



MEANING, IMPACT, AND A BOLSTERED BOTTOM LINE

How to combine community and profit in a residential development.



OVERVIEW

Research has shown that both the social and physical environments of a community have an impact on people's health and wellbeing [1]. For property developers, this is a significant factor in building new residential communities.

In a recent property development project, Central Equity faced the challenge of both appealing to a wide range of buyers and engaging a new community. Focusing on the core pillars of sustainability, community, and customer value, the company engaged the O initiative, a social enterprise, to provide an innovative and community-minded addition to its development.

The result was a partnership between Central Equity and the O initiative to deliver a locally-designed piece of art with the additional functionality of a public water refilling station.



Beyond its primary capability, the O fountain provided an opportunity for Central Equity to add layers of intrigue and engagement to the neighbourhood, while investing in sustainable solutions.

In turn, this helped elevate the success of the development and provided another avenue through which Central Equity could add value to its new community.

**It is no Secret that
Master-Planned
communities take
years to 'come-to-life'
and for a lot of home
buyers this is a major
pain point.**



THE DEVELOPER

Central Equity is a multi-award winning property developer with over 25 years' experience in the industry. Over the past three decades, they have made a significant contribution to the rejuvenation of inner city living in Melbourne. The company played a pivotal role in the emergence of Southbank over a relatively short time period, which resulted in the Southbank area transforming into a vibrant residential, arts, and cultural hub.

Suburban communities by Central Equity Land offer the opportunity to bring dream homes to life in beautiful environments. The emphasis on community in each project is integral to Central Equity's approach and has made an enormous impact on how residential developments are positively received by buyers.





Image: O fountain by Artist Donna Racovalis

THE CHALLENGE

Central Equity's master-planned Tarneit community, Newgate, located in Melbourne's growing west, was a project created entirely from the ground up. It boasts convenient access to Melbourne's central business district, as well as local communities like Truganina, Hoppers Crossing and Werribee.

Home buyers want their new home ready to move into, but they also want the promise of a community, interesting and inclusive public spaces that support the growth of their new identity. The market has also made it clear that sustainability is of great significance when deciding where to buy, adding another layer to the property development challenge.

As an astute property developer, Central Equity recognised the major obstacles to selling customers on the idea of a new community. It wasn't enough to provide the infrastructure; they had to provide the building blocks for long-term sustainability and community engagement. Central Equity wanted to add meaning and 'fine grain' to their development.

THE APPROACH

For this development, Central Equity, in collaboration with Wyndham City Council, were focused on meeting the expectations of prospective residents around sustainability and community while still hitting revenue targets.

In their venture, Central Equity sought to take a more sensory approach to add meaning and 'fine-grain' to the built form. This strategy deepens a community's connection to place. A recent article from architecture and planning Principal, Domino Risch, emphasised this, observing that: "Rich sensory experiences facilitate emotional connections to people, time and places"[2].

Central Equity's focus on community projects had already made an enormous impact on how residential developments are positively perceived by buyers. But this concept of sensory experience boosting engagement motivated the company to find new ways to integrate meaning into the development.

Rich sensory experiences facilitate emotional connections to people, time and places.



Central Equity places design excellence, innovative solutions, and inclusive public spaces that support healthy lifestyles at the forefront of its endeavours, while the O initiative values community, sustainability, originality and integrity.

Central Equity focused on specific elements that would deliver value to its clients and elevate its ROI.

Some key questions Central Equity focused on included:

What fine-grained layers can we incorporate to add interest, culture, and appeal to a new developing area?

How can we improve the sustainable value of the area in a way that contributes to the public amenity and infrastructure?

How can we engage this new community in a way that enhances a sense of ownership and belonging?

How can we engage local artists through creative initiatives that inject a cultural element and give a voice to the community and local issues?

How can we use the power of storytelling to highlight local environmental issues?

An Australian research paper explored the relationship between residential satisfaction, sense of belonging, and sense of place in a WA urban planned community. They weighed in favour of providing place-based experiences to improve residential satisfaction [3].

Additionally, resident satisfaction was shown to develop as a result of physical factors like the provision of parks and amenities, social factors such as a sense of belonging, and layout and design that promote community participation.

Residential property development hinges on the satisfaction and perceived value of home buyers, thus projects such as Newgate rely heavily on understanding what buyers want.



The community is engaged in the process of shaping the vision for the artwork which helps create community connection and elevate the O fountain beyond a run-of-the-mill utility.



THE SOLUTION

Central Equity investigated several design solutions, including lighting, landscaping, and art to offer points of interest to prospective clients. However it was the unique offering of form plus function from the O initiative that won them over.

The O initiative is about building community, enhancing public space and creating a positive legacy for future change. Within the Newgate community, the O initiative ticked several key boxes for Central Equity:

- Met desire for sustainable features
- Fulfilled a need in the public arena
- Created unique spaces for gathering and interacting with the neighbourhood
- Engaged the community in its design
- Capitalised on the power of sensory experience to bring people together and forge an emotional attachment in an otherwise unestablished residential community

The O fountain's unique selling point incorporates interaction, attraction, and practical functionality, and at the same time promotes awareness of sustainable practices to benefit the environment.



Image: Artist Elizabeth Dalton Hooker with her artwork

For example, one O fountain is a feature of Newgate's bio-retention reserve adjoining a Growling Grass Frog Conservation Reserve, which highlights the plight of the local Growling Frog. Within this reserve, the Newgate community now has access to a hygienic filtered water refilling station, with an innovative design and artwork that highlights this conservation story.



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THE IMPLEMENTATION

Central Equity liaised with the O initiative to develop a proposal that outlined maintenance costs and technical specifications for WyndhamCity. Wyndham City was both receptive to and supportive of the development of a fresh and unique amenity that doubled as a “talking point” for the community.

The process of gaining approval for the fountain from both the infrastructure team and the public arts department followed the subsequent steps:

- A site was chosen. In this instance, the site was new and plans needed to be specified to build necessary plumbing for the water connection
- The public arts department specified guidelines for locally-sourced art.
- An artist brief was developed and a shortlist of artists was collated by the City of Wyndham Arts Program Support Officer
- Three designs were released to the community to vote on.

“**The O fountains in the Newgate estate will contribute positively to placemaking and to the local community’s experiences of their local parks. We have designed the parks to be active places of play and connection. The O fountains are apt symbols of design thinking, with an emphasis on sustainability and conserving the environment. The artwork contributes a sense of lightness and joy and the iconic fountain form lends itself to a gathering or meeting place.**

Josh Dennis,
Associate Landscape Architect
SMEC



THE RESULT

Central Equity was delighted to have been able to collaborate with the City of Wyndham and the O initiative to enhance public space and sustainable infrastructure for the Newgate community. This gave the community a voice and helped foster belonging and identity in their new neighbourhood.

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Central Equity values innovative projects and inclusive places that support healthy, sustainable lifestyles. The O initiative aligns with all of these values and we are proud to include four water fountains in our Newgate estate development. The fountains provide the local community with points of interest, encouraging behaviour change by supporting park users to refill their own water bottles.

Central Equity is proud of this project and the association with both the O initiative and Wyndham City. Central Equity takes much pleasure in gifting the water fountains to the people of Newgate and the broader Wyndham community.

Eddie Kutner AM,
Founding Director & Executive Chairman,
Central Equity Group

Cities around the world are measured on how well they support healthy, vibrant, and productive lifestyles. In 2018, for example, the award-winning Greater Sydney Commission (GSC) found that “active and socially connected people are healthier” and “strong social networks help communities respond to the challenges of urban life”[4].

An integral part of the GSC’s community development focused on place-based experiences that supported social connection and cultural life, as well as cultivating meaningful engagement with local communities through infrastructure and services. In reviewing residential communities, researchers found “community identity” and “community attachment” to be major influencers in the success of the neighbourhood and the average length of residency.



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The blank canvas of the O fountain facilitates community engagement and fosters community identity. Coupled with the alignment of values with Central Equity it gave us an amazing opportunity to add value to the neighbourhood of Newgate. With this partnership, Central Equity recognised the O fountain’s trifecta of sustainability, community, and art.

The company recognised the innovative way in which the O initiative added value to the development, and initiated a bold step to incorporating a sense of identity within the newly developed community.

Gretha Oost

Founder of the O initiative and designer of the O fountain

The Newgate community is the proud benefactor of three O fountains, with one more on the way.

The delivery of these contemporary water refilling stations add to a sense of place within a newly built neighbourhood and in the case of the Growling Grass Frog, highlights local sustainability issues in a fresh way.

These unique features appeal to residents and combine to add meaning and impact to Central Equity suburban developments.



The O initiative partners with property developers, consultants, urban designers, landscape architects and placemakers to enhance public space and community wellbeing through the O fountain.




The O initiative helps attract residents, businesses and investors by communicating sustainable value. It contributes to an environment that promotes liveability and enhances people's everyday experiences.

If **you** transform places with great design and sustainable initiatives, the O fountain will give your next project an edge and contribute to green star initiative.

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Connect and get involved.

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References

- [1] Barnes et al., 2006; Edwards & Bromfield, 2009; Pebley & Sastry, 2004; Popkin et al., 2010; Sustainable Development Commission, 2009
- [2] Risch, D, 2020, 'Neuro-architecture: why we need to weave in all the senses', WorkTech Academy, <https://www.worktechacademy.com/neuro-architecture-why-we-need-to-weave-in-all-the-senses/>
- [3] Smith, Kylie M. (September 2011), 'The Relationship between Residential Satisfaction, Sense of Community, Sense of Belonging and Sense of Place in a Western Australian Urban Planned Community', Edith Cowan University
- [4] <https://www.greater.sydney/metropolis-of-three-cities/liveability/city-people/communities-are-healthy-resilient-and-socially>

