



“I LOVE GOING TO WORK.”

CEO OF CITY WEST HOUSING LEONIE KING IS PASSIONATE ABOUT MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

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For 25 years, City West Housing has provided affordable homes to those who need them. When Leonie King became CEO in 2017, she had worked in both government and non-government organisations, so she had an in-depth knowledge of the industry and was able to bring an insight into how to optimise processes and systems for the betterment of the company. “I knew some of its challenges, some of the potential, some of the idiosyncrasies,” she says. “The organisation was having growing pains. There was a fair bit of staff turnover, and most of the management team were new.”

Leonie spent the first six months in her role focusing on developing plans to accelerate growth and rebuild the company culture. “I looked at gaps in systems and processes, developed an ICT strategy, and looked at how I could stabilise the workforce,” she explains. “I put my stamp on things and made sure we had the right team. There is more work to do, but we are heading in the right direction.”

People often believe the role of the CEO is solely about setting the strategy and looking at the future, Leonie notes. But in a smaller organisation such as City West Housing, it’s a multifaceted position. “It’s also about rolling up the sleeves and »



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supporting the team,” she says. “It’s about the big decisions and the small. For example, in the next six months we will complete two property developments that will deliver another 174 apartments. Not only do we have to make sure those buildings are ready for occupation, we have to find 174 households who are ready to move in and will provide a mix of households that can create a community from Day One. It takes a lot of coordination.”

City West Housing’s goal is to develop and deliver new and affordable apartments, and to own and operate them for the long-term without an explicit subsidy. “It’s not a well-funded industry by any means,” Leonie says. “As a charity, you have to get creative with how you use the funding you have. We charge rent based on household income. In the inner city this means we are collecting on average 50 per cent of market rent. So we have to be creative with funding. We are very fortunate to receive affordable housing developer contributions through the City of Sydney, which helps significantly, but we still have to be creative in how we acquire land, fund the construction and ensure our operations are as efficient as possible.”

Leonie is an advocate for benchmarking performance against other organisations in the industry. She also looks at how the business’s reputation is tracking compared to other companies. “Reputation is everything in our industry; from reputation comes opportunity,” she explains. Success for Leonie comes from the achievements of her staff and customer satisfaction. “If we can’t keep our customers happy, then I’m not quite sure why we’re here,” she says. “Key to ensuring that customer satisfaction is our contractors and business partners.”

The critical difference between City West Housing and a private developer is that a private company often moves into affordable housing for a limited period. “They might build something and dedicate some of those units to affordable housing, but they don’t hold them in perpetuity,” Leonie explains. “It’s not long-term. They typically only rent apartments at affordable rents for 10 years, after which they will

“Service delivery is a two-way street, where communication and transparency is the key to maintaining a successful long-term partnership. The management, technical and administration teams from both our organisations have worked together to ensure that our day-to-day processes and goals are successfully met and exceeded.”
– Joe Puccio, Managing Director, Assett Group Services

convert it to a market apartment. There are differences in the operating model and how things are funded. When you build to manage for the future, you must also consider potential maintenance for lifts, common areas, apartments and so on.”

On top of overseeing the upcoming property developments, Leonie and her team will continue to deliver services to the 1,300 existing residents. “I’m passionate about the social services sector, having spent more than 20 years in and around it, and about making a difference to people’s lives,” she says. “I think that’s why I’ve stayed around. I love going to work. I have an equally passionate, committed team and contractors, and I feel like we’re all pulling towards the same goal.”

Leonie loves the challenge of juggling and balancing functional imperatives with commercial imperatives. “It’s unique to have to make commercial decisions, looking at commercial terms and frameworks

for developing and delivering housing,” she explains. “At the same time you might be reviewing operating metrics, customer feedback or making decisions about individual clients who have applied for or are living in one of our properties. A number of our clients will also need other support services to help them maintain their tenancy. I like that tension. It’s like a complex puzzle, and it keeps me engaged and focused.” ■



“PBS has enjoyed a great relationship with City West Housing over the past 18 months. We have collaborated to deliver the A\$30 million residential scheme at Harold Park, ensuring we meet the project outcomes. We look forward to working with City West Housing for many years to come.” – Dominic Fussell, General Manager, PBS Building (NSW)

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and extending opportunities for social housing tenants and Indigenous Australians by successfully implementing and focusing on Aboriginal Participation and Tenant Employment Plans.



Building with Integrity

Dominic Fussell, PBS NSW General Manager, praised the project team led by Project Manager Steve Lukas. “The team has worked tirelessly, ensuring that PBS maintains its high standards of onsite safety, product quality and contract timing.

PBS has enjoyed considerable success in the social and affordable housing sector with four projects

under construction. We value our relationship with City West Housing, having worked collaboratively over 18 months to procure and deliver the \$30 million Harold Park development. We look forward to working with CWH for many years to come, developing its portfolio and expanding PBS’s social and affordable housing market share.”

