



■ Robert Smith with the stack of letters and documents regarding his rental issue with Communicare



■ The Smiths are selling clothes and furniture for extra money to buy basic foods..



■ There were some heated exchanges between tenants and Rental Housing Tribunal officials.

## 'We can't afford to live'

There was little solace at a meeting last week for those living a few rands short of homelessness.

FAATIMAH HENDRICKS

Tempers flared between tenants of Communicare social housing units in Brooklyn and representatives of the Rental Housing Tribunal at a meeting last week.

Tenants, especially the senior citizens, once again expressed their frustration with having to pay steep amounts for rent. They are also dissatisfied with Communicare tenants all apparently paying different amounts for rent.

At the community meeting last week, the residents were not happy when told the tribunal did not have the power to set rentals.



"We are expecting you to help us," shouted someone in the crowd.

"You are all in cahoots," yelled another, referring to the tribunal, Communicare and government housing officials.

Robert Smith, 62, who lives in a Communicare flat in Brooklyn, was at the meeting to voice his frustration.

As a pensioner, he gets R1 200 a month. He has an

unemployed wife and two children, aged one and six. His rent increased to R1 113, an amount he simply cannot afford. To avoid being homeless, he pays his rent, but is left with just a few coins for the rest of the month.

His wife doesn't work because they cannot afford aftercare for the children. At Mr Smith's house, refuse bags are packed with his and his children's clothes to be sold to buy food. He also sells bits of his household furniture to get some money.

He lodged a complaint with the tribunal when his rent increased to R1 196. When he did not appear for his hearing it was decided that the rent be lowered to R1 113. He said the tribunal told him there was nothing else it could do to help.

See facing page

### CAPE TOWN SUMMER FESTIVAL

The City of Cape Town will be hosting the annual summer beach festival once again in 2012.

Date: 1 December 2012  
Time: 10:00 – 18:00  
Venue: Muizenberg Beach

A variety of entertainment will be offered, including a performance by Freshlyground. Other activities will include beach soccer, volleyball, obstacle courses, action cricket, recreational games, surfing lessons and many other stage performances.

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- What can be recycled?**  
YES PLEASE - RECYCLABLE MATERIAL
- ✓ Paper: flattened and folded cardboard, any paper, newspapers and magazines
  - ✓ Glass: rinsed bottles and jars
  - ✓ Plastics: any bags, rinsed bottles and containers
  - ✓ Metal: rinsed food tins, cans and scrap metal
  - ✓ Tetra Pak: foil-lined juice boxes and milk containers

- What can not be recycled?**  
NO THANK YOU - NON-RECYCLABLE MATERIAL
- ✗ Cling wrap or disposable nappies
  - ✗ Chemicals, paint, toothpaste tubes, polystyrene punnets, clear food punnets, dog food packets, washing powder packets, chips packets, motor oil containers, acids or solvents
  - ✗ Organic waste, food scraps, vegetable peels, garden waste
  - ✗ Clothing or shoes
  - ✗ Wet, dirty or contaminated items

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Statistics August 2012 - October 2012



■ Robert Smith lives in this block of flats in Brooklyn.

#### From previous page

"They said my wife must go to work. She can't work. Who must look after the children?"

Mr Smith said he would sell whatever he could lay his hands on. If he was given teabags and sugar, he would sell that, too, for money to buy food. There are times when he and his children stand at robots with a board asking for food and electricity.

"I can't afford to live," said Mr Smith. "How can I live?"

The co-ordinator of the Brooklyn Tenants' Committee, Ndoysile Sekwati, claimed Communicare "inhumanely" evicted rent defaulters.

"Sometimes, when children come home they see all their clothes and other belongings outside," said Mr Sekwati.

He said Communicare showed no compassion for its tenants.

"It's a very sad situation. On the website, it looks nice, but they don't care. They are now going for market-related rentals."

The tribunal's Lionel March advised

residents to lodge complaints immediately if they were unhappy with rent hikes because once Communicare started legal proceedings against a defaulter there was nothing the tribunal could do.

Mr March said that when people lodge complaints, they should ensure their rent was up to date.

"Landlords are entitled to their money – that is the bottom line," he said. "People are struggling today but you must make arrangements with the landlord before you come to us."

Edik Wilson, the other tribunal representative at the meeting, said once residents lodged a complaint about a rent increase, they should continue paying the old rent until the matter was resolved.

Mr Wilson admitted getting many complaints about Communicare.

"It's important for the community to be educated about the rights and responsibilities of the landlord and the tenant."

Meanwhile, Communicare said it was entitled to charge different amounts for rent, depending on the housing project. Some projects required a percentage of the tenant's salary for rent, which was the reason for people paying different amounts.

Communicare said 79% of its housing initiatives were social projects, 21% required market-related rentals and 54% of tenants were pensioners.

Communicare director Joel Mkunqwana said rents for the elderly depended on the size of their units.

Tenants who struggled to pay should address that with Communicare, but also be prepared to downgrade to a smaller unit in another area.

Communicare was a business, and could not afford to ignore rent defaulters or hold back on rent increases.

"How am I going to pay my staff and pay for services if the rent is stagnant?"

He said 99% of the tenants paid their rent. Those who found fault with Communicare were a minority.

"We can't allow ourselves to not act when people don't pay rent."

He challenged residents' claims that Communicare was quick to act harshly against those who were late with rent, saying the firm gave ample time to tenants to pay and did not immediately resort to legal action.

Tenants are also slapped with hefty bills for legal fees, but Mr Mkunqwana said residents could make arrangements to pay them off.

"We told our lawyers to allow them to make arrangements over six months and the debt gets consolidated," said Mr Mkunqwana. "Why must we pay their legal fees if they have wronged us?"

## Still time to enter Twilight run

More than 2 000 teams have already signed up for the 30th Twilight Team Run, but there is still time to enter this fun, weird and wacky event.

"The response this year has been exceptional," says organiser, Greg Damster, "and that's fantastic because events such as this are becoming an increasingly important part of the Community Chest's fundraising programme."

The money raised from the entry fees – R200 for a team of four or six and R50 for individuals – is used to support some 400 community development organisations across the

Western Cape. These provide care for children, families, the elderly, the homeless, the physically and mentally challenged, people living with HIV/Aids and those undergoing rehabilitation.

The Twilight Team Run starts at the Grand Parade at 7pm on Tuesday December 4, winds through the city centre for 4.5km before arriving back at the Parade. Teams are advised to arrive early as the judging for the best dressed team starts at 5pm. Entry forms are available online at [www.twilightrun.co.za](http://www.twilightrun.co.za) or from the Community Chest at 82 Bree Street, Cape Town.

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