

## Report to the community 2020/21

# the centre

## connecting community in north & west melbourne inc.

### FROM THE CHAIR

#### Karl Hessian



## Responding to a pandemic

Community groups and organisations are founded on relationships and maintained by personal connection. The policy responses that are required to combat the pandemic curtails much of the activity and engagement that sustains such groups.

As with many other community organisations, the last year has been highly disruptive for The Centre. We have spent the year adapting and revising programs, making plans and then shelving them, organising activities and cancelling them and then reinstating them and so on.

The Centre is neither special nor alone in that regard. The remarkable thing is how successful The Centre's accomplishments have been, given everything that has happened over the past year. It speaks volumes about the underlying and enduring need and desire of the community to come together whenever it may safely do so.

More so than ever I thank the staff, contractors and volunteers, past and present, who have continued to do their work against a backdrop of high uncertainty. I have been deeply impressed with their commitment to their activities, fully understanding that they may not see their efforts come to fruition, but working towards them regardless.

During the past year we bade farewell to our highly regarded Director, Tom Seddon, who we then promptly welcomed as a member of the Committee of Management. We were very fortunate to secure the appointment of Ariel Valent as his replacement in December 2020, allowing for a period of crucial in-person hand-over.

In concluding I would like to thank the City of Melbourne and the Victorian State Government for their invaluable and ongoing financial support.

### FROM THE DIRECTOR

#### Ariel Valent



## Centre keeps community contact

It was an honour to be appointed Director of The Centre in December 2020 and lead our dedicated team for the second half of the 2020-21 financial year.

Through the long months of the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, The Centre in Errol Street and the Pop Up Neighbourhood House in Docklands were both closed, and staff worked from home. Many hours were spent on the phone, online and through social media with local community members to ensure that people could meet their basic needs and to create social connections, particularly for isolated older people. The Centre also supported other agencies that provided direct relief and acted as a hub for reliable locally relevant information.

Many of our community programs were suspended; others continued online. Spring Fling could not go ahead.

The Centre was heartened by the resilience and mutual support offered within the North and West Melbourne communities. With people restricted to five kilometres from home, many were more connected to their local community than in pre-COVID times.

Towards the end of 2020, restrictions eased, allowing more people to come together. The end-of-year celebration on Errol Street served as a new beginning and The Centre finally opened its doors on 11 January 2021.

From that point, our programs were delivered largely as hoped. The Spanish Language Fiesta in March was a highlight, as was April's Come & Try Day. Home Away From

Homework Club returned at full strength at the beginning of Term 1, health and wellbeing programs could return to in-person delivery and the long-standing community choir was reinvented as SING NoW, with an enthusiastic group in a new venue and with a new music director. The Live Like a Local program gave international students still in Melbourne a diverse range of cultural and social opportunities.

The Centre's experiment with a Pop Up Neighbourhood House in Docklands continued. Online cooking sessions were a hit and the development of the District Docklands Community Garden was an important achievement in an area lacking in both green and communal spaces.

Special mention must be made of the *North & West Melbourne News* whose volunteer team kept the flow of local news, views and information going despite the challenges of COVID-19 restrictions.

Financially, The Centre benefitted from JobKeeper and other government support offered in direct response to COVID-19 restrictions. Despite our ability to earn income being severely curtailed, The Centre posted a surplus for the second year in a row and is well placed to serve existing and emerging needs in our local communities.

Sincere thanks to the voluntary Board of Management, to the dedicated staff, to all the volunteers, to our growing membership base and to our funders and supporters.

## Centre Staff, Contractors and Volunteer Program Leads

Director: Tom Seddon (to 12/20);  
Ariel Valent (from 1/21)

CFO / CIO: Craig Barry

Community Development Co-ordinator:  
Stacey Halls

Community Development Officer:  
Jason Butcher

Business & Operations Co-ordinator:  
Ragn Hannah

Reception: Karen Kirsopp; Gary Dowling

Foundation Skills Co-ordinator (to 12/20);

WorkOut Tutor (from 1/21): Frances McMillan

Homework Club Supervisor (to 12/20); Homework Club Co-ordinator (from 1/21): Laurence Angwin

Homework Club Supervisors: Jack Yang,  
Hannah Merrigan

Digital Literacy Tutor: Louise Cindric

Pilates and OAE Tutors: Sue Gertzel, Fernanda Cury

Community Choir Tutor: Maryanne Clements (to  
12/20); Jane York (from 1/21)

Dance Tutors: Catalina Gomez, Studio J

B-Friend Live Like a Local: Julie Turner

News Editor: Maurice Gaul

News Production Manager: Anne Burgi

News Advertising: Janet Graham

News Distribution: Tom Seddon (to 5/21);

Rashi Jain (from 6/21)

Spanish Language Fiesta Co-ordinator: Yulay Perez

Cleaner: Mitsalal Zufi

## Centre Board members

Karl Hessian, Chair

Lorna Hannan OAM, Deputy Chair

Kay Oke OAM, Secretary

Kathleen McPherson, Treasurer

Bill Liddy

Ben O'Connor

Kate Ritchie

Gary Dowling

Tom Seddon (from December 2020)

## Report to the community 2020/21

## MAJOR EVENTS



The laneways came alive with colour and music during the Spanish Language Fiesta.

### Spanish Language Fiesta

As reported last year, the Spanish Language Fiesta scheduled for March 2020 was an early COVID-19 casualty.

With flexibility from both the producing team and our funders, the 2020 event was presented as an online streaming festival, the first time The Centre has ventured into this arena. Presented across 5-6 December, the Spanish Language Fiesta was a great success, with 210 people participating in seven sessions, including themes such as cumbia, storytelling for children, Afro-Caribbean dance, percussion, and the highlight, The Big Latin Flavours cooking demonstration.

The online nature of the event allowed for global participation, with people as far away as Venezuela, Canada and Turkey logging in. As Melbourne was re-emerging from lockdown, this event served as the start of the Christmas in North Melbourne program of events and as a bridge to the 2021 event.

The 2021 Spanish Language Fiesta was presented as a one-day event in George Johnson Lane, North Melbourne, on 27 March. The event was a vibrant exploration of Hispanic cultures, with a full program of storytelling, poetry, music, dance, theatre, film, food and market

stalls. A silent disco dancing tour took the colour of the fiesta down Errol Street. The event overcame a wet start and an additional layer of COVIDSafe regulation to be a real celebration for more than 2000 festivalgoers. The aims of sharing Spanish and Latin American culture with the broader community were realised with about half the attendees coming from a Spanish-speaking background.

Congratulations to Yulay Perez and her dedicated volunteer team for producing two vastly different but equally successful fiestas. Thanks also to our many partners without whom the festivals could not happen.

### Spring Fling

Unfortunately, there is little to report about Spring Fling. An extended COVID-19 lockdown in the second half of 2020 meant that the festival could not take place.

With his background in festivals, new Director Ariel Valent set out to review Spring Fling and convened consultations with residents, businesses and community



Christmas on Errol Street was a joyful celebration for adults and children alike.



The Come & Try Day offered the chance to see what The Centre offers, including the Living History project.

groups. Views about Spring Fling were both strongly held and divergent; as a result, The Centre decided to reinvent the festival as a celebration of connection and creativity. While the financial year ended in optimism with 50 expressions of interest to be involved in the festival, the decision was subsequently made to cancel the 2021 event due to the challenges of COVID-19 restrictions. We wish for a different result in 2022.

### Christmas on Errol Street

With support from City of Melbourne, The Centre partnered with North & West Melbourne Precinct Association to create Christmas on Errol Street on Friday 18 December. This family-focused event also marked the last day of school. The street

was closed (north of Queensberry Street) to allow the community to take over the street. A Grinch Hunt and buskers encouraged people into shops to get their Christmas shopping done. Meanwhile dancers, magicians and of course Santa were hits with the kids.

### Come & Try Day

The Centre hosted an Open Day on Saturday 24 April, utilising our own spaces, as well as North Melbourne Library and Legion Hall. More than 100 people attended on the day, testing out everything from children's playgroups to photography, from singing to historical walks. The Come & Try Day also hosted the inaugural meeting of the North & West Melbourne Bicycle Users Group and served to relaunch the local community choir.

## Volunteers and students

**Student Placements:** Lisbeth Castrillon, Jack Mitra, Sylvia Tran, Loan Nguyen, Meg de Young, Jessica Arnold, Thilini Vithanage, Nicholas Cowley, Rebecca Mazzini, Anthony Denehey

**Volunteers include:** Abisheka Wanigasekara, Adithee Rawal, Agnes Girdwood, Alba Gatto, Alexandra Kent, Amelia Phan, Andrea Mairoth, Ani Verma, Anna Huynh, Anne Burgi, Annette McQuarrie, Annette Rowan, Ansh Verma, Avneet Hundel, Ayla, Ben Duong, Caity Girlie, Carlos Alberto, Carolina Sanchez, Carolyn Fyfe, Chanchal Verma, Chandrakant Verma, Chi Pam, Christopher Lin, Claire Yeoh, Craig Barry, Cuong Duong, Edward Vin, Eiko Sakaguchi, Elise Cara, Ellen O'Brien, Emily Smith, Felicity Udovicic, Flora Sciarra, Gavan Tobin, Geoff Pound, Gina Reyneke, Gloria Deng, Grace Packer, Hanna Melissa, Harriet Lancaster, Helen Michell, Isaun Wright, Jacques Peril, Jan Lacey, Janet Graham, Jennifer Priyadharsini, Joe Misuraca, John H Smith, John Smith, Joseph Misuraca, Josh Rule, Julian Blake, Karen Hayes, Kathleen Mcpherson, Kay Oke, Kennu Nguyen, Kenny Nguyen, Laura Misale, Laurence Angwin, Lei Ye, Li Melody, Lizzy Footner, Luca Guglielmino, Madeline Scully, Manuela Roca, Margaret Howden, Maria Taracena, Mary Kehoe, Maurice Gaul, Maya Ruth Pilbrow, Megan Fitzgerald, Melanie Karipidis, Melissa Villate, Mia (Thuc Mi) Quach, Michelle Brett, Nancy Lane, Nancy Nankervis, Natalie Chow, Nicolas McLeod, Nicole Pereira, Nidhi Singh, Nigel Pereira, Paola Yaguez, Pat Lightfoot, Patricia Harewood, Peter Robert, Phuong Vy Le Nguyen, Rahul Velumani, Rashi Jain, Rebecca Hough, Rob and Kay Oke, Robyn Dowling, Rosemary Tonkin, Rowan Hill, Ruby Ramsden, Sagalee Aba-Omer, Sandra De Luca, Sara Ochoa, Sarah Shaharizan, Shanon Colee, Shimi Kannoly, Shu Yea Lau, Shweta Patil, Stanley Parker, Stephanie Maniatis, Stephen Hatcher, Steven Muncaster, Susan Harraway, Suzie Luddon, Tamalika Saha, TejaSri Kaja, Thea Oakes, Thilini Vitanage, Thuc Mi Quach, Tienyi Long, Tim Cremeann, Tina Jiao, Tom Seddon, Uma Poomalai, Very Impressive, Yunesca Harris, Zoe Sheridan

## Report to the community 2020/21

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## Community Development

Community development is a pillar of The Centre: Connecting Community in North & West Melbourne. Community development means we work with and empower our local community; we are responsive to the needs, strengths and aspirations of our community members, and we create programs of value to our community.

An essential element of being a Neighbourhood House is simply being there: a safe and inclusive space that welcomes local people. The Centre provides a comfortable space to relax, to get a cuppa and to interact with others.

For half of the past year, we were unable to provide this service, creating somewhat of an existential crisis. We were not alone and we needed to change direction. As our community members could not visit us, we reached out to them using phone, messaging and social media.

From the re-opening date of 11 January, The Centre was open to walk-ins, and all manner of people with all manner of queries came inside. We try to understand the individual's needs and help them with the next steps, whether that is engaging in one of our programs or referring them to other agencies.

Advocating for our community is another vital role for The Centre. COVID-19 has provided some key directions for where this advocacy is most needed. The hard lockdown imposed on housing commission towers in North Melbourne and Flemington was a travesty and an insult to these communities, as was described in the resulting Ombudsman's report. The Centre has been involved with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's Paving The Way Forward initiative that has gone some way to repairing relationships with public housing tenants. The Centre also convenes the North & West Melbourne Bicycle Users Group, advocating for improved cycling experiences in the neighbourhood.

Towards the end of the reporting year The Centre created a brief for a Community Needs Analysis for North and West

Melbourne, and has engaged Strategic Development Group to work with us on this vital piece of work through the remainder of 2021. At the conclusion of this analysis, The Centre will develop a strategic plan that will include reviewing our programs, setting priorities to directly benefit our diverse community and collaborating with other community organisations.

## Errol's Angels / SING NoW Community Choir

The Errol's Angels choir has a history going back to 2002. The past year was a major challenge for many choirs, and Errol's Angels was no exception. By the end of 2020, some members of the group were singing online but this was far from ideal. The choir was revamped and relaunched in April 2021, a perfect time as COVID-19 restrictions were minimal.

New music director Jane York gave the group a fresh energy and a larger, central and COVID-19-friendly venue was found at Sokol Melbourne. Long term Angels joined new members to form an enthusiastic and sonorous 23-piece community choir.

The choir got through most of one term before being forced to run rehearsals online. Through multiple lockdowns, the choir has retained new members, which bodes well for the future.

Thanks to Maryanne Clements for her more than three years as choir leader of Errol's Angels, and to the Maternal & Child Health Centre for many years as the choir's practice space.

## Viva La Seniors

Viva La Seniors is a program that celebrates getting older in North Melbourne, providing senior local residents with opportunities to connect with others, to improve their physical and mental health and to visit places that would otherwise be out of reach. Participants come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

When COVID restrictions allowed, the following activities were undertaken:

**Monthly Morning Teas:** A casual social opportunity, meeting at The Centre. While



Catalina Gomez led an enthusiastic group of seniors in the Young @ Heart Dance Club.

sharing food was no longer possible, the conversation still flowed, with a notable event being the celebration of long-term participant and The Centre volunteer Pat Harwood's 80th birthday.

**Centre Adventures:** Once a month, a group of seniors visits historical, cultural or horticultural places of interest and significance, normally outside Melbourne. Despite the challenges of lockdown rescheduling, and the unavailability of the City of Melbourne bus, we managed to run five trips including to Phillip Island, Mount Macedon and Melbourne Zoo. Special thanks to volunteers Craig Barry and Megan Fitzgerald.

**Young @ Heart Dance Club:** Following a successful trial at Come & Try Day, Catalina Gomez led a small and enthusiastic group of seniors in weekly sessions that combined Zumba and Latin dance styles in a relaxed, convivial environment. Classes also ran via Zoom when necessary.

**Older Adults Exercise:** This long-running program run by Sue Gertzel and Fernanda Cury is an opportunity for participants to improve and maintain strength, balance and aerobic capacity, while also catching up with friends and neighbours.

## B-Friend International Students

Through a partnership with B-Friend, we created a Live Like a Local program that gave international students positive experiences of living in Melbourne, while also allowing social connections to develop and flourish. While many international students returned home when COVID-19 first hit, many remained and North Melbourne, West Melbourne and Docklands are all suburbs with a high concentration of international students. The Centre employed several students to help develop the program, and more worked in a volunteer capacity. Initially planned to run virtually, the easing of restrictions meant that activities could take place in person. In total, there were 349 attendances across 20 fun activities plus 20 volunteer team sessions. A wide range of students participated in weekly activities including picnics, photography excursions, guest speakers, a trivia night, panel discussions, and visits to local festivals and places of interest. The program also led to



The Live Like a Local program gave international students positive experiences of living in Melbourne.

the creation of an international student newsletter currently going to more than 400 subscribers. Thanks to Julie Turner for making this program so successful.

## The Legion &amp; Anzac Day

The Centre enjoys a fruitful relationship with the Legion of Returned Ex-Servicemen and Women (North & West Melbourne Sub-Branch).

This year, we presented an Anzac Day ceremony at the Memorial Cenotaph. Melbourne MP Adam Bandt was guest speaker and President of The Legion, Charlie Elliot, read the Ode for the Fallen to a group of 40 veterans and community members.

The Centre hires the unique Legion Hall for regular programs and special events. We worked with The Legion and City of Melbourne to make some overdue upgrades including replacing rotten boards, new heating and air conditioning and plumbing.

## Health &amp; Wellbeing

Pilates classes were run by Sue Gertzel and Fernanda Cury. The Centre offers graded classes that focus on body awareness, breathing, strengthening postural muscles and flexibility. Classes are offered at the Meat Market and Legion Hall and were run online during periods of lockdown. This long-standing program also provides social opportunities for participants.

## Other Programs

The Centre also:

- Implemented the Human Library project, encouraging locals to explore telling their personal story. This project will have outcomes in 2021-22.
- With West Melbourne Baptist Community Centre hosted a Community Dinner that featured a one-off vibraphone and violin musical performance
- Hosted monthly historical walks, led by 'Mrs North Melbourne' Lorna Hannan
- Participated in local networks including the NAC (North Melbourne Agencies Collective), North Melbourne Good Karma Network and North & West Melbourne Precinct Association.
- Lent practical support to local groups such as Hotham History Project
- Hired out our facilities

## Report to the community 2020/21

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## Docklands Pop Up Neighbourhood House

City of Melbourne funded The Centre to establish a Neighbourhood House in the Docklands. This two-year project saw the Pop Up established at District Docklands in November 2019. This proved to be a spectacularly challenging time in which to launch something new. Despite the challenges 2020-21 has presented, The Pop Up Neighbourhood House has continued to engage with community and stakeholders, to facilitate activities and to provide relevant information.

With City of Melbourne, the Docklands Pop Up Neighbourhood House convened the Docklands Collective, a working group of more than a dozen Docklands stakeholder organisations. The first meeting was held online in September 2020, and the group has since met regularly. Activities of the Collective include coordinating service delivery, collaboration on initiatives, information sharing and cross-promotion of activities and events.

The Pop Up empowered several resident volunteers to become Admins/Moderators for the new Docklands Good Karma Network, launched in January 2021 through Facebook. This platform promises to become a valuable resource for engaging and supporting Docklands residents.

The Pop Up was an important collaborator on the B-Friend Live Like a Local program. Seven of the activities were held in Docklands. One highlight was the March 2021 Neighbour Day picnic at Buluk



The District Docklands Community Garden is a shared community asset and an oasis in a sea of concrete.



**Pop Up  
Neighbourhood  
House  
@  
Docklands**

A project of [the centre](#)

Park where more than twenty international students engaged in games and activities and volunteers from the Pop Up performed Bollywood dances. The preceding Bollywood dancing classes were popular amongst Docklands' significant Indian community.

District Docklands supported the Pop Up to rejuvenate and use the District Docklands Community Garden as a shared community asset, running twice-weekly facilitated gardening sessions. Collaborations with the Docklands Toy Library to hold weekly playgroup sessions have proved a popular way to engage with children of the nearby, recently opened Docklands Primary School.

During periods of lockdown, Pop Up activities have transitioned online. The Pop Up has hosted regular virtual morning teas, cooking workshops and other ad hoc activities. Looking to the future, our Engagement Survey will help determine future programming. We will also continue to build the case for the establishment of a permanent Neighbourhood House in Docklands and for a permanent site for the community garden in the New Quay area.

## EDUCATION

As a Learn Local, The Centre provides pre-accredited training for adults, as well as our long-running Homework Clubs. Frances McMillan retired as Foundation Skills Coordinator at the end of 2020. Frances remains as the lynchpin of the Workout program, and a mentor to all she trained. Former Homework Club supervisor and tutor of 17 years, Laurence Angwin stepped up to become the Homework Club Co-ordinator from January 2021.

## Home Away From Homework Club



The Centre runs four Homework Clubs for local students from Grade 4 to Year 9: one at The Centre, one at North Melbourne Library, one at North Melbourne Language & Learning in Alfred Street and one at Hobsons Bay Library in Altona North. The lockdowns meant the program has operated in fits and starts; even after lockdowns lifted, the libraries remained closed to groups.

Fortunately, the North Melbourne clubs were offered space at West Melbourne Baptist Community Centre. Without this generosity we could not have continued. Unfortunately, the Altona North club was cancelled during and after lockdowns due to the closure of their meeting rooms. There are no other community venues in the vicinity of the local schools.

When the clubs could not run, co-ordinators and tutors contacted students and their families by phone or text. We sent care packages to the students, which included a letter, puzzles, quizzes and various activities. This was the first time many students have received post. Our feeder schools recommended against an online homework club, after a day of remote schooling.

Sessional supervisors Hannah Merrigan and Jack Yang led a dedicated group of volunteers, with 14 new tutors trained, many of them university students. In March, two former homework club participants joined as volunteer tutors.

Thanks to everyone who held fast during the lockdowns; we recognise that many of our volunteers had their own trials during the pandemic. Sometimes the tutors have had only a day's notice about homework clubs' recommencement, but they turned up full of enthusiasm. Their community

spirit shows the students that we care.

Thanks also to the North Melbourne and Hobsons Bay library staff and especially to the students and their families who support this institution of 17 years.

## Workout

The Centre's very successful Workout program is a partnership with Judy Lazarus Transition Centre (JLTC) in West Melbourne.

Tutors Frances McMillan and Louise Cindric take small groups of residents who are about to re-enter society following a prison term. The six-week program combines digital literacy, job search, practical measures and personal growth.

In 2020/21 the trainers proved their capacity for flexible delivery to JLTC in exceptional and difficult times. The original program was delivered in whichever way was possible to comply with COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns, from face to face in The Centre and North Melbourne Library, to visiting the JLTC premises, to delivering via Zoom.

JLTC's unique nature meant the restrictions had harsh effects on the residents. In response, Louise developed an Advanced Computer course with great success and Frances delivered a Community Connection Program that saw residents assemble construction kits that were sent to children in foster care. These developments and adjustments continued through later lockdowns.

Frances and Louise appreciate the support of all staff at The Centre and JLTC for managing the difficulties and share the pride in the tangible achievements as evidenced in this testimonial from a case manager at JLTC: "Both Orhan and Said really appreciated you making yourself available to help them get their email operational. You really understand how much this lockdown impacts the guys and being positive and passionate in helping with things like this really helps the guys cope."

## Other Adult Education

Other courses offered by The Centre, and delivered by Louise Cindric, focused on digital literacy. While COVID-19 disruptions created challenges for the delivery of these courses, we were able to complete courses in Computing Essentials and iGadgets, both providing vital skills for both the workplace and life more broadly.

## North &amp; West Melbourne News

The North & West Melbourne News is a key project of The Centre. We are delighted that every aspect of our thriving community newspaper – writing, editing, layout, advertising and delivery – is performed by volunteers.

In the 12 months covered by The Centre's annual report, the News was published four times, three during lockdowns, when it proved invaluable in keeping everyone connected with our local community. The print run was increased to 7,700 with the paper now delivered to an ever-increasing number of letterboxes in North Melbourne and West Melbourne.

Apart from the News' consistent

excellence, there were two highlights. Firstly, Community Newspapers Association of Victoria recognised the paper at the group's annual awards night. We were a finalist in two categories (best newspaper and best community content), won a statewide award for best design and layout, and two stories received special commendation. Congratulations to the entire team, especially editor Maurice Gaul and production manager and designer Anne Burgi. Secondly, a January writers meeting enjoyed an excellent roll-up and allowed us to celebrate the paper's recent awards and the contribution of our wonderful volunteers.

## Report to the community 2020/21

# The Centre steers a steady financial course

Kath McPherson, Centre Treasurer

At this time last year, I reported that after the challenges of the previous year, we hoped that this year The Centre would be back on track. I don't think any of us appreciated that a year on we would still be dealing with COVID-19's effects. Like most organisations another year of lockdowns and restrictions has had a significant impact of The Centre's finances.

The most obvious impact has been a significant 12.5% reduction in the overall income. This was almost exclusively due to another reduction in fees and charges income, which fell by 36.5% over the year. This means that since COVID-19 began, income from fees and charges for fee-for-service programs (e.g. Pilates, the Community Choir) and activities like our Centre Adventures and morning teas has fallen more than 52%. Income from the Department of Education for delivery of ACFE-funded pre-accredited training program courses also fell by a significant amount. Both these falls in income were directly related to our inability to deliver our programs over a large part of the year due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Fortunately, a significant amount of this lost income was offset by financial support from both the Federal and State Governments through initiatives such as the Job Keeper program and Business Support Packages. These programs meant that The Centre was able to keep staff employed during the lockdown period, allowing us to continue to support many of our regular clients while ensuring we were prepared to begin delivering our normal program of activities immediately after lockdown restrictions eased.

Our core funding provided by the City of Melbourne and the Department of Human Services, which together account for around 50% of The Centre's overall income, was maintained at pre-COVID levels. This on-going commitment from both agencies has been instrumental in maintaining The Centre's financial security.

The impact of the loss of income was

## The Centre – Summary Financial Data

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14
Income	\$486,359	\$556,079	\$518,988	\$497,509	\$518,152	\$522,839	\$468,903	\$431,295
Expenditure	\$434,165	\$504,317	\$564,688	\$536,880	\$507,697	\$472,605	\$408,677	\$466,419
Surplus / (Deficit)	\$52,194	\$51,762	(\$45,700)	(\$39,371)	\$10,455	\$50,234	\$60,226	(\$35,124)
Assets	\$309,350	\$205,938	\$157,640	\$199,082	\$262,112	\$271,805	\$237,387	\$195,331
Liabilities	\$143,395	\$92,177	\$95,641	\$91,383	\$115,043	\$135,191	\$151,007	\$154,126
Net Assets / Equity	\$165,955	\$113,761	\$61,999	\$107,699	\$147,069	\$136,614	\$86,380	\$32,873

also mitigated by a significant reduction in expenditure directly related to those programs that we were unable to run. As a result, program expenditure fell by more than 52% compared to the previous year. The maintenance of fixed costs at pre-COVID levels and tight control of other variable costs meant that overall expenditure fell by about 14% over the year.

The Centre also secured several small project grants during the lockdown periods. These included funding for 'The Human Library' project, the Docklands-focused 'Live Like a Local' project, delivered in partnership with B-Friend, and Christmas in Errol Street, delivered in partnership with the North & West Melbourne Precinct Association. These projects, along with self-funded programs like *North & West Melbourne News* (which has continued uninterrupted despite COVID-19 restrictions) and The Spanish Language Fiesta (delivered as a virtual event in December 2020 and again as a laneway event in March 2021) also made a significant contribution toward The Centre's fixed costs that would otherwise have to be solely funded from our core grant income.

Overall, despite the challenges associated with COVID-19 and the impact on our programs, I am pleased to report that The Centre finished the year with a healthy surplus of \$52,194. This surplus, on top of a similar surplus reported last financial year, has significantly strengthened The Centre's balance sheet. This places The Centre in a strong position both in relation to managing the on-going challenges

associated with the pandemic as well as rebuilding the programs that have declined over the last two years.

It is important to mention that at all times over the past two years The Centre has remained solvent. The Centre's Board monitors this closely. With cash and liquid assets totalling nearly \$295,000 at 30 June this year, the Board has no concerns with regard to The Centre's solvency at this time.

Despite the uncertainty regarding returning to normal operation The Board has reviewed and approved a full year budget for 2021/22, which envisages a return to normal operations this year and a reinvigorated program of activity under the

stewardship of The Centre's new Director, Ariel Valent. It also envisages a small surplus of around \$4,000 for the year to 30 June 2022.

The full set of audited financial statements is available on our website. Our auditor reported no issues with The Centre's finances and reporting again this year. I would like to thank the Board for their diligence and support in overseeing the accounts and treasury of The Centre. The day-to-day management of The Centre's finances and reporting is exemplary and sincere thanks to our CFO, Craig Barry, and our Director, Ariel Valent, for ensuring this high standard is maintained.

