

Article

## (Re)Building Home and Community in the Social Housing Sector: Lessons from a South Australian Approach

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### Abstract

Australia's social housing sector is under great pressure. Actions to improve social housing sector capacity and responsiveness have occupied the minds and endeavours of many policy makers, practitioners and scholars for some time now. This article focusses on one approach to challenges within the sector recently adopted in a socio-economically disadvantaged area within Adelaide, South Australia: transfer of housing stock from the public to the community housing sector for capacity and community building purposes (the Better Places, Stronger Communities Public Housing Transfer Program). The discussion draws on evaluative research about this northern Adelaide program, which has a deliberate theoretical and practical foundation in community development and place-making as a means for promoting and strengthening social inclusion, complementing its tenancy management and asset growth focuses. Tenants and other stakeholders report valued outcomes from the program's community development activities—the focus of this article—which have included the co-production of new and necessary social and physical infrastructures to support community participation and engagement among (vulnerable) tenants and residents, confidence in the social landlord and greater feelings of safety and inclusion among tenants, underpinning an improving sense of home, community and place. Consideration of program outcomes and lessons reminds us of the importance of the 'social' in social housing and social landlords. The program provides a model for how social landlords can work with tenants and others to (re)build home and community in places impacted by structural disadvantage, dysfunction, or change. The article adds to the literature on the role of housing, in this case community housing, as a vehicle for place-making and promoting community development and social inclusion.

### Keywords

co-production; community development; community housing; disadvantage; place-making; social housing; social inclusion; social landlord; stock transfer; tenants

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

Australia's social housing sector is under great pressure. Waitlists for social (public and community) housing properties remain substantial, resources for sector growth and redevelopment are limited and the hous-

ing and other needs of sitting and new tenants are increasingly diverse. This array of challenges facing the sector are not unique to Australia and reflect broader structural changes in western democracies related to neoliberal ideology, the well documented rollback of traditional welfare states and concurrent roll out of

other forms of social and private provision (Pawson, Milligan, & Yates, 2020; see also August, 2019; Housing Europe, 2019; Whitehead, 2015). As Robinson, Green, and Wilson (2019, p. 5) note:

In relation to housing, this has involved the weakening or dismantling of traditional state housing assistance programmes through processes of deregulation, privatisation and reduced spending....Funding for the construction and maintenance of social housing has been cut, stock has been privatised through sales and transfers, and tenant protection has been weakened.

Building social housing sector capacity and responsiveness to address the demands being faced has occupied the minds and endeavours of many policy makers and scholars for some time now. A range of strategies has been trialled or rolled out to meet the challenges facing the sector.

All jurisdictions across Australia have engaged in demand management approaches for some time now (most since the 1980s), tightening eligibility criteria for social housing. Such policy and practice has resulted in larger numbers of people with complex needs among applicants and tenants, for example, people with mental health and substance abuse issues, people with challenging behaviours, disability and lived experience of homelessness, including people moving on from chronic rough sleeping and women and families impacted by domestic and family violence (Flanagan et al., 2020; Muir et al., in press). In South Australia, the shift to tighter targeting to need has been particularly challenging, a legacy of the traditionally much larger public housing sector locally, and the sector's strong foundation as housing for workers and to support industry.

Most jurisdictions have also engaged in stock redevelopment and/or divestment to improve the appropriateness (design and quality) of housing for tenants, as well for neighbourhood redesign and destigmatisation, and to release capital for further redevelopment and new acquisitions (Pawson, Milligan, Wiesel, & Hulse, 2013). In some jurisdictions, housing authorities have pursued the direct transfer of housing stock within the social housing sector—from state (public) housing authorities to the community housing sector (housing associations)—to build capacity in a multi-provider social housing sector where opportunities exist for both increased asset leverage for growth/redevelopment and for improved housing outcomes for tenants. Such strategies have been pursued with more or less vigour depending on prevailing political ideology and the availability of dedicated resourcing for such programs in a context of inadequate government investment in social housing (Pawson et al., 2020).

This article adds to the evidence bases on social housing stock transfer to build sector capacity, as well as the literature on the role of housing, in this case community housing, as a vehicle for promoting community develop-

ment and social inclusion. It does this by specifically looking at tenant and community building outcomes in a social housing stock transfer program in Adelaide, South Australia. Such a focus within social (largely public) housing sector capacity building activity, and related research, has largely taken a back seat in Australia; contrasting with some international experience (Miller & Russell, 2012). The preoccupation of policy makers with stock transfer for asset growth and leverage purposes—efficiency and performance metrics and outputs, over more qualitative outcomes for people and place—in part explains the current Australian situation. So too does the relative newness of broadscale stock transfer initiatives, and the limited resourcing for evaluating and documenting broad program outcomes. The intrinsic and evolving differences in both purpose and values between the public and community housing sectors also clearly play a significant part here. While public housing providers have arguably not involved tenants in the design, delivery and management of housing as much as they could (with some involvement preserved through tenant advisory structures), Australia's community housing providers, and the sector collectively, have maintained and defended their traditionally more inclusive role. As the Community Housing Industry Association (2018, p. 35) notes: Not only do they provide “rental housing for households on very low to moderate income, or people with special needs,” community housing organisations also encourage tenants to participate fully in the social and economic life of their community. This underpinning ethos supports tenant wellbeing and strengthens communities through social inclusion and building social capital and social cohesion (Farrar, Barbato, & Phibbs, 2003).

Broadscale transfer of stock from the public to the community housing sector in South Australia is a recent phenomenon, unlike in some other Australian jurisdictions and in the UK (Pawson & Gilmour, 2010; see also Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2017; Pawson et al., 2013). A significant foray into stock transfer by the South Australian government (almost 1,100 properties) occurred from late 2015 through the Better Places, Stronger Communities Public Housing Transfer Program. Program evaluation reveals promise in the approach (Blunden, Liu, & valentine, 2017; Bullen, Liu, Pawson, & valentine, 2017; Skinner, Tually, & Goodwin-Smith, 2018), which, as discussed herein, has seen positive outcomes for tenants, as well as for the local community. Such outcomes have been promoted through the program's deliberate theoretical and practical foundation in community development and placemaking, situated alongside focuses on tenancy management, asset improvement and growth.

The community development focus within the program is described in work on the future of communities by Kenny and Connors (2017, p. 5):

Community development involves the quest for processes and structures that, as far as possible, will en-

sure that people who are affected by decisions have collective ownership of, control of and responsibility for those decisions, and that they are based on mutual respect and trust, and on sharing of knowledge, ideas and resources.

Kenny and Connors (2017, p. 5, emphasis added) see community development practitioners as working “*alongside* communities to identify community members’ collective needs and priorities; to develop assets, talents and resources; and to access new resources.” Place-making—as a concept and as implemented within the Better Places, Stronger Communities Program—envelops community development theory and practice, bringing to the fore the importance of geography and place-context in the lives of individuals and communities. It is the:

Collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximise shared value....With community-based participation at its centre, an effective placemaking process capitalizes on a local community’s assets, inspiration, and potential, and it results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people’s health, happiness, and wellbeing. (Project for Public Spaces, 2018)

The concepts are complementary and practice-driven, supporting co-production of programs, assets and planning for the future. International examples around both community development, and especially place-making, like the case study presented, tie housing more explicitly into community and place-making efforts than has been the case in Australia generally (Miller & Russell, 2012; Silberberg, Lorah, Disbrow, & Muessig, 2013).

The present article focuses on the outcomes and key lessons from the community development and place-making activity from the case study. The discussion considers the role that place-making approaches can play in repairing some of the frayed social fabric of Australian society of which housing is a central strand. It reminds us of the need to prioritise the ‘social’ in both social housing and social landlord; especially, as this case reinforces, in communities impacted by structural disadvantage, dysfunction or change.

## 2. Background and Literature

### 2.1. Social Inclusion and Community Development

While community development approaches have historically tended to emphasise the building of community capacities as a whole, and usually in relation to a specific spatial or geographic area, Shucksmith (2000) argues that such an approach has tended to mask the inequalities between individuals that are exacerbated by neoliberal processes of modernisation, leading to increasing social marginalisation for some (see also Giddens, 1991). He suggests instead a focus upon social inclu-

sion that is linked to the development of social capital among individuals. Community development, in this view, should be a primarily endogenous process stemming from the increased participation, skill development and actualisation of community members themselves (Shucksmith, 2000).

In 2008, the now-defunct Australian Social Inclusion Board was established to advise government on how to achieve better outcomes for disadvantaged people and track progress towards building a ‘socially inclusive’ community. Social inclusion, under their definition (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2012), means that:

People have the resources, opportunities and capabilities they need to:

- Learn (participate in education and training);
- Work (participate in employment, unpaid or voluntary work including family and carer responsibilities);
- Engage (connect with people, use local services and participate in local, cultural, civic and recreational activities); and
- Have a voice (influence decisions that affect them).

It is this broad model of social inclusion as a driver for community development that Better Places, Stronger Communities promotes and aims to support. This program underpinning is reflected in the overall program goals, as outlined in the following sections.

### 2.2. Better Places, Stronger Communities

The Better Places, Stronger Communities Program was announced in 2013, with a threefold intersecting rationale: to expand and strengthen the community housing sector; provide more diverse tenancy options for low income and vulnerable people; and relieve pressure on the public housing system. The underpinning logic model for the program specified five long-term outcomes as overall program goals (captured in Blunden et al., 2017, p. 7):

- The multi-provider housing sector is stronger and more vibrant;
- Access to affordable and appropriate housing for vulnerable people is increased;
- Choice and quality of housing for service users is improved;
- Tenants have improved financial and social wellbeing;
- There is an improved sense of community and social inclusion.

Following a competitive tendering process, two non-government community housing organisations (social housing providers) were awarded management of the nearly 1,100 properties transferred under the program. Junction Australia won management of the tranche

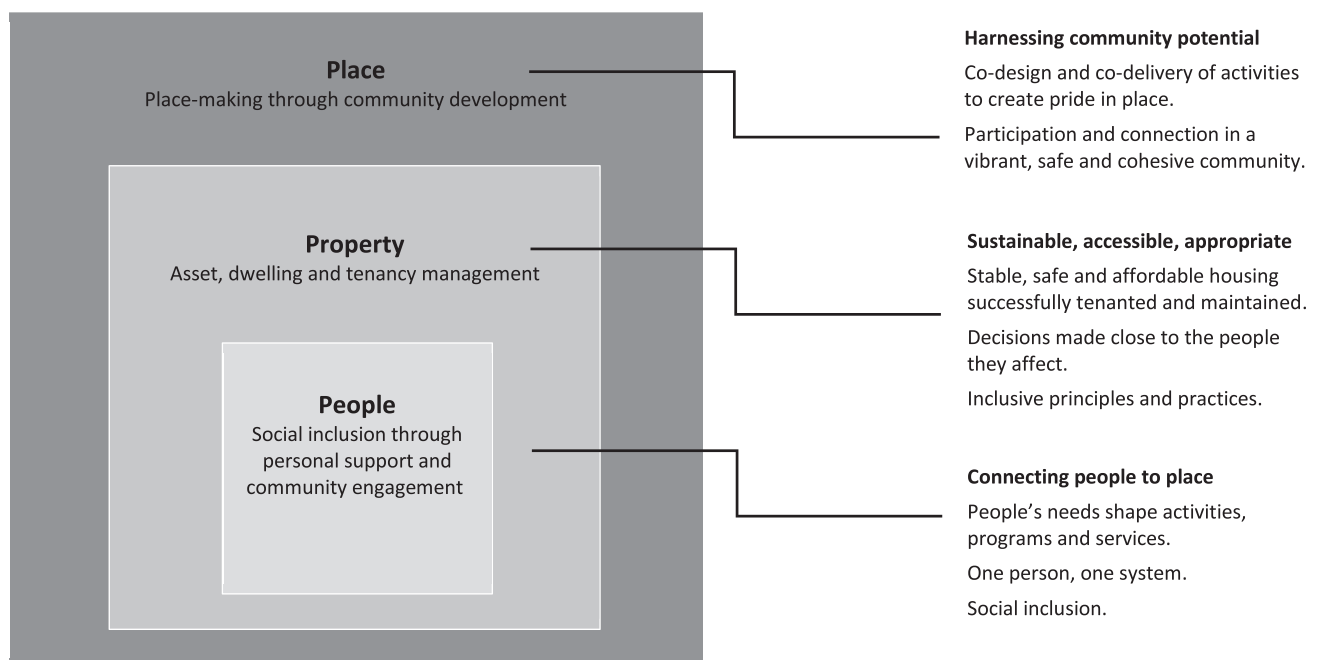
of 608 properties housing 986 tenants in southern Adelaide, contained in/around the suburb of Mitchell Park (Junction Australia, 2018). AnglicareSA Housing (AnglicareSA’s community housing arm) won management of the tranche of 479 properties housing 918 tenants in northern Adelaide, concentrated in the suburbs of Elizabeth Grove and Elizabeth Vale (AnglicareSA, 2019). These residential suburbs south and north in Adelaide (South Australia’s capital and major city) are within areas that have traditionally contained high concentrations of public housing (scattered and contiguous). Such housing was developed many decades ago now, to support regional industrial growth and development, including to house the workers (and their families) employed at now-defunct nearby automotive manufacturing or assembly plants: Chrysler/Mitsubishi Motors Australian Limited, Tonsley, which ceased operations in 2008, and General Motors Holden, Elizabeth, which ceased operations in late 2017. The locations tell the story of industrial growth, decline and restructuring locally in South Australia and reflect the decline of car manufacturing in Australia generally (Beer, 2008, 2018; Peel, 1995; internationally see Bailey & de Ruyter, 2015; Chapain & Murie, 2008). The areas are case studies of the impact of global forces and structural change, translating to high regional rates of unemployment and long-term unemployment. They are also case studies of the changing faces, needs and expectations of social housing tenants over recent decades, in terms of such things as experience of disability and desire to age in place (Flanagan et al., 2020; Muir et al., in press). The northern Adelaide (AnglicareSA Housing) Better Places, Stronger Communities experience is the foundation of this article.

The Better Places, Stronger Communities Program was offered for an initial period of three years, commencing October 2015. As noted earlier, and somewhat unusually for the Australian context, the program came with funds for the successful tenderers to use to facilitate and support community development within the locations. Such funds were used to appoint community development workers to work alongside teams of tenancy officers, enabling processes, infrastructure and actions to support community development.

The design of the overall Better Places, Stronger Communities Program included the South Australian government’s intention and option to extend the management transfer contracts for a further 20-years, pending assessment of contract compliance and outcomes. Contract extensions were awarded to both housing providers in late 2018. Notably, the contracts preserved some resourcing for ongoing community development work. The 20-year contract duration supports leverage opportunities for the providers, meeting lender/loan requirements (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2017). It also affords Junction Australia and Anglicare SA opportunities to support and facilitate community development and place-making, improve poor quality stock and its environmental and economic efficiency.

*2.3. The Northern Adelaide Better Places, Stronger Communities Program*

The specific approach for the Better Places, Stronger Communities Program in northern Adelaide is captured in Figure 1, drawing explicit connections and in-



**Figure 1.** Better Places, Stronger Communities model (northern Adelaide): people, property and place. Adapted from AnglicareSA (2016).

terrelationships between residents and tenants (people), dwellings and their management (property) and the broader physical, socioeconomic and cultural landscape (place). People, property and place are also reflected in the three key impact objectives distilled in the logic model for their version of the program (AnglicareSA, 2015b):

Working alongside community members and partners, AnglicareSA's vision for the Better Places Stronger Communities Program...is to create:

- A safe, vibrant and engaged community;
- A diverse and proud tenant population;
- Affordable, quality homes.

**Table 1.** Community development activities, northern Adelaide Better Places, Stronger Communities Program.

Activity	Description	Outputs/Outcomes
<i>Foundational work (people, property, place)</i>		
Community Leadership Group	Vehicle for co-production of program. Comprised of tenants/residents (approximately 12 members).	2018–2019: 9 meetings
Community services/Infrastructure audit	Audit of local social, physical and cultural infrastructure (services, groups, networks, buildings, spaces) in conjunction with local stakeholders.	Documents and maps identifying services/infrastructure capacities and gaps to inform planning.
Better Places, Stronger Communities News (and other communication outlets)	Outlets for program information, including tenant contributions.	Newsletter, mailbox and text-message alerts services for activities, events, information.
<i>Events/special-purpose activities (people, place)</i>		
Services Expo	Large-scale event showcasing local services.	2018–2019: 137 community events/activities held 2018–2019: 2,361 people engaged.
Community Christmas celebration	Family-focused event to celebrate the festive season.	2018: 700 attendees; 50 service providers. Improved understand of local services and networks.
Neighbourhood events, i.e., for Reconciliation Week, Harmony Day, neighbourhood picnics, barbecues, cat and dog microchipping days	Smaller-scale events responding to community ideas/needs.	2018: 300 attendees. Building community connection and identity.
Ready Steady Cook (cooking) group Craft group Women's wellbeing group	Interest groups to build networks and skills among tenants and residents.	Opportunity for tenant/community connection. Fora for sharing experiences. Developing and sharing life/living skills.
Cuppa Crew	Regular event for tenants/other residents to connect over tea/coffee (tenant-run) in designated places.	Weekly social engagement opportunity. 2018–2019: total 243 attendees.
Neighbourhood Watch	Establishment of local Neighbourhood Watch group.	Strengthened links with SA Police. Improved crime reporting, resulting in greater policing presence.

**Table 1.** (Cont.) Community development activities, northern Adelaide Better Places, Stronger Communities Program.

Activity	Description	Outputs/Outcomes
<i>Linkages (people, place)</i>		
External, i.e., Playford Men’s Shed Community tool (lending) library United We Read (literacy program)	Active promotion of links to practical and social supports for tenants and residents.	Greater tenant awareness and connection with local agencies, services and networks for access to specific support and for wellbeing, social engagement/inclusion.  Links with churches, local government, schools, children’s services, frontline services, existing and new sporting and social clubs.
Internal, i.e. Intensive Tenancy Support (at risk tenancies) Playford Communities for Children (support for children/families in disadvantaged areas) Thread Together (free stylist service and fashionable clothing for people in need)		
<i>Amenity/streetscaping (place)</i>		
Street clean-ups Community tree plantings Working bee at neighbourhood shops (installation of street furniture, beautification work) Large wall mural	Opportunities for tenants to collectively engage in building amenity and improve appearance of place.	Improved property conditions and visual amenity. 2016: 36m <sup>3</sup> waste material removed from one housing estate.
AnglicareSA shopfront (in Elizabeth Grove neighbourhood shops)	Shopfront/office in Elizabeth Grove neighbourhood shopping centre.	2018–2019: 3,002 visits. Point of access to workers, other staff and for community information. Space for community meetings (outgrown).
Affordable living initiative (people, property)	Actions aimed at improving energy efficiency of dwellings and building tenant understandings and behaviours for addressing escalating costs of living.	Four education sessions (157 tenants attended). \$805,000 of cost-saving improvements to homes (roof insulation, ceiling fans, window tint, external door seals, LED light fittings, water saving shower heads).

Notes: The affordable living initiative was a central plank during the initial term of the Better Places, Stronger Communities Program. Through the initiative modifications were made to make homes energy efficient, specifically to reduce energy costs. Tenants had some input into the types of modifications made. The initiative offered an avenue for engaging with tenants. Improvements to properties have not only been appreciated by tenants, but also helped build their confidence in the program, workers and landlord. Source: AnglicareSA (2015a, 2019) and Skinner et al. (2018).

Table 1 outlines the breadth of activities and structures co-designed and co-delivered under the umbrella of the Better Places, Stronger Communities program by AnglicareSA workers and residents (mostly AnglicareSA housing tenants) to meet stated objectives. The table also presents outputs/outcomes data for each ac-

tivity, demonstrating reach and progress. The structures/activities tie to the four key elements of social inclusion as generally defined in Australia: learn, work (including volunteer), engage and have a voice.

The essence of the AnglicareSA Housing model, and its aims, are grounded in the complementary principles,

theory and practice of community development and place-making (for social inclusion purposes), see Figure 1 and Table 1, as summarised in the earlier discussion.

### 3. Methods and Data

This article uses the findings of a qualitative process and implementation evaluation of the community development component within the northern Adelaide Better Places, Stronger Communities Program to show how such an approach can support (re)building home and community within and through the social housing sector (Skinner et al., 2018). The key impact objectives and five long-term outcomes set out in sections 2.2 and 2.3—with their clear social inclusion orientation—provided the criteria against which the evaluation was framed, and outcomes considered. The evaluative work on which the article draws was commissioned by AnglicareSA to document the approach and learnings as a case study and to evaluate the model for continuous improvement purposes.

The theoretical framework developed for the evaluation deliberately prioritised expert/participant knowledge, organically capturing the voices and perspectives of residents, workers and representatives of other community organisations involved with the program generally and its community development component specifically. Data were collected via either one-on-one interviews (25 participants) or focus groups with up to eight participants per setting (23 participants). Interviews/discussions were largely participant-led, allowing expert identification of key issues/matters, community development impacts, value and most significant change (Dart & Davies, 2003). Comprehensive notes were taken during all interviews and focus groups, along with audio recordings and fieldnotes detailing researcher reflections. Data were collected during September and October 2018.

A purposive sampling methodology was employed to recruit the relevant participants (Lavrakas, 2008), with the community housing organisation directly promoting the evaluation to residents and other stakeholders through their program and other networks. Some participants were recruited via snowballing/word of mouth. Resident participants were mostly tenants of the community housing organisation (with some non-tenant residents also participants), ten participants were workers of the community housing organisation or other local agencies and two informants were local business owners who were also long-term residents of the area. Efforts were made to recruit people more and less engaged with the program and its community development focus for balance in the evaluation. Some bias exists in the data towards the former group for unsurprising reasons: ease of identification, access and willingness to participate.

Notably, data saturation was reached early on in the fieldwork (Heneker, Zizzo, Awata, & Goodwin-Smith, 2017; Saunders et al., 2018; Seale, 2004). This is an important factor in the evaluation, triangulating value and

impact and indicating data rigour. Data saturation also assisted with developing the framework for analysis.

Ethics approval for the evaluation was received from the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee at the relevant research institution prior to data collection (Flinders University SBREC project number 8121). All participants provided informed consent. Significant care was taken to ensure the anonymity of participants across all stages of the research from initial contact about the research, through to fieldwork participation and reporting. Identifying information has been removed from all commentary provided, including context commentary that could identify any individual respondent.

#### 3.1. Analysis

The original transcripts and fieldnotes from the evaluation were revisited for this article, and (re)interpreted and (re)analysed using adaptations of Ritchie and Spencer's (1994) framework analysis methodology (see also Spencer, Ritchie, Ormston, O'Connor, & Barnard, 2014) and Halcomb and Davidson's (2006) iterative approach for thematic analysis. This approach to data analysis involved four steps: First, familiarisation with the project data through close review of transcripts and fieldnotes, documenting researcher/evaluator reflections about the data; second, content analysis of the data to identify/map overarching (key/repeated) themes as the basis for a thematic analysis framework; third, sorting overarching themes into a logical order for the thematic analysis framework, which in this case showed strong interconnectedness between themes; and, fourth, interpreting themes or demonstrating/reinforcing their prominence by matching key quotations from experts/participants consulted against each theme.

### 4. Findings and Discussion

#### 4.1. Outcomes

The data collected about the community development activity within the northern Adelaide Better Places, Stronger Communities Program identified a number of positive outcomes of such work within the program (Table 1) and its value to tenants and the local community (see Blunden et al., 2017; Bullen et al., 2017). These program outcomes can be adequately summarised as follows:

- Development and promotion of tenant and community participation and engagement infrastructure, via a group for co-production of community development and place-making activity itself and by establishing other local social groups/networks (and the resources/training needed to support their establishment and functioning);
- Development and promotion of a program of regular and special-purpose events and activities of

interest to tenants and the broader community, building a sense of place and identity;

- Delivering or facilitating the delivery of new physical infrastructure to activate streets, building pedestrian navigability and neighbourhood amenity and maximising opportunities for social interaction locally;
- Establishment and strengthening of links and pathways between key organisations for social, economic and cultural engagement and development in Elizabeth Grove/Elizabeth Vale and beyond;
- High levels of tenant and stakeholder satisfaction with the design, implementation and delivery of community development and place-making activities within the program.

Beneath these more ‘collective’ outcomes are also highly individual outcomes for many tenants (and some non-tenant residents), centred specifically on increasing social inclusion, overcoming social isolation and extending or building people’s life and living skills.

The community development and place-making outcomes identified above sit alongside four clearly related outcomes from the program more broadly. First, tenancy and asset management, which means ensuring tenants understand and comply with their responsibilities (payment of rent, property standards and condition, socially acceptable behaviour), meeting benchmarks for urgent and long-term maintenance requirements and requirements around allocation of vacant dwellings (tenant diversity). Second, affordable living, i.e., designing, delivering and/or facilitating delivery of initiatives to reduce the costs of living for tenants. Third, safety, which means actions to improve tenant safety, including perceptions about community safety. Fourth, (maintaining) high levels of residential satisfaction among tenants (AnglicareSA, 2019).

Consideration of the structure and processes underpinning the delivery and evolution of the community development component within the program, logically leads to a number of conclusions about the approach as a vehicle for improving inclusion outcomes related to people, property and place. Such outcomes are also important for social housing sector capacity building, as foundational principles for public housing stock transfer. The remainder of the article outlines the key lessons from the approach, supported with statements from stakeholders. Lessons are highly interconnected, and all play an equally important part within the whole picture of (re)building home and community within and through the social housing sector.

Before moving onto such lessons however, it is pertinent to point out that discussions with key stakeholders about the development and implementation of the northern Adelaide program revealed some challenges, barriers or tensions. Challenges reported included the time it has taken to build trust and connection with tenants/residents (a challenge for both

community development workers and tenancy officers); the challenge of finding appropriately skilled community development workers and explaining community development and its purpose; and some turnover of tenancy workers. Arguably the core challenges for the program generally—impacting program outcomes and tenants/residents’ views about the program and area—have been the poor quality of transferred housing stock, and issues with neighbours, mostly related to antisocial behaviour. These factors were highlighted as impacting people’s sense of wellbeing, connection and place. They were also core motivations for the development of the program by the housing authority, with redevelopment and better maintenance of dwellings seen as occupying a core role in (re)building pride in place and therefore (re)building ‘community.’

## 4.2. Lessons

### 4.2.1. Theme 1: People and Relationships Matter

The northern Adelaide Better Places, Stronger Communities experience strongly demonstrates the importance of people and relationships in the delivery of both human services and community development. Put simply, people and relationships matter, and in a range of ways:

I talk to the Anglicare people in the office and I see them out and about. The staff are very helpful. We feel like a family. I can’t say enough good things about Anglicare. They made me feel like a human again. (Tenant)

The high value ascribed to people and relationships by tenants reflected experiences with their former landlord, the state housing authority (known at different time points as the South Australian Housing Trust, Housing SA or, now, the SA Housing Authority). For some tenants this was a relationship of many decades, reaching back to when public housing was provided for working class families. For others it was a much shorter relationship, commencing after experience of an acute crisis or change in life circumstances impacting on their housing, a period of homelessness, for example. Regardless of duration, tenants noted a much more distant and disconnected relationship with the public housing provider compared with their current arrangement. The overwhelming majority of tenants felt they were no longer cared about or cared for by the state landlord, reporting significant challenges with accessing relevant staff and information and landlord preoccupation with compliance (‘ticking boxes’ on forms) over people’s needs. Many felt worn down by inappropriately met or unmet requests for property maintenance and repairs, a key housing concern. Tenants highlighted and criticised the highly impersonal experience of attending the regionalised local state housing authority office for whatever reason, where they were “just a num-



ber” and (too) often redirected to a computer screen for service, an overwhelming experience for many (older) tenants with poor or no technology literacy. Tenants also felt they had no genuine pathway to action about disruptive neighbours engaging in antisocial behaviour, impacting on their feelings about personal and community safety. Some longer-term and older tenants lamented the loss of their past stronger and consistent connections with their housing authority tenancy officers, who were, for a time, considered a trusted source of advice and community information; a resource to draw on in times of crisis or need.

Care and caring, listening, respect, trust, accessibility, responsiveness and reciprocity were identified consistently among tenants as critical factors in how they felt about their new landlord and what characterised their positively viewed approach to tenancy and asset management, and to community development:

I’m very glad I applied to Anglicare. There is a family relationship that didn’t exist with Housing Trust. Visibility and accessibility is really important in the community. You see [workers] frequently, and it feels like they care, and as a result you have more sense of responsibility. (Tenant)

Relationships built with tenancy officers were the foundation of engagement for many tenants:

It’s more friendly than it was with Housing Trust. I feel like I can talk to them, I’ve been able to go to my tenancy officer about things like financial counselling help. With Housing Trust you would only see TOs [tenancy officers] during inspection time [yearly], when they would go through everything that’s wrong with the property. (Tenant)

Tenancy officers were viewed as trusted individuals within a cohesive and complementary Better Places, Stronger Communities team. Understanding of the respective roles of workers in the program was evident. People noted they could easily access program workers for information and advice and depend on them for follow-up and action:

The team [is] now trusted and known in the community. (Tenant)

There’s trust and belief now in getting things done, that if an issue is raised, something will be done about it. (Worker)

Relationships between tenancy officers and tenants provided an important avenue for identifying people interested in greater involvement in local activities but unsure of opportunities. Such relationships (rapport and trust) were also the basis for identifying socially isolated or lonely tenants who might benefit from engagement

and other social supports offered through the program’s community development work (or other pathways). The Cuppa Crew (Table 1), is one structure built within the program, ‘staffed’ by tenants/residents, to build neighbourhood engagement.

Addressing social isolation among tenants has been a core approach within—and outcome of—the program generally, aided by community development workers and activity. The following vignette, assembled from our fieldwork, demonstrates impact and value here.

Jan [pseudonym] is a mother of adult children in her 50s who has resided in Elizabeth Grove for 25 years. The property she occupies was transferred to AnglicareSA Housing as part of the Better Places, Stronger Communities program in late 2015. Jan’s story is one of experiencing and overcoming social isolation. As a long-term sufferer of social anxiety and depression Jan found it hard to leave her house: “I stayed at home and did my own thing—I was in a routine, and I felt safe.”

Jan described immediate changes in the way things were managed with her new landlord, acknowledging the most significant changes for her have come through AnglicareSA’s work with and in the community. She credits becoming more connected to her community to the support and approach of workers: “I felt like I could go out and meet new people. I went to the Craft Group, and then also to the Women’s Wellbeing Group. The groups are diverse and they’re welcoming. Anglicare have also put on their Christmas show, and that’s been really great. Now, I’ll get involved with everything where I can. You can get the community out to free events—it’s the first, initial step for people to take to get out there and get involved. That’s the hard part. Participation is important, and often a couple of kind words from someone will start it off.” She also highly valued Anglicare’s role in “letting you know what’s going on in the community, and in connecting you with other services and things.”

Jan’s experience summarises the core and success of the program: her participation in groups and activities has given her “a sense of responsibility to pay it forward and it makes me feel good that I can give back....I feel like I’m needed in my community.” She is now actively involved in co-producing community development activities in the community.

Notably, social isolation was identified by some as a consequence of the breakdown or absence of connections between tenants and between tenants and their landlord. In fact, some tenants had decided that isolating themselves within their homes was the best option for feeling safe in their home and community. A small number of people reported being advised to do this by Housing SA staff in the past, especially when experienc-

ing antisocial behaviour from neighbours. For others, social isolation or exclusion was related to medical or other personal issues, circumstances or vulnerabilities that determined their eligibility for a social tenancy in the first place. This program focus speaks to the diverse needs of social housing tenants. It fits with findings of an increasing body of work around the growing and costly epidemic of loneliness and social isolation in Australia (Franklin & Tranter, 2011). Such isolation is masked by houses and front doors, resulting in disconnected and dysfunctional communities (Kearns, Whitley, Tannahill, & Ellaway, 2015). The prevalence of social isolation highlights the need for responses from social landlords that are built on understanding tenants' individual as well as collective needs, including being able to support co-existing needs such as ageing or disability and loneliness, trauma, mental health and social isolation.

The skills and character of the people fulfilling community development worker roles in the program were considered key elements in program successes. One tenant said: "[The workers] are the heartbeat of it....Nothing is too much for them....They like your feedback." Another concurred: "We give them ideas, they [the community development workers] run with them!"

Inductive analysis of the evaluation data allowed us to determine workers' core skillsets and characteristics for supporting community development and social inclusion:

- Approachability, reliability and consistency for following through on actions, processes, thinking;
- Ability to listen and support people from a range of backgrounds and viewpoints to articulate their wants and needs;
- Cultural awareness and tolerance;
- Vision and project planning ability, seeing how small components fit together and at different scales to achieve outcomes;
- Problem solving ability;
- Ability to prioritise issues and actions;
- Empathy, strong conflict management and resolution skills;
- Persistence and a 'can do' attitude;
- Resourcefulness to make something from nothing or very little;
- Willingness to take a chance on things that might otherwise be considered risky or unrewarding.

Our observations about the program also show the increasing need for community development workers to possess systems thinking mindsets: to understand how to navigate complex systems and pathways with tenants, with other agencies and with networks in the community and beyond. A core component of the community development work within Better Places, Stronger Communities has been what we describe as 'social wayfinding.' That is, workers pointing or referring residents in the direction of necessary local social and other

supports in order to build individual and community capacity for engagement, participation and, ultimately, wellbeing. Wayfinding strengthens links between people and local infrastructures—sporting clubs and facilities, support groups, cultural hubs, local authority supported forums and meeting places, education and training opportunities, among others—building a sense of place attachment and identity.

#### 4.2.2. Theme 2: Property (Home) Matters

While by design the Better Places, Stronger Communities Program is deliberately about much more than property or dwellings, it is also a program about the management of social housing tenancies (occupied and vacant) and social housing assets (dwellings). It is not surprising then that property was a recurrent theme, even with its explicit focus on the community development work within the program.

Property mattered in some key ways. Most prominently, the fact that AnglicareSA Housing delivered on maintenance and repairs built trust between tenants and workers/the landlord. Commitment to action around maintenance and repairs provided a foundation for relationships between workers and a level of trust in the program generally:

They repainted the house, fixed the floors, cleaned the gutters...there was a lot of maintenance that wasn't being done under Housing Trust. (Tenant)

Improvements to dwellings, including through the program's affordable living initiative (Table 1), developed tenants' confidence and respect in the program, workers and landlord. Property improvements further supported growing feelings of pride in streets, community and place; stakeholders noted that properties were being kept to a better visible standard by the landlord and tenants, improving the look of streets and areas within the suburbs. A number of the tenants actively co-designing and driving community development activity with workers noted that some of their willingness to do this came from the positive care and attention they and their homes were receiving under the program, along with the sense of place emerging with the support of the program, workers and other tenants.

#### 4.2.3. Theme 3: Place and Community Matter

You can have a million houses, but nothing is going to change without community. (Tenant)

Elizabeth Grove and Elizabeth Vale are more than the stereotypical disadvantaged communities they are often depicted as by outsiders and the media. They are neighbourhoods, a community and a place that represents the complex interplay of loose and tight, strong and frayed, formal and informal connections among resi-

dents (many of whom are social housing tenants) and between residents and local physical and social infrastructures and institutions.

Community development and place-making practice has provided vehicles for necessary and valued grass roots level examination of the appropriateness of community assets, identifying where opportunity exists to (re)build channels for community connections:

[Better Places, Stronger Communities] has had a big impact. People are a lot more aware of other people...talking to each other more....People are more relaxed. (Tenant)

Anglicare is [a] positive in the community. There's a real family atmosphere at the community events. Everyone has a story, and it's good to have the chance to get to know one another. (Tenant)

With groups like this and events you get to know more people in the area, you can stop and talk. A lot of people have anxieties and life issues, you need to get out and make friends. It's all about community. I'm not lonely anymore. I was pretty much housebound—when people stick to their houses it leads to depression and mental health issues. (Tenant)

Locating the entire Better Places, Stronger Communities team—tenancy officers, community development workers and management—at premises within Elizabeth Grove clearly reinforced agency commitment to tenants, place and the program. As well as giving easy access to workers, the shopping centre location has provided a focal point within the community for community development and place-making activity, with workers and residents (mostly tenants) working together to improve amenity by beautifying the environment surrounding the shops (landscaping), stocking an outdoor lending library and grow cart with locally grown and acquired produce, and constructing and installing street furniture to make it a more welcoming place. The Better Places, Stronger Communities office also provides a much needed and well-utilised meeting space for the community (albeit outgrown by most of the groups using it as they have expanded in size and membership).

The findings about the community development activity in the area show that together the suburbs are a place with a re-emerging shared identity. And, this identity has been both founded in, and continues to be influenced by, social and economic development (including restructuring), population and institutional diversity and change:

Community is starting to come back now. People are wanting that sense of community. (Worker)

That tenants and other stakeholders spoke so passionately about their 'place' in their world, and the need to

rebuild it socially and physically with help from others, speaks strongly to the fact that place and community matter, and have a very personal impact on people's lives.

#### 4.2.4. Theme 4: Program Design, Delivery and Ideology Matters

The design, delivery and underpinning ideologies of the northern Adelaide Better Places, Stronger Communities Program has been central to the successes evident from the community development activity; from tenant, stakeholder and researcher perspectives. The program's underpinning people, property and place model captures its essence well, acting as a logical conceptual framework for designing and implementing actions and against which to monitor outcomes (and outputs). It also encapsulates the difference in how social housing is viewed from AnglicareSA's organisational perspective (a non-government, community housing sector perspective) and their view of their role as a social landlord: walking with tenants to support them to create home within a vibrant, safe and cohesive community.

AnglicareSA's belief in co-producing (co-designing, and co-delivering) actions, strategies and plans to build home, community and place is about building a person-centred program, which can be, and is being, shaped in an ongoing way by the people whom it affects. This fits with observations about practice in "the most successful placemaking initiatives [which] transcend the 'place' to forefront the 'making'" (Silberberg et al., 2013, p. 3). AnglicareSA's role has deliberately involved scaffolding some of the supports residents who are not in AnglicareSA housing also need to rebuild community in an area that has been significantly impacted by global economic restructuring resulting in the decimation of the local car manufacturing industry.

Mutuality, responsiveness and iteration (commitment to continuous improvement) defines the model, rather than conditionality and compliance. In many ways, this represents a reversal of approach from that taken by the state housing authority in the area over the last two or three decades.

Participants spoke positively about the future for their suburbs, having a level of confidence in their own, their peers' and agencies' ability to collectively (re)build a more cohesive and inclusive community, with an identity reflecting the past and looking to the future. The community development work has effectively developed the social resources needed to rebuild community. The 20-year extension to the management transfer contract offers some resourcing consistency for co-developing a more sustainable path ahead. Sustainability for the model, however, will always rely on both keeping abreast of changes in the social and services landscapes locally, which are constantly evolving, and, the commitment of residents to community building work, including commitment from people not currently engaged with the work that is ongoing in the area.

## 5. Conclusion

Today's placemaking represents a comeback for community. The iterative actions and collaborations inherent in the making of places nourish communities and empower people. (Silberberg et al., 2013, p. 3)

The northern Adelaide Better Places, Stronger Communities Program has had enormous value and impact for many people and agencies in Elizabeth Vale and Elizabeth Grove, two suburbs within a broader region experiencing the impacts of structural change and socio-economic disadvantage. The program, of course, is not a panacea for all the challenges facing the social housing sector. Nor is the program a panacea for the economic and social challenges facing the Elizabeth region. Not all residents in Elizabeth Vale and Elizabeth Grove are reaping the benefits of the program. The model, with its foundation in co-production per the ideology, theory and practice of community development and place-making, however, is a big step forward in social housing practice, with tangible impacts as discussed throughout this article. It stands as an exemplar of why strategies to address significant and ongoing capacity challenges in the social housing sector in Australia must prioritise outcomes for tenants, including supporting social participation and inclusion, alongside necessary focuses on tenancy management and asset growth and improvement (a long-game). Forefronting outcomes for tenants requires more explicit recognition in policy, and in practice, of the nexuses between people (residents), property (dwellings) and place (community). This triad clearly works to support the four key elements of social inclusion as generally defined in Australia: learn, work (including volunteering), engage and have a voice, at least from the perspective of those people engaged in the program. Building positive outcomes for tenants is the core business of social housing and social landlords—a fact certainly recognised in the ethos of community housing and which arguably makes it an appropriate vehicle for such sector, tenant and community capacity building. Tenants and housing agencies are powerful assets in (re)building home and place.

The approach outlined, and this article, are a clear reminder of the value of community development and place-making in housing practice, and in housing research. Room clearly exists to expand practice and research bringing together these fields for individual, agency, neighbourhood, community, social housing sector and system-wide benefits.

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## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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