

Nova

S M A R T S O L U T I O N S

UnityHousing Boarding House Program Assessment



1. INTRODUCTION

Unity Housing is committed to constantly improving its social services. A key part of this ongoing effort is to ensure the benefits achieved by its activities exceed the running costs. In this context, Unity Housing has commissioned Nova Smart Solutions to perform an *assessment of the entry of data for the Boarding House Program into the Australian Social Value Bank calculator and its resulting final statement*.

This report starts with a summary of Unity Housing as an organisation and continues with brief excerpts about its programs in general, the Boarding House Program in particular and a short description of The Australian Social Value Bank to set the context. The report moves on to our Assessment of the use of the Australian Social Value Bank calculator and closes with conclusions and recommendations for Unity Housing to consider into the future.

2. ABOUT UNITY HOUSING

Unity Housing is a non-for-profit charitable housing provider. It provides housing to vulnerable people in South Australia's communities. Tenants include people affected by homelessness, older people, people living with disability, women and families affected by domestic violence and people experiencing mental health issues. Unity is also the largest non-government provider of disability housing in South Australia and supported housing for homeless people in the City of Adelaide. It is worth mentioning that Unity Housing has set up an internal working group to oversee the implementation of Social Impact Measurement and that this working group meets regularly and comprises representatives from each part of the organisation.

3 .UNITY HOUSING PROGRAMS

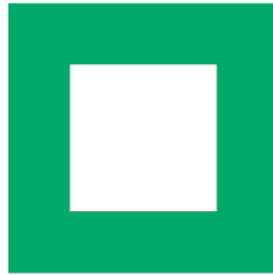
As mentioned in the 2016-2017 Annual report, Unity “... *is now embarking on a number of specific development programs...*” to expand its business. These programs include Disability Housing, Boarding Houses, Community Connect, Affordable Housing and Community Housing (see chart below).

DISABILITY HOUSING

>900 tenants living with disability.

BOARDING HOUSES

Entry point for highly vulnerable people into accommodation.



UNITY
HOUSING COMPANY

COMMUNITY HOUSING

Long term leases for people living on very low incomes.

COMMUNITY CONNECT

Improving life skill employment development for tenants.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Housing rent is set at no more than 75% of the typical market rent.

4. BOARDING HOUSE PROGRAM IN DETAIL

The main focus of the Boarding House Program is to provide a safe and secure accommodation entry point for highly vulnerable people who are at risk of homelessness due to a range of factors including family breakdown, unemployment, domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse, low income and social isolation.

Unity Housing provides four boarding house options that range from room-only with shared facilities to self-contained units with kitchenettes and ensuite bathroom. This program is generally transitional housing which gives eligible people an opportunity to stabilise their circumstances before moving to longer-term housing.

Boarding houses provide an opportunity to build confidence and a sense of wellbeing, participate in community life and further develop independent living skills. Currently, Unity has four boarding houses located in the inner city of Adelaide. Boarding house tenants can access both in-house and community-based support and assistance including financial counseling, legal assistance, recreation and leisure activities, cooking and nutrition and health management.

5. THEORY OF CHANGE

A good starting point for measuring social impact for any organisation in general and for Unity Housing in particular is to develop a Theory of Change.

The Theory of Change (ToC) has become a cornerstone in the social sector to improve service delivery, drawing strategies, identifying stakeholders, defining outcomes and, ultimately, to support data collection strategies. Peersman (2014), for example, states that having an explicit Theory of Change for the programme or policy is an essential tool for identifying which measures should be collected, and it also provides direction on which aspects of the programme implementation – and its context – data collection should focus on.

A Theory of Change reflects the relationship between stakeholders, resources, activities, outputs and outcomes. ToC could be thought as the story of the impact an organisation wants to achieve, who should be involved, what resources should be invested and what are the program activities that will make change happen.

When a Theory of Change is well designed, it is useful to reveal the following:

- whether stakeholders involved are aligned with expected change;
- whether activities make sense, given projected goals;
- whether there is room to improve or redefine outcomes;
- how to measure outcomes defining clear indicators.

As described, a properly developed ToC could be of much use for Unity Housing, including supporting the use of the Australian Social Value Bank.

6. THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL VALUE BANK DESCRIPTION

The Australian Social Value Bank (ASVB) is a cloud-based platform that allows users to quantitatively measure the impact its interventions have on the community. The ASVB contains a database that captures the benefit or the social values of achieving specific outcomes. In its website, ASVB says *“the values are consistent and robust”* which means that *“you can compare the value of your training program against the value of your mental health program”*.

The ASVB comprise 62 different outcomes organised under seven categories and uses them to calculate benefits to individuals, such as improved self-esteem or stopping smoking. These values can later be used within an SROI or Cost-Benefit type analysis or within the ASVB Value Calculator using Australian Dollars as the unit of measure.

The outcomes targeted by the ASVB fall under the following 7 categories:



7. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE USE OF THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL VALUE BANK CALCULATOR

For its Boarding House Program, Unity Housing selected the outcome ‘Homelessness to temporary accommodation’ which, according to the outcome description in the User’s guide of the ASVB, seems appropriate. Once the outcome is selected, the tool requires Unity Housing to provide the calculator with inputs to estimate the benefits derived from the program and related costs.

Valuing Benefits

The ASVB utilises the following external inputs to calculate the total social benefit the Boarding House program generates:

Number of Beneficiaries: The number of beneficiaries indicated by Unity Housing for the analysed program in 2017 is 45. Unity housing has been able to input into the calculator age range and location of beneficiaries which allows the calculator to add an extra layer of accuracy into the valuation.

Number of months the benefit lasts: The number of months the benefit endures for the Boarding House program in 2017 is 12. This number has been reached assuming the benefits that temporary accommodation bring are not confined to tenancy period.

After these values were inputted, the calculator required costing values to estimate the total social value (or benefits) of the program.

Program Costings

The Boarding House Program is an ongoing program and to derive the associated costings to 2017 tenants, Unity Housing applied a pro-rata approach as described below:

1. Calculated the total number of days spent by the 115 tenants who were already in the program at the beginning of 2017

2. Calculated the total number of days spent by all the 2017 160 tenants

3. Calculated the total number of room days spent by the 45 beneficiaries as a proportion of total room days.

4. Calculated the total expenditure on the 45 beneficiaries

The pro-rata cost estimation model followed by Unity Housing to estimate costs related to the 45 beneficiaries program beneficiaries during 2017 seems to be aligned with normal practices.

It is worth mentioning that Nova Smart Solutions did not perform any analysis or assessment of the calculations, variables, assumptions or models followed by the ASVB. Our assessment was limited to the process Unity Housing followed to calculate and input the values required by the ASVB model.

The assessment of the entry of data for the Boarding House Program into the Australian Social Value Bank calculator by Unity Housing performed by Nova Smart Solutions, which includes the assumptions taken to estimate the duration of the benefits and the model used to derive costings, shows that Unity Housing proceedings are aligned with normal the practises of choosing outcomes aligned with program outputs, quantify users and cluster them by age and location and making the necessary assumptions to allow costs to be properly allocated based on program delivery expertise. The process followed by Unity Housing to entry data for the boarding House program into the Australian Social Value Bank calculator is similar to the ones generally followed to estimate any cost-benefit ratio.

Based on the analysis carried out by Nova Smart Solutions for this program, we established that all assumptions taken by Unity Housing comply with Australian social sector common practices.

SOURCES:

<http://www.hpw.qld.gov.au/sitecollectiondocuments/whatistransitionalhousing.pdf>
http://unityhousing.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/UNITY-COMMUNITY-CONNECT-DELIVERY_2017_vers1_web.pdf
<http://unityhousing.org.au/boarding-houses/>
<https://asvb.com.au/asvb-can-help/what-is-the-asvb/>

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Unity Housing works closely with support partner agencies to facilitate successful tenancies. These close partnerships could, at first, be perceived as a common factor within Unity's business cycle. However, this kind of partnerships, usually generates positive synergies towards the common goal these agencies share: to improve the lives of clients and their families. From what we can observe, these partnerships are not considered within the ASVB analysis and we do recommend incorporating these into the future Cost-Benefit analysis. From our experience, the spillover effects of building synergies with partners usually increase the benefits of the evaluated programs.
2. Duration of benefits: a key factor to consider when calculating benefits under a Social Return on Investment framework is time. How long did the benefits created by the program last for the client? The data we gathered from the entries Unity Housing has done into the ASVB calculator indicates that an assumption of the benefits lasting for 12 months has been taken. Further research needs to be done in this regard to fully understand the lasting period of the Boarding House Program. The 12-month impact assumption is a good starting point, , however, exploring more sources of evidence to back this up could improve the assessment accuracy.
3. Homelessness to temporary accommodation seems to be an appropriate outcome to value this program. However, it is likely that the benefits derived from this program go far beyond this. Further analysis is recommended should Unity Housing continue estimating social benefits following the ASVB approach.
4. It is highly recommended that Social Programs providers develop its data blueprint and a theory of change to have better control of program efficiencies. Theory of change would also be useful to understand every related outcome for Unity's social programs.
5. No secondary benefits have been considered: Estimations on how much public money government departments can save due to the fact that this program exists should be considered in the future when estimating Social Benefits. However, we have been informed by Unity housing that the ASVB is working on incorporating a more in-depth analysis of the analysed outcome, including secondary benefits, into the future.
6. 45 tenants are the starting base from where benefits are estimated. Families of those tenants could be also benefiting from this program and they should be considered for this valuation.



ABOUT NOVA SMART SOLUTIONS

Nova is an Adelaide-based company focused on improving decision-making processes for organisations mainly operating within the not-for-profit sector. We are a team of passionate professionals who are constantly learning how to measure impact, evaluate social programs and improve service delivery for our clients. Nova provides social impact analysis, evidence-based research, economic analysis and strategic planning services to support our clients' service delivery. Some of the benefits we bring with our work include a better allocation of resources, enhanced program implementation, improved engagement with key stakeholders, increased internal and external accountability and more efficient fundraising processes. The tools that we utilise vary depending on the project and we are proud to say we bring data and stories together using tools that combine quantitative and qualitative inputs to build powerful cases and better strategies.



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