



# the centre

**connecting community in north & west melbourne inc.** 58 errol street north melbourne  
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annual report 2009/10



# From the Chair

*Your Committee of Management has had another busy 12 months ensuring the careful governance of our Centre.*

The Committee, which represents the many facets of our community, had all places filled and comprised Alex Abernethy, Bill Liddy, Lorna Hannan, Gary Hansen, Gary Heard, Karl Hessian, Tom Kramer, John Murphy, Sally O'Dwyer, Mary Tomsic, Sally-Anne Wilkinson and Ann Wilkinson. All served for the entire period, apart from Sally O'Dwyer, who unfortunately needed to resign a little early, and Sally-Anne Wilkinson, who went on leave in 2010. Meetings were held two-monthly, and were well attended, with vigorous and creative discussion. The Executive met additionally to deal with business arising between committee meetings. Thanks to you all – a wonderful group.

Thea's report covers the activities of the year, and provides a summary up to the present, of a difficult year. The challenge has been to plan for growth at the same time as we prepare to wind back at a time of financial uncertainty. However, we remain confident of our capacity to deliver the targeted and professional services for which we are known. We believe that difficulties often lead to exciting discoveries and new directions and we continue to review service delivery through an ongoing strategic planning process.

An AGM is a fitting time to thank the many who deliver and support the services of The Centre.

- First I thank the staff under the leadership of Thea. They are amazing, completely dedicated to the services they deliver, and the people they serve. They work as a well-oiled team with Thea at the helm, and are commended and thanked for their enormous achievements. We were very sorry during the year to lose Sandra Curro, Di Schmidtke and Celeste O'Keefe, and tonight we remember them fondly and thank them for their contributions.
- It goes without saying that The Centre is an organisation which could not function without its volunteers. We now have on the books over 500 volunteers, and on 24 October an amazing 200 volunteers enabled Spring Fling to be the festival

to beat all festivals. Thanks to you all, many of whom have been with us for years and years. In future we intend to cost the contribution which volunteers make and thereby truly calculate the value of The Centre. Clearly we could not do what we do without them.

- We also wish to record our thanks to the City of Melbourne, the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD), the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and other sponsors, including the North Melbourne Football Club and the North Melbourne Library. With reduced support coming from the City of Melbourne in future we are grateful for the transition finance and consultant's services which they have provided as we work to diversify our funding base.
- And finally I thank those from The Centre team, both staff and volunteers, for managing the arrangements for this AGM and the party which will follow.

Thanks for coming to this AGM. Your Committee of Management looks forward to another year of working with the community of North and West Melbourne, and the challenges and opportunities which that is sure to bring. After four years in the chair I have decided it is time for me to step aside. I will remain on the Committee and thank you all for the opportunity I have had to lead it over these years.

## Ann Wilkinson

Chair

### Committee of Management as at 30 June 2010

Ann Wilkinson – Chair  
 Gary Hansen – Deputy Chair  
 Gary Heard – Treasurer  
 Mary Tomsic – Secretary  
 Lorna Hannan  
 John Murphy  
 Bill Liddy  
 Tom Kramer  
 Alex Abernethy  
 Karl Hessian  
 Sally O'Dwyer (resigned April 2010)  
 Sally-Anne Wilkinson (on leave 2010)

# From the Director

*In 2009/10 The Centre undertook an 'austerity drive' as the cut to our funding base by the City of Melbourne increasingly took effect.*

However, we have been determined to keep our programs strong, to maintain service levels and respond to needs identified in the local community. We also undertook a five-year Strategic Business Plan towards a sustainable financial future, looking at potential partnerships and ways to enable existing programs to become self-sufficient, and even grow into community enterprises, underpinned by the essential heart that is our neighbourhood centre.

Our flagship programs, the *North and West Melbourne News*, Centre Adventures and the Global Homework Program, consistently flourished thanks to the many volunteers who contributed countless hours to ensure their success. We also entered new partnerships.

One key partnership was with the North Melbourne Football Club and its new Learning and Life Centre, where our Global Homework Program was delivered to upper secondary students in exchange for the footy club's financial support. Another was with all the other local neighbourhood houses in what became known as the SSP or Shared Services Project, identifying ways to collectively increase our connections and improve our systems. Then there was the partnership with the North and West Melbourne Precinct Association which delivered the Breakfast Event Series, bringing together local community, service providers, business and government, in a whole-of-community approach to strengthening the area for everyone who lives, works, plays or is homeless around North Melbourne.

The highlight of 2009/10 was Spring Fling week where over 30 local groups or organisations came together to showcase their talent and raise funds for their participation in the next street festival day in 2010. The highlight of that week was our Open Mic Night, preceded by the AGM and sustained by fabulous food cooked by Ainslee Smith and her team of volunteers, at the Lithuanian Club.

On the staffing front, we made it to the end of the year before we reluctantly bade farewell to Dianne

Schmidtke, our Community Engagement Manager. Di has taken another role in a nearby organisation, so we still get to see her.

For better or for worse, change is, of necessity, leading The Centre to become a different kind of organisation. Much of this change is funding based, but also the lack of space and accommodation continues to be a challenge to program and security and safety issues. This change will be planned and managed to ensure that core community needs are still met, funded programs can be reported on to their respective bodies, and industrial obligations and fair work practices are respected. However, things are certainly going to be different in 2010/11.

On behalf of the staff, students, volunteers and participants I would like to thank the Committee of Management, who have steadfastly continued to govern The Centre through all its highs and lows, giving hours of their precious time. I most especially want to thank and acknowledge Ann Wilkinson, who, as Chair for the past five years, has given me, and therefore all staff, her dedicated attention and support at every opportunity. Ann is stepping back from this role but will continue to participate as a committee member for 2010/11. We all thank you, Ann.

**Thea Bates**  
Director

*The Centre is an  
organisation  
which could not  
function without  
its volunteers*

# From the Treasurer

*The 2009/10 financial year saw The Centre return a small surplus of \$10,143 from an annual income of \$403,783.*

Income was mainly made up of operating and project grants from government (City of Melbourne and state government departments) and other funding bodies, with the balance derived from course and activity fees, advertising and other revenue. Funds were disbursed across the programs and activities of The Centre.

In last year's report, we advised of City of Melbourne's decision to cut \$200,000 (70%) from The Centre's core funding from 1 July 2009 in response to a change of municipal boundaries. This reduction was partly offset in 2009/10 by a one-off 'transition' grant. This report represents the first year of operation under the reduced funding agreement.

Both revenue and expenditure were around 25% lower than for the 2008/09 year. The 2008/09 year included delivery of the Spring Fling Biennial Street Festival, which explains around half of the difference (the next festival is scheduled for October 2010 and

will be covered in next year's report). The balance reflects reductions stemming from the cuts to core funding.

The financial results as reported do not take into account the value of contributions from The Centre's volunteers, without whom The Centre's programs and activities would not be possible. Incorporating the value of volunteer support would markedly increase financial activity.

At the end of the year, The Centre held net assets of \$93,364. Net assets comprise equity in equipment assets as well as general and specific-purpose 'reserves'. These reserves provide for responsible buffers and some financial safeguarding against future uncertainty.

The Centre managed to ride out the first year of a reduced funding environment with limited disruption to services, while spending much of the year engaged in strategic planning to address the financial challenges. The task ahead remains a difficult one.

The Centre recently applied for and received further (reduced) transitional funding commitments from

## The Centre: Connecting Community in North & West Melbourne Inc. Financial overview for the year ended 30 June 2010

### 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 2010.

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 via download at [www.centre.org.au](http://www.centre.org.au) or on request from The Centre by calling 03-9328 1126 or emailing [finance@centre.org.au](mailto:finance@centre.org.au).

### Top-line results

	2010 \$	2009 <sup>1</sup> \$	2008 \$
Total income	403,783	532,157	414,274
Total expenditure	(393,640)	(530,310)	(414,822)
Surplus (deficit)	10,143	1,847	(548)
Net assets / total equity	93,364	83,221	81,374
Cash held at end <sup>2</sup>	212,109	166,659	214,218

<sup>1</sup> Spring Fling Street Festival delivery year

<sup>2</sup> Includes committed funds held for future use.

the City of Melbourne over the next two years. These funds will help with the process of change and the continued development and implementation of strategies around future operations. The extent of restructuring required is still being evaluated and the associated decisions and financial effects will be documented in next year's report.

**Gary Heard**  
Treasurer

*The Centre  
managed to ride  
out the first year of  
a reduced funding  
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## Staff & Tutors

### The Centre Staff

Thea Bates	Director
Dianne Schmidtke	Community Engagement and Partnerships Manager
Robert Pisano	Finance and IT Manager
Linden Smith	Community Engagement Coordinator
Sandra Curro	Administration/Reception
Celeste O'Keefe	Global Homework Program Leader
Ainslee Smith	Centre Adventure Program Leader
Leonie Axford	Administration/Reception

### Program Tutors

Nikita Burt	Art classes
Davia McMillan	Creating Inspired Kids
Paul Murray	Computers
Stephen Wright	Calligraphy
Renate Giacometti	Yoga
Katie de Araujo	Yoga
Maria Zuluanga	Pilates
Sue Gertzel	Pilates
Shyamala Benakovic	Yoga
John Louey	Computers volunteer



# Community Learning Program

*I took over certain aspects of Di Schmidtke's role on 2 August this year – a bit of a hard act to follow as she was such a dynamic person.*

The job has involved coordinating the fee-for-service and ACFE courses and liaising with local traders, businesses and other community organisations. For those of you who don't know, ACFE stands for Adult Community and Further Education. It is part of the Department of Planning and Community Development. We are funded by them for our computer courses, an art class for people with disabilities, and classes which target people with experience of homelessness. For those programs we have been working in conjunction with Regina Coeli, a hostel for homeless women, Ozanam House, a hostel for homeless men, and Judy Lazarus Transitional Centre, a centre for men who are serving the last six months of a jail sentence.

We are accountable to ACFE for the delivery of these classes and must reach the student contact hours that we have been paid for. This means monitoring class sizes and attendance, and regular reporting to ACFE.

Our fee-for-service courses consist of Yoga, Pilates, Calligraphy and other classes that the community has indicated an interest in.

Being new to this role in The Centre, I took up the great opportunity of being mentored. ACFE has offered free mentoring to its providers, in areas where the provider feels that help is needed, which in our

case has been marketing. This has been done through SBMS, Small Business Mentoring Service. I have had four sessions so far which have been extremely instructive.

From discussions with SBMS we decided to run a small survey at the Spring Fling Festival. The results were surprising. There was high interest in the areas of languages, fitness, first aid and money. Next year we have decided to run some new classes – French, Italian and Spanish, Belly Dancing, Zumba and financial education. The survey also showed that many people were unaware that we run short courses, and are interested in attending. There is obviously a bigger market out there, which I will endeavour to access.

We have also been working on a colour centrefold for the next edition of the *North and West Melbourne News*. This has meant that venues, teachers, times, dates and costs have all needed to be finalised.

We also intend to produce a small colourful brochure for the local school kids to take home to their parents. We want the community to feel that The Centre is their centre, and that, as long as there is enough interest, we will endeavour to run anything they are interested in (within reason and provided we can find a venue).

**Robbie Cottrill**  
Community Learning Program Manager

*We want the community to feel that The Centre is their centre*



# Volunteer Program

*This financial year was full of activity in The Centre Volunteer Program.*

Volunteers helped with numerous programs including the Centre Adventure Program, the *North and West Melbourne News* and the Global Homework Program and took coordination roles for the 2010 Spring Fling Festival. For an organisation like The Centre, our volunteer team is the absolute backbone of many of our programs and activities.

Volunteers who helped with Centre Adventures lent a hand cooking, serving food and driving busses. Homework Program volunteers provided support and assistance with students' homework, acted as positive and friendly adult role models and nurtured good study habits. *North and West Melbourne News* volunteers contributed to writing, editing, laying out and delivering the paper. Preparation for Spring Fling 2010 started at the beginning of the year, and some key volunteers came on board to help us plan and organise events and activities. These coordination roles are not only essential to relieve the pressure on the Spring Fling team, but also ensure Spring Fling remains a community festival created by North and West Melbourne, for North and West Melbourne. The Centre also had a number of volunteers who helped with odd jobs including database management, graphic design, admin tasks and many other day-to-day duties. Evidently, without volunteers, the vast majority of The Centre's activities simply wouldn't run.

Centre volunteers come from a myriad of cultures and backgrounds. Challenging popular perceptions that young people don't volunteer, 56% of The Centre's volunteer team are under 34. For young volunteers, or people embarking on a career change in later life, volunteering provides a great opportunity to try out newly learned skills, or to test the water in a new area of interest. A number of volunteers in the Global Homework Program are training as teachers and find that the program allows them to trial vital learning and behaviour management strategies that form part of their studies. Many *News* volunteers are also training in editing, graphic design or journalism and the program provides them with the opportunity for industry experience and mentoring.

Centre volunteers also come from a wide range of

cultural and ethnic backgrounds. 30% of Centre volunteers listed their origin as Australia, 15% as Asia, and the rest are from other parts of the globe. Many of our volunteers are new arrivals and find The Centre gives them a place to connect with others and form relationships within their new community. For many, volunteering also provides an opportunity to improve communication and language skills in a positive and supported environment.

From a wider perspective, volunteering acts as important glue, which strengthens and holds the community together. People's sense of belonging and community connectedness is nourished when they are given the opportunity to make meaningful and significant contributions to the wellbeing of others. Volunteering creates a more vibrant, connected and inclusive community.

The Centre would like to thank everyone who volunteered with us this year. Your contribution has been immeasurable. Whether your time commitment has been small or great, you can be sure you have played a part in creating a stronger and more resilient North and West Melbourne community. Thank you!

**Linden Smith**  
Community Engagement Coordinator





