

the centre

connecting community in north & west melbourne inc.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Tom Seddon



Centre is a place for everyone

The Centre is North & West Melbourne's neighbourhood house in Errol St, North Melbourne and the publisher of the *North & West Melbourne News*. Instead of a thick annual report on the year to 30 June 2020 distributed to and read by few, we have this year decided to strip it back to basics and distribute it via the Spring issue of the *News*.

Neighbourhood houses are for everyone. Anyone can join The Centre, and it's free. We offer a range of programs and anyone can suggest new ones. Even better, become a Centre volunteer and help us make your idea happen.

COVID-19's arrival in Australia at the end of February made 2019/20 a year of two very different parts. The first eight months of the year ran as scheduled. But come March – as limitations on events and "social distancing" came in, and schools began to close – we cancelled the 2020 Spanish Language Fiesta.

Soon after that the Centre itself was required to close along with our Pop Up Neighbourhood House in Docklands, only opened in December. Like so many others, Centre staff learnt to work from home and to conduct meetings by video. Board meetings, too, moved online.

Financially, the Centre like many other institutions faced a sudden drop in income as programs suddenly stopped. State and federal programs provided support to keep The Centre afloat as restrictions continue even now. For the year as a whole, the association reported

income of \$556,079 and expenses of \$504,317 leaving a surplus of \$51,742. After two consecutive annual shortfalls, planning for and achieving a surplus even in these strange times was a necessity.

During the year Community Development Coordinator Carolynne Venn and Events Coordinator Tatiana Echeverri moved on to new challenges, leaving behind important legacies: Carolynne drove the successful establishment of our Docklands Pop Up Neighbourhood House and Tatiana founded our popular annual Spanish Language Fiesta. We welcomed incoming Community Development Coordinator Stacey Halls and former student intern-turned Community Development Officer Jason Butcher.

As well as Neighbourhood House Coordination Program funding from the Dept of Health & Human Services, The Centre receives operational funding from the City of Melbourne and we value the close working relationship we have at Town Hall with Tallia, Melanie, Ariel and Siobhan.

As ever, The Centre owes a big thank-you to our Spring Fling volunteers, the folks who write, produce and deliver this newspaper, homework club tutors, our staff and office volunteers and board members. Also to everyone who takes part in a Centre program from exercise classes to Errol's Angels Community Choir to staying mentally sharp in an IT class.

FROM THE CHAIR

Karl Hessian



Many thanks to many people

This year's report is a reminder that there were nine months of more or less usual operations that preceded the final distorting three, even if it doesn't feel like that.

The final quarter, in which so much cherished activity and community engagement was abruptly suspended, looms over everything and puts all else in the shade.

There are really only two things to be said. The first and most important is to sincerely thank all the staff, volunteers, contractors and everybody else who assists in the running of The Centre. This year you have been subjected to extraordinary stresses, uncertainties and disappointments. In March you quickly accepted our changed reality and dealt with it. You have continually kept

probing to tweak or develop new ways of working and you have adapted well and with grace. I am grateful to each of you.

Second, I need to acknowledge the financial support provided by all levels of Government. This has taken two forms: a relaxation of delivery requirements for existing grants and further cash. Each has been very much appreciated and has ensured that we could retain all our staff and remain viable. In large part due to this support we have generated a surplus. This is a humbling position to be in. As soon as possible this surplus will be re-invested back into our community and spent for the benefit of all.

Thank you to everybody in North and West Melbourne for your continuing support.

Centre Staff, Contractors and Volunteer Program Leads in 2019/20

Laurence Angwin, Home Away from Homework Club Supervisor

Craig Barry, CFO/CIO

Anne Burgi, North & West Melbourne News Production Manager

Jason Butcher, Community Development Officer (from 1/20)

Louise Cindric, IT Instructor

Maryanne Clements, Errol's Angels Choir Leader

Tatiana Echeverri, Events Coordinator (to 12/19)

Maurice Gaul, North & West Melbourne News Editor

Stacey Halls, Community Development Coordinator (from 6/20)

Ragn Hannah, Operations & Business Coordinator

Ashlea Karosas, Home Away from Homework Club Supervisor

Frances McMillan, Foundation Skills Coordinator

Yulay Perez, SLF 2020 Coordinator

Tom Seddon, Centre Director

Carolynne Venn, Community Development Coordinator (to 3/20)

Mitsalal Zufi, cleaner

Centre Board members

Karl Hessian, Chair

Lorna Hannan OAM, Deputy Chair (elected Oct 2019)

Kay Oke OAM, Secretary (elected Oct 2019)

Kathleen McPherson, Treasurer

Bill Liddy

Ben O'Connor

Kate Ritchie (appointed Feb 2020)

Margaret Wood AM

Michael Halls and Malcolm Peacock AM (retired at the Oct 2019 AGM)

MAJOR EVENTS

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



Spring Fling

The Centre has organised North Melbourne's major community street festival for decades. Falling government assistance, rising costs and a long-term drop in market stall hirers made Spring Fling for several years now by far the largest drain on Centre finances. We announced in mid-2019 that a festival that closed major roads and a tramline was now simply too expensive.

Spring Fling has evolved from its first year in the basement of the North Melbourne Town hall in the mid-1970s, and it would need to evolve again. Around 4,000 locals turned up on Saturday 19 October for a great day (until it rained) of activities in the laneways off Errol Street and also the North Melbourne Library, the Legion Hall and the Lithuanian Club. Not everyone agreed with taking the festival off Errol Street, and they let us know it! While Spring Fling cannot be held in 2020, we are looking forward to 2021.

Thanks to Event Coordinator Tatiana Echeverri and her team of volunteer supervisors as well as about 60 volunteers on the day, as well as sponsors Victorian Multicultural Commission, City of Melbourne, Alexkarbon, Costco and Flexicar.

Spanish Language Fiesta

"SLF" has fast become North Melbourne's "must do" laneway festival since its start in 2016 as the Centre then student intern Tatiana Echeverri's master's project.

In April 2019 some 2,500 people jammed George Johnson Lane and Lt Errol St and we had big plans for 2020 under new event coordinator Yulay Perez. Instead, SLF 2020 was an early casualty of COVID-19 restrictions and organisers spent a weekend pasting "cancelled" over the centre page fiesta advert in 6,500 copies of the News.



Docklands Pop Up

The Centre obtained funding for two years (since extended by three months) from July 2019 to take the neighbourhood house concept to Docklands. Initial groundwork was done by Carolynne Venn and interns Ivano Abram and Jason Butcher, leading to the generous provision of a shop space at The District Docklands shopping centre in November.

People found their way to the Pop Up as soon as the doors opened, which is fortunate since within a few months the doors closed again because of the pandemic and have remained so ever since. In that brief window, Carolynne & co made the Pop Up a regular hive of activity with weekly visitor services class on Thursdays, frequent all-welcome morning teas, chair yoga, Christmas tree decoration workshops in December and preparations for Bollywood-inspired activities for Cultural Diversity Week (our first cancelled activity as COVID-19 started to bite).

Still, a core group of by-now Pop Up regulars had formed and as lockdowns were mandated the Pop Up went on-line, and grew! Online activities started with regular WhatsApp catch-ups, grew into regular walks in twos, then larger groups when allowed (alas, not for long) and recently expanded to include online cooking workshops.



**Pop Up
Neighbourhood
House
@
Docklands**

A project of **the centre**

The News

Now in its 42nd year, the *North & West Melbourne News* is written, produced and delivered quarterly by dozens of volunteers, led by editor Maurice Gaul and design & production head Anne Burgi, with advertising and local notices managed by Janet Graham. This team has been in place since the Autumn 2019 issue.

The News focuses sharply on local stories and interests; it's a paper by, for and about North & West Melbourne. In 2019/20 we focussed on getting it delivered to more new buildings where mailboxes are often behind security.

With a current print run of 6500 (up from 5500 18 months ago), the News reaches thousands of local mailboxes and is also distributed from The Centre, Docklands Pop Up, North Melbourne Library, NMLL, and local shops and cafes.



Christmas at Docklands

Bus trips and morning teas

For years The Centre has offered day trips to places of interest around Victoria, and prior to being suspended we visited Ballarat's Tramway and Avenue of Honour, J Ward at Ararat, Castlemaine's Royal Theatre (for "Rocketman") on one trip and Buda House & Gardens on another, and finally Woodlands Homestead and the Living Legends retired racehorses in Greenvale.

We also hold monthly social morning teas where sometimes the conversation is general and other times there's a topic, such as International Women's Day or the City of Melbourne's new Active Seniors proposals.

Both programs were suspended in March.

Pilates

The Centre in conjunction with City North Physiotherapy offers a wide range of movement and exercise classes for all ages and abilities. Until suspended in March classes were held at the Legion Hall and Meat Market, and we were soon to add the Pop Up. Instead classes went online and that's where they continue to be held.



Bundling up the News for the dedicated band of local distributors who deliver the paper to local residents and businesses.



Errol's Angels

Errol's Angels Community Choir dates back to 2002. Until suspended under COVID-19 restrictions, the Angels practiced weekly under choir leader Maryanne Clements at the North Melbourne Maternal & Child Health Centre. Performances during the year included two visits to the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, the Docklands Pop Up, Gardiner Reserve (twice), the Souffle Sisters annual concert in Brunswick and Carols in Errol Street.

After in-person practices could no longer be held they moved on-line and now Maryanne runs them jointly with members of two other choirs she leads.

Boomerang Bags

For two years The Centre has hosted a Boomerang Bags group: volunteers who convert pre-used fabric and donated off-cuts into shopping bags and aprons.

In late autumn, volunteers from community centres across the west and southwest of Melbourne – including members of our Boomerang Bags group (especially super-sewer Deanna Eddington) – took up the call to sew thousands of gowns and masks for Western Health.

VP Day & Anzac Day

Each year The Centre with the Australian Legion of Ex-Servicemen & Women commemorate VP Day and Anzac Day with a public ceremony at the North Melbourne Cenotaph. Unfortunately, public health restrictions have prevented such public events beginning with Anzac Day this year.

EDUCATION

Adult Education

The Centre is a registered Learn Local provider of pre-accredited adult education courses. During 2019/20 our Digital Literacy classes were busiest, and in January 2020 we started our first group digital literacy course at VincentCare's newly opened Ozanam House. We also tried out new Introduction to Accounting & Bookkeeping and Introduction to Customer Service courses.

On top of group classes we offer one-on-one IT training both at The Centre and on-site at the Salvation Army's Flagstaff Accommodation.

While some one-on-one IT sessions were able to resume in June, they and our other classes have otherwise all been suspended since March due to COVID-19 although tutor Louise Cindric stays in touch and supports our students during this time.

Thank you to Louise and IT class volunteer Shu Yea Law, also Centre CFO Craig Barry for taking the accounting classes and our former Community Development Coordinator Carolynne Venn for customer service.

Workout

Workout is The Centre's program for residents of West Melbourne's Judy Lazarus prison transition centre (JLTC). This six-week

program combines digital literacy and job search with other practical aspects of returning to society: the first thing we do is get everyone a decent coffee and then sign them up for library cards and email addresses.

Workout was running well when COVID-19 hit. The restrictions were a serious blow to inmates as JLTC doesn't have the amenities of other prisons for engagement and recreation. They became depressed and despondent. Lou Cindric and Frances McMillan worked with JLTC staff to obtain permission to bring the program inside JLTC during the lockdown, and which also involved purchasing or loaning Centre IT equipment to allow access to wi-fi.

Responding to a request for more engagement, the "Workout 2 Community Connections" project saw the men enjoy constructing and packaging 50 high quality Leggo and Meccano toys that were sent to children going into Foster Care (through the Berry Street children's charity). This was funded by individual community members who believed in its value to both the men and the disadvantaged children.

When stage 4 lockdowns were imposed in August Louise, Frances and JLTC were all ready and able to deliver the program online.

The Centre thanks all the community members who donated to the toy project

and to the staff at JLTC and North Melbourne Library and to Faces and Places Café.

Home Away From Homework Club

Homework clubs started 2019/20 with a new club at North Melbourne Language & Learning (joining our clubs at North Melbourne Library, The Centre and Altona North) thanks to the support of the RE Ross Trust. As 2020 approached we prepared to start a fifth club at the Docklands Library.

But then came March and the challenges presented by COVID-19. Many suggested that homework clubs should go online (and some did) but that would not work for our style of club, or many of our students and their families. Our schools also advised against, feeling children had enough to do and uncertain about the cyber safety aspect of communicating with children on line.



This did not mean we abandoned our students. Project books with fun learning activities were created and sent to every student in the program and each family was contacted by phone and letter. We also stayed in touch with families of our students who lived through the hard lockdown of North Melbourne's community housing towers in July and continue to stay in touch today.

There was a window in June when restrictions eased but the libraries could not accommodate us with social distancing rules and miraculously the West Melbourne Baptist Church offered the use of their large community hall. This worked very well for the North Melbourne groups but was short-lived as we were unable to reopen for term 3.

Thanks to the homework club team without whom nothing in our club is possible. There are five session coordinators (Laurence Angwin, Ashlea Karosas, Hannah Merrigan, Jack Yang and Amali Wijayawardhane), a group of 20 volunteer tutors and a volunteer who maintains the waiting lists. Program Coordinator Frances McMillan calls them her "dream team" and says "we all thoroughly enjoy our time together working with the students and watching them grow and develop as learners and as people". Also thanks very much to the Errol St IGA who helped cover the costs of food.



*Left: The monthly bus trips included a visit to Ballarat.
Above: Fun at Spring Fling 2019.
Right: Errol's Angels in full voice at Christmas.*

Around the Centre office

Melbourne City Council kindly repainted our reception and training areas during winter 2019 and we bought a new reception desk, sofa, tables and chairs to make the area more professional, but also more attractive and welcoming.

Joining Operations & Business Coordinator Ragn Hannah at the front desk were volunteers Karen Kirsop, Gary Dowling, Olga Migaliatieve, Reme Sanchez-Romero, Shu Yea Law, Hoang Nguyen and Eila Yarnell.

The newly refreshed downstairs areas were the official reason for our 2019 December wind-up open house evening.

Errol Street came late to the NBN party, but that upgrade to Centre connectivity is happening now

along with an upgrade to cloud-based computing. New computers have replaced our oldest machines so that every workstation and laptop is ready for the new operating system. While we are anxious to get back to The Centre, these upgrades will make working remotely a lot easier and more efficient as well. We will also master the capabilities of our new printer, so we can produce our own posters and banners for the front window, which will also get a video display.

Centre interns in 2019/20: Regina Pang and Jason Ng from Hong Kong Baptist University (pictured at right); Jenny Zhu from Melbourne University; and from Victoria University and Polytechnic there were Ivano Abram, Jason Butcher, and Thilini Vithanage.



Centre benefits from new grant sources

By Kath McPherson

Despite the challenges this year The Centre has returned as surplus of \$51,700. You can see from the summary of recent years' results that this has been driven by a 7.1% growth in income. This largely due to work done prior to this year sourcing new grant income. Funding from the City of Melbourne to establish the Pop Up Neighbourhood House in Docklands was a major contributor to this growth along with some COVID-19 support funding from both federal and state governments. This growth has been despite a significant reduction in fees income due to the suspension of activities because of COVID-19.

The Centre has not seen a significant downturn in income overall because of COVID-19 largely because The Centre has a well-diversified income portfolio. The Centre is not overly reliant on any one income source and this considerably reduces the risk of running into difficulties during challenging economic conditions.

Helped also by Job Keeper funding for some staff, The Centre has been able to retain staff and contractors since our doors closed six months ago. Whilst many of The Centre's

The Centre - Summary Financial Data

	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Income	556,079	518,988	497,509	518,152	522,839	468,903	431,295	351,192
Expenditure	504,317	564,688	536,880	507,697	472,605	408,677	466,419	482,760
Surplus / (Deficit)	51,762	(45,700)	(39,371)	10,455	50,234	60,226	(35,124)	(131,568)
Assets	205,938	157,640	199,082	262,112	271,805	237,387	195,331	139,036
Liabilities	92,177	95,641	91,383	115,043	135,191	151,007	154,126	63,450
Net Assets / Equity	113,761	61,999	107,699	147,069	136,614	86,380	32,873	75,586

regular activities are postponed or cancelled staff have been engaged in ensuring that our regular clients have been supported during this difficult time, and adapting our ways of working so that it can operate safely and effectively when The Centre and the Docklands Pop Up reopen.

Centre expenditure was down on previous years because there were significant programs and activities that we have had to defer or cancel.

As stated the result of all this has meant the Centre reporting a surplus of \$51.7k. Rarely does the work that we do neatly line up with financial years so it is not uncommon for the

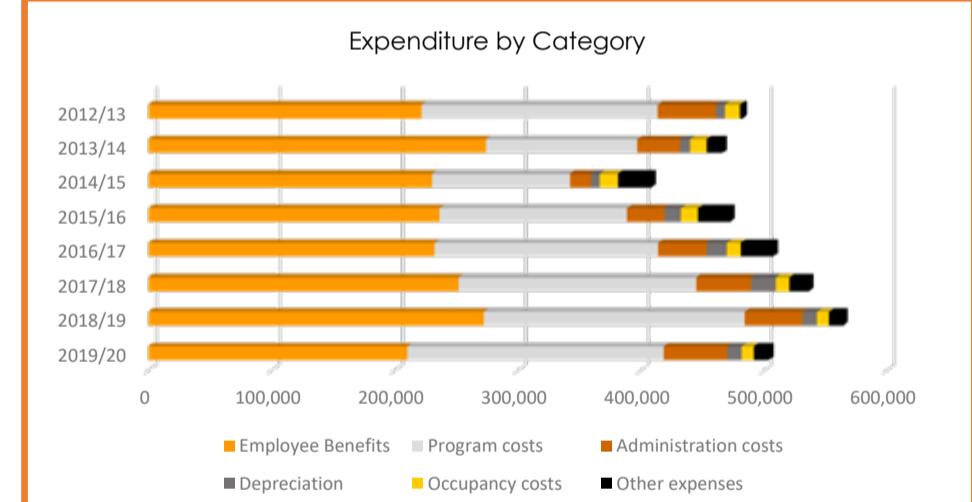
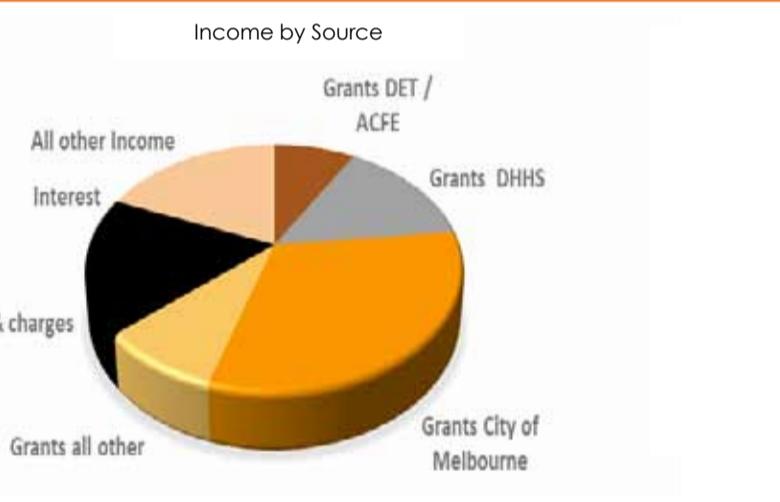
Centre to report a deficit as it has done for the last two years.

As you can see from the Summary Financial Data table a deficit in one or two years will be followed by a significant surplus the next year, just as is the case this year. It is important to mention that at all times over the last two years The Centre has remained solvent. With cash and liquid assets totalling nearly \$170k at 30 June this year The Centre will certainly remain so for a considerable time to come.

With the situation still uncertain regarding returning to normal operation we are planning for to remain in significant surplus for the six months to 31 December, to ensure

at least a break even result for the year to 30 June 2021.

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 Tom Seddon for ensuring this high standard is maintained.



COVID changes the way we live

The arrival of the COVID-19 virus in Australia in early 2020 changed life for everyone in many ways that may have been unthinkable beforehand. Six months later there's still no saying when things will get back to 'normal'.

The Centre's goal is community development. In other times, that means organising or facilitating activities large and small that engage local residents, and playing a part in keeping the community informed about matters that affect the growth and development of North & West Melbourne, and now Docklands.

Since closing the Centre and the Docklands Pop Up and suspending most activities in March, we have focussed on communication: relaying important information (or where to find it) via social media, staying personally in touch with dozens and dozens of Centre and Pop Up users, playing supporting roles where we were able to contribute to the work of government and relief organisations, and also finding where our programs could move online or otherwise address their purpose.

