

EATS rolls out better services for tenants

As people work harder and longer, it is more difficult for many to make or receive phone calls during working hours.

EATS has rolled out two new services to make it easier for time-poor tenants to get quality tenancy advice and information, when it suits them.

In August 2012, EATS rolled out its new website, which provides a wealth of information about tenancy matters. It includes links to support and related services like the Tenants Union of NSW, NSW Fair Trading, the Consumer Trader and Tenancy Tribunal, social welfare agencies and others.

To see the website click on or go to **www.tenantsrights.org.au**.

In February 2012, EATS began trialling the provision of advice by email, after a very brief phone call at a pre-arranged time with tenants.

Tenants can tell us about their tenancy problems, and provide demographic and contact information over the internet. It takes 5 – 10 minutes and can be done at any time of day or night. These questions are identical to the questions a tenant is asked when they phone our service during advice times.

EATS staff then phone the tenant within an agreed time frame, (usually a two minute phone conversation), and thereafter provide the requested tenancy information and advice by email.

The tenant can read the email and ask for or provide further information by email whenever it suits them.

The service promises to be more convenient than traditional phone advice for many tenants. At any time the tenant or the tenant advocate can ask for a phone conversation if its needed. It can also save time for both tenants and EATS. Tenants can get on with their lives and EATS can advise more clients.

Tenants can ask for email advice through the EATS web page ← click on or go to www.tenantsrights.org.au.

Web site features

The updated EATS' website went live in July 2012 after many months work. The website includes information on all things tenancy related.

The new website was designed with three basic functions – firstly it provides front line information to tenants on simple tenancy issues, secondly it has more complex information which tenants who have already received advice can access to assist them at the CTTT, and thirdly, the website has a 'community' function – it lets tenants know who we are and what we are doing.

Advocates are saving significant time by directing tenants to the website rather than having to send out resources via email or post. Intake workers refer tenants to the resources relating to their problem on the website while they wait for an advocate to call them. Tenants can develop a better understanding of the issues and have a more focused discussion with the advocate.

The website has been well received, with many tenants advising intake workers that they have visited the website before calling the service. We are looking at various ways that we can use the site to help tenants save time and access quality advice more quickly and at times that suit them better. We feel that this is a necessary evolution with most people working during the day and unable to spend much time on the phone.

Since the site went live, we have averaged about 300 visits per month. 62 per cent of these are new visitors, while the rest are returning. Most look at an average of two pages on the site per visit. Time spent on the site by users is increasing; an indication that tenants are finding useful information there.

In 2010-2011, EATS sent pamphlets or information to around 22 per cent of callers, around 400 per year. (The number was down in 2011-2012, as we referred tenants to already existing internet sites with relevant information.) Naturally, if tenants need information sent to them in other ways, we continue to do so).

If we maintain usage of our site at around 200 unique visits per month, we will be increasing tenants' exposure to and use of prepared written resources to over 2000 per year. Our experience with the use of such resources has been that tenants are better able to understand their rights and obligations sooner. Tenants still need quality advice (our increasing number of calls show that), but they are better able to make informed decisions if that advice is reinforced or illustrated with quality publications that can be quickly accessed.