

NEWTOWN

Neighbourhood Centre



GRATITUDE REPORT 2020



Photo: Diana Shypula @ Koshka Media

The 2019-2020 financial year will forever be remembered 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 Newtown Neighbourhood Centre (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 three days a week for our drop-in Information and Referral service. Staff also proactively took on roles they would not normally do like dropping off food and toilet paper to residents of Boarding Houses who were at high risk of infection from the virus.

I was also incredibly impressed with our 40 new CBD Newtopian volunteer outreachers who were recruited in February and then had to wait until July before we were able to provide them with their training so they could commence outreach to people sleeping rough in the city. Their patience, understanding and willingness to stay involved through the uncertainty was a sign of the genuine commitment of these volunteers.

Our Administration team played a key role this year in ensuring we were set up by December 2019 to work online using cloud based Office 365. This enabled us to easily connect for online

meetings and access online resources while working remotely. Admin also played a key role in ensuring we were able to re-open the building with a COVID Safe plan and with access to all the equipment needed to protect staff, volunteers, clients and community members from COVID-19.

One of our other challenges in 2019-20 was ensuring NNC's financial stability. Following some future projections on our expected income we had to make some tough decisions to restructure, as NNC was not in a position to carry additional costs of government funded programs and remain sustainable. As a result we unfortunately lost a couple of positions, and reduced hours for some roles. I want to acknowledge the significant contribution of those staff who left NNC under these difficult circumstances. This situation caused understandable distress for staff and also impacted our ability to provide the same degree of frontline services. NNC has been fortunate to receive the COVID-19 government stimulus payments which reduced the significant financial loss that had been predicted for the financial year. These stimulus payments have been essential for NNC given our loss of fundraising revenue in 2019-2020 and will

give us some time to get fundraising back underway.

During 2019-2020 we were pleased to receive visits from Minister Gareth Ward and Minister Luke Howarth, who wanted to see for themselves the programs and services at NNC. Minister Howarth even joined the Newtopian volunteers on their outreach for the night to get some firsthand opportunities to engage with people sleeping rough. We also appreciate the ongoing support and interest of our local Councillors and State and Federal MPs in the work of NNC.

We secured ongoing contracts this year with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice for our Boarding House Outreach Service and our Community Strengthening Programs. Our Commonwealth Aged Care Social Support Program was also renewed for a further two years. While COVID-19 delayed the implementation of some of our future planning, I am pleased that we are now back on track with our strategy for 2020-22. We are focused on getting ready for a significant relocation in 2021 and the launch of a new Volunteer Strategy for NNC. 2019-2020 was certainly a year to remember. I hope that the way we have risen to meet the challenges we have faced this year will stand us in good stead for 2020-2021.

Thanks as always for your steadfast support,

Liz Yeo
CEO
Newtown Neighbourhood
Centre

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL CONNECTION THROUGH A PANDEMIC

For more than 30 years, members of Sydney's multicultural community have made the weekly journey from all over town to meet at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre. Dozens of friendships have been nurtured, hundreds of games played, countless meals shared, births celebrated and deaths mourned.

For the members, our Multicultural Aged Care Groups provide an opportunity to discuss the week's news in their language, celebrate cultural events and regularly hear from external guests providing useful information, while sharing a delicious morning tea.

"My favourite part of attending the Communities of the Former Yugoslavia group is the people", shared Milanka.

"We come from the same culture and place which allows us to talk about our past, our family – everyone can relate".

However in March this year, this routine for the mostly 75 to 80-year-old members came to a sudden stop when everyone's priority shifted to surviving a deadly pandemic.

"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.

For many, seeing the emptied shelves and frantic stockpiling triggered memories of living through war. This was compounded by the fear of catching the disease, 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 "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 were 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, we are thrilled that our groups are slowly starting to meet back up in person.

To all the staff and volunteers who continued to support these seniors from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, thank you. Your tenaciousness, empathy and exceptional skills have ensured that members like Milanka have remained connected and safe during a global pandemic.



BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES

NEWTOPIAN SLEEPOUT

Our third annual Newtopian Sleepout was held in August 2019 and raised a record \$164,000. The night gives participants an opportunity to sleep out in Newtown Square and experience some of the challenges faced by individuals experiencing homelessness on a daily basis.

A big thank you to the 124 individuals who got involved and braved the cold.



SENIORS WEEK

There were lots of activities this February as we celebrated Seniors Week.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre partnered with other local organisations including Community and Cultural Connections, Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre, Ethnic Community Services Cooperative and Addison Road Community Centre, for Love to Celebrate, a multicultural event to share culture, conversation and cuisine. The event, held at Addison Road Community Centre, encouraged seniors to engage in activities and was attended by over 300 people.

At the Centre, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre's Aged Care team hosted a free line dancing event for the over 60s and it was tremendous to see everyone learning the cowboy shuffle and enjoying a great day out.

We loved being able to show our appreciation and celebrate the important role seniors play in our community.



SNAPSHOT OF THE YEAR



735

NUMBER OF PEOPLE
ACCESSING
NEWTOWN NEIGHBOURHOOD
CENTRE'S SERVICES



96

NEWTOPIAN OUTREACH
ENGAGEMENTS
+ OUTREACH WAS SUSPENDED
IN MARCH DUE TO COVID-19

A LOCAL HERO

In October, our wonderful and passionate volunteer Jane was named the winner of Westfield's Local Hero Awards. Jane was nominated for her key role in establishing and expanding our Newtopian Outreachers initiative.

As the successful recipient, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre received \$10,000 to ensure the continuation of the Newtopian Outreach project.

A big thank you to Jane for all her hard work and to everyone who voted in the community!

A TV HIGHLIGHT

In December, our One Stop Shop service received a visit from Dr Chris Brown and the team from The Living Room. The episode emphasised the connection and relationship humans can have with their pets and how services like Pets in the Park and Maggie's Rescue (who work with pet owners experiencing or at risk of homelessness) help keep their animals happy and healthy.



A sincere thank you to all of our One Stop Shop partners who provide wrap around and easily accessible support for our clients.

TACKLING HOMELESSNESS

BOARDING HOUSE ACT SUBMISSION

In October, the NSW Government collected feedback about the boarding house sector to assess the impact of the 2012 Boarding Houses Act.

Following a boarding house roundtable discussion, NNC submitted a detailed report based on our experience working directly with clients in boarding houses and results from a five year study in partnership with the University of Western Sydney and the Australian Catholic University.

We are extremely proud that the statutory review of the 2012 Boarding House Act not only mentioned NNC extensively throughout the report but has also recommended implementing some of our suggestions, including rent increases to be limited to one per year.

COMMUNITY WELLBEING CLINICS

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit, our Boarding House Outreach Service Team partnered with Sydney Local Health District to host targeted community wellbeing pop-up clinics for boarding house residents in the local areas of Petersham, Marrickville, Glebe and Ashfield.

On average 90 people attended each of the four clinics where they received detailed health information and were able to be tested if they showed signs of the virus.

It is challenging within a boarding house to adopt proper hygiene practices due to shared facilities and common spaces. It was gratifying to see a large number of people engage with the clinics and learn proactive measures to prevent the spread of the virus. The clinics reported no positive cases which was an amazing feat.

PERCENTAGE OF SURVEYED CLIENTS WHO REPORTED NOTICEABLE IMPROVEMENTS WHEN EXITING THE BOARDING HOUSE OUTREACH SERVICE:

82%

Housing or living situation improved

90%

Emotional wellbeing improved

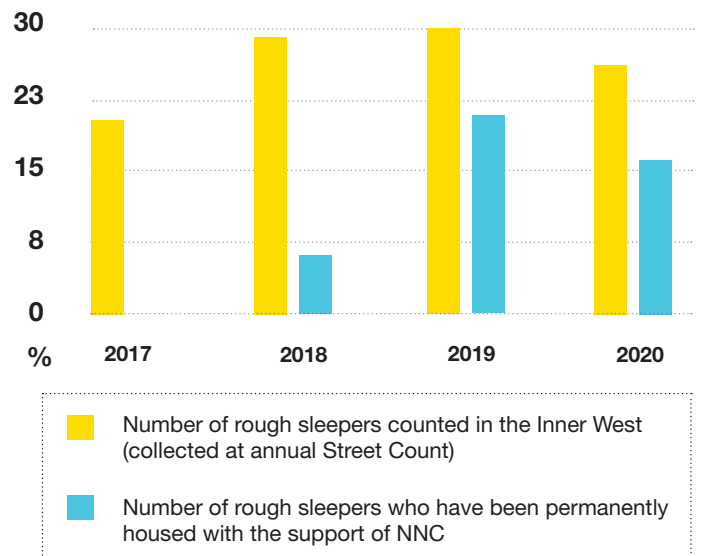
87%

Financial situation improved

94%

Increased confidence to tackle future challenges and opportunities

IMPACT OF OUTREACHES IN NEWTOWN (2018-2020)



A NEW ROLE FOR OUR OUTREACHERS

We are extremely appreciative of our Newtown Newtopian Outreach Volunteers who kindly offered to provide social calls to those most vulnerable in our community during the pandemic when their weekly street patrols were suspended.

Our volunteers checked in weekly on our boarding house clients who were feeling isolated due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The calls helped to keep the clients connected and updated on current restrictions, and also helped to support our case managers with their increased workloads.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre relies on volunteers to support our work and we could not do as much as we do without them. To all our volunteers, thank you.



YOU HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre aims to build an inclusive, resilient, self-reliant and creative community.

We offer support services to the local community and provide assistance to those most vulnerable.

We remain committed to ending homelessness and social isolation in Sydney's Inner West.

This is not a goal we can achieve on our own. We value our relationships with other local providers who we work in partnership with to address the key causes of homelessness (such as domestic and family violence).

We also work with our partners and with the broader community to find practical local solutions to address homelessness and social isolation in the Inner West.

We are grateful for the generous support of our donors, who give both financial contributions and gifts in kind, allowing us to lead the way and be innovative in creating stronger connections with community.

Together we are building a stronger more connected community while also celebrating the diversity of the Inner West.

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Photo: Diana Shypula @ Koshka Media

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Supporters

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Fitness First – Newtown
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Newtopian Outreachers
Newtopian Sleepout participants
NNC volunteer counselling team
NNC volunteer facilitators for family and social inclusion programs
NNC volunteers for our Multicultural Aged Care Support services
NNC's Donors & Regular Givers
One Stop Shop Service Partners
Orange Sky Laundry
Oz Harvest
Share the Dignity
Support the Girls
Sydney Local Health District
Tanya Plibersek MP
Thread Together
Two Good Co.

Funders

City of Sydney
Clubs NSW
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Inner West Council
NSW Department of Communities and Justice
Street Smart
Uniting Foundation
Westfield
Westpac Foundation

Partners

Cattleyard Collective
Community Restorative Centre
Tom Foster Community Centre
Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre

Newtown Festival Major Partners

City of Sydney
Inner West Council
Urbane Newtown

Newtown Festival Promo Partners

AESOP
Proud & Punch
Rainbow Fertility
Veggie Delights

Newtown Festival Media Partners

2SER
Happy
The Music
Yeah Sure

Newtown Festival Hospitality Partners

Courthouse Hotel
The Bank
The Marlborough Hotel

Newtown Festival Community Partners

All My Friends
Better Read Than Dead
BIKESydney
BOYTHING
Buzzing Minds
Clean Vibes
Dendy
GIRLTHING
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Sydney Sustainability Centre
The Coopers Arms
The Red Rattler
The Vanguard
Tommie Talks
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