

Facilitating Successful Tenancies with Humanitarian Migrant Tenants: Potential Hints and Tips for the LANDLORDS' ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

These suggestions for practice were derived from a series of interviews carried out in 2013 in Adelaide with humanitarian migrants from large households (n=22), real estate agents (n=11), lessors (n=10), service providers (n=18) and community leaders (n=4). They are not a complete list of recommendations for working with humanitarian migrants, and only include the findings from the empirical research. They are presented to the Landlords' Association of South Australia and may be used in the creation of resources for their members.

1.1.1 Finding tenants for rental properties

- Refresh your knowledge of state and federal equal opportunity legislation.
- While some humanitarian migrants may lack extensive Australian rental histories, you can still establish reliability by asking applicants for proof of steady bill payments.
- Although past negative experiences with particular ethnic groups should never be used to treat any applicant or tenant less favourably, use your experience to prepare for more successful tenancies by supporting tenants to avoid potential pitfalls and enlisting the support of housing workers (e.g. from ARA or Housing SA) if necessary.
- Often humanitarian migrants have had their education severely compromised by war, political upheaval and/or protracted periods in refugee camps. This means that filling in application forms to a high standard may be a challenging. A good prospective tenant may be overlooked for this reason. Some lessors have found that relying more on a verbal interaction with the applicant has provided them with a better means to access the required information.

1.1.2 Contract signing and initial stages of the tenancy

- If a tenant is still learning English, ask them to invite a bi-lingual friend to the Tenancy Agreement signing. Otherwise, with the tenant's consent, contact a relevant ethnic association (details provided below) to enquire about interpretation services. Be mindful that while one tenant may be literate in English, a co-tenant may not be. Also be aware of the potential stress inflicted on children by asking them to interpret.
- Place particular emphasis on emphasising tenants' rights and responsibilities. These may vary significantly from tenants' assumptions or previous experiences of renting overseas.
- If concerned about tenants' property maintenance skills, consider offering to visit the tenants after a period of four to five weeks to address any queries and offer specific demonstrations of garden or property maintenance. You may also wish to conduct more frequent inspections (no more than once ever four weeks) for the initial months of the tenancy and offer additional property maintenance advice and support.
- If concerned about tenants' ability to maintain outdoor areas to the standard required, a gardening service may be offered with the additional costs made clear.
- Prepare tenants for what occurs during periodic inspections and how they are scheduled.
- Provide tenants with a list of recommended cleaning products (including photos of the products) that you would like them to use in certain parts of the property. Moreover, provide tenants with a starter kit of the cleaning products they would like them to use in their property.
- In order to facilitate friendly relations between tenants and their neighbours, consider whether facilitating an introduction would be helpful.

1.1.3 Periodic inspections and maintaining the tenancy

- In addition to a letter to advise tenants about an upcoming periodic inspection, also send a text message (which migrants are more likely to show to a friend for translation) to the tenant and/or call the tenant regarding the inspection. This will increase the likelihood of the tenant being adequately prepared for the inspection.

- If there are concerns with the maintenance of the property, tenants are likely to respond better to being instructed in how they can rectify the problem. On the other hand, tenants may respond poorly if made to feel that they have been harshly judged on their failure to meet required standards. Reassure tenants that that the issues will not become a problem as long as they are addressed within the required time.
- If there are ongoing problems with rent arrears and/or property maintenance, contact TIAS (see contact details below) to find the service best equipped to support the tenancy.

1.1.4 End of tenancy

- Provide newly arrived humanitarian migrants or those still learning English with additional reminders about the approaching end of a tenancy. In addition to a letter, text messages and a phone call will help ensure tenants are adequately prepared for the cessation of their lease.
- It is important to emphasise the much higher standard of cleanliness that is required for the final inspection and bond return (compared with the standard required for periodic inspections). Encourage the use of a professional cleaner and advise tenants on how they can dispose of large unwanted items.
- Considering that large humanitarian migrant families have such a difficult time finding private rental accommodation if possible, provide your tenants with more than the required 28 days notice if you do not intend to renew the family's fixed-term lease. Similarly, if you require a property to be vacated for renovations, provide as much notice as possible and/or refer them to a housing service (such as ARA, HousingSA, SYC or MYSA) that will assist them to find alternate accommodation.

ORGANISATION	SERVICES/ELIGIBILITY	CONTACT DETAILS
Landlords' Association of South Australia	Information and advice on property management to members	0419 804 509
Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Service (TIAS)	Advice and general information on tenancy issues. They can also advocate for low-income tenants who contact them.	(08) 8305 9459
TIS	Pre-booked and on-demand telephone interpreting (fee for service)	131 450
Australian Refugee Association (ARA)	Tenancy support to humanitarian migrant tenants who have been in Australia between 6 months and 5 years	(08) 8354 2951
Housing SA Private Rental Assistance program	South Australian residents that meet the asset and income requirements	131 299
Service to Youth Council (SYC)	Young people up to 25 years old	1300 306 046
Multicultural Youth SA (MYSA)	Humanitarian migrants up to 30 years old who have been in Australia between 6 months and 5 years	(08) 8212 0085
Equal Opportunity Commission	Training and advice on discrimination and equal opportunity	(08) 8207 1977
Lutheran Community Care	Free financial counseling	Blair Athol: (08) 8269 9300 Peachy Place: (08) 7070 6711
Ethnic associations	May be able to offer tenancy and interpreting support depending on funding and the availability of staff.	http://www.sheltersa.asn.au/multicultural-directory/ Search 'CALD Groups (Australia)' and 'CALD Groups (SA)'