

## Case Study: Carbon Neutral Program

### Outcomes

- Carbon Neutral Certified Organisation.
- Over 1,100 tCO<sub>2</sub>-e saved.
- Over \$1 million saved over five years.
- 2,448 tCO<sub>2</sub>-e invested in biodiverse revegetation offsets.

Uniting Communities is leading the way in environmental responsibility in the not-for-profit sector through its commitment, strategic thinking and organisation-wide carbon reduction.

In 2015 it became the first registered charity nationally, to be certified under the Federal Government's Carbon Neutral Program and the first organisation in South Australia.

### The business case

Organisations that decide to reduce their environmental impact do so for varying reasons. In 2010, the Uniting Communities Board agreed that it was their moral duty, to their clients and to society, to contribute to reducing the impacts of climate change.

“The business case was clear – not only would we be doing the right thing, we would also benefit through operational savings, meeting our funding commitments and in terms of our reputation” says Simon Schrapel, Chief Executive.

### The approach

A dedicated group of organisation leaders drove the initiative and engaged the services of carbon

consultant Suzanne Ridding, to advise and assist. Importantly, both capital and operating budgets were allocated from the start.

Through a combination of policy development, planning, engagement and education, Carbon Neutral quickly became a popular initiative that appealed to all areas of the organisation.

The Carbon Neutral Committee was formed with managers and others from across the organisation's departments. Together with ideas from employees, they developed an emissions reduction plan based on the measured carbon footprint from electricity, fuel use, gas, paper, waste, stationery and air travel.

Employees attended training on the effects of climate change and how they could contribute to emissions reduction.

“Working with socially disadvantaged and low-income people, we could relate to the benefits that our actions would bring,” says Robyn Sutherland, Executive Manager Services.

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With over 85 sites, wide communication and engagement has been key to reaching 1,400 employees and volunteers. Site Representatives were appointed to, facilitate emissions reduction initiatives, which then become integral to everyday activities; a critical element of a successful sustainability program. Regular newsletters have provided news and tips as well as reporting on achievements.

## Initiatives

The three-pronged strategy has consisted of building upgrades, policy and procurement initiatives and behaviour change. Together, these enable lasting change and maximum impact.

Outstanding efforts in carbon reduction, often leading to process efficiency as well, are recognised and rewarded.

Energy efficiency investments with short-to medium-term payback periods have been implemented including lighting upgrades at the Administration Centre and Murray Mudge Aged Care and insulation and air conditioning treatments at Aldersgate Aged Care. These are underpinned by behaviour change initiatives.

“Our Switch-Off campaign is wide-reaching and often emotive,” says James Glenn, Property Manager. “Our Carbon Neutral Site Representatives have helped to ensure its adoption.”

Streamlining waste collection from 16 contractors to one was a major undertaking, which included education and infrastructure changes at many sites. The results were very rewarding with total waste to landfill falling from 80% to around 20% within two months, coupled with significant dollar savings.

“Where we can we work with our suppliers, choosing those that offer lower carbon or carbon neutral products,” says Lee Sauerwald, Executive Manager Corporate Services. “While they help us to reduce our carbon footprint and improve our efficiency, this means we’re also having a wider influence on the broader community.”

Behaviour change can be challenging, so initiatives to reduce paper and printing, “Y-Print”, increase recycling, “Y-Waste” and “Drive Green” have, along with a specially-developed logo, given this program an identity.

Dedicated resourcing from Zero Waste SA and the Conservation Council’s Green Hubs Energy Efficiency Program has also assisted in targeted areas.

## The impact

The carbon footprint was reduced by 35% over five years, resulting in a reduction in operating costs of over \$330,000 a year. This is money that can otherwise be invested into Uniting Communities programs.

Building upgrades alone have realised energy savings of over 450 tCO<sub>2</sub>-e. Uniting Communities’ 110 vehicle-strong fleet is now 70% hybrid petrol-electric and rising. All vehicles are fully carbon offset. In total, fuel and maintenance expense reductions of around \$750 per vehicle per annum are being achieved as a result of the 1.3 tCO<sub>2</sub>-e saved per vehicle. Together this totals over \$57,000 and 100 tCO<sub>2</sub>-e every year.

“The Carbon Neutral Program means something to people and helps make us an employer of choice,” says Leanne Brus-Bentley, Executive Manager People & Culture.

Uniting Communities is setting an example with its ongoing leadership, strong commitment and thorough program management. Together, these elements have contributed to the achievements so far. Multiple benefits will continue to accrue for this organisation as a result of its efforts which will continue as a strategic organisation program.

## Contact

If would like to know more or have any questions, please contact Suzanne Ridding, Carbon Neutral Program Manager, Sustainable Business Consultants, on 0411 520830 or [sridding@adam.com.au](mailto:sridding@adam.com.au)

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