



UNITY
HOUSING COMPANY

COMMUNITY CONNECT STRATEGY



2016-2020



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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Unity aims to help people enjoy healthy and fulfilled lives. For us that starts with a good home, but often that is not enough, so we also want to provide broader opportunities to help meet the existing and future needs of our tenants. Housing is more than just the physical dwelling; it is also about environments, people and places where tenants want to live and become involved in the community.

The Community Connect Strategy 2016-2020 will guide Unity’s role in assisting our tenants in responding to, and managing, the many challenges they face and ensuring that we are well placed to provide this assistance. This Strategy has been prepared at a time of considerable growth and change for the organisation and is one more example of Unity being responsive to the challenges we face.

The Community Connect Strategy identifies the various ways that Unity can best respond to the changing needs of our tenants and contribute to improving their lives. Unity has established the following four streams of work to guide us over the next four years. These are:

- Community Engagement and Participation Framework
- Community Development Projects
- Employment and Learning
- Place Making

With Unity focusing on these priorities we believe that our existing and future tenants will be well placed to become active citizens in the communities in which they live.

This document also highlights the role that Unity has as a social landlord. Being a social landlord involves much more than just providing an affordable house or a bed to sleep in. Social landlords have a crucial role to play in promoting social inclusion and addressing barriers to accessible, safe and secure housing.

Social landlords need to embrace a philosophy that ensures all actions and tenancy management decisions promote social inclusion and the independence, preferences and individuality of people living in our properties.

To ensure tenants receive the support necessary to sustain their tenancies, Unity has also continued to develop close working relationships with support providers. The quality services provided by our support partners ensure the best possible outcomes, as we work together to respond to the needs of our tenants.

Through the Community Connect strategy and its companion document, the Community Connect Delivery Plan, Unity will make a difference by helping children get a better start in life; by supporting young people starting out on their career journey; by helping those on low wages having difficulty making ends meet; by supporting the large number of people in our community experiencing mental health problems to regain hope, and ensuring older people are able to feel safe in worry-free housing.

None of this is possible without the enthusiastic support and commitment of our tenants and partners. We sincerely thank them all.

MATTHEW WOODWARD

1.0

INTRODUCTION

Unity Housing's vision is to create opportunities for people to live in affordable and sustainable homes of their choice.

This vision is supported by four strategic priorities:

- Develop the social housing portfolio
 - Develop housing for people with disabilities and older people
 - Develop the affordable housing portfolio
 - Deliver services that enhance social outcomes for tenants and communities.
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Unity wants communities to thrive and believes that all residents are entitled to high quality homes; safe and sustainable neighbourhood environments; and the opportunity for social and economic participation.

Realising this vision is heavily reliant upon Unity forming strong and effective partnerships with tenants, support providers and other stakeholders. We actively work with partners who share our willingness and passion to deliver locally focused services that support the development of sustainable, self-reliant communities with high levels of active citizenship, pride and well-being.

The overarching goal of this strategy is to set out Unity's strategic intent and priority objectives for the next four years in relation to our community development programs (Community Connect Strategy).

Unity is a registered Tier 1 housing provider and aims to ensure that our Community Connect Strategy is tenant centred and maximises a positive impact for our tenants.



2.0 CONTEXT

The development of this approach has been against a backdrop of change in the Community Housing sector, with rapid growth in scale and capacity, and increasing demand for services throughout the sector.

Unity has been at the forefront of this change in SA, with rapid and continuing growth in its housing portfolio across new geographic regions and housing markets. This has of course resulted in Unity becoming part of a broader range of communities and housing a broader and more complex range of individuals within those communities. Unity's tenants have always been at the heart of all it does and the organisation has worked hard to ensure it connects with and delivers for its tenants.

To assist in this, Unity undertakes an annual independent benchmarking exercise, contracted to an independent professional organisation, to measure tenant satisfaction with the services provided by Unity. Based on the results to date, Unity tenants have shown excellent levels of satisfaction with many elements of their housing services. The tenant survey report also identifies areas for improvement and Unity responds by actively reviewing policies and procedures and facilitating continuous improvement.

Unity seeks to build balanced and functional communities through its diverse housing portfolio of low-high needs, low income, and affordable housing. We deliver a continuum of housing options including:

- a boarding house program which provides an entry point for highly vulnerable people into low cost, safe and secure accommodation;
- a community housing program which offers accommodation to people on low incomes, people with a disability, and those experiencing or at risk of homelessness; and
- an affordable housing portfolio providing opportunities for people who struggle in the private housing market and may not otherwise be eligible for subsidised housing.

3.0 THE CHALLENGE

Unity's tenants are more likely to experience barriers to employment, good health and general wellbeing throughout their lives than the average individual. For those in work, most are in low-paid employment.

However our tenants have many strengths and considerable potential. Building on these will be a key theme with the strategic intent of improving outcomes by building on the positive aspects of tenants' lives. There are those tenants who could, with the right opportunities, become independent and no longer require our support. Unity wants our housing to be a vehicle for breaking disadvantage. We want to encourage our tenants to be aspirational and to ultimately move through the housing spectrum and achieve independence.

We recognise that our biggest challenge will be our ability to target our limited resources to optimise the outcomes that we deliver to people who need them.

In order to meet this challenge we will:

- Ensure a robust approach to assessing the feasibility of projects prior to their initiation and apply an evidence based approach;
- Maintain our focus and capacity to measure the outcomes we deliver and demonstrate value for money;
- Work closely in partnership with our communities and partners to share resources and expertise and co-deliver plans that achieve the desired outcomes; and
- Develop and implement initiatives with a wider commercial perspective in order to generate income that will cross-subsidise our benevolent activities.

4.0

AIMS AND PRIORITY OBJECTIVES

Our key aims are that by the end of 2020 Unity will have met our targets in relation to tenant's:

- Increased quality of life;
- Ability to be working and/or learning;
- Feeling that where they live is safe; and
- Being active in contributing towards making their neighbourhood a great place to live.

We will achieve these aims by listening to our tenants concerns and by working towards the following priority objectives in both the delivery of our core services and our partnership working:

(i) **Community Engagement and Participation framework**

Unity recognises that community and stakeholder engagement is intrinsic to the successful functioning of all community based organisations, with the outcomes ultimately influencing all key decisions. With

recognition of the value of community and stakeholder engagement having matured globally, there is now a professional standards framework (eg IAP2) to provide community, practitioner and government confidence in the effective practice of engagement.

- By 2017 Unity will implement a revised Community Engagement and Participation framework that is based on tenant feedback and integrated into the organisations work practices.

(ii) **Community Development Projects**

Unity has established a sound track record of implementing community development projects within our boarding houses and in selected regional locations. Unity will develop projects to achieve community development outcomes across all of its regions and housing programs.

Unity will develop a needs-based project strategy relying on evidence from disciplines that are relevant to community development, tenant consultation and strong partnerships with external agencies and facilities.

- By mid-2017 Unity will establish a process for measuring social outcomes in order to evaluate its community development projects.
- By mid-2017 Unity will develop a fully costed plan for the implementation of a region-based model for community development projects.
- By end 2020 Unity will increase its provision of community development projects to cover all of its housing programs. We will build on existing partnerships with other agencies and will deliver new and innovative projects that are recognised as best practice.

(iii) **Employment and Learning**

Unity will seek to achieve an increase in educational attainment levels across all tenant age groups. We will work with other service providers to deliver learning that is creative and ensures positive outcomes for tenants facilitated through local employment opportunities through our ongoing development projects.

- By the end of 2017 Unity will increase the number of dependents who live in its properties who access educational support.
- By the end 2017 Unity will increase the number of its tenants who are adult learners;
- By the end 2017 Unity will increase the number of its tenants who are on pathways into sustainable employment.

(iv) **Place making**

Unity will build community resilience that is underpinned by greater tenant self-reliance. We will focus on increasing satisfaction with the neighbourhood as a place to live. Community leadership and ownership of neighbourhood improvements will also be a focus.

- By the end of 2017 Unity will establish 'placemaking' as an integral approach across our core business activities, in conjunction with our key partners.

5.0 DELIVERY

To meet our aims we will only work on projects with a clear business case, which meet a defined need within a specific community and have the active support of tenants. We recognise that Unity's key strengths and expertise are as a social and affordable housing provider and we are clear that in the delivery of this Community Connect Strategy we will not become a replacement for other statutory or public services.

In consultation with our tenants we will consider what role is most appropriate for us to play in the delivery of the priority objectives and recognise that this may involve a combination of the following:

- listening to tenants stories and assisting them to convert ideas into our practice;
- providing clear direction to other partners and services that will support our tenants;
- being a commissioner of projects to partner agencies where they have the expertise and track record in delivery;
- being a direct deliverer of services and projects where we do have the expertise and it makes business sense to do this; and/or
- developing or purchasing the capacity to deliver the outputs and outcomes we require.
- track record in delivery that we don't;
- being a direct deliverer of services and projects where we do have the expertise and it makes business sense to do this; and/or
- developing or purchasing the capacity to deliver the outputs and outcomes we require.



6.0 OUR COMMITMENT

We will ensure that the strategic commitment and the necessary resources that are required to deliver this strategy will be made available, and value for money and improved outcomes clear and being achieved.

We will set ambitious but achievable targets and report on progress regularly via our formal meeting and communication structure. These reports will incorporate customer surveys and external data. They will demonstrate clear value for money as well as social impact.

We will have clear communications plans to ensure tenants are aware of the opportunities and support they can access to improve their life chances.

Our staff will be fully trained to understand the Community Connect Strategy and their roles in its delivery, and will provide the highest quality customer service.

In all areas of our work, we will seek to influence local, regional and national agendas with our priority objectives in mind.





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