



## Frances Nelson MBE Award

2011

This information sheet provides details about the winners in both categories of this year's Frances Nelson MBE Award. In the umbrella group category the winner is East Ayrshire Tenants and Residents Federation (EATRF) and the runner-up is Edinburgh Tenants Federation (ETF). West Lothian's Homelessness Service Inspection by young people won the local group category this year with the young people of the Seaforth House Residents and Ex-Residents RTO in Falkirk coming second and the Cuthelton and Crail Street Community Club in Parkhead in Glasgow finishing third.

### **East Ayrshire Tenants and Residents Federation**

#### **Coordinating Responses to Scottish Government Consultations**

EATRF has coordinated responses to Scottish Government consultations including "Fresh Thinking: New Ideas", the Housing Bill 2010 and the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC). These responses have been well received by Ministers and have led to national recognition of EATRF.

Following their response to the Housing Bill, EATRF were invited to give oral evidence to the Local Government and Communities Committee at the Scottish Parliament in April 2010. Their consultation response and evidence has ultimately shaped what has since become the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010.

In addition many ideas generated by EATRF members have been included in the SSHC discussion paper and as such will shape the Charter.

Locally, EATRF has worked with the Council to review the Allocations Policy which had led to the introduction of a Common Allocations Policy including a number of local housing associations. This was very much supported by EATRF as applicants now only need to complete one form to be considered for housing with a number of social landlords.

EATRF has provided a number of training courses for their members including topics to develop and support groups such as committee skills training, to topics which will increase members' knowledge of housing issues such as Homelessness and Private Rented Housing.

## **Edinburgh Tenants Federation**

### **Tenant Led Inspection Team**

Tenants in Edinburgh wanted to change the way they were involved in influencing services; they wanted to have a direct impact on services in a way that checked how a landlord was performing from a tenant's point of view. ETF decided to try out Tenant Led Inspections as a way to really scrutinize and change one aspect of a landlord's housing service. Tenants wanted to compare and contrast landlord services so chose to inspect two landlords (City of Edinburgh Council and Dunedin Canmore Housing Association) at the same time. A small team was established and in 2008 carried out the first pilot inspection about repairs reporting; another inspection quickly followed in 2009 about voids.

In May 2010 Edinburgh's Tenant Inspectors decided to widen their vision; tenants wanted to recruit and train more tenants to enable more people to get involved and to share their experiences.

The Inspectors organised an informal gathering for anyone interested in finding out more and forty tenants came along to their information session. From their ranks, six new tenants came forward as potential trainees. Having previously had training on how to carry out an inspection, the experienced inspectors worked with ETF staff over a number of months to develop a training programme for their fellow tenants. The inspectors then delivered four full days of training in research methods to the new recruits involving all aspects of inspections. The training done by tenants and for tenants had a huge impact on the six trainees, some of whom had never been involved in tenant participation before.

On the back of the training, the newly enlarged Tenant Led Inspection Team planned and undertook an inspection of the quality of kitchen and bathroom installation for both Dunedin Canmore Housing Association and the City of Edinburgh Council.

The Tenant Led Inspection process has been successful because it has been:

- Led and planned by tenants at a pace set by tenants;
- Successful in recruiting new tenant inspectors;
- Looking at a service area that tenants felt was important from a tenants' point of view;
- Comparing two landlords simultaneously which gave tenants a unique opportunity to look at one service from two providers;
- Tenants working with ETF staff to plan and deliver training.

## **West Lothian Homelessness Tenant Led Inspection**

The Homelessness Service Users Focus Group provides people who are/have experienced homelessness with a platform to have their say on the service and how their needs could be better met. Participants of the Focus Group took part in a unique Homelessness Tenant Led Inspection (TLI).

In 2009, five service users were introduced to the TLI process and signed up to become inspectors for a TLI of West Lothian Council's Homelessness Service, with the support and guidance of two experienced Tenant Led Inspectors. This TLI explored the Council's Homelessness and Support Services from a service users' perspective, which had never been attempted before.

The TLI took twelve weeks to complete. The two TLI mentors developed a relationship with the service users, gaining their trust by starting slowly and gradually building up the level of work when the group felt more confident. A full report was published and formally launched in January 2010. The launch involved all TLI inspectors presenting their investigations and findings to staff, managers and senior managers in the Homelessness Service and answering questions from the audience.

The Council then developed an action plan for areas of improvement and the group attended a meeting with the Council to discuss and agree these actions in March 2010. In March 2011 the Council met with the TLI again to provide an update on the process of the action plan and the TLI was agreed and signed off as completed.

The young people involved in the TLI have given some of their own thoughts on the process:

"This inspection has shown me that it is good to look back at where I was and realise how far I have come now. I have learned how to listen to others and have a better understanding of how and why things are in place and how they work. This experience has made me a better person and a much happier one."

"When we started doing this inspection I was not in a good place and I was really quite down. Finding out about the things that we did while working with the others has helped to boost my confidence. It has made me more knowledgeable and I enjoyed finding out how the system works. At the beginning I was quiet and embarrassed about my situation but I don't think this now as I am happy to talk out. I really enjoyed working with this team as they are a really good bunch of people."

"Happy to make people more aware and help to remove the stigma of homelessness, it is good to give something back. I am now at college and enjoying my course, I can see a new future for myself now."

"I have realized that I am not ashamed to have been through the homeless route as this experience has helped me to be where I am today, I am ready to look forward and I hope to go to college to do Social Care and to help others if I can."

“I am happy to help to make the homeless route easier for others, things happened in my life that I wished hadn't but now I am glad they did because they made me a better person.”

The benefits of the TLI to West Lothian Council include:

- Gained valuable insight and knowledge of people who have used the service;
- Used a creative approach to service delivery;
- Enabled the service to make improvements where a need for change has been identified;
- Treated service users as capable people with something to offer which challenged the assumption by staff that service users are dependent on a service;
- Involving service users motivated staff and cemented the commitment by senior managers and decision makers.

### **Seaforth House Residents and Ex-Residents Registered Tenants Organisation (RTO), Falkirk**

#### **Becoming an RTO and Peer Educators**

This tenants group is made up of young homeless people between the ages of 16 and 25 years. They are all or have been tenants of YPeople's Seaforth House Supported Accommodation. The group set out to achieve a recognizable voice for the service users both while they resided in Seaforth House and in the wider community. They wanted to take the service users committee and enhance the profile of tenant participation by becoming a constituted registered tenants' organisation.

The Scottish Government awarded the group an RTO grant to make a DVD of their experiences in becoming an RTO. The planning, filming and editing of the DVD by the group was a landmark achievement. The DVD is now supporting the group in their role as peer educators when they visit similar groups to encourage them to become involved in tenant participation.

The group meets regularly with representatives from Falkirk Council to discuss policy matters, repairs and refurbishment and to take part in local initiatives such as “Secret Shoppers” where tenants reported back to the Council about their experiences in one stop shops etc.

The work being done by this group of young people is changing the opinions of decision makers who now recognize that neither housing status nor youth should prevent people from sharing thoughts and opinions or taking part in policy making.

One of the learning outcomes from this project is that if this group of young people with mixed abilities can overcome the challenges involved in tenant participation, then any group of tenants can do the same.

The Seaforth House RTO has proven that no group of tenants will be discriminated against and under the Housing Scotland Act 2001; councils will provide funding, training and support to enable tenants to become part of the consultation process.

Other tenants will benefit from the positive experiences of these young people when it comes to setting up their own groups. In their role as peer educators, the members of Seaforth House Residents and Ex-Residents RTO will ensure that others understand that they will be listened to when they express their thoughts and opinions in the right forum.

### **Cuthelton and Crail Street Community Club, Parkhead**

#### **Developing Garden Ground into a “Forget-Me-Not Garden”**

The “Forget-Me-Not Garden” is a small piece of land that nestles in the Cuthelton Community. Originally, it was overgrown and unattractive so the community decided to transform it. The group met with community members and other agencies to come to a decision that would be best for the area and appeal to the broadest spectrum of the community.

There was a culture of fear growing amongst the older members of the community towards some of the younger tenants. Unfortunately, it impacted on the sheltered tenants enjoying their gardens and streets. The younger tenants felt victimized and disgruntled at the negative attitudes towards them.

It was decided that the new garden would be a beautiful happy place that would celebrate the lives of those friends and family that have passed away. Through a local initiative the young people received training as horticultural apprentices to enable them to work on the garden. After consultation and research the garden was created.

The “Forget-Me-Not Garden” has made the community happier and safer. Everyone shares in the upkeep and maintenance of the garden and lots of new friendships across the age ranges have been made. They have gained respect for one another and banished fears. The residents now feel in charge of their own lives and are willing to take responsibility for their own well-being.

The initiative came from two sheltered communities in Cuthelton and Crail Street. It has given the older tenants endless confidence and pride, that they can take charge, inspire and be the leaders of their own and others’ destiny.

The club also wrote a poem to celebrate the “Forget-Me-Not Garden”. Here it is:

## Forget-Me-Not

Forget-me-not, for I am still here,  
In the beauty of flowers, in the birdsong you hear.  
I'm the breeze as it flutters the leaves to the air,  
As a butterfly floats, with never a care.  
Who sustains all this wonder, the stars in the sky?  
And the mountains that shadow the birds flying by.

Forget-me-not, for I am not gone,  
I am the colour of life as the night turns to morn.  
And if nature allows only what can survive,  
When my heart stopped beating, why is love still alive?  
Why do you need me, with memories so dear?  
Love, it continues and proves I'm still here.

Forget-me-not, is the name of this space.  
It's nurtured for you, so that you find your place.  
Peaceful and tranquil, that will ease troubled mind.  
Search please no longer, as in nature you'll find,  
All the proof that is needed, that love lasts forever,  
And that I'll be beside you forever and ever...