the centre

connecting community in north & west melbourne inc.

FROM THE CHAIR Karl Hessian



Renewed enthusiasm and energy

To begin, let me give a big shoutout and thank you to all the volunteers, staff and contractors who have delivered on their programs in the past 12 months. It has been quite a remarkable year and we all owe them our thanks for their perseverance and the time and effort they have put into The Centre.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the Director, whose commitment to planning activities and events in the latter half of 2021 has borne fruit this year. His preparedness to try out new things has been to our collective advantage.

It has been wonderful to see the renewed enthusiasm and energy in The Centre and the Docklands Neighbourhood House since both reopened in November 2021. The new outdoor seating in Errol Street was an instant success and more important strategic work was happening inside The Centre and across the community.

With Strategic Development Group, The Centre conducted a Community Needs Analysis for North and West Melbourne. Through this important work, we identified the needs and aspirations of our community, particularly from those cohorts whose voices are seldom heard. This study will inform the strategic plan for The Centre over the coming years. Already we have strengthened our relationships with African Australian, Chinese and Vietnamese communities and people experiencing homelessness.

During the year we had some staffing changes and we welcomed Alex Gyles, Ayla Dempsey, Peter Robert, Tamalika Saha and Jorge Jorquera. We farewelled Ragn Hannah and Jack Yang and we thank them for their contribution and wish them both the very best for the future.

Thank you to all our returning course and event participants who have embraced the opportunities of the new operating environment and welcome to everyone who has discovered The Centre for the first time.

I look forward to seeing everyone at our first in-person Annual General Meeting in three years where we can talk about not only the year just concluded but some of the exciting things coming up in 2022-23.

FROM THE DIRECTOR Ariel Valent



Centre moves back into 'real' world

This past year was a year of two halves. The latter part of 2021 was dominated by Victoria's COVID-19 lockdown. While lockdown was not new for The Centre or our local communities, it sure did make social connection – the lifeblood of our Neighbourhood House – challenging. Some parts of our program had to be cancelled. For other elements, we persisted with virtual sessions. Delivering education, health and wellbeing, and social gathering online has its limitations, but it also provided some opportunities.

Our long-running WorkOut program, with men returning to the community after prison sentences, expanded to include Homestretch; we ran first-time sessions in juggling, magic, Zumba, digital gardening and flag design; and we introduced My Story My Voice a powerful online seven-workshop series by and for people of diverse cultural backgrounds to tell their personal stories.

Our Home Away from Homework Club kept in regular phone contact with students and their families and sent activity packs home to more than 100 households. We also solicited donations from the community and provided families with toys, games and other distractions as the lockdown wore on.

The North & West Melbourne News was published on time and on point.

Our plans for a re-invented Spring Fling were re-worked a number of times. In the end, we tried to bring some community cheer through non-gathering activities including leaving surprise gifts for strangers and encouraging people to design a flag for North & West Melbourne.

COVID-19 still affected our programs at the start of this year, but The Centre was able to organise a range of successful events from the celebratory Spanish Language Fiesta to the solemn Anzac Day ceremony.

Our ongoing programs sprang back to life and it was encouraging to see people singing together, exercising together, eating together and learning together. Providing these opportunities for connection, progression and expression is what The Centre is all about.

While The Centre's core neighbourhood is North and West Melbourne, we have also taken great strides in Docklands. Two community highlights included the inaugural Repair Café that diverted 50 kg of waste from landfill and the Holi festival that saw more than 1,000 people anointed with coloured powder in this Hindu celebration. Our fruitful partnership with Development Victoria allows us to work with the

My sincere thanks to all staff, tutors, volunteers, Board members, partners, participants and broader community. We have been through a lot, but the fact that we went through it together means our community is stronger. Hook forward to The Centre building on these strengths into the future.

community to plan and deliver more programs.



The community picnic in December 2021 in the reserve outside West Melbourne Baptist Community Centre provided a welcome apportunity to reconnect after months of lockdowns.

Centre Staff, Contractors and Volunteer Program Leads

Director: Ariel Valent

Community Development Coordinator: Alex Gyles CFO / CIO: Craig Barry

Community Development Officer: Jason Butcher

Community Education Coordinator (from 6/22): Jorge Jorquera Spanish Language Fiesta Coordinator / Community Outreach

Co-ordinator: Yulay Perez

Business & Operations Coordinator (to 12/21): Ragn Hannah Reception: Karen Kirsopp, Kathleen McPherson, Maryrose Kiomall, Hawo Mohamoud, Trinh Nguyen

Homework Club Coordinator: Laurence Angwin

Homework Club Supervisors: Jack Yang (to 2/22), Hannah Merrigan (to 12/21), Ayla Dempsey (from 2/22), Peter Robert (from 2/22)

WorkOut Coordinator: Frances McMillan Digital Literacy Tutor: Louise Cindric Pilates and OAE Tutors: Sue Gertzel (to 10/21), Fernanda Cury, Alice

Wilcox (from 11/21)

Community Choir Tutors: Jane York (to 10/21); Susie Kelly (from 11/21)

Dance Tutors: Catalina Gomez, Claudia Aparicio, Jolity Bollywood

Art Tutor: Shyamasree Bose News Editor: Maurice Gaul

News Production Manager: Anne Burgi News Advertising: Janet Graham

News Distribution: Rashi Jain Holi Event Assistant: Tamalika Saha

Cleaner: Mitsalal Zufi Student Placements: Harry Fischer, Gabrielle Batey, Rajiv Saxena, Brigitta Metaxas, Katherine Moss

Centre Board members

Karl Hessian, Chair

Lorna Hannan OAM, Deputy Chair

Kay Oke OAM, Secretary

Gary Dowling, Treasurer

Bill Liddy

Ben O'Connor

Kath McPherson

Kate Ritchie

Tom Seddon

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community Development at The Centre is focused on working with our local community in an empowering way to drive communityidentified change. We always endeavour to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the local community.

In September, Strategic Development Group and The Centre commenced work on a Community Needs Analysis. This involved facilitating a process for The Centre to work in a more inclusive way and collaborate more with North and West Melbourne's diverse community. The Community Needs Analysis is now complete and is available on The Centre's website. Apart from existing as a final report, the process saw connections made, relationships deepened and collaborations enacted with community groups such as the Eritrean community, the Vietnamese community and people experiencing housing challenges such as homelessness. We are excited to see these collaborations lead to more inclusive community programs and events.

Programs

Men's Afternoon Teas began in January in response to requests from community members for an opportunity to get together casually. On a fortnightly basis, men have been gathering at The Centre to connect and support each other.

Out and About Community Walks continued to be a popular means for community members to connect with each other and learn about the local area. This year we curated a variety of themed walks with guest leaders, including



Molina Asthona, a participant in My Story My Voice, told her story as part of the Community Picnic in December.

Politics & West Melbourne and Media & Controversy.

'My Story My Voice' was an exceptional capacity-building project that occurred during October and November on Zoom. Led by Yo City in collaboration with The Centre, this workshop series provided tools to support people to find their voice and tell their story. With the support of experienced and talented presenters, participants broke through perceptions and gained resilience.

Events

The December Community Picnic was a great opportunity for North and West Melbourne to reunite after lockdown lifted. The event commenced with a Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony by Wurundjeri elder Bill Nicholson. Co-presenters West Melbourne Baptist Community Centre hosted 'My Story My Voice', Rotary's barbecue sizzled, kids joined in the organised activities and Homebrew Verandah Singers performed.

In February 2022 we partnered with SalamFest to present SalamFest on Errol. Over four days a range of interactive street activations showcased Islamic culture from across the globe. Highlights included Turkish marbling art, whirling dervishes, Arabic calligraphy, dhol playing and traditional Bosnian dance.

The Great Aussie Barbecue was held in April for international students. This event was led by B-Friend and their volunteers, in collaboration with The Centre and City of Melbourne. It provided an opportunity for connection and networking for international students at Buluk Park, Docklands.

In collaboration with Hotham Mission, The Centre held the **Hip Hop in the Park** event in April. At the soccer pitch next to North Melbourne Community Centre, local hip hop artists and performing dancers put on a great show. People of all ages enjoyed dancing together in the open air at this free event after long periods of social restrictions.

Together with The Legion of Ex-Servicemen and Women, The Centre presented an Anzac Day Ceremony at the Memorial Cenotaph with guest speaker City of Melbourne councillor Davydd Griffiths. This year's ceremony featured a live bugler playing the Last Post and Reveille, which added to the sense of solemn occasion.

> Alex Gyles Community Development Co-ordinator

Docklands Neighbourhood House

The Centre has run The Pop Up Neighbourhood House facility in District Docklands, New Quay since late 2019.

Amid the challenges of 2021 The Pop



Up continued to connect and support the community as best we could through online activities such as our Digital Gardening Club. As 2021 drew to a close, and lockdowns ended, The Pop Up Neighbourhood House became Docklands Neighbourhood House, demonstrating its intention to remain an ongoing focuse of care and connection for the community.

Our post-lockdown children's art classes proved very popular. Since January 2022 we have collaborated with the Melbourne City Marina and local community-minded fitness instructor Matt Strickland of Premium Fitness to provide regular yoga and Pilates classes in the Melbourne City Marina lounge space.

In February, we launched the first Docklands Repair Café in partnership with the Sustainable Living Festival. The event featured a special online broadcast by Costa Georgiadis, host of ABC TV's Gordening Austrolia, and attracted community members from Docklands and surrounding suburbs. More than 50 kg of potential waste was saved from landfill. Monthly Docklands Repair Café events in partnership with Docklands Representative Group will be held in late 2022.

Holi at Docklands 2022 was held at Ron Barassi Park West on Saturday 19 March with great support from the local Hindu community.

This Festival of Colours was the first of its kind in Docklands and attracted more than 1,200 people, predominantly Docklands residents, but also international students from all over Melbourne. In addition to the traditional playing with coloured powders, the event included vibrant dance and musical performances, children's story time and arts activities, Indian street food and giveaways.

Pre-event dance and children's art workshops were held in partnership with Jollity Bollywood and Shyamasree Bose, a local art teacher and Centre volunteer, with a flash mob dance performance on the day and art by local children providing the backdrop to the stage performances.

Docklands Neighbourhood House was delighted to partner with Development Victoria, which supported our staffing and program from October 2021 to at least December 2022. With this support, we are now embarking on several new projects and programs in Docklands, including a range of social sports and recreation, arts and crafts, and community action research. The research will enhance and inform our community development, emphasising co-design principles, as we develop future programs in partnership with the Docklands community.





Good News - read all about it!

The North & West Melbourne News, our muchloved community newspaper, has enjoyed a spectacular year.

The News reflects and celebrates our local village. If someone has done something, if something is going on, you'll find it in our pages.

We capture the full diversity of our village - cultural, social, artistic and educational. We are warmly inclusive; our stories are always entertaining and informative.

Energy and joy are our buzzwords. We don't do staid or stale. As a modern 'parish pump', the News provides the social glue that connects this community.

While we're all volunteers – writers, coordinators, deliverers – we publish a product of professional quality.

There's no secret to our success. Our 20+ writers – including committed locals and young journalism students – produce compelling and sparkling stories bursting with human interest. Our 15 local organisations that contribute reports on their own activities ensure the News is the genuine voice of our community.

Key team roles ensure eye-catching layout and design (Anne Burgi), a healthy revenue via advertising (Janet Graham) and an efficient distribution (Rashi Jain).

In April, 30 News volunteers attended a writers' meeting and a joyful celebration of our year.

Local readers are embracing the News.

Community legend Loma Hannan said:

"You're showing us exactly what a community newspaper should be." There's no higher praise.

Wider recognition came with Community Newspaper Association of Victoria's statewide

This year we won best design and layout (Anne Burgi); best feature story (Anna Huynh); and were equal runner-up for both best community newspaper and best community content.

> Maurice Gaul News editor

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Spring Fling

The Spring Fling Street Festival is the 40-plus year institution run by The Centre. The year started with optimism that we could present a reinvented Spring



Fling in October 2021. However, it soon became apparent that large gatherings were unviable in the environment of lockdowns.

Several models of smaller events were considered, before we eventually decided to create a series of non-gathering events aimed to give lockdown-weary locals a bit of springtime cheer.

The Centre ran a competition to design a flag for North and West Melbourne. A panel of respected judges selected Pat Connolly's design as the winner, while more than 500 online votes were received awarding Jasmine Srinivasan the People's Choice award.

Give the Gift of Spring saw 50 gifts distributed across public areas around North Melbourne. With an encouragement to "pay it forward", these gifts found their way into the hands of surprised and delighted locals.

We also joined the throng of online workshops, with magic and juggling for kids, dog costuming, flag design and Zumba all on offer through Zoom.

Viva La Seniors

The Viva La Seniors program celebrates seniors in our local neighbourhood, providing older residents from diverse cultural backgrounds with opportunities to connect with others, to improve their physical and mental health and to visit places beyond the everyday.

Unfortunately, this program went into hiatus during lockdown. Once lockdown lifted, there was great enthusiasm for seniors to reconnect, socialise and explore together.

Centre Adventure bus trips visited historical, cultural or horticultural places of interest outside Melbourne.

After sneaking in an August trip to Daylesford last year, there was a long gap before the next one. A highlight in April this year was a trip on the ferry to Portarlington followed by a visit to Fort Queenscliff. Other destinations include Alowyn Gardens, Healesville Sanctuary, Art Gallery of Ballarat and Cloudehill Gardens.

Monthly morning teas continue to provide opportunities for catch-ups and cuppas with old friends and new.

The Young @ Heart Dance Club was a weekly opportunity for older people to get active to music from across the globe, and Older Adults Exercise provided a weekly session for participants to improve and maintain balance, strength and aerobic capacity, while also offering the opportunity to socialise.

Pilates

The Centre's long-running Pllates program teaches body awareness, breathing, strengthening postural muscles and flexibility.

This program continued almost at full strength during lockdown, a testament to its contribution to participants' physical and mental health.

Long-term teacher Sue Gertzel hung up her theraband during the year, and we welcomed local physiotherapist Alice Wilcox to join Fernanda Cury as the program's instructors.

Sing Now! Community Choir

The community choir was another activity that continued online during the lockdowns of last year.

Jane York kept participants 'Zinging' (that's Zoom plus singing!), overcoming the challenges of collaborative virtual musicmaking.

Upon the choir's return to in-person singing in November 2021, the choir welcomed new musical director Susie Kelly. Her infectious enthusiasm, broad musical knowledge and warm personality quickly inspired this group of diverse and committed singers.

In 2022 the choir has continued to explore a range of musical styles and is looking forward to its first performances in the second half of the year.

> Ariel Valent The Centre Director

Spanish Language Fiesta

The 2022 Spanish Language Fiesta (SLF) was held on Saturday 26 March from 11 am to 4 pm in George Johnson Lane, Little Errol Street and the North Melbourne Library. The SLF was a highly successful event, popular with both Spanish-speaking people from across Melbourne and local residents of North and West Melbourne. It provided an excellent opportunity to immerse festivalgoers with Hispanic culture through a lively and engaging mix of language, food, dance, music and other activities.

This year's program featured two live bands (including one for kids), seven dance performances, two workshops (Afro-Latin and bachata) and a wild, colourful Colombian Carnival that injected a uniquely South American atmosphere into the laneway. This year we also added a stage at the entrance to the fiesta, and a bicycle that rode down the local streets playing Latino music. In 2022, organisers refocused on the festival's purpose, which is to promote and celebrate the Spanish language. As a result, we incorporated several traditional Latin American languagerelated games such as tongue twisters. This fun activity was enjoyed by both participants and audience members, proving hilarious for both native Spanish speakers and those without Spanish skills. Additionally, popular languagerelated activities from previous years returned, including Spanish classes for children and adults, storytelling, poetry, and theatre.

The festival attracted more than 2,500 people and has come close to outgrowing the narrow laneways. It also welcomed five new sponsors and the involvement of 13 food and market stallholders.

> Yulay Perez Community Outreach and Events Coordinator



Volunteers

Aditi Rawal, Agnes Girdwood, Alba Gatto, Alexandra Kent, Alice Gage-Brown, Amalia Melendez, Amy Deng, Angle, Anna Huyrih, Anne Burgi, Annette Rowan, Annette McQuarrie, Arantza Lopez, Ben O'Connor, Benjamin Evans, Bill Liddy, Bruce McKenzie, Carolyn Bennett, Carolyn Fyfe, Chancal Verma, Claire Yeoh, Conie Valdez, Craig Barry, Daniela, David Steel, Dawn Doherty, Diana, Ed Zhao, Elko Sakaguchi, Elijah, Elise Cara, Ellen O'Brien, Elya Ritenis, Emily Smith, Erika. Evelyn Thompson, Fara Abdulahi, Flora Sciarra, Fouad Merai, Gary Dowling, Gavan Tobin, Geoff Pound, Georgie Preston, Gina Reyneke, Hanna Melissa, Harinya Karanam, Harriet Lancaster, Hawo Mohamoud, Helen Cusack, Helen Michell, Holly McGrath, Ibado Mohamed Saed, Isabelle Khor, Isuan Wright, Jacques Peril, Jan Lacey, Janet Graham, Jennifer Priyadharsini, Jennifer Waters, Joe Misuraca, John Smith, Josh Rule, Julia Wedding, Julian Blake, Julie Stephens, Karen Kirsopp, Karl Hessian, Kate Ritchie, Kathleen McPherson, Katianna Grosser, Kay Oke, Kenny Nguyen, Kevin, Lareina Guo. Laura Misale, Laurence Angwin, Leo and Charmaine, Lilla Anika, Lizzy Footner, Lorna Hannan, Louis, Lucas Hanger, Madeleine Scully, Mahonri Iona, Margaret Howden, Mary Kehoe, Maryrose Kiomall, Maurice Gaul, Megan Fitzgerald, Melissa VIII ate, Michelle Brett, Nancy Nankervis, Nancy Lane, Natalie Chan-Lei, Natalie Chow, Nebojsa Pajkic, Ned Nicolson, Nicholas McLeod, Nicky Capriolo, Nicole Pereira, Nigel Pereira, Patricia Harwood, Peter Robert, Rajiv Saxena, Rashi Jain, Renae Fanigan, Rob Oke, Robert Howden, Robyn Dowling, Rocky Rupesinghe, Rosemary Tonkin, Rowan Chapman, Ruby Ramsden, Sam, Sandra De Luca, Sascha Klave, Scott Mathieson, Seng Hoarg On, Shannon Colee, Shimi Kannoly, Shu Yea Lau, Shweta Patil, Stanley Parker, Stephen Hatcher, Stephen Hatcher, Steven Muncaster, Supretha Viknesh Balaji, Susan Harraway, Suzie Luddon, Suzie Luddon, Tamalika Saha, Tammi Adams, Thilini Vitanage, Thomas Sharp, Tim Cremean, Tina Jiao, Tom Seddon, Trevor Johnston, Trinh Nguyen, Uma Poomalai, Very Impressive, Violeta Kitanovska, Wayne Killingsworth, Wendy Langmore, Zoe Sheridan



Patricia Harwood and Karen Kirsapp were acknowledged as super volunteers.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

As a Leam Local, educating adults to get the skills they need for work, study and life is a cornerstone of The Centre.

WorkOut is a collaboration with the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety through which experienced staff from The Centre assist residents of Judy Lazarus Transition Centre who are nearing the end of their prison sentences to reintegrate into the community and to prepare for the world of work.

This program was impacted both positively and negatively by COVID. In late 2021 amid lockdowns the program shifted to online delivery. Building rapport and managing group dynamics over an internet connection were particular challenges, despite which the program delivered tangible benefits.

With residents not able to leave the transition centre for other activities, Frances McMillan and Lou Cindric created a new program called Homestretch, building on the knowledge acquired in WorkOut, and increasing students' confidence using digital technology to navigate government supports, housing, health and other necessities of life outside.

Ironically, the WorkOut program has struggled to build momentum in post-lockdown 2022, largely due to fewer residents entering the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre program.

Beyond WorkOut, The Centre offered digital literacy programs for the general public and, through a new partnership with Ozanam House, for people experiencing homelessness. All classes had good attendances and provided very worthy skill development for a wide range of people.

The Centre proposed an expanded adult education program in 2022. Towards the end of the financial year, we created the position of Community Education Co-ordinator and appointed Jorge Jorquera to lead this development.

> Ariel Valent The Centre Director

Homework Club

The Home Away From Homework Club operated three clubs in North Melbourne and one in Altona North in 2021-22.

They ceased classroom interaction due to the lockdown in July. The team

kept in contact with the students and their families, sending regular care packages and making phone calls. We developed a close bond with the families, often being the only people to check on their welfare.

The age-specific packages – containing letters of encouragement, poetry, origami, art activities, jokes, riddles and maths worksheets – were very popular and for many students it was the first time that they received mail.

Homework Clubs resumed in November 2021 with the majority of past students returning. This year started with a campaign to attract new tutors. To date, 12 new tutors have been inducted, and the clubs now boast a 3:1 studentto-teacher ratio. In terms 1 and 2 there has been a consistent and growing number of students, with most new enrolments due to word of mouth.

The Altona North Homework Club that started in 2014 was always full to bursting. Volunteer tutors Kenny Nguyen and Peter Robert have dedicated themselves to this needy cohort. In a big disappointment to the students, their parents and local schools, we were informed that Hobsons Bay Council no longer had the funds to support the club beyond June this year.

Focus areas at the North Melbourne clubs have included reaching out to newly arrived migrants and refugees, foreign language appreciation and improving handwriting.

After 11 years with us as a student, tutor and supervisor, Jack Yang left us early this year for employment with the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank.

Thank you to The Centre staff and all volunteer tutors who help enrich the homework clubs. They have a positive impact on the lives of our students.

> Laurence Angwin Homework Club Co-ordinator

TREASURER'S REPORT

At this time last year, The Centre reported on a year of decline, in both income and activity, due to COVID-19 and the associated restrictions and lockdowns. The 2021/22 year has been one of rejuvenation and growth for The Centre. Income growth of 23.8% for the year led to The Centre's total income exceeding \$600,000 for the first time, largely due to an increase in income from grants and donations of more than \$100,000.

Our core funding – provided by The City of Melbourne, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Department of Education and Training – has been instrumental in maintaining The Centre's financial security and has provided a strong foundation for the growth we saw over the year. New support from Development Victoria has allowed The Centre to continue to operate the Docklands Neighbourhood House. Income from fees and charges grew by over \$25,000 from the lows reported in 2020/21, totalling around \$89,600. This is still around \$40,000 under pre-COVID levels but is expected

The Centre – Summary Financial Data

	2021/22 \$	2020/21 \$	2019/20 \$	2018/19 \$	2017/18 \$	2016/17 \$	2015/16 \$	2014/15 \$
Income	602,475	486,359	556,079	518,988	497,509	518,152	522,839	468,903
Expenditure	581,274	434,165	504,317	564,688	536,880	507,697	472,605	408,677
Surplus /(Deficit)	21,201	52,194	51,762	(45,700)	(39,371)	10,455	50,234	60,226
Assets	331,647	309,350	205,938	157,640	199,082	262,112	271,805	237,387
Liabilities	144,491	143,395	92,177	95,641	91,383	115,043	135,191	151,007
Net Assets / Equity	187,156	165,955	113,761	61,999	107,699	147,069	136,614	86,380

to increase in 2022/23.

An increased level of program activity and events once lockdown lifted saw our total expenditure increase to \$581,000. Our direct program expenditure grew by around \$80,000, and an increase in staffing to support this resulted in staff costs growing by about \$75,000.

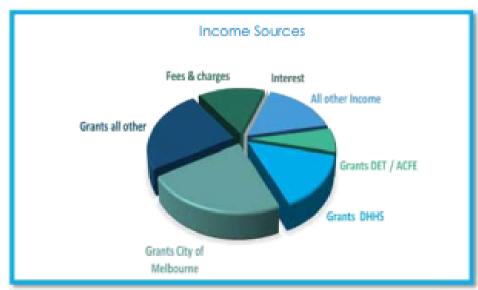
The Centre finished the year with a healthy

surplus of \$21,201. Three consecutive years of surpluses have helped place The Centre in a sound financial position.

With cash and liquid assets totalling nearly \$310,000 at 30 June this year, the Board has no concerns with regard to The Centre's solvency.

The full set of audited financial statements is available on our website. My thanks to the Board, especially former Treasurer Kath McPherson, for their diligent oversight and to CFO Craig Barry and Director Ariel Valent for ensuring exemplary financial management throughout the year.

> Gary Dowling PSM Treasurer



Expenditure by Category

2014/15
2015/36
2016/17
2011/38
2016/30
2020/21
2021/22

0 100,000 200,000 300,000 400,000 500,000 600,000

Employee Senefits # Program-costs # Administration costs
Depreciation # Occupancy costs # Other expenses

The Centre: Connecting Community in North & West Melbourne Inc 58 Errol Street, North Melbourne, Vic 3051 Tel: (03) 9328 1126 Office hours: Monday 10.00am to 6.00pm Tuesday to Friday 10.00am to 3.00pm



