

NEWTOWN

Neighbourhood Centre

New(town) Beginnings # 16

Dear Neighbour,

Two Sundays ago, we hosted Newtown's biggest annual party – Newtown Festival!

While the day is always filled with a spectrum of colour, gorgeous pooches competing for illustrious medals, and lots of loud joyous music, the purpose behind the event is much more significant and consequential.

The money we generate from the Newtown Festival allows Newtown Neighbourhood Centre to continue supporting those in our community who are doing it tough. Often derided, judged and marginalised, these are individuals who may be experiencing homelessness, suffering financial instability, are socially isolated due to mental health, or are victims of domestic violence.

This year my team hosted a 'Community Heart Tent', featuring a host of free activities and giveaways for all. There was the delightful Drag Storytime sessions, glitter makeovers and face painting, fresh fruit for all, reading and craft corners, plus plenty of bean bags and cushioned benches to lounge on.

One of the guests who enjoyed basking in the sun with us was Jodie*. Jodie has been a regular at the Centre for many years. Jodie first came to the Centre when she was experiencing homelessness after a relationship breakdown and was forced to sleep on park benches with her then young daughter. My colleagues and I have been able to witness her transformation and saw her permanently housed in an apartment in the inner city a couple of years ago.

I couldn't share with you details of her past because I have only known Jodie for a couple of years and our conversations focus on her present day life. She doesn't go into depth about what she has experienced, but focuses on where she wants to go next. She is fiercely strong, motivated and resilient.

About a month ago, I had the enormous pleasure of attending Jodie's graduation from a new food business incubator course run by TAFE, City of Sydney and University of Sydney. The innovative and intensive program connects industry mentors with students keen to pursue their dream of operating a food-related business. Jodie's class was the inaugural group of graduates.

In the absence of her friends and family being able to attend, Jodie wanted someone to share the day with her and asked if my colleague or I would accompany her. I immediately said yes and tried to contain my unabashed excitement at being asked.

On the day, we enjoyed delicious canapes while chatting with her classmates and some of the teachers who participated in the program. Some other students had experienced hardship like Jodie but their drive and determination was what shone through.

Jodie's dream of owning her own small business, focusing on native ingredients, is well within her grasp.

The other day she came into the Centre to look at images for her potential business card and is going to connect with another Centre visitor, John, featured in the last newsletter who is now back to freelancing as a designer, to help her with branding.

Jodie feels a strong connection to the Centre; a place where she was able to get respite during her darker moments. Having never experienced homelessness firsthand, I imagine that having a sense of place is deeply important. I like to think that NNC is one of Jodie's special places.

So, on behalf of Jodie and the staff at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, we sincerely thank you for allowing us to continue our work.

Thanks,
Mel

P.S. If you would like to support us by purchasing a Newtown Festival t-shirt you can buy [online](#) and pick up at the Newtown Market, or just swing by the Market between 12-2pm this Saturday. All proceeds come back to Newtown Neighbourhood Centre.

*Not her real name

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

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