Annual Report

Creating Community Well-Being Through Housing Education + Support
Message from the Executive Director

Rent Smart Education and Support Society has continued to recover and respond to the challenges that COVID-19 has presented over the past year. Adapting our Rent Smart Educator courses to a virtual format has been a priority. We have focused on shifting from and emergency adaptation to a format where new educators receive a comprehensive, interactive and polished training experience.

Our Rent Smart learning designer and team have also been focusing on developing our print resources into a modern and adaptable digital format set to launch in 2023. This shift will allow for decreased costs for printing and shipping training binders and ensuring that legislative content is kept up to date for all educators delivering courses.

In response to feedback from annual surveys, the Rent Smart team has also been creating a Participant Workbook that will replace the Tenant Participant Manual. This workbook will increase engagement from participants while ensuring materials are accessible to those who face multiple learning barriers. The Participant Workbook will reduce costs associated with printing or ordering manuals required to run Rent Smart courses at the organizational level. The Participant Workbook is expected to be piloted in the fall of 2022.

Many changes happening and we appreciate the strong individual, organizational, community, provincial and territorial support from you all. The team at Rent Smart has continued to demonstrate a high degree of professionalism, adaptability, willingness to innovate and respond to challenging times.

Thank you to the Board of Directors for your continued attention to detail and commitment to the vision and mission of Rent Smart.

Sincerely,

Linda Amy, Executive Director

Rent Smart in Action

A Growing National Organization: Rent Smart Education and Support Society (RSESS) is a national organization with staff across the country located in BC, (Mission, Victoria, Kelowna, Kamloops) Alberta, (Calgary and Edmonton), Ontario (St. Catharines), and New Brunswick (Moncton).

This fiscal year, a total of 245 recorded courses by 79 Educators were delivered across the country compared to 185 in the previous year, a 25% increase overall.
RENTSMART BASICS
RentSmart Basics is a versatile introductory course and can be tailored to the needs of certain populations.

RentSmart Basics focuses on the “three keys” for successful tenancies and can be delivered in-person or virtually. This past year approximately 57% of the Basics courses were facilitated virtually.

While there has been a 13% decrease in Basics Courses Nationally (from 103 to 91) this year likely due to COVID-19, we saw a 165% increase in Basics Course Delivery in Manitoba (from 13 to 33).

RENTSMART CERTIFICATE
RentSmart Certificate is a six-module, comprehensive tenant education course.

Once graduates complete the course, they receive a certificate of completion which can act as a good reference when looking for housing. RentSmart Certificate courses can now be delivered in-person or virtually using online resources such as an online manual and the accompanying RentSmart Certificate Online (RSCO) course.

A RentSmart Basics graduate told us:
“i learned how to become a good and understanding tenant.”

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In our Annual Graduates Survey (2021-22), 81% of RentSmart Certificate graduates surveyed reported the course gave them more confidence in applying for places to rent and 72% reported that the knowledge gained through the RentSmart Certificate course contributed to developing a positive relationship with their landlord.

Unlike the Basics Course, we saw a significant, 47% increase, in the number of Certificate Courses delivered this year compared to last, approximately 50% of those courses were delivered virtually. This increase potentially indicates a need for the more in-depth curriculum delivery as the effects of low vacancy, rising inflation and rent continues to create extremely difficult housing stability challenges.
RENTSMART EDUCATOR

To make RentSmart Education available across Canada, RSESS trains staff from other organizations to deliver RentSmart courses to their communities through a train the trainer model called RentSmart Educator. With RentSmart transitioning to an entirely virtual Educator training delivery platform we were able to deliver 14 RentSmart Educator Courses and 142 new Educators were trained across Canada totalling over 1100 Educators trained since 2015.

In our 2021-2022 Annual Educator Survey, one Educator told us “Not only does the Rent Smart information help my clients, but it helps myself and my friends and family members just as much, they all come to me with questions about renting and I feel confident about answering them effectively.”

In efforts to move our curriculum to a virtual format and familiarize Educators with our Dashboard system, we developed the Student Educator Dashboard which students use to access all curriculum documents needed throughout the training. Once they have completed the Educator training, Educators receive access to the full Educator Dashboard where they can access all materials necessary to deliver a RentSmart course including updated Educator Curriculum. We have phased out the printed Educator Binder as of June 2022 and now provide all Educator Curriculum through this Student Educator Dashboard format.

Adapting Virtually

RSESS and partner organizations were not immune to the COVID-19 pandemic and as a result the number of courses delivered fell across Canada. The silver lining to this drop was the innovation of virtual courses that has emerged as a result of in-person courses being restricted. Educators now have the option and resources to run courses in-person or virtually.

While many Educators were prevented from offering courses due to organization specific policies reducing programming during the pandemic, one Educator commented in our Annual Educator Survey, “It’s because of COVID that I’m ABLE to run Rent Smart courses” speaking to the adaptability opportunities within Covid-19 and how it positively impacts Educator’s ability to deliver RentSmart courses virtually. In the same survey, when asked whether delivering virtual courses was a success or not, another Educator commented “It was a success because it gave the opportunity for many who would not have been able to attend due to travel issues and/or remote communities a chance to attend.”
Of the 245 reported courses delivered across the country this year, 53% of those courses were delivered in a virtual format, similar to the previous year where 55% of courses were delivered virtually. Pre-pandemic, all courses were delivered in person to our knowledge. In efforts to support this shift, our transition to the RentSmart Subscription model helped facilitate much needed Educator Dashboard updates.

**SHIFTING TO A SUBSCRIPTION MODEL**

In early March 2021, RSESS launched a new subscription model with three levels of subscriptions: Essentials, Preferred and Champions. Every organization with a RentSmart certified staff member can choose the level of subscription that fits their needs. This new subscription model provides RentSmart with incoming revenue for ongoing provincial adaptations and to provide Educators and organizations with the tools to offer engaging, up-to-date, and practical training. The free transitional 1-year Essentials Subscriptions provided in March 2021 to all existing RentSmart Certified organizations expired in March 2022.

As of April 2022:
- 67 organizations purchased an Essentials level Subscription.
- 18 organizations purchased a Preferred level Subscription.
- 3 organizations purchased a Champions level Subscription.

To support new organizations certifying Educators for the first time in understanding what a RentSmart Subscription can offer, we introduced a 3-Month Trial with an Essentials Subscription. This Subscription Trial allowed organizations and Educators an opportunity to explore and use resources to support them in delivering RentSmart courses.

**Dashboard Upgrades***

In preparation for the RentSmart Subscription implementation and to support with virtual course delivery formats, the following upgrades were added and/or improved in the Dashboard:

- New and updated resources
- Improved user experience
- Support tutorial documentation
- Course Data Search + Export
- Refined course management system
- Customizable + Comprehensive Course Data and Statistics

*Depending on the Subscription level purchased, an Organization and its Educators will have varying features.

**A RentSmart Educator graduate told us:**

“**This was truly an amazing course. I usually get bored halfway through a virtual course, but the Facilitator kept everyone engaged making it interesting hearing other participants views and experiences as well as her own. I am very grateful this course was offered to me.”**
New Initiatives

1. **Rent Smart course materials** are currently being adapted for the province of Saskatchewan with a launch date of early 2023!

2. **BC Foundations**: In March 2022, Rent Smart launched our latest initiative, the Foundations course in BC. This course, based largely on our successful RTA course pilot project in 2020-21, was developed for those who work in supportive roles with tenants.

   As renters face extremely challenging rental markets, those who work with them have noticed an increased need for guidance. A strong knowledge of relevant legislation and its application is required to effectively support tenants through the process of finding rental housing and to set the stage for a successful tenancy. This knowledge is also crucial to respond appropriately to issues that arise and to prevent evictions. The RentSmart Foundations course aims to not only share knowledge, but to help participants apply that information in real-life situations, enabling them to effectively guide the tenants they work with.

   Foundations is a 6-hour course and is offered monthly in a virtual format over 3 consecutive days. Due to the generous financial support we have received from the Victoria Foundation and the United Way Southern Vancouver Island, we have been able to expand our course offerings and continue providing them at no cost to BC participants over the coming year. Efforts are currently underway to develop Foundations courses in other provinces where RSESS operates.

3. **Expanded BC Public Courses**: In January 2022, through 3-year support from BC Housing, RSESS has been able to expand free virtual RentSmart Certificate course offerings across the province. Previously only available in the CRD, these free public courses are open to up to 500 BC tenants each year. All courses are delivered virtually and combine both self-paced learning with facilitated sessions. This initiative is an opportunity to work more closely with both provincial and regional networks and organizations both for promotion of courses and occasional co-delivery.

4. **The Nunavut Tenant Literacy Project**: Rent Smart is pleased to announce that we have completed phase one of the Nunavut Tenant Education Workshop – Atuqtuatsiarniq Iglulirijikku’nit. This phase included the development of a Facilitator’s Guide, Participant Workbook and focus groups held in Cambridge Bay and Arviat.

   Our Executive Director, Linda Amy and Susana Guardardo traveled to Nunavut and conducted focus groups with the new curriculum. That feedback is now being implemented into the final version of the workbook and the Educator Curriculum will be the next task in this project. This program is grounded in Inuit societal values and takes into consideration the unique factors related to tenancy in Nunavut Territory.

   *Rent Smart will continue working closely with Ilitaqsiniq (Nunavut Literacy Council) and the Advisory Council to develop phase two of the program. Phase two will include the development of a Master Trainer Guide and Community Educator Manual in addition to conducting a Community Educator Training and facilitating a number of pilot courses for public housing tenants.*

   *This project is funded and supported by the Nunavut Housing Corporation and is fully customized to reflect the housing situation, challenges and culture of the north. Inuit societal values form the foundation of the program and this would not be possible without the expertise and collaboration with Ilitaqsiniq.*
We gratefully acknowledge the following for their financial support and generosity.

FUNDERS

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