

# DEAR NEIGHBOUR,

My name is Liz Yeo and I'm the CEO at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre (NNC) and a proud long-term resident of Newtown.

I hope that you have been taking care of yourself and your loved ones during this stressful time.

As a local resident I thought you may be interested in what our Centre has been doing in 2020 and wanted to thank you for the part you've played in keeping Newtown the inclusive, caring and fun place we love.

2020 will be remembered for a long time as one of the toughest years the world has faced. And we know there are still challenges ahead as we deal with the ongoing health, social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am so proud of the way our team of staff and volunteers at NNC responded to the pandemic. While we unfortunately had to close the Centre in the early part of 2020, as soon as it was safe to do so, and in line with health requirements, it was the staff who got a roster going to ensure we could open at least 3 days a week for drop in information and referral.

The members of our Multicultural Aged Care Groups were particularly impacted by the pandemic when they had to suddenly stop their weekly catch ups.

*"This year has been extremely challenging. At the start of the pandemic I was fearful and afraid to leave my house and the worst part was having no control of the situation",* expressed Milanka, a member of the Communities from Former Yugoslavia group.

For many of our members, seeing the emptied shelves and frantic manic stockpiling triggered memories of living through war. This was compounded by the fear of catching the virus, plus the fear of isolation. There was also a deep shared anxiety about their lack of digital literacy skills in order to shop for groceries or stay connected.

*"Ordering online worked for the younger people but for older people like me with no computer skills it was awfully difficult...And then if we did go to the shops, the shelves would be empty",* Milanka explained.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre's Aged Care staff devised plans to make regular contact with the group members. There were constant reminders about the importance of hygiene, social distancing and daily exercise, plus regular entertainment packages were posted out which included brain teasers, word finders and songs to sing.

Members were encouraged to each call at least one person every day. This was aside from the regular welfare calls staff and volunteers would make to engage the seniors, monitor their wellbeing and keep them updated on anything related to COVID-19.

Milanka reflected that *"being stuck at home I found my anxiety levels increased rapidly. I was extremely lonely and depressed and wondered when it would end. These calls helped to build hope and was one of the best ways to harness social connection during the pandemic".*

Our staff reported similar feelings from other group members and said that members were appreciative that we hadn't forgotten about them. The pandemic highlighted the significance of our face to face groups and how important social connection is to everyone, but in particular seniors.

While we are extremely cautious about social distancing measures, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre is thrilled that our groups are slowly starting to meet back up in person.

Looking ahead, I am pleased we are back on track with our strategy and focused on a significant move and the launch of our new volunteer strategy in the new year.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre remains committed to ending homelessness, domestic violence and social isolation in Sydney's Inner West, and to changing individual lives.

2020 has highlighted the importance of social connection and I hope we are able to continue to support the local community by keeping the Centre's doors open.

This is a massive goal and is not something we can achieve on our own. Throughout 2020 we had to unfortunately cancel our two big fundraising events, Newtopian Sleepout and Newtown Festival.

**If you are in a position to make a financial donation to the Centre, please donate at [www.newtowncentre.org](http://www.newtowncentre.org).**

Your donation will ensure Newtown Neighbourhood Centre is able to help the increasing number of people who will need support as we face the impact of COVID19.

We also hope to harness the goodwill of the community and continue to grow our volunteer base in order to support the important work of the Centre.

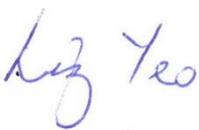
Please feel free to contact me anytime at [liz@newtowncentre.org](mailto:liz@newtowncentre.org) if you have any feedback or questions about what we do.

**Together we can continue to build a stronger, more connected, more caring community.**

I wish you and your family a fantastic time over the holidays and all the best for the year ahead!

Thank you for the part you play in helping to create our own little Newtopia!

Kind regards



Liz Yeo  
**CEO – Newtown Neighbourhood Centre**