

BHC's low-cost housing project in Brisbane shines

ROSANNE BARRETT THE AUSTRALIAN OCTOBER 02, 2014 12:00AM



Brisbane Housing Corp chief David Cant with Green Square tenant Glenis Wilkinson. Picture: Lyndon Mechielsen Source: News Corp Australia

IT has helped residents on the verge of homelessness find a stable life, now an inner-city low-cost housing development has earned a nomination for a global architecture prize.

Affordable housing company BHC's 80-unit Green Square development in Brisbane has been short-listed in the prestigious 2014 World Architecture Festival awards to be announced tomorrow.

Designed by Cox Rayner architects, the \$17 million 10-storey block is built around a plant-lined atrium, allowing for cooling breezes, cross-ventilation and neighbourly connections.

BHC chief executive David Cant said architect Michael Rayner designed a highly livable, open and airy building that increased tenant interaction, despite strict building and fire-safety requirements.

"It just works," he said. "That's the magic of architecture."

About 80 per cent of the tenants were on the public housing waiting list and many self-assess as having a disability. Mr Cant said the stability of their living arrangements and the design meant tenants had a chance at forging new friendships and ties.

BHC was gifted the land by the Brisbane City Council, which uses two lower levels for community services relocated from the Fortitude Valley Mall.

Resident Glenis Wilkinson lives in a spick and span studio, fresh with sunlight and lined with

potted herbs and citrus trees.

“It’s great having the atrium, just opening the door and having the breeze on a hot day, the sound of the rain,” she said.

Cox Rayner principal Michael Rayner said the atrium design — typically considered more expensive because it requires more surface area and takes space from living areas — did not cost more and provided natural ventilation.

“There hadn’t been a lot of breakthrough architecture in affordable housing projects of this scale,” Mr Rayner said. “We were working within a tight budget ... but we wanted to design a building that engendered a sense of community and pride.”

The building also uses hanging gardens, timber finishes, a rainwater tank and water-efficient appliances. Studio tenants use a communal laundry on each level.

Green Square won an Australian Institute of Architects National award last year.

BHC is a not-for-profit housing provider that has built more than 1500 dwellings in 12 years.

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