

COMMON GROUND

TURNING LIVES AROUND

Talking about commitment to the community is easy – actually turning concern for our most vulnerable citizens into sustainable homes is a magnificent achievement. Grocon put its skills to work under its Corporate Social Responsibility charter to deliver Elizabeth Street Common Ground Supportive Housing. Officially opened in August 2010, the eleven storey, Five Green Star Design residential complex provides 131 secure and well-appointed studio apartments for long term homeless persons. There are also 30 affordable tenancies in the form of two bedroom apartments for low income earners.

It is not just a stylish block of apartments though. Inspired by the New York model, the complex integrates numerous common spaces and essential services which can turn tenant lives around, including a green roof designed by Hassell, medical facilities, mental health facilities, an art therapy room, a common computer room, a recreation room, employment referral services and a library. Entries on both Berkeley Street for the low income apartments and on Elizabeth Street for the studio apartments give a sense of privacy and security, with swipe card entry and CCTV.

This is a project which transforms lives. Working in conjunction with State and Federal Governments, Yarra Community Housing and Home Ground Services, Grocon worked for no profit and at no margin to build and fit out Common Ground right down to cutlery and bedding, essential given almost half of the new tenants owned no more than a bag of clothes after many years of life on the streets.

Not only did Grocon work for no margin, their undertaking was to return any cost savings on the original contract budget of \$44.1 million. Up to 70 subcontractors and suppliers showed their commitment to the goals of the project by also working for reduced or no profit, and combined with construction innovation, this resulted in an actual delivery price of \$34 million. Grocon therefore returned just over \$9 million – almost 20 percent of the original contract price - back to Yarra Community Housing.

“Community is a core value of Grocon, and Elizabeth Street Common Ground is a good expression of this,” said Grocon’s Corporate and Government Affairs Manager, Jane Wilson.

“We gave an opportunity for businesses to contribute and do something about homelessness. The biggest challenge was understanding the clients, understanding the vulnerability of the clients and building for that.

“There is a disabled unit on every floor; the building entries are disability friendly; and every unit has a balcony. There are podiatry facilities and foot baths in the medical suite because many long term homeless people have trouble with their feet. On the roof there is a garden with vegetable and herb plantings. There are good services at the location. We don’t want this to feel like an institution, it needed to be a quality environment.

MAIN CONSTRUCTION COMPANY : Grocon
CLIENT : Home Ground & Yarra Housing Community
PROJECT END VALUE :\$42.5 Million
COMPLETION : October 2010
ARCHITECTS : Webber
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER : Bonnaci
QUANTITY SURVEYOR : Rider Levett Bucknall
LAND SURVEYOR : Survey 21



“This project is something that as a company we have taken a lot of pride in and are keen to do again. As a company with our experience working with organisations like Yarra Community Housing, you bring a lot to the table. The planning process for example was cut from 12 months to twelve weeks, because this work is what we do. A lot of corporates don’t realise what they can do and how they can contribute.”

Up to 60 Grocon staff worked on site at the height of construction, including the company’s own form workers, carpenters and a large number of apprentices. Two members of the workforce were referred from the Brotherhood of Saint Laurence under Grocon’s Community Employment Program. One of these, a former refugee from Sierra Leone who was also homeless, has now gained a career with the company and since moved on to work at another Grocon project.

Common Ground has been built to the same high Five Green Star standards of Green Star Design as many of Grocon’s other recent landmark projects. Features of the project include rainwater harvesting; grey water re-use for flushing of toilets; natural ventilation through the central void and operable windows and sliding doors throughout which makes air conditioning unnecessary; 30 solar panels boosting gas fired hot water; a C-Bus lighting and electrical control system for the common areas integrated with motion detectors for automated lighting; energy smart meters for each apartment; a central boiler delivering hot water to radiators in each apartment for safe and effective heating; double glazing throughout for effective thermal insulation; and recycling waste storage on each floor.

These initiatives not only make the building as a whole more environmentally sustainable, but also ensure ongoing life is more financially sustainable for the tenants, by reducing water and power consumption and therefore cutting tenant utility bills by around \$10 a week – a significant saving for those on Centrelink incomes.

Being the first Home Ground project in Australia meant Grocon’s site staff had a constant stream of visitors interested in the project and its progress throughout construction. Extra PPE was kept on hand, and over 2,000 visitor site inductions carried out.

“Our construction people became quite adept at discussing homelessness,” said Jane Wilson.

“This project was very worthwhile for us. Our people learned a lot from this experience, and we will put these lessons to work in Sydney and Brisbane on the next two Common Ground projects to deliver as good an outcome.”

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FIRST RATE STEEL FIXERS

With 35 years steel fixing experience to their credit, no project is too high, too complex or too demanding for Denfam. The family-run company laid and tied all the steel reinforcing for Grocon's Common Ground project, working on site for a year as the project rose to its full height.

The reinforcing task included both the ground slab and also the floor slabs and structural concrete. Denfam's crew worked under an OHSE Management plan which ensured there were no incidents either on the ground, or working at heights.

"We are very experienced in all building and civil construction projects," said Director, Michael De Nittis.

"We deliver precise, neat work, and generate a friendly working atmosphere. All our employees have been trained on the job, and no job is too complicated for us. If necessary, we can also organise the supply of reo for a project."

Denfam have provided the steel fixing for some of Victoria's best known recent major projects, including Melbourne's Rectangular Stadium, Media House, Eastlink, the Westgate M1 Upgrade, and the RACV Building. They also provided steel fixing services for the Sugarloaf Pipeline, Watsonia Barracks Accommodation, the Albury-Wodonga Train Line Upgrade and the Werribee Zoo Hippo Enclosure. The Hippo Enclosure offered a special challenge: as the ground slab needed to look natural and wavy, all the reinforcing steel had to be bent and tied according to the flow of the natural ground.

Denfam employ over 30 experienced steel fixers, so are capable of providing their expertise to multiple major projects concurrently for commercial, industrial, civil, recreational, Government and major residential projects anywhere in Victoria. Every project has its challenges - Denfam's many years of experience, solution-focused attitude and professional approach ensures steel fixing which meets the needs of a project's design specifications and achieves the timeframes of fast-paced works programs.



AWARD-WINNING WATER WORKS

One of the industry's more down to earth trades has a major Green Star role on Melbourne's Common Ground project, because the water efficiency points all come down to hydraulics. Richstone Group installed the in-ground and above ground plumbing packages and the roofing systems for the Five Star Green Star (Design) residential apartments, that incorporated sustainability initiatives including rain water harvesting, a grey water re-use system and gas boosted solar hot water plant which included roof-mounted panels.

Other Green aspects included the use of low VOC adhesives, a company policy wherever possible; WELLS rated cisterns, tapware and dual flush pans. One of the project's challenges was the amount of pipe work needed to be installed in a small ceiling space, due to the dual water systems.

In support of the project's community goals, Richstone undertook the project at a reduced margin, as did their suppliers. Richstone's trade qualified plumbers worked for twelve months on the job, with a peak labour force of ten.

"In addition to the community aspects of the project it has a lot more meaning and depth to it," said Richstone Director, Hayden Richardson.

"Now sustainability has become such a critical aspect of construction, plumbers are finding themselves very much at the forefront and impacting more on both the design and programme requirements. Our expertise has developed to include rain water harvesting, re-use water and solar systems, we also offer both roofing and hydraulic services. As a subcontractor we have the capabilities internally to manage design and construct contracts. We also offer fulltime estimating for both roofing and hydraulics.

"We only use Quality Certified products, and we are dedicated to continual upskilling of our staff. Currently our staff are being trained in the DuPont system. As a young, keen company, we enjoy taking on the challenging marquee jobs."

Other recent projects completed by Richstone Group include the Equiset Goods Shed North redevelopment, which won numerous awards for its sustainability initiatives, including this year's Victorian Premiers Award. They also worked on the Melbourne Aquarium's quarantine area for the new penguins, another multi-award winning project, built by Probuild. Successfully delivered the plumbing retrofit for the 253 room Rialto Hotel refurbishment, winner of the 2010 Property Council of Australia Award for Innovation and Excellence. Recently completed the hydraulics for Grocon's Pixel Building, Melbourne's first zero-carbon, zero-footprint development, and have just finished the roof for Melbourne's new rectangular stadium AAMI Park.

With 60 tradesmen on staff, and the combined 35 years hands-on trade experience of the two Directors, Shannon Egglestone and Hayden Richardson, they are capable of tackling multiple major projects across the commercial, industrial and recreational sectors, and bring leading-edge Green expertise to the essential task they do.

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IMPROVED RECYCLING FOR BETTER LIVES

The market has been waiting a long time for the technology and advantages that Wastech Engineering has now delivered with the new chute system, Smoothtubes. Wastech Engineering designed, manufactured and installed the new Smoothtubes chute system in the Common Ground Supportive Housing Project in Elizabeth Street Melbourne, bringing new technologies and additional benefits for both builder Grocon and the residents, the majority of whom have been homeless long term, and will now have secure housing constructed to the highest ESD principles, including a seven star energy rating.

Smoothtubes is a major innovation in the garbage, linen and recycling chute market and is now available for the handling of garbage in multi-level, high density projects. The system delivers a new standard in chute systems that are cleaner, greener and much quieter than traditional steel and cement chutes. Self cleaning and unlikely to block, the system was chosen for the many benefits that it brings to the residents of Common Ground Melbourne.

The system is designed and manufactured in Australia by an Australian owned company, Wastech, who were the first to bring the plastic chute to Australia and are now the leaders in this technology. Wastech's involvement in this particular project demonstrates the clear commitment to positive social and environmental goals which is the hallmark of truly progressive Australian businesses.

Celebrating the launch of the first, recycling chute in Australia, designed specifically for co-mingled recycling material, Wastech provide a range of services and solutions for every aspect of waste disposal and recycling management.

Services which include consultancy and recommendations for waste management logistics; specific site and specialised waste management solutions; formal, waste management reports; on-site service teams and preventative maintenance contracts. All backed up with a 24/7 maintenance program and breakdown response service.

With a strong history of supply to waste and recycling contractors, commercial builders and other key organisations, Wastech enjoys a reputation for quality which is matched by a willingness to provide waste management solutions across a wide range of major and complex developments.

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