The GROH crisis: members tell their horror stories

The SSTUWA has asked members who currently, or have in the past, lived in Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH) for their experiences with the scheme.

The stories they shared with us about GROH were unbelievable, disappointing and in some cases, horrific. They wanted us and you to know just how problematic the scheme has become and how desperate the need is to reform it.

Many stories were long and they detailed the myriad problems with accommodation, ranging from obtaining and keeping it, to getting things fixed in either a timely manner or even at all.

There were communication issues with GROH, trying to get in contact in person, phone or email and obtaining paperwork. Sadly, there were also stories from SSTUWA members reporting a lack of professionalism and courtesy in their dealings with some GROH representatives.

There were stories we have not been able to publish as they deal with matters still to be dealt with by law courts. Members say their GROH homes are not secure enough to protect against instances of criminal activity.

Names and locations have been withheld in order to protect SSTUWA members or ensure their privacy.

The list of grievances, issues and threats to people's safety and security are long, greater than what you will read here or that we have been able to publish.

In reading these stories it is clear that things need to change and that change needs to happen now

Caravan parks used as accommodation

If we are fully staffed and teachers are not the partner of someone in a GROH house (e.g. police officers) we don't have enough houses. If we want to employ additional teachers they would have to live in the caravan park and this is not suitable accommodation to stay in long term. (Editor's note: The caravan parks have the right to move teachers from one site to another, and they often do.)

Housing allocations frustrating

There are (rare) new and affordable houses for sale in my town and GROH doesn't buy them – we have four uninhabitable 2x1 units sitting empty, waiting for redevelopment. GROH consistently does nothing to address the lack of available houses in town and it's so frustrating. Housing allocations are inefficient, with couples in 4x2 houses and singles in 3x1 houses, and families squished into whatever is left over. It's ridiculous.

Where do I start with GROH housing?

I had been in GROH housing for 12 years in a range of towns.

They have moved me into a house that had been "condemned" and then "uncondemned". Security was so bad that when my house was broken into, they simply kicked through the wall.

I have been in a place that had no heating or cooling for almost 10 months. When they did arrange for air-conditioning they removed a large unit from my ceiling and left it open and exposed for weeks.

Rent was excessive, as such it was cheaper over two years to buy a house in town. I was placed in a house that had not been cleaned by the previous tenant. GROH had done the exit inspection. I got there and found human excrement in the bath and rotten milk/food in the fridges that I had to clean myself as no one was available to clean it.

I also had to find my own accommodation at my own cost because they didn't think the house I was allocated was that bad. When a second house was broken into and my spare keys were stolen (I was in town at the time) they told me I was responsible for re-keying because I shouldn't have left the keys inside.

As a homeowner I have now offered a teacher the use of my family caravan as they had no accommodation in town for them.

Not given same accommodation tenure as previous GROH tenant

As a new principal appointment I have been placed into a GROH property for six or 12 months. No clarity yet though on which one it is.

Outside of my long work hours, I spend free time submitting applications for other rentals or to purchase.

With the property market booming, it should not be assumed I can afford either. My family are not intending to move until we have stable accommodation, meaning I am running two households.

At my previous school I was provided with a property and a single rental supplement, but this was only available whilst the position was fixed-term. On winning the job permanently, the rental doubled – what had happened?

The previous GROH tenant (in my new town of abode) was in the same property for 19 years, so I am curious as to what has changed and why I can't be granted the same tenure based on my role.

Housing in poor state when moving in, maintenance not being done

I arrived to a house that appeared not to have had any repair or maintenance work done for quite some time. Some of the repair issues go back to 2019 and remain outstanding. Air conditioning units have not been maintained, although under the tenancy agreement the owner is required to have them cleaned annually whilst the tenant maintains the filters in-between.

The garden, when we moved in has never been maintained, with many dead trees (significant white ant activity) and weeds. My husband and I have taken two large trailer loads of refuse from the garden to the tip. Sprinkler systems are broken, however we are expected to maintain a garden and grassed areas.

The stove top is old and, on several occasions, when we have tried using one of the larger jets it has made a huge bang before igniting.

Issues have been reported; however it took an email to escalate the issues to get the repair from 2019 sorted out and someone to look at the stove. But the stove continues to have the same issue.

We have also replaced globes to the oven and to other areas of the house as well as rubber rings on plugs in the kitchen (sinks would not hold water). These issues should have been picked up on the tenancy outgoing report for the previous tenant and replaced. The most concerning issue is the disrepair of some of the properties leased to GROH and the exorbitant rents paid to landlords who have no interest in looking after their properties and get away with it due to housing shortages in remote and rural areas.

Worried for my belongings and family safety after break-in attempt

My accommodation was subject to a break-in attempt during the July school holidays. My backyard/side access sliding screen door was buckled, the glass door was tried but only just held up. It does not lock well.

My garage was broken into where both a screen door that we had added for additional protection and a wooden door were broken and locks smashed.

The thieves rummaged and made a mess of the garage, stole tools and used them to try to steal a motorbike. They then tried the laundry access door to the house. These struggle to close due to lock mechanisms being bent.

I am currently still waiting for my doors to be secure enough so I can sleep properly at night with two young children and myself in the house. But when we leave for upcoming holidays I will not have any peace of mind that it will be secure enough.

I will be screwing a lot of extra holes into the premises in an attempt to keep my belongings safe during the school holidays. The solution for the most recent school term was to screw each of those doors shut but my children could not access the back yard to play.

The side sliding door has no locks (currently locked at night with a tiny drop bolt), and the glass door struggles to clip together. One door I currently have my car up against for added security but this will be not there while I away on holiday. The laundry screen door I have to carefully push back the latch in the frame to allow the door to close, and then be locked. A few more cracks in the wooden frame and it would be irreparable. I am still waiting for these to be repaired.

I am very apprehensive about these holidays and how secure my personal belongings will be. With a young family, this is our home – we don't live minimally, so I do worry.

No air-conditioning for three days and rotten food

I'm happy with the internal layout of my GROH house, which is functional and fit for purpose. However, there remains numerous maintenance issues which have been difficult to resolve; particularly in a timely manner, including a septic tank that continues to emit a foul odour despite numerous repairs; ongoing blocked and overflowing internal drains; securing a replacement of a defective oven door and a lost key to a power meter box that prevented electricity from being connected to my accommodation for three days.

We had no air-conditioning for three days, in stifling heat, and the food in our fridge and freezer spoiled. I understand the meter box key was eventually located by GROH in an office drawer.

Eventually I made a formal complaint to the Minister for Education, GROH head office and the Minister for Housing about the total lack of service and the mistruths about jobs being completed when they had not.

Schools in the regions struggle to recruit and retain staff and having inferior housing maintenance only exacerbates these ongoing battles.

I am sure the standards and the issues facing rural/remote housing would be resolved in much more appropriate and timely manner in the city.

Children in education, particularly Indigenous children, need continuity in their teachers and their education. By providing continuity teachers become a part of the community, forming bonds with families and their kids. A pleasant home environment for teachers could go a long way to provide the continuity so desperately needed to keep kids engaged in the education system and community.

We have never experienced such unprofessionalism and disorganisation

Sharing terrible GROH stories has become a popular past time for those who relocate from Perth. It's pretty much a rite of passage here and on the regular, causes significant distress amongst our teachers.

When we moved into our GROH house 18 months ago, we were given a date to move in (with eight weeks' notice). Two weeks out, that date was delayed and then delayed again another week, with only a few days' notice. The reason being was that the house needed cleaning.

At every delay, we communicated very clearly the day we had to move out of our old home (due to the end of our rental lease) and our growing concerns about the pressure the delay was creating.

On the day before we were meant to be receiving our keys, it was delayed another day because it still needed cleaning. By this point we had to get out of our old house due to the end of that rental lease (which we had already had to extend by two weeks because of the GROH delay).

We were told we would be put in the caravan park with three kids and two pets (but the caravan park had no vacancies because they hadn't booked it). Our furniture was to be put in other people's garages.

In the end, we had to sign a waiver that the house hadn't been cleaned and we had to accept it in 'as is' condition.

A GROH representative finally arrived (two hours later than stated). We tried to take it all in our stride and respond graciously. She scolded us like children about the email and call we'd made the week prior about our concerns about the date. We were both shocked by the unprofessionalism exhibited.

Our principal was similarly frustrated at the incompetence of it all.

Despite two email requests, we still haven't received a property condition report 18 months later. The house had numerous dents and dings in the walls when we moved in. I'm anxious these weren't recorded but without GROH's assistance, we are stuck with it.

It caused a huge amount of stress to our family and to my work and I have never since or again experienced any degree of unprofessionalism and disorganisation like it.

Is this the day I get broken into?

After several break-ins, it felt like our unit complex was being targeted – I believe three break-ins happened in quick

succession. After multiple emails to our housing office, very little was done to upgrade security.

Our biggest priority was making sure security screens were on all ground floor windows. This was seemingly ignored and we were sent the building codes and told they were up to standard.

Personally, we did not feel safe coming home every day to the bare minimum security. As teachers we have enough stress to deal with. Opening my door and thinking: “Will this be the day I get broken into” is not a nice feeling.

Maintenance can take some time

Maintenance can be slow – my first report regarding my air conditioners did not get actioned at all. When I phoned to follow up I had to re-submit the report. It took another 10 days for someone available to have a look at the job. They are also meant to be reverse cycle but there is no heating option on the units in the main living areas, which was lovely during winter.

Over the summer break maintenance was done on the roof and ceiling of my house due to rainwater pouring down the internal walls during heavy storms. When I left for the summer break everything was turned off, except for the fridge. When I returned at the end of January the air conditioners were still running – and the repairs were done over the week before Christmas.

I still have a hole in my yard that no-one can explain. I have not refilled it because I do not know the reason for it being there. I am assuming it was a plumbing problem from a previous tenancy as it is on the external wall from the bathroom.

I know from a previous tenant that requests for kitchen cabinet repairs/replacement were made but still have not been actioned. I have not requested this because the kitchen is functional even if the cupboards do not close.

Other problems have been attended to more promptly but, again, plans to return to finish jobs have taken time to happen. This is partly a staffing issue for the maintenance team and also location.

Otherwise, I am grateful for access to a property here. I was asked to consider sharing but with a menagerie of pets I did not think that would be fair to another person.

Remote community house plagued with issues

I am living in a condemned house in a remote community.

I did not have hot water for months – electricians came whilst I was away (they did not phone to check if we are going to be in community). They left two receipts in the door and left. The first time they came they did not fix the issue, even though they claimed to have.

After two days I realised the freezers had defrosted. The electricians had not turned the switches back on. That was six months of meat and supplies gone – it could not be replaced from the community shop.

I have no floor coverings in the lounge/dining area. The carpet in the bedrooms is disgusting, frayed and a tripping hazard.

The bathroom shower is all rusted out. The front decking has rotted away and is dangerous. The front steps are rotten. I have tried to fix them with wood from the tip.

The place hasn’t been painted inside for at least 10 years. I have made an effort to paint over the apricot colour at my own expense.

We cannot drink the water but are not given water filters. I had to pay $630 out of my own pocket for a water filter and fitted it myself to the laundry tap. This so that I can drink water out of the tap at my own house.

The water we shower with dries out your hair and skin. I have bought and fitted a water softener to the shower head.

These are just a few of the issues we face in remote communities.

Found out there was no accommodation only when arriving

Last year I was doing a relief stint for four weeks. This was the worst in terms of accommodation because when I got there nothing had been arranged. The pub accommodation was full and so was the caravan park.

I had to stay with another teacher who did not originally want anyone staying with her. This made me feel terrible and like an intruder. Trying to get a hold of GROH staff to discuss what was going on was always a messy ordeal.

Husband hurt himself on dilapidated deck

Just recently my husband hurt his foot from walking on our outside deck. This deck has been reported multiple times over a two-year period.

After escalating this issue again we got an email that the contractor is having a disagreement with GROH and won't do the work. This is obviously of no help to us. GROH offers one excuse after another.

This is just one of a list of issues we are facing with our living arrangements.

Time running out to find new accommodation

My husband, pet dogs and I relocated from Perth at the start of the year and were lucky to secure GROH accommodation with the arbitrary one-year limit for my area.

With that year coming to an end, we are being forced out with nowhere to live.

At the moment there are zero rentals within 40 minutes driving distance of my school that allows pets. The rentals that do, cost almost three quarters of my weekly wage.

We now feel forced to buy a house so we have somewhere to live at the end of the year.

I have tried to contact GROH to request an extension but I have had no reply whatsoever for over two weeks.

It is a very stressful position just because they put a one-year limit. I think due to the housing crisis this should not exist at the moment to relieve the pressure for staff.

Worried I will get blamed for house issues once I leave

I went through the summer months without a working air conditioner as I endeavoured to have it fixed. It finally got fixed in September after I told them in April there was no urgent need with winter coming but stated it had to be done before Term 4.

My GROH representative never collected my property condition report, and I am nervous that I will get blamed for every issue in the house once I leave.

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