

Chairperson's Report 2007

This is my first report as Chairman of the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre, and it gives me great pleasure to report on the extraordinary hard work and change in our Centre in the previous 12 months.

The most noticeable change for the Centre has been the move to a new location, and our new Coordinator, Kate Melhopt.

Since 2006, the Centre has moved to a spare classroom in Bourke Street Public School, in addition to various smaller premises in Chippendale and Surry Hills, to accommodate the Council's major renovations to the Surry Hills Library and Doherty Hall. It was critically important to the Management Committee and staff of the Centre that any relocation was primarily to a space in Surry Hills, and we are grateful to the School and Council for their efforts to ensure this occurred. Our thanks also to the Department of Housing, Crown St Public School and other local organizations for allowing us to squeeze into local premises. However, despite the wonderful generosity of the School community, and the marvelous space, this temporary move has limited the Centre's ability to offer some of our programs, and also to expand our services.

The Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre Management Committee continues to strongly support the City's current specifications for the Doherty Hall redevelopment. We continue to be a "key stakeholder" in the planning process, and as mentioned in previous reports by our former Chairperson, Mike Salon, we had three key requests:

- a Neighbourhood Centre welcoming "front door" at ground floor level (possibly shared with the Library);
- that the Centre retains the opportunity to raise funds by space hire to community groups for sympathetic activities of their own choice;
- and that the dinosaur mural be retained if at all possible.

I am pleased to report that the Neighbourhood Centre's welcoming front door has been agreed to, and negotiations about hall hire are ongoing – so stay tuned! Sadly, the dinosaur mural was not able to be retained, but we will continue to advocate for an appropriate piece of public art to replace it.

The renewal of community facilities in Surry Hills is long overdue, and we look forward to partnering with the Council in the final stages of the construction, and the opening of the new Centre. As we understand it, this will take place in middle to late 2008. Our thanks to all the clients of the Centre who have been patient and flexible while we deal with the difficulties of this transitional period. My thanks also to all our staff, but especially our coordinator Kate, who has been patient and creative in their solutions to space and other concerns.

In spite of the difficulties with space, I am pleased to report that 2006/2007 has been a successful year of consolidation for the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre as an organisation. With the Centre's eye firmly focused on moving back to a new and improved space, we have set about ensuring that the organization of the Neighbourhood Centre is also new and improved.

I am really pleased to confirm that after the hard work of many Management Committee members and Coordinators, over several years, The Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre has successfully converted from a *shareholder based incorporated cooperative* to a *membership based incorporated association*.

As many of you know, this conversion has provided the impetus for us to modify our rules and objections to ensure that we are targeting marginalized and disadvantaged people with our services. Whilst the Centre will still provide our full range of current activities, including Childcare, any growth will be focused on better meeting the needs of these people in our community.

In addition to this structural change, and with the assistance of the peak body for Neighbourhood Centres, and a lot of hard work from our coordinator, Kate, the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre now has – for the first time – a full set of policies and procedures. This is an important step to prepare the Centre for an expanded role, and to better service the Surry Hills community.

These two organizational achievements – becoming incorporated and adopting policies and procedures – will lay the groundwork for the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre to return to being the heart of the Surry Hills Community. Our vision will continue to develop as 2008 progresses – but we are working hard to ensure that when we return to our new premises, the Neighbourhood Centre will not only run our own programs, but assist other members of the community in developing and implementing their own ideas.

The Centre remains underfunded, and the 2006/2007 accounts look especially poor due to the lack of a Festival during the financial year. Our 2007 Festival was delayed from April until October, due to the renovations in Prince Alfred Park. I am pleased to report that a healthy return from October's spectacularly successful Festival should ensure the Centre's stable financial future for another year. Many thanks to our Festival Director Cathy Wills, and the enormous number of volunteers she received help from, for such a successful Festival. We will return to our traditional April Festival in 2008 – I look forward to seeing you there!

Finally, a sincere thank you to everyone who has supported the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre during the year. This includes numerous staff and councillors from the City of Sydney; our local State and Federal members of Parliament, the numerous State and Federal funding agencies, and the various partners we gain assistance from for services and activities. Our special thanks to the staff and children of Bourke Street Public School, who have housed our Centre for 2007.

Thanks to everyone who has volunteered their time and talents – this includes the Management Committee, the volunteers and performers at the Festival, and the volunteers who help with our activities. Also thank you to the Surry Hills businesses which support us.

And finally, thanks to our wonderful staff. The Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre would not run without its staff – their efforts have been significant in the past year, and they deserve our sincere thanks.

Linda Scott

Chairman, Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre Management Committee