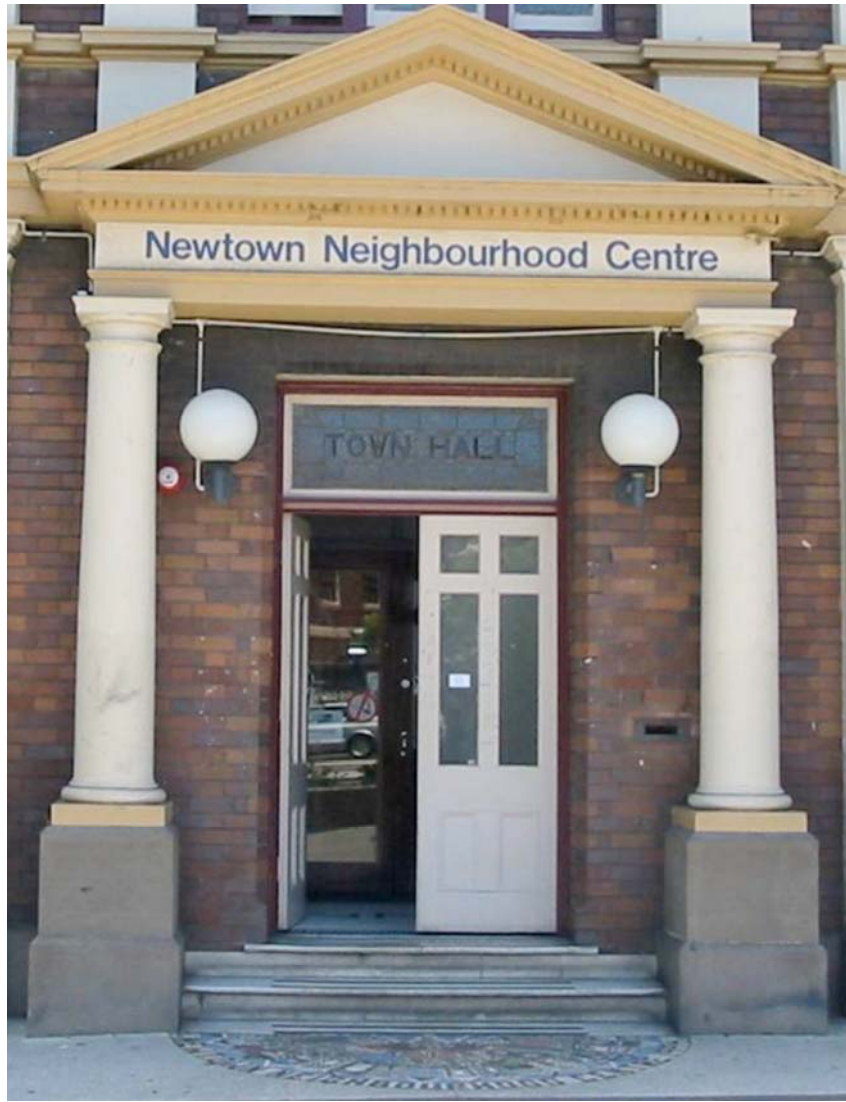


Newtown Neighbourhood Centre



an Easy access centre

Report by: Danielle Notara

Funding Proposal:

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre: An Easy Access Centre

Summary:

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre plays a vital role in the community by providing information and advice on a variety of support services and program delivery to the aged, people with disabilities, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and people on low incomes. However, due to mobility constraints, some service users are unable to access the upper levels of the centre meaning that the equal participation is not possible. This situation is neither acceptable in the present nor sustainable in the future. It is thus necessary that the NNC be made an easy access centre by the installation of a lift. NNC operates within a diverse community and this diversity should be reflected in the ability of all members of the community to access the services provided for them.

Actions:

The proposed changes involve the installation of a lift in the front of the centre to give access to the upper floor. The area in which the lift will operate is currently the NNC Coordinator's office. The willingness of the Coordinator to sacrifice already limited working space is demonstrative of the necessity of this project. It is acknowledged that NNC is a heritage-listed building however; we believe the heritage listing mainly applies to the outer facade of the building, and thus the lift does not interfere with such preservation.

Evidence:

Through conducting research with centre users and the broader community, much evidence has emerged to support NNC's proposal. A survey conducted with over 100 persons whom have contact with the centre (see Appendix 1), found that 60% were over the age of 40. Of this group 69% of people had trouble accessing the centre and 79% use the centre on a weekly basis. Of further concern, centre users over the age of 60 make up over half of the aforementioned group, 80% indicate they have difficulty accessing the centre, whilst 100% of respondents use the centre on a weekly basis. Research has found that "NSW meets only 35% of the identified need for activities of daily living in older people"¹ NNC thus plays an important role in providing services to the local ageing population and this is being jeopardized by the ability of their ageing clientele to access the centre. A client who regularly uses the centre commented:

"I am in a gentle exercise class in the hall upstairs and I would like to think that in years to come that I can still be involved with this group because it is an important part of my social network."

This highlights the fact that whilst problems have already arisen and as the clientele continue to age, the sustainability of the provision of NNC services to the burgeoning ageing population comes into question.

Difficulties have also arisen for people with physical disabilities who wish to access the centre. It is the case that those people in a wheelchair have to go to considerable lengths to do so. When asked what assistance would be required one person described:

¹ *Social and economic priorities for a fair and sustainable community: 2006-2007, State Budget*, NCOSS, 2005.

“I would need 2 to 4 strong men to carry me and my manual wheelchair up the narrow staircase”

Such requirements put undue pressure on the individuals attempting to access the centre and staff who wish to preserve the dignity of their clients.

In other cases people could not access the centre all together, commenting:

“Whilst I cannot use the NNC Facilities and access now because I use a motorized wheelchair, if a lift were put in I would make good use of the NNC. As a resident of Newtown it would be a key source of pleasure and information.”

This draws attention to the issue of inequality in accessing facilities and the right to participate equally in the local community.

It has been the case that group coordinators have had to turn people away from their activities:

“We have had to tell two people they would not be able to come to our meetings this year because they are wheelchair users and therefore unable to access our meeting room.”

One of the most popular activities at the centre, Bingo, has been forced to relocate to another premises in order to cater for the needs of all its players. Further, NNC must ensure that accompanying any material advertising events at the centre is the notice:

“We regret there is no easy access for people with mobility issues at the centre, please phone us if this affects you.”

One respondent who uses a wheelchair noted that whilst there are several accessible bus routes that stop within 20 meters of NNC, access to the NNC itself however is limited.

These are not issues that affect only the aged or people with disabilities; mothers with prams have also experienced difficulties when attending the centre. Further these grievances do not remain isolated to those directly affected, these people have relatives, neighbours and colleagues who share their concerns. A petition in support of installing a lift has collected 1000 signatures from the residents in the local area, suggesting strongly that this is an issue that has support from the broader public.

Results

With such a cross-section of age groups and differing requirements, council must act decisively and deliver an effective response to this proposal. The installation of a lift would see NNC operating to its full capacity in providing much needed services to the community and ensure equal participation for all those who wish to access the centre.

If you would like any more information on this subject or if you would like to discuss this matter further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Lisa Burns

Centre Coordinator

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

Ph 9516 4755

Appendix 1



Newtown Neighbourhood Centre Incorporated

Town Hall, 1 Bedford St, Newtown. PO Box 19, Newtown 2042

Ph: 9516 4755 Fax: 9519 2509

Email: coord@newtowncentre.org

ABN: 96 884 462 833

The Newtown Neighbourhood Centre Inc. (NNC) is trying to determine how accessible the NNC facilities and services are to members of the public who currently use the Centre or would like to use the Centre. As a community Centre we aim to provide everyone with the same opportunity to utilise our services.

*Completing this survey will allow us to determine how accessible NNC is, especially in terms of mobility access. Please assist us in this endeavour by returning the completed questionnaire by the **31st January 2007**.*

You can hand it in personally by dropping it into the 'suggestion box' at the front counter of the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre,

mail to: PO Box 19 Newtown 2042

or Fax: 9519 2509.

Name: (Optional) _____

Age: (Please tick) 18-40 40-60 Over 60

Can you access upstairs:

Yes with ease Please proceed to the last question of this survey and provide us
with comments/feedback

Yes with difficulty If so do you need assistance? yes no

If yes, what kind of assistance do you need?

No Would you like to access the current services/facilities of NNC?
yes no

What would make the upstairs area more accessible to you?

Are you:

Room Hirer Centre User NNC Group User

NNC group/activity/service you attend: (Please specify) _____

How often do you use the Centre?

Weekly Monthly Very Occasionally

Do you have any comments regarding the NNC facilities and access?
