincentian House will accept referrals for, and consider, other family groups who are having difficulty accessing assistance from other services. Vincentian House endeavours to be flexible and adaptive to the special needs and circumstances of the people we work with.

Referrals will be accepted from any recognized Community and Government Agency. Self-referrals should be made via the Homeless Persons Information Centre on 1800 234 566.

Resident services

Residents have access to a range of onsite services including:

- Health Services Clinic
- Homeless Persons Information Service
- Centrelink Outreach Service
- Counselling
- Positive Parenting Program
- Supported Playgroups
- Retailing timetable of Parenting Support Groups, Living Skills and other support programs

Many of these services are available by appointment to those who fit into our criteria. Please contact Vincentian House on (02) 9357 1533 for more information.

Vincentian House

Vincentian House
Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 536, Sunny Hills, NSW 2010
Telephone: (02) 9357 1533
Fax: (02) 9354 8001
Email: vincentianhouse@talbot.org.au
Website: www.vnhs.org.au
ABN: 46 272 691 325 004

Let us do without hesitation whatever good lies at our hands.”
Frederick Ozanam
Founder of St. Vincent de Paul Society
Peer Education Support Program (PESP) Information Sheet

Have you experienced homelessness? Do want to improve how homelessness services are delivered? Do you want to influence government policy and create change in the homelessness service system? Do you want to be part of a team dedicated to ending homelessness? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you might be interested in joining Council to Homeless Persons’ (CHP) Peer Education and Support Program (PESP).

What is PESP?

PESP is a volunteer program that provides people who have experienced homelessness with an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of the homelessness service system. PESP team members play a key role in promoting the benefits and transformative power of meaningful consumer participation in homelessness service system and policy development. This is done primarily through consumer participation activities such as:
- consumer participation training and advice
- group and one-on-one presentations
- peer facilitation and focus groups
- peer support
- media activities
- consultation with all levels of government
- consultation with related sectors
- participation in working/steering groups and committees

How do I become a PESP member?

PESP members undertake an interview process and successful applicants must meet key selection criteria set out in the position description. They are given comprehensive training, supervision and support that enable them to undertake their role.

PESP members can stay in the program for up to two years, after which time a new person will be given the opportunity to join. When they have finished their term, PESP members have the opportunity to become graduate members.

Graduate members have the opportunity to continue to be involved with CHP through activities such as presentations, special projects and consumer consultations.

Contact PESP

If you are interested in joining the PESP or knowing more about it you can contact Cassandra Bewden, PESP Coordinator via email at cassandra@chp.org.au or on 8415 6200.

More information

For more information about CHP or PESP, visit our website at www.chp.org.au
Consumer participation guide

**Complaints process**

The following document outlines the complaint process of the NSW ombudsman.

IN AUSTRALIA
YOU HAVE THE RIGHT
TO COMPLAIN

If you have a complaint you
cannot resolve, about the actions or
decisions of an Australian Government
agency, you can contact the
Commonwealth Ombudsman.

We also have information in other languages,
please contact us for a full list.

1300 362 072 (Local call cost)
GPO Box 442, Canberra ACT 2601 www.ombudsman.gov.au
Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) 131 450
How do you make a complaint?

Start by contacting the relevant agency’s complaint handling area to try and resolve the problem. If you have not tried the agency first, we may decide not to investigate your complaint at this stage.

If you want the Ombudsman’s office to become involved, you can make a complaint:
- by telephone, fax or email
- in person or in writing
- via the online complaint form at www.ombudsman.gov.au
- by SMS to 0413 COMM 0MB (0413 266 662)
- by filling in the attached complaint lodgement form provided here.

Help us give fair and efficient consideration to your complaint. Provide as much relevant information as possible so we have a clear picture of the problem. Be specific rather than general, and tell us what action or outcome you would like to see as a result of your complaint.

Someone else can make a complaint for you, but we may still need to contact you to get your approval to proceed.

Investigations are carried out in private.
You can ask that your name not be given to the agency concerned, but this may make it difficult to deal effectively with your complaint. Anonymous and ‘whistleblower’ complaints are also accepted.

Investigating in private also means that we may not give you all of the information provided by the agency you complain about, such as copies of letters or documents. If this is the case, we will give you the reasons for our decision.
What happens when you make a complaint?

Your complaint will be given careful attention. If we have the legal power and resources, we will examine your complaint as promptly as possible. Many complaints are finalised quickly. Complex or more formal investigations may take much longer.

We may ask you for more information such as letters or other documents, or ask you to make your complaint in writing.

If we do not take up your complaint, we will tell you the reasons why. If we are unable to help, we may be able to refer you to someone who can, such as:

- the Administrative Appeals Tribunal or other tribunals
- state, territory, industry and specialist Ombudsman
- other complaint-handling agencies.
How will your complaint be handled?

We will carefully consider your complaint and assess the best way to resolve it. We will usually contact the agency to investigate and find out what they have to say about your complaint. Many complaints can be resolved at this stage without the need for further investigation.

If the cause of the problem is not clear or a solution is not found, we may investigate further by asking more questions and reviewing the agency’s files, policies and procedures. We may also require documents to be provided and questions answered in a more formal process.

We will keep you informed of how your complaint is proceeding. If we find that an agency has made a mistake or acted wrongly, the Ombudsman can recommend a remedy, such as the agency:

- reconsidering or changing its decision
- apologising
- changing a policy or procedure
- consider paying compensation where appropriate.

We cannot force an agency to do what we recommend. However, the Ombudsman can make a special report to the relevant Minister, Prime Minister and Parliament, or release a public report. Agencies usually act on the Ombudsman’s recommendations.

When the investigation is finished we will let you know the result and what the agency will do to solve the problem. If we find the agency has not acted wrongly, we will explain why we reached that view.
You can ask for an internal review of our decisions or actions if you are not satisfied with the way we have handled your complaint. This request should be in writing, and should be submitted within three months from when we advise you of our decision.

Services available to help you to make a complaint

If you are a non-English speaking person, we can help through the Translating and Interpreter Service (TIS) on 131 450.

National Relay Service (NRS): if you are deaf, or have a hearing, sight or speech impairment, TTY users phone 133 677 then ask for 1300 362 072; Speak and Listen users phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 1300 362 072; internet Relay users connect to the NRS (www.iprelay.com.au) then ask for 1300 362 072.

We have information sheets in many community languages, at www.ombudsman.gov.au, and can provide copies of a large print information booklet.

What you can expect from us

Our Service Charter sets out the standards of service you can expect from us, and what you can do if these standards are not met.

Copies of the charter are available at www.ombudsman.gov.au or from our offices.
Consumer participation guide

Complaint lodgement form

To submit a complaint about an Australian Government agency you can telephone, email, write or visit our website, or you can use this form. Before making a complaint to the Ombudsman, you should try to resolve the problem with the relevant agency’s complaint handling area.

Full name

Address

Suburb/Town

State Postcode

Phone number(s)

Name of Australian government agency you want to complain about

Have you contacted the Australian government agency you are complaining about to try to resolve the problem?

Yes [ ] No [ ]
Details of your problem *(attach a separate sheet of paper if necessary)*

What do you think the agency should do about your problem? *(attach a separate sheet of paper if necessary)*

Signature

Date

Tear off form and post to Commonwealth Ombudsman GPO Box 442, Canberra ACT 2601

This information will help us to investigate your complaint. We will keep your personal information confidential as far as possible. There may be some circumstances when your personal information will need to be given to others as part of investigating your complaint. Documents held by the Ombudsman are subject to release under the Freedom of Information Act 1989 (Cth). Information entered on this form will be put into our case management database. We collect, manage, use and disclose personal information under the requirements of the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth).
Social Media

There are many examples of organisation using social media to involve consumers. A great example is the NSW police force page on Facebook which can be found at: