

# Viv's Place opens door to a rethink of social housing

Tom McIlroy

An innovative, \$30 million build-to-rent social housing program in Melbourne looks set to help guide the Albanese government's plans to provide homes for 4000 women and children dealing with domestic violence or homelessness.

Viv's Place – designed to provide permanent housing and on-site support services for 60 women and 130 children – was completed this month and is being viewed as a first of its kind project in Australia.

Designed by ARM Architecture for homelessness organisation Launch Housing, the building could be mistaken for a boutique hotel.

Built after seven years of research and consultation, it is among projects federal Labor is watching as it unfolds an election commitment to build 20,000 social housing properties, 4000 of which have been slated for women and children dealing with domestic violence and older women on low incomes and at risk of homelessness.

The development includes access to education, healthcare and legal assist-

ance on-site, with specially designed rooms for ongoing care.

It features materials, patterns and colours traditionally found in the home, such as terracotta tiles, coloured wallpaper, wrought iron lacework, fencing and garden motifs.

"Given the clientele for this building, we have designed a vibrant, colourful, patterned building which deliberately moves away from social housing models that are austere and institutional in both appearance and function," ARM director Andrew Lilleyman said.

"The building really takes on its own identity. The design replicates motifs that are intended to emphasise a space of sanctuary – spaces within, which harness and develop growth and prosperity."

The Victorian government provided 40 per cent of the funding, while the philanthropic community and individual donors contributed the rest.

New York's Sugar Hill project was among the models studied for Viv's Place. It was one of the first social housing projects to include carefully targeted support programs for residents.



Launch Housing's Laura Mahoney, left, with Andrew Lilleyman and Jessica Heald of ARM Architecture at Viv's Place. PHOTO: TASH SORENSON

Viv's Place has 60 apartments, a communal lounge, games area, a range of children's spaces and an outdoor terrace and garden. Launch Housing chief impact officer Laura Mahoney said it was designed to be generous and abundant in every sense.

"Family and domestic violence is the main reason women and children end up experiencing homelessness," she said. "Each year in Australia 7690 women return to perpetrators due to having nowhere to live.

"Viv's Place helps solve this problem by providing safe, purpose-built and beautifully designed housing for women leaving family violence."

Federal Labor plans to build 20,000

new social housing properties and set aside 10,000 affordable homes for frontline and essential workers including police, nurses and cleaners.

Ms Mahoney said Viv's Place should help set a new standard.

"From the first day families move into Viv's Place, they have a safe and permanent home to recover and rebuild, access to the support they need and the opportunity to put down roots and participate in the local community," she said.

"We hope this will be the first of many of these kinds of tailored permanent housing solutions which are so desperately needed to address family and domestic violence across the country."