

Building partnerships for sustainability

Greg Hunt is the Executive Officer for the South East Councils Climate Change Alliance in Victoria and shares their story in engaging a new audience for sustainability.

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Preaching to the choir, dealing with fellow travellers, talking to the usual suspects – we’re comfortable with People Like Us (PLUs) but we’ll never bring about the broad-scale change needed if that’s all we talk with. We’re half way through a partnership program where we’re going beyond the already engaged to attract a new audience for sustainability.

‘We’ is the South East Councils Climate Change Alliance (SECCCA), an incorporated grouping of 8 member councils in Melbourne’s south-east on whose behalf we conduct mitigation, adaptation and sequestration projects (check the website at this URL <http://www.seccca.org.au/docs/SECCCA_Flier.pdf . SECCCA supports member councils with community energy efficiency programs across the south –east.

SECCCA member council, the City of Casey has a greenfield site, Selandra Rise, on Melbourne’s urban fringe that will eventually have 18,000 residents. Typically a council follows the population with provision of community services in its Community Centre or Neighbourhood House when the numbers reach a minimum number. However, if residents work out for themselves lifestyles and behaviours in the absence of services, by the time the council arrives to deliver them they are not readily retrofitted. Casey decided that it should provide support from the very start and as residents moved into the estate, they could attend resident’s coffee mornings, new parents groups, evening yoga classes and the rest of the community-building programs that councils offer.

The development at Selandra Rise is being rolled out by Stockland, a major greenfield developer with a clear need for the commercial success of their developments. The desirability



Selandra Community Place at Cranbourne North: Photo provided by City of Casey

of one estate over another is in part determined by the breadth of the offer to new residents. A volume builder on the Selandra Rise estate is Henley and they are carving out a market niche that includes in their range of homes a strong sustainable living option. They have built, as part of the display village on the estate, a zero-emissions 8 star house.

These four partners (in bold) found a strong confluence of interests in offering SECCCA’s Sustainable Homes Program through the City of Casey’s Selandra Community Place (SCP) <http://www.selandracomunityplace.com.au/>, built by Henley in Stockland’s display village.

SECCCA staffs the Selandra Community Place from Thursdays to Sundays when there is a strong throughput of intending residents for Selandra Rise and other greenfield sites across the region and elsewhere. Visitors to the house, which looks like any other house on the estate, but certainly feels more comfortable for all of the sustainability measures - insulation, double-glazing draught-proofing, etc. are approached by SECCCA staff and engaged in conversation about their housing intentions, building plans and living patterns. They are offered enrolment in SECCCA’s Sustainable Homes Program, a free building consultation based upon a range of changes they could make to improve the environmental performance of the house they build

and they can take away a set of information cards to include in the brief to their builder for the house they’d like to live in.

SECCCA receives a weekly report on how many attended what questions were they asking and what services they would like. A striking finding is that many people have never considered sustainability issues before, it is not part of their experience and they often don’t even know what questions to ask. They are not the usual suspects. Having a staff member to approach them and lead them through the discussion is of inestimable value. How to gain maximum benefit is a welcome message, and to win the Energy Efficiency Trifecta; (i) install insulation, (ii) double-glaze windows and (iii) draught-proof the house. Whereas each measure will bring about an energy saving, adopting all three gives a much bigger synergistic benefit with consequent bigger dollar savings.

The partnership has proved spectacularly successful with each partner receiving a direct response to the need which led them to the partnership. SCP has been recognised in a number of awards for planning, service delivery and collaboration. Perhaps of greatest importance, random visitors on a weekend jaunt to a display village come away with enthusiasm for the sustainability message and the means to incorporate energy efficiency into their lives.