

Case study – Compass Housing



The inherent sustainability in providing a fundamental human need

Sometimes success is measured by something other than the bottom line. For Compass Housing, it is the smiles on the faces of the many disadvantaged people it places in a home through social and affordable rental housing.

While much of the effort in sustainability is directed at Mother Nature, Compass concentrates on human nature, or what it calls personal sustainability. The company focus is on the group of people who are most susceptible to housing stress.

Established in 1984, Compass Housing is a not-for-profit organisation that alleviates hardship for low to moderate income families by providing secure housing. Compass currently manages properties throughout NSW, including Newcastle, the Hunter Valley, the Central Coast, Mid North Coast and Central West.

In a commentary on our times, Compass operates in a growth industry. Over the last seven years, properties under management have increased from 500 to over 3500 and the company itself has tripled in size. Also characteristic of our times is the way Compass acknowledges the link between environmental and social sustainability.

‘We aim to be more than a housing provider,’ says Executive Manager Business, Environmental & Organisational Development, ►

In brief

Compass Housing has implemented many environmental initiatives. The company’s most significant achievement to date has been installing separate light switches in closed offices and an overriding switch to conserve power. This has saved almost 20,000 kilowatt hours of electricity and about \$5000 annually.

Other initiatives have altered existing processes to reduce environmental impacts. Some of these improvements have increased efficiencies and generated financial savings. With a sustainability champion in each office Compass has:

- encouraged residents and staff to adopt a sustainable lifestyle to conserve resources and save money
- set all printers to double sided and black and white with an automatic shut down after 30 minutes
- established a sustainable lifestyle program for their tenants that includes health & nutrition, emotional well being, community contributions and sustainable living
- established Envirobuild, where housing is constructed from sustainable resources. Smart metering will be employed to encourage reductions in energy and water use.
- developed a waste system that separates organic material, paper and cardboard, and mixed recyclables.
- included hybrid vehicles in the company fleet.



- ▶ Lyndall Robertshaw. 'We encourage our clients to improve their physical and mental wellbeing to ensure they have a brighter future.'

Central to this approach for Compass is including residents, staff and clients in its community development and environmental aspirations. For example, in 2009 Compass launched its total sustainability initiative GROW, a program designed to improve the lives of clients and staff by promoting the benefits of a sustainable lifestyle.

GROW aims to enrich the lives of Compass tenants by enhancing their personal, social, environmental and economic sustainability. The program achieves this by increasing clients' awareness and getting them involved in health and nutrition; bolstering their emotional wellbeing; providing security of housing tenure; promoting community contribution; and practising sustainable living.

Compass joined the Sustainability Advantage Program to increase its commitment to these principles, and more.

'Environmental sustainability and climate change is a direct focus of Compass Housing,' says Robertshaw. 'The housing we build and the way we live has a big impact on the environment, the longevity of the housing, and the economy, as well as peoples' wealth and wellbeing.'

'We want to continue to increase staff, tenant and other stakeholder engagement in environmental sustainability. We want to help our tenants reduce their resource consumption, lower their living costs and reduce their impact on the environment.'

Compass has undertaken many environmental initiatives, but of particular note is the company's Envirobuild Project – a pilot housing venture that will be constructed from sustainable resources and materials. This duplex will include smart metering to manage energy and water use and encourage residents to be more resourceful.

Local and national companies and organisations are supporting the project by donating materials and expertise worth about \$300,000. Robertshaw says Envirobuild will bring experience and knowledge to Compass, its tenants, and the wider community well beyond the cost of the project.

Compass has also undertaken many other environmental initiatives, including tree planting, a tenant-community vegetable garden, and training funded by the Office of Environment & Heritage to educate property managers, asset managers and community development workers about environmental sustainability, energy efficiency and how to engage tenants. Additionally, Compass has cut landfill waste through better waste management and by reducing paper use.

A standout area of achievement for Compass is the interest in Envirobuild from other organisations, businesses and the community housing sector.

However, Robertshaw says the major return for Compass has been the more sustainable attitude and behaviour of staff, clients and suppliers, especially in resource consumption.

'It is wonderful to receive rewards for our work,' she says, 'but of more importance to us is the impact we can have on the lives of our tenants by helping to find them a home, alleviate some of their hardship, and raise their self-esteem.'

Your next step

To find out how your business can join the Sustainability Advantage Program, contact the team:

Email sustainbus@environment.nsw.gov.au

Call 02 8837 6000

Visit environment.nsw.gov.au/sustainbus/sustainabilityadvantage.htm