

# Community Partnership Award

POPULATIONS GREATER THAN 50,000

# LATROBE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

*This year, ICMA presents two Community Partnership Awards in the 50,000-and-greater population category. The first award goes to the city of Latrobe, Victoria, Australia, and Chief Executive Officer Paul Buckley for the Our Future Our Place project.*



PAUL BUCKLEY

The Morwell East public housing estate in the Latrobe Valley of Victoria, Australia, was struggling with a host of community

issues, including long-term unemployment, physical unattractiveness, and a poor public image. At the same time, a review of the labor market in the valley showed that many of the construction workers were employed from outside despite the fact that the area was plagued with high unemployment. “Our Future Our Place” was created to address all of these problems—improve the social mix and appearance of the neighborhood, meet identified skill shortages within the community’s workforce, and provide skill training for its long-term unemployed and indigenous residents to help them obtain sustainable employment—in a way that maximized the development of constructive partnerships between the federal, state, and local governments; local industry; and the community.

The pilot phase of the project, which ran for one year, targeted two sites on which to build two houses in 12 months. For each site, two teams of two job seekers spent two days on-site and two days receiving training in relevant building industry skills. The training, which came through active participation in the construction of low-cost, attractive, and innovative homes located on former public housing demolition sites, was provided by Try Youth and Community

Services, which also provided access to its training facilities and jointly supervised the on-site work with the Latrobe Development Group. The final product—two three-bedroom houses in neighborhood renewal areas—had several environmentally sustainable design features, including passive solar orientation, a concrete floor acting as a heat bank for winter sun, and low-toxicity materials used in construction.

The construction of new and innovative private housing within specific neighborhoods provided the foundation for meeting all of the program’s goals: it rejuvenated these areas into stronger well-integrated neighborhoods, improved both the physical appearance and the public perception of traditional public housing estates, helped alleviate current skill shortages in the community for major construction projects, and provided a vehicle for training and on-the-job experience for long-term unemployed residents. At least 65 percent of participants completed the needed certificates in building and construction, and at least 45 percent gained full-time employment—well above the national average currently achieved through any program for this target group.

“Our Future Our Place” was primarily developed through the partnership of Try Youth and Community Services, the Latrobe City Council, and the Victoria Department of Human Services (DHS), as well as a range of other commonwealth and state departments, a number of community organizations, and the private sector. The Latrobe city team, which



**Helping the long-term unemployed get back into the labor market, while meeting community needs**

comprises members of the executive office, designed and managed the entire program. It worked on relationships and negotiations with the federal and state governments, various government agencies, and community groups for two years before obtaining the required funding from the government and the land from DHS. The project was designed to be self-sustaining: the houses, once constructed, are sold at public auction; the value of the land is refunded to DHS; and the surplus funds are used to purchase equipment for the next house. The first house sold for \$130,000, which provided enough surplus to purchase construction materials for the next house. And the program was actively promoted throughout Victoria to ensure that upon completion of the pilot project, the participants could connect with the building and construction industry statewide.

While a number of programs are designed to help the long-term unemployed get back into the labor market, many lack the flexibility to meet specific community needs. This project, which models a whole-of-government approach to helping socially disadvantaged people find sustained employment, is innovative in that it meets that goal while

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providing local businesses and the construction industry with potential employees who have obtained a level of knowledge that will enable them to work safely and productively on any building and construction site. And in so doing, it promotes the idea that individual and group circumstances can be changed to achieve positive outcomes.