



**REMEMBER**  
Weslo's Web Site at  
[www.weslo-housing.org](http://www.weslo-housing.org)  
FOR ALL THE LATEST NEWS  
AND INFORMATION

**Inside:**

**GALA DAY FUN**  
**SUPPORTING OUR**  
**COMMUNITIES**  
**TPAS CONFERENCE**  
**KEEP WARM**

# Tenant News

Christmas 2009

Weslo's on-line: [www.weslo-housing.org](http://www.weslo-housing.org)

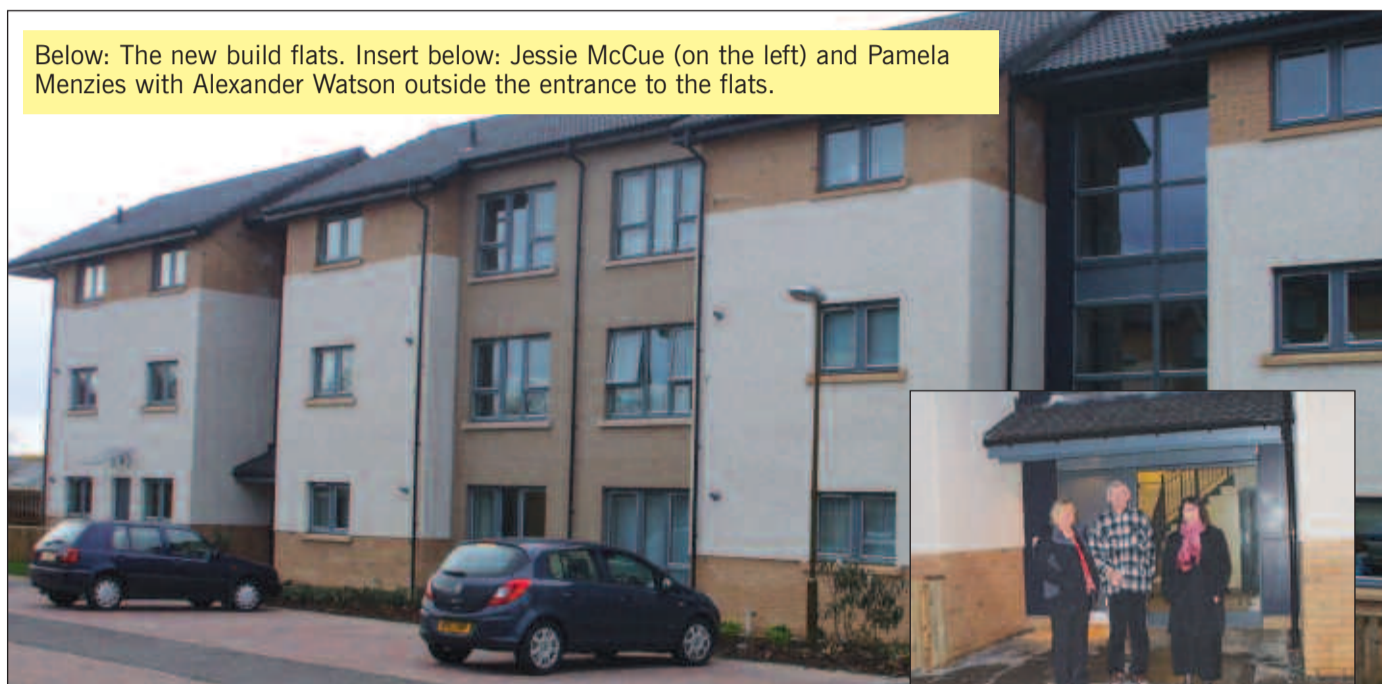
## NEW HOMES FOR WESLO

Weslo Housing Management has recently taken over 24 new build flats in Ravens Brae, Ladywell, Livingston. These are the first properties acquired by Weslo through the partnership agreement set up in 2004 between Weslo, Almond HA, Horizon HA, and the West Lothian Housing Partnership creating the West Lothian Strategic Alliance. The Alliance has been appointed Development partner status by West Lothian Council and aims to build 600 affordable homes in West Lothian.

Of the 24 new flats, 12 have two bedrooms and 12 have one bedroom. Four ground floor flats have their own access. All are fully double glazed, have gas central heating and controlled entry systems.

It is almost 10 years since Weslo has been able to offer prospective tenants in West Lothian a new home, so this has been an exciting time for us as a landlord. The most enjoyable part of the exercise has been the ability to offer applicants who have been on the Common Housing Register for a considerable time, including 11 Weslo tenants, a brand new home.

David and Elizabeth Bonnar are over the moon with their recent move to Ravens Brae. They have lived in Livingston before but moved to a Weslo property in Whitburn 6 years ago. They provide care for a relative who lives in Livingston and in recent years they found that they were being called out more often and they found it increasingly difficult to respond as quickly as they would have liked. First they advertised for a mutual exchange but when this proved unsuccessful they applied to West Lothian Council for a property in Livingston. As they were providing support they were awarded social support points but these were not enough to be allocated a house. This situation changed earlier this year when the new houses were completed and they were one of the first nominations received. Mrs Bonnar told us, "I am amazed that the main door ground floor



Below: The new build flats. Insert below: Jessie McCue (on the left) and Pamela Menzies with Alexander Watson outside the entrance to the flats.

flat is much warmer and cosier than our old flat. My husband enjoys gardening and is looking forward to having it in shape for next summer."

Like Mr & Mrs Bonnar, Robert Menzies had been looking to move back to Livingston from Seafield but had insufficient points to be considered a priority. He said, "I moved away from Livingston after my relationship broke down. Being in Stoneyburn made it difficult to keep in close touch with my family. Since moving to Ravens Brae in August, I have been able to see my son almost on a daily basis. It is also much closer to Howden where I help train the Under 13 team at Livingston FC Boys Club. I am delighted with my new flat – it is more than I had hoped for."

Jessie McCue the Housing Officer for the estate and her assistant Pamela Menzies recently invited the tenants to join them for a

sandwich lunch in Oscars Bar and Grill. This gave everyone the opportunity to meet in an informal social setting. Tenants had been expressing an interest in setting up a neighbourhood watch scheme and Community Police Officer Craig Ireland came along to talk to them. Below we see some of those in attendance.

Jessie said, "I am very pleased that so many of our tenants were able to make time to come along and meet us. They are keen to keep the area in good condition and were happy to have the opportunity to meet Craig and discuss any questions they had.

Craig now has a list of contacts and will be back in touch with more information on setting up a neighbourhood watch scheme. It is nice to see the estate settling down and the tenants enjoying their new homes."



### Newsflash

At the time of going to press Weslo was undergoing its first inspection by the Scottish Housing Regulator. The Regulator will be looking to ensure that we are well run, accountable to our tenants and other service users and that we are continually improving our services. The inspectors will look at a range of information and talk to different people including managers, staff, tenants and other service users such as housing applicants and homeless people. The detailed report is due out in March 2010 and we will bring you more information in the summer edition of Tenant News.

### Rent Increase 2010

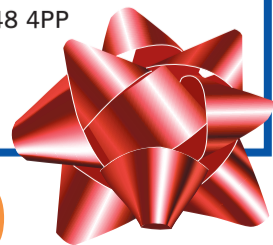
Every year Weslo reviews the amount we charge our tenants as rent and this year we are asking for your views on the proposed rent increase.

In order to keep up with rising costs and to ensure that we manage and maintain our properties to a high standard, rents are increased in April of each year. The rent increase for 2010/11 will be agreed by the Board at its meeting in February 2010.

We are very aware of the increasing financial pressures that tenants, in common with everyone else, face in the current difficult economic climate. We will do everything possible to limit the level of rent increase to that required to meet our financial commitments and to ensure that rents remain affordable to tenants.

As usual we will send you a letter at least 4 weeks before the increase comes into effect, advising you how much your new rent will be.

We will be discussing the proposals with the Tenant Participation Committee at the end of January. If you are not part of this group and would like the opportunity to express your views we would really like to hear from you prior to consideration by the Board in February. Please write to Mike Bruce, Chief Executive at 66 North Bridge Street, Bathgate, EH48 4PP or e-mail him at [enquiries@weslohm.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@weslohm.co.uk).



MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE FROM WESLO

## EQUALITIES & DIVERSITY GROUP



Weslo believes that equality and diversity is about recognising differences, respecting each other as individuals and tailoring the services we offer to meet differing needs. Our commitment as a landlord is to:

Deliver services, facilities and resources that are accessible, relevant and of use to every individual in the communities in which we work.

Understand better who our customers are so that we are able to provide appropriate services that are accessible to all people within the communities we serve.

Be mindful that people are different and take account of these differences in the way in which we help and advise our customers.

Provide clear, meaningful information about Weslo services in ways that are accessible and meet the diverse needs of our communities.

Promote our housing and services to a range of different communities.

Work with partners in consulting with all sections of the community on service needs and provisions.

In October 2007 an Equalities and Diversity Working Group, made up of Weslo staff and tenants, was set up to look at how we can deliver improvements while ensuring that there is no discrimination in the way our policies are designed and delivered. Below are some of the things that we have done or are currently looking at.

We asked all our tenants to complete a census form to provide us with up to date information on who was living in the property along with their date of birth, ethnicity and details of any special needs and equality issues. This has been a very protracted exercise but we are hopeful that it will be completed in the next few weeks. If you are one of the 139 tenants still to return their census form and we have written to you recently; we would urge you to complete the form and return it now. If you need help in filling in the form, please contact your housing officer on 01506 634060. The information collected will allow us to accurately record your personal and household details along with any special needs that you or a family member may have. In turn this will allow us to deliver services that are appropriate to the needs of our tenants. We appreciate that over time there may be changes to your household or your personal circumstances and you should tell us if someone moves into or out of your home, if you have any special needs or are experiencing difficulties in your home, for example difficulty bathing or using the stairs.

How will we use this information? If we know that a tenant who reports a repair is elderly and takes a long time to answer the door, we can let the tradesman know in advance that they need to allow more time for the tenant to let them in. Where a tenant has advised that they have sight problems and need us to produce correspondence in larger sized text then we can do so.

During the summer we launched a new web site ([www.weslo-housing.org](http://www.weslo-housing.org)) and in the design stages we were able to ensure that those people using it could make the text size bigger, this has been useful for those with sight problems. We have now added a "browsealoud" facility to the website. This has speech enabled the website and the articles can now be read out; making it easier for people who find it hard to read to access and understand the information. This includes those with dyslexia or learning difficulties, those for whom English is not their first language, or anyone with a mild visual impairment.

Unsurprisingly we have established from your census returns that approximately 95% of tenants describe themselves as Scottish or British. We have seen a rise in recent years of other nationalities seeking housing. While we have not come across too many language problems, we are able to offer a telephone interpreting service called Language Line. This helps us to communicate with those who either don't speak or have a limited understanding of English.

We aim to promote independent living and provide a comfortable environment for all our tenants through the provision of medical adaptations. Approximately 19% of our current tenants have mobility problems while 14% have medical conditions. In some cases, these tenants may need some type of adaptation fitted in their home to allow them to live there independently. We have always worked very closely with Community Occupational Therapists to ensure that appropriate adaptations are carried out; these can vary from installing lever taps for someone with arthritis to a major adaptation such as the conversion of a property to suit a wheelchair user. Last year we spent almost £100,000 on medical adaptations - this helped improve the lives of over 150 tenants.

As part of the equalities review in 2008 we introduced a satisfaction survey where the job being carried out cost more than £100, to find out what those tenants thought about the work. The feedback we have received has always been positive but in some cases as one tenant told us "having this work done has made a huge difference to my life". If you think that you may need an adaptation please contact your Council Social Work Department and ask to speak to the Occupational Therapist or speak to your Housing Officer for further advice.

With this in mind David McLaren, Housing Manager is gathering the key census findings to incorporate into the Equalities and Diversity Strategy which will be presented to the group for consideration early in the new year. It will then be considered by the Tenant Participation Committee and made available on the website for comment before being implemented.

If you would like further information on the Equality and Diversity Working Group please contact June Harper on 01506 639124 or e-mail her direct at [june.harper@weslohm.co.uk](mailto:june.harper@weslohm.co.uk)

# Stay warm this winter

With the high cost of fuel, it is important that you stay safe and warm at home at this time of year.

There are several simple things that you can do to reduce the risk of damage in your home, these include: -

- Keeping your home warm by leaving the heating on all the time and set the thermostat at a minimum of 15 degrees centigrade.
- If you have a storage tank or pipes in the attic, leave the hatch cover open to allow warm air to circulate in the loft space.

If your water supply freezes: -

- Turn off the water at the Mains Stop Valve.
- Open your cold water taps to drain the system.
- Turn off the central heating and the water heater.

To thaw pipes:

- Put on an electric fan heater or use a hair dryer near the pipes.
- Carefully pour hot water over the pipes or wrap them in a cloth soaked in hot water.

If you get a burst pipe:

- Turn off the water at the Mains Stop Valve.
- Switch off the electricity at the mains.
- Turn off the central heating and the water heater.
- Open all your water taps to drain the system.

**Warn neighbours and contact Weslo on 01506 634060**

**REMEMBER:** Turning your thermostat down by 1 degree can reduce the cost of heating by 8%

In the event of an emergency repair being required, the emergency numbers are: -

|                            |                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Gas - all areas</b>     | <b>01506 630288</b> |
| <b>Other emergencies –</b> |                     |
| <b>West Lothian</b>        | <b>01506 630288</b> |
| <b>Bo'ness</b>             | <b>01324 503050</b> |
| <b>GAS LEAKS/SMELL GAS</b> | <b>0800 111 999</b> |

## A New Housing Bill for Scotland

**The Scottish Government have recently completed a consultation exercise on proposals for a Housing (Scotland) Bill which is to be introduced to the Scottish Parliament in 2010.**

The draft bill is intended to underline the Government's commitment to the future of social housing. The proposals aim to:

1. Safeguard social housing for the use of future generations through reforms to the Right to Buy.
2. Improve value for tenants and taxpayers by modernising the regulation of social housing.

The Government proposes to safeguard social housing by reforming the Right to Buy (RTB) for social housing tenants. The consultation outlines plans for:

- ending the RTB on new supply social housing;
- ending RTB for new tenants;
- reforming pressured-area designations (pressured area status allows councils to suspend the right to buy for certain tenants living in the area for a period of time to ensure that there are enough houses for people who need them);
- developing guidance for RSLs seeking extensions to the ten year suspension on RTB; and
- revising guidance on landlords' continuous occupation discretionary powers.

If you would like to discuss your eligibility to buy your home, please contact Margaret Walker on 01506 639121 or e-mail her at [margaret.walker@weslohm.co.uk](mailto:margaret.walker@weslohm.co.uk).

Part Two of the consultation paper describes how the Scottish Government hopes to improve value for tenants and taxpayers by modernising the way social housing is regulated. The consultation outlines plans for:

- a Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC); and
- a modernised Scottish Housing Regulator with statutory independence.

Under the proposals the Scottish Housing Regulator would have powers to assess and report on landlords' performance against the Scottish Social Housing Charter and, if necessary, enforce compliance with the Charter.

Over 319 responses were made to the consultation paper, including Weslo's submission, and these are currently being considered by the Government. If you would like to see Weslo's comments, or indeed any of the submissions made, these are available on [www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/285372/0086985.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/285372/0086985.pdf)

We will bring you more news of the changes as these are made public. Meantime if you have any views on the proposals contained in the new Bill, let us know. Contact Margaret Walker on 01506 639121 or e-mail her at [margaret.walker@weslohm.co.uk](mailto:margaret.walker@weslohm.co.uk).

# Older Person Advice Project



**In 2008, Age Concern Scotland reported that more than £4.5bn worth of benefits was unclaimed in Britain.** Government figures show that despite high levels of pensioner poverty and rising bills, older people are more likely than any other group to miss out on benefits cash and that billions of pounds remain unclaimed by older people every year. Many older people miss out because they don't realise that they are entitled to extra cash, don't know how to claim, or feel there is a stigma attached and would rather 'make do'.

In 2005 Linkwide Ltd, a subsidiary of the Link Group, launched the Older Persons' Advice Service as part of its wider aim to promote inclusion, tackle inequalities in society, contribute to Scotland's broader social justice agenda, and deliver high quality projects and services to those most in need. Their aim was to ensure that everyone over 60 was aware of all the benefits available and had access to information about services in their own areas. The service proved so successful that it became the Older Persons' Advice Project (OPAP) and was extended to include other housing providers. Now in its 3rd phase of delivery it has secured over £2million in benefits for older people. In November the success of the project was recognised when they won the 2009 UK Housing Award for Outstanding Achievement in Housing in Scotland.

Weslo became involved with OPAP in July 2008 since when 94 tenants, aged 60 and over, have contacted the OPAP team and had a free and independent benefit check. This has resulted in a staggering £167,236 in accumulated benefits being awarded which has greatly improved their quality of life.

The team consists of Gael MacKenzie, Ruth McIntosh and Audrey Anderson. Gael, the Project Assistant, is the main point of contact and the person you will speak to when you telephone. She has worked within the benefits system for 30 years. The 2 Welfare Rights Officers are Ruth and Audrey. Ruth has been with the project since its conception; she too comes with a comprehensive benefits background and has worked with the over 60's since 1993. Audrey, who joined the team last year, has over 20 years experience working in Housing and Support Services. She is also very involved in a voluntary capacity with the NHS Braveheart Project - supporting older people who have had heart attacks. Ruth and Audrey carry out many of the home visits and will visit you at home to discuss your needs and complete a benefit check

Between them, they have a wealth of benefit experience, have excellent communication skills and are very aware of individual's needs.

Here we see (left to right) Gael, Audrey and Ruth who make up the team working with Weslo tenants.



Gillian McAllister, Weslo's Senior Housing Officer who liaises with the team said: "In the current climate of increasing fuel, food and other domestic bills, we must ensure that older people don't miss out on what they are eligible to claim from the state. We want them to claim all of the benefits they're entitled to - just a few pounds can make all the difference. Often it is pride that stops people applying for benefits but they must realise that this isn't charity - it is money they are entitled to. The team can also offer information on social events and courses available in your community, tax and fuel advice, referral for adaptations to the property and sometimes, most importantly, a friendly chat."

# Supporting our communities

This year Weslo staff have adopted SiMBA (Simpson Memorial Box Appeal) as their chosen charity of the year. The charity aims to support families affected by the loss of a baby during pregnancy or close to the time of birth and provides precious Memory Boxes to maternity units who wish to have them. Since March staff have been holding a series of monthly fundraisers and to date they have raised £400 from the sale of home baking and a variety of lunchtime snacks.

Our Community Budget Committee has disbursed approximately £3,000 this year to worthy causes and continues to assess the many varied requests for help we have received. Some of those we have been able to help are:

**Blackburn United FC** has received £150 to sponsor a match ball and to purchase practice balls.

**Livingston FC Boys Club** has received a £50 donation to their club funds. The club consists of 8 teams - 2 under 9's, 2 under 10's, 2 under 11's and 2 under 12's and aims to give the kids a good solid standard of coaching and the opportunity to be involved with a professional club at different levels.

We were able to provide a £100 donation to the **West Lothian Disabled Ramblers**. The group organises twelve rambles a year between April and September, to various venues throughout Scotland to allow disabled people access to the countryside. Membership is varied and includes many ambulant disabled members' e.g. visually impaired people, people with learning difficulties etc. They also have a small fleet of electric scooters for people with walking difficulties.

We were happy to make a £100 donation to the **Open Door Accommodation Project** to cover the cost of preparing their Annual Accounts. The Craigshill based project provides accommodation, information and support to homeless single 16 - 21 year olds and has an outreach service providing tenancy support.



**Blackburn Primary** held a Christmas Fair to raise money for school funds. Below we see John Rankine from Weslo presenting an i-pod Nano to Jacquie Kerr and Amber Lamb from Primary 1 for their raffle.

Once again, we were delighted to continue our sponsorship of

the annual **West Lothian Bowling Association Senior Open tournament**. The semi-finals and final took place on 3 September at Glenmavis Bowling Club in Bathgate where Alan Chester of Mid Calder played against the holder Brian Holloran of Pumpherston and Davy Clelland of Kinneil met. Ronnie Martin of Bellsburn.

After some great bowls and despite the drizzly weather Brian Holloran retained his crown and right we see Mike Bruce, Chief Executive presenting the trophy to Brian.



If you know of any group or worthy cause that might benefit from our assistance then please write to Weslo Housing Management, Community Budget Committee, 66 North Bridge Street, Bathgate, EH48 4PP with full details.

# A gala performance

**As a company, Weslo has lent its support to worthy causes across your local communities; providing financial help for clubs to organise sporting events, school fundraising activities and financial support to support local Radio Grapevine, to name just a few.**

Many of the staff working with Weslo also live locally and they, along with their families, support many other groups and charitable organisations in a more personal way. During the summer there was a lot of activity on the gala day front and we thought you would be interested in hearing about how some of our staff were involved in their local gala days.

Pamela Meehan, an Admin Assistant at our Maintenance Yard, was more involved in Whitburn Gala day than normal as her daughter Abbie had been chosen to be a flower girl. Pam tells us how she was involved. "The gala day committee work very hard during the year to organise a fun packed civic week. This years events included a talent concert, a fun run, a swimming gala, a quiz night and a fireworks display. The theme for the gala procession was "The Circus" and the minute Abbie was chosen we decided to enter into the spirit of the day by decorating the house. My work colleague Marion, who has lots of experience decorating gala floats, and I bounced lots of ideas about. Once we agreed what we were doing she set about creating all the circus characters painted on recycled cardboard, from the office of course, while family and friends made hundreds of paper flowers to decorate the arch. All the hard work was rewarded by a 3rd place in the decorated house section. On the day, it was great to see Abbie enjoy the experience."



Abbie told us, "I had the best day ever! I loved all the excitement, posing on the colourful float and of course there was lots of clowning around..... The "Celebrity Audience" featuring Leon Jackson and me was my favourite part of the house. After the crowning ceremony we had a big party at my house for everyone who had helped which was fab! It was a shame when everything had to be taken down. I would love to take part again but mum said No Way! But secretly, she loved it all really " Below we see Abbie with the ringmaster in front of her celebrity audience.

Helping friends and colleagues decorate houses isn't the only gala day involvement for Marion Reynolds. She has been a member of Stoneyburn and Bents Children's Gala Day Committee since 2004 where she helps organise various fundraising events, the civic week and the big day itself. This year she wasn't able to be as involved due to ill health but was delighted when the Committee asked if she would judge the Decorated Premises and Arches. Marion said, "This proved to be more difficult than you would think because everyone puts in a lot of effort. I feel it's right to keep the local gala days tradition alive; it gives the younger generation

something to look forward to in the summer and this is why I continue to get involved."

Bathgate Bairns have commemorated the founding of the Old Bathgate Academy and John Newland's contribution to it's building since 1844. In 1924 the Historical Pageant, commemorating the marriage of Princess Marjory to Walter, Lord High Steward of Scotland, was introduced creating the Bathgate Procession and John Newland Festival. The pageant is followed by a procession through the town to the Meadow Park where a host of events are laid on to entertain the Bathgate Bairns. All children participating in the pageant are selected from the Bathgate schools and it was a pleasant surprise when Arran Menzies was chosen to be the "Keeper of the Keys" – one of the main principal characters. Arran's mum Pamela, who is a Housing Support Officer in our Bathgate Office arranged for him to tell us a bit about his day.

"After numerous rehearsals it was great when the actual day arrived and I could put it all into practice. The rain kept off for the ceremony at the Old Bathgate Academy; this was followed by the traditional parade through Bathgate. It was great to see and hear so many people I knew cheering my name as I was drawn through the town in my horse and carriage. After the parade all the principal characters went for lunch at a local primary school which was very nice – steak pie my favourite!

After lunch and out of my costume we headed for the park to enjoy the entertainment that had been arranged. It was then back home with family and friends where my parents had arranged for a marquee in the back garden and we partied for the rest of the day. Our house also got 3rd place in the decorated house competition so my mum was really pleased after all the hard work that had gone into building the castle at the front of the house.

To sum up my day I would say that the whole experience was fantastic and I would encourage others to try it. It is also a lovely memory for my family and me to keep."



Above we see Arran in the middle with Heralds - Glynn Boyd & Cameron Pert

10-year-old Megan Towns from Beancross Primary School was elected Queen of Grangemouth Children's Day this year. Of course, this meant

that the house had to be decorated! After much deliberation Megan decided on her theme – Disney Princesses. That decision made, her aunt Donna (a Housing Officer in our Bo’ness office) set about making sketches of how it should look. Donna then drew and painted some of the characters while her husband Kevin was given the responsibility of creating the castle. Everyone was roped in to help including Megan’s grandparents, mum, sister, aunts, uncles and neighbours and below we see Megan with her cousin Malachie (Donna’s son) in front of part of the decorated house.



Donna said, “It was a lot of work and thankfully the weather was fine when we were painting the larger areas of the castle. Many of the neighbours were thrilled to be involved in the preparations for the big day and enjoyed the community spirit that had grown over the months. After the crowning ceremony family, friends and neighbours were invited to a party which was a fantastic way to bring the celebrations to an end.” Below we see Queen Megan – a real princess for a day.



## Work Experience with Weslo

***Weslo has a long association with Bathgate Academy providing one-week work experience placements for some of their 4th year students. It is very important that young people get the opportunity to experience what it is like in a work place environment and gain an insight into the skills and attitudes required by business before they leave school.***

At the beginning of December we were able to provide a further three students with the opportunity to come to us for a week. They were Lorraine Carruthers, who was interested in an office based administrative role, along with Caitlin Dick and Blair Hughes who were both interested in pursuing a trade when they leave school.

During the week, they spent time learning about their chosen subject, shadowing Weslo’s staff and being shown practical examples of how things operate in our workplace.

We asked them about their experiences.

Lorraine said, “I spent some time in the office with the repairs staff and the receptionist and was able to see what they do on a normal day. However, I really enjoyed going out with the Housing Officer and the Voids Inspector where I had the opportunity to carry out an empty house inspection.” Lorraine is undecided on what she wants to do when she leaves school but in the meantime she is concentrating on her standard grades in June.

Caitlin said, “I have already decided to stay on at school but still don’t know what I want to do once I leave. I would like to thank Weslo for giving me the chance to work out of doors with the builders but I can’t see myself making it a career.”

Blair, who would like to get a joinery apprenticeship when he leaves school next year, was happy to have the opportunity to see first hand what the joiners do on a day to day basis.



Lorraine, Gavin Wolfe (Weslo’s Assistant Technical Manager), Blair and Caitlin.

Each year West Lothian Council Education & Cultural Services host a Big Business Breakfast to celebrate the role employers play in developing stronger working partnerships in the community. This year Mike Mitchell Weslo’s Technical Manager represented Weslo and was very surprised when he was asked to accept a Highly Commended Award presented in recognition of our commitment to the work experience programme.

We hope that students find their time spent with us both interesting and informative and we look forward to continuing to provide this worthwhile opportunity for other students next year.

## TPAS Conference 2009

Tenant Participation Committee members Sybil Watt, Colin Torrie and Hugh Ruck attended the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) annual conference in October. They were accompanied by Housing Officer June Harper. They have all attended this conference in the past and we were pleased to find that they all reported back that it had been a very interesting and stimulating conference.



Sybil attended a workshop entitled "Affordable rental housing: A Global Challenge" presented by Professor Duncan MacLennan. The workshop looked at the growing shortage of affordable rented housing and how this might be addressed by the development of a new housing policy for Scotland. She said, "I find that it is useful to attend these workshops as they discuss topics that we as tenants don't think about on a daily basis. I also appreciate the opportunity to meet tenants from other areas and discussing how their landlords perform."

Colin felt that one of the highlights of the conference was a play about anti-social behaviour, written and performed by Naomi Breeze entitled, "Four Walls". The play tells how a bit of youthful exuberance gets out of hand and a minor misunderstanding between neighbours, who were once best friends, escalates out of control. The play explores how the matter was resolved with the involvement of housing staff. Colin said, "Weslo staff had commented on how thought provoking another of Naomi's productions "H is for Life" had been. After seeing this new play, I can understand how they felt. It had been so realistic that one of the delegates sitting close by asked her friend if it was based on a real situation".

Hugh told us what he enjoyed about his attendance at the conference this year. "I knew that Weslo was about to be inspected by the Scottish Housing Regulator so I decided to go along to the Plenary session - "The Scottish Housing Regulator - where's the tenant's voice?". This session was led by John Jenkins, who was to lead the Weslo Inspection Team, and covered the role of the Regulator and tenant involvement in the process. I found it was a well presented, humorous presentation that helped to prepare me for the meeting that took place with the Tenant Participation Committee, the Inspector and tenant assessors just a few weeks later."

June attended the workshop 'Reducing the Risk of Sex Offending in our Communities' by Judith McCullough. It explored how housing staff and tenants can work with statutory agencies to minimise the risks to members of the public while preserving the legal rights of offenders. The subject proved to be both controversial and emotive; provoking an angry response from many of those in the audience. June said, "This year there were tenant representatives from across the UK and delegates had the opportunity to share ideas and examples of best practice. In my view it was the best TPAS conference I have attended."

Above we see June, Sybil, Hugh and Colin during one of the workshop sessions. All agreed that this had been a great opportunity to meet new people and exchange ideas and they would welcome the opportunity to attend in 2010.

If you are interested in being involved in the Tenant Participation Committee and would like more information please phone David McLaren, Housing Manager on 01506 639120 or write to him at 66 North Bridge Street, Bathgate, EH48 4PP.

*Weslo has four places reserved on its Board for Tenant Directors and at our AGM in 2010 two of the current Tenant Directors will be retiring. Mike Crozier, Operations Director will be writing out to you in February to explain the process and asking if you are interested in being more involved in influencing how Weslo operates. In the meantime if you would like more information about being a Tenant Director please contact Kate Hedges on 01506 634286.*

### Post Inspections for Repair Works

Weslo Housing Management is committed to delivering the best possible repairs service to our tenants and we want to ensure that we are meeting all of our obligations as a Registered Social Landlord.

- So how do we know if we are actually achieving what we said we would?
- Can we demonstrate that the quality of our reactive repairs is improving?
- Can we demonstrate that we use customer feedback to make improvements to the performance of the reactive repairs service?

A good way of finding out the answers to these questions is by carrying out post inspections of the repairs undertaken. This also includes work carried out by external contractors such as Whitburn Glazing and Dunnigan Builders. These inspections are designed to assess whether the work has been carried out to an acceptable standard and this gives us the opportunity to find out what you think about the repairs service and what we can do to improve it.

Below are some questions and answers that relate to the whole concept of post inspections and why it is important to do them.

#### How many reactive jobs do Weslo carry out in a year?

Over the last financial year Weslo completed over 9,000 repairs. In the first nine months of this year we have completed almost 7,000 repairs.

#### How many jobs are post inspected by Weslo?

We intend to post inspect a minimum of 10% of the repairs we carry out. This varies between 45 and 65 inspections per month depending on the amount of jobs completed.

#### Who carries out the post inspections?

Our Trade Supervisor, Davie McCue carries out the post inspections. Davie is a time served joiner who has 40 years of experience under his belt and he operates to a high standard when it comes to inspecting the quality of the work.

#### Why are post inspections important?

Post Inspections are a good way to assess whether repairs are being carried out to an acceptable standard. This gives us a platform to measure our performance and the quality of the reactive repairs we undertake. We need to know our strengths and weaknesses. This helps us focus on the areas where we can make improvements to manage and deliver the best possible repairs service to our tenants.

#### What are the results of our post inspections?

Out of the last 600 post inspections we found that 98% of the jobs carried out were satisfactory.

#### Why is tenant feedback important?

We need to know what you think about our repairs service. Did we get the job done to your satisfaction? What did we do right? Did we get it wrong? How can we improve? Your feedback will help us to help you.

Pictured right we see Mrs Brown of Murrayfield Terrace, Blackburn with Davie. She had contacted Weslo to praise some work carried out within her bathroom. She said, "The plasterer carried out a great job to my bathroom wall. His aptitude and workmanship was brilliant and he wasted no time in doing the job. I just wanted to let you know that I received a first class service".



## Good News for Parents and Pensioners

From the beginning of November 2009 Child Benefit has been disregarded as income for Housing and Council Tax Benefit purposes. This has meant that many families are now getting more help with their rent. For those of you who were already



claiming housing benefit your claim will have been reassessed and you will have been notified by West Lothian Council or Falkirk Council of any changes to your award. If you are a low income family not in receipt of housing benefit you may now be entitled to help with your rent or council tax. You can get an application form at our offices in Bathgate and Bo'ness or you can contact any CIS office in West Lothian or the One Stop Shop in Bo'ness.

In November 2008 changes were introduced to Income Support for some lone parents. These changes are being phased in over 3 years and the second series of changes were introduced in October 2009. Below are details of the changes:

- from 24 November 2008, if your youngest child is aged 12 or over, or will be 12 in the next year, your Income Support may stop during that year if you are only claiming it because you are a lone parent
- from 26 October 2009, if your youngest child is aged ten or over, or will be ten in the next year, your Income Support may stop during that year if you are only claiming it because you are a lone parent
- from 25 October 2010, if your youngest child is aged seven or over, or will be seven in the next year, your Income Support may stop during that year if you are only claiming it because you are a lone parent

If you have been affected by these changes, you may have had to make a claim for another benefit (for example Job seekers Allowance). This will affect your housing and council tax benefit and you should inform the council housing benefit staff about these changes. If you need to report any changes or need to discuss your claim for housing benefit in West Lothian you can contact a Revenues Officer direct on 01506 639145. If you live in Bo'ness you should contact the Bo'ness One Stop Shop at 24 East Pier Street, Bo'ness EH51 9AB - Tel: 01506 77889 or if you live in Falkirk you should contact the Falkirk One Stop Shop in Callendar Square, Falkirk FK1 1ZF - Tel: 01324 506868

There are also changes to the Capital rules for Pensioners over the age of 60. From November, the threshold was increased from £6,000 to £10,000 for Pension Credit, housing and council tax benefits. If you already claim any of these benefits your claim will have been re-assessed by the council and you will have been notified of any changes to your award. If you have not applied for help with your rent or council tax because of savings, you might want to consider making an application.

If you are over the age of 60 and feel that you could benefit from some financial advice, why not contact the office on 01506 634060 (West Lothian) or 01506 639100 (Bo'ness & Falkirk) and ask to speak to your housing officer. They may be able to refer you to the Older Persons Advisory Project (OPAP) who can provide a free and independent finance check. As you can see from the article on OPAP elsewhere in this newspaper; tenants have already received additional income in excess of £159,000 over the past 18 months.

## Graduate Trainee Graduates

Hi my name is Gregor Colville; some of you may remember me from an article I wrote in the tenant newspaper two years ago. At that time I was the latest employee to join Weslo Housing Management but I was the first to join as a graduate trainee.

I joined Weslo shortly after completing my Honours Degree at what is now University West of Scotland and a brief summer job at Argyll Community Housing Association. Joining Weslo allowed me to study towards my Postgraduate Diploma in Housing Studies on a part-time basis at Glasgow University while also giving me vast amounts of real experience working with the different departments within Weslo.

I began my training working in the estates department assisting the Housing Officers. Carrying out this role helped me to get a great perspective of what it is Weslo does and how, through the work of Housing Officers and their support staff, we help to manage the communities that you live in. While Housing Officers, Housing Support Officers and the Receptionists are the face of Weslo to so many of you, there are other equally important departments such as Finance and Repairs whose staff help Weslo provide the high quality of service that you experience.

One of the many great aspects of the graduate trainee programme was the opportunity to go on secondment to other housing related organisations. In my time I have had the experience of working at the Strategic Support Unit at Falkirk Council, Almond Housing Association, West of Scotland Housing Association as well as at Shelter Scotland in Edinburgh. While these organisations have different roles to play in the world of social housing they allowed me to see housing through a different perspective and helped shape my views on the problems and solutions in the social rented sector.

I have recently received the news that I passed my final exams and have successfully completed my post-graduate course. University was another great experience, totally different to my under-graduate course. At Glasgow University I was in the company of professionals from throughout the housing sphere, local authority workers as well as housing association employees who were involved in a huge range of housing jobs. This diversity of classmates really brought to life the work, struggles and success stories of the housing sector of which I was able to contribute my Weslo experiences too.

As I mentioned earlier, I began my graduate traineeship in the estates department and, so it is that I have come full circle and find myself once again back there, this time though I am not the assistant but the newest member of the estates team. From July I assumed the role of Housing Support Officer for the Belvedere estate as well as being involved in the management of the Weslo Initiatives properties at Millhaugh Lane, Bathgate, a role I thoroughly enjoy and am excited about being involved in.

Finally, in my article two years ago I stated that I hoped to meet you all at some point, well I now know, that was a little hopeful, however for all of you who I have met I thank you for opening my eyes to the real issues involved in the world of social housing.

I must also thank all the staff at Weslo for their patience and understanding, as well as the help that they provided me in both my academic and professional work that has made the last two years the success I believe it has been.



## Weslo Staff Changes

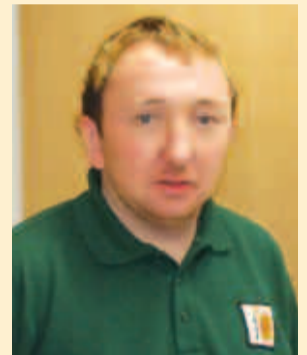
In June we told you that Vicky McIllduff, the Receptionist in the Bathgate Office had gone on maternity leave and was eagerly anticipating the birth of her baby in mid July. Baby Emily was safely delivered on 21 July, just a little bit late, and as we can see below she is bright eyed and alert.



Vicky plans to return to work in January but admits that it is going to be difficult even though Emily will be in her granny's capable hands.

In October David Main joined Weslo's workforce as a Joiner. David is no stranger to Weslo - when he was in his 3rd year at Armadale Academy he spent some time on a work experience placement. He also spent a lot of time with Tom Walker, our former foreman, and benefitted from his vast experience. When he left school he was fortunate to get a joinery apprenticeship with West Lothian

Council. Since qualifying David has also been self employed for a period of time working in the commercial sector. While this was good experience he found that he missed doing jobbing works and meeting different people so when the opportunity arose to join Weslo, he took the chance to come on board. So far he is enjoying the variety of work and will endeavour to do a good job, every time.



## You tell us you are satisfied

Weslo tradesmen are asked to ensure that they issue you with a repairs satisfaction card whenever they complete a job. We monitor these returns on a monthly basis to see just how we are performing and to ensure that you are getting the level of service that you expect.

In the 6 months between May and October over 3,040 jobs were carried out. Over this period 281 tenants returned completed forms and everyone recorded their satisfaction with the way staff dealt with their enquiry and 280 were satisfied with the standard of the repair and the way that the work was completed. We were able to satisfy our less satisfied tenant once our inspector had the opportunity to meet to discuss the problem and agree further remedial action. This has since been completed. Only one of these repairs was completed outwith the stated response time and in accordance with our Repairs Compensation Scheme a £15 compensation payment was made to the tenant.

We are committed to providing the highest possible customer service. If you are not satisfied with any of the services we provide or have any suggestions as to how we might improve please let us know. You can telephone David McLaren, Housing Manager on 01506 639120 or e-mail him direct at david.mclaren@weslohm.co.uk.

Would you like the opportunity to win £75 in our prize draw? All you have to do to be entered into the quarterly prize draw is to complete and return your repairs satisfaction card. We have even made it a freepost card so you don't even have to look for a stamp to post it back - just fill it in and pop it in the post box. William Stevenson of Bathgate did just that and found himself the lucky recipient of a £75 gift voucher. A delighted William, who only recently moved into his home with Weslo, told us that even though he has been a tenant for years with other landlords he has never been fortunate enough to win anything. After all the expense of moving in, the Toys R Us vouchers were especially useful as it was his eldest daughter's birthday that weekend. The gift voucher allowed him to give both his daughters an extra treat. We hope they had a lovely shopping trip.



Above right we see William being presented with his voucher by Repairs Assistant Isabel Flannigan.

## Contacting Weslo couldn't be easier

During the summer we launched our new look web site and in the first 3 months over 1800 people logged in to check it out. We made it easier for you to contact Weslo and to report a repair via the web site. From experience we know that many of you have internet access and indeed many of you have already given us your e-mail address.

At the moment there are almost 220 tenants with e-mail addresses and we have set up an electronic mailing list of those tenants. This allows Weslo to contact all of these tenants - with their permission of course - at the push of a button to seek their views on any proposals that are being considered. So, if you are interested in Weslo contacting you via e-mail why not drop us a line along with your home address to [enquiries@weslohm.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@weslohm.co.uk) and we will record your details for use in the future.

## PayPoint Outlets

As you are aware you are able to make rent payments by card at any retail outlet displaying the allpay or PayPoint logos. Recently First Quench Retailing has gone into administration and you will no longer be able to make payment at any of their stores, these include Threshers, Wine Rack, Haddows and The Local.



You can still make payments at The Post Office and any other shop displaying the allpay or PayPoint logos.

To find your nearest payment outlet visit [www.allpay.net/outlet](http://www.allpay.net/outlet).

**HAPPY NEW YEAR TO EVERYONE FROM WESLO**

# How are we performing?

As a Registered Social Landlord, we are required to complete an annual statistical report to the Scottish Housing Regulator. These figures are then used for comparison against other RSL's.

Each year we set key performance targets to monitor how we are doing throughout the year and at the end of the year we compare our results with other local housing providers. We are also part of the Millennium Benchmarking Group – a group of 8 landlords who share performance information on a quarterly basis and share good practice to improve service delivery.

## So, how are we doing?

All of our tenants have either the Preserved or the Modernised Right to Buy. In recent years the number of sales has reduced. However, as Weslo has acquired properties through the Mortgage to Rent Scheme there has been no dramatic change in the number of properties in our ownership. We are continually looking at ways to increase the amount of properties we have available for rent.

| Number of Properties | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|----------------------|------|------|------|
|                      | 2119 | 2112 | 2096 |

We aim to minimise loss of rental income by prompt, effective recovery of rent arrears. Below you can see that we have achieved consistent performance over the last 3 years in respect of non technical arrears and technical arrears. Technical arrears are generally those due to outstanding housing benefit. We will continue to work hard to collect our rent with the implementation of a robust policy and procedures. Weslo's performance in this field compares favourably with similar landlords in the country.

| Arrears                         | 2007  | 2008  | 2009  |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Current Tenants (non technical) | 0.48% | 0.52% | 0.70% |
| Current Arrears (technical)     | 1.62% | 1.46% | 1.86% |

Over the past 3 years we can see that approximately 50% of our tenants are eligible for housing benefit to pay some, if not all of their rent. Housing benefit accounted for 46.86% of our rent receivable last year. We continue to work with West Lothian and Falkirk Council Revenues Departments to ensure that benefit applications are processed as quickly as possible.

| Housing Benefit                        | 2007   | 2008   | 2009   |
|--|--------|--------|--------|
| Full                                   | 37.94% | 36.17% | 37.97% |
| Partial                                | 14.72% | 14.91% | 12.67% |
| As a percentage of gross rental income | 48.53% | 48.54% | 46.86% |

We aim to manage our void process to minimise rent loss and make the property available for relet as soon as possible. Over the past 3 years we have seen a number of properties needing major repairs or where unfortunately the tenant has passed away. These often result in an increased void period. We are currently reviewing our void procedures to see how we might reduce these figures.

| Void                     | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|
| Number of relets         | 115  | 96   | 100  |
| Average void time (days) | 28   | 33   | 36   |

In each edition of Tenant News we bring you information about the Repairs service.

If you have any comment on the performance figures above or would like to see information about other services please contact Margaret Walker on 01506 639121 or e-mail her on [margaret.walker@weslohm.co.uk](mailto:margaret.walker@weslohm.co.uk).



## Dates for your diary

The Bathgate and Bo'ness Offices will be closed on the following dates:-

|        |                  |
|--------|------------------|
| Friday | 25 December 2009 |
| Monday | 28 December 2009 |
| Friday | 1 January 2010   |
| Monday | 4 January 2010   |
| Friday | 2 April 2010     |
| Monday | 5 April 2010     |
| Monday | 3 May 2010       |
| Monday | 17 May 2010      |

Please note that our offices will close at 3pm on Thursday 24 and 31 December.

## A SAFER COMMUNITY

### Safer Neighbourhood Teams – working in your communities

In April 2007 West Lothian's Safer Neighbourhoods Unit was launched. This police-council partnership initiative was set up to clamp down on antisocial behaviour problems in local communities. The multi-agency unit comprised of 12 community police officers, four neighbourhood response team officers and four youth workers. The unit proved to be successful in the initial pilot areas; reducing the incidence of violence and anti social behaviour and reassuring the communities. In 2008 West Lothian Council funded a further nine police officers to allow the Safer Neighbourhood Teams to extend their cover across the county. The teams are based in each of the nine council wards, and consist of two dedicated Lothian and Borders police officers and a council-funded neighbourhood response officer – all of whom are visible, accessible and known to local people. They work closely with partner agencies such as neighbourhood wardens and housing staff (statutory and voluntary) and the local community to tackle the crime and disorder concerns and issues identified within the neighbourhood.

The scheme was extended to Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh in January 2009 where Weslo has almost 300 properties. Jessie McCue, Housing Officer, and Pamela Menzies, Housing Support Officer, were happy to accept an invitation to attend meetings of the Safer Neighbourhood Team.

Below we see PC's Andrew Kidd, Phil Shepherd, Ian Holmes, SNT Officer Roy Turnbull and Jessie McCue at a recent meeting



Jessie said, "Weslo has always enjoyed a close working relationship with Broxburn Police but working with the SNT has brought a new dimension to the relationship with regular meetings and around the table dialogue. These meetings have allowed open discussions to take place in relation to preventative measures and anti social behaviour problems. This has proved to be successful; being seen to be working together in partnership has reassured both tenants and owners that their concerns and complaints are being taken seriously." One example of how the scheme has helped the community can be seen in Uphall. This is an area where Weslo has constantly received complaints about youths playing football in the grassed areas. In the past we have erected "No Ball Games" signs but these have not always proved to be a successful deterrent. The police have also been inundated with complaints which they have not always been able to resolve. This year after discussing this problem it was decided to write to all the residents in the estate advising that children under the age of ten should be allowed to play ball games within the estate so long as they did not cause damage to property or create a nuisance. The police, who were fully informed of the content of the letter, were then able to respond to complaints appropriately. Where they found that children were behaving in an inappropriate way the parents were contacted and the matter was discussed. Where it was found that the children's parents were tenants we were able to carry out a joint visit to explain the problems to both the parents and the children. Residents have commented that this has reduced the numbers of teenagers and adults playing in these areas and reduced the noise levels and damage to the area. The focus continues to be on the prevention and reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour including vandalism, noise and youth disorder. We are all working towards the same goal – to build safer, stronger communities and make your neighbourhood a safer place to live. Working in partnership, sharing information and engaging with communities is vital if we are to get the right resources in the right place to address particular problems of different communities. To be successful, Safer Neighbourhoods Teams cannot work in isolation – we must all work together with the community to help create a safer environment.

**If you are experiencing a problem, you can contact the Safer Neighbourhood Team on 01506 775000 or contact your Housing Officer on 01506 634060**