



2013 Finalist's Case Study

Victoria University Skills for Sustainability

VU undertake challenge of eco facelift – Albion Community House, An EcoLiving Centre

Section 1: About the project

Summary

Victoria University (VU) students undertook the green challenge of converting a heritage listed house into a sustainable EcoLiving Centre (ELC) in Albion, the first of its kind in Melbourne's West.

VU partnered with Sustainability Victoria, Brimbank City Council, City West Water and community partners to retrofit the Albion Community House with sustainable building features to develop an ELC and successfully provide educational opportunities for the community to learn about sustainable living.

Project partners

Primary Partners: Sustainability Victoria, Brimbank City Council. *Secondary Partners:* City West Water, Friends of Iramoo, Albion and Ardeer Community Club, St.Albans Community Centre Co-op Ltd

Section 2: The results

The problem

The Western Region of Melbourne is home to many older-style residential buildings; however as the demographics of the region are changing we are seeing an increase in house renovations. In particular, residents are enquiring more and more about how to sustainably retrofit their homes to reduce their carbon footprint. The ELC was therefore designed to be an eco-house that is representative of many homes in the area and provide ideas and resources for the community who have previously had very few avenues for environmental education. In 2008, VU initiated this vision and designed the Centre to provide opportunities for education about sustainable living and behavioural change both during the retrofit period as well as after its completion. In 2011-12, VU decided to establish the Centre at the existing Albion Community House which is a 1920s Federation Bungalow and has a rich history in the community and would serve to inspire the community who are faced with the challenge of sustainably upgrading their existing home.

The approach

The sustainable retrofit occurred during 2012-13 with over 100 students from VU's Trades College involved in the Sustainability Learning and Behavioural Change program. They participated in formal educational activities whilst they sustainably retrofitted the building. In addition, the project's objectives were delivered through the following means: information dissemination, sustainability demonstrations, press, social media and several events.

Our goals

- Establish an ELC in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne in order to educate, inform and demonstrate the benefits of sustainable living and facilitate the adoption of sustainable technologies and practices.
- Establish a framework and governance structure to provide effective management and oversight of all future operations of the ELC and utilise the building as a resource centre/meeting place for the community.
- Use the ELC as a mechanism to leverage and bring together the various sustainability initiatives already in place in the region by various organisations and community groups in recent years.
- Strengthen the relationships between all stakeholders; education, local Government, state Government, industry and community groups.



Institutional Profile

- Dual Sector University
- Year Founded: 1916
- Students: 51,642
- Staff: 2,496
- Alumni Worldwide: Over 100,000
- No. of Campuses: 9
- No. of Offshore Sites: 17



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Obstacles and solutions

Difficulty finding suitable ELC site.	The project was delayed initially due to the precise location of the ELC not being specified in the original proposal and the lengthy processes of obtaining the required building/statutory permits and the finalisation of the plans for the Centre. As a result, VU decided to establish the ELC by retrofitting an existing property; the Albion Community House as opposed to constructing an entirely new building.
Construction Delays	The sustainable retrofitting building works were delayed due to weather conditions, the discovery of asbestos onsite and student timetabling issues. As a result the construction and project schedules were adjusted to suit and the discovery of asbestos served as a great learning example to our students on how to appropriately handle asbestos.

Performance and results

The project has resulted in the successful retrofit of the Albion Community House into an ELC; and the formation of a permanent meeting place for community groups to learn about its sustainable features and how they can be adapted in their own homes. Our student evaluations indicated that all of the students achieved an either equal or greater level of environmental awareness due to the ongoing trades training received onsite at the ELC. Additionally, more than half of the students surveyed indicated that they would be interested in undertaking further training in green skills. We have not only increased their awareness of sustainable building practices but fostered their interest to perhaps move into a previously unthought-of career path.

Section 3: The future

Lessons learned

- It is more time and cost effective to undertake a sustainable retrofit of an existing house as opposed to constructing a new building entirely. Sustainably retrofitting existing houses is fast becoming a new emerging trend and the need to educate the public on such is apparent.
- A working partnership with the local Council is critical to ensure greater collaboration, relevance and input into the ELC for the community. It also guarantees compliance with local laws and governance arrangements.
- A transparent and inclusive relationship with community groups is ideal to ensure greater collaboration, relevance and input into the ELC for the community. It also ensures that the ELC is co-created by the community for the community.

Sharing your project

The ELC now stands as a permanent fixture in the community, showcasing what can be achieved sustainably. In order to communicate the Centre's goals, VU have utilised social media, local press and a presence on both VU and the Council's websites to pass on its green message to the community. In addition, a series of events were held including a Progress Open Day, Community Open Day and an Official Launch Event which saw the Hon Ryan Smith, Minister for Environment and Climate Change and Youth Affairs, officially open the ELC and assist in showcasing the Centre to both local and state communities. The Centre is now managed by a Community Advisory Group and is being utilised by several community groups and clubs for both recreational and educational purposes, ensuring that its green message is being widely reached.

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award Australasia finalist?

The ELC project and subsequent Green Gown Award Australasia finalist nomination has recognised the University's ongoing commitment to improving our environmental sustainability performance across all our campuses and fostering education for sustainability in our teaching, learning and research.

Further information

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