

Consumer Information Days presented by the Good Service Mob

PEAK HILL

Tuesday 22 September 2009, 10am-1pm

Southern Cross Hall, Newell Hwy, Peak Hill

WELLINGTON

Wednesday 23 September 2009, 10am-1pm

WACHS Youth Centre, 96 Arthur St, Wellington



MEDIA RELEASE

Monday, 7 September 2009

The Good Service mob from nine complaint handling agencies is coming to Peak Hill and Wellington to hold a free information day about consumer issues. Staff from each of the organisations will also be available to discuss individual enquiries. The information day will be held in

Peak Hill on Tuesday, 22 September 2009, 10am - 1pm

Southern Cross Hall, Newell Highway

Wellington on Wednesday, 23 September 2009, 10am - 1pm

WACHS Youth Centre, 96 Arthur Street.

The day will include information for Indigenous consumers and the community if they are having problems with:

- banks, credit cards and loans
- businesses, contractors and consumer rights
- discrimination
- electricity, gas and water companies
- federal government agencies (Centrelink, taxation)
- health providers, such as doctors, nurses or hospitals
- legal issues
- state government agencies (housing, police, child protection, community services, correctional centres)
- telephone, mobile and internet companies.

The Good Service committee is a collaboration between the Financial Ombudsman Service, Commonwealth Ombudsman, Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), Health Care Complaints Commission, Legal Aid NSW, NSW Anti-Discrimination Board, NSW Office of Fair Trading, NSW Ombudsman and the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman.

RSVP:

If you are interested in attending, please call Rose Gordon (Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW) on (02) 8218 5221 or email to roseg@ewon.com.au.

More information

For media inquiries, please contact Katja Beitat on (02) 9219 7497 or toll free on 1800 043 159. For more information about the Good Service Mob visit www.goodservicemob.com.au.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Energy and water - a case study

Marie, an Aboriginal woman, contacted EWON when her electricity was disconnected for a debt of \$1300. She had a two month old baby and needed to have her supply reconnected to heat the baby's bottles, but she couldn't afford to pay the bill. A friend recommended she call EWON for help.

Marie told EWON she had signed up with a new energy retailer some time ago, but wasn't sure whether she had received a bill or made a payment towards her account.

EWON provided Marie with the names of agencies that distributed EAPA (Energy Accounts Payment Assistance) vouchers, so she could seek emergency assistance while we investigated her case.

We discussed Marie's case with the retailer, who agreed to reconnect her supply if she set up a Centrepay arrangement to pay off her debt. They also agreed to release Marie from the contract, if she wanted to return to the standard supplier for the area.

Marie received \$180 in EAPA and paid a further \$100 towards her account. Her supply was reconnected and she set up a payment plan to pay off the remaining debt.

EWON contacted the standard supplier for the area, who opened a new account for Marie and agreed to a Centrepay payment arrangement so she could stay on top of her bills.

Health care complaints – a case study

A woman called the Health Care Complaints Commission to complain about the length of her wait for hip replacement surgery. She also complained that her GP had refused to contact the hospital to organise this surgery. The woman, who lived alone, said that her condition was deteriorating and the pain was getting worse – she could no longer walk or leave the house without assistance.

The inquiry officer explained that the Commission could not force the hospital or surgeon to put her higher on the list for hip replacement surgery. The woman said that she still wished to make a complaint, but had difficulty in writing as a result of problems with her arm. The inquiry officer drafted a letter of complaint, based on the information that the woman had provided.

With the assistance of an officer, the complaint was resolved when the hospital transferred the woman case to another surgeon who was able to perform the surgery at an earlier date.

Fair Trading stops dodgy businesses

A company was selling TV and sound systems, security systems, furniture and whitegoods on a rental/lease basis to people in the North Coast and North West of NSW. The company appeared to be targeting Aboriginal communities and areas with a high proportion of public housing.

The goods sold by the company were of poor quality, some even second hand. Some items were not being delivered until several payments had already been made by customers.

This company insisted that customers sign a direct debit form, which took the repayments from their Centrelink benefits; otherwise they would not provide any services to customers.

The Office of Fair Trading and other government agencies took action against the company because of their unethical practices. The company eventually went into liquidation when Centrelink suspended their approval for direct debits from people's benefits.

NSW ombudsman – a case study

An Aboriginal man with a disability who was a public housing tenant complained about a severe cockroach infestation at his unit. He had reported the problem to his client liaison officer five weeks earlier but no action had been taken.

At the NSW Ombudsman's suggestion, he then contacted the department's client feedback line to make a formal complaint. He was told a fumigator would come to his unit within the next three weeks.

The tenant phoned the Ombudsman a week later complaining that the infestation had become so severe that he could not cook or sleep at night. The Ombudsman made inquiries with the department and - as a result - they agreed to arrange for a fumigator to attend the premises within 24 hours.