



Jill Edmonds at her home on the Central Coast

## CELEBRATING WOMEN ADVOCATES

Because 8 March is International Women's Day we thought that the March issue of Outasite Lite should celebrate some of the amazing women who live in residential parks in NSW. We talked with six women who are active within their own communities and in residential parks more broadly.

None of the women moved into a residential park with the intention of becoming a resident representative or advocate but a particular event or situation triggered something in each of them that led to them becoming leaders in their communities.

- Christina helped out a friend, and has never looked back. She is now a regular at the Tribunal and is not unfamiliar with the inside of Parliament House!
- Faye could see that there was a need in her park for someone to stand up and represent the needs of the residents.

- An excessive site-fee increase was the reason Janice became active.
- Pam met with a resident advocate who inspired her to get more involved in resident issues.

Once they became active, most of the women found that they were not only participating as members of a residents committee, or working on individual issues that came up in their communities; they also got involved in broader campaigns and advocacy around residential parks.

Many of these women now dedicate many hours a week to assisting other residents and they are all volunteers. As Christina explained: "I find my advocacy work keeps me very busy!"

And being a woman advocate is not easy. All but one of the women we spoke with believes that she has been treated differently to her

male counterparts. They reported having been ignored or not taken seriously by some operators and male Tribunal Members.

A number of the women feel that in parks there is sometimes an attitude that “the men will look after us”, and that some men can act as though they are “members of a boys club”. They all believe that more women should step up and get involved in park issues because women are just as capable as men and often flourish when they become active.

When asked about their achievements these women were typically modest, responding that they were just pleased to have been able to help people. Further prodding, however, unearthed some of the fantastic results they have achieved.

Janice was involved in getting funding for and delivering community education across the state to fellow residents as a member of a resident organisation.

Christina has successfully prevented a number of tenancies being terminated. She also took a very complex appeal from the Tribunal to the Appeal Panel and successfully argued that the Tribunal made the wrong decision. The result was a fantastic outcome for the 80 plus residents she was representing.

Jill secured funding from the Department of Fair Trading and Gosford City Council and undertook a feasibility study on establishing a cooperative model of resident-funded, resident-owned residential parks as a way to provide affordable housing and security of tenure for people on low incomes.



Janice Edstein and Christina Steel



Pamela Meathringham

Marie has had many successes negotiating with operators to reach a resolution everyone is happy with, avoiding the need to go to the Tribunal.

Pam, like many of the women advocates interviewed, has successfully challenged excessive site-fee increases on behalf of fellow residents too many times to mention.

Five of the six are also actively involved in systemic advocacy around the laws and regulations for residential parks, taking every available opportunity to push for a better deal for residents.

All of the women we spoke to are retired, but their involvement and advocacy around residential park issues keeps them busy and that's the way they like it. Marie told us: “I did come to the coast to retire but I am enjoying being able to use my knowledge to help people”.

There is no doubt that these women are dedicated. What they do is hard work but the thanks they receive from residents keeps them going. As Christina explains, “I don't think anyone does advocacy for rewards, but you just keep getting rewarded when someone says ‘thank you’ or you see the relieved look on someone's face when you tell them they don't have to face the problem alone.”

**We thank and acknowledge: Jill Edmonds; Janice Edstein; Marie; Pam Meathringham; Christina Steel and Faye Wilson for sharing their stories for this article.**

# ON THE ROAD

Following the Christmas break we are back on the road visiting parks and providing free information sessions for residents.

We have just been out and about with Tenant Advocates in South and South West Sydney, the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and on the far South Coast.

Colleagues from NSW Fair Trading have been attending our information sessions, and talking about the services they provide for people who live in residential parks. Residents have let us know they feel this makes the information sessions even more valuable.

For more information and to find out dates for information sessions in your area visit [thenoticeboard.org.au](http://thenoticeboard.org.au) or give us a call.



Julie Lee presenting a community information session at Windang

If you would like us to visit your park or you think you can host an information session please give us call on 8117 3700 (ask for Julie Lee).

## WHERE NEXT?

<b>MARCH</b>	South West NSW
<b>APRIL</b>	The Hunter region
<b>JUNE</b>	Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and the Tweed areas.

# OMBUDSMAN FOR RETIREES?

In Victoria a number of advocacy groups are campaigning for a special Ombudsman to administer complaints against the retirement housing sector, including residential parks.

The Consumer Law Action Centre (Victoria) has reported older people routinely calling for advice about unfair fees, complex contracts, bullying and intimidation. Sound familiar? Some of these issues are what we regularly hear about from park residents.

Retirement housing, or housing targeting older people falls under a number of different laws in Victoria, as it does in NSW. The idea behind a special Ombudsman is that one body would have oversight over all of the different types of housing.

In NSW we are seeing a huge expansion in residential parks targeting older people and there are often calls for greater regulation and oversight of the retirement village industry. So, would NSW also benefit from a special Ombudsman?



Amelia Christie

Amelia Christie from the Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Association (CPSA) believes that a NSW Ombudsman able to deal with issues arising in retirement housing could be worthwhile: "CPSA hears from far too many people who have been duped by the retirement housing sector. Unfair contracts, neglected maintenance and services, and rapidly increasing fees that weren't explained are far too common place."

"Right now people have limited avenues to take to get these issues rectified. CPSA would welcome the introduction of a housing ombudsman to keep the sector in check."

# FREE LEGAL ADVICE FOR PARK RESIDENTS

Following the introduction of the *Residential (Land Lease) Communities Act 2013* on 1 November 2015, NSW Fair Trading has provided a small grant to five Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services.

Northern Rivers, Mid Coast, Hunter, Illawarra and South Coast and South West NSW Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services all received funding for a part time worker to focus on residential parks in 2016.

Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services already provide free advice and assistance to people who live in residential parks but the introduction of the *Residential (Land Lease) Communities Act* places additional pressure on service provision. The extra funding will help ensure that the services are able to assist residents to adjust to the new law by providing advice and community education on issues arising from its implementation.

Now is a good time to get in touch with your local Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service with any questions about how the new law affects you.



Get advice from your local service:

## NSW Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services

Eastern Sydney	9386 9147
Inner Sydney	9698 5975
Inner West Sydney	9559 2899
Northern Sydney	8198 8650
Southern Sydney	9787 4679
South Western Sydney	4628 1678
Western Sydney	8833 0933
Blue Mountains	4782 4155
Central Coast	4353 5515
Hunter	4969 7666
Illawarra South Coast	4274 3475
Mid Coast	6583 9866
Northern Rivers	6621 1022
North Western NSW	1800 836 268
South Western NSW	1800 642 609

## Aboriginal services

Greater Sydney	9698 0873
Western NSW	6884 0969
Southern NSW	1800 672 185
Northern NSW	1800 248 913



### The Tenants' Union of NSW is:

- A community legal centre specialising in NSW residential tenancies law.
- The main resourcing body for the NSW Tenants Advice and Advocacy Program.

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