

Katrina evacuees get rental help in San Diego

With assistance from local rental owners, 18 New Orleans households are now receiving help from a special Rental Assistance program here in San Diego. Folks assisted range from single moms to elderly and disabled individuals, such as Robert

Depriest, pictured with his cat (who relocated with him). Mr. Depriest—who is a 64-year-old Type 2 diabetic—came home to San Diego to live near family. He credits the Housing Commission as well as his landlords (at the aptly named S.O.S. Management and Property Services) for helping him experience a smooth transition.

S.O.S. leasing consultant Elisa Gonzalez reports she had a good experience working with the Housing Commission in this emergency housing endeavor. "It was very easy to move Mr. Depriest

When asked what he'd do without rental help, Mr. Depriest had a quick reply:

"I'd be up the well-known creek without a paddle!"

because the document response [by Commission staff] was so fast," she said. S.O.S. helped expedite the process as well by waiving the standard rental history requirements since the phones were still out in New Orleans during the leasing period, and Mr. Depriest's former landlord could not be reached.

S.O.S. Management and Property Services manages over 1,000 rental units in San Diego, of which 20 percent are leased to people with vouchers. According to S.O.S.'s Elisa Gonzalez: "Many of the owners who we represent like working with the Rental Assistance Program because of the security of regular rent payments—plus they appreciate how it encourages tenants to keep the units well-maintained because of the annual inspection process."



Katrina evacuee Robert Depriest—shown here with his cat, Mo'ki, who relocated to San Diego, too.

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Call Center update

The new Housing Commission Call Center, created to help rental property owners and clients get answers to questions fast, is still a work in progress. We have taken complaints of long waits seriously, which is why we have added another rental assistance expert to the Center staff. We hope this shortens wait times. Also, for those who do not need help immediately, we invite landlords to email questions to a new address dedicated to helping you: ownerinfo@sdhc.org.

The Housing Commission tries to provide good "customer" service, despite HUD budget cuts to the Section 8-Rental Assistance Program.

Mediation helps landlords and tenants

The National Conflict Resolution Center (NCRC) regularly mediates disputes between landlords and tenants. Issues such as past-due rents, noisy tenants who disturb other renters, and tenants' requests that landlords make repairs and maintenance are just a few of the typical problems brought to NCRC.

What is mediation? Mediation is not binding. It is not like arbitration or litigation, in which a decision about the conflict is made by a judge or a jury—a decision by which the “plaintiff” and “defendant” must legally abide. Rather, in mediation, two willing parties meet with an NCRC-trained and experienced mediator, who helps them through a proven process to a written agreement. They, therefore, resolve the issue themselves at immensely lower cost and with the potential of preserving a civil relationship. NCRC's success rate is over 80 percent—proof that the process works.

Why can't parties reach agreement themselves? They often do. But NCRC finds that “human” factors often get in the way. First, people think they're right—or there wouldn't be a conflict at all! “A” thinks he's right, and “B” thinks she's right, and they insist on getting what they

“see” as justice. Secondly, disagreements often result in anger. And when the parties are angry at each other, they are less likely to resolve the issue. Further, Robin Seigle, director of NCRC's Business Division, notes that, on their own, people usually see things in ways that support their own interests.

The mediator cuts through these and other stalemate difficulties, diffuses the anger, and enables each party to respectfully listen to the other's side—and repeat what the other person said to ensure the accuracy and understanding of what was heard. The core—and underlying—issues are then further explored. Finally, each side is asked what he/she is willing to do to help resolve the dispute. Further discussion usually leads to an agreement that everyone feels is better than continuing the conflict.

A family, for instance, may insist their kids are not noisy, just behaving like an “average” family, yet the landlord lists complaints from other tenants that the noise is too loud and too frequent. The family might then agree to change the times the children play near other units—not, say, before 7 a.m. or after 9 p.m. In response, the landlord might agree to respectfully inform—and calm down—the complainers and invite them to let him know of any violations.

Pools, privacy, parking, pets, and more—many aspects of apartment living can lead to disputes. In the rare instances that mediation doesn't work, nothing is lost. Disputants can always proceed to litigation. But NCRC inspires society that while conflict may be inevitable, it is manageable.

For more information, contact NCRC at 619.238.2400.



More info just a click away... at sdhc.net

Need quick info about the Rental Assistance Program? Find it on the Housing Commission's web site, www.sdhc.net. (Click on “Have housing to rent?”) We recently redesigned the Rental Owner web section to make most-requested information and resources easier to find. These topics include the online rental vacancy listing, setting/increasing rents, direct deposit instructions and form, tenant/landlord resources, property inspections check list, and more.

VIEWpoint is published by the Rental Assistance Department as a way to keep rental owners/managers updated on issues and policies regarding our programs. If you have any ideas for future stories—or if you would like extra issues sent to your staff—please contact Community Relations Specialist Janine Rojas at janiner@sdhc.org.



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