



The Centre

Annual Report

2010/2011

The Centre
Connecting Community in North & West
Melbourne Inc.

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Chairperson's Report

Until recently, we relied on core funding provided by the City of Melbourne in the form of an operating grant. The amount of this grant was substantially reduced in 2009, and to help with adjusting to the new lower grant level, the City of Melbourne provided supplemental transition funding over three years. The 2010-11 year was the middle year of the transition funding, and was the year in which we confronted our new funding reality. Adjusting to living within our new budget has been painful, and has taken a deep human toll.

Throughout the year the staff have been magnificent. In the first half of the financial year, time and again, they put the interest of the Centre ahead of themselves in an attempt to cut costs. They had their hours reduced, and cut back on all manner of spending. The extended closure of the Centre over Christmas meant that some staff had to take leave without pay. In short, the staff rallied tremendously to keep our Centre functioning as it had been, and how we all wanted it to remain.

In the second half of the financial year, there was no option but to reduce staff numbers and prepare for a different kind of Centre. This was challenging for all of us, and the committee grappled with the uncertainty of the situation along with everybody else. I'll step outside the bounds of the 2010-11 year for just a moment, and say how much I feel the loss of Di, Linden, Thea and Ainslee. Each of them was much loved by us, and they contributed significantly to the values and culture of the Centre. I miss what was, but I am grateful for what they created while they were there. It is a cruel irony that for the want of money we were unable to keep such dedicated staff.

Where have we washed up at the end of the 2010-11 year? We are solvent, and we are living within our means. In both a financial and emotional sense, we have reached the bottom, and I am confident that we have seen through the worst. This is a year that I am happy to leave behind. Looking to the future, I have become increasingly optimistic. The committee is working through the appointment of a manager at present, and once that is resolved, we will be in a strong position to rebuild.

My heartfelt thanks go to all who served as members of the committee this last year. I would especially like to acknowledge the contributions made by two outgoing members, Mary Tomsic and Ann Wilkinson. They have both been supportive and knowledgeable contributors to the Centre. They have both been office bearers, Mary as secretary and Ann as chair, and they will be missed by us all.

Above all I am grateful and appreciative to the staff and volunteers for their efforts throughout the year. Our community is enriched by your dedication.

Karl Hessian
Chairperson

Team Leader's Report

Thea Bates was the manager of The Centre until June 2011. As she has left, I have been asked to give a report in the absence of a new manager.

The last financial year has been a difficult one for The Centre and many hard decisions had to be made. We were subject to a large funding cut which meant that our core staffing allocation went from 4.5 effective full time (eft) staff to 1.5 effective full time staff. It was decided that this 1.5 eft would be divided into three positions, to be instigated at the end of this financial year. This decision was painful for the staff and slowly people started applying for jobs or courses elsewhere and leaving.

Leonie Axford, our young receptionist and administrative assistant was the first to leave. She started a new course at RMIT in forensic science.

Linden Smith, our highly competent and valued Volunteer coordinator, after a long well deserved holiday, decided to also move on. She is now working for Qantas as an air hostess.

Thea Bates, the manager here for three years, needed full time work, and so has now moved on to greener pastures at Brimbank City Council.

Ainslee Smith has also moved on, but this has occurred in the current financial year.

The short courses, which are my area of responsibility, have been running with mixed success. Some of our courses are government funded (computers, adult art, and training for men at Ozanam House). Students for these classes are often homeless, or disadvantaged in some way. We also offer classes to the men at the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre (JLTC) in West Melbourne. These are men who are coming to the end of a jail sentence. They have been deemed no threat to the community or to themselves. JLTC aims to help them slowly integrate back into the community, and our centre provides them with classes to facilitate that.

The most popular fee for service class is Pilates. Run by Sue Gertzel, her classes have gone from strength to strength. Sue and Maria Zuluanga have been teaching two classes, very well attended, and are intending to run a third in second semester 2011. The children's art class continues to be very popular and Nikita does a great job with often up to 14 children in that little back room. Calligraphy is still attended by a small dedicated band of students. We struggle with low numbers in the yoga classes, but hopefully this will improve in the future.

We have had to scale down the number of courses we have been offering as the attendance was not there, and we were not covering cost. This is partly due to a lack of staff and therefore there has not been time spent promoting and marketing our classes.

The Centre Adventures, a program instigated by Ainslee, remains very popular. The bus trips are always full, and the lunches she cooks are fabulous. She is really talented in this area, recently coping well with cooking a gorgeous lamb roast for 18 people in our little kitchen and back room.

Volunteers continue to apply to us, mainly for the Global Homework Program. Francie has done an excellent job in running this program. She inducts new volunteers regularly, and has instilled into the student participants a sense of pride in what they are doing.

I am looking forward to the appointment of a new manager. I feel that much work is needed to revitalize The Centre. I would like to see an expanded number of courses, but this needs time and effort, which has been impossible to find this year due to the staff shortages.

Robbie Cottrill
Team Leader

Financial Report

Important notice

Information used in this financial overview is extracted from the full financial report of The Centre: Connecting Community in North & West Melbourne Inc. ("The Centre") for the year ended 30 June 2011.

For a complete understanding of the financial performance, financial position and activities of The Centre, the full financial report should be referred to. The full financial report also includes a full description of the accounting policies adopted by The Centre, and explanatory notes to the financial statements.

The full financial report, including the independent auditor's report, is available free of charge on request from The Centre by calling 03-9328 1126 or emailing finance@centre.org.au.

Top-line results	2011¹ \$	2010 \$
Total income	427,246	403,783
Total expenditure	(419,666)	(393,640)
Surplus (deficit)	7,580	10,143
Net assets / total equity	100,944	93,364
Cash held at end²	175,866	212,109

¹ Spring Fling Street Festival delivery year.

² Includes committed funds held for future use.

Treasurer's Report

The 2010/11 financial year was essentially a tale of two halves. The Centre began the year very differently from how it ended it. In the end, The Centre generated a small surplus of \$7,580 from an annual income of \$427,246, a result which partly disguises what was a challenging and often uncompromising year for management and staff.

The year was the second year of operation under the new City of Melbourne Community Services and Funding Agreement (CSFA). As previously advised, the base funding is down by around \$200,000 (or 70%) from the previous agreement, partly offset by temporary and decreasing 'transition' grants to assist with organisational change, and as expected this came with enormous challenges.

The year began with a full program of delivery and optimism that this delivery could be sustained by securing additional funds to offset the reduction in core funding. Unfortunately, despite best efforts, these funding targets could not be reached and it became clear that The Centre was at increasing risk of operating beyond its means and could not continue to do so indefinitely.

In order to mitigate this risk, unpalatable decisions were required. The Committee of Management was therefore forced to make wholesale reductions to service delivery and staffing levels, and to provide for a base operating level by year-end, supportable under the reduced funding environment. The second part of the year was therefore one of transition to this new structure and with it came the inevitable disruption to services and overall operations.

Financially, the objective for the year was to ensure at least a breakeven budget to help promote financial stability whilst in continued transition. When new income did not eventuate, cost reduction strategies were required and implemented. The resulting small surplus for the year increased net assets to \$100,944. This amount includes both equity in fixed assets plus general and specific-purpose cash 'reserves' and provides the best possible financial basis for the future.

With the backdrop of restructuring, The Centre managed to provide continuity in its core programs, albeit on a reducing scale, and to successfully deliver the biennial Spring Fling Street Festival. The festival was the main reason for increased financial activity compared to the prior year (offsetting the financial impact of reduced core funding).

The new financial year presents the continued challenge of providing an effective program with a smaller organisation. We anticipate a continued period of change, from which we ultimately hope to see the reinvigoration of The Centre.

Gary Heard
Treasurer

Global Homework Program

“Strength in Numbers”

The Global Homework Program is very happy to report that, in this year of dramatic change and reduced staffing at The Centre, we continue to thrive and grow in numbers and look forward to doing so into the future. The students and tutors all report a strong sense of belonging to the program and show their attachment and commitment through regular attendance, and continuous improvement in the completion of set homework tasks, as well as in basic literacy and numeracy skills.

After the resignation of Celeste O’Keefe in August 2010, I took over as Co-ordinator of The Global Homework Program. As a retired teacher, with 40 years experience across the Primary, Secondary and TAFE sectors, I am still very passionate about providing children with the best possible opportunities to become worthwhile, confident and capable members of our society and I am thoroughly enjoying the experience of working with and supporting the education of the young people of North Melbourne.

I am employed by The Centre on a permanent part-time basis (originally for 20 hours a week but since funding cuts in January 2011, for 16 hours per week). When I started in the role, Linden Smith was employed as the Volunteer Co-ordinator for The Centre and she did all the work associated with the recruitment, induction, training and management of volunteer tutors for the homework program. Since the funding cuts, however, this role ceased to exist and sadly Linden has moved on. Her role is now shared between myself and a young volunteer, Dan Tutas, who is doing an excellent job.

Since February 2011, the program has been running 2 nights per week for 10 weeks each term (Tuesday nights for secondary students and Wednesday nights for primary students). We have 60 students fully enrolled who attend regularly, drawn from 8 different schools in the local area. 45 of these students are from ESL backgrounds and a total of 11 nationalities are represented in our student population.

We have a pool of 60 active volunteer tutors from diverse backgrounds and across all age groups who demonstrate strong skills and genuine dedication and commitment to the students. We operate on a very positive tutor student ratio each week (1 tutor: 2 students) and have an excellent retention rate of both students and tutors. Due to our advertising campaign, primarily at University of Melbourne and the Australian Catholic University, interest in the program from potential tutors is high and to keep up with this demand I run an average of 4 tutor induction sessions per term in addition to my work managing the sessions.

Frances McMillan
Co-ordinator, Global Homework Program

Spring Fling Report

The theme of Spring Fling Street Festival 2010 was Local Circus Spectacular. The important elements in any circus of strength, resilience, balance, cooperation and fun we believe mirror that of a healthy and happy community. Ardie the Elephant was the 2010 festival totem. Elephants are renowned for their concern for their community and each other and this is at the core of The Centre. Ardie represented the importance of strength and balance in North and West Melbourne and the Spring Fling Street Festival 2010 celebrated this in our community.

We were thrilled with the readiness and eagerness for participation in the 2010 festival with many very important local organisations promoting it. There were also a number of local businesses, including Jason Coleman's Ministry of Dance Studios in North Melbourne offering free interactive 'come and try' activities for the community as well as the Town Hall Hotel coordinating several traders to assist with the stage programming. In the lead up to Spring Fling students from North Melbourne Language and Learning took photos of local places and Stewart Russell and his team from Spacecraft Studios at the Meat Market in North Melbourne transferred the images to screen prints to create The Centre Stage backdrop. The community learnt how to juggle, hula hoop and the new art of Parkour. Students made circus bunting and crafted their very own Ardie the Elephant.

Spring Fling is made possible by the funding received from the City of Melbourne Arts and Culture Department. We also acknowledge the hard work and support from the Events Melbourne team, the Street Activities team, the Health and Building Department. The systems in place at the City of Melbourne to help ensure industry best practice for Festival Management and Delivery are world class and we appreciate the focus on detail and the support. Spring Fling was also made possible with the support of the 2010 Partners. Major Partner and Festival Patron the North Melbourne Football Club, who are committed to the healthy and active development of our community, were at the festival with their Home Turf project. Major Partner Yarra Trams supported our community by coordinating the diversion of the 57 tram as well as the replacement bus service. They also coordinated the Yarra Trams Treasure Tracker adventure. Major Partner the Queen Victoria Market was on board to help us encourage the message to shop local and champion affordable healthy eating. We were thrilled they produced the Cooking Pod activity featuring local chefs cooking up signature dishes on the street. Corporate Partner Graphyte Media based in North Melbourne helped reduce our printing costs. Supa IGA helped feed the hungry volunteers and The Leveson Hotel generously hosted our pre-festival Volunteer team meetings. Hotham Mission funded the Welcome to Country Ceremony. We share a common goal with them which is to strengthen relationships with local indigenous people. There were many other agencies also involved.

Thank you to our Patrons North Melbourne Football Club and Terry Laidler who continue to champion North and West Melbourne. Finally, thank you to the volunteers who did much more than make the festival possible. We were thrilled to have begun the introduction of the successful national community festival model where senior volunteers coordinate festival components to help ensure genuine community involvement.

The biggest challenge the festival now faces is ensuring sufficient resources are available to manage the enormous swell in support and consequent growth of the festival. This is a great problem to have and we look forward to sharing ideas and strategies with interested stakeholders.

Spring Fling provides an opportunity for our community to catch up and share the best of North and West Melbourne and ideas for the future. Thanks very much to the 14,000 of you who came along and for to those of you who made it happen.

Kristie Walker
Spring Fling Coordinator

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT

Karl Hessian
Gary Heard
Ann Wilkinson
Gary Hansen
Mary Tomsic
Lorna Hannan
Bill Liddy
Tom Kramer
Alex Abernethy

CENTRE STAFF

Management Staff

Thea Bates	<i>Director</i>
Dianne Schmidtke	<i>Program Coordinator</i>
Robert Pisano	<i>Finance Coordinator</i>
Linden Smith	<i>Volunteer Coordinator</i>
Ainslee Smith	<i>Centre Adventures Coordinator</i>
Robbie Cottrill	<i>Community Learning Coordinator</i>
Leonie Axford	<i>Receptionist/Administrative Assistant</i>

Spring Fling Team

Kristie Walker
Tam Pay
Nikita Burt

Newspaper Team

Alan Hood	<i>Volunteer</i>
Janet Graham	<i>Volunteer</i>

Global Homework Program

Celeste O'Keefe	<i>Global Homework Program Coordinator</i>
Frances McMillan	<i>Global Homework Program Coordinator</i>

Tutors

Davia McMillan	<i>Kids Art Class</i>
Nikita Burt	<i>Arty Farty Institute/Brickworks</i>
Paul Murray	<i>Computers</i>
Nicole Clarke	<i>Computers</i>
Chiemi Jardine	<i>Computers</i>
Renate Giacominetto	<i>Yoga</i>
Katie D'Aruya	<i>Yoga</i>
Maria Zuluanga	<i>Pilates</i>
Sue Gertzel	<i>Pilates</i>
John Louey	<i>Computers</i>
Stephen Wright	<i>Calligraphy</i>