

Tenants Protection Association (TPA)



At the heart of everything that TPA do is a vision about home- the opportunity to create a place of safety, joy, growth, stability, creativity and wellbeing.

Established in the late 1970s and incorporated in 1982, TPA offers a range of services from advice and advocacy to education, outreach and in-depth case managed tenancy support. The many successes that this Christchurch service has had is testament to their tenacity and commitment to the rights of tenants. Last year TPA won the Australasian Housing Institutes (AHI) award for leading tenant engagement practice.

They won this award because, according to AHI, tenants benefit from a consistent well-informed and credible advice/advocacy service. In the past two years (2013-2015), in an environment of significant upheaval, there were over 20,000 calls through the phone service and post-

earthquake, the call duration had risen significantly. TPA conducted 80 education sessions, prevented numerous evictions and stabilised a large number of tenancies at significant risk of eviction in a time of unprecedented rental scarcity in both the private rental market and the social housing arena. TPA provided 160 rental clinics in the eastern suburbs which were hardest hit by the earthquakes. They also organised 15 housing forums with an estimated attendance of over 2,000 participants. TPA has worked tirelessly to improve rental housing standards.

A man came into our office with a donation and reminded us that we had housed him in our emergency house (now long gone) for several months until he got back on his feet. He subsequently went to Bible College and was ordained a Minister and had never forgotten our kindness and support, vowing to give us a donation when he was in a position to do so. If we did not need the money we would have framed it!

When TPA was first formed they talked about working with anyone who lives in a home they do not own. They later talked about working with anyone who lives in a dwelling they did not own. Now they talk about anyone who lives in a shelter they do not own and increasingly they work with people who have no shelter at all.

Last year they provided tenancy advice to over 8000 calls through their advice line and this year's statistics indicate that 15% of calls are from outside the Canterbury region. They offer face-to-face information and advice at their offices and rental clinics at Work & Income offices in Linwood and New Brighton with outreach services to any community of need, upon request.

TPA's **Outreach** and **Supporting Vulnerable Tenancies (SVT)** programmes are designed to work directly in local communities providing tenants with resources, advice, advocacy and support around issues. The SVT Programme is a "whatever-it-takes" approach and works with tenancies at risk putting supports and actions into place to maintain these tenancies. The outreach programme works with community groups and tenants to provide an on-the-spot tenancy service.

TPA provide a range of education workshops for tenants and for community organisations. Education is focussed to youth, first-time renters and new migrants into the city and also agencies who have clients who are tenants, usually delivering 40 education sessions per year.

In 1999 TPA established the **Christchurch Housing Forum** and it has operated continuously since then, meeting every six weeks and including representatives from all sectors. Covering a variety of housing topics it is regularly attended by 60-80 people at each meeting.

One of our first Supporting Vulnerable Tenancies (SVT) tenants was Jane and her four year old son. Jane suffers from long term illness and lived in a completely enclosed home: curtains closed, not answering the door and living in considerable chaos, and who faced eviction. She has maintained the tenancy we found for her for 10 years while raising a beautiful independent young man, now works part-time and able to celebrate her life and successes.



TPA staff left to right: Helen Gatonyi, Lisa Coulter, Di Harwood, Niki Smith and Ali Brunel

How are TPA funded?

The work they do and high regard to which they are held in their community, can be seen by the funding support they receive from local government, philanthropic and gaming trusts. Only two or three times in their history have they received a government grant and this has never been more than 7% of their budget. Their work is supported mostly by local trusts, The Rata Foundation, Christchurch City Council Metropolitan Fund, Lottery Grants Board, COGS, and some support from groups like JR McKenzie Trust, Lion Foundation, Casino Charitable Trust. Perpetual Group and other small gaming trusts.

The current environment for tenants

TPA have been long-time advocates for affordability of housing, habitability of rental housing, security of tenure for tenants, and professionalism in the business of being a landlord. They have been asking for a rental housing warrant of fitness and a registration of rental properties for over 20 years.

Another client with a head injury and facing eviction and incarceration, was shut out from every agency in the city because of his illness and erratic behaviours. He is now maintaining his tenancy, has stayed out of jail, and doors previously closed are being opened.

They have seen movement in the area of habitability, though still no rental housing warrant-of-fitness; and with the incremental changes to the Residential Tenancies Act they are beginning to see a shift toward more professionalism from landlords. However, they say, they are still advocating for: security of tenure for tenants, a rental housing warrant-of-fitness, a register of rental housing; and would love to see an environment where the eviction of a child from their home is a last resort.

Is there a need for a national forum for tenancy advocates?

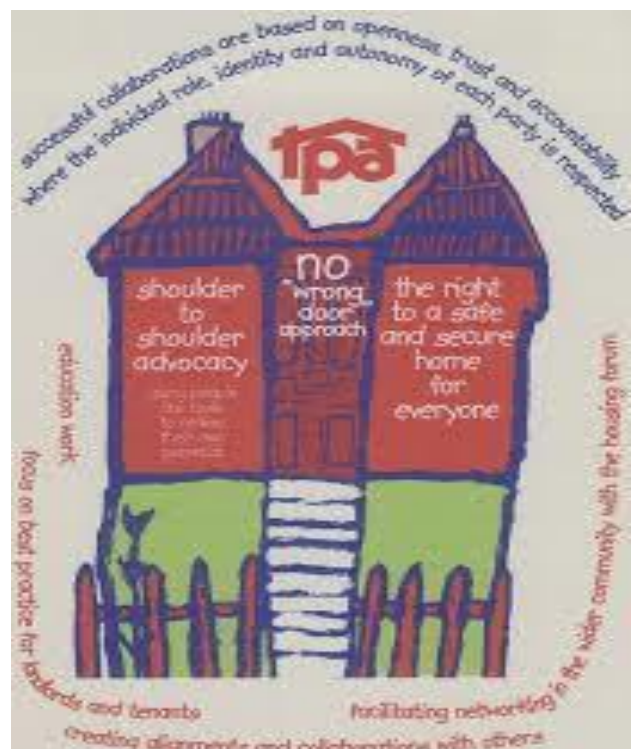
TPA have been encouraging the development of a national association of tenant advocates since the mid 2000's. They see a national focus for tenant advocates as a way of bringing best practice models of working to the various organisations delivering tenant advocacy - teasing out what tenant advocacy is as opposed to an advice and information model or the strictly legal model of delivery. A national forum for tenant advocates would

TPA values:

- Housing first
- Shoulder-to-shoulder advocacy
- Strong diverse relationships
- Ethical and professional behaviours

provide an opportunity to come together and discuss issues, concerns and to develop responses nationally. It would be an enormous opportunity to share resources, information, expertise and support.

For more on TPA view their website at www.tpa.org.nz.



The attached Parity article, from October 2007, is also worth reading – as current today as it was then.