

NATIONAL AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY HOUSING

Eight NSW housing associations have won or been highly commended for nine National Community Housing Awards in the three years that the awards have been made. There are a total of 6 Award categories with **Best Achievement** and **Highly Commended** in each category. For 2 years, the Award for Corporate Governance was not made due to the small number of entries.

Included here are relevant excerpts from the National Awards report for 1999, 2000 and 2001¹

Awards Winners

1999

Central Tablelands Housing Association Inc.

National Award for Excellence in Organisational Management — Best Achievement 1999

The Central Tablelands Housing Association was formed in July 1997 out of three separate community housing organisations in Orange, Bathurst, and Mudgee. CTHA is the overseeing organisation and has local branches in these three communities. Its main objective is to provide medium to long term housing and service to tenants.

There are 259 units in total throughout the three towns. Through their adoption of an efficient organisational structure and additional initiatives, CTHA has achieved success in organisational management.

Development and implementation of a Best Practice Policies & Procedures Manual.

- Development of stock allocation model.
- Implementation of Information and Technology Strategy
- Establishment and implementation of a centralized administration and accounting system
- Adoption of NSW Federation of Housing Code of Practice
- Audit Review to ensure that administrative processes were being carried out properly.

Each branch maintains a strong connection to the community through both the public and private sector. All branches are involved in joint venture programs.

¹ National Community Housing Forum – National Awards <http://www.nchf.org.au>

For CTHA winning the award has brought recognition to the organisation as well as bolstering confidence. Karen Blake, the Executive Officer of CTHA, said, "*winning the award has justified our organisational structure which also assists other organisations in now moving towards the same structure.*"

The steps taken by CTHA are useful for any organisation that is attempting to coordinate housing in different areas. CTHA has been able to tackle problems related to distance and lack of trust between the branches. Its ability to serve the interests of many different communities without compromising the tenants' welfare is what makes it a model to look to.

Canterbury Bankstown Community Housing Co-operative

National Award for Excellence in Corporate Governance — Best Achievement 1999

The Canterbury-Bankstown Community Housing Co-operative was established in December 1996. It assumed the role of two smaller housing associations in Canterbury and Bankstown. It is made up of 300 rental properties whose target groups include single people with children, larger families with 5 or more children, and older people. Through the establishment of an efficient Board, the Co-op has achieved excellence in Corporate Governance.

The Co-op's ability to balance its business and corporate affairs while still providing fair and suitable housing for people in need is what has enabled it to be successful in corporate governance. The skills, work, and commitment of the voluntary Board of Directors are one of the underlying features of the organisation. To design a new board, the organisation adopted the "portfolio-system" where applications were accepted from qualified people in each portfolio. The sections they divided them up into were Law, Asset Management, Housing management, Financial Management, Community Management, Social housing provision, Organisational Management.

It is through this highly skilled Board that decisions are made to maintain not only the economic success, but also the tenants'.

Through the development of a stronger relationship between the Co-op and the broader community, the Co-op has been able to further improve service to tenants. The Co-op has been responsible for encouraging productive relationships with welfare services, NGOs, local councils, Members of Parliament, etc. Partnerships have been formed with welfare groups to provide the Co-op with assistance in placing tenants in the most appropriate housing. The Co-op has also involved itself in other community development issues such as Bankstown City Council's draft of Affordable Housing Strategy. Co-op workers have played key roles in the policy development and advocacy work of New South Wales Federation of Housing Association. Communication with tenants has been achieved through tenant surveys, newsletters and forums.

Financial structures have also been altered to produce a successful organisation. The Co-op has been able to reduce rent arrears by about 20%. It has developed its own tenant management software, increasing efficiency. One of the ways the Co-op keeps up with maintenance issues is by following a 5-year maintenance plan for all

properties. It has also adopted the NSWFHA's Code of Practice and a three-year business plan to keep them on track. Organisational management has been closely scrutinized to ensure that good policy and procedures underpin financial and other accountability processes.

The Co-op operates under a Policies and Procedures Manual, which ensures consistency and efficiency in all sectors. It is through this manual that it is able to achieve excellence in Board Management, tenant service, and financial areas. The manual establishes procedures for all of the areas and cannot be altered unless voted on by the Board.

The steps employed by the Co-op of attracting a qualified Board can be utilised by any organisation looking to redesign its Board structures. The processes undertaken by the Co-op may be useful for many different community housing organisations - particularly for organisations handling a large group of units. The implementation of tenant management software, for example, is extremely beneficial for large co-operatives.

Community Housing Lower North Shore

National Award for Excellence in Asset Management — Highly Commended 1999

CHLNS provides housing in four areas of the Lower North Shore of Sydney - North Sydney, Mosman, Lane Cove, and Willoughby. It began in 1983 with the aim of creating long-term, affordable housing for low income persons. It now manages 110 properties consisting of boarding houses, units, and a small number of houses and duplexes. Through a Joint Venture program with the North Sydney Council, CHLNS has been able to improve conditions and services for tenants.

The adoption of Joint Venture projects has enabled CHLNS to grow successfully as an organisation. In 1995 North Sydney Council established a three-year Capital Works Program which was endorsed by the Department of Housing. It contributed 30% of the cost of the properties and relied on CHLNS to manage them.

The Joint Venture purchases include: A Boarding House, conversion of a large house into a Boarding House style arrangement and projects focusing on special needs groups such as tenants with an intellectual disability. This Joint Venture Capital Works Program is the only one of its type in NSW. The Joint Venture project has enabled CHLNS with funds to provide more housing to people in need.

Argyle Community Housing Association: Claymore Project

National Award for Overall Excellence in Community Housing — Highly Commended 1999

Argyle Community Housing Association took over management of 80 properties in December 1995 as a way to help the Department of Housing in Campbelltown with the problems surrounding Claymore. Claymore is a suburb in Campbelltown that was faced with problems such as crime, rubbish in the streets, and general community distrust. Proctor Way, in particular, had been associated with these problems and no

one wanted to move in to the area. Over the past four years, Argyle has been able to successfully turn this area around and make it a desirable place to live. Argyle also manages 338 properties in the areas of Macarthur, Wingecarribee, and Goulburn, NSW. **Argyle's ability to continually involve the tenants in the improvement of the housing organisation contributes to its success in community housing.** Without the commitment of the tenants to the improvement of Claymore, the goals of Argyle would not have been achieved. Argyle's first step was to tackle the problem of community distrust. It had to work hard to convince people to stay at Claymore and help make it a promising community. This was achieved through making contact with local agencies and fostering communication between neighbours through ventures such as the establishment of BBQs.

The tenants were involved initially in clean-up projects. This, coupled with general optimism for the area, is what allowed Argyle to continue forward with the rest of the steps. Argyle was then able to bring new tenants into the area with support links and a vision for the area. A community garden was established that was able to increase tenant contact and involvement. Maintenance and repairs at Claymore are dealt with quickly to keep up tenant morale. Argyle supports tenants in taking their own initiative.

Argyle has been able turn the Claymore community around through effective tenant involvement. This is achieved through constant communication and a clear focus on goals.

2000

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme

National Award for Excellence in Service to Tenants and Communities — Best Achievement 2000

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme is proactive in responding to local housing needs and demonstrates a clear commitment to self - evaluation and continuous quality improvement. The scheme was one of the first to achieve full three year accreditation status.

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme offers secure, low cost accommodation to eligible low to middle income earners within the Narrabri Shire. Housing eligibility and allocation are based on need. A written, set criteria based allocation process is in place. Allocation is carried out by two executive members, a tenant representative and the housing manager, with allocations based on the target group, property type and applicant need.

Hume Community Housing Association

National Award for Overall Excellence in Community Housing — Highly Commended 2000

Hume offers its services primarily in the South West Sydney in Liverpool, Fairfield and northern Campbelltown. 78% of Hume's applicants are migrants speaking 16 different languages. The private rental market in SW Sydney is easier than most parts of Sydney with lower than average market rents. However the affordability factor for tenants is exacerbated by loan repayments to migration sponsors, and higher health costs for many tenants caused by pollution, the effects of torture and trauma, and long periods in refugee camps.

Hume currently manages 563 homes under 13 different programs and guidelines and with formal support agreements with 11 external agencies who assist 108 Hume tenants sustain successful tenancies and fulfilled lifestyles.

Hume is quite clear that its business is quality housing management for people on low incomes. Hume's planning and decision making is underpinned by its four commitments: A. to tenants - to offer top quality housing management; B. to applicants - to maximise affordable housing opportunities; C. to communities - to contribute and maintain quality strategic connections; D. to funding bodies - to deliver agreed service to above expectations.

Marrickville Area Community Housing

National Award for Excellence in Service to Tenants and Communities — Highly Commended 2000

Marrickville Area Community Housing Co-operative (MACH) was established in 1983 by Marrickville residents and incorporated with 5 houses being funded in 1984. It presently manages 96 properties.

MACH aims to create a better community through:

1. meeting the housing needs of all the people's of the Marrickville community;
2. by providing a range of self managed, affordable, quality, secure housing;
3. by linking up with other housing and community service providers;
4. through the participation in the political process and the broader housing movement.

2001

Best Achievement

St George Community Housing — National Award for Overall Excellence in Community Housing

Highly Commended

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme — National Award for Overall Excellence in Community Housing

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme — National Award for Excellence in Asset Management

Short listed

St George Community Housing — National Award for Excellence in Service to Tenants and Communities

Narrabri Community Tenancy Scheme — National Award for Excellence in Service to Tenants and Communities

Sapphire Coast Tenancy Scheme — National Award for Excellence in Innovation