



Annual Report 2020



OUR VISION, MISSION, VALUES

OUR VISION

Our vision is to enhance lives through community housing. Our purpose is to work together to provide safe and affordable homes that strengthen lives and communities.

Formed in 1984, Link Housing is one of the longest-running not-for-profit Community Housing Providers in NSW.

OUR MISSION

We currently manage close to 4,000 homes, accommodating more than 6,000 residents across metro NSW. We provide:

- social housing
- housing for people with disability
- affordable housing
- urgent accommodation and housing assistance
- support services and programs through a network of partners.

OUR STRATEGY

Our strategy 2018–2023 guides the work we do and includes the following strategic pillars and goals:

- **People**
empowering and engaging tenants and staff to deliver quality outcomes
- **Partnerships**
being a partner of choice
- **Places**
providing 7,500 quality homes for those in need
- **Performance**
delivering a legacy of strong governance and financial performance.

OUR VALUES

We are guided by our values, which support our culture:



Ethical

Through transparency, fairness, honesty



Excellence

In everything we do



Respectful

Of everyone we engage with



Accountable

To tenants and other stakeholders



Safety

Think safe, work safe, be safe



Leadership

The courage to shape the future

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We wish to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which we work and pay our respect to the Elders both past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This document may contain images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples now deceased.

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CHAIR & CEO'S REPORT

We can look back at the financial year 2020 with significant pride. It represented our 35th year of operation as a Community Housing Provider (CHP) within New South Wales, which we celebrated by organising a hugely successful outdoor festival on Sunday 17 November 2019 for staff, residents, partners and the community. It was a brilliant day full of carnival rides, food and plenty of smiling faces.

The financial year also saw Link Housing continue to expand its services and the number of homes in management. Little did we know at the time the challenges and disruption that we would face early this year.

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has impacted the world in profound ways. It commenced as a public health emergency, which impacted the way we meet, live, work and interact. At Link Housing we were fortunate to be able to harness the energy of an amazing group of staff, to quickly develop a response and continue operating our essential services remotely to ensure continuity to the communities we serve. The earlier investment we made in our information technology and telecommunications also served us very well.

Never has it been more important for us as a community housing sector and indeed as individuals to be open to innovation and change – to be agile, efficient, effective – and flexible to meet new challenges and opportunities that present themselves.

The swift action by the Federal Government with 'Job Keeper' and 'Job Seeker' initiatives have proved a lifeline for many; however, the far-reaching economic impact of COVID-19 is likely to be felt by many workers and businesses for years. It is with the backdrop of this pressure on the Australian economy that CHPs; policy

makers; academics; economists; bankers; developers and builders, have been presenting the case for a collaborative Government investment at a Federal, State and Local level to deliver a substantial volume of social and affordable housing – throughout Australia. The intention is to stimulate the economy, provide a pipeline of jobs to tradies and small businesses, and provide good quality homes for those in need.

As we begin to plan for the move from a health emergency to our economic response, the value and benefit of advocating for the building of community housing to not only create jobs, but also provide stable futures, will never be more important. This is a win-win which we will continue to advocate and seek to deliver.

Continuing the theme of doing more, we must recognise and thank the NSW Government for a year of planning, action and investment. The past 12 months has seen the Government develop a series of strategies to facilitate further investment and partnerships between CHPs, Government and the private sector to deliver more homes and improved services. Examples of this include the consultation on a new 20-year lease for properties managed on behalf of Government, the draft property redevelopment frameworks, draft State housing policy and the \$35 million invested in the Together Home program to provide homes and

support for long-term rough sleepers. We applaud these strategic actions.

The strategic direction taken by the NSW State Government continues to strengthen the foundations of the community housing sector and will enable us to increase our contribution and become more pivotal in providing diverse housing solutions over the coming years.

One of the most exciting developments during the year has been the expansion of our relationship with Wentworth Community Housing. On 30 June 2019, Link Housing and Wentworth Community Housing signed a Memorandum of Understanding to explore potential partnership opportunities. This ultimately resulted in a Merger Agreement being signed between the two companies on 28 September 2020 and approved by the members at the Extraordinary General Meeting on 26 October 2020.

One of the most exciting developments during the year has been the expansion of our relationship with Wentworth Community Housing.

Whilst the energy and synergy between the organisations has always been clear, it is the potential

Images left to right: Nirmal Hansra, Chair and Andrew McNulty, CEO, Link Housing



for greater advocacy and increased ability to contribute to the delivery of housing solutions, which ultimately makes the merger of our two well respected Tier 1 CHPs the most fascinating ... it places a greater obligation on us to do more.

In contrast, not everything has to be big to be beautiful, or make a dramatic and lasting impact. Over the past year in partnership with Women's Community Shelters, Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Women's Shelter and Twilight Aged Care, the amazing Beecroft House has opened. This incredible community backed project provides homes for 20 vulnerable older women at no cost to the Government. It demonstrates the importance of sometimes simply saying yes to good ideas and working with great partners to iron out the finer detail afterwards. The success of this project has led us to a second project called Mosman House, announced recently, which will provide a further 18 homes for vulnerable older women by December 2020.

In September 2019, Link Housing delivered its second fundraising event, 'Home Sweet 2019', a sleepover sponsored by a range of fantastic companies including Aqualand Australia, Pitcher Partners, Broadspectrum, Community Sector Banking, JLL, Grosvenor Performance Group, Trio Property Group, AON, Thomson Geer, Custance Architects, SR Constructions, Maintrade, Bendigo

Bank, and Extend-a-Home. We raised a tremendous \$181,914 for our long-standing partners, The Burdekin Association, Women's Community Shelters, and the Link Housing Scholarship Program. COVID-19 didn't stop many things at Link Housing; however, it did lead us to defer our 2020 Home Sweet fundraising event into 2021 for the safety of all involved.

Link Housing achieved a solid trading result for the financial year 2020. Property related income increased by 26% to \$52.3 million with net surplus of \$4.5 million and net assets of \$143.7 million including cash of \$19.4 million and property assets of \$188.6 million. We currently manage 3,917 homes and house over 6,000 people.

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None of our achievements for the year would have been possible without the wonderful work of our team of staff, business partners, and Board members who have all been pushing in the same strategic direction throughout the past 12 months, aiming to improve services and do more. We give them our sincere thanks for their commitment and dedication.

We would also like to thank the tenants of Link Housing, particularly those involved in our very committed Tenant Advisory Group, together with our Executive and Senior Management Team, for the skills and hard work throughout the year.

Finally, we would like to thank our fellow Directors for their diligence, careful deliberation, and support throughout the year. Thanks again to Sonja Walters and Julie Savet Ward, who have guided Link Housing with care, compassion and a tenant focus over the past nine years before stepping down from the Board in November 2019, following completion of their highly successful terms.

We continue to hold the belief that housing is a human right and homelessness is a resolvable problem that with focus and investment can be eliminated within Australia.

Nirmal Hansra, **Andrew McNulty,**
Chair, Link Housing CEO, Link Housing

YEAR IN REVIEW

Over the financial year, Link Housing’s board, management and staff sought to achieve goals set out in our 5 year strategy (2018-2023) across the key pillars of: *People, Places, Partnerships and Performance.*

Our People



OUR CLIENTS

Approximately **6,000** people live in our homes with the following demographic profile:

- 50%** aged 55 and over
- 8%** children aged 16 & under
- 55%** female
- 15%** sole parents
- 68%** receive a pension
- 15%** English as a second language*
- 2%** identify as Indigenous

*15% speak a language other than English as their first language. Arabic and Mandarin are the most-spoken languages other than English.

OUR STAFF

2 Office locations
Chatswood & West Ryde

103 Staff

From our offices in Chatswood and West Ryde, Link Housing provides the following services:

- Social Housing
- Housing Assistance
- Affordable Housing
- Disability Housing

Our Places



3,917

Tenancies under management

417

New tenancies (includes turnover)

255

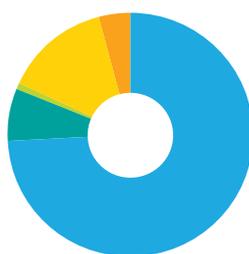
Properties owned

24

Local government areas

SOCIAL HOUSING

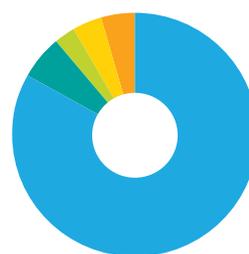
3,070



- 2,299** Capital
- 218** Owned (Nation Building)
- 5** Owned (Miller St)
- 432** Leasehold
- 116** Fee for Service with North Sydney Council

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

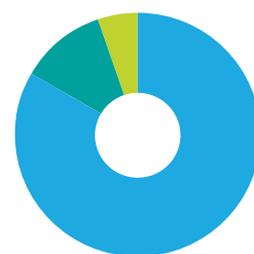
556



- 478** Affordable Leases (private and local government owned)
- 32** Owned (Potts Hill)
- 15** Fee for Service (Councils, Charities)
- 22** Market Rent (Fisher Ave)
- 24** Meanwhile Use (Beecroft House and others)

DISABILITY HOUSING

291



- 243** Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA)
- 33** SDA Respite Tenancies
- 15** Other Disability Accommodation

Our Performance



Revenue

**\$52.6
Million**

Surplus

**\$4.5
Million**

Total Equity

**\$143.8
Million**

2019

**\$139.3
Million**

Cash

**\$19.4
Million**

Assets

**\$235.6
Million**

Tier 1 Registration

We have maintained our registration as a Tier 1 Community Housing Provider under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing.

Working in Partnership



Formal partnerships

including new partnerships with UNSW, Stryder, Macquarie University and Twilight Aged Care.

\$181,914

raised in our charity sleepover, *Home Sweet 2019*, with 17 partner sponsors and many more individual and team donors.

Beecroft House opens

in partnership with Women's Community Shelters. Our first affordable housing meanwhile-use property.

Merger agreement signed

with Wentworth Community Housing with a target to become *Link Wentworth Housing Ltd* on 31 March 2021.



Awarded 23 Together Home

places by the NSW Government to help those experiencing homelessness into safe and secure housing. Working in partnership with CatholicCare, Dignity and others.

Strengthening connections

with our Indigenous partners, clients, staff and the community through the *formalisation of our commitment to reconciliation and endorsement of our first Reconciliation Action Plan.*

OUR RESPONSE TO COVID-19

COVID-19 has challenged everyone, forcing us to find new ways of living, working and communicating with each other. At Link Housing, we responded quickly, transitioning 80% of our staff to working from home, embracing digital technologies, and adapting our service delivery.

Since March 2020, our main focus has been on keeping our staff, tenants, and the community safe – and minimising the impact of COVID-19 on them. Banding together, our staff have worked tirelessly to advocate for the needs of our clients during this difficult time, and provide assistance to each and every person that seeks our help.

KEEPING OUR TENANTS AND STAFF SAFE A CONTACTLESS SERVICE

Since the first restrictions were introduced in March, we worked quickly to pivot our business to provide a contactless service and ensure continued support to our tenants and new clients. As an essential service, we remained open throughout, delivering services via our website, email and phone – where possible. With many of our tenants and clients vulnerable, elderly and less digitally savvy, we found new ways to operate safely with frontline staff working from our West Ryde and Chatswood offices, as well as from their homes.

Residents were kept informed of changes to service delivery and

updates on COVID-19 via timely texts, emails and mail, as well as through our website, special edition COVID-19 newsletters and our social media channels, especially Facebook.

We continued to carry out essential repairs and maintenance, ensuring they were completed in accordance with government health guidelines and social distancing.

Additionally, Link Housing worked closely with other Community Housing Providers (CHPs) in the Northern Sydney area, specifically SGCH and Bridge Housing in partnership with the Women's Housing Company, to coordinate services, with the goal of making it easy for people seeking housing to get assistance when they needed it. Communications at all of our offices and via relevant channels advised clients of our contact numbers to ensure that if one of our offices had to close due to COVID-19, clients could call another local CHP office and get help.

Later in 2020, Link Housing continued to adapt and ensure the safety of our staff, clients and the community by becoming a COVID Safe business.

HELPING TENANTS TO SUSTAIN THEIR TENANCIES

Aware of the toll that COVID-19 might have on our tenants, their finances and mental health, we took a number of steps to provide additional support to ensure they remained in their homes. Some of these measures included:

- Making an early decision to forgo 2020 annual rent reviews, as well as not including some COVID-19

Our Housing Managers continued to respond to tenant needs by visiting them when needed (adhering to COVID-19 social distancing and health guidelines).

stimulus payments in rent calculations for our Social and Disability Housing tenants.

- Liaising with our Affordable Housing tenants and landlords where there were difficulties, to agree on solutions that work for everyone, including rent reductions where possible.
- Working with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and the sector to agree best approaches to help tenants in arrears to sustain their tenancies.
- Encouraging residents who may have lost their jobs or were experiencing hardship to get in touch with us to find ways we could help.

STAYING CONNECTED AND RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY NEED

To adhere to social distancing restrictions, we made the difficult but necessary decision to limit tenant home visits and cancel face to face community engagement programs and events. To stay connected to our residents, our teams got creative and implemented a number of new programs and initiatives:

'Stay Connected' campaign

We launched a Stay Connected campaign to get mobile and email addresses for residents for whom we didn't have these details on file. Tenants were invited to a web page where they could provide these details online or call us to provide them. For tenants who didn't have an email address, our staff helped them to set one up.

Wellbeing calls

Though our regular tenant Home Visits were paused for safety, our Housing Managers continued to respond to tenant needs by visiting them when needed (adhering to COVID-19 social distancing and health guidelines). They also commenced wellbeing calls to check in with our most vulnerable residents and see how they were coping. A tremendous 1,750 calls were made over the period to June 2020. During these calls, Housing Managers also asked residents to complete our annual Health and Wellbeing survey via a new app developed in-house and requested email and mobile numbers to ensure they could stay in touch.

Food boxes

From these wellbeing calls, it was identified that a number of vulnerable residents were struggling to afford or travel to get the food they needed. Our Community Programs team quickly responded to the need by partnering with Rapid Relief to deliver

food boxes. We also partnered with the City of Ryde, Hunter's Hill Council and Harris Farm Markets at Boronia Park in delivering food hampers as part of our care packages provided to Link Housing tenants. This amazing initiative, called the 'Harris Farm Markets' 100 Box Program', delivered 100 hampers every weekday to help those most in need throughout the City of Ryde and Hunter's Hill Council areas during the COVID-19 outbreak. The free hampers were full of fresh produce and other vital food items.

'Virtually Linked' online classes

Our Community Programs team also launched 'Virtually Linked', a series of virtual classes and fun sessions over a month to give residents an opportunity to connect with Link Housing and one another. Residents were able to access a number of classes, including exercise, cooking and art classes, Bingo and workshops on using digital devices and the internet.



Health-related assistance

Link Housing has been working with NSW Health and DCJ on mental health and other health-related issues concerning COVID-19. As we approached the flu season, our Community Programs team were pleased to support Link Housing to partner with Sydney North Health Network (SNHN) to provide our City of Ryde local government area residents, aged between 10-65 years, with free influenza (flu) vaccinations. These were funded by the government, and provided by Harbour Health Care (HHC) in a safe clinic environment. The Community Programs team looks forward to continuing this initiative due to its success.

A TENANT'S STORY OF FINDING A HOME DURING COVID-19

The hard work of the Link Housing team throughout the pandemic is demonstrated through the stories of the people we help and through the feedback we receive from them. One such story is that of Lydia who is a new resident of Link Housing.

Suffering from deteriorating health conditions, Lydia moved to Australia from China to be closer to her daughter in 2014. In November 2019, after family relationship breakdowns resulted in domestic violence and further poor health, her doctor recommended she relocate from Darwin to Sydney to improve her mental health and connect with the Chinese community there.

Her daughter and grandchild moved with her, but their funds were quickly drained from moving and from further medical bills. Eventually the family were left to live on the street, sleeping in their car.

During another hospital stay, Lydia was connected to an NDIS support worker and eventually, to Link Housing staff, Tam and Bella. Within three weeks, Lydia was able to move into new accommodation in Waterloo.

"If we didn't have the introduction to Link Housing at the hospital, we would probably have remained on the streets living in a car and our mental health would have deteriorated significantly."

Lydia's daughter

Lydia and her daughter are especially grateful to have a home during COVID-19, believing Lydia's health conditions would have made her particularly susceptible while homeless:

"I am really supportive of the services Link Housing provides and the way they have integrated my mother into the community housing system, which provides a safety net for thousands of people. I would imagine a lot of people in similar domestic violence situations would be experiencing an increased level of distress due to the pressures of COVID-19."

"As an advocate of community housing, I encourage governments to continue to invest further in supporting people who are or on the brink of homelessness, as with an ever-growing demand of help required, limited funds would have kept my mother on a waiting list."

OUR SERVICES – SOCIAL HOUSING & HOUSING ASSISTANCE

SOCIAL HOUSING MANAGEMENT TRANSFER (SHMT) UPDATE

December 2019 marked the first anniversary since the NSW Government's Social Housing Management Transfer (SHMT) program, which saw thousands of public housing properties previously managed by Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), transferred to Link Housing, and other Community Housing Providers (CHPs) across NSW. This effectively doubled our property portfolio and the number of tenants in less than 12 months. Over the past year, we have continued to work hard to integrate these former public housing tenants into our Link Housing community – and meet their needs. We launched the following key initiatives:

Social Housing Service System Coordination Plan

In July 2019 we officially launched a three-year rolling Social Housing Service System Coordination Plan that we developed with SGCH and Bridge Housing, in partnership with the Women's Housing Company. The plan sets out our partnership arrangements for working together and our collective approach to the strategic management of the social housing service system in Northern Sydney.

The plan is structured around the following five directions to improve and ensure consistency in the social

housing service system coordination in the Northern Sydney District:

- Coordinated responses to housing need
- Clear communication
- A voice for people in housing need
- Collective advocacy to improve outcomes in Northern Sydney
- Continuous improvement.

Read more and download the full plan from our website: linkhousing.org.au/teamwork-delivers-housing-services-in-northern-sydney

Tenant Voice Forum

One of the actions in the Social Housing Service System Coordination Plan was to run a local event for SHMT tenants to attend and share their feedback with us. Working closely with our CHP partners, we ran the first Northern Sydney Housing and Tenant Voice Forum in November 2019. The forum provided tenants with an opportunity to voice their ideas and concerns to inform future planning and service delivery. There was a series of facilitated discussions to explore residents' thoughts on key topics, including neighbourhood issues and housing management. The event also provided an opportunity for the tenants from the various CHPs to get to know each and understand the new governance arrangements for social housing in Northern Sydney.

Extending the plan – Homelessness Services Action

In response to COVID-19, this year we also developed a Northern Sydney Housing and Homelessness Services Action Plan, with SGCH and Bridge Housing in partnership with the Women's Housing Company. The

plan also drew on the input from our homelessness service partners including, Burdekin Association, Catholic Care, Dignity, Manly Warringah Women's Resource Centre, Mission Australia, Phoenix House, Taldumande Youth Services and Women's Community Shelters.

The plan sets our approach for working together to take a proactive, person-centred approach to respond to people experiencing homelessness. It has four key priority actions to improve service coordination and delivery to prevent and address homelessness.

- 1 Improving understanding of and access to housing assistance
- 2 Coordinating our outreach to rough sleepers
- 3 Case-coordination to prevent and address homelessness
- 4 Developing tools and structures to improve our partnership working and service responses.

Maintenance Pop Up

A Maintenance Pop Up was run in September 2019, which saw tenants invited to join Link Housing tradespeople, our property contractor, Broadspectrum, and staff from NSW Government Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC) for a 'working bee' type event at one of our properties in Normanhurst.

Residents were delighted to have a maintenance team onsite to discuss repairs and maintenance and to fix issues immediately. Jobs completed on the day included light fittings made safe, old furniture disposed of, new stoves installed, leaky taps fixed, faulty doors and locks attended to and much more. Issues that we were unable to

be resolved on the day were scoped out and recorded for future attention.

In addition to being pleased about the work completed on the day, tenants also commented on feeling a 'sense of community'. A morning tea, BBQ lunch, coffee cart and chats with neighbours and staff helped to further create this community feeling. The initiative is part of Link Housing's commitment to listening and responding to the needs of our tenants and helping to create homes and communities that residents can take pride in.

OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH NORTH SYDNEY COUNCIL CONTINUES

On 12 March 2020, we celebrated the first anniversary of the transfer of management of 72 North Sydney Council owned social housing properties to Link Housing. The event took place at one of the transferred properties and attendees – including residents who transferred from the DCJ last year, staff and North Sydney Council – heard from our CEO, Andrew McNulty and the Director of Community and Library Services at North Sydney Council, Martin Ellis.

The Link Housing community has been greatly enriched by these residents and their involvement with our programs and events since the transfer a year ago. Residents at the event appreciated hearing about the work that Link Housing has been undertaking on their properties to improve the safety and comfort of their homes, and about future improvement plans.

We take this opportunity to thank the Director of Community and Library Services at North Sydney Council, Martin Ellis, who has been a keen advocate of social housing in the local areas for decades. The community and Link Housing is fortunate to know and work with Martin.

ADAPTING TO MEET THE INCREASED DEMAND DUE TO COVID-19

One positive to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis has been the increased recognition from the NSW

Government of the need to house those sleeping rough. In response, the NSW Government invested more than \$70 million to prevent and respond to homelessness during the pandemic. This included an initial funding boost in March 2020 which consisted of approximately \$20 million allocated to provide rental subsidies to assist vulnerable people in the private rental market through the pandemic, \$14 million allocated for Temporary Accommodation (TA) and a further \$36 million on 8 June 2020 for the Together Home program – the largest housing response dedicated to rough sleeping in NSW history.

Link Housing welcomed this additional funding, which meant we could better manage the significant spike in housing stress, domestic violence clients, and demand for emergency short term accommodation that our frontline Access and Demand team observed at the peak of the pandemic. Working with our CHP partners and Specialist Homelessness Services in the area, the team provided increased targeted, assertive outreach in hot spot areas, and prioritised re-housing people that were sleeping rough into TA.

With an influx of homeless people who had been couch surfing, evicted or moved on from their temporary residence by people who were fearful of contracting the virus, as well as the increased NSW Government funding for TA, Link Housing quickly leveraged the private market and hotels to find more TA for new clients. Additional support came from the community, with local hotels and accommodation providers reaching out to us to offer their properties and/or rooms for TA. Visits to clients who we had secured TA were also conducted – the team aware of the value and need for these visits given the complex situations faced by these clients.

Despite the challenges to service delivery due to COVID-19, such as restrictions to open home inspections and partners working remotely, we found ways to achieve housing outcomes for these vulnerable clients. Anne Campbell, Executive Director Housing and Homelessness, Policy,

Strategy and Commissioning at DCJ, recognised our efforts, saying:

"I think the work you are doing to support vulnerable people and your engagement with DCJ, SHS and other services at this time are critical in supporting people who are very vulnerable."

The Together Home program, launched on 1 July, highlighted the need to exit people into long term housing, rather than back into homelessness – and also saw Link Housing quickly adapt to develop a new model of service to deliver the program in Northern Sydney. Link Housing was selected along with 18 other community housing providers to deliver the program in partnership with the NSW Government.

To ensure a 'housing first' and client-focused approach, we created two dedicated 'Together Home' specialist roles within our Access and Demand team to manage the program. The passionate and committed specialists quickly mobilised to secure appropriate properties for our 23 clients, who were previously homeless, onboard the relevant support services, and settle clients into their new homes.

HOW WE HELPED DURING COVID-19

From 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2020:

We assisted 70 people into Temporary Accommodation (TA).

- 20 were experiencing primary homelessness
- 45 were experiencing secondary homelessness
- 5 were experiencing tertiary homelessness

We permanently housed (in social housing) 42 people.

- 7 were experiencing primary homelessness
- 31 were experiencing secondary homelessness
- 4 were experiencing tertiary homelessness

OUR SERVICES – AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In partnership with private property owners, investors, property developers, local governments and other charitable organisations, Link Housing offers Affordable Housing to people whose household income is not high enough to cover market rental prices in the area where they live or work.

ACHIEVING OUTCOMES

By providing Affordable Housing in addition to Social Housing and Housing Assistance services, Link Housing can offer accommodation options along the full spectrum of homelessness and rental housing supply.

This year, we were delighted to welcome a new Affordable Housing team who, between them, have a wealth of real estate and private sector experience. Combined with their community housing values, together the team have developed their unique approach to letting properties, which has seen them weather the upheaval of COVID-19 – and receive positive feedback from landlords, tenants, partners and Link Housing staff alike.

Throughout 2020, the dynamic team have developed strong relationships with staff in our other frontline departments, as well as teams including Assets and Marketing and Communications, to be able to deliver the best service to their clients.

An example of the links that the Affordable Housing team has with other parts of the business is the

way in which they now work with our Access and Demand team to assist clients who may not be eligible for Social Housing – or may still be on the Social Housing wait list. Our Affordable Housing property managers work closely with staff members in this team to leverage Link Housing's Affordable Housing services and properties to secure affordable and appropriate accommodation for clients that come through to our Access and Demand team. These clients are then provided ongoing support by the property managers, and relevant partner and specialist homelessness services, to sustain their tenancy in their Affordable Housing rental property.

Link Housing was thrilled to see another two of our Affordable Housing families purchase their own units during the year, making a total of four tenants that have been able to purchase their own properties since June 2019.

One of the great benefits of Affordable Housing is that it allows people to manage their rent, while saving to buy their own home. Link Housing was thrilled to see another two of our Affordable Housing families purchase their own units during the year, making a total of four tenants that have been able to purchase their own properties since June 2019.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE OUR SERVICE

We introduced a new property management system, Property Tree,

It was a challenging year for many of our Affordable Housing tenants and landlords. Both are our clients, and we have worked hard to support them during this time..

in July 2019 to support the growth in our Affordable Housing portfolio and enable our property managers to focus more on service improvement. Property Tree is a leading software for Affordable Housing and real estate, greatly improving the customer experience. Its introduction was supported by a communications plan that especially targeted landlords, who were most impacted by its rollout.

As a result of its introduction, automatic operational and transactional communications and notices are now emailed to clients based on actions they take, such as their payment of rent. The new system's features have also helped our property managers to more efficiently manage arrears, tenant and landlord files and accounts, reduce their administration and manual processes, and overall improve the customer experience for both groups.

EXPANDING OUR PORTFOLIO TO MEET DEMAND

Link Housing manages Affordable Housing properties for private owners, as well as local councils including North Sydney Council, City of Ryde, Inner West Council and Lane Cove Council. Throughout the year, we grew our Affordable Housing property portfolio, with more private owners transferring their NRAS properties to Link Housing, and a few local councils launching new developments with Affordable Housing units to be managed by us.

We received keys for 21 new units at Macquarie Park – owned by The City of Ryde Council – for 'key workers' in the Ryde local government area.



We began promoting them through our website and property websites, as well as through the NSW Police and NSW Ambulance recruitment departments to advertise them to new recruits graduating to work in the area.

Another exciting addition were nine brand new apartments in the old Marrickville Hospital site, which were earmarked for 'key workers'. Link Housing took responsibility for managing these properties as part of Council's Affordable Rental Housing Program. Four of the properties were fully accessible and the team worked closely with both the Senior Disability Housing Specialist and Private Rental Specialist to identify clients who would benefit from this accommodation.

PROVIDING SUPPORT DURING COVID-19

It was a challenging year for many of our Affordable Housing tenants and landlords. Both are our clients, and we have worked hard to support them during this time and negotiate the best outcomes for all. With

the stress of COVID-19 coming straight after the Christmas period – traditionally already a difficult time due to added expenses – we referred a number of clients to Mission Australia or Anglicare for financial assistance.

We also received numerous Rental

Reduction Requests from tenants as the impact of COVID-19 was felt. Our team responded by entering the majority of these clients into repayment plans, as well as working closely with them to ensure they do not experience further financial hardships or arrears where possible, and trying to lessen the impact on landlords. We undertook market reviews of all rents on vacant properties to ensure asking prices were accurate in the current environment.

Part of the ongoing support through this period has involved the team increasing their direct telephone and email communications with landlords and tenants to ensure levels of customer service continue, and support is provided.

COMPLIANCE AND COMMUNICATIONS

This year, we focused our Affordable Housing property promotions on premium advertisements across high-traffic websites, such as Domain and Realestate.com, as well as our own website and through our social media channels. New collateral was also developed to promote our services to landlords and investors, and

encourage them to partner with Link Housing in the provision of Affordable Housing. We also launched a campaign during COVID-19 to reach essential workers and let them know about our Affordable Housing services that help them live closer to where they work.

Improvements were made to the customer journey, including adding new web lead forms, eligibility criteria and automated email replies. We have now built a database of around 1000 Affordable Housing leads and applicants since March 2020 to communicate with about our available properties regularly.

Link Housing was pleased to meet our National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) compliance again this year. While completed on time, the team is continuing to refine

the procedures for collecting and collating documents with the Income Review Team to streamline the process. To assist, the Income Review Team wrote a NRAS Processing Manual, which is being rolled out to all team members.



OUR SERVICES – DISABILITY HOUSING

After many years of providing support and some housing previously to our disabled clients, Link Housing officially became a Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) provider in March 2018. SDA is a product under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and is for people with extreme functional impairment or very high support needs requiring specialist housing solutions and supports.

We now provide around 50 SDA Group Homes, which accommodate about 300 people, as well as managing a number of SDA respite homes and non-SDA homes. We are proud to be a SDA provider, as it means we can further assist people with disabilities to pursue fulfilling and independent lives.

2 YEARS OF WORKING WITH THE CEREBRAL PALSY ALLIANCE

March 2020 marked two years of working alongside the Cerebral Palsy Alliance (CPA) in providing people living with a disability greater choice about their living situation, and access to the support they require to achieve their goals. CPA provides family-centred therapies, life skills programs, and equipment and support for people (and their families) living with cerebral palsy, and other neurological and physical disabilities.

Link Housing had successfully tendered to become a SDA provider in partnership with the CPA, being awarded a package under the NSW Government's Specialist Disability Services to commence management of 49 group homes, as well as a 10-bed medically supported facility. Many of our SDA tenants live in the shared accommodation across the group homes, with five tenants generally sharing a home. While Link Housing provides the accommodation, CPA ensures tenants have access to the in-house support they need to live independent lives.

We look forward to continuing our strong relationship with CPA.

A SDA Rent and Income Review was conducted for the first time in March 2020, giving tenants an extended period of time to settle into their new residences before undertaking a review. The review process used a communication strategy that was person-centred and developed in consultation with CPA.

The review targeted 197 SDA tenancies, with feedback sought from all respondents. While some opted not to provide feedback, those that did provided very positive feedback. 68% reported being very satisfied or satisfied (providing a rating of either 9 or 10 out of 10), and 30% reported satisfaction (providing a rating of 7 or 8 out of 10).

In particular, tenants reported being particularly happy with communication provided, proactivity, choice options, reliability, trustworthiness, engagement levels, immediate response and having Link Housing in control of the business.

BECOMING KNOWN AS A DISABILITY HOUSING PROVIDER

As a fairly new provider of SDA, Link Housing has been working hard to lift our profile in the community and with our service partners, while providing high quality information to people living with disabilities and their families. We have improved the content on our website as a means of improving communication on the ways we can help people living with disabilities and included SDA specific information.

We produced specific SDA marketing collateral – including a new brochure – as well as having tailored disability client communications in the tenant newsletter. Other initiatives were incorporating SDA communications in our public relations media strategy, running an Adwords campaign to



Arnel Landicho, Senior Disability Housing Specialist



direct those searching for SDA using search engines to our website to complete a form for lead generation, providing a list of apps to use for the vision impaired and improving accessibility features on our website, and providing a simplified version of the accommodation agreement for new clients.

As part of a strategy to deepen and grow our partnerships with other service providers, we have also had key partners include us on their websites with reference to SDA. Link Housing highly values its relationships with other key providers, and we were thrilled to add 28 new properties from Inala to our portfolio. We are continually looking at ways to expand our disability portfolio with SDA and non-SDA properties.

OUR INCREDIBLE SPECIALIST DISABILITY TEAM

Led by Arnel Landicho, our Specialist Disability team is passionate about their work and believe that housing is essential for people to have a good quality of life and to live with dignity. Based in West Ryde, the

team oversees the tenancies, rentals and maintenance, as well as providing other support, to ensure clients are comfortable in their homes. Together with Disability and Housing Specialist, Mandana Parnian, Arnel encourages the use of a person-centred approach to assist clients and their families in finding the best options for their personal situation.

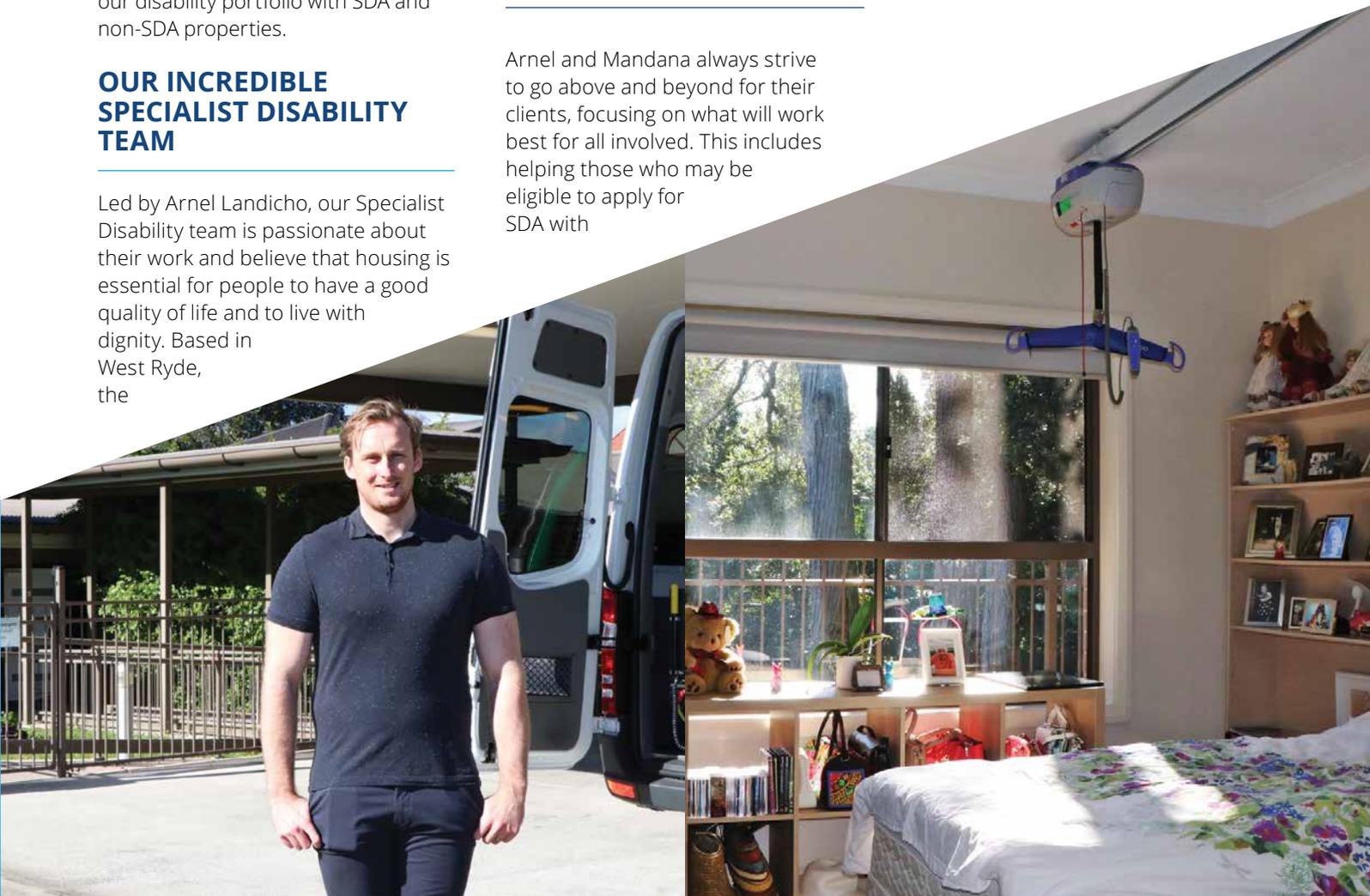
“Affordable, sustainable and appropriate housing helps people with disability to participate in the social, economic and community aspects of life.”

Arnel Landicho, Senior Disability Housing Specialist

Arnel and Mandana always strive to go above and beyond for their clients, focusing on what will work best for all involved. This includes helping those who may be eligible to apply for SDA with

their application forms or by working through the various criteria required to meet the strict approval requirements. They also work in close partnership with many different support services, including our NDIS clients’ support providers, to assist clients overcome other personal difficulties, such as mobility or access to transport.

COVID-19 presented a particular challenge for the team this year. Aware of the sensitive and vulnerable nature of SDA tenants – particularly those in the group home style accommodation – the team worked with support partners and the Asset team to ensure the safety of clients and staff during this time.



OUR SERVICES – TENANCY SUPPORT

Link Housing is committed to providing more than just housing. We strive to help our residents by supporting them with the help they need to sustain their tenancy. Our partnerships with more than 30 support organisations – including not-for-profits, government and corporate – are critical to achieving this, and we value the help and contributions each of our partners makes to the lives of our residents. Support services range from youth services to domestic violence relief, mental health assistance and disability support. We also introduced our own dedicated specialist support team in 2019 who help our residents with complex needs.



A NEW DEDICATED SPECIALIST SUPPORT TEAM

In 2019, recognising the need for a team that could focus specifically on assisting our residents with complex needs, Link Housing introduced a Specialist Support Team (SST). The team has three full time staff, a Social Worker and two Specialist Support Workers, who are responsible for providing direct support and support coordination to these residents. They work alongside our residents and support partners to develop an individualised plan with key milestones to help these tenants successfully maintain their tenancy.

The value the SST brings to our organisation and our tenants' lives is evidenced by the findings of the Australian Social Value Bank (ASVB).

With direct support provided to 177 residents from July 2019 to June 2020, the ASVB calculated the net benefits of the program as \$163,661 – representing a benefit cost ratio of 1.39. The ASVB further noted outcomes including 48 participants with improved overall health, and 43 with improved condition of their Social Housing property, as a result of the program.*

YOUTH INCENTIVE PROGRAM LAUNCHED

We launched a new program in February to support young people living in transitional housing to achieve better futures, by giving them the opportunity to work and save. The Work Rent Incentive Scheme allows young people with jobs to pay the same rent as those without, enabling them to save and spend more of their income without their rent rising once they start earning.

The program was codesigned with our partners, Taldumande Youth Services, Burdekin Association and Phoenix House. Within a month of launch, 13% of eligible young people had signed up for the program. The program has

the potential to make a real difference to the lives of these young people as it will encourage them to develop savings habits, provide an incentive to work, and assist them in moving towards economic independence.

NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES

As a means to improving social cohesion and reducing anti-social behaviour, in early 2020 we developed neighbourhood engagement plans for nine of our complexes. The plans included running morning or afternoon teas every four weeks, with a presentation and discussion of a relevant issue, such as calculation of rent or repairs and maintenance. The plans were based on the success of our engagement with residents at one of our properties in North Ryde last year. This engagement delivered excellent outcomes including reductions in nuisance and annoyance, improved relationships between residents, and resident participation in programs, including an art class and a regular games night.

In addition, we held a number of information sessions and workshops for residents. A useful event held this year was on energy and water, with tips provided on energy and water savings, common problems and how to fix them, hardship programs and bill assistance schemes, and scams to look out for. We also partnered with Olympus Solutions to provide workshops on securing your dream job. Our older residents were able to attend free sessions to get legal assistance and help with later life legal planning.

*Calculations provided by the Australian Social Value Bank, owned by Alliance Social Enterprises (www.asvb.com.au). Produced by Simetrica, using best practice methodology for policy evaluation. These values are used under Licence #a5rR95 with expiry date 31/10/2021.

OUR TENANT ADVISORY GROUP (TAG)

We were delighted to have two new members join our Tenant Advisory Group (TAG) this financial year, adding to the diversity of the group and representation across our service portfolio.

ABOUT THE TAG

Being a part of Link Housing's TAG gives tenants an opportunity to raise and discuss issues, provide advice in relation to our policies, and advocate for support to improve their living situation, as well as that of their neighbours. Their mission is 'to inspire the active voice and enrich community relations', which they have excelled at during this year, even with the challenges of COVID-19.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Despite having to cancel the June 2020 meeting due to COVID-19, the TAG found creative ways to stay in touch and continue with their mission. A number of TAG members

attended online workshops and tutorials via our Virtually Linked program. The August 2020 meeting was able to proceed, using Zoom and phone call conference for those members who could not or did not want to attend physically, while the rest of the team was able to meet in person.

One of our TAG members, John Murray, found a productive way to use the isolation period by building Link Housing Street Libraries. The purpose of the street libraries is to create a sense of community, encourage new social interactions and build friendships over a love of books – all of which were particularly important during this year of social isolation. The libraries are being rolled out at a number of Link Housing properties in Ryde, Hornsby and Eastwood.

INVALUABLE INPUT

The TAG continued to make valued contributions to Link Housing

throughout the year. They provided important feedback on the 'Creating Opportunities, Strengthening Communities 2020-2023' community engagement plan, which outlines the work of the Community and Partnerships team for the next three years. They also were involved in the development of content for the 'TAG Corner', a regular editorial piece in our Link Housing Tenant Newsletter.

Finally, their input into our tenant communications plan for the merger with Wentworth Community Housing was invaluable. The TAG also assisted with a number of important communication pieces about the merger – including a flyer and tenant Q&As. We thank all of our TAG members for their time and efforts this year.



COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Link Housing provides much more than accommodation. We work alongside our tenants to build communities through our range of community programs and events, and by facilitating access to wrap around support for people who need assistance to sustain tenancies. Our goal is to link residents to opportunities to assist them to achieve their goals.

This year marked the first full year of our new organisational structure, which included a dedicated Community Programs team with responsibility for engaging with residents to enhance their lives and communities. The team is committed to helping our residents achieve outcomes that include:

- Improved emotional wellbeing
- Improved job readiness and employment
- Improved feeling of safety and security in their neighbourhood
- Improved overall health
- Improved levels of education and skills
- Improved satisfaction with neighbourhood and community

Throughout 2019-2020, the team worked to deliver programs, events, workshops and initiatives to strengthen the links between our residents and their community and give them an opportunity to learn new skills and share their learnings with others. COVID-19 challenged the delivery of some of these programs,

however the team quickly adapted to ensure residents could continue to learn and be connected.

TEACHING RESIDENTS DIGITAL SKILLS DIGITAL DISCOVERIES PROGRAM

With secured funding from the Australian Government's Be Connected Program, which supports the development of digital skills in the over 55 demographic, we launched a new program called Digital Discoveries to help our residents learn digital skills to keep them connected to their family and friends and broader community.

The 6-week program taught residents how to use a smartphone or iPad and how to use the internet. We were able to hold 12 sessions across Northern Sydney, before we had to pause the program due to COVID-19 restrictions. Despite this, we continued to support digital learning through our online Virtually Linked classes – launched in response to the restrictions.

ARTS AND CULTURE PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE

Link Housing is fortunate to have many talented artists and photographers among our residents, some who are trained and others who simply enjoy participating in arts and crafts. To support their interests in this area, we develop programs and activities in consultation with our residents.

NO PLACE LIKE HOME ART PROGRAM AND EXHIBITION

2019 marked the fourth year of our annual art exhibition, which has become a highlight in the Link Housing calendar. The 2019 travelling exhibition showcased 102 pieces of inspiring art from residents and non-residents, while emphasising the importance of having a safe, secure and affordable 'home' and raising awareness about the need for more community housing. With over 300 participants from all over NSW contributing artworks around the theme '*No Place Like Home*', this year's exhibition was the biggest and best yet. In partnership with City of Ryde, North Sydney Council, Northern Beaches Council and Hornsby Shire Council, launch events and artworks were shown in five locations – at the West Ryde Community Hall, Pop-Up Gallery by North Sydney Community Centre on Miller Street, Wallarobba Gallery in Hornsby, the Blaxland Road Art and Culture Hub and at Creative Space Northern Beaches – in August and September 2019. Special guests to the launch events included the North Sydney Mayor, Jilly Gibson, and exhibition curator, Rachel Carroll, along with a number of local dignitaries, community leaders and the artists.

Community Connections Online Photography Competition

To keep residents' spirits up during COVID-19 and provide another way of engaging with others, we launched an online photography competition on 30 April. Residents were invited to submit photos that reflected what makes

IN FOCUS: PARTNERING WITH UNSW FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Link Housing participated in a research project with the University of New South Wales (UNSW) as part of a design competition for students to generate ideas about how to improve sustainability in social housing through repairs, maintenance, retrofitting and tinkering. The project involved 59 students inspecting properties in groups to look at the layout, design, how the tenants used their homes and their energy

bills. Based on this, the students came up with design plans to improve sustainability. The project was only made possible by the seven Link Housing residents who kindly opened their homes to the students and gave their time. As a result of the project, there were several service improvement opportunities and sustainability ideas identified by the students that can be incorporated in Link Housing's maintenance program. It is hoped this can be a potential long-term partnership between Link Housing and UNSW going forward.



them feel a part of their community or what they love about their home. The entrants could also enter their photographs into our 2020 'No Place Like Home' art exhibition. Seventeen residents entered their photos, with 12 of those to be included in the art exhibition. Everyone who submitted a photo was entered into a prize draw – with three lucky winners receiving \$100 gift vouchers and five receiving \$50 gift vouchers.

THE BLAXLAND ROAD ARTS AND CULTURAL HUB AND COMMUNITY ROOM UPGRADES

Link Housing was excited to officially open our new Arts and Cultural Hub in Ryde in August 2019, to coincide with our annual Link Housing Art Exhibition 'No Place Like Home'. The new hub is the result of a \$65,000 grant from the NSW

Government, which enabled us to transform one of our under-utilised common rooms at a Ryde property into a vibrant arts and cultural hub. The multi-purpose venue is now a stunning gallery space and studio theatre, with new lighting and a state of the art hanging system for displaying high quality artworks.

ART CLASSES AND WORKSHOPS

Free art classes and workshops were held throughout Northern Sydney as a way for residents to express their creativity and have fun engaging with others. In North Ryde, a free morning tea and art class was held each

Friday in the Community Room, with Dorina – a talented artist and Link Housing resident – kindly lending her expertise to lead the classes. At another community-led class in Kent Street, more residents gathered to connect over art. We were pleased to have 17 regular participants to the classes, with seven of those submitting artworks to the *No Place Like Home* Art Exhibition. Additionally, Tai Chi and Art Classes were held for residents in North Sydney.





SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The Link Housing Scholarship Program gives our residents the chance to further develop their pursuit of, or interest in, education, sport, or other arts or cultural activities, through the provision of financial support. The program is open to all Link Housing residents and there is no age limit, however the value awarded depends on the age group of the recipient and what the scholarship is to be used for.

Link Housing was thrilled this year to award a record number of scholarships – 83 in total, to the value of \$120,000 – thanks to the fantastic fundraising effort of the annual *Home Sweet* charity event in 2019. Mayor of Willoughby, Gail Giles-Gidney, presented our recipients with their scholarships at Link Housing’s 35 Year Birthday celebration, which was held in conjunction with our annual end of year celebration.

The program has been assessed for its social impact using the Australian Social Value Bank calculator, noting the improved self-esteem and confidence of the participants. The net benefit of the program was

found to be \$187,938, representing a benefit cost ratio of 2.29. The net benefit per participant was \$2,264.*

COMMUNITY GARDENS

Link Housing works with our residents and partners, including the Royal Botanic Gardens’ Community Greening Team and Vegepod, to create community gardens for our residents to maintain and enjoy. Educational workshops are also held to help tenants learn more about gardening and help to get everyone working together, with valuable advice provided on garden design, the type of garden and its needs, and installing and maintaining the green space.

“We don’t just build community gardens, we also build communities by involving residents in building gardens which helps to develop and empower ownership. The gardens also help to promote a sense of responsibility as they require constant care and attention.”

Philip Pettit, Community Greening Team Leader at the Botanic Gardens & Centennial Parklands Community Greening Team

Each year, Link Housing’s Community Garden Program and Competition is held with the support of the Botanic Gardens Trust. The competition is open to all Link Housing tenants to compete across a number of

categories including Best General Garden, Best Herb and Vegetable Garden, Best Communal/Community or Shared Garden, Best Courtyard/ Balcony Garden, and Best Kid’s Garden. Points are awarded for creativity, maintenance, effort and enthusiasm, sustainability and functionality, with the winners announced at the end of year celebration. This year we had 33 participants in the competition, with Sima Hosseni named Overall Winner and Maureen Bennett the category winner for Best General Garden.

COMMUNITY EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

EVENTS

Every year, Link Housing runs multiple events for residents, appealing to all groups and interests. These events aim to foster a sense of community for our tenants, while also allowing them to pursue their personal interests. These range from small morning teas held at specific properties for residents of a block or area to enjoy, to larger events.

Link Housing joined some amazing women to celebrate International Women’s Day 2020 at Chatswood Library.

In partnership with Willoughby Council and Chatswood Library, Lifeline, Google, Lively and Stryder 70 women came together to celebrate what makes them remarkable. It was a truly uplifting day and an opportunity for attendees to share their stories, get to know each other and celebrate how strong women are.

In 2019 a record number of scholarships were awarded

83

Scholarships in total

\$120,000

Total value awarded

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For Chief Operating Officer Margaret Maljkovic, a speaker at the event, the stand out moment was when attendees stood up to share what makes them unique, strong and truly remarkable! #EachforEqual

LINKFIT PILOT

During the financial year, we concluded some programs such as our successful LinkFit pilot. The pilot was part of our focus on health and wellbeing outcomes, and saw Link Housing partner with a local gym to provide free gym memberships to a small number of tenants who completed a health assessment.

COMMUNITY FUND

Link Housing provides funding to residents for starting a community activity or another initiative that helps foster or build a sense of community, or improve their neighbourhood. Residents submit applications for funding, outlining the project

and its perceived benefits. Some of the funds this year went towards the purchase of a vacuum cleaner for the upkeep of a community room in Gladesville, a new fridge for the community room in Ford St, North Ryde, and the running of an art workshop by resident artist, Dorina, in North Ryde.

RELEASING OUR COOKBOOK 'FROM OUR KITCHEN'

This year, Link Housing released its very own cookbook – *'From Our Kitchen'* – full of recipes from our older residents and staff. This amazing project commenced as a way for us to celebrate the valuable contribution that our older residents make to the community and our culture by passing down their recipes

through generations. We invited residents to contribute their favourite homemade recipes during some of our hosted activities and events during the year – including NSW Grandparents Day and the NSW Seniors Festival.

The result is a beautiful collection of recipes that shows the incredible diversity and multiculturalism of the Link Housing community. In addition to providing a free e-link to the book, we also regularly published recipes on our Facebook page for our followers to try. We hope the cookbook further demonstrates the power of food to bring people together to share memories and meaning.



HIGHLIGHTS



CELEBRATING OUR 35TH BIRTHDAY

Link Housing marked a significant milestone in 2019 – our 35th birthday. To celebrate our journey to become the diverse and inclusive organisation we are today, we threw a big, family-friendly festival, open to the public, on 17 November.

This event was the highlight of the year for our residents and staff, and the festival, held at Chatswood Oval, was attended by over 1500 people, including residents, staff, local community members, partners, family and friends, and members of the public. The event-filled day, which was free for our residents, celebrated our 35th year of providing safe and affordable community housing to the most vulnerable in our community.

The festival was officially opened with a traditional dance from Uncle Terry Olsen, after receiving a Welcome to Country by Ann Weldon from Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC).

Attendees were spoilt for choice with food options, with ten food and drink trucks offering everything from coffee, gelato, waffles, fudge, popcorn and fairy floss through to paella, pizza and Halal Malaysian cuisine. Oz Harvest, Australia's leading food rescue organisation, also came with their food truck.

There was an array of activities to keep everyone busy – from children through to adults – including a petting zoo, reptile talk, jumping castle,

face painting, an obstacle course, an arts and craft table, giant Jenga and chess, a photo booth, massages, mechanical surfboard, bubble soccer and soccer darts, mini putt putt and a North Sydney Bears sports clinic.

The main stage was the centre of the event, featuring non-stop entertainment, with Ryde Councillor, Penny Pedersen, acting as Master of Ceremonies for the day. Attendees listened to performances by With One Voice Sydney Sings, as well as Grammy Award winning staff member, Maddie, and Sarah Breden.

A particular highlight of the day was the 'Link Has Talent' talent show, which was judged by the audience with the help of Santa.

The festival was not only a wonderful celebration shared between members of our community, but also provided an opportunity to connect the general public to the 'heart' of community housing, with attendees chatting with our residents and staff.

There were also a number of community stalls, run by our partners, which provided information on their services to the attendees. These included the Sound of Hope, Taldumande Youth Services, Uniting and The Housing Connection, as well as booths run by the North Sydney Bears, Willoughby Roos and St John Ambulance.

We combined our birthday celebration with Link Housing's annual End of Year Tenant Party and

Scholarship Program Awards Ceremony. The Hon. Jonathan O'Dea, MP gave his time to assist with the ceremonies, while Mayor of Willoughby Gail Giles-Gidney presented our worthy scholarship winners with a record number of awards, to the value of \$120,000.

Part of the funding for the Scholarship Program comes from Link Housing's big charity fundraising event, Home Sweet. This event also raises funds for Women's Community Shelters and The Burdekin Association, in an effort to end homelessness. We were thrilled to also present these beneficiaries with the cheques for the money raised at the festival.

The festival was an amazing way to mark Link Housing's birthday milestone with the public, and we are grateful to the Link Housing staff that planned and ran the massive event – the largest we have ever organised. We were pleased to see so many members of our community and our partners enjoying the day and having fun together, and we thank them for coming to celebrate alongside us.

You can watch a short video of the event on our Link Housing YouTube Channel, Link Housing 35 Years Birthday Celebrations.





BEECROFT HOUSE

HELPING OLDER WOMEN FIND SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Beecroft House is an exciting and innovative housing initiative that provides safe and secure housing for 20 women over the age of 55. Link Housing was honoured to be part of this project – together with Women's Community Shelters (WCS), National Projects and Maintenance, Generous & Grateful, and supported by Twilight Aged Care – in an effort to improve access to accommodation for this client group, who are one of the most at-risk groups for homelessness in Australia.

“The number of older homeless women in Australia increased by over 30% between 2011 and 2016 to nearly 7,000.”¹

*The Hon. Dr Kay Patterson AO,
Age Discrimination Commissioner*

Beecroft House, located in Sydney's north-west, was officially launched during National Homelessness Week, in August 2019. The large historic home has been beautifully renovated as part of the project, providing 20 bedrooms with adjoining private living areas.

The launch followed an intensive year of planning and renovating, after Twilight Aged Care approached WCS in 2018 with an offer to use their vacant

Beecroft property as meanwhile use, transitional housing, for a two-year period.

The planning period involved extensive community consultations, which provided overwhelmingly positive feedback for the project from the local community. There were also a number of working bees to get the property ready for the women to move in.

Link Housing jumped at the offer to be a partner in the 'meanwhile use' project, which provides the tenants with safe, secure and affordable housing for two years. Support is being provided to the residents to identify permanent housing solutions following this period.

The new residents include women from the NSW Social Housing waitlist, as well as some from the WCS network. These are women who have lived full lives, contributing to their communities, caring for others and raising families, but due to financial insecurity or a crisis event in their lives, have found themselves vulnerable to the wider issue of housing affordability.

A MODEL TO IMPROVE AFFORDABLE HOUSING AVAILABILITY

'Meanwhile use' models are where empty buildings, which may remain vacant for a year or two while development applications and plans are in progress or pending approval, are leased and repurposed to offer an affordable and safe accommodation option.

It is hoped that this model will provide an opportunity for future projects

and for other housing providers that might be seeking creative solutions to Australia's worsening affordable housing and homelessness crisis.

It can be an innovative option for property owners or developers of empty or under-utilised properties, with empty buildings being maintained and managed by a third-party during their 'meanwhile use'. This can also help with the insurance risk of having an empty property compared to one that is tenanted.

It is also a positive contribution they can make to their community – providing temporary housing and shelter to people in critical need.

An Australian Social Value Bank calculation was done for the first year of the project, which demonstrated the great benefits it has delivered for the residents and the organisations involved in the primary service delivery. Most notably, the net benefits for the project in its first year were \$394,202 with benefit cost ratio of 3.07*.

We are excited to be involved in another similar project, Mosman House, which has just launched.

We are excited to be involved in another similar project, Mosman House, which has just launched.

Link Housing and our Beecroft House partners are grateful to the organisations and members of the public who fundraised and donated their money, time and assistance to help make this innovative project a reality.

¹ Older Women's Risk of Homelessness: Background Paper, Exploring a Growing Problem, Australian Human Rights Commission (April 2019).

* Calculations provided by the Australian Social Value Bank, owned by Alliance Social Enterprises (www.asvb.com.au). Produced by Simerica, using best practice methodology for policy evaluation. These values are used under Licence #ASRR95 with expiry date 31/10/2021.



HOME SWEET RAISES RECORD FUNDS FOR CHARITY

Home Sweet is Link Housing’s big fundraising event, which aims to end homelessness. We were thrilled this year to raise over \$180,000, for beneficiaries The Burdekin Association, Women’s Community Shelters (WCS) and to our Link Housing Scholarship Program.

First held in 2017, the event in September 2019 was even bigger and better with almost 100 people sleeping over at Freshwater Surf Life Saving Club, including staff, management and directors from Link Housing, as well local business and community ‘leaders and influencers’.

The event is not only an excellent source of fundraising for extremely worthy beneficiaries, but also gives attendees a very small insight on what it is like to sleep without a comfortable bed, and most importantly, raises significant awareness of the number of vulnerable women and young people for whom homelessness is a real risk – if not already a reality.

“Thanks to all of you here today I am quite optimistic and hopeful that we will ultimately solve the challenge of homelessness one day”.

James Griffin, Member for Manly

Manly Warringah District Cricket Club cricketer, Jay Lenton, acted as MC at the event, with Ann Weldon from Metro LALC leading the Welcome to Country. Member for Manly, James Griffin, also spoke and surprised us by presenting a Private Members’ Statement to Link Housing CEO, Andrew McAnulty, on the fundraising event, which he had lodged in Parliament prior to the event.

Attendees were able to hear inspiring stories from Justene Gordon, the CEO of Burdekin Association, and Annabelle Daniel, CEO of WCS, of how the funds raised at the previous event have helped their organisation to improve the lives of women and young people sleeping rough or at risk of doing so.

Latest Census data and new research suggests:

In the five years to 2016, the number of homeless people in NSW increased by

37%

On any given night in Australia,

27,680

young people aged 12–24 are homeless

New research points to

older women

being the fastest-growing group of people experiencing homelessness



“Link Housing’s Home Sweet Charity Sleepover is a way for everyone to show that, as a community, we can make a difference by supporting those most vulnerable in our community.”

Annabelle Daniel, CEO of Women’s Community Shelter

A particular highlight for attendees was being able to hear directly from Link Housing resident and past Scholarship Program winner, Jessica Clark. A goalball champion, Jessica spoke about how her scholarship has helped her pursue her sport and achieve despite disadvantage and her disability.

Guests to the event were treated to a memorable experience that included a delicious dinner of woodfired pizzas from Pizza Picchio, drinks, networking, live music, games, kids’ communal art, and give-aways through a best slipper competition. After braving a

night’s sleep in the cold and on the hard floors of the Freshwater Surf Life Saving Club, guests were treated to a complimentary breakfast from Saltbush Cafe just next door and a yoga class.

This was all made possible by our sponsors, without whom the night would not have been possible. We are exceedingly grateful to these sponsors who generously donated money, furniture, drinks, food and gifts to make the event an amazing experience for everyone. They included Aqualand Australia, Pitcher Partners, Broadspectrum, Community Sector Banking, JLL, Grosvenor Performance Group, TRIO Property Group, Aon Australia, Thomson Geer Lawyers, Custance Associates, SR Construction Pty Ltd, Maintrade, Generous & Grateful, Bendigo Bank, Extend a Home Designers and Builders, Bayfields and Coca-Cola.

The amount raised greatly exceeded our target of \$120,000 (also being the amount we raised in 2017), and meant Link Housing could increase the total funds available for our Scholarship Program – doubling the number of

scholarships awarded to our residents. The scholarships are available to tenants of all ages, including children, and supports them in pursuing their education, sport activities or other special interests by paying for tuition and courses, equipment, uniforms and excursions.

We were pleased to present the worthy beneficiaries of the event’s fundraising with their cheques at our big 35-year birthday festival, and our Scholarship Program recipients were also presented with their awards by the Mayor of Willoughby, Gail Giles-Gidney.

Sadly, due to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions we were unable to host the event in 2020. However, we are already thinking and planning on making the 2021 event even bigger and more successful than 2019.

You can watch a video to see some of the highlights of the 2019 sleepover, including our guest speakers on the Link Housing YouTube Channel, ‘Link Housing Home Sweet 2019 sleepover raises \$180K to Help End Homelessness’.





Images above, left to right:

Board members from Link Housing and Wentworth Community Housing at the merger agreement signing dinner.

Former Link Housing Chair, Sonja Walters and Wentworth Community Housing Chair, Ken Gilbert at the signing of the MOU on 30 June 2019.

MERGER WITH WENTWORTH COMMUNITY HOUSING

In one of the most exciting strategic steps for Link Housing, merger discussions took place over the past 12 months, resulting in a merger agreement being signed on 28 September 2020. With members voting in favour of the merger on 26 October 2020, we are pleased to confirm that Link Housing and Wentworth Community Housing will merge to become a new entity, **Link Wentworth Housing Ltd (Link Wentworth)** on 31 March 2021.

Over the financial year, CEO, Andrew McNulty, supported by the Link Housing Board and Management began and progressed talks with Western Sydney based Community Housing Provider (CHP), Wentworth Community Housing. Discussions focussed on the complementary nature of the Tier 1 CHPs in terms of geography (refer to the map of each organisation's properties as of 30 June 2020 on the next page), and the shared mission to provide secure and affordable housing and services to the community.

EARLY DISCUSSIONS

With market rents continuing to escalate across NSW, and the supply of appropriate social and affordable housing failing to keep pace with demand, both Link Housing and Wentworth Community Housing

recognised the opportunity to do more to solve the housing crisis – by working together. Based on a shared understanding that increasing the scale of our operations would enable us to develop more social and affordable housing and better support our local communities, we started exploring opportunities to collaborate. The first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to commence discussions in relation to exploring collaboration options was entered into on 30 June 2019.

DUE DILIGENCE TO AGREEMENT

In March 2020, with COVID-19 only exacerbating the housing crisis, a second MOU was signed, kicking off a comprehensive due diligence process with the help of KPMG. The due diligence process had many steps including further board discussions on potential benefits of merger, risk assessments, ensuring an understanding of governance and legal requirements, and, overall, sharing of information to ensure the merger was in the best interests of both organisations – their staff, clients and the broader community. We were pleased to have taken the time to get to know each other's business, strategy, operations, culture and values – and formally complete the due diligence period in August 2020.

With our aligned values, vision and mission, a merger agreement was signed in September 2020, to bring the two organisations together under a new name, Link Wentworth Housing Ltd (**Link Wentworth**), with a target Day 1 date of Wednesday 31 March 2021, to begin operating as a single organisation.

A FOCUS ON COMMUNICATIONS

In June 2020, work also began on a communications strategy that would ensure relevant, timely and engaging communications of the news to key stakeholders across both Link Housing and Wentworth Community Housing. The strategy, endorsed by the Boards via a special Board Communications Sub-Committee comprising directors from both organisations, proved successful. Staff, tenants, members, partners, government, contractors and other key contacts responded positively to the merger announcements and remain engaged in the next steps and plans for the future. The focus on communications will continue in the lead up to Day 1 of the new organisation on 31 March 2021, and throughout the 12-18 month integration period.

LEADERSHIP APPOINTMENTS

Another Board Sub-Committee comprising directors from both organisations was set up to lead on selecting a CEO and independent Chair for the new organisation. After an extensive recruitment and interview process, current CEO of Link Housing, Andrew McNulty, was appointed CEO elect of Link Wentworth. As CEO elect, Andrew is responsible for bringing together the best of the two organisations.

Current service areas

- Link Housing core (Northern Sydney)
- Link Housing and Wentworth Community Housing
- Wentworth Community Housing core (Western Sydney and Lithgow)
- 📍 Office locations (Link Housing)
- 📍 Office locations (Wentworth Community Housing)



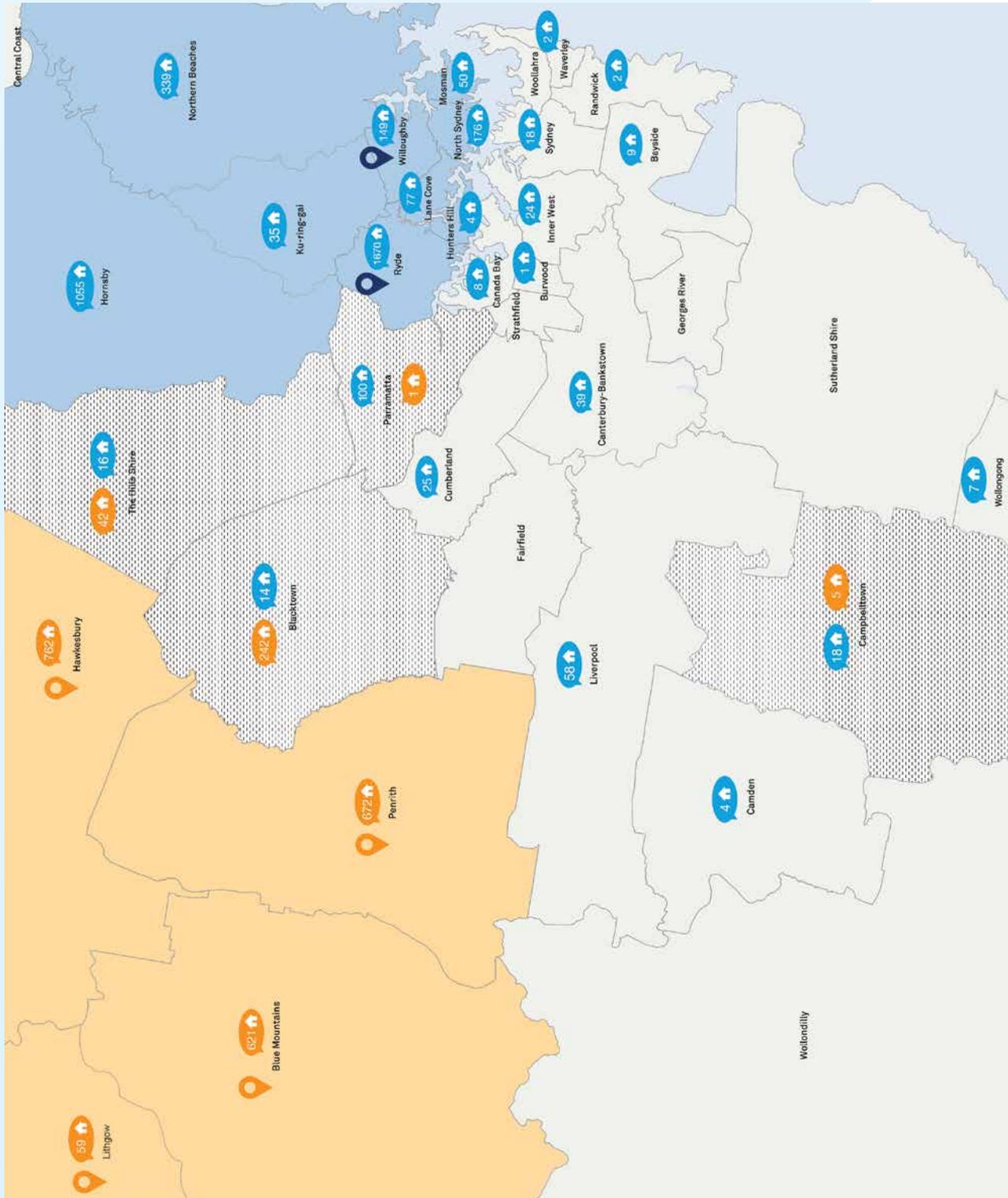
2,389 homes (30/06/20)

Homes in management has grown as follows: 2015 (2,115); 2016 (2,161); 2017 (2,200); 2018 (2,411); 2019 (2,323); and 2020 (2,389)



3,917 homes (30/06/20)

Homes in management has grown as follows: 2015 (1,318); 2016 (1,395); 2017 (1,462); 2018 (1,849); 2019 (3,868); and 2020 (3,917)



CEO of Wentworth Community Housing, Stephen McIntyre, was invited to participate in the process, however for personal reasons has opted not to continue a full-time executive career. Instead he is keen to pursue Board opportunities, whilst maintaining his long-standing commitment to addressing social and economic disadvantage. He will continue as CEO of Wentworth until Day 1 of the new organisation.

The proposed Link Wentworth Board composition is as follows:

- **Independent Chair**
Mike Allen, and PSM
- **Board members**
Belinda Bentley, Nirmal Hansra, Simon Maughan Wright, Mark McEnallay, Kerry Robinson OAM from Link Housing; and Brodie Druett, Ken Gilbert, Dr Dianne Jackson, Aimee Lindfield, Andrew Sweeney from Wentworth Community Housing.

Mike Allen is a respected industry leader, independent housing advisor and former Chief Executive of

Housing NSW with over 30 years of experience in social housing management. We are delighted to have Mike join the team in a consulting capacity until his official role starts on Day 1 of the new organisation. Mike has a strong commitment to the values and principles of social housing and providing high quality housing services for those most in need.

MERGER BENEFITS

This exciting merger is about growth and sustainability. As a merged organisation, Link Wentworth will be one of the largest CHPs in Australia, ideally positioned to deliver more housing and provide expanded services. With an increased scale of operations, broader coverage of Sydney and surrounds, and more than 60 years of combined experience, the merger sees a myriad of benefits as detailed in the Key Benefits infographic (below).

THE FUTURE

We now embark on a period of integration planning to take us to Day

1 of our new organisation on 31 March 2021, when we will officially become Link Wentworth. We are committed to taking our integration step by step and to completing it over a period of 18 months or so to ensure we can continue to deliver the same high standard of services to our clients and the community. If you would like to receive updates on our journey and from the new organisation, Link Wentworth, please visit the Link Housing website and subscribe to our news. You can also visit linkhousing.org.au/partnerships-growth/our-growth

We thank the Link Housing Board for their tireless work over the past 18 months on this project. We also thank and acknowledge Melanie Leijer, a Board Director who has decided not to continue on the Board of Link Wentworth. Melanie will be focusing on completing a Masters and on her role as COO of Vet Partners. We also extend our gratitude to management, our members and our TAG for the tremendous time and energy spent helping with the merger.



OUR COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION

Link Housing was excited to launch our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in 2020. With our rich and diverse community, which includes many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we are committed to understanding, supporting and advocating for them and their cultures.

INTENTION OF THE RAP

Link Housing's first RAP has been built on the foundations established through our growth from a small Community House Provider (CHP) in 1984, to being one of the longest-running, not-for-profit CHPs in NSW. As an organisation, we strive to be inclusive and respectful of the culturally diverse and rich groups that comprise our broader community.

We started our RAP journey two years ago, and were thrilled to receive endorsement from Reconciliation Australia for our 'Reflect' RAP this year.

“The RAP reflects Link Housing’s commitment to reconciliation, focusing on three key areas including organisational commitment, shared understanding and layering the foundations to connect in order to take this journey together for the future.”

Andrew McAnulty

Our RAP's three key areas of focus follow our journey to date:

1 Organisational Commitment to Reconciliation

We commenced our reconciliation journey in 2018, led by our Specialist

Support Worker, who identifies as an Aboriginal person. There was a strong interest from staff and management to do more to recognise, respect and include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in our operations, and in 2019, it was suggested we formalise our commitment to reconciliation by developing our first RAP. This was endorsed by both management and the Board without hesitation.

2 Shared Understanding

Link Housing is committed to a path of shared understanding. We were greatly influenced during our first NAIDOC Week event in 2018 by our special guest, Ann Weldon, from Metro Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC). Her story and teachings about reconciliation left a profound impact on Link Housing staff. A quote from her is now framed at our Chatswood office – “Leaving legacies and not building empires” – and guides us in driving to provide a legacy of decent homes for those in need, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.

3 Laying the Foundations to Connect

Although only beginning our RAP journey recently, we have committed to laying the foundations for improved cultural safety, diversity and inclusion at Link Housing. We have continued our collaborations with the Metro LALC team and Ann Weldon, with their presence now a crucial part of our community and corporate events, including our West Ryde office opening event in March 2019, Home Sweet in September 2019 and our 35 Year Celebrations in December 2019. Our RAP Working Group (RWG) has planned and led numerous RAP initiatives, to promote understanding and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, including opportunities to involve our community in National Reconciliation Week (NRW) and NAIDOC Week. These foundations ensure we are in a strong position to

better embrace our community and deliver services that always respectful of cultural considerations.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RAP

Developing the RAP has been an inspirational and incredible learning journey for the team involved. The RWG was formed in early 2019, and is comprised of six representatives from our frontline and corporate services teams, including our Specialist Support Worker, who identifies as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person.

The RWG's initial role was to steer the process of officially developing the RAP, as well as undertaking initiatives and activities to further promote cultural awareness and understanding within Link Housing and its broader community. The group also worked in consultation with Paula Coghill and Chad Richie from the Community Housing Industry Association in NSW (CHIA NSW), as well as receiving ongoing advice from a Link Housing Aboriginal resident and celebrated Aboriginal artist, Bibi Barba.

With the RAP now officially endorsed, the RWG will move to leading the implementation of the actions and deliverables contained in our RAP document, which can be viewed by searching 'Reconciliation' on our website: linkhousing.org.au.

We thank Bibi Barba, Ann Weldon and the collection of several other organisations and Aboriginal partners who provided their input, and continue to support us in becoming more culturally aware.

RAP INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The RWG organises activities for staff and our community to encourage understanding and provide opportunities to experience Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Just a few of the many activities this year included an internal campaign to raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

cultures through weekly lunchtime screenings of relevant documentaries and emails and posters about prominent activists throughout July 2019, and inviting staff to attend a cinema showing of documentary, *The Australian Dream*, which highlighted the racism and vitriol faced by former AFL player, Adam Goodes.

Other major initiatives included:

NAIDOC Week 'Voice.Treaty.Truth. Let's work together for shared future'

Link Housing celebrated NAIDOC Week between 7 and 14 July 2019 by hosting various cultural activities, including art workshops with Aboriginal artist, Bibi Barba, which produced the beautiful artwork featured on our RAP. In groups of 20, staff and residents collaborated and painted the artwork designed by Bibi.

During the art and culture workshops, attendees were able to hear Bibi's story and also created an Aboriginal art bookmark to take home as a token of Bibi's appreciation for their participation and to signify their own involvement.

As an organisation, we also participated in some of the many free NAIDOC Week events held throughout the community, and encouraged staff and residents to attend and learn more about Indigenous history and culture.

RAP ARTWORK AND RELATIONSHIP WITH BIBI BARBA

Link Housing has been lucky to continue working with celebrated Aboriginal artist, Bibi Barba, the sister of one of our community members. Bibi and her sister are a valued part of our RWG, providing ongoing consultation. She also supported Link Housing's Reconciliation

Week and NAIDOC week celebrations for 2020.

Recognising Bibi's talent, powerful story and voice, Link Housing commissioned her to do our RAP artwork. Designed as three parts, the middle artwork is an original design painted by Bibi, symbolising unity and community through Indigenous culture and colour. The other two parts were designed by Bibi and painted by Link Housing staff and residents during the art and culture workshops led by Bibi during NAIDOC Week.

"The artwork is a big statement that invites people to learn about Indigenous culture and unite together to understand it. We are all human beings and changing generations and their perspective on Aboriginal culture and living together is important"

Bibi Barba

We are excited to feature this artwork on our first RAP, and have incorporated the middle part of the design to become Link Housing's RAP logo. This beautiful piece of art is also now proudly displayed in our West Ryde office.

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK 2020

'In This Together'

National Reconciliation Week began this year on the 27 May and ended on 3 June, two significant dates representing pillars in reconciliation with Australia's First Nations peoples – the 1967 Referendum and the 1992 High Court Mabo decision. This year also marks 20 years since the reconciliation bridge walks of 2000.

Link Housing participated in the Reconciliation Australia official activities and was pleased to host a screening of the award-winning documentary film, *In My Blood It Runs*. Unfortunately due to COVID-19 social distancing requirements, the screening had to be virtual, with staff provided a link to view the film.

They were able to later share their reflections on the movie at a virtual morning tea event on 3 June 2020. Over 50 staff joined in to pay their respects to the Traditional Owners of Country and recognise Mabo Day.

It was a particularly poignant event this year, not only giving staff an opportunity to meet and discuss important matters together after a long period of social distancing, but also as it coincided with the Black Lives Matter movement and the push both globally and here in Australia for better community education around issues of racism, white privilege, and systematic racism.



COMMUNICATIONS & ADVOCACY

A key part of Link Housing's strategy is our advocacy for more social and affordable housing. We understand that our voice and influence is only as strong as our credibility as a Community Housing Provider (CHP), our brand and our communications. By the same token, we recognise that our brand and communications are integral to our engagement with our tenant community, customer experience, and our service delivery.

PARTNERSHIPS AND SPONSORSHIPS

Recent figures reveal only 46 per cent of Australian households in need of social housing are receiving it. Hence, Link Housing has continued advocating for more investment in social and affordable housing, working closely with both the government and with our partners – including the *'Everybody's Home Alliance'*.

Linked to achieving the Premier's Priority by reducing street sleeping by 50% by 2025, Link Housing also worked closely with the City of Ryde and Hornsby Shire Council in early 2020 for their local homeless street counts. A team of Link Housing staff were involved in doing the street counts, targeting hot spots with local council members, other CHPs, specialist homelessness partners and local police. These counts provide much-needed data to inform future approaches to reduce homelessness.

Link Housing is committed to contributing to the local communities we do business in. Our valuable

partnerships with local councils, including the City of Ryde, allow us to achieve this. Council's annual Granny Smith Festival is one community event we take great pride in supporting. As Silver Sponsor of the 2019 festival, Link Housing had a stall where community members could find out more about our services, grab a free Link Housing bag and enter our free competition for a chance to win an iPad.

INDUSTRY CONNECTIONS

Link Housing is actively involved with the Australasian Housing Institute, PowerHousing Australia, Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) and CHIA NSW. Our involvement with these industry groups has ensured organisational KPIs are met and client and tenant outcomes are achieved. It has also allowed for collaboration with other CHPs through events, projects, and working groups, which allow us to serve our clients more effectively as an organisation and an industry.

EXPANDING OUR COMMUNICATIONS

We take great satisfaction in serving our residents, partners and supporters with valuable communications. In 2018, a comprehensive three-year communications strategy was developed and endorsed by Link Housing's Board. Our Marketing and Communications team tracks our progress against this strategy, as well as for any new projects, using a range of data, analytics and KPIs. For the last year, we were pleased to achieve encouraging results and feedback on the quality of our communications. Highlight results include:

- 72% growth of unique visitors to our website
- 20% Adwords click-through rate
- 49% average growth of subscribers across our social media channels
- 109% growth of our email subscriber database
- 35 media mentions

As we've grown in tenant numbers and diversity, customer experience has been a focus and the team has rolled out initiatives to provide more regular, digital and accessible communications for tenants. We made significant progress this year with the following:

A new website enabling more digital services

The launch of our new website in 2019 was an important step in our digital journey. Our website is a place where clients can find important information and be served with the same efficiency as they would if they called our office. Key tenancy information and documents are on our website, including online forms. Through the course of the year, we continued to create online forms for all relevant physical forms, to give tenants a choice and increase service efficiency. Around ten forms that were previously available to tenants in hard copy versions only were digitised and made available as online forms for ease of access and completion.

Going Digital Campaign

The Going Digital campaign was launched to capture each tenant's preferred way of receiving our much-loved, quarterly tenant newsletter, CommunityLink. Tenants were provided with a Going Digital form, which they could either fill-in by

hand or online, which asked if they would prefer to continue receiving the hard copy newsletter in the post or a digital email version. By the end of the campaign, we were pleased to have collected email addresses for 70% of our entire tenant cohort, which was particularly helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic, where we were able to communicate quickly and efficiently with our residents. The Going Digital campaign has also improved the customer experience for our residents who now receive communications from us by email if they prefer.

Multi-channel and accessible content

To communicate and engage our clients through multiple channels to deliver information efficiently, provide better service, and build a sense of community, this year we increased the regularity and volume of our communications via our website, email and across social media. As an example, over the year, we published and distributed 76 blogs posts, 12 new tenant fact sheets and brochures, and 313 Facebook posts.

Building on the accessibility features and functionality of our website, we also increased the number of communications translated into non-English languages to cater to our culturally and linguistically diverse tenants. A one-page document with our translation service details written in Simple Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Korean, Farsi and Armenian, was also developed and is now with each edition of our tenant newsletter, CommunityLink.

In response to COVID-19, we adapted and increased the frequency of our communications across all channels and kept our residents informed about any changes to our business, as well as key service changes to be aware of.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Link Housing draws on the collective experience of our management and staff to develop insights, points of view, ideas and best practice approaches that raise awareness

about the issues that lead to housing stress and homelessness – and about the inadequate supply of social and affordable housing.

Over the year, we contributed policy consultation responses for the following:

- Ku-Ring-Gai Council Housing Strategy Community Sounding Board – November 2019
- City of Sydney Draft Homelessness Plan – February 2020
- Inner West Council Affordable Housing Policy – February 2020
- Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness – June 2020

Many of our submissions included case studies of our clients who have transitioned out of homelessness with the help of housing assistance products, including private rental subsidies and Link2Home. The case studies illustrate how housing assistance products and collaborative projects supported by community housing providers can achieve positive outcomes for those in need of assistance.

We were also involved in consultations for new programs and strategies launched by DCJ in response to COVID-19, including RentChoice Assist COVID-19 and Together Home – Private Rental Assistance Strategies. We continue to work closely with local police and health agencies, and this year contributed to the NSW Police Hornsby Better Communities strategy and Northern Sydney Local Health District Homelessness project and Employment Training Forum.

Speaking out against Domestic Violence

In March, Link Housing's Head of Housing Services, Alison O'Neil, presented to a full house at the 'Action on Homelessness – Older Women in Crisis' forum alongside Bev Barker from Older Women's Network NSW and Annabelle Daniel from Women's Community Shelters. Alison reported on the troubling statistics of women 55 years and older who are struggling to find affordable housing to rent, as

well as the contributing factors such as domestic violence. Alison also spoke on radio station 2GB about this issue and the impact of domestic violence on women and families. Alison, like all Link Housing staff members, is driven to serve and advocate for those in need.

In the media

Our residents and staff members were featured in a range of media publications this year. In February, our CEO, Andrew McNulty, appeared on ABC's NSW news to provide Link Housing's perspective on Affordable Housing in response to Landcom's Queenscliff health centre redevelopment. The segment also featured one of our Affordable Housing tenants, Carol. Our involvement in this story allowed us to communicate the importance of building more affordable housing so people like Carol are not at risk of homelessness. Andrew was also interviewed later in the year for Channel 7 about the need for more investment in social housing by the NSW Government in the lead up to the state budget.

Link Housing was also pleased to have our partnership with Inner West Council featured in media, with another nine affordable housing units built in Marrickville, as part of Council's Affordable Rental Housing Program. Additionally, local and metro media supported with coverage of our key community programs and initiatives, such as the opening of Beecroft House, our 'No Place Like Home' art exhibition, our 35 year Birthday event, the Link Housing 'Home Sweet' charity sleepover fundraiser, and our annual Community Gardening competition.

We thank our tenants who share their stories for media and our thought leadership. We are grateful for their willingness to help us to raise awareness about the need for more community housing. View our media stories on our website: linkhousing.org.au/resources/media

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT & OUTCOMES

Link Housing focuses on delivering our services responsibly. This year we took further steps to improve our economic, social and environmental impact.

ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY

Link Housing is committed to lowering our carbon footprint and employing sustainable work practices that protect our environment. This year, we engaged environmental firm, Pangolin Associates, to conduct a comprehensive assessment of our organisation's greenhouse gas emissions. The study looked at our utilities and equipment use, our waste, how our staff commute to work, flights taken, and third-party services we engage.

Through undertaking the carbon assessment, we made progress towards achieving some of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The report suggested meaningful ways we can improve practices and make different choices to reach our environmental targets. We look forward to implementing some of these measures in the year ahead.

GOING DIGITAL

With digital transformation a key part of our five year strategy, we have continued to pursue projects throughout this year to digitise our services, automate manual processes, and communicate and engage with our clients through multiple channels. We made some significant progress with the following initiatives:

System and process improvements

Link Housing has invested significantly in technology and additional resources to become more efficient and effective as we grow and evolve. In 2018, a new Business Improvement team was set up to help the organisation better leverage existing systems, explore the use of new technologies, as well as streamline, automate and improve processes.

The team, comprising project managers, data specialists and system administrators, manage our core housing system Kypera and the operational processes that support its best use. The team achieved some great results for the business over the last year. Leveraging our investment in moving to the cloud and Microsoft Office 365 in 2018, they have improved the breadth, depth and ease of our business reporting using Microsoft Power BI. Staff and management looking for performance data are now able to access better data and insights, more easily and conveniently. The flow of benefits is an improved service for our clients, partners and the communities we serve.

Other areas of focus over the last year include the continued work to streamline our income review process to make it easier for our tenants to comply with our rent policies and sustain their tenancies. The introduction of Centrelink consent forms that allow us to get income details straight from Centrelink, web forms so tenants can complete the process online and other initiatives have allowed the team to reduce the time taken to complete our twice yearly income reviews.

Launch of our Wellbeing app

The launch of our Wellbeing app this year was an exciting milestone on our digital journey. The app was developed in-house and enables our Housing Managers to conduct and complete Wellbeing surveys during home visits with tenants or during phone calls. The app replaces the Health and Wellbeing survey that we formerly sent to tenants. Collecting this vital information regularly from our tenants via the app has meant resources can be efficiently directed to programs that are of greatest benefit to our residents, and residents have been quickly referred to our Internal Specialist Support team and external partners, where required.

PEOPLE AND CULTURE AWARD WIN

Link Housing was thrilled that our People and Culture Team won the Team Award at the PowerHousing Australia National Awards in November 2019. PowerHousing Australia facilitates a national network of 36 growth and Tier 1 regulated Community Housing Providers (CHPs), who develop and manage affordable housing across the country. Their annual awards are highly prestigious among CHPs, with the event celebrating social housing successes and recognising excellence in professional practice. Our team won the award for their support of Link Housing, as we grew substantially during the Social Housing Management Transfer (SHMT) in 2018-19, which saw 40 new employees recruited over a 12 month period.

COMPLIANCE AND WHS

As a Tier 1 registered community housing provider in NSW, Link Housing

must annually undertake a rigorous compliance assessment against the National Regulatory System for Community Housing. Pleasingly, Link Housing's most recent compliance assessment was very positive with the organisation being assessed as compliant against all performance outcomes. The Registrar of Community Housing also commended Link Housing for its efforts in promoting social and affordable housing through their ongoing events.

Safety is one of Link Housing's core foundational values. While this has been true of Link Housing for a long time, it became even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Underpinning our approach to safety, is our compliance with the Australian

/ New Zealand Work Health and Safety standard, which is designed to integrate 'safe thinking' into all significant organisational functions and activities.

Over the year, Link Housing also migrated its work health and safety management system to a new platform called Protecht, and in October 2020 became certified against the recently approved ISO 45001 health and occupational management system, which embodies the latest international safety methodologies.

MEASURING OUTCOMES

In early 2019, Link Housing launched an Outcomes Framework,

'Enhancing Lives and Communities', to measure the social impact of our services and programs.

Over the financial year, we used data from our various surveys, events, programs, performance information, as well as from the Australian Social Value Bank (ASVB) Value Calculator*, to track and report on our progress.

We are pleased to provide our Outcomes Framework 2019-2020 results below. The outcomes are reported against the six key areas of the Outcomes Framework (Employment, Safety, Wellbeing, Health, Education, Community), with the provision of affordable, secure, long term and quality housing central.

WELLBEING

Improved emotional wellbeing and mental health

56% OF TENANTS SATISFIED

their life has improved since living in a Link Housing property

102 ARTWORK SUBMISSIONS

for 'No Place Like Home' Art Exhibition

45 FOOD BOXES

and helping hand packages distributed

6.9/10 RATING

residents satisfied with their life as a whole

EMPLOYMENT

Improvement in job readiness and employment

327 HOUSEHOLDS

moved into employment**

3 PARTNERSHIPS ESTABLISHED

with employment support agencies

7 RESIDENTS

taking advantage of Link Housing's Work Rent Incentive Scheme

20 REFERRALS

to employment services

SAFETY

Improved feeling of safety and security in my neighbourhood

7/10 RATING

residents satisfied with how safe they feel in their neighbourhood

80% OF TENANTS

are satisfied with their neighbourhood

7 BLOCKS ANALYSED

as part of the UNSW project to improve sustainability in Social Housing properties through maintenance and retrofitting

91 RESIDENTS

worked with our Specialist Support team to improve their overall health or condition of their property

HEALTH

Improved overall health

13.78 NET COST BENEFIT RATIO

for North Sydney Tai Chi and Art Class*

5.48 NET COST BENEFIT RATIO

of 5.48 – LinkFit 2019 pilot program*

6/10 RATING

tenants satisfied with their health

15 TENANTS RECEIVED A FLU VACCINATION

via a Link Housing/SNHN Flu Clinic

EDUCATION

Improved education attainment

83 RESIDENTS

received a Link Housing Scholarship in 2019

4.9/5 RATING

tenants who felt our Scholarship Program helped them achieve their goals

2.29 NET COST BENEFIT RATIO

for Link Housing Scholarship program*

5.32 NET COST BENEFIT RATIO

for our Digital Discoveries program*

COMMUNITY

Improved satisfaction with neighbourhood and community

3 COMMUNITY ROOMS

developed and refurbished

47 RESIDENTS

entered our annual gardening competition

34% OF TENANTS

have said their neighbourhood has improved in the last 3 years

17 RESIDENTS

entered into our Community Connections photo competition

All data is extracted from Link Housing's Health and Wellbeing survey and CHIA NSW 2019 Report, unless stated otherwise.

*Calculations provided by the Australian Social Value Bank, owned by Alliance Social Enterprises (www.asvb.com.au). Produced by Simetrica, using best practice methodology for policy evaluation. These values are used under Licence #a5rR95 with expiry date 31/10/2021.

** Calculated using the following methodology – households that have experienced a change in income resulting in a rent increase of more than 10%. Figures have been prorated for the full financial year 2019/20.

OUR STAFF

Our staff are at the heart of everything we do. We kicked off the new financial year buoyed by our Best Workplace 2019 Award for our 'Voice Project' staff survey results (shared in our last annual report), and a number of staff recruitment, development and engagement initiatives, including our famous annual Pet Day event.

The second half of the year, however, presented our staff and organisation with one of the biggest challenges and changes to work practices we have ever faced with COVID-19.

STAFF SNAPSHOT

102 staff

by end of FY20

65 staff

in our Chatswood office

37 staff

in our West Ryde office

ADAPTING TO COVID-19

Though COVID-19 has tested us, it has also strengthened us as individuals, team members and as an organisation. We are proud of our staff's willingness and ability to adapt to the quickly evolving landscape and their continued commitment to providing our tenants with the support they needed during this time.

With the impact of COVID-19 affecting all aspects of work and life, Link Housing surveyed staff in the early stages of restrictions when staff had recently begun working from home. The survey provided invaluable feedback on how staff were feeling and how they were responding to changes, such as working from home.

Overall wellbeing from staff, which reflected emotional wellness, stress levels and sense of safety, was rated at 81%, and overall progress was rated at 92%, which reflected staff perceptions around organisational performance and continuity. Staff were also later consulted via a survey to develop Link Housing's Return to the Office plan. Both surveys, combined with 'wellbeing check-ins' with staff, have provided information for ongoing planning and tweaking of our approach.

As a registered COVID-Safe business, we continue to be responsive, vigilant, and seek to minimise risk for staff, clients and the community, without compromising our service to clients.

RECRUITMENT AND NEW STAFF

To support the continued growth and maturing of our business, we strengthened our employee branding and recruitment campaigns this year with the addition of the following initiatives:

- Commenced an Intern Recruitment Program via a partnership with Macquarie University
- Continued streamlining our New Staff Induction program
- Began advertising roles on sites targeting Indigenous applicants
- Completed our annual staff survey via the independent Voice Project. Our exceptional employee engagement and satisfaction results saw us recognised in the Voice Project's "Best Workplace" awards. Read more about the Awards: voiceproject.com/awards

This year we also took the opportunity to capture some of what staff love about working at Link Housing in a video that has received positive feedback, and now takes pride of place on our website. The video also features in our recruitment and brand campaigns, giving an insight into our organisational culture. Watch the video and read about our other staff highlights below.

linkhousing.org.au/an-inside-look-at-link-housing



We are proud of the staff benefits and rewards we offer, which include:

- Additional paid leave – Link Days
- Flexible working arrangements
- Salary packaging
- Study assistance
- Weekly fresh fruit delivery
- Monthly birthday celebrations
- Employee Assistance Program

DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Link Housing is committed to developing and retaining our staff. Numerous staff advanced their careers with internal promotions, cross training and development. This year we invested close to \$100K for training and development initiatives to assist staff working on the frontline and across the business.

Based on staff feedback, group training was organised in the following areas:

- **Leadership** – a two-day training course

- **Mental Health** – a two-day accredited Mental Health First Aid Training course for frontline staff and Black Dog Mental Health Workshop for all staff
- **Wellbeing and Psychological Safety** – ‘Leading from the Heart’ Time Management training

A number of our staff attended the two day Community Housing Industry Association Conference (CHIA) on the 31st March and 1st April. The 2020 conference theme was ‘Community. Opportunity. Growth’, highlighting the current and growing shortfall of affordable and accessible housing in Australia.

Staff were also invited to complete individual training and courses of their choice, specific to their career aspirations and job role. Some staff were also recognised in Link Housing’s quarterly awards for Leadership and Teamwork, Service Excellence and Innovation. The awards are just one of our staff recognition and reward initiatives.

STAFF WELLBEING

Our Staff Wellbeing program is now in its second year. Staff are grateful for regular program inclusions such as the reimbursement for influenza vaccinations, the monthly massage, reflexology and meditation sessions held in the offices, and our annual Step Challenge. New this year was a Financial Planning Lunch and Learn session for staff and the introduction of group supervision for both our Tenancy and Access and Demand teams.

“It’s been quite a journey of change and growth!”

Deon Wyngaard, Quality Assurance and Risk Manager



“We know we have an important role to play in helping those members of the community who are in need, so everything we do comes back to our mission of serving the thousands of people who depend on us.”

Ghilaine Hammond-Baillie, Process Analyst and Systems Administrator



ENGAGEMENT AND EVENTS

Link Housing takes every opportunity to engage staff members with events and campaigns. As is the case for our larger, community events such as Home Sweet and No Place Like Home, staff are always eager to be involved in our smaller events. As well as boosting staff morale, these events and campaigns always aim to help our broader community.

Our annual Pet Day was a highlight for the company, bringing together staff members, kids, and of course, family pets, at our Chatswood and West Ryde offices. All the kids were excited to be involved and ran a very well organised 'cookie cafe', raising \$575 for Monika's Doggie Rescue. A big thank you to our CEO's son, Andrew, for leading this event.

Link Housing also took the opportunity to join campaigns that promoted action on important community issues, with our organisation's committees taking the lead and encouraging other staff members to join.

Continuing our support for the White Ribbon message, our White Ribbon Committee actively participated in a number of events. The team represented Link Housing at a 'No Excuse For Abuse' march for White Ribbon Day in November 2019, alongside City of Ryde Mayor, Jerome Laxale, Ryde Councillor Penny Pedersen and a large group of community members. In May 2020, the committee was also the face of a Link Housing campaign for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Staff members held up posters with strong calls to action to show their support and commitment to raising awareness to end violence against women.

RECOGNISING LONG SERVICE

We are lucky to have a number of staff that have been with us for a long time. These staff members are appreciated for their extensive knowledge of the organisation, their commitment to Link Housing and our residents, and their ongoing contribution to our culture.

We recognise the following staff members:

- Diana King
31 years
- Liz Breden
15 years
- Trish Fredericks
15 years
- Michelle Ho
13 years
- Vanessa Berry
12 years
- Christine Curran
11 years
- Deon Wyngaard
10 years
- Ghilaine Hammond-Baillie
10 years
- Keith Stephens
10 years

The much loved Christine Curran, a Housing Manager with Link Housing for over 10 years, retired during the year. Christine was recognised with a number of farewell activities organised by staff, as well as honoured with a Link Housing Life Membership.

OUR ORGANISATIONAL CHART



OUR BOARD

Link Housing's dynamic, diverse and highly skilled Board is committed to providing the best possible leadership and governance to management and the organisation.

The following Directors have been elected by the members of the Company and are responsible for the organisation.

The board functions with the support of three board committees: Audit and Risk; People and Culture; and Development.

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS



NIRMAL HANSRA, DIRECTOR AND CHAIR

Nirmal has over 35 years' senior executive management experience and 13 years of board and corporate advisory experience. He is the Chair of Campbell Page Ltd and Non-Executive Director of Have a Voice Pty Ltd, Children's Tumour Foundation of Australia and National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters. He is also an Independent Member of the Audit and Risk Committee for the Property Group at NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and Chair of the Compliance and Risk Committee for Gleneagles Asset Management Ltd. Nirmal held Finance Director/Chief Financial Officer roles in leading companies including Australian Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd, Ruralco Holdings Ltd, Fujitsu Australia Ltd and Texas Instruments Australia Ltd.



SIMON MAUGHAN WRIGHT, DIRECTOR AND DEPUTY CHAIR **Chair of the Development Committee**

Simon is the owner and principal of ABSA Corporate Advisory, a mergers and acquisitions advisory and transactional business, and a private real estate development business. He has been a director of ANZ Investment Bank (Business Sales and Acquisitions) and Westpac Business Bank Succession Services, as well as CEO and director of a real estate development and asset management group of companies. He is currently a Director at Blue Mount Capital. Simon is qualified in law with a Post Graduate Diploma in Labour Law, a Master of Business Administration, a real estate licence and a Post Graduate Certificate in Digital Management. He is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and Chair of the Board Development Committee.



BELINDA BENTLEY, DIRECTOR **Member of the People and Culture Committee;** **and member of the Development Committee**

Belinda is the founding director of 9Springs, a privately held property investment, development and advisory group. Belinda's experience varies from structuring complex commercial real estate transactions for the NSW Government and private corporations to being responsible for key development projects and portfolios in NSW, Victoria and Queensland, with values ranging from \$30m to over \$1b. Belinda holds a Master of Property Development and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Belinda is a member of the Urban Land Institute's National Executive and Chair of the Urban Land Institute's Sydney District Council.



MELANIE LEIJER, DIRECTOR
Chair of the People and Culture Committee

Melanie has diverse executive level experience within both large companies and mid-sized organisations, and strong financial and operational experience. She is currently COO of VetPartners and previously GM of Operations at Lendlease's retirement living business. Melanie is studying a Master of Science in Coaching Psychology, and holds a Bachelor of Economics, a Master in Business Administration and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



MARK MCENALLAY, DIRECTOR
Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee;
and member of the Development Committee

Mark is an FCPA qualified accountant and has over 30 years financial and management experience. His early experience was in the consumer goods industry and included eight years working overseas where he was exposed to many different business environments. His more recent experience has focused on the services and not-for-profit sectors and he is currently a consultant and company director.

Mark's qualifications include: Bachelor of Commerce; Fellow Certified Practising Accountants Australia; Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and Fellow of the Governance Institute of Australia.



KERRY ROBINSON OAM, DIRECTOR
Member of the Audit and Risk Committee; and member of the People
and Culture Committee

Kerry is Chief Executive Officer of Blacktown City Council, where he leads 2,140 staff delivering a budget of \$736m for a community of 370,000 people and 21,000 businesses. He is the Deputy Chairman of Blacktown Venue Management Limited and of Better Foundation Limited. Kerry is a non-executive director and of CivicRisk Mutual Ltd, which provides a range of insurance services. He is a Member of the University of New South Wales' City Futures Research Centre advisory panel. Kerry has over 30 years' experience in the property industry having held senior roles in corporations and Government. His experience includes eight years as an Executive General Manager delivering large, complex industrial town centre and residential projects with values of over \$1b. He has extensive experience negotiating and managing large and complex joint ventures.



ANDREW MCANULTY, DIRECTOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Member of the Development Committee

Andrew is Link Housing's CEO and a member of the Development Committee. He is a respected community housing figure, both nationally and internationally. He has delivered social, affordable and large-scale urban renewal outcomes for over 20 years across Australia and the United Kingdom. His experience highlights the innovation and vision required to create cutting edge outcomes for projects which link government, the private sector and the community housing sector – in order to deliver high quality affordable housing.

FINANCIALS

THREE-YEAR FINANCIAL RESULTS AT A GLANCE

LINK HOUSING LTD ACN 003 084 928
(A company limited by guarantee)

The statutory accounts for the year ending 30 June 2020 have been audited and the full copy of the accounts can be found on our website: linkhousing.org.au/resources/annual-reports/#menu. The following information is an abbreviated version of the Annual Accounts for the past 3 years:

	FY2017/18 ACTUAL \$'000s	FY2018/19 ACTUAL \$'000s	FY2019/20 ACTUAL* \$'000s	AASB 16 ADJUSTMENT \$'000s	FY2019/20 ACTUAL \$'000s
Property Income	15,697	30,376	39,838	-	39,838
Grants & Subsidies	8,327	8,858	9,355	-	9,355
Property Related Income	24,023	39,234	49,192	-	49,192
Rental & Outgoing Expenses	13,609	17,013	19,827	(13,335)	6,492
Property Maintenance	1,633	2,974	5,689	-	5,689
Tenant Support Services	4,477	7,342	9,337	-	9,337
Property Related Expenses	19,719	27,329	34,853	(13,335)	21,518
Tenant Advocacy & Governance	2,912	3,393	4,965	(552)	4,413
Depreciation & Amortisation	1,197	3,300	3,714	623	4,337
Operating Surplus/(Deficit)	195	5,212	5,661	13,264	18,925
Net Interest Income/(Expense)	(7)	(345)	(281)	(2,621)	(2,902)
Property Revaluations	1,879	19,144	(713)	(10,842)	(11,555)
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	2,068	24,011	4,667	(199)	4,468
Number of dwellings	1,849	3,868	3,917		3,917
BALANCE SHEET					
Investment Properties	105,076	125,920	125,288	63,333	188,621
Cash & Term Deposits	12,858	15,580	19,430	-	19,430
Other Assets	22,608	23,763	22,810	4,754	27,564
Total Assets	140,542	165,262	167,528	68,087	235,615
Bank Borrowings	4,238	3,679	3,235	-	3,235
Lease Liabilities	-	357	174	68,286	68,460
Grants In Advance	1,168	2,324	3,157	-	3,157
Other Liabilities	19,854	19,609	17,002	-	17,002
Total Liabilities	25,260	25,969	23,568	68,286	91,854
Net Assets	115,282	139,293	143,960	(199)	143,761

*denotes, actual before AASB 16 adjustment

LINK HOUSING THANKS OUR PARTNERS & SPONSORS

PARTNERS



SPONSORS



LINK HOUSING

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