

## PROJECTS

### Office of Housing and Utilities Project

For a couple of years now, EWOV has been working with the Victorian Office of Housing (OoH) on energy and water issues affecting customers living in public housing. We've provided quarterly reports and set up direct points of contact with OoH regional managers for advice and assistance on individual complaints. We've also scheduled meetings with local OoH staff during our regional, rural and metropolitan visits. This has enabled us to identify particular billing, supply, disconnection/restriction and energy efficiency issues affecting these customers.

Earlier this year, the Director of Public Housing and Community Building wrote to express his appreciation for our efforts in this area. He also advised that OoH staff were addressing three areas of concern raised in recent EWOV reports.

To help address the problem of people being billed for usage after they've left the premises, OoH staff are reminding tenants of their responsibility to contact utility providers at the start and the end of their tenancy. A project is underway to better align the suburb names and postcodes in the OoH database with Australia Post listings to help prevent misunderstanding about site addresses. An OoH fact sheet on the economical use of electric storage heaters is also being developed and distributed.

### Transitional Housing and Utilities Project

This project has addressed energy and water issues faced by transitional housing tenants and managing organisations. Transitional housing is short term accommodation used to bridge the gap between homelessness and permanent housing. The energy and water services may be in the name of the tenant, or in the name of the housing owner/agency.

Transitional housing managers find they face particular problems in relation to utilities — such as a tenant having trouble setting up an account because the previous tenant didn't disconnect, or having to pay out-of-hours connection fees when tenants move in. They can also find themselves up against 'privacy walls' when they ring to try to sort these things out. It was from this kind of feedback that EWOV's transitional housing project emerged.

To this point, we've worked with housing managers to identify issues and suggest solutions. Our next step is to work collaboratively with them and EWOV scheme participants to achieve solutions. In this way, we're providing housing managers with a valuable sounding board between utility providers and the governing body, the Office of Housing.

Feedback from organisations providing information, advocacy, housing, outreach, family and youth services has highlighted the value of our varied programme of community activities.

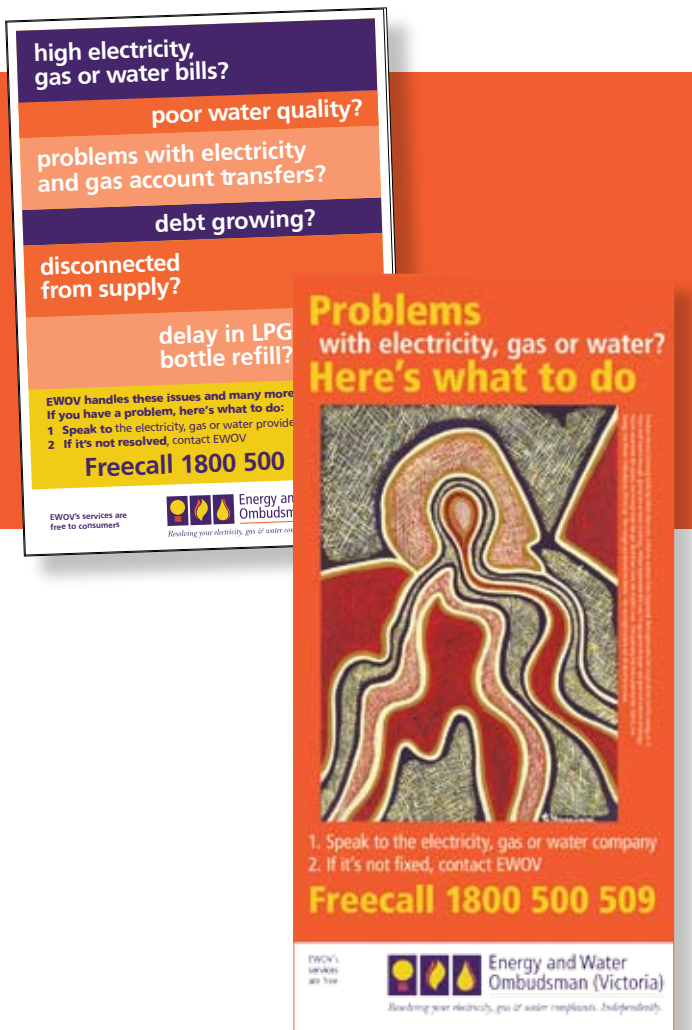
### Utilities Project for Women in Prison

Women entering and exiting the Victorian prison system often find they have problems with their energy and water accounts. This project has helped address that. In undertaking it, we've worked co-operatively with staff from Corrections Victoria, the Concessions Unit of the Department of Human Services, energy and water providers and financial counsellors.

Among other things, a process has been initiated to prevent account arrears building up while women are in prison, and to assist with the reconnection of their supply once they leave prison. The value of this project has been highlighted by plans to expand it to include a pilot programme for men.

### Koories – Know Your Rights Project

This is a community education initiative designed to improve access to government services for Indigenous Victorians. It's led by the Indigenous Consumers Unit of Consumer Affairs Victoria. EWOV participates, together with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, the Office of the Public Advocate, Ombudsman Victoria and Privacy Victoria. During 2006/07, we took part in community education forums in Footscray, Shepparton, Swan Hill, Thornbury, and in the Loddon Mallee and Gippsland regions.



## REGIONAL AND METROPOLITAN VISITS

Through our annual community visits programme, we connect with energy and water customers, community agencies and, where practical, regional staff of energy and water providers. It also enables us to get EWOV resources directly into the hands of those who can use them and pass them on.

One of the things we took into account in planning our 2006/07 destinations, was 2005/06 case numbers from each Shire/Council in Victoria. For example, we saw that case numbers from deemed Melbourne 'growth areas' were low, possibly reflecting lower awareness of EWOV. So, we made sure we visited two of those areas (Casey/Cardinia and the Hume Region), with visits to two more planned for next year (Melton/Caroline Springs and Whittlesea). We also travelled north, south and east, to Mildura, Bendigo, Swan Hill, Seymour, Wangaratta, Myrtleford, Wodonga, Wonthaggi, Cranbourne, Craigieburn, Broadmeadows, Meadow Heights and Pakenham.

Our audiences were quite varied. For example, in Myrtleford, the group was mainly public housing tenants, who we hear are now passing on to their Tenancy Support Group meetings the EWOV information we provided. In contrast, our visit to Victorian Arabic Social Services (VASS) in Broadmeadows, provided us with information on the kinds of energy and water issues VASS sees among people from Arabic speaking backgrounds.

There were also quite a range of different issues raised with us — from hardship programmes, energy retailers' marketing activities and advice about concessions, to supply upgrades, delays with new connections and the timely repair of street lighting.

Overall, it's clear that our being proactive about getting out into the community really pays off — for the community agencies and individual customers who learn more about us, who actively pass that information on, and who appreciate the networking opportunities we're told our visits provide — and for us in gathering information about energy and water issues and building relationships.

## NEW EWOV POSTERS

Look out for two new EWOV posters which have recently been distributed. A general A4 poster about EWOV has been sent to Victorian community agencies. It's designed for noticeboards in waiting/foyer areas.

There's also a poster designed for Indigenous consumers — featuring artwork by Eileen Harrison, a Kurnai woman from Gippsland.

As with all of our publications, these posters advise customers to speak with their energy or water provider first — and to contact EWOV if the issue isn't resolved.