

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 wanted to share with you some of what our Centre has been doing in 2018 and also importantly to thank you for the part you've played in keeping Newtown the vibrant, open, weird and safe place we love.

Here at the Centre, we provide assistance to people who are the most vulnerable, with a particular focus on those at risk of social isolation, homelessness and domestic violence. We also do fun stuff like the Newtown Market and Newtown Festival!

In the last year we've focused on growing services to get more people on a pathway to a better future.

One of the key lessons I have learned this year is that to make a real difference to people's lives means working with the whole community to try and address the causes and impacts of social disadvantage and isolation.

A great example of this is the 'Newtopian Outreach' project. A group of 20 volunteer trained local residents embarked on an outreach project to engage with rough sleepers. So far these volunteers, and our professional outreach team, have collectively offered assistance to 108 people on the streets of Newtown.

You can check out our website to hear the Newtopian Outreach story in their own words www.newtowncentre.org

Below are some of the ways we as a community have helped in 2018:

- Over **6,400** people have received relevant information, advice, and support
- **228** people were provided with specific referral to resolve their housing situation
- Over **300** people who are frail or aged have received practical and social support such as shopping assistance and recreational activities they would not otherwise be able to access
- Over **250** people living in Boarding Houses in the Inner West have benefited from 1:1 case management support to improve their housing situation
- In response to domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness among women and children, we commenced a new early intervention service to specifically support women in this situation

These numbers represent real people in our community each with their own unique story.

I was recently lucky enough to run into one of those people who first came to the Centre over a year and a half ago. Marina came to Newtown Neighbourhood Centre following the unexpected breakdown of a relationship. Her husband had been the primary breadwinner, and she suddenly



found that she could not pay the rent alone. She and her daughter became homeless for the first time.

They couch surfed for several months, and at one desperate stage were even told by someone they might need to “find a tree to sleep under”. Marina shared her story at our inaugural Newtopian Sleepout in Newtown square 2017. At that point in time she had just been successful with our support in obtaining secure social housing and she was over the moon about having her own place.

When I ran into Marina as she was coming in to the Centre the other day she looked fantastic! Her big smile stood out to me even more than usual (she told me she had finally finished getting all the work done on her teeth, which she said means she can now actually eat things that are not mush!). She told me that she was still loving their house, and that her daughter now had a job in a restaurant near their place and was doing really well.

She said while it's taken a while to get on top of things like finances and paperwork (things which her ex husband was always in control of), she had just finished doing a first aid course yesterday, and she was finally really feeling ready to start looking for part time work again. Marina said again how much of a difference the support of NNC had made in her life.

Only a couple of months ago, another former client of ours stopped me out the front of the building and said I just want to say “thank you for saving my life”. Four years after he had finally worked up the courage to come into the Centre and acknowledge he needed help (he had been rough sleeping in Camperdown, and was dealing with serious mental health issues) he enthusiastically told me his life had turned around and that he now had a successful small business, a partner, and was about to buy a house. I was blown away by his story and his resilience, and humbled by the fact that our team had played a small but significant part in that journey.

As I look to the year ahead, many of the issues we face as a community are prevalent and growing. As you can imagine, demand for our services has been on the increase with a 1300% increase in people sleeping rough in the Newtown area from 2017-2018. To ensure we can at least in some way meet this demand we have to reach out to people like you from time to time to ask for your support.

Here are some of the ways we aim to support the Inner West community to fulfil its potential to achieve a just and inclusive community in 2019:

- Increase local community members' knowledge and advocacy around housing affordability, homelessness and domestic violence
- House a minimum of 36 homeless people that are sleeping rough on our streets through a new homeless service
- Increase the number of women and children that access our new women's hub services

Ultimately we want to end homelessness and social isolation by tackling the causes, as well as by offering practical support and solutions.

Yes, these may seem like huge goals, but I know that if there was one community in Australia that can make these things happen it's the inner west - by working together we can make these things happen!

If you have any feedback for me please feel free to contact me anytime at liz@newtowncentre.org

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

Kind regards



Liz Yeo
CEO – Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

