

GETTING PICTURES IN FOCUS

Photography is a fabulous tool. It communicates all sorts of ideas and feelings and does so very quickly. Take a housing association's annual report. A lot of time and effort goes into its researching, writing and editing.

The most important part is undoubtedly the information it carries, the hard facts.

But is the factual information enough? Will it, by itself, be effective in telling people what you want them to know about you?

No, it's not. Two other ingredients are needed for an effective annual report: good design and good photography to make it visually interesting and accessible.

Photography works as a 'hook' which will bring your readers into the annual report. And there is nothing in the visual world more interesting to a human being than the face of another human being.

By looking at the pictures, your readers will already have acquired an impression of you without having yet read a word: about your equal opportunities policies, from the race, gender and age of the people featured; about the style and state of your properties; how busy you are from seeing your staff photographed at work; and how your tenants feel, judged from the expression on their faces.

Photography can give your organisation a human face. It shows how a home can put a smile on someone's lips and hope into their eyes.

Three kinds of photography stand out as useful for an annual report: documentary, public relations and architectural.

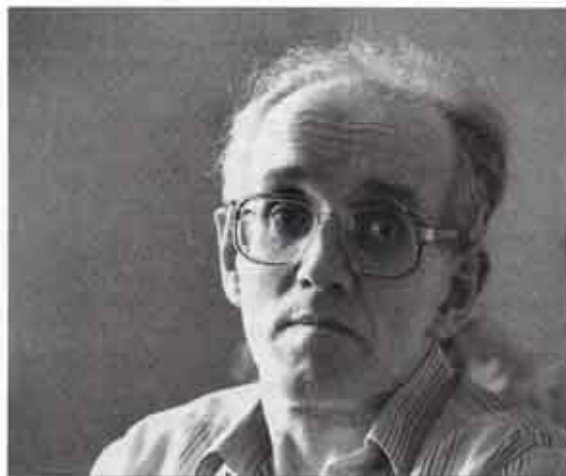
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Documentary photography

Each of your tenants has a story to tell and documentary photography is there to help tell it.

Documentary photography tells your readers who your house and how they have benefited from your services.

There are many stories: stories of people with special needs; stories of old age, and youth; stories of families who lost their home or



never had one to begin with; stories of single parents; stories of young people coming off the streets.

Your staff also have a story to tell about how they give support to those who need it and how they keep your organisation running smoothly.

These aspects of life can be also captured by photography.

For the purposes of public relations and funding, it is not really enough that a housing association does a good job. It must be seen to be doing a good job.

And photography is the best way of making that happen. Photography works.



Public relations

Public relations photography has two main branches: the first makes sure that everyone knows just how busy you've been – it records formal events such as the unveiling of a plaque or the launch of a new scheme.

It is still all too common in this kind of photography to portray two individuals smiling at the camera, shaking hands, both grasping

a hugely over-sized cheque.

Then there are stories of effort and co-operation between your tenants and your staff – 'fun days', 'fun runs' and so on.

The other branch of public relations photography tells your readers who you are, it gives your organisation a face.

This can be done through portraits of staff, committee and tenants – the people who make things happen in your organisation.



You don't have to have perfectly lit shots

of smiling heads. Portraiture, if done

properly, should be more than a smiling face, it should probe a bit to convey a personality – perhaps someone who is efficient and professional, or someone who is caring.

Your readers need to know that staff, board and management are not anonymous pen pushers and paper shufflers – they are human beings who care about their work and go about it efficiently.

Architectural photography

Architectural photography lets people know about the state and style of your properties.

But beware! A plain, small, black and white photo of a building in your annual report will not be enough to tell your readers whether it's an old dilapidated house or a brand new conversion.

A building is big. If it is reduced in size to a three inch by four photograph, we will not be able to see the cracks in the brickwork, the rotting window frames, the missing shingles, the rising damp. Unless we get up close.

That's the secret. The same applies to a brand new conversion or a new building – how can you show it off in the annual report?

Colour helps. Blue skies and fluffy clouds look good. Special lighting and filters also help if you can afford that sort of thing.

But colour is expensive to print

and some housing associations cannot afford it in their annual report.

If you can't afford colour, go for the architectural details, the ones that make your building stand out from the rest – an arch, a lamp post, a nice shiny door.

Or go for the evocative rather than the descriptive. Images that make you think of home – a staircase with sun pouring through the window, a children's bedroom with a pile of soft toys on the bed, flowers on the window-sill.

In the final analysis, housing associations provide, not so much houses, as homes.



USEFUL TIPS

- 1 Use a good camera. To avoid grainy pictures, make sure it uses at least 35mm film and that it has a reasonable lens. Make sure it is an auto focus camera as opposed to a fixed focus. A fixed focus lens cannot be adjusted so the closest you can get to your subject is about four feet without blurring.
- 2 If your photos are going to be printed in black and white in your annual report, use black and white film in the first place. By using colour film for black and white printing, you lose contrast.
- 3 For group photos (say of members of a particular team) make sure you don't cut off their feet if it's a full body shot and that you can see all their faces when you press the shutter (some people like to hide their faces behind their colleagues).
- 4 Never take only one shot of your subject; they may have blinked – or worse, half blinked – which accounts for 99% of a rather silly-looking expressions on people's faces in photos.
- 5 Get at least three or four shots of the same pose.
- 6 When using a flash make sure you are not standing at right angles to a reflective surface. – the light will bounce straight back at your lens leaving you with a lovely shot of... a flash.
- 7 Avoid 'red eye' by getting your subjects to be at an angle to the camera, not looking straight at it.

