

CHAIRS REPORT

I am happy to report that 2008 has been yet another very successful year for the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre. Looking ahead, we prepare to move back into our refurbished home on Crown Street in December.

Achievements

The Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre has enjoyed many significant achievements this year.

I had the pleasure of participating in our first ever comprehensive review of all Neighbourhood Centre staff. This process was one of the many changes to the functioning of the Neighbourhood Centre as a result of our Policy and Procedures Manual, put in place last year.

The process was helpful to ensure our staff's training and everyday needs are planned for, and to ensure their views about the future of the SHNC are heard. Personally, it was a reminder to me of the incredible dedication our staff show to this community each year.

The Neighbourhood Centre also hosted yet another successful Festival on Saturday 12th April, 2008. This Festival boasted record visitors, participants and volunteers. Importantly, it also boasted a very successful profit that ensures the programs of the Neighbourhood Centre can continue for another year. The Festival's newest feature – the first ever Surry Hills Fashion Catwalk - was a huge success, featuring local emerging fashion designers and attracting large audiences.

The Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre hosted a Community Planning Meeting on Saturday 24th May, 2008. Many members of the community, as well as our staff and volunteers, attended. This day was a great success, canvassing a broad range of issues that underpin the success of the SHNC in future.

The extensive feedback received on this day, as well as the results of hundreds of surveys from the community, contributed towards the Centre's priorities for the year forward, as compiled by the staff and Management Committee. These priorities will be an important guide in future, particularly in relation to new programs designed to be run when the SHNC moves to our new building.

As part of this Review, the Management Committee and staff have also undertaken a comprehensive investigation on our childcare services to ensure they best meet the needs of the community. The Neighbourhood Centre will continue to offer occasional care services in the short term, but is continuing to look into the feasibility of some long day care places.

Following on from last year's report, I am happy to report the SHNC has made a significant contribution to ensure the City of Sydney Council maintains elements of the mosaic wall, featured on the outside wall of the old Doherty Hall. We are proud to have made this contribution to ensure the history of the area is maintained.

We have also continued to negotiate with the City of Sydney Council to ensure a prominent public entrance for the SHNC in the building, and to ensure control of the hall hire. These negotiations are due for imminent finalization, but I am confident the community, SHNC and City of Sydney Council will all be well served by the outcomes.

Perhaps our most significant achievement this year has been to raise the profile of the Centre. Our staff have been inundated with queries regarding use of the rooms and the Hall in our new premises offers to enter into partnership with other community and government organizations, and our Festival and other programs are recording record volunteers and attendees.

Looking forward, the SHNC is set to increase and improve our service provision for the community, and we do so with a firm financial base.

Challenges

As with last year, our key challenges in 2008 have involved space for our ever increasing programs. Our staff have worked hard to overcome the difficulties presented by our current premises, especially given they are spread over two suburbs. The staff and Management Committee have fought hard to retain fair access to the Hall for the Neighbourhood Centre's current programs, and to ensure future opportunities to grow and contribute to our community. This priority has been mentioned each year in our annual reports, and has been reflected as an important issue in all community consultations. As mentioned previously, these negotiations are due to be finalised soon.

The Surry Hills Festival has thrived in Prince Alfred Park, and we are working to accommodate the Council renovations planned for this park. We hope renovations can be delayed to accommodate an annual March/April Festival, and are working actively with Council staff to achieve this goal. If not, the SHNC is committed to going ahead with a community festival at an alternate location, and we are currently actively investigating alternative options. As well as the community benefits, the Surry Hills Festival is critical to the financial performance of the Centre.

Thanks

I would like to thank the enormous number of volunteers that have assisted the SHNC this year – we could not have delivered the programs or the Festival without them. I also make note of our funding assistance from the City of Sydney, and the various State and Federal Departments that fund our programs. I particularly thank the sponsors of the Surry Hills Festival.

I standing down as Chair, I note the tremendous efforts of all our staff, especially Kate Melhopt, for their ongoing work and commitment for the Neighbourhood Centre. I also thank all the current Management Committee members for their work during the year – it has been a successful and cohesive group, and a pleasure for me to work with.