



# fact sheet

## Community Renewal in Riverwood



*“Community Renewal is about reclaiming communities for people ...communities where no one is left out.”*

Community renewal is about partnerships between communities and service providers, it's about recognising the benefits of diverse communities, closing the gap between the socially included and the socially excluded, responding to peoples needs for stable, well balanced communities, and building community confidence.

The process of community renewal is ultimately about community re-engagement of disadvantaged communities with each other, with services and employment, and with the broader community.

**“It's our best opportunity to restore pride and a 'sense of place' to dislocated communities.”**

### Riverwood Background

The Riverwood public housing estate in Sydney's southern suburbs was built in the 1950s-1970s and comprises over 1,300 dwellings, housing 2,700 residents. It consists of blocks of walk-up flats and two high rise towers which contrast sharply against the surrounding primarily low rise residential area.

### Key Issues for Riverwood

Riverwood had the following characteristics prior to the commencement of the Community Renewal Strategy in 1996:

- High crime rate
- Significant unemployment and poverty
- Low levels of residential and neighbourhood amenity
- High vacancy rates
- Vandalism and a sense of alienation
- Tenancy and property management difficulties.

### Problems with the estate model

About 30% of New South Wales public housing is located in estates where there are more than 100 properties. These estates were developed from the 1950s to the mid 1980s and many experience similar problems including:

- housing which is poorly designed and maintained
- poor access to necessary services such as health services, transport and family support
- concentrations of disadvantaged families who are stigmatised by the rest of the community
- problems with crime and personal security.

### Key strategies of Community Renewal

- make client service staff more accessible and visible so they can respond to problems quickly
  - work with the Police to identify trouble-spots and ways to reduce criminal activity
- improve housing so it better meets contemporary standards so residents want to stay
- improve social mix through identified sales and use housing associations to diversify management
  - work with groups of residents so they can develop new skills and help prioritise work
- link residents with training and employment opportunities
  - encourage other service providers to work in partnership with residents and the Department.



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before



after

## What We Have Done

**Stage I** commenced in 1996/97 with 112 apartments and included:

- The creation of new 4 bedroom apartments;
- The creation of a new 'garden apartment' concept;
- Creation of useful private space;
- Removal of an unsightly and unused road to create gardens;
- Provision of internal laundries;
- Bathroom and kitchen upgrades;
- Additional secure parking; and
- Eliminating unsettling pedestrian traffic.

**Stage II** commenced in 1997/98 and will be completed in 2000/01.

It comprises a total of 245 dwellings and involves:

- Definition of private, public and communal space;
- Provision of internal laundry facilities to individual units and bathroom upgrades;
- Fire safety upgrading work;
- Relocation of car parking areas to more secure locations;
- Provision of balconies to some units; and
- Construction of garbage storage bays.

More than \$10 million has so far been spent on the renewal strategy in Riverwood and a further \$4 million is allocated this year.

## Where We Are Today

The results of the completed works are that tenants now feel safer and more secure. Resident participation in the Neighbourhood Advisory Board has increased as tenants take a renewed interest in and responsibility for their homes. Gardens are now being cared for and children and adults are now using spaces which were once barren.

The Riverwood Community Renewal Strategy was awarded two Commendations, including the President's Commendation in the 1998 Urban Design Institute of Australia (UDIA) Awards. As a result of the work, the number of properties becoming vacant has dropped so that in the 12 months to September 1999 there were 4 properties that became vacant in Stage I and there were 2 properties that became vacant in Stage II. This compares to the rest of the estate where in the same period a total of 81 properties became vacant.

Vandalism and graffiti problems have dropped to a negligible level with the number of incidents reported by the Neighbourhood Watch Committee for 12 months to July 1999 dropping to 6 incidents for Stage I and 10 incidents in Stage II, compared to 127 incidents for the whole estate over the same period.

Tenant comment about the Community Renewal Program

**"We waited 20 years for something better and it's finally come, you just couldn't imagine what it's done for all of us."**

## What We aim to Achieve

The aim of the Riverwood Community Renewal Strategy is to:

- Improve the stability of the community;
- Increase tenant satisfaction;
- Improve Client Service delivery; and
- Improve the value of the housing assets.

NSW Department of Housing

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