



COMPASS HOUSING CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

Compass is excited to be celebrating 30 years of providing housing to those in need. Our organisation differs greatly from that one founded 30 years ago and we are pleased to have had Dr Tony Gilmour and Helen Karathomas research and author our 30 year commemorative book “Navigating Change”.

As the title of Dr Gilmour’s book suggests, the history of Compass is a story of innovation and overcoming the odds. That a company founded as a tenant collective by a group of idealists and radicals from regional New South Wales would, 30 years later, find itself on the cusp of becoming the largest non-government provider of subsidised housing in the country, is a testament to the ingenuity, courage and dedication of all those who guided its course over that time.

Up until well into the 1980s, the old state housing commissions were focused almost exclusively on accommodating what today would be called “working families”, that is, traditional nuclear families with at least one parent in full time work. Single people were deemed to be ineligible unless they were elderly and those with limited English language skills or with special needs were largely excluded.

While there had been a handful of community housing organisations in existence in the 1970s, most were dedicated to crisis accommodation or short term transitional tenancies. Community housing only developed as a genuine alternative to public housing following the injection of serious money from the Commonwealth in the 1980s, and, were it not for the pioneering work of reformers like Vivienne Milligan, Brian Elton and Lynden Esdaile within the New South Wales Government, and their creative repurposing of the federal government’s Mortgage and Rent Relief Scheme, it might not have existed at all.



The genius of people like Milligan was to take a federal funding scheme designed to provide short term financial assistance to renters and mortgage payers experiencing difficulty paying their housing costs, and transform it into something altogether different. Instead of subsidising tenants' incomes, the New South Wales Government's Community Tenancy Scheme used public funding to increase the supply of housing that could then be rented to eligible tenants at a discounted rate. It was during this period of reform that the organisation that would become Compass Housing started its life as the Newmacq Community Housing Company.

Like many of the community housing schemes of the time, in the early days Newmacq operated more like a tenant collective than a recognisable business. The professionalisation of the sector over the years is a reflection of the heightened level of accountability and business acumen necessitated by more targeted government allocations policies.

In the mid 1980s, despite having 92 tenancies under management, six of the eight company directors were tenants and promotional material was often produced by hand. By the mid-90s, Newmacq's portfolio had increased to 128 tenancies. Despite this relatively impressive roster of properties under management, the organisation still had just three staff, none of whom worked full time.

In 1997, Newmacq took a major step into the future with the appointment of Kelvyn Enright as company secretary. Born in New Zealand, Enright was a town planner by profession and prior to joining Newmacq had been the Chief Executive of an organisation providing crisis accommodation to homeless men in Canberra.

Enright was somewhat unique for the organisation in that he brought senior executive experience to the role. While there had always been a more senior member of staff at Newmacq, the cooperative/collectivist philosophy that underpinned the organisation from its founding in 1985 throughout much of the 1990s meant that the notion of someone being "the boss" was something of an alien concept.

Between 1990 and 1996 Newmacq's property portfolio remained steady at 128. However during the late 90s, Newmacq entered a period of rapid growth due largely to its involvement in the Building Better Cities program and a successful tender under the 1999-2000 Community Housing Program. By 2001, Newmacq managed around 500 properties in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie areas.

In the early 2000s the Government implemented additional accreditation requirements that revealed certain internal controls and processes were below what was necessary under the new regime. Attempts by the management to right the ship were unsuccessful and in April 2004, Kelvyn Enright vacated his position at the helm and MGI Wamstekers Chartered Accountants were appointed as interim managers with administrative control of the organisation passing to staff seconded from the New South Wales Federation of Housing Associations. Three months later, Greg Budworth was appointed as General Manager. It was an unexpected choice given Budworth's background was certainly not overflowing with experience in the social housing sector. Yet the appointment of this former police detective, banker and pastor who also had CEO and executive experience in for-profit human service organisations would see the organisation

now known as Compass embark on an expansion project that, within a decade, would see it transition from the brink of collapse to the verge of becoming the largest community housing organisation in the country.

Throughout 2005, Newmacq began to expand beyond its traditional heartland of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie. Small parcels of stock were taken up in the Port Stephens, Cessnock and Maitland Council areas. Around the same time a decision was made to scrap the Newmacq name in favour of something more reflective of the company's newfound expansionist vision. In August 2007 Newmacq officially became Compass Housing Services.

In the years between 2007 and 2010, Compass embarked on an ambitious program of expansion. Many of the original community tenancy schemes originally set up in the 1980s were struggling for survival under the new performance based registration system. Mergers were the logical answer for many. Compass' first action during this period was to acquire the Upper Hunter community tenancy schemes. In 2008 Compass won a New South Wales Government tender to take on social housing provision in the remote Western New South Wales town of Broken Hill. As part of this "whole of area" transfer process, Compass acquired 109 units of formerly state run public housing along with 40 community housing properties originally managed by the Broken Hill Community Tenancy Scheme. In September 2010 Compass consolidated its presence in Western New South Wales by acquiring 60 tenancies from the Western Plains Housing Scheme based in Dubbo and later was chosen as an amalgamation partner by the Central Coast Community Tenancy Scheme. In addition to these acquisitions, Compass was awarded more than a thousand additional dwellings under the Commonwealth Government's Nation Building Economic Stimulus Package. Compass was able to leverage off these properties to deliver an additional 127 dwellings, which, along with properties obtained through other capital funding programs like the National Rental Affordability Scheme, has brought the number of properties Compass owns to 1392.

In 2014, Compass became one of the first community housing providers to venture beyond its home state thanks to a merger with the Brisbane based 4Walls. The merger added roughly 950 properties across South East

Queensland to the Compass portfolio. Based out of the heritage listed post and telegraph office at Woolloongabba, the Queensland team provides a variety of affordable, transitional and long-term housing programs including the Community Rent Scheme, Youth Housing and Reintegration Service and National Rental Affordability Scheme.

Compass' holdings in Queensland received an enormous boost when Compass was announced as the winning bidder for a major stock transfer initiative in Logan City. Known as the Logan Renewal Initiative, the project will be delivered in partnership with not-for-profit developer BlueCHP under the banner of Logan City Community Housing (LCCH). The Logan Renewal Initiative will see LCCH take on the tenancy management of approximately 4800 public housing tenancies, making it the largest single provider of social housing services in Australia.

Throughout the previous decade of growth and professionalisation Compass has never lost focus of the importance of tenant empowerment. Thanks to an impressive array of services promoting personal, professional and social development, Compass tenant satisfaction levels remain at sector leading levels.

The story of Compass Housing is, in many ways, the story of the community housing sector in Australia. Characterised in its early years by a collectivist management style, Compass nevertheless managed its way through a period of early expansion, attempted to modernise yet struggled to adapt to the challenges of a more rigorous accreditation process and came within striking distance of being disbanded altogether before ultimately emerging triumphant as the leading community housing provider in Australia. Yet while the Compass of today would be almost unrecognisable to the early directors of Newmacq, it is noteworthy that throughout the previous 30 years the one thing that has remained constant is the organisation's dedication to empowering its tenants.

At the end of the day the success of a community housing provider is not measured on how many tenancies are managed, but on the number of lives transformed. On that score, sound foundations have been laid for Compass' next three decades.



Over the past 30 years, the demographic of social housing tenants has undergone a complete transformation. Whereas in the past the old state housing commissions provided accommodation for low income working families, these days almost 90 per cent of social housing tenants in both public and community housing are reliant on social security with many having extremely high or complex needs. For this reason community housing organisations have begun to broaden their mission and offer additional services beyond the direct provision of housing. At Compass, that process has been realised under the banner of the GROW program. GROW combines a concern with environmental sustainability, with a concern for how people can achieve personal or community sustainability.

At their most basic level, Compass community programs are about changing lives and places for the better. This ambition is realised most profoundly through the Compass Grow a Star program. Grow a Star empowers young people to reach their full potential in social, academic, sporting and musical pursuits by helping families overcome the financial or generational challenges that prevent young people from following their dreams.

Compass also encourages tenants to pursue personal or community sustainability through the Compass Connect program – a place making initiative that promotes social inclusion and personal development by encouraging tenants to put forward plans for projects that enhance the amenity of communities, the capacity of people or the performance of assets. Compass Connect has led to the creation of numerous

shared spaces and social inclusion activities including community gardens, new BBQ areas, an internet café, computer literacy classes and the installation of solar security lighting.

Compass has also tapped in to the benefits of providing local communities with a central place where they can access a variety of social, educational and support services. In 2010 Compass took on the management of the KBT Hub on the New South Wales Central Coast. Under Compass management the previously government run facility was renamed The Meeting Place and dramatically expanded its activities to include market days, a community garden, free internet access and a weekly fruit box program offering fresh produce to local residents. In 2015, inspired by the success of The Meeting Place, Compass established a new community hub known as The 123 Hub in Broken Hill.

In 2015, Compass took its dedication to building communities to the next level with the appointment of Professor Dave Adamson OBE, an Emeritus Professor with the University of South Wales who is internationally recognised for his expertise in economic and community regeneration.

Professor Adamson's Deep Place method has been successfully implemented in parts of the UK and involved linking community development with economic development in which social housing tenants are the focus of new employment opportunities. Compass will initially pilot the Deep Place method in Newcastle and Logan.