



THE TUCSON RENT PROJECT

INNOVATION
FOR **JUSTICE**
and STEP UP
TO **JUSTICE**



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
James E. Rogers
College of Law

THE TUCSON RENT PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

In Spring 2019, the Innovation for Justice Program (i4J) at the University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law and Step Up to Justice (SU2J), a non-profit pro bono law center, partnered to design and launch the RENT Project, community-based tenant education workshops designed to fill tenants' knowledge gaps about their rights and responsibilities as tenants, and prevent evictions. This report provides an overview of the need for tenant education in Pima County, how the RENT Project was designed and adapted to meet community needs, and how the RENT Project operates in the field. This report also summarizes the results of qualitative and quantitative research regarding the effectiveness of tenant education in preventing evictions and advancing housing security, and concludes with lessons learned.

i4J and SU2J are grateful to the Agnese Nelms Haury Program in Environment and Social Justice for its generous financial support, which made the RENT Project possible.

ABOUT THE INNOVATION FOR JUSTICE PROGRAM

The Innovation for Justice (i4J) Program at the University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law is a social justice innovation lab that designs, builds, and tests disruptive solutions to the access to justice gap. Barriers to entry, power imbalances, and flawed processes exclude marginalized populations from effectively using the civil legal system and hinder that system from delivering on its fundamental promise of justice for all. Our interdisciplinary research teams engage in action-driven research and apply design- and systems-thinking methodologies to expose inequalities in the legal system and create new, replicable strategies for legal empowerment.

At i4J, we believe that change does not happen in silos; innovation calls for broad insight, engagement,



and support. We collaborate with community partners in the non-profit, government and private sectors, and lived experience experts from the communities in which we work, to create new models for delivering legal empowerment to underrepresented populations. Through several project-based, community-engaged [learning opportunities](#), i4J students are exposed to the justice gap, trained to think critically about the power of technology and innovation to close that gap, and empowered to be disruptive problem-solvers in the changing world of legal services.

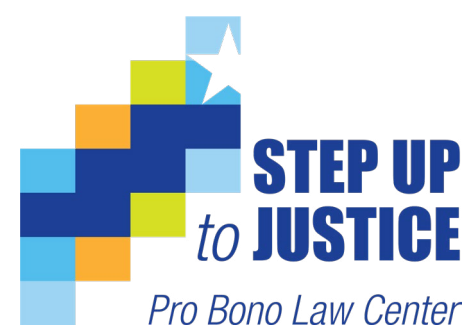
Learn more about i4J at www.law.arizona.edu/i4j.

ABOUT STEP UP TO JUSTICE

Step Up to Justice (SU2J) is a full-service, free civil legal center for low-income individuals and families in Pima County, powered by the talents of volunteer attorneys and the efficient use of technology and funding. As a public service provided by private citizens, SU2J harnesses the energy of volunteer attorneys and channels that resource to members of the community who need but cannot afford legal services. SU2J leverages technological innovations to bring civil legal services to clients where and when they need them. Rather than employing funds to hire staff-attorneys that can help a limited number of clients, SU2J targets funds at the infrastructure necessary to connect clients in need with volunteer attorneys ready to help. In doing so, SU2J reaches clients, recruits volunteers, builds partnerships, and provides free civil legal services efficiently and at a low cost.

SU2J delivers uplifting, affirming experiences to all stakeholders. Clients feel respected, heard, understood, and confident that they have a strong advocate to help them navigate the complicated legal system. Volunteers engage in inspiring, state-of-the-art opportunities that are worthy of time and dedication. Community partners such as courts, schools, and social services are able to share resources and yield better results for clients, volunteers, and the Pima County community.

SU2J was founded on the belief that the infrastructure needed to bridge the gap between volunteers and clients must be robust, innovative, and committed in order to be effective. The optimized delivery of free civil legal service requires efficient, careful financial stewardship. SU2J maximizes donors' return on investment by continually asking, "How can we direct quality, free civil legal services to the most people in need at the lowest cost?" SU2J staff think positively, are motivated to solve problems, and enjoy challenges. They assume ownership for their work and the organization's work, and are proud to be a part of the mission.



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Step Up to Justice is ground-breaking, forward-thinking and committed to advancing efforts to secure equal access to justice for all. Learn more about Step Up to Justice at <http://www.stepuptojustice.org/>.

WHY PIMA COUNTY NEEDS TENANT EDUCATION

When i4J and SU2J conceptualized the RENT Project in 2018, Pima County residents experienced over 13,000 evictions per year (over 1,000 per month).¹ Three quarters of eviction actions filed in Pima County end with a judgment against the tenant and in favor of the property owner.² [Observations of eviction proceedings revealed](#) that less than 20% of tenants appeared at their eviction proceeding, and 90% of those tenants who appeared were self-represented. This is striking because research demonstrates that tenants who have legal representation experience [dramatically more successful outcomes](#) than those who do not have legal representation.

Evictions are tragic for families and for communities. Once evictions happen, stable housing becomes further out of reach. An eviction judgment stays on a credit report for seven years, which makes it difficult for tenants who experience eviction to secure safe, affordable housing. But housing instability is not the only consequence of eviction. Evictions disrupt every facet of an individual's life.³ They [destabilize families and cause severe harm to their economic, social, mental, and physical well-being](#).

¹ Data provided by Pima County Justice Court for eviction filings and judgments from February 2014 to February 2018 (on file with author).

² *Id.*

³ MATTHEW DESMOND, EVICTED: POVERTY AND PROFIT IN THE AMERICAN CITY 5 (2016) (“[W]ithout stable shelter, everything else falls apart.”).

Evictions harm communities too. [Researchers estimate](#) that a quarter of evicted renters are likely to need services, including shelter and emergency medical care, that require extensive financial resources. And evicted children are more likely to encounter the child welfare and juvenile delinquency systems, which also require significant resources. Efforts to care for evicted community members strain state and local resources, leaving little resources to fund eviction prevention strategies.

In the Fall of 2018, i4J conducted a [landscape analysis of eviction in Pima County](#), engaging a broad range of stakeholders in exploring how and why evictions occur.⁴ Evictions stem from overlapping, complex systems-level failures: low wages and a lack of affordable housing require community members to allocate a disproportionately high percentage of their income to rent, and leave them with no financial capacity to absorb unexpected expenses; strict landlord-tenant laws create a legal ecosystem in which one missed rental payment can translate into an eviction within a matter of weeks; and when confronted with an inability to pay rent, tenants struggle to locate assistance and problem-solve with property owners.

At the time the RENT Project launched, there were limited resources in Pima County for tenants at risk of eviction. Rental assistance was scarce. The only federally funded legal aid provider in the County was able to serve less than 6% of those that needed and qualified for its services. And the rapid, rigid eviction process left a very small window to deliver assistance—a tenant served with an eviction notice has just 5 days before they are expected to appear in court for a hearing, and tenants can be removed from their house 6 days after the hearing. The call from community-based social services was consistent: they wanted upstream interventions that could empower tenants to understand their rights and responsibilities, and equip them to take action before the threat of eviction loomed.

There had not been a significant change in Pima County eviction rates from 2018 to 2020, with [pre-pandemic data](#) demonstrating that there were about 1,000 filings per month in January and February of 2020. But [COVID-19 has disrupted eviction trends](#): pandemic-related job and wage loss fueled the eviction crisis and many Pima County renters have fallen behind on rent. Federal- and state-level eviction moratoriums temporarily slowed eviction judgments in Pima County from over 1,000 filings per month to an average

⁴ During the 2018–2019 academic year, i4J applied its design- and systems-thinking framework to a challenge framed as: “Increase housing stability for tenants in underserved communities by reducing the frequency of eviction.” Innovation For Justice, University Of Arizona James E. Rogers College Of Law, [EVICTION IN PIMA COUNTY](#) (Fall 2018).

of 450 filings per month from March 2020 to December 2020. Despite federal and state eviction moratoriums, [70% of these filings resulted in a judgment against the tenant](#) (down only 5% from pre-pandemic rates),⁵ and [experts predict](#) a tsunami of evictions as those moratoriums expire.

Tenants who are evicted during COVID-19 will lack resources to pay for a first month’s rent and security deposit, and will face increasing difficulty locating replacement housing. And in the current health crisis, renters may not be able to seek temporary shelter with family or friends who are practicing social distancing. The need to empower tenants to understand their rights and responsibilities has new and urgent relevance.

THE TUCSON RENT PROJECT

Designing RENT’s Tenant Education Curriculum

The RENT Project engages volunteer attorneys and students in delivering tenant education workshops embedded in social service organizations. The RENT Project curriculum that is presented at these workshops was co-designed with community stakeholders to fill knowledge gaps in the tenant community, and to deliver tenant education where and when tenants want it.

In the fall of 2018, i4J constructed a prototype curriculum for the RENT Project based on interviews conducted with a wide variety of Pima County stakeholders, including tenants, property owners, attorneys, judges, court staff, and social service providers. Three key themes emerged from these interviews: (1) tenants lack accessible, useable information about what to do when they cannot pay rent; (2) Arizona law governing the habitability of rental property is confusing, and tenants need assistance in understanding their options when something is wrong with their rental unit; and (3) tenants would benefit from basic explanations of common issues that lead to eviction and what to do when they are at risk of eviction.

This prototype curriculum was shared with low-income community members, and social and government service providers at a participatory action research workshop. Participatory action research (PAR) combines local knowledge with social science expertise to gather information in

⁵ See *supra* notes 1–2 and accompanying text.

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Sandra Muñoz, a single mother of four, shared with i4j how her eviction experience affected her and her then two children in 2010. Sandra worked as a technical assistant in a Tucson call center when a medical leave caused her to lose income and fall behind on rent. Sandra and her children were evicted from their home. Sandra believes tenants should know and understand their rights. She cautions that evictions create long-term hardships for tenants, including difficulty finding suitable housing in the future. Sandra participated in the development of the RENT workshop curriculum, and spoke at an eviction symposium hosted by the Pima County library.

service of social or environmental change.⁶ PAR workshops involve potential users of a product in the design process, thus increasing the chance that the final version reflects users' perspectives and needs. Workshop participants walked through the curriculum, shared reactions, and recommended changes with i4j research team members. Based on the feedback received at that workshop, the curriculum was revised to align more precisely with community needs.

When the RENT Project launched, the curriculum was divided into three parts to address the three key themes described above:

- [1] What to do if you can't pay rent;
- [2] What to do if something's wrong with your rental; and
- [3] The top ten things Arizona tenants should know.

The curriculum was designed to be delivered in person by a volunteer attorney and supplemented with printed materials provided to workshop participants in a take-home folder. These take-home materials were written in plain English, at a sixth-grade reading level. In response to community feedback, all of the curriculum materials were subsequently made available in Spanish and by video, online at <https://tucsonrentproject.org/>. Workshop participants receive a refrigerator magnet that contains this URL to remind them that these resources are available online.

Launching RENT in the community

Through robust cross-sector community engagement, i4j and SU2J established meaningful relationships with several community stakeholders that serve Pima County's lower-income populations. The RENT Project research team worked with these stakeholders to understand and relieve barriers, such as health issues, lack of transportation, and inflexible or unusual work schedules, that might prevent lower-income community members from attending workshops, and to identify the most promising locations and times to host the workshops.

Stakeholders felt that the optimal workshop locations included community-based organizations, community centers, and libraries situated in lower-income neighborhoods that are at a higher risk for eviction.

⁶ See Davydd J. Greenwood et al., [Participatory Action Research as a Process and as a Goal](#), 46 J. Hum. Rel. 175, 177 (1993). It invites people who are concerned about or affected by an issue to take leading roles in producing and using knowledge about it. See RACHEL PAIN ET AL., [PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH TOOLKIT 2](#) (2011).

Workshops were typically scheduled on Wednesday after 5pm, to afford participants time to travel to the workshop after work. Workshops were also offered during the afternoon or on the weekend to give people with unusual work schedules the opportunity to attend.

The Tucson RENT project offered 18 workshops from its launch in August 2019 until March 2020, when workshops were strategically postponed due to COVID-19. The majority of the workshops were held at either [Step Up to Justice](#) (7 workshops) or [Emerge! Center for Domestic Violence](#) (6 workshops). Other workshops were held at [Sister Jose's Women's Center](#), the [Marana Food Bank](#), [St. Cyril's of Alexandria Roman Catholic Parish](#), and the [Quincie Douglas Library](#). In addition, the following community partners agreed to host RENT workshops and were prepared to do so prior to the COVID-19 closures: [Pima Community College Adult Education Program](#); [Pima Council on Aging](#); the [Center for Opportunity](#); and [Interfaith Community Services](#).

At a typical RENT workshop, participants are greeted by student volunteers and provided a folder with follow-along and take-home resources. They are then asked to sign a legal waiver, a media waiver, and a consent form agreeing to participate in the survey-based research component of the workshop. After signing these forms, participants complete a voluntary one-page, five-question pre-assessment survey designed to capture demographic information and gauge their preexisting understanding of tenant rights and obligations.

Participants then attend a 30-minute live lecture delivered by a volunteer attorney and answer the two-page, eight-question post-assessment survey designed to test whether and how the workshop impacted their understanding of tenant rights and obligations. After completing the survey, participants have 30 minutes to engage with volunteer students to review the curriculum and discuss any additional resources mentioned at the workshop. During this time, a SU2J attorney is available onsite to conduct client intake if any participants have an issue with their rental and want to apply for legal assistance.

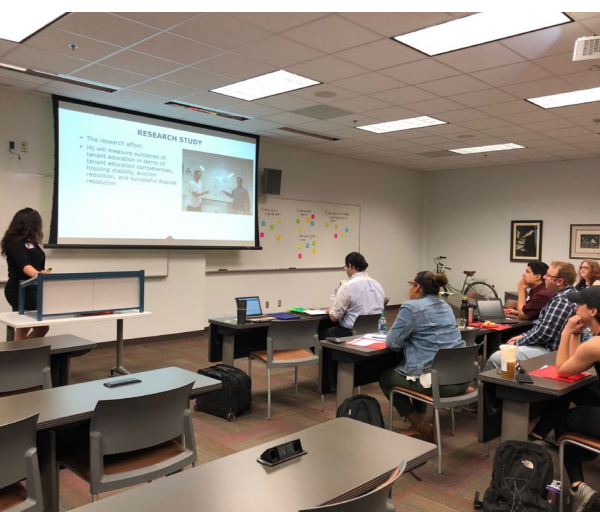
Adapting to Community Need

Since the RENT Project launched, we have continued to engage the community in identifying emerging and unmet community needs, and the best strategies to meet those needs. The three major changes that we made to the RENT Project's deliverables include: (1) adding a new section to the curriculum that addresses rights and responsibilities of tenants who experience

domestic violence; (2) translating the curriculum and all additional resources into Spanish; and (3) rapidly responding to COVID-19 disruptions by creating a video version of the curriculum, moving all materials online, and creating COVID-19-specific tenant resources.

1. Providing tenant education to empower survivors of domestic violence

The first major change to the curriculum stemmed from SU2J's existing partnership with [Emerge! Center for Domestic Violence](#). Emerge! provides survivors with resources including emergency shelter, safety planning, and domestic violence (DV) education. When survivors experience civil legal issues, Emerge! refers them to SU2J for legal services.



Content specific to domestic violence survivors was added to the curriculum based on this partnership with Emerge! and consensus among community stakeholders about the high demand for DV resources, including renter-participants who attended some of our early workshops. Domestic violence survivors are often subjected to eviction together with their

perpetrators. Some landlords find it convenient to evict both the perpetrator and the survivor due to overall disturbance, police presence, or other tenants' complaints. Many evictions may be prevented if survivors knew and understood their rights and the protections they are entitled to. Moreover, if survivors understand their rights as tenants, they could be empowered to report the abuse with authorities right away and potentially avoid further abuse.

Emerge! saw value in offering tenant education to the survivors they serve, but felt that any tenant education needed to include domestic violence implications. Arizona tenant law has certain exceptions for survivors of domestic violence, but survivors must be aware of and satisfy requirements to qualify for the exceptions. For example, although tenants generally have an obligation to pay rent for the duration of their lease, under Arizona Revised Statute § 33-1318, survivors may terminate leases before the end of the lease term and relinquish obligations to pay future rent if they provide written notice to their landlord stating that they experienced domestic

violence or sexual assault *within the past 30 days*. Additionally, the written notice must be accompanied by either a copy of a protective order or a copy of a police report. Equipping survivors with this information may enable them to leave a dangerous situation without fearing legal consequences, such as eviction or civil damages for unpaid rent.

To ensure survivors' security and privacy, and to remove attendance barriers, RENT workshops were held at a private, undisclosed Emerge! location once or twice a month, depending on perceived need. Additional changes to RENT workshop procedures were made to further ensure privacy and safety. For example, survivors who wished to participate in the RENT Project's research component, including the six-month follow-up survey, were given the choice to have Emerge! contact the RENT Project on their behalf instead of the RENT Project contacting the survivor, to align with Emerge!'s practice of not contacting survivors by email (which might not be secure communication). Before COVID-19 struck, we hosted six workshops at Emerge, and had several others scheduled. The Tucson RENT Project looks forward to hosting more workshops at Emerge! once it is safe to commence in-person activities.

2. Providing materials in Spanish

The next major change included offering Spanish versions of the RENT curriculum and all additional resources provided at the workshops. Many community stakeholders serving our lower-income community members voiced the importance of providing tenant education in Spanish. According to [U.S. Census data](#), 41.6% of Tucson's population and 37.8% of Pima County's population is Hispanic or Latinx. Hispanic and Latinx populations are [disproportionately represented](#) among renters, and among those who are extremely lower income and severely cost burdened, making them at a heightened risk for eviction. This risk has been amplified by COVID-19, as [Hispanic and Latinx populations are more likely to have suffered pandemic-related job and wage loss](#). They might also have less access to financial relief such as unemployment insurance, as many "[work in informal ethnic job sectors and also face linguistic, cultural and legal barriers to applying for and collecting unemployment benefits](#)." According to an [NPR poll](#) released January 2021, "[b]lack & Latino households are twice as likely as white families to say they're struggling to pay or have fallen behind on rent or mortgage payments." And according to Princeton's [Eviction Lab](#), which has been studying eviction trends during the pandemic, "[b]lack and Latinx renters in general, and women in particular, are disproportionately threatened with eviction and disproportionately evicted from their homes."

Understanding Pima County's demographic makeup and the needs of its more vulnerable renters was essential to providing effective tenant education that moves the needle toward access to justice.

[Housing instability and poverty exacerbate each other in a vicious cycle:](#) lower-income communities are more likely to experience housing instability, and housing instability reinforces racial and ethnic wealth gaps for generations, affecting childrens' academic achievement, employment opportunities, and lifetime earnings. Understanding Pima County's demographic makeup and the needs of its more vulnerable renters was essential to providing effective tenant education that moves the needle toward access to justice.

3. Pivoting to address new community needs during COVID-19

Due to COVID-19, in-person RENT workshops are postponed until it is safe for our staff, volunteers, and workshop attendees to gather together. Nonetheless, i4J and SU2J have remained committed to providing tenants with additional resources and information to help them understand and navigate their rights and obligations in the face of the pandemic. Additionally, the COVID-19 outbreak provided a unique opportunity for i4j to see how community connections, originally built to support the RENT Project, could be leveraged to widely disperse information about COVID-19 eviction protections and resources, accelerate emergency legal services for tenants in need, and drive policy-level change.

i4J and SU2J were able to leverage their research and expertise to educate tenants on their rights and obligations during COVID-19. For example, at the very start of the pandemic, i4J created a flyer on what tenants need to know during COVID-19. The flyer was circulated to community stakeholders and revised based on feedback before it was widely dispersed by our community and government partners. Final [English](#) and [Spanish](#) versions of the flyer included information on Arizona's Executive Order temporarily delaying the enforcement of an eviction judgment, the Order's implications for tenants, and a sample notice letter that that tenants could fill out and provide to their landlord to qualify for the Order's protection. The flyers also included other resources that tenants at risk of eviction might need, including information on Arizona's COVID-19 Rental Eviction Assistance Program, contact information for emergency services, and resources for rental, foreclosure, and utility assistance, unemployed benefits, and legal aid. Similarly, SU2J created English and Spanish flyers that were distributed by the Pima County Justice Court and directed tenants in need of legal services to SU2J.

Both i4j and SU2J worked quickly to make all RENT Project resources, including the curriculum and new COVID-19-specific eviction resources,

The COVID pivot would not have been possible but for all the community engagement that had happened before and in the development of the RENT Project

available online at <https://tucsonrentproject.org/>. To promote accessibility, i4j created a video version of the curriculum that is also available on the website. SU2J also created a COVID-resource page on its own website <http://www.stepuptojustice.org/covid-19>.

Additionally, i4J and SU2J leveraged their knowledge and expertise to educate the community during virtual community meetings and information webinars. For example, the i4J RENT Fellow presented at a tenant-facing webinar hosted by Representative Raul Grijalva (who serves Arizona's 3rd district), and spoke about legal aid resources during COVID, including those offered by SU2J. The Fellow also participated in weekly meetings with a coalition of community and government leaders collaborating to address the COVID-19-exacerbated eviction crisis. Similarly, SU2J provided several presentations on housing issues to various community groups and partner agencies, including Interfaith, El Rio, AZ Center for Disability Law, and Pima County Council on Aging.

In response to the dramatically increased need for housing-related legal services, SU2J amped up its volunteer-driven service model by recruiting additional volunteer lawyers to assist tenants with a variety of housing-related legal issues and providing Continuing Legal Education seminars to attorneys wishing to volunteer to help tenants. It also raised funds to hire a Housing Intake Specialist, ramped up its wrongful eviction appeals work, and filed several appeals on behalf of tenants who were wrongfully evicted during the pandemic.

SU2J's RENT Leader continued to guide community engagement with a network of partners, however, the focus of the work shifted from RENT Project tenant education workshops to meeting the urgent community need for COVID-19-related legal assistance and education. Instead of coordinating community workshops, the RENT Leader responded to partner referrals, triaged new tenant legal-aid requests, and assisted with post-eviction education.

i4J and SU2J also participated in community resource fairs with county and community partners to connect tenants with legal assistance. Specifically, i4J's RENT Fellow was



physically present at the workshops with a suite of iPads that tenants used to virtually connect to offsite SU2J staff and volunteer attorneys.

Finally, both i4J and SU2J led community advocacy efforts to drive policy-level change. For example, at the start of the pandemic, i4J's then RENT Fellow (now i4J Program Manager) wrote a [policy brief](#) that explains the eviction crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic, and calls on government and community leaders to take actionable steps to prevent evictions and their downstream costs. SU2J was one of several community partners who wrote letters in support of the brief's policy recommendations. i4J and SU2J also led community efforts advocating for federal and state moratoriums on eviction, for example, by authoring these community-backed letters calling on Governor Ducey to reimplement a statewide moratorium on evictions in [December](#), when the CDC moratorium was originally set to expire January 1, and in [March](#), when it was set to expire April 1.

When the pandemic first hit, i4J had just produced its first version of the [Cost of Eviction Calculator](#), which leverages the historic eviction data from [Princeton's Eviction Lab](#) and [Stout's cost-benefit eviction analysis](#) to empower any community to estimate the downstream costs of eviction. The Calculator was selected as a finalist in the [Georgetown IronTech Lawyer Invitational](#). When COVID-19 sparked research and predictions regarding the increased risk of eviction during the pandemic, i4J's then RENT Fellow quickly modified the Calculator to leverage predictive data produced by [Stout](#) and the [Aspen Institute](#). The Calculator can now be used by any community to estimate the downstream costs of eviction associated with the anticipated increase in eviction during COVID-19. i4J has worked with advocates across the country who are generating jurisdiction-specific reports using the Calculator and providing the reports to decisionmakers to support the need for eviction-prevention policies such as eviction moratoriums, rental assistance, and right to counsel during COVID-19. Recently, i4J collaborated with the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) to revise the Calculator's methodology and produce a study on the [Cost of COVID-19 Evictions](#), nationally and by state. This timely research shows that if only a quarter of those at risk of eviction during COVID-19 face disruptive displacement and homelessness, the partial cost of providing just a few social safety nets is \$130 billion dollars. In addition, i4J's [Arizona-specific](#) and [Pima County-specific](#) Cost of Eviction reports were provided to local decisionmakers as part of i4J's advocacy strategy in the weeks leading up to Governor Ducey's decision to extend the eviction moratorium.⁷

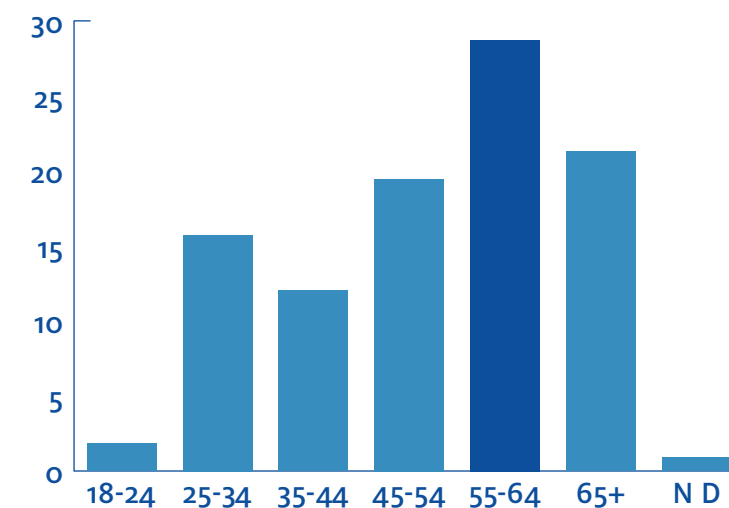
⁷ i4J is grateful to [Family Housing Resources \(FHR\) Cares](#) for its financial support of the Cost of Eviction Calculator.

While i4J and SU2J look forward to resuming tenant education workshops when it is safe to do so, we will continue to leverage our knowledge, expertise, and community relationships to find innovative ways to empower renters and keep people housed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research component of the Tucson RENT Project was designed to collect qualitative and quantitative data regarding whether tenant education could prevent evictions and advance housing security. To gather this data, we conducted three surveys. The first survey was a [one-page, five-question intro survey](#) administered at the start of the workshop, before the volunteer attorney presented the curriculum. The purpose of the survey was to gather demographic data and gauge participants' pre-existing understanding of their rights and responsibilities as tenants. The second survey was a [two-page, eight-question exit survey](#) administered directly after the volunteer attorney finished presenting and was designed to test whether there was any change in participants' understanding after the workshop. The third survey was a [12-question follow-up survey](#) that was administered to workshop participants six months after their participation in a workshop.

Attendees who consented to the follow up were given the choice to either be contacted by email and/or phone, or to contact us. Magnets were provided at the workshop as reminders of RENT Project resources and the follow-up survey. Six months after each workshop, a RENT Fellow attempted to contact participants using their preferred contact method. Participants who could be reached were provided a link to the 12-question follow-up survey, which was designed to take approximately 10 to 15 minutes. Those who successfully completed the follow-up survey were compensated with a \$20 gift card.

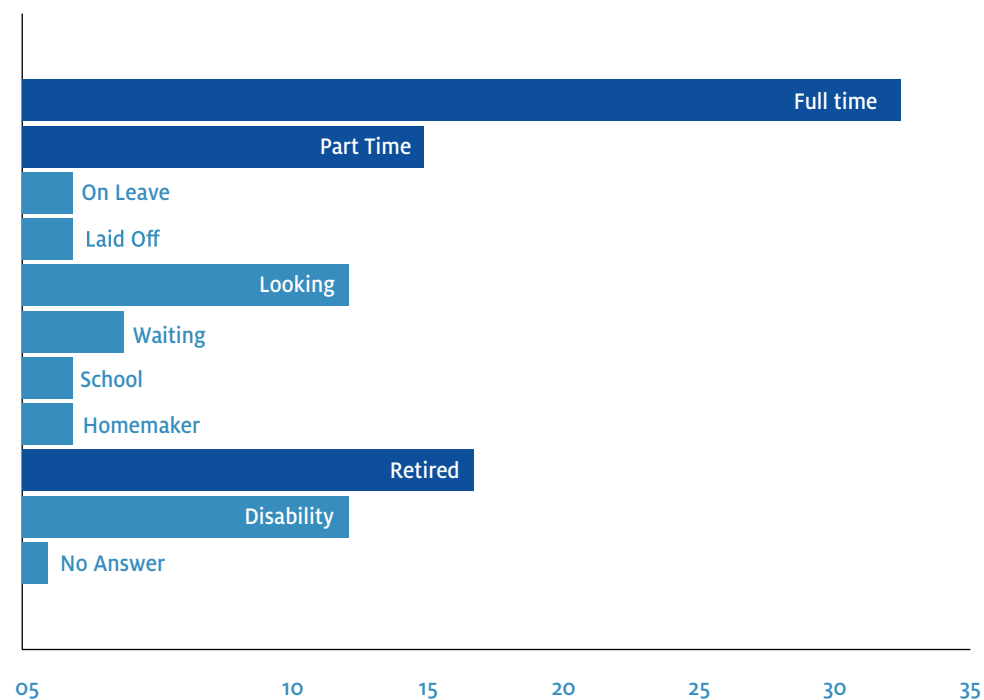


WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

108 workshop participants completed the intro and exit surveys offered at the workshops. Workshop participants tended to be older, with attendees ages 55–64 making the largest proportion. Almost 70% of attendees were 45 or older and half were 55 or older.

Almost half of participants worked full time (32.41%) or part time (14.81%),

while one-in-six participants (16.67%) were retired. About 12% of participants were looking for work, while another 12% were receiving or awaiting approval for disability payments. Other participants responded that they were waiting for work due to health-related reasons (3.70%), going to school (1.85%), temporarily laid off (1.85%), on leave but still employed (1.85%), or were keeping the house or being a homemaker (1.85%), and one preferred not to answer (0.93%).



Of the 108 participants who participated in our workshops, 32 completed the follow-up survey. The distributions of age and employment status in the follow-up survey did not vary significantly from the overall distributions of all workshop participants.

FINDINGS FROM THE INTRO AND EXIT SURVEYS

Understanding of rights and responsibilities immediately before and after the survey

The intro and exit surveys were designed to test whether and to what degree the curriculum offered at the workshop increased participants' understanding of their rights and responsibilities. To determine this, both surveys asked the same three questions: (1) With regards to "what to do when you will miss a rent payment," what is your level of knowledge; (2) With regards to "what to do when something's wrong with your rental," what is your level of knowledge; and (3) With regards to "tenant's rights and responsibilities in Arizona," what is your level of knowledge? Before and after responses to these questions are addressed below.

1.) Knowledge of what to do when you miss a rent payment:

The first question of the before and after survey asked participants to rank their knowledge of what they should do when they miss a rent payment. Of the 108 participants, 105 responded to this question. All 105 participants ranked their knowledge higher after the workshop than they ranked it before the workshop, with more participants ranking their knowledge as "expert" or "substantial" and less ranking their knowledge as "some" "very little" or "no knowledge" after the workshop.

KNOWLEDGE LEVEL	BEFORE	AFTER	DIFFERENCE
Expert knowledge	8/105	19/105	Increased 137.5%
Substantial knowledge	15/105	51/105	Increased 240%
Some knowledge	40/105	29/105	Decreased 27.5%
Very little knowledge	28/105	6/105	Decreased 78.6%
No knowledge	14/105	0/105	Decreased 100%

Before the workshop, only 8 of 105 participants ranked their knowledge as expert and 15 ranked their knowledge as substantial. After the workshop, 19 of 105 participants ranked their knowledge as expert and 51 (almost half of all) participants ranked their knowledge as substantial, an increase of 137.5% and 240%, respectively. The number of participants that ranked their knowledge as "some knowledge," "very little knowledge," and "no knowledge" decreased after the workshop, by 27.5%, 78.6% and 100%, respectively.

2.) Knowledge of what to do when something is wrong with your rental:

The second question asked participants to rank their knowledge of what they should do when something is wrong with their rental. Of the 108 participants who participated in the workshop surveys, 104 provided a rating before the workshop and 105 provided a rating after the workshop. Following the workshop, knowledge increased for all 105 participants, with more participants ranking their knowledge as "expert" or "substantial" and less ranking their knowledge as "some" "very little" or "no knowledge" after the workshop.

KNOWLEDGE LEVEL	BEFORE	AFTER	DIFFERENCE
Expert knowledge	5/104	13/105	Increased 160%
Substantial knowledge	20/104	61/105	Increased 205%
Some knowledge	47/104	29/105	Decreased 38.3%
Very little knowledge	25/104	2/105	Decreased 92%
No knowledge	8/104	0/105	Decreased 100%

The number of participants who ranked their knowledge as experts after the workshop increased by 160%, compared to the number who ranked their knowledge as experts before the workshop. 61 participants ranked their knowledge as substantial after the workshop, compared to 20 before the workshop, for an increase of 205%. And fewer participants ranked their knowledge as “some,” “very little,” and “no knowledge” after the workshop, for reductions of 38.3%, 92%, and 100% respectively.

3.) Knowledge of tenant’s rights and responsibilities in Arizona:

The third question asked participants to rank their knowledge of their rights and responsibilities as an Arizona tenant. This question was not in the original survey and survey participants from the first few workshops did not receive this question. In total 71 participants responded to this question.

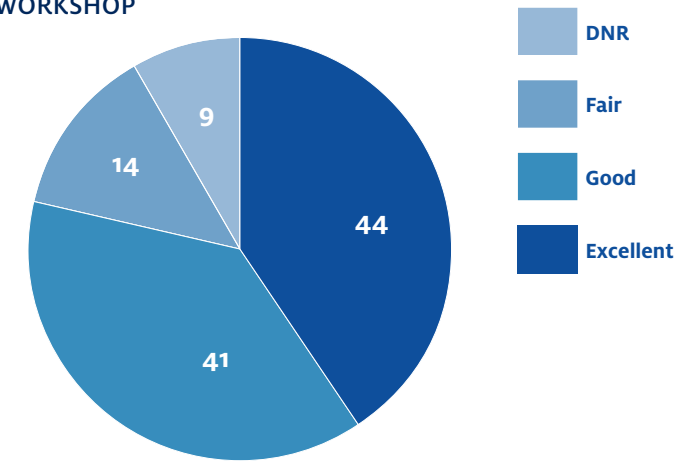
KNOWLEDGE LEVEL	BEFORE	AFTER	DIFFERENCE
Expert knowledge	2/71	10/71	Increased 400%
Substantial knowledge	9/71	45/71	Increased 400%
Some knowledge	17/71	14/71	Decreased 17.6%
Very little knowledge	26/71	2/71	Decreased 92.3%
No knowledge	17/71	0/71	Decreased 100%

All 71 participants ranked their knowledge higher after the workshop than they ranked it before the workshop. Notably, the number of participants who ranked their knowledge as “expert” or “substantial” increased 400% after the workshop when compared to the number of participants who provided those ratings before the workshop. And fewer participants ranked their knowledge as “some,” “very little,” and “no knowledge” after the workshop, for reductions of 17.6%, 92.3%, and 100% respectively.

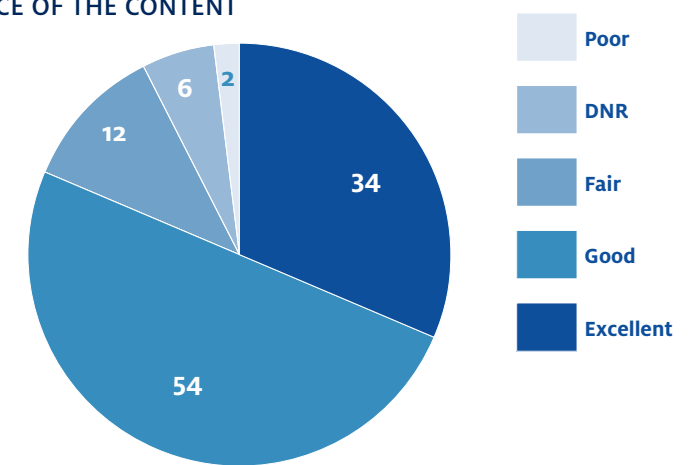
Tenants Rating of the Workshop

In the post-workshop survey, participants were also asked to rate, among other things, the overall workshop, the content and materials provided, the information learned, and how that information will help them in the future. Participants ratings for each question are provided below.

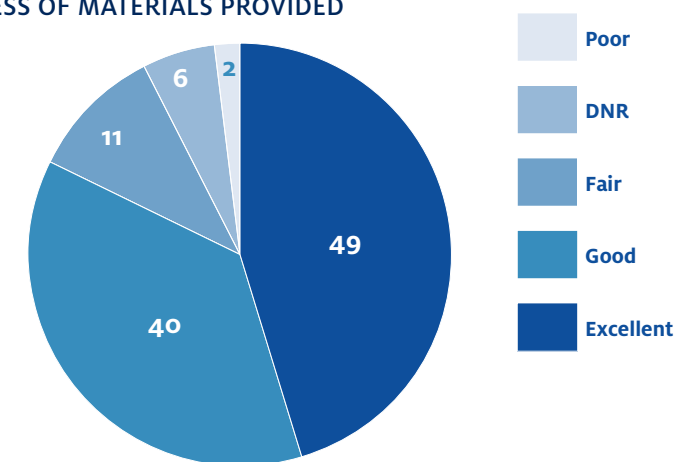
108 PARTICIPANTS RATE THE OVERALL WORKSHOP



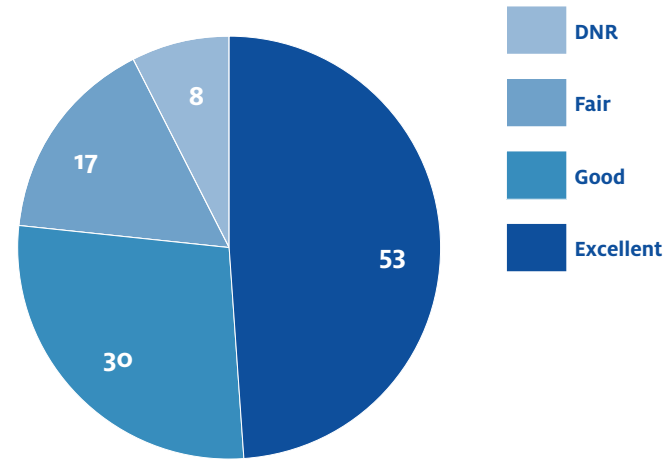
108 PARTICIPANTS RATE THE RELEVANCE OF THE CONTENT



108 PARTICIPANTS RATE THE USEFULNESS OF MATERIALS PROVIDED

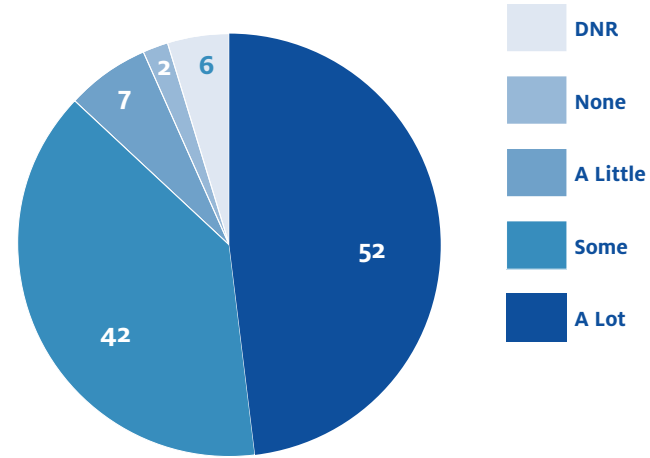


108 PARTICIPANTS RATE THE QUALITY OF VISUAL AIDS

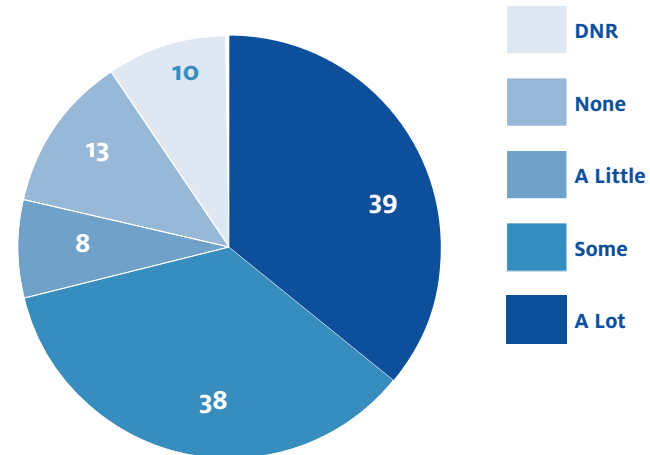


Tenants Assessment of the Information Provided at the Workshop

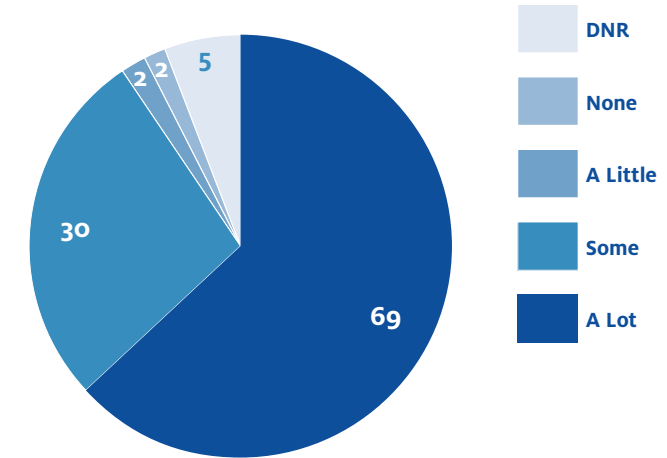
108 PARTICIPANTS RATE THE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION LEARNED



108 PARTICIPANTS RATE HOW MUCH MORE INFORMATION TENANTS WOULD LIKE ON THIS TOPIC



108 PARTICIPANTS RATE HOW THE INFORMATION WILL HELP THEM IN THE FUTURE



Tenants likelihood of recommending the Tucson RENT Project to a friend

Workshop attendees were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, the likelihood that they would “recommend the event to family or friends,” with 1 being not at all likely and 10 being extremely likely. The average rating was 8.37, with almost half (48%) rating the workshop as the highest possible rating of 10, more than 80% rating it as a 7 or higher, and 97% rating it as a 5 or higher.

FINDINGS FROM THE SIX-MONTH FOLLOW UP SURVEY

The purpose of the six-month follow-up survey was to collect quantitative and qualitative data on the effectiveness of tenant education in preventing evictions and advancing housing security. To meet this goal, the survey asked questions including whether and how tenants communicated any recent issues to their landlord, whether and how the problem was resolved, whether they moved and why, and whether they applied anything they learned from the RENT Project.

Our findings are based on data collected prior to and during the COVID-19 outbreak. It is possible that some of the tenants participating in workshops at the beginning of 2020 faced not only housing instability but also wage and job loss, and health-related issues. Results from the follow-up survey are addressed in detail below.

Communicating Habitability Issues:

One of the goals of the RENT Workshop is to teach tenants what to do when they have a problem with their rental, and a key learning outcome included understanding how to communicate the problem with your landlord. The curriculum emphasized the importance of communication, and especially emphasized the need to follow up any verbal communication in writing. To determine whether this learning objective was met, respondents were asked whether they experienced a problem with their rental and what they did to communicate the problem to their landlord or property manager. Twenty-one (65.62%) of the 32 respondents experienced an issue with their rental within six months of attending a RENT Project workshop. **Of those who experienced problems, 17 (80.95%) communicated the issue to their landlord.** Methods of communication varied: six had an in-person conversation, eight spoke on the phone, and three wrote a letter. The fact that respondents opted to have in-person or phone conversations suggests the need to reiterate the importance of communicating in writing. Notably, **all but two tenants who communicated rental issues said that their landlords addressed the problem.**

RENT: Reach out, Explain your situation, Negotiate a payment plan, and Track your payments:

The RENT Project teaches tenants to apply the RENT acronym when they experience a problem with their rental or are at risk of missing a rent payment: Reach out; Explain your situation; Negotiate a payment plan; and Track your payments. To test whether this part of the curriculum improved tenants' problem-solving skills, participants were asked whether they had been at

risk of missing a rent payment in the past six months and, if so, directed to select from a list of multiple choice questions *any* actions they took in response (respondents could choose more than one response). A quarter of respondents said that they were at risk of missing a payment, while three quarters said they were not at risk. **Everyone who was at risk of missing a payment contacted the landlord or property manager in advance.**

The Promise of Tenant Education:

Participants were also asked "In the past six months, have you applied anything you learned from the RENT Project tenant education workshop?" Possible responses included: (1) I've applied something I learned about what to do when I am going to miss a rental payment; (2) I've applied something I learned about rental housing and domestic violence; (3) I've applied something I learned about what to do when something is wrong with my rental; (4) I've applied something I learned about my rights and responsibilities as a tenant; and (5) I've contacted a resource that was mentioned at the RENT workshop. Participants were instructed to select all options that applied to them.

All but one of the 32 respondents applied something they learned from the workshop. More than 40% of the 32 respondents applied something they learned about what to do when something is wrong with your rental, 50% applied something they learned about their rights and responsibilities as tenants, 21.9% applied something they learned about what to do when you are going to miss a rental payment, 18.8% contacted a resource that was mentioned at the RENT workshop, 9.4% applied something they learned about rental housing and domestic violence, and 6.3% selected other and explained that they used what they learned to help other tenants.

To gauge whether tenant education could promote housing stability and prevent evictions, participants were also asked whether they moved in the past six months. Twenty-seven (84.38%) of the 32 respondents did not move within the last past six months, while five (15.63%) did move. When asked what prompted them to move, respondents explained that their lease expired or that they purchased a house. **Notably, none of the tenants who responded to the survey had experienced an eviction or moved to avoid an eviction within six months of attending a RENT workshop.**

LESSONS LEARNED

There is not a one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to housing instability. Every community faces complex and unique challenges, and a **critical first step involves robust community engagement** with lived experience experts and diverse stakeholders to understand those challenges from multiple perspectives. Even after the challenges are defined, continued community engagement is essential to ideating, designing, and launching effective solutions. Through robust engagement, i4J uncovered a need for tenant education, and i4J and SU2J created strong partnerships with non-profit and social service organizations, community centers, and

There is not a one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to housing instability.

A critical first step involves robust community engagement.

libraries to co-design and launch a tenant education program that was wanted and supported by the community. Our RENT Project curriculum fills knowledge gaps identified by tenants and those who interface with tenants. Both the tenants and landlords participated in the initial feedback, and receiving input from both sides was particularly valuable. **By building with and within our community, we created lasting partnerships and ensured that the Tucson RENT Project has wide reach and sustainable impact.** White paper reports and press and social media coverage of this project engaged even broader community support and paved the way for collective solutions for housing and eviction problems in Pima County.

The RENT Project's volunteer model was a cost-effective approach to providing tenant education that also helped build community. Because i4J is embedded within the University of Arizona, and specifically Arizona Law, i4J was able to recruit and train 25 students to help run workshops, and only 2 to 3 volunteers were needed at any given workshop. SU2J's innovative pro bono model means they have access to over 200 attorneys who are ready and willing to volunteer, and SU2J was able to leverage this model to secure 10 volunteer attorneys to provide the curriculum at the workshops. Volunteers participating in the RENT Project were recognized at SU2J's annual volunteer recognition event and in the RENT Project's annual report, which may inspire the volunteer attorneys and students toward future volunteerism.

Running workshops in the community presents challenges in recruiting participants. We learned to cast a wide net to many social service partners and to host workshops at times and in places that were convenient for tenants. In fact, workshops that generated the largest attendance were held at churches and community centers where communities already gathered. By bringing the workshop to the community, we alleviated barriers such as transportation and inflexible work schedules.

The Tucson RENT Project provides a scalable and replicable model for community education that can be adapted to meet other community needs. As explained in this report, the Tucson RENT Project continued to listen and adapt to community needs even after the workshops launched. For example, SU2J's experience with RENT revealed the need to employ the same kind of upstream education with mobile homeowners who rent the land underneath their home. SU2J applied for and received grant funding to develop a new project modeled after the RENT Project to meet the needs of this group of tenants. That project will launch in the summer of 2021.

CONCLUSION

Evictions destabilize communities and escalate low-income individuals' risk of inescapable poverty. The RENT Project works to successfully promote stable housing through eviction reduction, and levels the playing field for tenants by increasing their education, awareness, and capacity to effectively communicate and negotiate with landlords. Tenants who participated in our workshops were equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to communicate and problem solve with their landlords when they experience a problem with their rental or when they might miss a rent payment.

81% of attendees who experienced a problem with their rental communicated the issue to their landlord and landlords resolved the issue 88% of the time. Everyone who was at a risk of missing a rent payment communicated with their landlord and took additional action, such as applying for rental assistance or picking up more hours, to avoid eviction. And not one of the tenants who responded to our follow up survey faced housing disruption as a result of eviction within six month of attending a RENT workshop.

Implementing the RENT Project's strategies provides a permanent, systematic solution to the eviction crisis not only in Pima Country but potentially nationwide. The RENT Project provides a sustainable and replicable model to improve tenant competencies and community engagement toward protecting vulnerable populations from social, economic, environmental, and generational hazards of eviction and homelessness.



THANKS

The work of i4J would not be possible without the support of the community, including our staff, volunteers, and community partners, as well as the community leaders who have been with us since the beginning—thanks to all of you for your many contributions to the Tucson RENT Project. You have helped deliver critical tenant education to Pima County residents by donating your time, your expertise, your feedback, and your encouragement. We hope to continue collaborating to find innovative ways to maintain housing stability for our community. As always, our door is open and your feedback is welcome, so please email or call anytime!

Contributing Individuals:

Karen Alala-Miranda
Tom Bayham
Bonnie Bazata
Brooke Bedrick
Daniel Bowman
Neal Brubaker
Matthew Caylor
Anna Ceder
Manira Cervantes
Antonio Coronado
Sylvia Cuestas
Victoria A Damato
Leslie Diaz Cenia
Daniel Dominguez
Judy Drickey-Prohow
Gabriela Elizondo-Craig
William Fortna
Judge Keith Frankel
Mika Galilee-Belfer
Joy Herr-Cardillo
Maura Hilser
Jacqueline Horwitz
Briana Hoyos
Logan LaFleur
Sylvia Lett
Jordan Paul
Adam Pelz
Tien Phan
Mackenzie Pish
Leighton Rockafellow Jr.
Amanda Rutherford
Myrna Seiter
Brittney Young

Partner Organizations:

[Emerge! Center for Domestic Violence](#)
[Interfaith Community Services](#)
[Pima Community College Adult Education Program](#)
[Pima Council on Aging](#)
[The Center for Opportunity](#)
[The Community Food Bank in Marana](#)
[The Quincie Douglas Library](#)
[Sister Jose's Women's Center](#)
[St. Cyril's of Alexandria Roman Catholic Parish](#)



STAY ENGAGED @UARIZONALAW
law.arizona.edu/i4j
@stacybutler4

