

# Northcott Public Housing Estate Community Designated #109 (Surry Hills, Sydney, Australia)

The Northcott Public Housing Estate is a multi-storeyed housing estate comprised of approximately 1000 residents representative of 50 different countries and is described as a residential area of striking socio-economic disadvantage. This estate is the first community outside of a regional boundary to have worked towards accreditation as a safe community of the International Global Safe Community Network.



In 2001, the social change arts organisation Big hART Inc and Creative producer Christopher Saunders began consultations with the Northcott community about a participatory arts programme. In July 2002 the project Northcott Narratives began in the community. Five years on from these first consultations tenants now work together to identify and address their own individual and community needs. *“Through engaging members of the community in collaborative arts-based activities, people have been invited to tell their stories and get involved with other members of their community to create art, increasing a sense of belonging and safety amongst participants”* said Frank Panucci, Director Community Partnerships, Australia Council for the Arts.



At Northcott safety is about social connectedness and relationships; individual and communal agency; physical and emotional well being; a functional and helpful physical environment; a positive image within the broader community, allowing for partnership, support and understanding.



Representatives from the Department of Housing, Big hART, Police, the tenants Safety Committee hosted a site-visit in September 2006. Key partners assured the site-visit team of the long term sustainability of the safety measures that had been established. For example, the Community Development worker position has been extended to July 2008 and the establishment of the Neighbourhood Advisory Board with a sub committee (Safety Committee) directly responsible for driving ongoing safety programmes at Northcott, this committee is responsible for reporting on and addressing issues of concern to residents related to their safety and wellbeing. There was also strong evidence of a significantly more empowered and positive community that demonstrated considerable improvements to their quality of life.



The Northcott application, to achieve accreditation as an International Safe Community, focused primarily on a reduction in violent crime and safety for the residents on the estate as, prior to 2001, residents had been traumatised by a history of murders, suicides and violent crimes. The application was prepared by Surry Hills Public Tenants' Association, Big hART in partnership with New South Wales (NSW) Department of Housing, NSW Police – Surry Hills LAC, St Vincents Hospital and City of Sydney LGA. With successful collaborative partnerships formed, a number of programmes were initiated to increase community connectedness, access services and activities and to improve community safety and well being. These have included falls prevention for the elderly; remodelling the flats for the residents to enable modifications for safety, especially in kitchens and



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bathrooms; the installation of fire alarms; and significantly, the establishment of a community development worker, provided by the Department of Housing, that is based at the Estate.



It was also evident from the Northcott application and site visit that the community and partners at Northcott have been working with a perception of safety that aimed to:

- Increase individual and community sense of ownership of issues around crime, safety and wellbeing;
- Build community capacity to respond to issues of crime and safety; and
- Support and replicate the community development process which leads to crime prevention, enhances safety and develops individual and community wellbeing.



Sandy Henderson, Chairperson Surry Hills Public Tenants Association stated that:

*“Unfortunately, Northcott is a high-risk community, making it all the harder to develop the techniques needed to make it a safer place. Four years ago there was very little contact between any of the agencies. Now there is liaising and communication, so key safety issues are raised and dealt with much quicker. When a community stands together, they are stronger and therefore much safer. We believe it is a fundamental right for all people to feel safe and be safe in their home and communities and therefore, we are dedicated to the WHO Safe Community model and are committed to ongoing participation at all levels”.*



Additionally, as noted by Reg Mahoney, Assistant Commissioner, NSW Police in his letter of support for the Northcott application: *“serious crime has reduced now. There have been no murders and no suicides for more than two years and instead of negative media, there has been a great deal more positive media stories about what is now an empowered and largely positive community”.*



Lord Mayor of Sydney, and member of Parliament for Bligh the Hon Clover Moore reported in her letter of support that:

*“Since the employment of [a] community development worker and the commencement of the Big hART programme, I have witnessed dramatic and positive change on the Northcott Estate. Crime rates for the estate, especially for violent crime, are lower, isolation is reduced and there is a noticeable positive sense of community amongst tenants.*



*I believe that the Northcott experience shows the way to prevent large-scale social unrest and violence, and ensure that people who need help get the assistance they need. The Northcott experience should be used as a model for other housing estates so that this type of positive community change becomes more common.”*

Northcott Public Housing Estate Community became the 109<sup>th</sup> Internationally designated Safe Community at a ceremony held in Surry Hills, Sydney, Australia on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2006. During the ceremony, Big hART launched the Northcott Narratives – Say Hello Resource Box ([www.bighart.org](http://www.bighart.org)). To view the Northcott Safe Community application for designation visit [www.safecommunities.org.nz/sc/nort](http://www.safecommunities.org.nz/sc/nort)



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