



Annual Report 2021 - 2022



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### **Chair Report**

It is now just over a year since Tenants Queensland (TQ) changed its legal status to a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG), and I can report that a continued focus on our governance processes and board development are putting the organisation in a good position to meet the challenges of the future.

Our work to update documentation, including bank accounts and contracts etc., continued as we undertook board development on Director's responsibilities and risk, and reviewed our governance policies. On behalf of the board, I would like to extend sincere thanks to Minter Ellison for supporting these activities, having agreed to continue their partnership with us following TQ's transition to a CLG.

Our internal focus extended to implementing an external WHS audit, structured to occur at regular intervals, and resulting in a workplan to uplift processes and drive continuous improvement. We also commenced automation of our payroll and time and attendance processes.

We continue to await the evaluation of our major funding program, QSTARS. We look forward to engaging with our funders to determine any improvements to these very important services, particularly within the context of current challenges facing Queensland renters.

All our work this year has occurred with the backdrop of COVID-19, yet we have continued to deliver quality services to those in need. The entire TQ team is commended for their work.

During this year, we lost our long-term board member and Chairperson, Rohan Tate, who was involved for eight years. On behalf of the board, I would like to thank Rohan for his time and commitment. My appreciation is also extended to the rest of the board for volunteering their time and energy to achieving good governance in support of renting households across the state.

A very special thank you to our members, your continued support is greatly appreciated. We welcome and encourage your feedback anytime throughout the year, to ensure we continue to provide the very best service to Queensland renting households.

As a stop press, it was pleasing to receive news in September 2022 that funding for the QSTARS Program has been extended and increased. The news provides certainty to renting households across the state that they will be able to access the services they need.

**Penny Gillespie** 

### **CEO Report**

The 2021/22 financial year has presented TQ with both challenges and opportunities.

In October 2021, we finally saw passage of legislation changing Queensland's tenancy laws. A long consultation process which commenced three years earlier, interrupted by COVID-19, resulted in significant changes. Taking effect immediately, were changes allowing renters experiencing domestic and family violence to more easily end tenancies and get their bond back. You can read more details below in this report about changes which will take effect in our next reporting year.

We are proud of the many positive changes we have achieved. Allowing renters to keep pets more easily is much welcomed. Unfortunately, the inclusion of 'end of a fixed term' as a reason to end tenancies is a change we cannot support given the insecurity it brings.

Commencement of promised stage two tenancy law reforms were anticipated this year but have stalled within government and are now likely to commence any time. Keep an eye out for the Make Renting Fair in Queensland alliance, which will become active again in the near future.

Of note is our significant work with renting households impacted by the February flood event. Our team undertook great efforts to inform renters of their rights and support their advice needs, responding to enquiries regarding loss of amenity and mould, and in some cases, the loss of their entire tenancy.

This year we witnessed rents reach an all-time high with exceptionally low vacancy rates statewide. We have been hearing firsthand of the difficulties tenants face in their search for suitable housing. The risk of homelessness is not just a concern for the most vulnerable but also to many low to middle income working households.

It goes without saying that members of our TQ team are truly dedicated to delivering a high-quality service to those that need it most. I continue to be amazed at their commitment to go above and beyond and I sincerely thank all members of our team. To further acknowledge their commitment, we spent time this year with our team to develop a Team Recognition Program which will come to fruition next year.

Again, this year, I was privileged to continue participating on the Premier's Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Council.

In wrapping up another year, I offer my sincere thanks to the array of law firms which have provided invaluable pro bono assistance to TQ. Of note, Minter Ellison for continuing our partnership, in particular their support to review and strengthen our governance processes, and Herbert Smith Freehills for their support on HR and IR matters.

I also want to thank and acknowledge the individuals of the TQ board, who give up their time voluntarily and without whom we could not function. A special thanks is extended to Penny Gillespie for taking on the Acting Chair role following the departure of Rohan Tate (who will be missed).

Penny Carr





## **Enhancing workplace culture**

Over the past year TQ has focused on building a positive and supportive work culture by creating workforce engagement opportunities, implementing strategies that will assist in forging strong employee relationships, and strengthening and improving TQ's internal communication channels between and across TQ. Initiatives have included:

- A regular monthly staff and quarterly partner newsletter schedule and efforts focused on engaging greater staff input.
- The introduction of a 6-weekly management team meetings schedule with a focus on TQ internal processes and initiatives to build greater internal connection and cohesion.
- Regional staff representation on the recently re-established WH&S committee.
- The planned introduction of a WH&S Wellbeing Plan to highlight health and wellbeing issues on a bi-monthly basis.
- Establishment of a staff project group to drive the Team Recognition Awards project.

- Seeking staff feedback on the revamping of TQ's website.
- The delivery of "Lunchbox" sessions for staff on a variety of topics such as superannuation and wellbeing.
- Delivery of Cultural Safety Training to all staff on Seven Steps to Practical Reconciliation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Awareness.
- Delivery of all of staff training focused on organisational policy and procedure and our relationships with colleagues.

Over the year we have reviewed important organisational processes including Performance Planning to ensure its relevance and currency, as well as our Cultural Statement, for its effectiveness.

The global pandemic has highlighted this more than ever. But we also have the chance to be empathetic, passionate and strive for social justice.

\*Maree Hoad is a part-time Community Education Worker and part-time Regional Advice
Worker based in TQ's Rockhampton office. Maree provided the guest presentation at TQ's
AGM last year.

### What I love about my job\*

The thing I love most about my job is the adaptability and versatility to educate tenants. On any given day I can be having a cup of tea and a biscuit and an informal yarn with a group of aunties, demonstrating our browse aloud website functions on a big screen to CALD clients, flossing very badly with some very cool kids, riding a pony (and yes, it's okay to feel sorry for them I did!), or simply holding someone's hand and telling them we are willing to help. Engaging with people in the right way for them is vital for people to feel confident in contacting our service and feeling empowered to ask for assistance.

Our job roles within TQ require hard work, dedication and the ability to adapt to changing information, legislation, and social circumstances.

### **Leading with inspiration and drive**

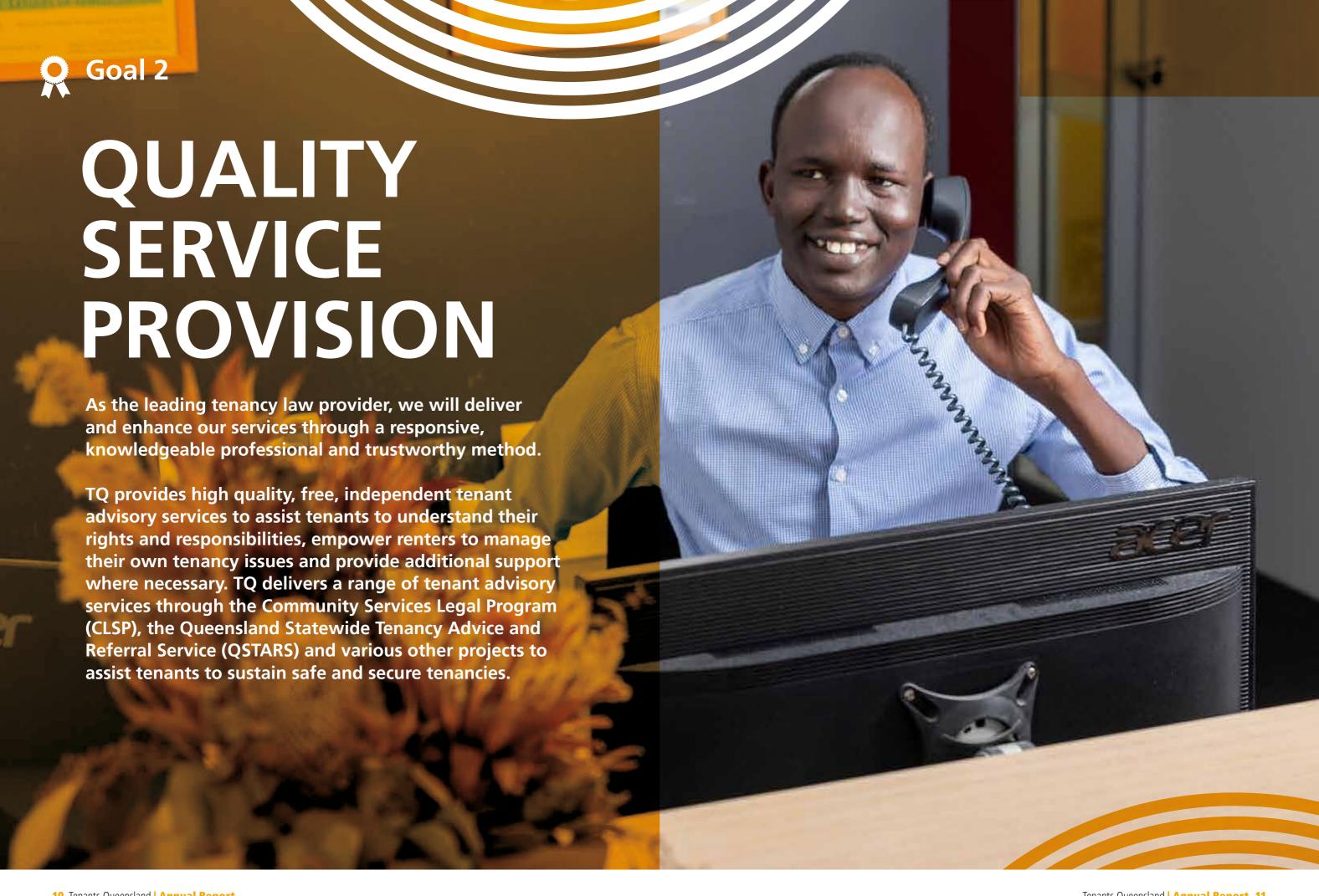
The Leadership Team meets fortnightly throughout the year to inspire and drive the work of the organisation towards its strategic goals and achieve the best outcomes for tenants. The joint Management Team, comprising the senior and middle management teams, meets on a 6-weekly basis. The Joint Management Team focusses on ensuring funding and client expectations are met and ensuring information flow regarding priorities and projects. On a quarterly basis, management team meetings align with the QSTARS performance review held with the Department of Communities, Housing and the Digital Economy (DCHDE).

### **Joint Consultative Committee**

TQ's Enterprise Agreement supports the implementation of a Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) to provide a mechanism for regular exchanges of information on the implementation of the Agreement. The JCC meets quarterly and has representation from the CEO, Business Manager, a staff-elected member and a union delegate.



The Leadership Team





### **Legal Services**

The Legal Service Team provides case work in relation to complex tenancy law matters, often representing clients who face high levels of disadvantage. The Team also takes on strategic litigation where the outcome has the potential to advance tenants' rights or clarify the interpretation of tenancy laws.

In early 2022, the Legal Services Team expanded on a short-term basis to provide complex advice and casework to tenants affected by the February flood and rain event. A variety of issues have come forward including failures to provide a rent decrease when the property was unavailable and where renters needed to terminate agreements following the complete inundation of their rented home. However, by far the most common issue arising from the flood is that of mould, with a large number of on-gong cases.

National Rental Affordability Scheme and NDIS matters along with Human Rights, Domestic and Family Violence, as well as complex matters for prisoners have also been a focus during the year.

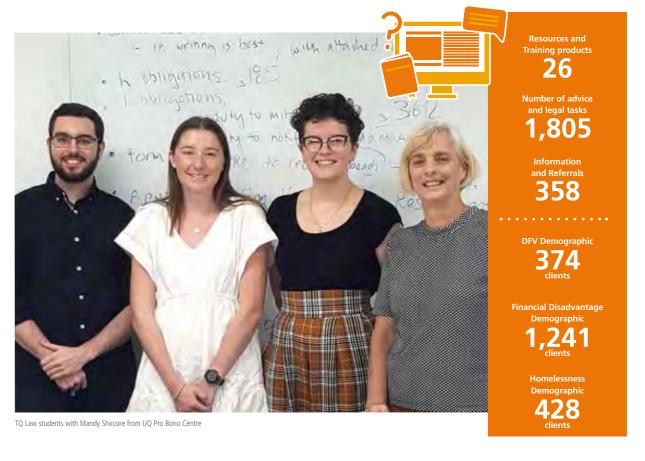
### Legal support and quality assurance

The Legal Service provides specialist legal support for TQ services and ensures the accuracy and consistency of advice provided by paralegals; community legal education products and publications; and TQ training materials. Intensive additional work was required throughout the year - for information products for both workers and tenants, due to the changes in legislation introduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we lead up to changes to tenancy laws (commencing October 2022) the Legal Services Team is collaborating with our other teams to provide legal checks for TQ and QSTARS community education resources.

### **Tenancy Law Clinic**

The Legal Service Team support a Law Student Advice Clinic run in conjunction with the University of Queensland (UQ) Pro-Bono Centre. As an elective subject the clinic provides a rare opportunity for three or four students each semester. Under TQ supervision, students learn the practical application of social justice principles and tenancy law with a diverse range of clients.



### **Legal Services Team Case Studies**

Law student clinic assists international student\*
Many renters rent rooms and pay rental bonds. However,
too often rental bonds paid for informal accommodation are
not lodged with the Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA)
as required under Queensland tenancy laws. When renters
move out, their head tenant or provider may unfairly refuse
to return their bond money. This is a familiar story for young
renters, especially international students who do not know
the renting rules or where to seek help.

Fortunately, when Abbey\* had a renting problem her boss referred her to TQ for assistance and the Law Student Clinic delivered support. Abbey aged 20 arrived from Korea to work in Brisbane and spoke limited English. This was her first time living in a foreign country. Abbey found a room in a shared apartment on Gumtree and paid the Rooming Provider two weeks' rent and a \$290 bond.

When Abbey moved in, she did not feel safe as there was no lock on her bedroom door and was sexually harassed by male residents in the apartment. With our help, she gave notice and moved out. Abbey then discovered her bond had not been lodged with the RTA when the Rooming Provider failed to return her \$290 bond as promised. Getting her bond back was problematic as she only had a phone number and did not know the real name and address of the person, to whom she paid her bond.

The law student advice clinic met with Abbey, gave advice and drafted a letter so she could provide the required seven days' notice out of leaving. They then helped Abbey draft a letter of demand seeking the return of her bond money and pointing out that it was a serious offence to fail to lodge her bond money with the RTA. The law student also helped Abbey apply to the RTA Dispute Resolution

Service for conciliation. The clinic advised Abbey to keep texting the Rooming Provider to seek the return of her bond and advise she was taking the matter to the RTA if not returned. Shortly after the RTA conciliator contacted the Rooming Provider, the \$290 bond was voluntarily returned to Abbey.

Abbey was overjoyed with the outcome and said, "I would not have got my money back without [the help of Tenants Queensland (law student clinic)]".

### Paroled tenant assisted with new tenancy\*

Jim\* had a tenancy with the Department of Communities
Housing & Digital Economy (The Department). The
Department has a standard policy where, upon application,
they can approve a tenant to be absent from a property for 5
months. On a case-by-case basis, the Department can extend
this 5-month period.

The DCHDE had initiated termination proceedings against Jim and QCAT had terminated the tenancy. At the time of referral to TQ a Warrant of Possession (WOP) had been issued, and the police had 14 days to execute the WOP to remove the tenant from the property. The Parole Board considered Jim's application for parole and the release date was to be the day after the planned date of execution of the WOP

TQ requested that the DCHDE cease all termination processes and allow Jim to resume the tenancy on release, however, this was met with refusal. TQ wrote to the DCHDE complaining that they had not considered Jim's human rights in their decision making to proceed to terminate the tenancy, when they knew Jim was being released from prison.

The WOP was executed by police and possession of the property was returned to the DCHDE.

The result of the human rights complaint was that the DCHDE began a new tenancy agreement with Jim, which began on the date of release from prison and Jim was not released into homelessness.

This case highlights one of the problems for incarcerated tenants renting from the DCHDE. The lengthy delays when tenants who are eligible for parole have their matters heard by the Parole Board, mean the 5-month absence from the property is almost always exceeded.

#### Cathy, the flood and a bond dispute\*

Cathy\* had left her Gympie tenancy for non-liveability after her home had been affected by the severe storms in February.

Cathy's property manager made an application to Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) seeking an order that Cathy pay \$1900. Cathy acknowledged that she owed \$700, as she had not been able to pay rent for several weeks after the storms hit. However, the agent was also seeking \$900 for 22 hours of professional cleaning services.

During Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) conciliation
Cathy tried to negotiate to settle the dispute for \$700.
Unfortunately, the property manager refused to participate
in conciliation and proceeded with the QCAT application.
At the first hearing, the magistrate ordered that the
parties undertake further conciliation, which the agent
again refused to engage in. It was at this stage that Cathy
contacted Tenants Queensland (TQ) for advice. After careful
examination of the property manager's application, TQ
identified several problems with the amounts that the agent
was claiming. The cleaning charge appeared to be a claim
for the costs of removing the mould that had infested the
property due to the storms. Additionally, the cleaning had
been performed over a month after Cathy had left the
property, in which time the mould had continued to spread.

TQ represented Cathy at the hearing and TQ were able to mount a defence to the property manager's bond claim. The magistrate ultimately ordered that Cathy pay just over \$700 for the unpaid rent — which was exactly what she had offered to pay during the conciliation. Cathy was very pleased with this outcome and was very happy to finally put the matter behind her.

### Supporting Marie to end her tenancy \*

Marie\* was experiencing depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder following the trauma she had experienced both during and at the end of her tenancy due to domestic and family violence (DFV). It became clear that Marie was not able to self-advocate and required both legal and non-legal support to advance her matter given the imminent risk of harm, homelessness, financial disadvantage, and declining mental health.

There was an urgency to this situation as Marie needed to leave the property before the person using violence was released from custody. He had previously tracked Marie to two other tenancies, so it was vital she was moved before he was released.

Marie was supported by timely legal advice through multiple phone appointments and by email. TQ assisted Marie to complete and submit forms, developed a plan to resolve issues and build capacity for self-advocacy, negotiate with the real estate agent and coordinate local service providers to address Marie's needs in a holistic and safe way.

TQ represented Marie when the real estate agency disputed her right to leave the tenancy with seven days' notice, despite Marie submitting the appropriate notice ending tenancy and supporting evidence of the DFV she had experienced, in accordance with the legislation.

TQ also successfully disputed the real estate agent's claim that Marie was responsible for damage caused to the property by the perpetrator of DFV. She was able to obtain a refund of overpaid rent, claim Marie's full bond and negotiate with the agent in relation to their claims that the bond clean was inadequate.

Marie was referred to DVConnect to obtain crisis accommodation, and to the Brisbane Domestic Violence Service (BDVS). TQ advocated on her behalf in relation to the urgency of her situation and the need for an immediate risk assessment, given that her ex-partner was due to be released from custody within days.

A full intake through BDVS was not able to be completed within the tight time frames so TQ advocated for Marie to access a Flexible Assistance Package and DFV Helping Hand Headlease through the DCHDE's Rent Connect team.

\*The names have been changed to protect our clients' privacy.

### Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Sector Capacity Building Project

The Legal Services Team also delivers the Domestic and Family Violence Sector Capacity Building Project (DFV Project).

The DFV project aims to build the capacity of workers who support people experiencing violence to deal with tenancy issues. The approach includes strategies to contribute to increased safety and reduce barriers to access or sustain stable housing and provides information to support people experiencing DFV to start, stay or leave a tenancy. The project provides training on tenancy related DFV issues; resources; and a "helpdesk" to assist workers with advice on tenancy issues relating to domestic and family violence.

A major milestone was achieved during 2021-2022 with provisions for tenants and residents experiencing domestic and family violence permanently (and immediately) enshrined in tenancy law following the review of the Housing Legislation Amendment Act 2021 (RTRA Act) in October 2021. Over this year, the DFV Project updated fact sheets and resources in line with these changes, provided

training to DFV and related services as well as to other TQ team members.

The DFV Project produced a range of new and updated resources for both renters and workers including:

- DFV & Social Housing Resource designed to assist workers understand public, Indigenous and community housing policies in order to assist tenants experiencing DFV to start, stay or leave housing.
- Community Service Announcement videos. There are five short video 1-2 minutes each with easy explanations of DFV and tenancy law.
- DFV Tenancy Toolkit for workers with detailed explanations of tenancy law, links to forms, and extra resources such as sample letters.
- Start Stay Leave Quick Guide easy to use for renters to explore their options.

#### Showcase

The project held a Showcase and Celebration event in the Brisbane office to view new and old resources.



Staff, Project Evaluation Team, and Women's Legal Service staff at the Showcase

### Training delivery and networking

The DFV project offered both online and face to face training visiting regional areas including Rockhampton, Toowoomba, Kingaroy, Beaudesert, Ipswich, Gold Coast, Caboolture and Nambour. Our online delivery allowed the

DFV Project to connect with services in Far North, North and Central Queensland. In early 2022, we delivered DFV tenancy training specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

|                                 | Online | Face-to-face | Total |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------------|-------|
| Training sessions delivered     | 21     | 19           | 40    |
| Number of training participants | 306    | 295          | 601   |
| Networking events               | 9      | 13           | 22    |
| Participants in network events  | 113    | 480          | 593   |

### Helpdesk

Helpdesk is designed to provide workers with advice on tenancy issues for their clients. During this year the DFV Project Helpdesk provided advice on 175 separate matters.

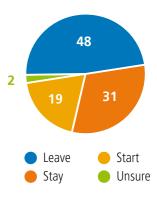
### Helpdesk case study bond loan conundrums\*

In July 2021, prior to amendments to the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act, a youth worker contacted the DFV Helpdesk after contacting many services trying to seek assistance for her client.

The youth worker was assisting a young woman who was leaving a relationship where there was violence. The young woman gave a Notice Ending Tenancy, some supporting documentation around the DFV and applied for her bond refund. The young woman and her partner had been in private rental and had a bond loan in both their names; the young woman had been paying off the loan. The tenancy was continuing for her partner, as he was a co-tenant on the lease.

The young woman had difficulty in getting her bond back because there was a bond loan. Rather than releasing her bond, the Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) referred her to the Department's bond loans area because the RTA needed approval from the Department to release the bond. However, The Department refused to approve the bond release because they treat co-tenants' bond loans as joint and several liability, and where a tenancy is continuing for a remaining co-tenant they do not release any of the bond.

### **DFV Helpdesk Questions**



The young woman and the youth worker felt it was unfair that Housing would not agree to refund the portion of the loan that she had paid off and essentially the person using violence would benefit.

TQ assisted in untangling the snarl of bureaucracy that was preventing the RTA and the Department from releasing the young woman's bond.

TQ contacted the Special Response Team in the Department, the team that oversees decisions relating to DFV within the department. Once the young woman provided evidence that she had personally paid off the portion of the bond loan, the Department agreed and notified the RTA to release her portion of the bond.

<sup>\*</sup>The names have been changed to protect our clients' privacy.

# **Queensland Statewide Tenant Advice** and Referral Service (QSTARS)



The QSTARS program focus aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- 1. Queenslanders are aware of their rights and responsibilities and support services available to assist them to resolve tenancy and residency issues.
- 2. Queenslanders can exercise their rights to resolve tenancy/residency issues, particularly in relation to security of tenure, safe and appropriate accommodation and contractual matters.

The QSTARS program delivers tenant advisory services to residential renters throughout the state and supports and refers clients with additional needs to appropriate services.

35,200 **Hours of tenancy** information and advice 64,500 Instances of service 127,700

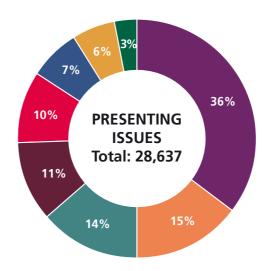
The service includes the following key elements:

- The Hub, a state-wide phone service which is the entry point for all QSTARS clients
- Regional Service Providers (RSP). The State is divided into four regions for the purpose of the program – Southern Queensland, Brisbane and North Coast, Central Queensland and Northern Queensland.
- TQ operates QSTARS offices in Spring Hill (Brisbane), Logan, Southport and Palm Beach, Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns and in Mt Isa.
- TQ QSTARS Partner organisations include, Community Plus, Enhance Care, Suncoast Community Legal Centre, Ipswich Regional Advocacy Service, Toowoomba Community Legal Centre, Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre and Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre.

#### **Client demand**

During the 2021 to 2022 financial year, TQ's QSTARS Teams (including the HUB) and its QSTARS Partners assisted thirty-five thousand two hundred (35,200) clients with over sixty-four thousand five hundred (64,500) hours of tenancy information and advice and one hundred and twenty-seven thousand seven hundred (127,700) instances of service.

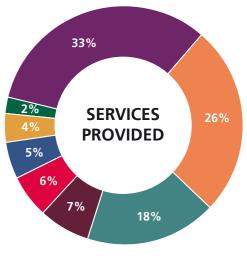
### **QSTARS Statistics**



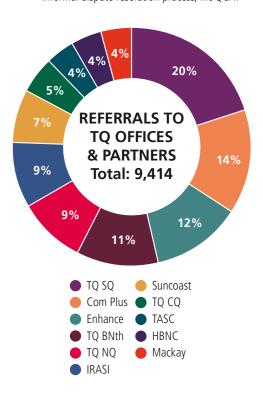
- Termination
- Rental bonds, refunds, payments, claims
- Repairs/maintainance
- Rent, increases, receipts, payments, arrears
- Tenancy Agreements
- QCAT/Court
- Entry/privacy
- Tenancy databases



- Termination with grounds
- Break lease
- End of lease
- Excessive hardship
- Warrant of possession
- Mutual agreement
- Retaliatory eviction
- Exit condition report



- Advice on resolving issues
- Info related to current advice work
- Info and/or referral only
- Assistance to identify strengths and resources to solve issues
- Developed plan to resolve issues and build capacity for self advocacy
- Support client to communicate with REA/Lessor
- Advice to the client to prepare for formal or informal dispute resolution process, inc QCAT
- Direct worker involvement to prepare for formal or informal dispute resolution process, inc QCAT



### **QSTARS** Learning and Development

It's been another big year in our learning and development space. The Layers of Learning modules developed to build the competencies of our people, have been updated with new training packages aligned with our strategic priorities. These include education on DFV changes, a draft Hub Intake module, a Hub Worker Training module, and HUB coaching sessions.

Record keeping was also enhanced with the refinement of competency profiles within our information management system for each role in TQ and aligned to job descriptions. This was supported with personalised weekly training plans for new employees.

Improvements to training support for front line workers in managing threats of harm and were also undertaken and integrated into service delivery.

In alignment with our goal to improve digital learning opportunities a webinar series covering 15 topics, including most of our core products, was rolled out on a dedicated learning and development streaming channel. Whilst we are increasingly able to deliver training face to face again, the use of IT platforms for the provision of training is now embedded into our practice, optimising our options.

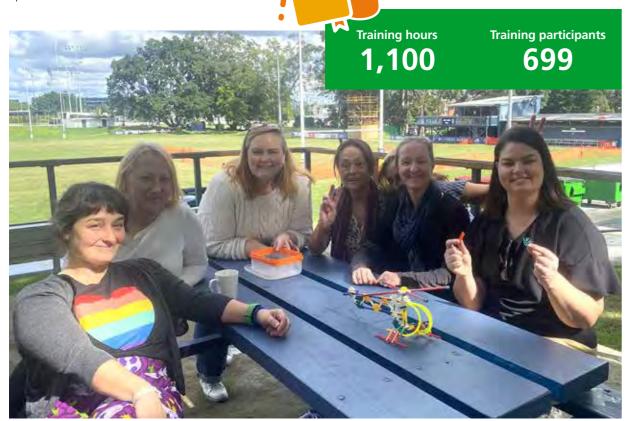
In addition, a digital quarterly training calendar has been launched allowing staff to easily access and book training.

With face to face working increasingly an option, we have implemented regional training days for TQ and our sub-contracted partners. These are an opportunity to build teamwork and collaboration, deliver consistent QSTARS services and the share best practice approaches.

Work has now commenced on research and input for the tenancy legislation changes commencing next year.

The collection of feedback has been modernised using Microsoft Forms and this has enabled quality digital feedback to be collected on training provided. The feedback obtained for the new webinar series has been overwhelmingly positive, with 100% reporting high levels of satisfaction with the webinars and high relevance to their roles.

During 2021-2022 1,111 hours of training was delivered to 699 participants (including multiple instances of the same participant).



Brisbane and North Coast Training Day



International Tenants Day celebration at the Gold Coast

### **Community Education**

TQ's Community Education workers develop and provide education to prospective clients across Queensland through the delivery of workshops and presentations and through participation in community events. Community education activities aim to increase individual and organisational understanding of tenancy issues, knowledge of tenancy rights and responsibilities and awareness of tenant advisory services.

Key events included, University Orientation weeks, NAIDOC, Anti-Poverty Week, Mental Health week, Homeless Connect, Youth week and International Tenants Day.

This year TQ has maintained a strong focus on engagement with the First Nations people of Queensland Examples of our engagement include tenancy pop ups in North Queensland, participation in the Central Highlands and Brisbane NAIDOC events, and attending Murri Court Yarning circles and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, housing and legal services across the regions. Outreach to First Nations service providers has sought to inform them of our services and provide pathways for their clients.

### **International Tenants Day (ITD) 2021**

ITD, universally celebrated on the first Monday of October each year, aims to connect tenants with support services, increase their understanding of tenancy rights and responsibilities, and embed the QSTARS service into the fabric of the community.

ITD events are held across TQ offices and regions to celebrate and raise awareness of tenants across Oueensland.

### **Community Access Points (CAPs)**

To enhance our QSTARS reach, a network of CAPs, particularly in regional areas of Queensland, has been developed to provide localised points of access. CAPs are points or locations at which Eligible Persons can access QSTARS through another service, e.g., a remote Nielsen health centre or via an IT portal.

Approximately one hundred and sixty-eight new CAPs were added to the list of CAPs established since the commencement of the QSTARS program.

### **QSTARS** Case Studies

Notice to Leave Set Aside

Following a referral from the QSTARS HUB, Bella\* attended a regional QSTARS office after receiving a Notice to Leave from her lessor. Bella is a sole parent and receives a Centrelink benefit. When the tenant attended, she was concerned that she and her family were facing a very real risk of homelessness and likely to suffer excessive hardship.

Prior to the meeting, Bella had applied for over twenty rental properties, but each application had been refused. The region where Bella lived has continued to experience low rental vacancy rates since the COVID-19 pandemic, with vacancy reported at around 0.6%.

The QSTARS worker met with Bella in person to obtain detailed instructions about the Notice to Leave. Bella explained that before receiving the Notice to Leave, she had been sending the lessor's agent repeated requests for repairs and maintenance. The QSTARS worker advised Bella that she could try and argue the Notice to Leave

was retaliatory, by applying to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal ("QCAT") within four weeks after the Notice to Leave was issued.

The QSTARS worker prepared a QCAT Application and written submissions in accordance with Bella's instructions. They advised Bella about how to file her application, and what to expect at the QCAT hearing. The matter was then listed for a hearing where Bella represented herself.

At the QCAT hearing, the Tribunal decided to set the Notice to Leave aside.

As the Notice to Leave was set aside, the tenancy was sustained. This outcome has enabled Bella and her family to continue to reside at the rental property for now, giving them more time to try and find another suitable property.

\*The names have been changed to protect our clients' privacy.





### **Financial Counselling**

TQ secured three-year funding through the Financial Counselling Foundation to deliver a free financial counselling service to tenants who are struggling financially. This service offers assistance with any matter related to debt such as rent arrears, utility debt in current and previous properties, credit, fines and complaints relating to a tenant's utility or credit.

Financial Counseling integrated within our existing tenant advisory services enables TQ to:

- Deliver financial counseling support to high-risk households through internal referral,
- Utilise a proactive approach for stressed clients
- Develop a more detailed understanding of risk of financial stress.

### **Rent Problem Resolved**

Julie\* presented to TQ with what she described as tenancy issues regarding her rent arrears. It was quickly determined she was in fact needing support to recover rent paid into a rent account of a real estate agent who was no longer looking after her property. Following a long session and lots of questions the story unfolded as follows.

Julie a full-time university student who is in receipt of a Centrelink payment had been renting her property from an agent but paying her rent to a rental payment company. The agent advised they were no longer looking after her property and told the client of the new agent.

Julie made a mistake and made a rent payment into the old rental payment account and was then advised by the new agent she had not made a rental payment and was now in arrears. Julie told the new agent about what she had done who advised its wasn't their problem and that she needed to bring her arrears up to date. Julie made an additional payment of rent, leaving her in financial hardship and unable to buy food.

Julie called the old agent, but they simply referred her back to the new agent. Julie also contacted the private rental payment company, and they told her that the payment had already been processed and could not assist.

Six weeks later Julie contacted TQ's Financial Counsellor for assistance. On behalf of Julie, TQ wrote to all parties concerned requesting the return of the over payment within five days.

Four days later Julie received the money into her account and the bank fee she was charged when she had insufficient funds to make the other rent payment. Julie had been dealing with the problem for almost two months and TQ were able to resolve the matter in four days.

\*The names have been changed to protect our clients' privacy.



### **New funding**

TQ secured funding for the following services which enabled us to continue to provide and extend support in areas where it has been most crucial.

- Flood funding
- Financial counselling funding



### **Business Plan**

A key focus of the 2021-2022 year for the Board was the development of a Business Plan that included a suite of projects focused on key development areas for TQ including:

- Diversifying access to TQ services using information technology.
- Identifying ways to improve TQ's client information management system.
- Driving the Stage 2 tenancy law reform through the Make Renting Fair in Queensland Alliance.

- Engaging pro bono assistance to review TQ's board governance processes and documentation.
- Collating and analysing rental market data to improve our understanding of the housing and rental sector
- Enhancing our understanding of program outcome measures and what data is needed to capture these outcomes.

### Governance

TQ is governed by a Board with support from the Finance and Risk and People and Culture Committees.

In March 2022, the Board farewelled the incumbent Chair, Rohan Tate. Rohan joined the Board in 2014 and took on the Chair role in December 2018, remaining as Chair until his retirement. TQ and the Board thank Rohan for his time and commitment to guiding the Board and leadership team, especially though the update of the constitution and transition to a company limited by guarantee.

Penny Gillespie stepped in the Acting Chair role following Rohan's retirement.

During this year the Board welcomed Ms Sally Watson (Director) and Mr Patrick Morgan (Specialist Skills Director) bringing a wealth of specialist skills to the Board. Sally rejoins the Board having previously been a Committee Member and Chair of TQ and Pat Morgan is also familiar with TQ having held the Business Manager position some years ago

### 2021/2022 Board and Committee members

**Rohan Tate** Chair

Damian Eckersley Company Secretary

**Penny Gillespie** Director Seleneah More Director Scott Pardey Director Sally Watson Director

| Rohan Tate         | Damian<br>Eckersley | Seleneah More |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 4 (of 5)           | 6 (of 6)            | 6 (of 6)      |
| Penny<br>Gillespie | Scott Pardey        | Sally Watson  |
| 6 (of 6)           | 6 (of 6)            | 2 (of 2)      |

Following transition to a company limited by guarantee the Board also transitioned to a bi-monthly meeting schedule, hence 6 Board meetings were scheduled during 2021/2022. The Board undertook a number of development sessions during the year. These included Directors responsibilities, financial literacy and risk management planning.

### 2021/22 Directors

### Penny Gillespie (Acting Chair and Director)

Penny joined TQ Board in 2019. She is a member of the Australian and New Zealand School of Government Executive Fellows and holds a Technical and Further Education Teachers Instructional Skills Certificate and a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Three Dimensional Design from the University of Sussex, United Kingdom.

Penny has held Senior leadership roles in not for profit and government and Director of sole trader consulting business and has extensive professional experience in project and program management, review and evaluation; stakeholder engagement, organisational and service model design (community services and housing services), submission, report and tender development and writing and strategy development.

Penny has held previous Board directorships. Her field of expertise is in community services and housing and homelessness.

### **Damian Eckersley (Director and Company Secretary)**

Damian joined the TQ Board (then Steering Committee) in 2002 to be involved in an organisation which furthers the rights of people who rent their home.

He held the position of Convenor from 2003 to 2013 during a period of great growth in both the private rental market and in the services that TQ provides.

Damian is an architect working in the private sector. Damian has a Bachelor of Architecture and is a Registered Architect.

### Seleneah More (Director)

Seleneah joined the TQ Board in 2018. She holds a Bachelor of Social Science with the Queensland University of Technology and a Graduate Diploma in Urban and Regional Planning with the University of Queensland Lakes Station.

The foundation of Seleneah's work is her belief in the expertise of local people and their resources to improve their communities. Seleneah has endeavoured to deliver

improvements to the Urban environment as an urban planner for ten years and community development practitioner for 20 years.

### Scott Pardey (Director)

Scott joined the Board of TQ in 2019. Scott is a chartered accountant with experience in international aid & development as well as the Not-for-Profit sector in Australia.

He is a Bachelor of Business graduate from Queensland University of Technology, and enjoyed a 12-year career with advisory firm Grant Thornton in Australia, the UK and South East Asia. Scott co-founded the community-led West End Film Festival.

More recently he has worked within Indigenous affairs, through consulting projects and as the Chief Financial Officer and Company Secretary of a national Aboriginal Not-for-Profit.

With an interest in data analysis and impact measurement, Scott is keen to support TQ to continue its exceptional client-focused work for years to come, through sustainable and innovative approaches to governance and relevant emerging issues.

### Sally Watson (Director)

Sally joined the TQ Board in 2021. Sally was previously a member of the TQ Steering Committee between 2016 – 2019.

Sally also worked for Tenants Union Queensland in its North Queensland office during the 2000's. Sally manages a large homelessness service in Cairns - Shelter Housing Action Cairns (SHAC). She has previously worked for James Cook University, Homelessness Australia and the National Youth Coalition for Housing. Sally is a current Director of the Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) and has been since 2015.

Sally has a Batchelor of Social Work (UQ), Batchelor of Laws (JCU) and a Master of Public Policy (ANU).

### Patrick Morgan (Special Skills Director)

Pat is a qualified accountant (CPA -retired) with extensive private sector experience in various industries. After finishing in the resources sector, he moved into the public sector for over 25 years. This included being the CFO of several government departments and a senior executive responsible for corporate services functions in multiple departments.

After retiring from the public sector Pat decided to step into the NFP sector. This included working for TQ as the Business Manager for 3 years. Since retiring from paid work Pat has contributed to TQ via the Finance and Risk Committee and joined the Board in July 2022 as a Specialist Director.



Seleneah More speaking at the AGM



Staff wellbeing morning tea

### The Finance and Risk Committee

The Finance and Risk Committee assists the Board to fulfil its responsibilities in prudent financial management and operations. The committee supports the Board in budget development, review of financial reports and risk oversight, ensuring our risk processes are reviewed regularly and are managed appropriately.

The Finance and Risk Committee comprises Pat Morgan as a Special Skills Director, Scott Pardey as Chair and Sally Watson, who joined the Committee in 2022. The Committee met on five occasions during 2021/2022.

| Scott Pardey | Pat Morgan | Sally Watson |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| 5 (of 5)     | 5 (of 5)   | 2 (of 2)     |

### The People and Culture Committee

Our people are our greatest asset and TQ continues to seek out and encourage opportunities to provide a well-supported organisational environment for our teams. This year the People and Culture Committee comprised Penny Gillespie (Chair), Seleneah More, Damian Eckersley and Scott Pardey. The Committee was rejuvenated this year meeting late in the year on one occasion. Expectedly, the Committee re-focussed strongly on building organisational culture as well as staff well-being, particularly given the growing complexity of client matters.

### Planning, Assurance and Risk

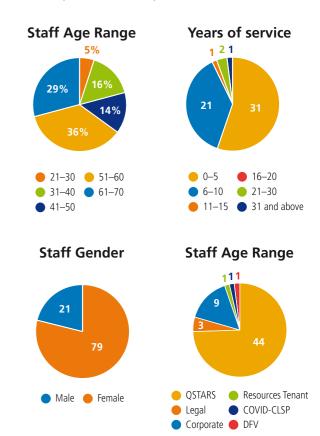
TQ is committed to high standards of corporate governance, assurance and risk management. The Board and Leadership Team regularly review TQ's progress against our Strategic Plan 2021-23, it's risk register and through our annual cross check and national accreditation scheme reporting.

# Australia National Accreditation Scheme (NAS)

TQ is accredited under the Community Legal Centres (CLC) Australia National Accreditation Scheme (NAS), through which TQ ensures it meets industry standards and provides high quality, accessible and culturally appropriate services to our clients. TQ is accredited under this scheme and continues to implement ongoing improvements aligned to our NAS Improvement Plan.

#### **Our TQ Team**

Our workforce establishment plan is reviewed by the Board annually and TQ employs team members in accordance with the approved budget. As of 30 June 2022, TQ employed 45.23 full time equivalent across 56 positions in 8 offices.





### **Stakeholder Engagement**

### **Resourcing our front-line**

TQ continues to actively engage with a broad crossspectrum of community, industry and government stakeholders in order to drive its goals.

TQ continues to deliver its QSTARS services through sub-contracts with other community services in specific locations. These partnerships support our engagement with local communities and connections to renters.

TQ is represented on the Residential Tenancy Authority's Stakeholder Forum and Stakeholder Working Group to ensure the needs and views of renters are heard.

TQ engages in structured relationships with other peak groups through regular meetings to collaborate on sectoral issues. These include the QShelter's Housing and Homelessness Peaks meeting, the QCOSS Queensland Peaks and CEO Networks.

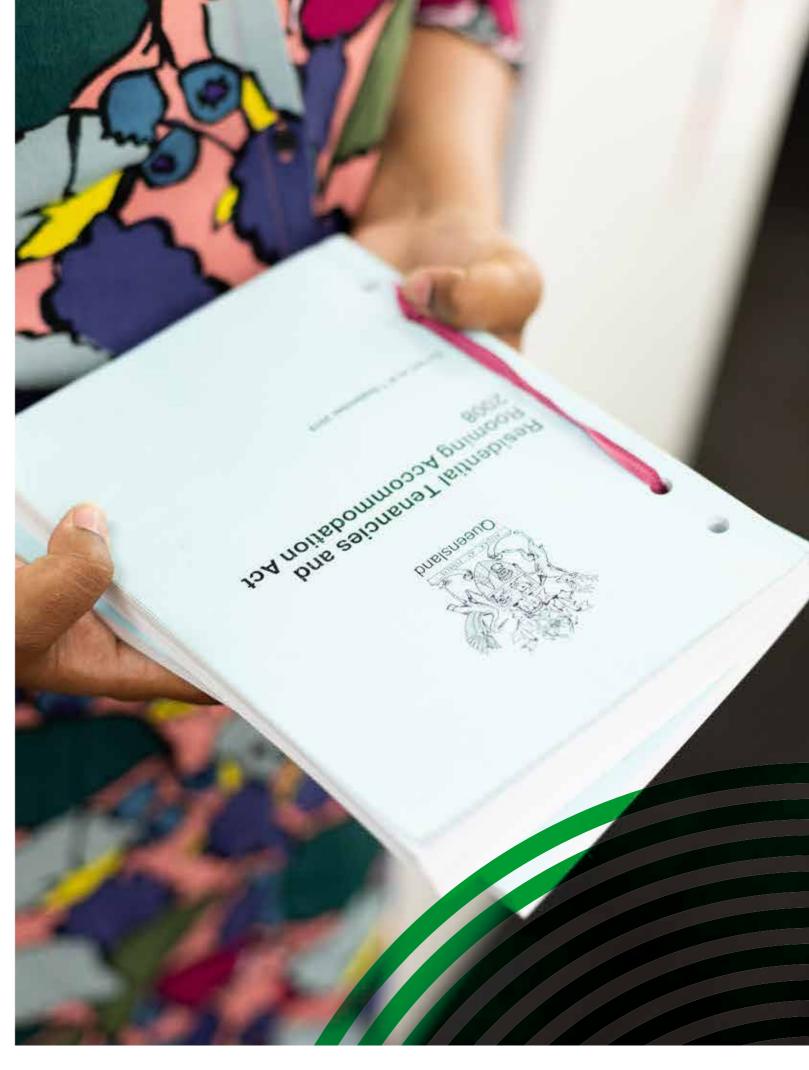
TQ continues to convene the National Association of Tenant Organisations, which ensure national collaboration on state and territory issues and input to national policy.

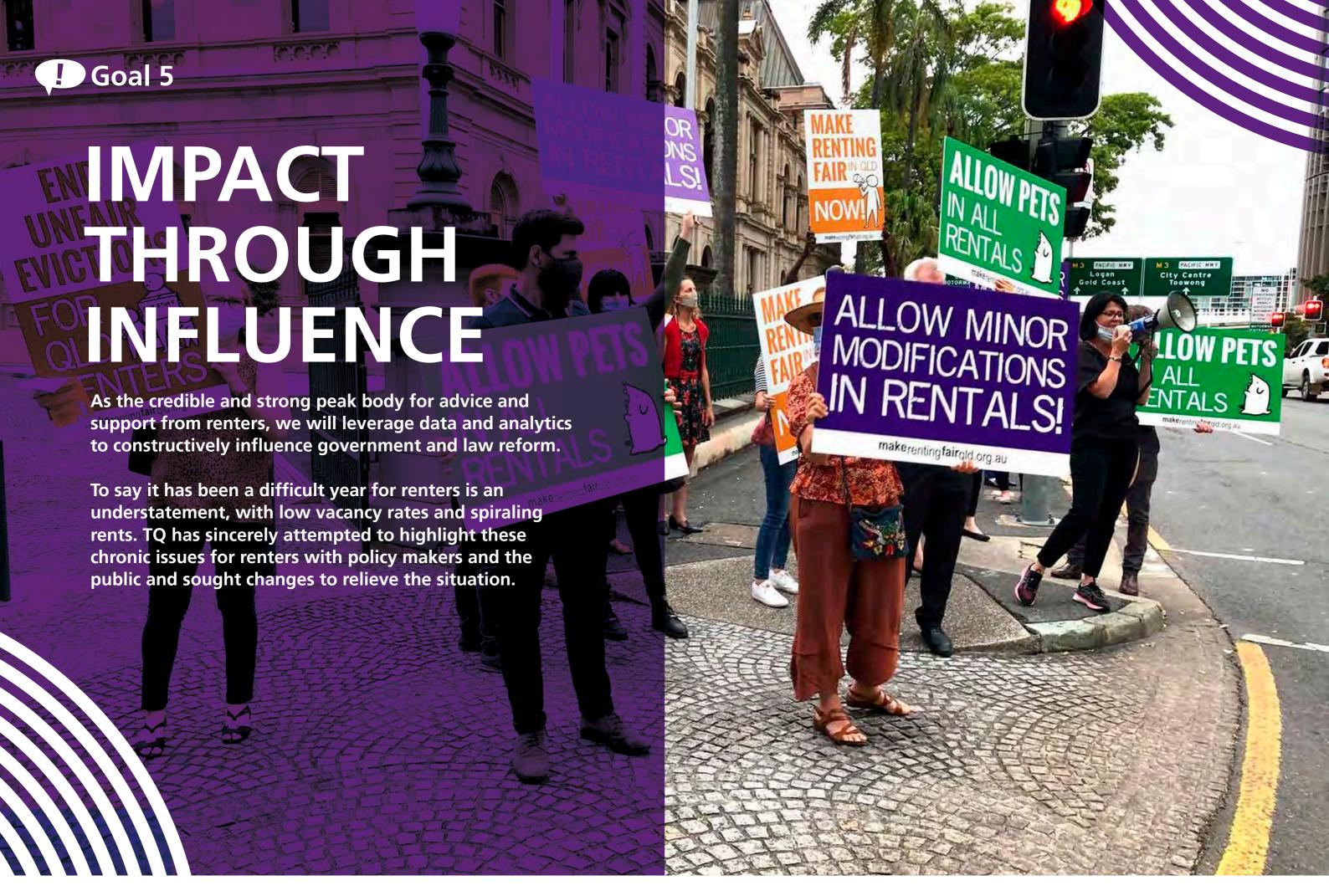
TQ are active participants on the DCHDE's Housing and Homelessness Services Peak and Industry Sector group, the DCHDE's Residential Services Reference Group and the Minister's task-oriented flood recovery group.

Our workers across the state have engaged with housing and homelessness networks and services targeting harder to reach client groups to ensure reach and effectiveness of our services. The CEO has continued to contribute as a member of the Premier's DFV Prevention Council.

TQ engages with researchers, academics and universities for collaborations and support. An update of the Rental Vulnerability Index will be completed in the coming year, in conjunction with the University of New South Wales following the release of 2021 census data.







### **Advocacy**

### Make Renting Fair in Queensland (MRFQ)

Throughout the year, TQ continued to play a key role in the alliance of organisations calling for improved tenancy laws in Queensland, MRFQ. The culmination of a long consultation process has been some significant changes that were passed by the Queensland Government on 20 October 2021. Changes such as domestic and family violence protections commenced immediately. The law reform changes relating to keeping of pets, the reasons a tenancy can be ended, repairs and conditions reports are due to commence on 1 October 2022. The final stage one change relating to minimum housing standards will apply to new tenancy agreements from 1 September 2023 and fully implemented by September 2024.

These are hard fought and significant improvements of which we can be proud. Unfortunately, we were disappointed with the inclusion of 'the end of a fixed term'

#### **Submissions**

TQ continued to raise the voices of renters in government consultations and reviews including the following submissions.

# Submission on the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021

This was a substantial submission (and appearance at the public hearing) to the Community Services and Support parliamentary committee. We provided a detailed and lengthy response to the Bill tabled to amend Queensland's tenancy laws. Of note is our opposition to including 'the end of a fixed term agreement' as a reason to end tenancies. Despite our opposition, this was included in the legislation passed. A full copy of this submission nis available on our website.

# Submission to the Review of Anti-Discrimination Act 1991

In this submission, TQ described to the Commission a number of issues where renters faced potentially discriminatory behaviour. We advocated for the inclusion of representative complaints, increasing limitation periods to provide prospective complainants more time to lodge a

as a reason to end a tenancy, in the final stages of the law reform process. We will keep this squarely on our radar.

The government's second stage of the law reform process was due to commence in the first half of 2022 but at the time of writing there had been no announcement from the government. MRFQ presented its key asks to government in April and continues to prepare a campaign around these asks in readiness for stage two:

- Limit rent increases
- Make bond returns fair
- Fairer contract terms
- Make your home accessible, safer and healthier
- Make your home your own
- Protect your privacy
- Ensure you are treated with respect

complaint, and expanding who is protected under Anti-Discrimination laws.

# Submission on the Draft National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032

In this submission we responded with a number of items including access to safe, accessible affordable housing for women and families experiencing violence, the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples leading their own responses to domestic and family violence as well as a range of changes to tenancy laws to better support those impacted by domestic and family violence.

# Submission to the State Penalties Enforcement (Modernisation) Amendment Bill 2022

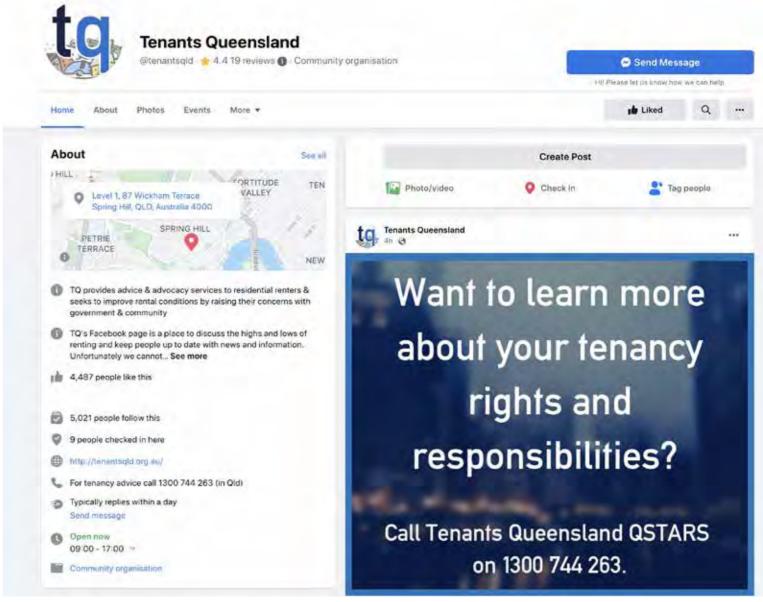
This Bill sought to change the way in which the RTA operates and how the interest on renters' bonds are dealt with by government. TQ strongly opposed the proposed amendments in both our submission and appearance at the public hearing of the Economic and Governance Committee. Disappointingly, the changes passed parliament resulting in the end of the self-funded model of the RTA.

### Media coverage and social media

The housing crisis (and the suffering of many) has generated increased media coverage, and this has provided a powerful platform for TQ to advocate strongly for tenants' rights. TQ has leveraged this interest to emphasise the importance of strong tenancy laws in a healthy housing system. This provided opportunities to prosecute our key asks through various forms of media during stage one of the tenancy law changes and continue to be seen as the preferred authority on tenants' rights in Queensland.

More than sixty articles have been reported across print, television, and radio over the year.

TQ's social media platforms continue to be effective tools for raising the concerns of renters with the public as well as expanding awareness of our services. During the flood recovery we were able to use this medium to direct renters to recovery hubs and provide other pertinent flood information. By encouraging engagement through the sharing of stories about TQ's advocacy work we have been able to provide a positive forum for our supporters during this challenging time.



TQ on facebook

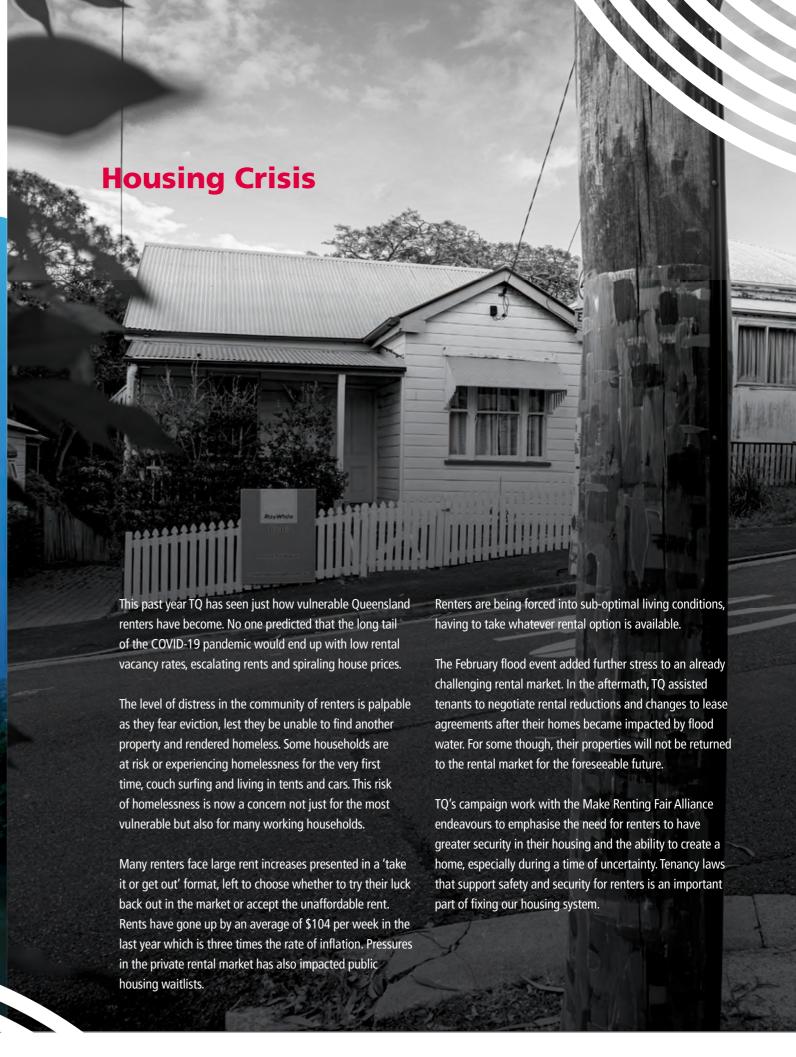
# **Community Education Flood response**

February 2022 saw 887 millimeters of rain hit Southeast Queensland (SEQ), Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk on March 1st 2022, stated that "In three days Brisbane received 80% of its annual rainfall". This amount of rain lead to nearly 25,000 residential homes being impacted by the rain and subsequent flooding.

TQ immediately began ensuring renters across the affected areas had access to the information needed in dealing with the floods. This included how tenancy laws apply, managing mould and who's responsible, and the availability of other supports and services. We ensured our products were up to date and responsive to the current disaster before distributing them far and wide, in hard copy and social media.

Research was conducted into all flood affected areas of SEQ and the numbers of rental dwellings within each of the local government areas was ascertained. Through this research we identified the most affected suburbs with the highest rental tenancies. Both Evacuation Centers and Recovery HUBS were targeted for information distribution and onsite advice.

In the early March TQ QSTARS Community Education Workers attended as many Community Recovery HUBS as possible, meeting individually with affected renters as well as providing team leaders with flood related fact sheets and other resources. During this time, 12 of the 18 operational recovery HUBS were visited. These connections delivered the opportunity for providing advice to renters as well as connections to Community/Neighborhood centres, Housing Service centres, Services Australia offices in support of flood affected tenants that presented for support.



# Feedback from clients and others about TQ's staff and services

... I would like to take the opportunity to share with you my appreciation of the Queensland Government's ongoing funding of QSTARS' who actively support and advocate on behalf of Queensland tenants. I was very fortunate to be advised of QSTARS. I am just one of the many Queensland tenants on whom QSTARS have devoted energy, legal counsel, and professional integrity. I am most grateful for the support I received from TQ's QSTARS' Rockhampton Office. Thank you once again to the Queensland Government for your support and funding of QSTARS.

//

... "Thank you for all the hard work in making positive changes to the system on which Housing Standards are built."

///

...I recently received a lot of assistance from Karen regarding vacating a NRAS property due to financial hardship. Karen was extremely helpful and informative. I didn't realise there were quite so many options open for me to access in this matter. Karen stepped in when my Real Estate provided incorrect information to me. Karen is very quick to grasp information and provide feedback and guidance. Karen was also very polite and kind towards my situation. I was very impressed with Karen's service given that my stress levels were in the extreme. I have had far too many personal matters to deal with. I do not think I would have survived without Karen's support having already many many trips to my GP re what has been transpiring. The support service provided is much needed in all communities due to the short supply of Rentals in the market. I hope this assures you of my appreciation for the service provided and continue to support other clients in going forwards.

...Just thought I would touch base and let you know that the court hearing went well last week and that the hardship application was successful. Thank you very much for your support, advice and coordination of the court application.



...I wanted to write an email to pass my appreciation for Helen and the team at QSTARS. Helen has been helping us out since since May with multiple matters and there just aren't enough words for me to express my gratitude to her. She has been an absolute gem who has been so professional and helpful. She has been exceptional in her help and communication. The way she has empathised with us and gone above and beyond to help us and continue to help us is really appreciated. Please pass my heartfelt gratitude to her. I have told her this many times but a service of that magnitude deserves a recognition.



I just wanted to express my appreciation for one of the advisers that I have talked to on multiple occasions. Jayson has been extremely helpful to me in discussing issues that I had been experiencing as a tenant. He is very patient and considerate as he is willing to take the time to hear your full story as well as, explain the confusing terminology and processes of legislation. This made me feel comfortable in making my own informed decisions and helped me grow my confidence in understanding my rights as a tenant. I am very grateful





### **Income and Expenditure Statement**

#### Revenue

TQ is funded by the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy (DCHDE) to deliver the Queensland Statewide Tenant Advice and Referral Service (QSTARS), TQ manages QSTARS and delivers services in partnership with its sub-contractors.

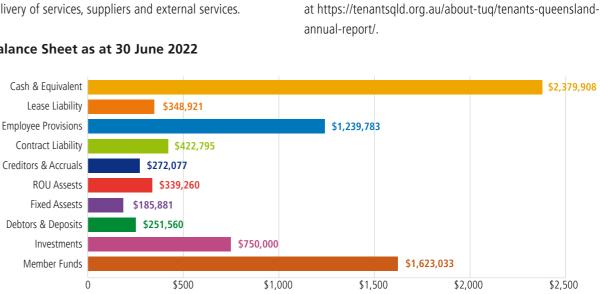
TQ also receives funding from the Department of Justice and Attorney General (DJAG) to deliver Community Legal Services under the Legal Assistance Program, administered by Legal Aid Queensland. DJAG and the Department of Social Services provide funding for the Domestic and Family Violence Sector Capacity Building Project, under the Keeping Women Safe in their Home initiative. Funding has also been received from both State and Commonwealth Governments to provide advice on tenancy matters in response to the floods and COVID-19. The Financial Counselling Foundation Australia provides funding to deliver financial counselling services to tenants in private rental accommodation at risk of financial hardship.

TQ runs a student clinic with UQ Pro Bono Law Centre for Clinical Legal Education Program, in Tenancy Law, which makes a contribution to TO Revenue.

### **Expenditure**

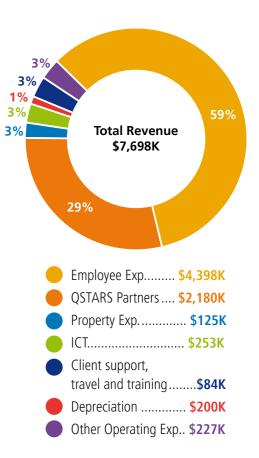
28% of total expenditure goes to TQ sub-contracted partners and 59% is expended on employee expenses. Depreciation consists of a significant amount of amortisation of right of Use Assets (Leases). Other operating costs include ICT, which plays a large part in the delivery of services, suppliers and external services.

#### Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2022



**Thousands** 

FY 2021-2022 Expense Breakdown



As of 30 June 2022, TQ held \$422,795 of unspent program funds. These funds are shown as a contract liability as of 30 June 2022 and are considered a reciprocal transaction for which revenue is recognised as services are performed.

The Audited Financial Statements and Report can be found

### **Acknowledgements**

The Board would like to thank members & supporters, our funders and supporting pro bono agencies as well as our QSTARS partners for their support and contribution to TQ's ongoing work. With the combined support of all agencies and individuals, TQ is better able to achieve its goals and ultimately better the lives of people who rent their home across Queensland.

### **Our funders**

TQ acknowledges the funding received from the:

- Queensland Government Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy for the QSTARS Program
- The Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and the Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney General for the Community Legal Services Program (CLSP)
- Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney General and the Australian Government Department of Social Services with 'Keeping Women Safe in their Homes Initiative'
- The Financial Counselling Foundation Australia for the Financial Counselling Program.

### **Pro Bono Support**

### MinterEllison.

MinterEllison is TQ's corporate pro bono partner and as such have continued to provide significant support to TQ in a number of areas. We would like to sincerely thank Robert Reed (Special Counsel OAM), Stephen Knight (Partner) and Famin Ahmed (Lawyer) who have facilitated the various pro bono assistance. Our sincerest thanks are extended to:

 Anastasia Maynes (Special Counsel) for her work reviewing TQ's governance and board processes and documentation and the provision of general governance advice.

- Nicole Gordon (Special Counsel) and DJ Alexander (Lawyer) for their assistance with a tender TQ submitted and on advice around TQ's PBI status.
- Aroha Greenwood (Senior Associate) for her assistance updating TQ factsheets and the development of training products in line with the new tenancy legislation.
- Lynne Kozak (Special Counsel), Melinda Smith (Partner) and Lillian Burgess (Lawyer) for their support on a property law matter.



Herbert Smith Freehills have provided significant and on-going support to TQ throughout the year. We sincerely thank Matthew Cameron (Senior Associate) and Genevieve Hallam (Solicitor) for their assistance on HR and IR matters.

### Allens > < Linklaters

Allens have made themselves available to support TQ at short notice on numerous occasions. We sincerely thank Peter Brennan (Senior Associate) for his assistance with section of TQ's submission into the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021.

### **Our QSTARS Partnerns**



















### Tenants Queensland

### TQ and Partner Offices

### **BRISBANE HEAD OFFICE AND HUB**

Level 1/87 Wickham Terrace, Spring Hill, 4000

#### **BRISBANE NORTH COAST**

#### **BNC**

Level 1/87 Wickham Terrace, Spring Hill 4000

#### Community Plus +

26 Devon St, Yeronga 4104

#### **Enhance Care**

Suite 2/77 King St, Caboolture 4510

### **Suncoast Community Legal Service**

The TAFE Bldg., 170 Horton Parade, Maroochydore 4558

### **CENTRAL QUEENSLAND**

#### Rockhampton

240 Quay St, Rockhampton 4700

### **Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre**

22 Charles St, Pialba 4655

### **Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre**

Suite 9, The Dome, 134 Victoria St, Mackay 4740

#### **SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND**

#### Helensvale

2D/9 Sir John Overall Dr, Helensvale 4212

#### **Palm Beach**

4/1051 Gold Coast Highway, Palm Beach 4221

#### Logar

9/90 Wembley Road, Logan Central 4114

### **Ipswich Regional Advocacy Services (IRASI)**

Ground Level, IGIC Bldg., 40 South St, Ipswich 4305

### **TASC National**

223 Hume St, Toowoomba 4350

### **NORTHERN QUEENSLAND**

### Cairns

208 McLeod St, Cairns 4870

### Townsville

Tenancy 1, 181 Sturt St, Townsville 4810

### Mt Isa

Suite 28, 119 Camooweal Street, Mount Isa 4825

For more information visit our website at www.tenantsqld.org.au For tenancy advice call 1300 744 263







