

## Community Organising Case Study – Affordable Housing

*This is a case study of how the community organising approach was used in the context of affordable housing. For more detail on this or the policy itself please contact the Sydney Alliance.*

### Listening Phase:

In 2013 the Sydney Alliance launched a series of ‘Table Talks’ on the issue of housing affordability. Over 30 Sydney Alliance partners made commitments to host Table Talks within their communities. Over the following 12 months, 280 *Table Talks* were conducted across the Sydney metropolitan area across a wide variety of different communities including mosques, community centres, churches, synagogues, university students, schools, retirees and mixes of all of the above and more.



The Table Talks asked participants to share stories about their family’s experience of housing stress in Sydney. The stories were collated and a housing team met regularly over this period in an iterative process to hear carefully what the issues were.



Key stresses included: high cost of rental, lack of renter’s rights, children moving back in with their parents, children being unable to afford their own home, concern for the homeless, the extremely high waiting list for social housing, the lack of affordable housing within an hour’s drive (not to mention 30 minutes!) to work.

The Table Talk process didn’t jump into solutions, but invited individuals to step up to be part of the housing campaign in more active ways.

### Discernment & Research Phase:

Within six months the core team grew to 21 members with a wider community of 65-70 leaders in local communities that were engaged to take action. The housing team started a process of ‘cutting’ the issue down from a wide ranging problem to a very specific solution. The housing team then sent delegations of leaders to meet with experts including top academics, developers, superannuation funds, the Committee for Sydney, Sydney Business Chamber, NSW Property Council, Urban Taskforce, Real Estate Institute of NSW, former Labor and Liberal Ministers of housing and planning and distinguished urban planning consultants. After each set of meetings the team would regroup and share learning. This work was actively supported by top academics who took part in the team through the involvement of the National Tertiary Education Union.



Over a series of workshops, the team discerned a solution. The solution had to meet a series of criteria:

1. **Non Divisive:** Broadly supported across the non-profit sector.
2. **Developed Leaders:** Actively supported by Alliance partners and could engage local leaders who had emerged through Table Talks.
3. **Unique contribution:** The Alliance could make a unique contribution and weren't seeking to replicate the efforts of other organisations.
4. **Evidence based:** The solution was strongly supported by evidence and was economically feasible.
5. **Clear decision maker:** that there was a clear target who if they shifted the policy could be implemented.

The outcome of this iterative process was to launch a campaign calling for a plan for social and affordable housing in NSW, that was measurable with specific targets. The most effective tool to achieve this was called "Inclusionary rezoning": the inclusion of a % of affordable housing in new developments where development is contingent on government intervention.

The decision maker was discerned as the NSW Planning Minister, followed by a newly formed Government agency called the Greater Sydney Commission. During this period the "power map" shifted a number of times requiring new tactics and positioning as ministers, Premiers and planners changed and as new policies, projects and priorities were announced from the government.

**Action Phase: 2014-2016**

During the action phase the housing core team and larger community of leaders worked collaboratively using their diverse skills, talents and networks to move the landscape in NSW on the issue. Including but not limited to:

- **Launch:** A major assembly launching the campaign in Sydney Town Hall with 1388 leaders attending.
- **Creating a base of youth:** An interfaith, inter-community Youth Housing Summit with 83 attending.
- **Accountability assemblies:** Five accountability assemblies ahead of the NSW election where local candidates were invited to speak to the diverse assembly of Sydney Alliance leaders. In Sutherland (342 local leaders attending), Chatswood (217), Parramatta (404), Glenmore Park (107), Leichhardt (106) and Lurnea (91).
- **Being everywhere:** Coordinated participation at major government consultations on major districts and debates. Australian Christian Lobby Debate (45 leaders and a question from the floor),



Televised Parliamentary Leaders Debate (1 of 2 questions from the floor), present at all district planning consultations in six regions across Sydney. Turning out 110 local leaders to participate at the Bays Precinct Consultation where every member raised affordable housing in conversations. Religious organisation leaders raising the issue with decision makers at every event they were invited to.



- **Coordination** with key supporters within the Government
- **MPs:** Multiple persuasion or neutralisation meetings with over 30 Government and Opposition MPs in their local electorates.
- **Non Partisan:** Actively building a non-partisan strategy with independent and Christian Democrat MPs (who hold the balance of power) as key Macquarie St champions.
- Media actions, such as when 102 young people and 9 faith leaders (including a Bishop!) set up a share house across the road from Parliament House and another where a mini wooden house for the homeless built by a school student was the backdrop for a meet and greet with MPs at the start of a sitting week).
- **Creating space for politicians to act:** Engaging and persuading supportive conservative thought leaders such as Premier Nick Greiner to “go public” at key moments in the campaign.
- **Letters:** Waves from individuals and organisations to key decision makers in government.
- **Unifying:** the non-government housing sector behind one key goal of 15% inclusionary rezoning on private land and 30% on government land.
- **Coordination:** with large non-partner organisations such as Vinnies, Mission Australia and the Salvation Army running different but related campaigns.



### The Win:

In November 2016 the Greater Sydney Commission announced a 5-10% inclusion of affordable housing in the draft plans. While not the full ask of the Sydney Alliance, there is strong evidence to show that this would not have been possible without coordinated, unified civil society action organised by the Sydney Alliance. The campaign continues in 2017 for 15% inclusionary rezoning.