

Inner Sydney VOICE

WINTER 2014



SAVE
MILLERS
POINT

A COMMUNITY FIGHTS BACK



+PLUS

A CIVIL SOCIETY:
LOBBYING YOUR MP
CITIZEN JURIES
SYDNEY ALLIANCE

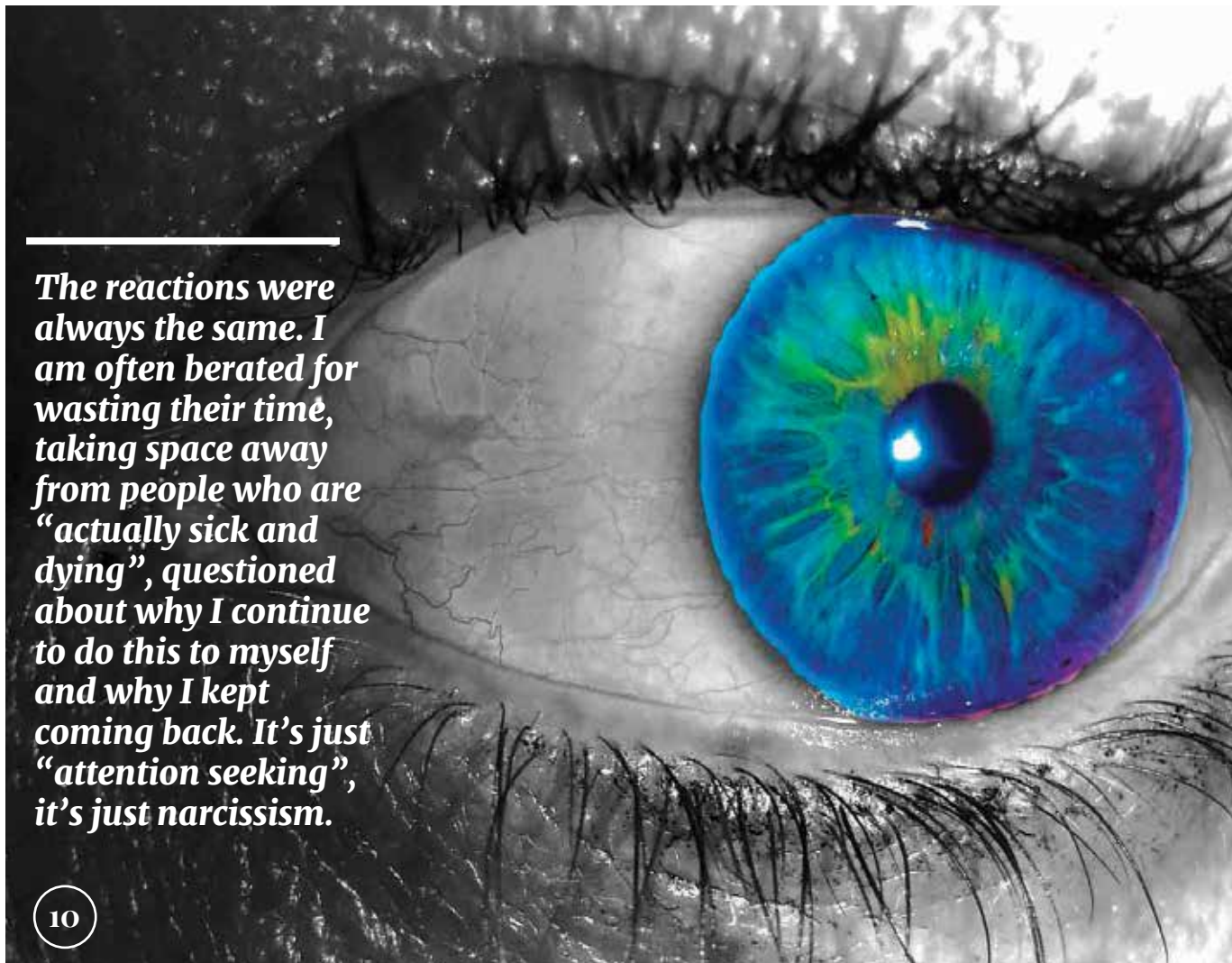
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HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE
PUBLIC MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

AGED CARE ASSESSMENTS:
YOUR RIGHTS

BOARDING HOUSE REGULATION:
WHO IS WINNING?

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The reactions were always the same. I am often berated for wasting their time, taking space away from people who are “actually sick and dying”, questioned about why I continue to do this to myself and why I kept coming back. It’s just “attention seeking”, it’s just narcissism.

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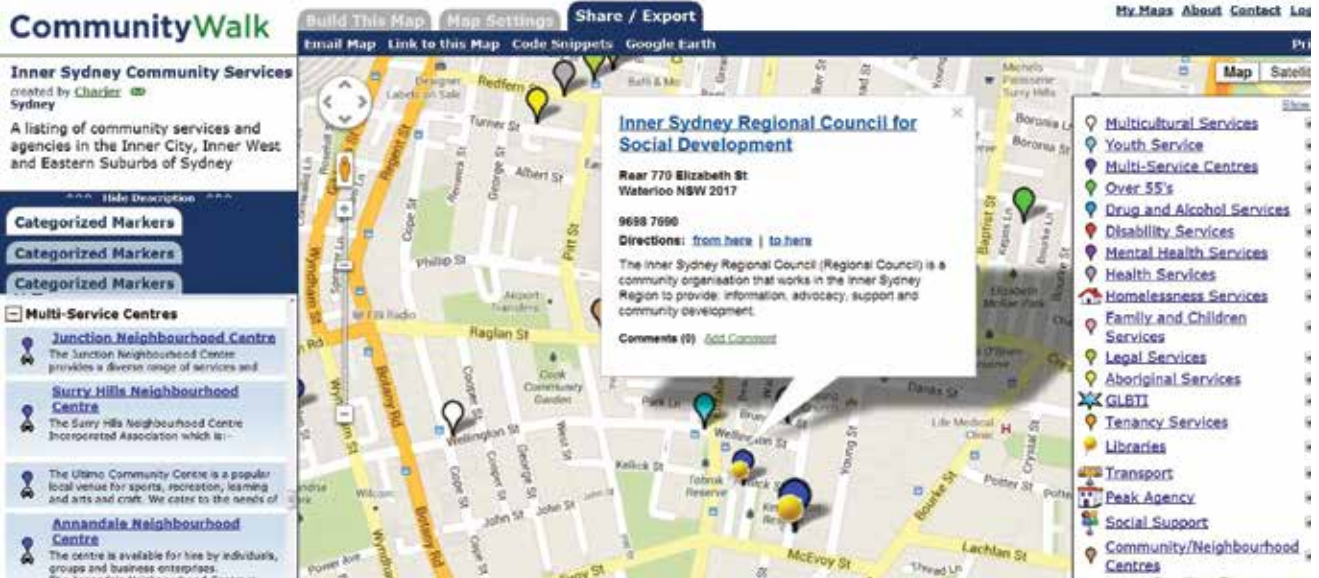
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Cover Story:
Since the first community meeting held on 22 March 2014, residents from Millers Point, Dawes Point and The Rocks have been preparing for a campaign to save their homes.



Online community services map is live!

Find community services in the eastern suburbs and inner city.



Check out the link on our website www.innersydney.org.au
 To add or update service listings please email admin@innersydneyrcsd.org.au

HELP SUPPORT INNER SYDNEY REGIONAL COUNCIL'S COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKER IN MILLER'S POINT & THE ROCKS

In the best Marg Barry tradition of Inner Sydney Regional Council, we responded promptly to the community need in Millers Point and The Rocks following the announcement that public tenants, who make up most of the community, would be removed from the area.

With the encouragement of other agencies, ISRCSD appointed a part time Senior Community Development Officer to

provide assistance to the community groups in the area and to help map the support required. You can see the project detail of the Millers Point Public Housing Support Project on www.innersydneyrcsd.org.au

While we seek conventional funding for this role we are running this project on donations from our network. Please consider supporting this important work which otherwise would not happen.

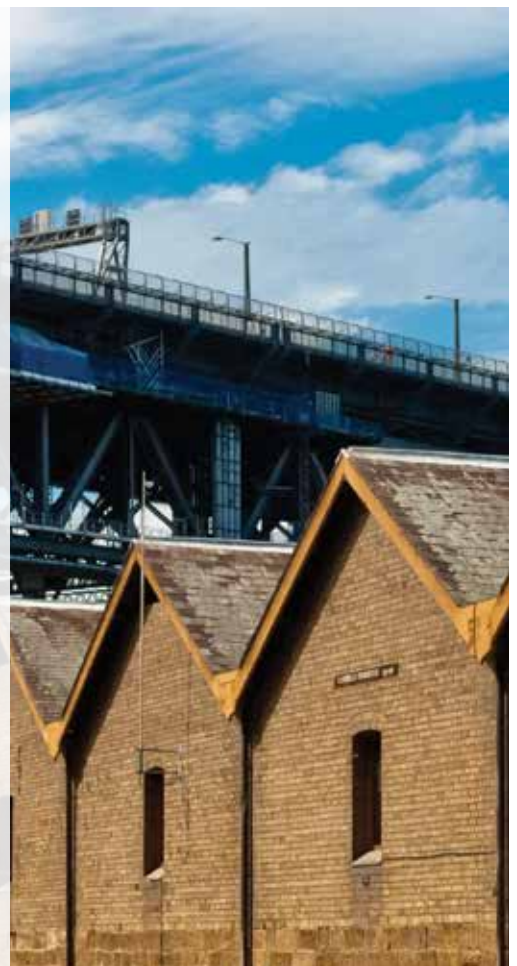
YOU CAN SUPPORT FINANCIALLY

by a donation to Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development at Bendigo Bank BSB 633 108 A/c No: 1353 98972
 Please add Millers Point & your name to the deposit and email your details to admin@innersydneyrcsd.org.au.

YOU CAN SUPPORT WITH TIME AND SUGGESTIONS

By contacting Joel at Joel.Pringle@innersydneyrcsd.org.au or phone 0406 435 290 with any contacts or suggestions that you think could be of use to him in this project.

For further information: contact Charmaine Jones
char.jones@innersydneyrcsd.org.au or (02) 9698 7690





**INNER SYDNEY
REGIONAL COUNCIL**
FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

ABOUT

Inner Sydney Voice is the journal of the Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development Inc; a non-profit organisation committed to the idea of information as a tool for community development. The organisation defines Inner Sydney as being the local government areas of Botany Bay, Leichhardt, Randwick, City of Sydney, Waverley and Woollahra.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the traditional custodians of the lands across the areas we service, particularly the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, traditional custodians of the land on which our office is located. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

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Editorial

The decision to remove public housing from Millers Point, The Rocks and Dawes Point has sent shockwaves through these local communities and through the inner city public housing communities we service. Not only does the decision cleanse these suburbs of all public housing it also changes the suburbs themselves which were listed in the state heritage register for their community as well as for their buildings.

Saved from redevelopment by the Green Bans the area is now under threat by an under-funded public housing system selling off, on a ten year average, 2.5 public housing properties a day to cover its operating costs. This has been done under the guise of ending non-existent subsidies to public tenants, many living in properties obtained at no cost from the Maritime Services Board. In the case of the Sirius building it applies to a modern high-rise building fit for purpose with no other problem than its location.

ISRCSD moved quickly to provide assistance to the Millers Point community and while ongoing funding is being found we are seeking donations to support this work – you will find details on how to do this on the page opposite.

You can find out more about some of the issues raised by the announcement in *Some places are too upmarket for public housing* (page 6) and *A community fights back* (pages 7). *One from the vaults* goes back to a report on “Save the Rocks” from our first issue in 1978 (page 31). Our article on *Understanding Aged Care Assessments* (page 27) also has relevance to Millers Point given that many of those impacted by the decision are aged and there is a concern that ACAT assessments might be used to try and push some people into care rather than replacement public housing with easy access to services.

A focus for this issue is on community involvement in civil society. Alex Greenwich shares his experience from both sides of the desk in *How to Lobby your MPs* (page 8). In *Sydney Alliance: building civil society differently* (page 24) we explore how the Alliance works, while Iain Walker from newDemocracy explores how a citizen’s jury should work *In the Jury we trust* (page 22).

On the planning side in *Better Block* (page 18) we explore Community Driven Planning and how locals reimagined Clovelly Road and what can be learnt from it. While Susan Thompson explores *Creating Healthy Built Environments* (page 14) and gives us some guidelines in *Assessing new developments to see how they support Health and Wellbeing* (page 16).

From the Looking Forward Looking Back conference we have Mahlie’s powerful *A journey through the public mental health system* (page 10) which highlights where the system needs to improve.

Boarding Houses play an important role in the affordable housing and homelessness narrative. In *Boarding House Regulation – Who is winning?* (page 28) we look at some of the issues.

Charmaine Jones & Geoff Turnbull,

Co-editors Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development

“The area is now under threat by an under-funded public housing system selling off on a ten year average 2.5 public housing properties a day to cover its operating costs”

MILLERS POINT AND THE ROCKS

GEOFF TURNBULL AND JOEL PRINGLE EXPLORE THE 19 MARCH 2014 ANNOUNCEMENT BY MINISTER GOWARD AND HOW THE COMMUNITY IS FIGHTING BACK.



SOME PLACES ARE TOO UPMARKET FOR PUBLIC HOUSING

The media release said that 293 properties in Millers Point and Gloucester Street and the Sirius building in the Rocks would be sold “due to the high cost of maintenance, significant investment required to improve properties to an acceptable standard, and high potential sale values”. While the heritage properties may be covered in part by the first two reasons the decision to sell the Sirius building which was purpose built public housing for aging in place was solely for its “high potential sale value”.

Public tenants, promised the opportunity by Land and Housing Corporation to comment on the Millers Point Social Impact Assessment before any decision was made, only saw it and the Governments 5 page response dismissing a number of the recommendations, after the Minister’s announcement.

Most found out about the decision to sell their home when personally addressed letters were hand delivered or shoved under their doors. Entitled – “Moving to a new home” the letters informed residents that government owned properties will be sold “including the home you occupy”. The entire community went into shock at the unexpected announcement. [See “A

community fights back” – opposite]

The decision has broad ramifications for public housing in areas with high sale values. For the first time to our knowledge, fit for purpose public housing is being sold off purely because of how much it will bring in the private market. For years the government has argued the need for social mix throughout the city and now one of the areas where there is a mix is to be cleansed of all public housing.

One of the issues that emerged after the announcement was the way the Minister handled the media reporting and how it misrepresented how public housing operates. While the media release was readily available it was some time before details of the kit supplied came to light.

The Minister’s slick media kit said that NSW Taxpayers were paying rental subsidies as high as \$44,000 a year in Millers Point. It contained case studies of heavily “subsidised” tenants designed to turn the community against the Millers Point tenants – in one case claiming “the total subsidy received across two generations was \$528,000”.

There are no subsidies paid to

tenants, these “subsidies” are an internal accounting calculation of the difference between the rent being paid by a public tenant and what the property would rent for in the open market. The bulk of the properties cost the public housing provider nothing as ownership of waterside worker housing had been transferred to it from the Maritime Services Board in the 1980s.

If applied to any public housing in a desirable area a high “subsidy” would be “paid” by comparison to those in Campbelltown, Gosford, Mount Druitt or Minto which the Minister used for comparison. It is not surprising that public housing tenants in the increasingly desirable inner city fear that the Millers Point “logic” could be used next to move them out of their homes. You can read more about the “subsidies” on the Tenants Union blog *the Brown Couch*.

The Ministers reference that for the “subsidy” paid for a single tenant in Millers Point they could subsidise up to five tenants in Wollongong was not a promise to put the proceeds of the sales into new housing stock in such places. The Minister was repeatedly pressed on this and she refused to commit to the proceeds going to new stock.

No, the proceeds from Millers Point will become part of the depletion rate of public housing over the last decade that has seen 2.5 properties a day sold to pay the operating cost of running an underfunded public housing system. The sales will decrease public housing stock and make it even harder for those 57,000 on the waiting list to get into public housing and in the process it will disrupt long established communities like Millers Point.

The sales are forced by a false logic that says that Government should not contribute to the cost of public housing and that it should be fully funded through rents. Changes to the Governments allocation policy made public housing into “housing of last resort” and almost totally did away with full rent payers making it financially impossible for the system to be funded viably by those on welfare.

The Millers Point media kit not only advanced the “subsidy” argument, it set times to show the media houses in bad repair with itemised repair bills

A COMMUNITY FIGHTS BACK

Since the first community meeting held on 22 March 2014, residents from Millers Point, Dawes Point and The Rocks have been preparing for a campaign to save their homes. The dedication of people to their community, in spite of the personal toll and stress of being told that they will be relocated against their will, has been inspiring.

That first meeting, attended by over 200 residents and supporters, was in response to the then Minister's decision to effectively close down one of Sydney most historical, diverse and stoic communities. Around 300 households who already experience disadvantage and hardship, including many older people and former wharf workers, people with a disability and their carers, have been told that property prices mean that there is no place for them in the inner city.

But many are fighting back, and support has been forthcoming not only from across Sydney, but also the State.

The three local resident groups, representing the diversity of the Millers Point area, have come together in a working group to co-ordinate campaign actions and oppose the forced relocations.

The Government has committing to tearing apart a resilient community and important social support will be lost. Members of the Public Housing Tenants Group have been working tirelessly to ensure that their neighbours are supported through meetings with Housing NSW relocation officers and ensuring that legal rights are known.

Often missed in the discussion about Millers Point is the importance of this informal support and care. If the community is broken up, the Government will need to provide higher levels of social assistance to avoid households falling into further disadvantage.

A poster has been produced for the campaign by Reg Mombassa, just one of a number of high profile supporters. Many unions, particularly the MUA with its connections to retired maritime workers, have expressed their support. The City of Sydney has made a financial contribution to the work of the combined working group and to legal assistance.

Planning is afoot for the establishment of a 'Friends of Millers Point' group, to incorporate the many offers of assistance, skills and expertise on offer from the general public outside the community.

Importantly, public housing residents from surrounding areas have established contact and expressed their support, knowing well that the false logic behind the Millers Point sell-off will see their own homes next at threat, along with the accelerated decline of public housing stocks as homes are sold off and not replaced.

Given that many of the terrace houses are on single, large titles, and the revelations about the complex relationship between the Government and developers that is emerging from current ICAC hearings, it is not difficult to see this battle becoming reminiscent of the Greens Bans that saved this community when it was first under threat in the 1970s.

No-one wants Robert Askin's vision for high-rises over Millers Point to be completed by the Baird Government. Sydney won't accept a class-cleansing of its diverse neighbourhoods. The residents of Millers Point won't leave their homes without a fight.

Geoff Turnbull is the Publications Officer and Joel Pringle the Senior Community Development Officer responsible for Millers Point at ISRCS.

To follow the community campaign:
www.facebook.com/millerspointsaveourhomes



presumably with no commentary as to how the lack of government maintenance had contributed to the problem. They also provided before and after shots of houses previously purchased on 99 year leases. Photos of the newish public housing in Pyrmont or Lilyfield that tenants could be moved into was also provided as well as case studies of recently relocated tenants.

Not to miss the marketing potential of the announcement the FACS website had a prominent link on its home page for potential buyers to register their interest in buying Millers Point properties. It is unlikely that any of FACS regular visitors could avail themselves of this real estate opportunity.

The way the media was fed the story has raised concerns among tenants and advocates alike. Rather than help the community understand some of the problems in the state's public housing system that need to be fixed by the government, the announcement demonised Millers Point public tenants as somehow rorting the system by being paid huge subsidies.

While the immediate announcement impacts those in Millers Point and The Rocks it also has wider ramifications for the sector that requires a far broader response. A Rubicon was crossed when the Government decided to move public housing tenants out just because they lived in a desirable area. It says we should not have public housing throughout the city, only in the cheapest areas. The sector, other public tenants and those concerned about equity and fair play have to stand behind the Millers Point public tenants before the "logic" removes public housing bit by bit across the entire city.



HOW TO LOBBY YOUR MPS

RECENT MEDIA REPORTS SUGGEST THE MORE MONEY YOU HAVE THE MORE ACCESS YOU HAVE TO DECISION MAKERS. WE ALSO HAVE GOVERNMENTS WITH VERY CONSERVATIVE AGENDAS AT A STATE AND FEDERAL LEVEL, WHICH POSES CHALLENGES FOR THOSE PURSUING A MORE PROGRESSIVE AGENDA. THE KEY LIES IN BEING PREPARED, WRITES
ALEX GREENWICH MP

I have learnt from social justice advocacy that every challenge also brings opportunities. Done well, the person you lobby and win over could become a champion of your cause.

Make sure you have identified the right point of intervention: remember you have elected representatives at local, state, and federal level, and there are both lower and upper houses. Which level of government needs to take the action? It may not be straightforward – many responsibilities are shared (or buck-passed!) between different levels of government. Who needs to take what action to get progress on your concern?

The current make-up of our parliaments mean that multi-party support is vital; make sure to meet with as many sides of politics as possible. This prevents your campaign becoming a partisan football, where the issue risks being lost in personality and wedge politics, where one party is trying to push the other into a corner. Be careful of using the opposition to ‘have a go’ at the government, which may just get the decision makers to say no on principle.

The key to winning over an elected official is to understand their motiva-

tion; this will also help identify if you are wasting your time. Check their website, social media and newsletters. Review their speeches and questions in Parliament, this is all online.

A good starting point is providing your MP with information. Given the range of issues a MP needs to deal with and the massive amount of information provided to them, they may just need your material presented succinctly in a factual and non-political way in order to understand your concerns and be supportive. Give them a one page summary, with a clear request for their action – but make sure it is something they can do. For example, most MPs ask the responsible minister to change the law; it takes a huge amount of time and effort to get a private members bill drafted and introduced, let alone to convince other MPs to support it.

Politicians always have to look to being re-elected, so the old sales adage “what’s in it for me?” is also important to remember. Most MPs are risk-averse. Make sure you communicate how widely supported your cause is, profile the various types of supporters, and explain to the MP how they

will get good outcomes from backing your cause, whether this is individual votes from a portion of their electorate, positive media reports or being able to show that they are actively representing their electorate.

Coalition building is important – alliances and networks are vital to building momentum and getting key decision makers to understand that action is needed. Who else supports your goal and does your MP respect them and their opinion? Don't duplicate another campaign – this will raise questions about your bona fides, and undermine both groups. If possible, make sure that you involve a range of political party members and community members supporting your cause.

Use your time well; don't waste it on those ideologues you will never convince. Valuable campaign effort can be wasted that would be better spent working with someone somewhere else. An obvious example here would be lobbying the Shooters Party for gun control, or Fred Nile's party about removing religious exemptions. At the same time, these parties may agree with you on specific issues or be open to learning about a concern that does not conflict with their main agenda.

Don't forget your MP's staffers – they have the ear of your MP. Every MP has to rely on the assessment their staffers make for decisions on whether they need to understand or get behind a campaign or issue.

When meeting with your MP start by listening to them; this will help you understand what is important to them and identify party or policy positions and their personal motivation. Going in all guns blazing will deny you valuable information you may need down the track.

In general, MPs (lower house members) meet with constituents, not people from outside their area, and they focus on concerns that affect their constituents. Upper house MPs (Senators or MLCs) generally have a



“Local papers are often more targeted to your MP’s direct constituency and they will often provide you with more comprehensive and localised coverage”

broader focus as members of the house of review and don't have a specific geographic electorate – they are more likely to examine big picture reform. Don't forget to look at Parliamentary committees that review legislation, can question ministers and make reports with recommendations for reform.

Make sure that any meeting request comes from someone your MP is accountable to in some way.

Identifying the best face or voice for your campaign is essential. Ask who the MP will listen to and get that person on board. Sometimes the most effective campaigners are those who realise that someone else needs to do the talking for them. When campaigning for marriage equality, it was obvious to MPs that an inner-city homosexual like me wants law reform, but the less obvious supporters were far more influential, and I stepped back to allow for clergy and parents to add a different perspective to the campaign.

It is also important to remember that MPs are people, and personal attacks will be as effective with them as they are with you. Being respectful, patient, and friendly will achieve more than screaming at them. It is not generally a good idea to threaten loss of votes or massive campaigns against your MP when you sit down to talk to them.

Make sure you have a campaigning tool box with a range of tools – meetings, petitions, email campaigns, expert advice, research reports and phone calls. Different MPs relate better to different types of communications.

The most effective will be personal one-on-one personal contact. Form letters, email campaigns and petitions won't have the same impact as a human face and a personal story, unless you have thousands of these contacts, and even then it may be the personal story they remember.

Using the media is helpful getting your MP's attention and getting progress. This doesn't mean you need to focus on getting your campaign on major TV current affairs programs or daily newspapers. Indeed local papers are often more targeted to your MP's direct constituency and they will often provide you with more comprehensive and localised coverage. Search online for hints about working with the media – they have their own pressures and interests too.

It is important to not give up or just take your MP's word that they will “handle it”. Follow up with your MP's office about agreed action, and share your successes with them so they know they are part of the team. Your MP will also appreciate a thank you when they have put time and effort into your concern.

Remember decisions are made by those who show up, so make sure you show up!

Alex Greenwich MP holds the NSW seat of Sydney as an Independent.

More information about Alex can be found at www.alexgreenwich.com
www.facebook.com/alexgreenwich
<http://twitter.com/alexgreenwich>



IN A PRESENTATION TO THE LOOKING FORWARD LOOKING BACK CONFERENCE MAHLIE REFLECTS ON HER EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE PUBLIC MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE AND WHERE THERE MAY HAVE BEEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE SYSTEM TO REACT DIFFERENTLY. IT IS A POWERFUL STORY THAT HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITIES OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WHERE THE SYSTEM NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED.

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PUBLIC MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM



I guess the first public health system intervention should have been with my mother. She was 17 when I was born premature because she refused all pre-natal care. When I was taken to the neonatal ICU, she didn't come to see me for the entire month I was there. Yet, I was still sent home with her. We moved house constantly, mainly due to my father's nomadic lifestyle. He wasn't around a lot and spent a lot of his life in and out of prison. My mother ignored me for long periods of time, rarely spoke my name and often hid me from people she knew. I am her greatest shame. She told me constantly that I was unwanted and worthless. This litany of hate formed my brain's blueprint. It structured the way I see myself. Its power over me is why I self-harm. It's why I am more often than not suicidal; it's why I have destructive and abusive relationships. We accept the love we think we deserve, they say.

My mother would slap me across the face repeatedly so I would cry and she would win. I learnt to shove my emotion down and seal it up. Control and power was everything to my mother. I think lots of people with many mental health issues also have trauma rooted in power

and control plays. There are so many correlations of this power and control mechanism within the public mental health system. One of its biggest downfalls is that it often imitates the trauma dynamic. It disempowers and restricts the consumer. It leaves them vulnerable and scared and does not provide stability or reassurance. You never know what's going to happen from one day to the next. Am I discharged today? Am I being moved to long term? Will they let me out on leave? Can I have my phone for 10 minutes? It's a game. Many the people I have met over the years in psych wards have echoed this 'game' analogy. I know what to do to get admitted, to get leave, to get discharged. For me, the worst thing is knowing that it's not about best practice or care. It's a game of budgets and beds for them. Over the course of the last 4 years I watched the emergency psychiatric ward go from over 8 beds to only 4. It's like a really exclusive restaurant you can never make a reservation for.

At age 11 I jumped out of tree and broke my collarbone. I told the doctor I wanted to die. My grandfather was told to "watch me closer". No intervention.

At 13, when my mother finally left, I started cutting. I bounced from foster home to foster home, running away, using drugs and alcohol and within a year I was addicted to stimulants. I had almost constant suicidal ideation and was experiencing symptoms now described as 'mania' and 'psychosis'.

At 15 I ran away with a man who promised to take care of me forever. He told me he was 19. He was 35, older than my mother. For a year, he locked me in a house and controlled me. I don't need to verbalise what happened in that year, but it changed who I was forever. It ended violently. He went to prison for 15 years, but only because the authorities had the power to take the evidence from me, I refused to cooperate. They sent me to therapy once, I was aggress-

sive and non-responsive so they gave up and let it go. I spent the next 10 years denying it had ever happened.

My first long term visit to the mental health system was at 16 and lasted 6 months. It was involuntary. I fought them constantly and was violent, aggressive, defiant and treatment resistant so I spent a lot of time in seclusion and restraint and in observational rooms. No one ever seemed to look at the trauma I had faced. I was uncontrollable, so they inadvertently did to me what I had just experienced. They locked me in. They left me alone. They fed me drugs. They took away my power. They controlled me. Public mental health wards aren't safe places. In my experience, men and women are not ever separated, the strong prey on the weak and there are stand-over tactics, bullying and sexual harassment between the patients.

You become a lab rat in an attempt to find "the proper treatment". For example Lagactil or chlorpromazine made my muscles twitch and spasm. But in order to "give the medication time to work" I endured this for weeks. I was discharged with an incredibly high dosage of lithium and benzodiazepines. I recorded feeling as though I was "trapped under glass". Within 3 months of discharge I started to have issues with my kidneys, and I stopped taking the lithium. I continued to take the benzo's and developed an incredible dependence on them.

At 19, I fell pregnant and I straightened myself out. They knew about my mental health. It was the same hospital in the same town. Yet once again, after losing that child at 22 weeks, I was sent home without any psychiatric care or follow up. The dozens of suicide attempts in the next 6 months were dealt with at home. The hospitals had never helped before, so know one even bothered to try.

I have never had a relationship that wasn't violent, co-dependent and

unhealthy. I don't cry or express my hurt and sadness, as my childhood taught me this was unacceptable. I punch walls and cut up my skin violently.

When I met my last partner, I stopped using drugs and alcohol, and severed all contact with anyone she deemed "unhealthy", which was everyone. But the more connected I became to her, the worse my fear of abandonment became. I used her love for me as a weapon because I had no idea what to do with it.

It was her leaving me (the first time) in 2010 that put me back in contact with the public mental health system. I was so suicidal, my nurse friend had me admitted and I spent over a week in the acute ward, being placed back on lithium even though the doctors were aware of my past experiences. Once again, within months I developed kidney stones and early symptoms of diabetes and I was again stuck under the pane of glass. I'm an artist, a trained and qualified photographer, graphic and web designer. Creativity is everything to me. Lithium took that all away and my doctor advised me to stop taking the drug.

I started private therapy and received my 'bipolar and borderline personality disorder' diagnosis. I read everything I could about them and unlike many people; I found my diagnosis a positive thing. It was like finally finding the road after you'd been searching for it for 28 years. But I stopped going to work, would drink, take pills and cut and go to the ER sometimes up to 4 times a week.

The reactions were always the same. I am often berated for wasting their time, taking space away from people who are "actually sick and dying", questioned about why I continue to do this to myself and why I kept coming back. It's just "attention seeking", it's just narcissism. There's nothing wrong with me I just need to stop being so

silly. I've received stitches without pain relief, I've received no medical care at all, I've been left to sit on the "crazy chair" (a plastic chair near the nurses station) for up to 9 hours. I was often discharged without seeing a psychiatric registrar because they were just too busy. I started to understand the curse of being in the "too hard basket". Mental health services refused treatment to me and I even flew to Melbourne and used my girlfriend's address to access a specialist service of which there is no NSW equivalent.

In June of 2011, I was admitted again after I had taken a toxic dose of lithium, damaged my nerves whilst cutting and drunk 2 litres of vodka over a 4 hour period. I had also hit my head. I complained about the pain in my neck and head. A lot. I was told that I was fine. I spent a week in the ward and was discharged.

9 days after my discharge, I was at home doing laundry when I was hit with the worst headache of my life. My partner resisted telling the ambos about my mental health issues, but eventually had to and they relaxed immediately and they diagnosed it as a severe panic attack. Begrudgingly took me to the hospital because of my elevated blood pressure, heart rate and inability to stand. I went blind. I could not walk. I could not talk or understand language. I was having a stroke. I was 28 years old.

I'd spent the majority of my life fighting receiving blows to the head. This had resulted in a dissection of my veritable artery, one of four blood

"I am often berated for wasting [doctor's] time, taking space away from people who are 'actually sick and dying'"

supplies to our brain. My artery was blocked by a large blood clot. It wasn't until I was given an MRI that this was picked up. The bump to my head preceding my last admission had resulted in part of the blood clot dislodging and hitting my trigeminal nerve, causing a stroke. It was 100% preventable. Had the clot been seen 9 days earlier, medication could have easily controlled and prevented the stroke, my neurologist offered to assist me in filing a complaint against the hospital. I spent 2 weeks on the neuro ward and a further month at home, learning to walk, talk and recovering from brain injury. I needed constant physical care and had to ease myself back into the world.

This highlights the neglect that I have seen within the mental health system to adequately deal with physical health issues in consumers on their wards. I have seen in myself and others, important medical issues overlooked by those in charge of the psychiatric units. This needs to be addressed immediately. My best friend was recently in a psych unit, discharged with a massive infection the psych ward refused to medically treat

appropriately. We left the ward and went straight to the ER where she was admitted straight away, put on fluids, IV antibiotics and underwent surgery and a week-long medical admission. This is not ok.

After my stroke, life was incredibly difficult emotionally. Many brain injuries cause massive emotional and psychological changes and I was not immune to this. I developed severe health anxiety, suffered panic attacks and agoraphobia that I still work hard to conquer.

The stroke also had some amazingly positive effects. Learning to regain my independence again was difficult, but over the next two years I worked on remoulding my relationships. I told people how I felt, I opened up, I let myself be loved and learnt how to love in return. I refer to this time as my "stroke of luck". The people who knew me would probably tell you I became a different person, and I think I did. Sadly, a lot of people around me couldn't handle this change, and I lost almost everyone but a few people that proved themselves to be true friends.

During this time, I was a participant in the public health DBT program and saw a public health psychologist twice a week every week. His name is Andre and he saved my life. He is an advocate for consumer participation and if he was still in Sydney today, I know he would be here to listen to me speak. Over our two years together, Andre showed me a system that could work. He went above



All photos: ©MJewellPhotography

and beyond for me, always. He pulled every string, cashed in every favour and used his intelligence and tenacity to, time and time again, advocate for me and insist on best practice where I was concerned. He sat with me in the ER and observed the interactions between me and the ER nurses and then he questioned them. He kept me out of the long term ward that had caused me massive trauma as a child. He educated everyone around him about BPD, self-harm, chronic suicidality and DBT and the best thing about him was that he did this all WITH me. Not FOR me. I don't think Andre ever believed in walking beside me in my journey. I think he walked a tiny step behind, trusting and encouraging me to lead.

The DBT program runs a weekly 2 hour 'learning' session as well as a private consult with appropriately trained psychologists and is not funded properly. It has a 6 month waiting list, and it takes on many of the most difficult patients they see; the self-harmers, the borderlines. It is based on Marsha Linehan's 3 year DBT program and is an abridged version that runs for only 12 months.

Over the last year, things have taken a bad turn for me. My 7 year relationship ended, my mental health regressed severely, I started cutting and using again, I went back to a previous violent relationship, I became homeless and Andre left his position at the hospital. It's been a shit year, but I'm still here. I have the public mental health system to thank for that. The DBT program taught

MAHLIE'S SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO MAKE THIS SYSTEM WORK BETTER:

At first, DO NO HARM. Do not project your feelings onto your patient. They are not responsible for how you feel about them or their coping strategies.

Give them TIME. We must stop the revolving door. People need to work in their own timeframes.

LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN. Stop talking at them and just LISTEN. It is important to hear what is NOT said also.

Look at the safety and security in your wards. If you wouldn't stay there, why do you think I should?

Understand that having a mental illness does not mean your patient doesn't have the right to APPROPRIATE MEDICAL CARE.

Educate yourself and your staff. Use best practice, not cheapest practice.

Be aware of your power and control and how this is used. The consumer must always lead their own treatment. It should be on their terms, whenever possible.

Look at the history. What has this person survived? Avoid recreating their trauma.

Keep everyone informed. They should know what you know. They should be leading the plan, and their carers and support system should be included as much as possible.

NEVER GIVE UP HOPE. If you give up on us, how can we have hope for ourselves?

me how to understand myself and the reasons behind my actions. It also taught me I had choices and options, that my behaviour was MINE to decide. That's meant that, as bad as this year has been, I can maintain healthy relationships with my amazing friends and repair and restore any hiccups we might have. I am learning to cope with distress better and make better choices. This program saves the lives of incredibly vulnerable and disempowered women, most of whom do what they do just to try and survive. NSW HEALTH NEEDS TO FUND IT.

I want to finish by saying this. Every morning I wake up and I make choices. Will I go to work today? Will I stay sober and clean today? Will I cut today? Will I be kind to a stranger today? I don't have a choice to forget my shitty childhood, my lack of family support, or the things that I've experience that have hurt me in the past. But my mantra is:

NEVER FORGET, AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT YOU HAVE THE POWER TO SAY: THIS IS NOT HOW THE STORY IS GOING TO END.

The public mental health system needs to stop taking that power, it needs to EMPOWER the most vulnerable of people, not punish them.

Mahlie Jewell is a classically and technically trained freelance fine-art photographer, printmaker and graphic and web based designer. The images provided are examples of her work. You can see more of her portfolio at www.facebook.com/MJewellPhotography. She currently works as the web and graphic designer at Domestic Violence NSW.



CREATING HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENTS

SUSAN THOMPSON PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF HOW URBAN ENVIRONMENTS CAN SUPPORT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING. SHE ALSO SUGGESTS QUESTIONS TO ASK OF NEW DEVELOPMENTS ABOUT HOW THEY WILL SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY'S HEALTH – BOTH THOSE WHO ALREADY LIVE IN AN AREA AND ASPIRING RESIDENTS.

Nearly every time you pick up a newspaper or magazine, turn on the television or listen to the radio, there is bound to be an item about health. And more often than not, obesity is part of the discussion. Given this, it's not surprising to learn that obesity is a significant risk factor for our most common contemporary health problems – the so-called 'lifestyle diseases' – such as diabetes, coronary and chronic respiratory conditions, cancers, and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

And you may also have encountered debates about evidence linking these contemporary health problems to the way we live in cities. Diminishing opportunities for physical activity as part of daily living, our car dominated transport systems, increasing fast food availability and reduced ready access to affordable fresh food, and lack of social connection, are all implicated.

For some time, health professionals have acknowledged that to address these epidemics, we need to look well beyond costly medical treatments, drug therapies and surgical interventions. Rather than only caring for people once they are sick, the health system has to shift to a greater emphasis on prevention. And to do this successfully requires effective collaboration with other professions – especially developers, town planners, urban designers, landscape architects, transport planners and engineers. There is widespread agreement that our towns and cities can play an important role in supporting healthy behaviours as part of everyday living.

SO WHAT IS A HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENT?

There is a growing body of research showing that urban form plays a significant role in both human and ecological health. Suburbs far away from the city centre, with low residential densities, segregated land uses, disconnected street patterns, limited provision of public transport and few local employment opportunities encourage car dependent, physically inactive and socially isolated lifestyles. These urban qualities also contribute to climate change with excessive greenhouse gas emissions. Alternatively, environments with higher residential densities, where shops and homes are located in close proximity and where it is easy to cycle and walk to commercial precincts, make a positive contribution to health. Such neighbourhoods are also good for environmental sustainability.

The University of NSW (UNSW) Healthy Built Environments Program (HBEP) has compiled much of this research, together with policy implications, in a comprehensive Literature Review (HBEP Review). This is free to download from

the HBEP website. The HBEP Review defines three 'domains' of built environment influence in relation to supporting good health and well-being:

- The built environment and physical activity
- The built environment and social connection
- The built environment and access to healthy foods.

Below are some of the ideas from these domains which highlight key features of a healthy built environment.

A HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for contemporary chronic disease. Physical activity helps to protect against heart disease and stroke, diabetes, and cancers such as colon and breast. It also diminishes the impact of clinical depression and anxiety. And it's interesting to note that the protective effects of physical activity are independent of obesity – so even if you are overweight, being active will make a positive contribution to your health (see the NSW Premier's Council for Active Living 'Why Active Living Statement' for more information).

A healthy built environment is one that encourages physical activity. This includes walking and cycling for transport, and using green open spaces for recreation. It's also about designing buildings and public areas with easy-to-use stairs so that people are encouraged to move rather than standing still in a lift or travelling on escalators. Walking is perhaps the most common physical activity and is generally part of all non-car transport trips. Walking is available to nearly everyone. Participation can occur from a very young age to well into later life, irrespective of cultural background, income levels and education. So creating a walkable environment – one where it is easy, safe and enjoyable to walk for both recreation and transport – is central to a healthy built environment.

Some other urban environmental features important in supporting physical activity are:

Distance and Density: The research evidence tells us that keeping everyday trip distances short by having mixed use neighbourhoods and compact development makes active transport a viable option by providing destinations to which people can walk and cycle. However, increasing the residential density of the built environment alone will not necessarily encourage increased active transport. Density, mixed use and micro-design elements in some combination are most likely to influence levels of physical activity (HBEP Review pages 47-52).

Street Networks: The research increasingly demonstrates



Former industrial sites provide opportunities for denser development



Public transport - the light rail extension in the inner west of Sydney



Great designs include stairs

that grid street patterns decrease distances between origins and destinations and encourage active transport (HBEP Review page 53). Street layouts, based on a grid, ensure direct and easy to navigate access to shops, schools and public transport stops. If there is a cul de sac, pedestrians and cyclists should be given through access.

Open Green Space: There is strong evidence that people who live close to a variety of recreation facilities are more physically active than those who do not enjoy such proximity. Recreation activities can vary from organised sport, impromptu games and play, as well as walking, jogging and cycling (HBEP Review page 57). There are other significant health benefits of natural, green and open spaces. Research suggests that there is an instinctive bond between human beings and other living systems. Removal of this bond by 'building out' natural elements (including plants, animals and even the weather) is fundamentally detrimental to health (HBEP Review pages 66-68).

With continuing urban population growth, provision for additional green open space is essential. In rapidly developing urban areas where land costs are high, governments must ensure that funding is available for the purchase of adequate amounts of open space, as well as landscape design and ongoing maintenance. Policy needs to reflect the diverse array of users of open space, including children, older adults and those with disabilities. In addition to large areas of natural open space, the incorporation of nature into urban and building design should be pursued, particularly in higher density areas. This can include roof top gardens, green walls and feature plantings in window boxes and building entries. Importantly, provision needs to be made for these plantings to be well maintained.

WHAT IS A WALKABLE PLACE?

Accessibility is a key criterion. To encourage walking for transport, the services and facilities that people need to use on a daily basis have to be close, as does public transport. When thinking about walking for recreation, paths have to be handy to residential areas so it's easy for people to use them. Connectivity is another principle of walkability, as is the quality of the infrastructure. Connections between walking and cycling paths, and quality green open space, are some of the issues here. Path width is an important consideration if walkers and cyclists are to be accommodated safely. Differently abled users, as well as parents with strollers and prams, may be another factor in determining the adequacy of shared paths. Facilities such as water fountains, seating (with shading), public toilets that are clean and well maintained, and rubbish bins are all characteristic of good quality walking infrastructure. Interesting things to see along the way, a pleasant ambient environment free of pollution and excessive noise will also encourage walking. And above all else, walkable areas are safe. Paths are free from trip and fall hazards and users perceive the locality to be safe for walking. This might mean ensuring that a wide range of demographic groups are out and about, and that behaviour on shared paths is respectful of multiple users – signage is important here.



Public art can help to make a safer and more inclusive community



Community gardens are important for a healthy built environment

A HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENT CONNECTS AND STRENGTHENS LOCAL COMMUNITIES

A sense of community and belonging where people live, work and travel are important determinants of physical and mental health. The consequences of social isolation are loneliness, depression and anxiety, and while people of any age can be affected, older community members are most vulnerable. Sense of belonging fosters perceptions of security, confidence and comfort which can encourage people to be active and engaged in their neighbourhood, as well as socially connected to others. Incidental interaction enhances possibilities for human connection and caring. In turn, this increases perceptions of safety and reduces feelings of loneliness and isolation, all of which have benefits for mental health.

Considerations that relate to the urban environment to bring communities together are:

Incidental Social Interactions: Spaces between buildings – on the street and in town squares – are important for encounters and social interaction. An incidental greeting between individuals waiting for a bus or walking along the footpath can begin a conversation which contributes to a sense of community. Active transport (that is, walking, cycling and public transport use) presents further opportunities for casual interaction not afforded by the private motor car (HBEP Review pages p.69 and 71-74).

Safety: While sense of community and social interaction are key determinants of health, a large body of research suggests that people will not interact within, or feel part of, a community that is unsafe and/or is perceived to be unsafe (HBEP Review pages 74-75). Safety is an essential foundation of a healthy place. Policies need to ensure that urban areas include a variety of well-maintained and safe public spaces. Arrangements for the ongoing maintenance of such spaces should be formalised. Natural and physical territorial enforcement should be encouraged as a way to protect

• ASSESSING NEW DEVELOPMENT TO SEE HOW IT SUPPORTS HEALTH AND WELLBEING

By Susan Thompson

Denser residential development and mixed use neighbourhoods are conducive to the creation of walkable suburbs and reduced car dependency in daily life. However, as towns and cities densify we have to be careful that this is done in a way that comprehensively supports health and well-being. It's important that proposed developments, both small and large, are assessed in terms of how they will help new and existing residents to be healthy. So what is 'health supportive' dense development? Here are some questions (and there are no doubt others) to ask at different stages of the planning and development process. The categories and questions are not mutually exclusive and there is considerable crossover between the different issues.

• HOW WILL THIS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

Safety: Will this be a safe place? Will buildings enable overlooking (or 'eyes on the street') of public areas and roadways, especially walking paths, so that people will feel safe in this area?

Design: Are streets designed for people first – and cars last? Is public art included in the design? Is the community involved in the design? Are stairs incorporated into the design?

Landscaping: Does the development have good landscaping plans? Does it make best use of existing environmental features – such as water and topography – to ensure an aesthetically pleasing environment?

Environmental features: Does the development unnecessarily expose users to high noise levels? Does the design

take seasonality into account? Is there adequate shade provision to protect users from the hot Australian sun? Are cold wind tunnels avoided? Is there sufficient sunlight in winter with overshadowing caused by tall buildings kept to an acceptable minimum? **Green open space:** Is open space close by (a 400m easy walk)? Is the amount and size of open space areas adequate for the proposed population? Are open space areas well linked to each other, particularly enabling access by walking and cycling? Do they look attractive and well designed? Are the open spaces appropriate for the community who will use them? Are dog parks proposed? Are they easy to access by walking and cycling paths that link to residential areas?

privacy. Involving communities in crime prevention programs and policies is also very important.

Open Space and Community Interaction: The location and treatment of green and open spaces can support both organised and incidental social interactions and activities. These spaces create a focal point for communities to meet and grow (HBEP Review pages 66–68). As cities densify – and the urban environment becomes busier with more hard surfaces and increased visual and aural stimulation – planning policies must support the provision of green open space.

A HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENT PROVIDES EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD.

Regular physical activity needs to be accompanied by a healthy intake of food to ensure that energy ‘in’ is balanced with energy ‘out’. This is the key to maintaining a healthy body weight. Research indicates that convenient food access is a determinant of food choice. Proximity of healthy food outlets, including supermarkets, can positively influence the consumption of health promoting foods.

Features supporting access to healthy food for everyone are:

Food Accessibility: The research indicates a relationship between exposure to healthy food options and healthy

eating. Access to a supermarket or other reliable source of fresh, healthy produce appears to improve healthy food consumption (HBEP Review pages 86–88). Accordingly, it is important that food retail areas have a variety of food options. Supermarkets are ideally centrally located within urban areas to ensure equitable access.

Larger Scale Food Production: Urban agricultural lands play an important part in the production and supply of healthy food to urban areas in Australia and should be protected (HBEP Review page 93). Policies to assess the value of peri-urban land for food production should be encouraged prior to re-zoning.

Farmers’ Markets and Community Gardens: The link between exposure to community gardens and farmers’ markets, with increased consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables, is obvious although difficult to quantify. Markets and gardens also facilitate community interaction and physical activity. They are an extremely valuable element of a healthy built environment (HBEP Review page 92). Land use zoning should support, not prohibit, the use of land for farmers’ markets and community gardens. To be effective, these policies require support from other community agencies such as schools, gardening clubs, and recycling and sustainability groups.

CONCLUSION

To make the HBEP Literature Review findings more concrete, below are some questions to ask at different stages of the planning and development process when assessing if a new development supports health and wellbeing.

The built environment is pivotal in supporting healthy behaviours as part of daily life. The research is compelling and there is increasing acknowledgement that we have to work across health and the built environment sectors in order to be effective. Nevertheless, ensuring that new development supports healthy behaviour of both existing and future communities is not an easy task. Our best chance of successfully tackling these complex and challenging 21st century issues is through collaboration and knowledge sharing, with health and built environment professionals working closely with local communities

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References for further reading can be found in the on line version of this article.

Infrastructure: Is there provision of adequate infrastructure to support physical activity?

For bikes – are there separated lanes; if shared lanes, are they of adequate width and safe; is bicycle parking secured, covered and well lit at night?

For car share spaces – are they adequate and easy to access?

Public transport – is the provision adequate and is the proposed development well linked to existing and new public transport?

Walkability: Will the development create a walkable environment for new and existing residents as well as a wide range of people regardless of abilities?

Overall: Are daily activities within walking and biking distance? Will it be easy to get to places without a car? Will reliable and safe public transport be close by and easy to get to?

• HOW WILL THIS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SOCIAL CONNECTION IN THE COMMUNITY?

Safety: Will people feel safe in this development/community? Is there sufficient provision for street lighting? Are the designs creating opportunities to get more “eyes on the street” day and night? Is there sufficient attention to pedestrian safety?

Public spaces: Are public spaces designed so that they are integral to the development and wider neighbourhood? Is there adequate and suitable provision of landscaping? Are there facilities to encourage sitting, looking, meeting friends? Is the space well shaded in summer and does it have adequate sunlight in winter? Will it be easy for all members of the community to use this space? Are there opportunities for community involvement in the ongoing

creation of the public space? What about public art? What about social and community programs that will work in conjunction with the public space drawing people out of their homes and into the wider neighbourhood?

• HOW WILL THIS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD?

Healthy food outlets: Are supermarkets selling a variety of foods planned?

Are there cafés and outdoor eating opportunities? Are liquor/fast food/convenience stores balanced with healthier eating options and a good distance away from local schools?

Urban agriculture: Is there provision for community gardens and urban agriculture in streets and open spaces as appropriate? Are there public spaces that are not used on the weekends that can accommodate a farmers’ market?



BETTER BLOCK

CLOVELLY ROAD WAS TRANSFORMED AS A GREENER, SAFER, MORE LIVEABLE STREET ON 27TH OCTOBER 2013. **MEGAN SHARKEY** EXPLORES WHAT THOSE KEEN TO REIMAGINE THEIR STREETS AND COMMUNITIES CAN LEARN FROM COMMUNITY DRIVEN PLANNING USED IN THE FIRST BETTER BLOCK TRANSFORMATION IN SYDNEY

The Better Block demonstration day saw over 2000 people attend, 259 survey participants, local councillors and staff, state parliamentary minister, local VIPs, media, and over 150 volunteers. The street felt alive and activated.

Located on Clovelly Road between Arden Street and Beach Street intersections, the demonstration day increased greenery (over 300 plants and trees), slowed traffic by narrowing the street, utilized empty shop fronts, street furniture lined the pavements, pop-up cafes and pop-up businesses generated economic activity, included bike parking and a bike mechanic, and arts and music.

Clovelly Road may be a regional road but we made it a community street.

IT CAN BE DONE HERE, THERE OR ANYWHERE

Feeling disenchanted with the state of their daggy looking block, a string of business turnovers and empty shop fronts, Phil Stubbs and Lisa Patrioni talked about how their block, its businesses and residents might become a stronger community and more aesthetically pleasing. Dreaming of a social, economic hub bustling with activity invoking a Parisian boulevard with trees, street furniture and people; Phil began researching place-making which led him to Better Block. Empowered, Phil thought we could do this here - why not it fits perfectly. Clovelly Road is a wide street where once the tram travelled. It has little pedestrian infrastructure, little greenery and deactivated shop fronts. Plans ensued and contacts were made, the first Sydney based Better Block was born.

Stepping back, the Better Block ideas started in Dallas, Texas during 2010; the brainchild of Jason Roberts and Andrew Howard. They lived in a derelict, older part of town with wide streets, empty shop fronts and a struggling community needing a facelift, but they were at a loss to know how to do it. The planning process would take years before real change occurred - why not change the things they hated now? Many of the planning laws were inhibiting social and economic vibrancy to their block - why not break them? Empowered they did just that and changed their street for a day. They brought out tables and chairs, narrowed the street, slowed traffic, opened up empty shop fronts, posted all the planning laws they were breaking and invited the council.

The results were amazing with lots of people attending and giving great feedback. Instantly the area was



“Many of the planning laws inhibit social and economic vibrancy to the block – why not break them?”

invigorated, people were at the centre of the street, and a small-scale social and economic hub imagined. Government staff were amazed and people all over the United States began contacting the Better Block founders. Thus the Better Block crusade began with the founders choosing to open source content, methods and ideas so that any group, anywhere could hold their own Better Block and put planning directly into community hands.

Better Block is part of a broader movement called tactical urbanism. Other tactical urbanism examples include Guerilla Gardening or Sunday Streets here in Sydney. Mike Lydon and others have summarised some of the tactics in their booklet *Tactical Urbanism Short Term Action // Long Term Change*. It encompasses the community and government small-scale changes to the street characterized by “an offering of local ideas for local planning challenges, short-term commitment and realistic change, low-risks with a possibly a high-reward, and the development of social capital between citizens”. The community are getting involved, driving the planning process and make their voices heard.

ORGANISING THE BETTER BLOCK

Clovelly Road Better Block demonstration day was the culmination of hard work, time and ideas by a core group of local resident volunteers, led by Phil, with business input and additional volunteers supporting on the day and throughout. The planning process for the Better Block day began early in 2013. Phil began by contacting the broader movement, local councillors, key partners, such as UNSW, Bike East, and Transition Randwick for support, funding partners and attending local precinct meetings. At this stage it was a two person driven process to gain support (Lisa, Phil’s partner, supported him with ideas, artistic design, and general help). Phil attended approximately 10 group community meetings, such as ThinkActChange and BikeEast, to pitch the idea, solicit additional volunteers, strategic supporters and to promote the first Better Block meeting.

The first community meeting, “Have Your Say” in August 2013, introduced locals to the Better Block idea, surveyed them and asked for volunteers. Over 80

people attended this meeting. During this meeting, volunteers could assign themselves to the broadly organised teams required for setting up the Better Block. Our teams, for example, were transport and traffic, arts and kids, landscape/greenery, logistics, council, media and print, businesses, and market research. A second meeting two weeks later established the core group of lead volunteers, approximately 15; the team leaders were the most enthusiastic and dedicated, they showed up and committed time! Each team leader was responsible for their “sub-volunteers”. Phil Stubbs and myself worked together to liaise between the teams for overall cohesion. The suggestions and ideas from the “Have Your Say” survey and place-making research guided the teams to the changes desired and required to enable a greener, safer and more liveable street. The majority of the team leaders took ownership of their team and really enabled the day to happen and become a success. In addition to ideas, the “Have Your Say” survey was turned into a two-page briefing note and utilized as a business and council information tool.

The group held three additional meetings at Creativity Unlimited, our local art studio and Better Block meeting space. These meetings allowed us to hash out logistics, have creative design sessions, form community bonds and keep everyone accountable. Communication is important away from these meetings and can be very difficult when volunteers have full time jobs. The Clovelly Road Better Block utilised a few communication methods internally and externally. Internally,

google documents, dropbox, email and phone were used. Google docs allowed volunteers to see who was on the team and basic strategy; after a few weeks this communication tool became ineffective. Dropbox was utilised for large file sharing. Email became the main form of communication. Externally, the group utilised facebook, instagram, mail chimp, twitter, vimeo, survey monkey, and pinterest. Facebook and twitter were the two most used communication tools. Mail chimp provided a good platform to email invites professionally; likewise, survey monkey was a good survey platform.

“The council were a bit wary of us initially. They’d seen it all before [community groups with grand ideas]. They replied to about 10% of our emails and contact [...] or didn’t understand what we were trying to achieve.”

were made on both sides. For example, the group wanted the Better Block demonstration to extend further west on Clovelly Road past Arden to include the whole neighbourhood centre and the council wanted concrete barricades around the park-lets and pop-up business. We negotiated metal fencing barricades. Additional features, such as pedestrian crosswalks were also vetoed. One rule break was the painting of street art on the ground. People loved it. We did it though had been forewarned to not paint. Bringing in the council prior to the event, rather than the just do it approach, enabled us to have an open dialogue, as well as really engage with



Strategic partners were an integral part of this project as well. For example, University of New South Wales provided strong support and they received mutual benefit as well. UNSW became a partner through PhD candidate and lecturer Laura Goh. They assisted by having their first year planning students work on a real world project. Many students attended our first meeting, we held a private information session for them and all students volunteered on the day: Two even wrote content and provided research on the Better Block feedback report. Distinguished professor Michael Neuman provided technical expertise as well. Our partnership with them gave us interesting insights, a testing group for the demonstration day survey, and the students saw up

close and personal the transformation of a street in real time.

The whole group were bound by the council and logistics team. Council approval for the “event” was sought; though in the first United States Better Blocks they just did it. Subsequent Better Blocks (USA) have since received council support or are being driven by councils themselves. The Clovelly group sought council approval to hold the event with the caveat that we could break some planning rules. This was the hardest part of the process. As Phil stated, “The council were a bit wary of us initially. They’d seen it all before [community groups with grand ideas]. They replied to about 10% of our emails and contact [...] or didn’t understand what we were trying to achieve.” Many concessions

the council. This, in the long run, has enabled us to move forward with council discussions in an open positive way. On the day councillors and staff were blown away by the result and really changed their “wary” view. Since then a few have suggested we hold Better Blocks in other areas of Randwick that could use it.

LESSONS LEARNED

Council approval in the Australian context is key; it can be stifling but is needed. The first Better Block in Sydney, as well as, two in Melbourne, broke down the first wall. This will help in the future, but will more flexibility to break the rules be allowed?

Another big barrier to both the Clovelly Road Better Block and the breakdown of the Bondi group is the time commitment placed on the

leader. Phil Stubbs dedicated nearly six months of unpaid work to this project and Avi Melkiner, of the Bondi group, found that as the leader she could not continue to afford the unpaid work.

A more defined management structure and bringing additional volunteers in early could remove some of the work load from the leader, but it would still require a significant time commitment. Council support, at least within Randwick, will also make this easier in the future.

Time commitment comes from the leader, core volunteers who averaged three to ten hours a week (over two to three months) and on the day volunteers who worked in one to three hour

nesses had not even met each other to form relationships, locals to meet and start the conversation of what could be. After the event, the momentum was really great and lots of volunteers were engaged. Unfortunately, months passed before the group followed up with the council thus losing many volunteers and had many asking "Well, what next?"

In March 2014 a group of core volunteers got together to move the concepts of Better Block forward and keep the council momentum and discussion going. They formed ParktoPacific, which builds on the ideas of Better Block and looks to enact small-scale community driven changes on Clovelly Road from Centen-

to focus on his business full time, but has been researching grants and partners, such as Project for Public Spaces (PPS), to enable long-term change of his block.

Other groups have begun to follow suit. A Bondi group was started and even received Waverley Council funding and support to hold its own Better Block in July. This has unfortunately been put on hold and Avi Melkiner has joined Street Talk to keep moving forward by building resident and business relations, with other core members still doing support in their own ways. I hear whispers of a group in Marrickville discussing a potential Better Block or tactical urbanism movement.



shifts, six hours in a pop up, or even all day including setup and breakdown!

Monetary costs for the day included event insurance, transport costs for trees and plants; in kind support from Randwick Council for security and barricades, printing and design, and a few other incidentals totalling approximately eight to ten thousand dollars. This required sponsors and made strategic partners like Council necessary. Crowd-funding and community grants could assist further in the future.

WHERE TO NOW?

The Clovelly Road Better Block has been a great catalyst around the Eastern Suburbs, sparking further community empowerment and change. The council discussion has improved. It enabled an area where many of the local busi-

nesses had not even met each other to form relationships, locals to meet and start the conversation of what could be. After the event, the momentum was really great and lots of volunteers were engaged. Unfortunately, months passed before the group followed up with the council thus losing many volunteers and had many asking "Well, what next?"

In March 2014 a group of core volunteers got together to move the concepts of Better Block forward and keep the council momentum and discussion going. They formed ParktoPacific, which builds on the ideas of Better Block and looks to enact small-scale community driven changes on Clovelly Road from Centen-

Clovelly Road Better Block Feedback Report with background of the area and Better Block, and research from the day. On May 6th they presented at a Randwick Council briefing session receiving positive feedback and ideas from council. On 10 May they hosted a community meeting at the Randwick Literary Institute (RLI) with speakers including Mayor Scott Nash (Randwick), MP Bruce Notley-Smith, MP Matt Thistlewaite, and Mayor Sally Betts discussed complete streets; it gained further support for another Better Block for 19 October 2014 in Clovelly. The next meeting on 25th May at the RLI will be the first volunteer working session for the next Better Block demonstration and is open to all. Phil Stubbs has since returned

Clovelly Road will hold a second Better Block to be highlighted during the Walk 21 conference which will showcase the event; the ParktoPacific group will be organizing along with locals, businesses and supporting partners. More and more I hear people from the Sydney area talking about community planning and meeting people involved in projects like Better Block. The movement has begun and the community are taking their streets back.

Megan Sharkey helped co-ordinate Clovelly Better Block. She is an environmental planner and sustainability consultant and is on the steering committee for ParktoPacific. Photos appearing in this article are courtesy of Sara Stace, Ari Anderson, and Emily Whitworth. Facebook/clovellyroadbetterblock Facebook/parktopacific and www.parktopacific.com References, links for further reading can be found in the online version of this article.



IN THE JURY WE TRUST

WITH DELIBERATIVE PROCESSES BEING INCREASINGLY USED TO ASCERTAIN COMMUNITY VIEWS, IAIN WALKER EXPLAINS THE CITIZEN JURY PROCESS USED BY NEWDEMOCRACY.

Democracy, at its best, should be something far more than the blunt tool of “the vote” – it is an expression and the enacting of the informed will of the people. Yet finding the will of the people has become harder and harder as those pushing a specific issue learn from the experiences of others how to ‘get a result’ from the current system where even the hint of an impact on the vote makes decisiveness an unwanted trait.

At The newDemocracy Foundation, we seek to conduct practical trials of potential systemic changes to ‘how we do democracy’ so that citizens, bureaucrats and elected representatives can see the practical results. Are the outcomes sensible, trustworthy and representative of an informed community view? In short, do they better identify the will of the people?

One key innovation is the use of random selection to generate representative groups to deliberate on complex issues. The Citizens’ Jury is one form of this, but it is the principle of using random selection that we see as being of merit and worthy of research testing. To explore why, in this article we’ll take a step through what we see as the systemic flaws in the democratic process today. Our focus is threefold:

we aim to deliver an innovation which is more representative, more deliberative (rather than driven by adversarial debate) and earns greater public trust.

Our democratic bodies are most successful when citizens see “people like me” among their representatives. This is made challenging by the nature of the democratic contest, and means that while we see a number of very talented individuals elected, they tend to emerge from a handful of life experiences and personality types rather than being reflective of the breadth of the community. Remove the lawyers, student politicians, former political staffers and those with family connections to elected office and one would thin the ranks of any parliament in the world quite quickly. This is not a comment upon the fairness by which they were elected – simply that our elected bodies rarely, if ever, resemble a mix of people we would see in the street.

A deliberative process like a Citizens’ Jury is one which allows people access to information and the time to reflect upon, question and openly discuss that which they have learned. It allows for the addition of expertise and for new solutions to be found. This is a singular failing of many campaigned proposi-

tions – they formulate a single solution (“*The Government must do x*”) and encourage people to lend their names to a petition as electoral democratic legitimacy comes from the law of large numbers – not whether those numbers have any depth or meaning. It’s akin to equating Facebook friends with actual friends: the real test is how many would help you out of a bind (not many). The numbers themselves become meaningless. It is for this reason that the Foundation does not advocate for any form of direct democracy, as there is no way (as yet) to allow for this type of exploration and assimilation of information.

Trust is harder to measure, but easy to know when we see it. The public view of politicians has descended to such a level that if a local member was to say “*Good morning*”, then a fair proportion of constituents would look up at the sky in order to check for themselves that it was. On most issues, all possible policy solutions are open not just to critique, but brutal cynicism – especially from those who wear their political identity very openly. As citizens, we look into the decision for the dark hand of the donor, the lobbyist, the populist position which the decision maker doesn’t believe in but does so for electoral advantage. At newDemocracy we suggest that there are a great many decisions which would be more trusted if taken by everyday people, even if the exact same decision was taken by a Premier, a Minister, a Mayor or an expert group, because the latter was probably commissioned by someone we elected. The electoral imperative has become our barrier to trust.

The three principles explored are better executed through the use of a jury. The use of random selection with a rough match to the Census profile of the community (technically a stratified random selection) delivers us a more representative match to the everyday people in the community. We see diversity by age, gender, education, background, income and career. Done with large enough numbers of people (thirty or forty rather than six or eight) the nature of sampling will ensure a diverse mix of people are selected. Our view is

that this selection should be conducted by someone outside government – a research foundation, a university, the Electoral Commission or even the Sheriff's Office (which manage the jury roll).

Importantly, the only people we choose to exclude from eligibility are those in a paid political role. If people are members of political parties, activist groups or have commercial interests then these will tend to occur in the same percentage they occur in the wider community and their presence contributes to it being representative. As long as people's active or conflicting interests in the process are declared then there is no need to touch the sample.

The Citizens' Jury process must then ensure people are given time and space to deliberate. A great deal of government consultation (from local to federal) tends to have a final result not just in mind but in the form of a draft report! Our baseline for getting involved is that government must be open to all possible solutions and that no draft solution exists: if it's a hard decision then they should just take it and own up to it, but a Jury process won't work if it's an effort to 'launder' a hard decision. Jury processes that lack time are the clearest indicator that there is a draft decision that someone is trying to push through, and this remains the key reason why the Foundation has declined projects over the past year.

Neutrality and comprehensiveness of information provision and avoidance of agenda setting by organisers is difficult to achieve. Our starting point is to ask juries at the outset *"what do you need to know and who would you trust to inform you"* and respond to their wishes on that basis. Where the jury does not have the capacity to call its own expert speakers or (especially) when information is tightly controlled or 'interpreted' by a facilitator telling people what they have heard then that is a red flag of an attempt to steer a process. It is worth noting that organisers such as ourselves shouldn't make an effort to apply 'quality control' to requested expert speakers: citizens are smart enough to make their own decisions about who they trust and whether

"Our democratic bodies are most successful when citizens see "people like me" among their representatives"

they feel they are being misled. A poor speaker can be just as informative in some respects.

Moreover, a feature of every process we run is an open call for submissions. We look at the community in two ways and ensure we make space for both 'insisted voices' and 'invited voices'. Active voices who may have a history of not always productive dealings with government get the chance to make their case to everyday people and see if right is on their side and their argument stands without people being coloured by the legacy of past conflicts. Equally, bringing in invited people through random selection is the circuit breaker that lets all parties make their case, including corporate and council views. A robust deliberative process will have an open and accessible information gathering process that lets people and groups provide submissions for the jurors review, and places as much agenda control as possible (in choosing who they hear more from) in the jurors' hands.

A great deal of our time spent with elected representatives is spent on the question of the amount of authority to give everyday citizens brought together for a deliberative process. In our experience, the greater the devolution of authority the greater the response rate from a diverse mix among the community will be achieved, as more people are willing to give up their time once they see their decision is meaningful rather than 'advisory' – it's what prompts people to give up considerable time (50–100 hours) to participate.

When we assisted the Public Accounts Committee of the NSW Parliament to conduct an Energy Inquiry, it was pointed out that the Committee didn't

have the power to commission wind turbines or new power plants. We asked what power they did have, and the answer was that they could table reports to parliament, compel response by Government, and ensure the matter was debated. We simply asked for that same level of authority to be devolved to citizens (it was), and this turns out to be a far better hearing from government than most people will ever experience. Equally, the MPs valued the chance to hear from a genuine mix of people who had committed the time to inform themselves and open themselves up to new positions such that as a group they could present a consensus set of recommendations to the Parliament. They didn't come with an unachievable wish list: instead they did the hard task of making trade-offs, and in so doing what they presented was of much greater value. A range of their recommendations were acted on, advanced by the (bi-partisan) Public Accounts Committee and subsequently the Government.

For those active in their local community, I would suggest that you welcome governments undertaking jury processes for one reason. Even if you disregard all the high-minded and well-meaning sentiments for democratic reform expressed above, there is one great promise of the juries: if you feel ignored by those in elected government or among the executive staff, then the jury is the great equaliser and everyday people like you will recognise a good idea and sound logic regardless of power or position. If right is on your side, then a jury of 30 or 40 of your peers will respond to common sense without the limitations on judgment that the political process applies by its very nature. With the jury having greater pre-agreed authority than any other form of community engagement, your path to a fair hearing and action on the results is magnified by having it endorsed by a truly representative mix of citizens.

Iain Walker is the Executive Director of The newDemocracy Foundation, a non-partisan and non-issue orientated research foundation. For more information go to www.newdemocracy.com.au



SYDNEY ALLIANCE: BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY DIFFERENTLY

SYDNEY ALLIANCE BRINGS TOGETHER A WIDE SPECTRUM OF CHURCHES, UNIONS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS.

GEOFF TURNBULL EXPLORES THIS NEW FORCE IN SYDNEY'S CIVIL SOCIETY DEBATE.



Sydney Alliance publically launched its agenda for the 2015 NSW State election one year out on 26th March 2014 at Sydney Town Hall. This followed months of listening sessions conducted by Alliance member organisations and the Alliance regional groups to hear about the issues that were of concern to everyday people. In November 2013, 270 representatives had packed out Granville Boys High School to listen, discuss and judge what three areas would be on their city-wide action agenda.

In the end it was decided the Alliance would work for the next 18 months on Sydney's housing crisis, improving the transport system and expanding the reach of the Aboriginal job creation program to migrant and disengaged youth across the city. Teams undertook further in depth research into each of the issues to arrive at specific actions for each campaign to bring to the March 2014 Assembly. The "ask" from the Assembly can be found in the box at the end of the article.

An organisation that has a deliberate deliberative approach to choosing the issues on which to campaign is reasonably new to Sydney but what makes this body really have potential is the size and diversity of its membership. Sitting around the table are 49 partner organisations including large union, religious and community organisations.

Sydney Alliance brings together the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies with the Arab Council of Australia and the United Muslim Women's Association. The Baptist Union and Hope Street joins with Catholic Dioceses, schools, services and religious orders alongside the Uniting Church Synod and many of its individual parishes and agencies.

In the Union membership is Unions NSW, The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union, the National Tertiary Education Union, NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association, United Services Union, Rail Tram & Bus Union and United Voice.

A broad range of community organisations are also members including Cancer Council NSW, Youth Action, Settlement Services International, Sydney Marae Inc, Climate Action Network Australia, Dress for Success Sydney, Asian Women at Work as well as many regional, migrant, legal and community services.

Worryingly for government at all levels, the Sydney Alliance has been training US style community organisers for the last 5 years and it is setting up regional groups across Sydney to bring the grass roots of their diverse memberships together to listen, research and undertake more localised civil society actions.

One regional group has worked with Koori Job Ready, Glebe Youth Services, the CFMEU and Mirvac to get local Aboriginal youth apprenticeships at the Harold Park Housing Development. Another group used the lead up to the council elections to obtain patient drop off zones in front of medical centres in Liverpool after listening to stories about people getting parking fines dropping of sick and elderly patients.

The NSW Government has previously run up against Sydney Alliance in the Action to save Boxing Day. That story is worthwhile telling as it illustrates how the Alliance can work.

During 2012 the NSW Government undertook to business that it would relax working restrictions on Boxing Day. Shop employees were concerned that they would lose valuable family time together over the Christmas break. The Shop Distributive and Allied Employees' Association of NSW and other members of the Take the Time Coalition took the issue to the Sydney Alliance to see if churches and other Alliance members were prepared to be involved in a broad based campaign to stop the Government's plan. The Alliance agreed and began the organising legwork to analyse the issue, the decision makers and how it could be stopped.

The action culminated in a work/life balance forum aimed at encouraging the Hon Rev. Fred Nile MLC, who held the key

vote in the NSW Upper house, to publicly commit to opposing further deregulation of trading hours. I was one of 25 people undertaking Sydney Alliance's National 6 day residential community organiser training that helped run the forum at Wesley Mission's Lyceum Theatre, a place where Rev Nile felt at ease.

The room was largely occupied by retail workers there to tell Rev Nile about what Boxing Day meant to them and their families. The capturing and telling of powerful personal stories about how an issue affects everyday people is an important part of the Sydney Alliance process. Present also were a good selection of senior church people and representatives from many of the Alliance's member organisations. As part of Alliance actions representatives from member groups publically acknowledge their organisations support for the action.

The stories resonated with Rev Nile, an ex-shop assistant, who feels strongly about families spending time together. When he publically committed to not supporting the erosion of family time on Boxing Day a well-oiled audience of 200 union, church and community people, irrespective of their personal feelings about Rev. Nile's position on many other issues, rose and delivered him a standing ovation. Rev. Nile had the power to kill the legislation in the NSW upper house and on this issue he had promised Sydney Alliance his support.

In the lead up to the action the Alliance had set up a meeting between the union and the then Treasurer Mike Baird over the issue, but no change had come from that meeting. After Rev. Nile had agreed to attend the forum the Treasurer had also been invited but declined. A few minutes before the forum commenced the Sydney Alliance Organiser, who had been working for months on the action, was rung by the Treasurer and advised that the Government would withdraw the legislation for the time being. The announcement of the phone call at the end of the forum was a great cause for celebration.

This kind of action was what Sydney Alliance was set up to do. In London in 2007 a similar group, the South London Citizens, had successfully embarrassed the Tate Modern Gallery into paying

“The Sydney Alliance is about ... building community leaders inside their partner organisations ... and taking action for the common good”

its cleaners what the Greater London Authority calculated as being the London Living Wage. It is based on the long tradition of US community organising in particular on the work of the Industrial Area's Foundation (IAF) founded in 1940 by Saul Alinsky and subsequently guided by Edward Chambers.

Sydney Alliance grew out of the frustrations of Amanda Tatersall who, after years of organising in the union movement and on social issues, went looking for a better way of building successful coalitions. Her investigation documented in her PhD and book *Power in Coalition*, lead her to adopt the IAF approach to organising and to set about building the Sydney Alliance as one of IAF's 60 partner organisations around the world.

While work started to build Sydney Alliance in 2007 it was not until September 2011 that the Alliance went public with its foundation assembly. In the meantime it sold the concept of the Alliance to organisations, recruited members, provided training and then in 2010-11 held an initial listening campaign among its members to identify issues from which the Alliance's initial campaign agenda was drawn. The process strengthened organisations and in the case of some unions reportedly changed the way they worked with their members and with people outside the union movement.

It is important to understand the Sydney Alliance is about training people as much as it is about social change. They see themselves as building community leaders inside their partner organisations, strengthening relations between organisations and taking action for the common good.

Actions are about training people as much as they are about winning some achievable outcome.

Sydney Alliance has survived the first few years and is both deepening and growing its influence so people need to be aware of its existence and to look at how they might relate to it and work with it as the opportunities arise.

At an organisational level the Alliance is self-funded by its members and membership for small organisations is prohibitively expensive, although where the Alliance is working on issues with smaller organisations it encourages involvement in all but ultimate decision making activities. One of the benefits of membership is that organisation members can access free two day organiser training, so if someone is a member of one of the Alliance's member unions, churches or community groups they can access this training and bring those skills back to local groups and issues.

Similarly, if you are involved in a member organisation and are looking to become involved in action for change, then Sydney Alliance can provide you with an avenue for following up your interest, training you in different aspects of organising while working with people in your organisation or region who are also interested in bringing about change.

Where you are already working on an issue or in your local area, your issues may not be easily winnable nor get the broad popular support needed to be on the Sydney Alliance agenda city-wide or at a regional level. In that case some new tools for your local campaign might be all Sydney Alliance can offer. This can leave some change activists feeling as if they have little in common with the Alliance.

Some people react to the Sydney Alliance as having an almost American evangelical feel – which is unusual for something supported by non-evangelical churches and unions. Actions are heavily choreographed with floor teams and at the last assembly there was even a choir that brought together the religious, union and multi-cultural community music traditions.

The American model being picked up from IAF brings with it some cultural

aspects and is yet to adjust to Australian ways. By its nature though it is training people in new ways and inevitably that comes with a formulaic approach often seen in new converts to any world view – political or religious. Over time this should mellow.

Disappointment has been expressed by some who have met with research team members about the lack of understanding of the complexities around particular issues, and the disconnect between the advice given and the final recommendations for action. Research team members are not necessarily experts – their role is to meet the experts to explore evidence for policy development and collaboration with others working in the area. However there appears to be a gap between an evidence based policy approach and the collaborative decision making of the Sydney Alliance as they seek solutions that are acceptable to the broad Alliance membership.

Sydney Alliance is learning as it goes, it is already changing the way some large organisations go about their civil



“Sydney Alliance is learning as it goes, it is already changing the way some large organisations go about their civil society interactions”



society interactions and it is making widely available to those under its umbrella tools and methodologies used successfully for many decades in the US by the civil rights movement, religious and labour organisations.

This is a very different approach to the issue based approach that many of us have experienced. It is as much about building the people and organisational capacity as it is about the ability to undertake a winnable action within a limited time frame.

Local community groups and activists need to be aware of the Sydney Alliance, how it operates and how it may, or may not, mesh with their local activities and campaigns. Sydney Alliance looks like it will be part of the social change landscape into the future.

Geoff Turnbull has undertaken 2 and 6 day training with Sydney Alliance as a member of the Uniting Church and has participated in two inner city Alliance regions and various Alliance activities. He is also involved in local community groups and campaigns unrelated to the Alliance.

SYDNEY ALLIANCE AGENDA FOR THE COMMON GOOD MARCH 2014- JUNE 2015

JOBS FOR THE COMMON GOOD (WORKINGSTART!)

Supporting disadvantaged communities with good jobs that change lives.

We'll start with a specific ask in Glebe, that once evaluated, can be taken to all parts of the city.

We'll ask the Minister for Citizenship and Communities, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to:

- Fund a pilot of an Employment Support Worker to work in Glebe and surrounding suburbs for three years at a cost of approximately \$150,000 per year;
- Contribute funding to an evaluation of this innovation at a one off cost of approximately \$50,000; and
- Facilitate a cross portfolio expansion of this innovation so the role can be expanded to other communities.

TRANSPORT FOR THE COMMON GOOD

The following three issues are time-specific, concrete, affordable and achievable over the next term of government. Each is about better using the infrastructure we already have.

We'll ask the Premier to:

- Remove the extra station access fees charged to people who use the airport train stations, to make public transport to the airport affordable for all.

We'll ask the Minister for Transport to:

- Commission a public feasibility study into the construction of a park-and-ride interchange on the Olympic Park line, to enable an express train service from the end of the M4 to

Central Station.

- Answer why the NSW Government is behind in their program to upgrade train stations across the City, and what they are doing to get things back on track ... starting with installing a lift at Arncliffe Station.
- Make public the outcome of the evaluation process for access upgrades and to ensure that all train stations are fully accessible by 2020.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR THE COMMON GOOD

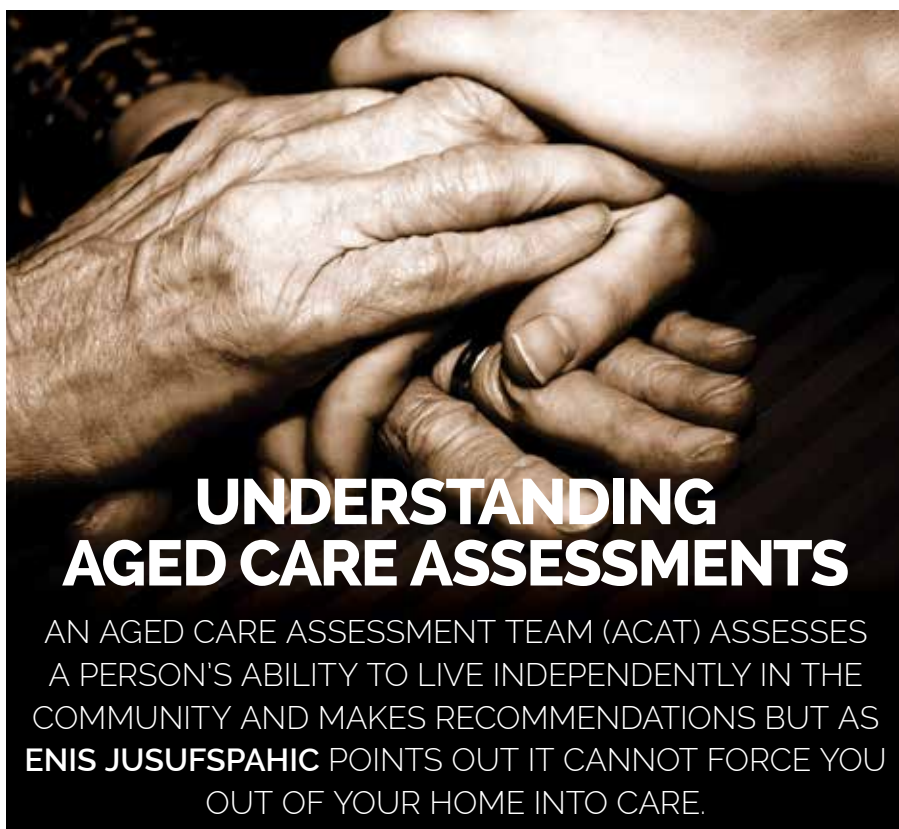
We'll ask the Minister for Community Services and Women to:

- Commit to a formal plan, with numerical targets, to increase the supply of social and affordable housing in NSW over the next four years
- Establish a quality, permanent, affordable shared equity scheme.

We'll ask the Premier to:

- Remove stamp duty on new and existing dwellings for first homebuyers
- Or replace up front stamp duty with a no interest delayed payment scheme and
- Re-extend the First Home Owners Grant to purchases of pre-existing dwellings

Further details about Sydney Alliances Agenda for the Common Good for the election year can be found on their website at www.sydneyalliance.org.au.



UNDERSTANDING AGED CARE ASSESSMENTS

AN AGED CARE ASSESSMENT TEAM (ACAT) ASSESSES A PERSON'S ABILITY TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY IN THE COMMUNITY AND MAKES RECOMMENDATIONS BUT AS ENIS JUSUFSPAHC POINTS OUT IT CANNOT FORCE YOU OUT OF YOUR HOME INTO CARE.

The purpose of the ACAT assessment is to provide an informed opinion of the care needs of a person aged 65 years of age and older. The ACAT is able to assess a younger person with disability if they have an age related condition and all other local support services have been exhausted. The purpose of the assessment is to give a person options about how to best address their care needs through assistance at home to remain living independently or residential aged care.

The Australian Government provides funds to the State and Territory Governments, specifically to operate and manage the Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACAT). Each area has its own local team – there are 58 across NSW. You can find phone numbers for your local ACAT team on the www.myagedcare.gov.au website or by calling My Aged Care on 1800 200 422.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

In order to access aged care packages and residential care, the Commonwealth requires that the person undergoes an ACAT assessment of their ability to live independently in the community. The ACAT asks the person a series of standardised questions which look at the individual's housing situation, whether they are supported by friends and family, their mobility and health as well as the person's ability to carry out activities of daily living such as housework, shopping

and showering. You have a right to have a person present during your assessment to assist you with answering questions.

ACAT'S POWERS

Following the assessment process the ACAT convenes a panel of aged care experts who make a recommendation about the person's care needs. It is purely a recommendation and it does not carry any legal weight. You have a right to ask for another assessment. The ACAT does not have power to compel a person to take up an aged care package or to enter residential aged care. The NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) has powers to appoint a substitute decision maker for a person in case of incapacity to make decisions for themselves. In this case the substitute decision maker may or may not decide to agree with the ACAT recommendation having taken into account what is in the best interest of the person.

MILLERS POINT CONCERNS

With the large number of long term aged residents in Millers Point, the Government decision to sell the public housing properties may put residents under pressure for ACAT assessments to push them into care rather than being rehoused in public housing in the local area. The decision to sell people's homes and remove the neighbours they rely upon, changes their housing situation and impacts on their support networks with friends, neighbours and familiar services. It hence changes the way an assessment may be made. Aged tenants and community and legal services need to be aware of the ACAT processes if they are to prevent people being prematurely pushed into care by the decision to sell.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND OLDER PEOPLE

There are certain human rights and freedoms that are particularly relevant to older people, including rights to:

- “an adequate standard of living including access to adequate food, clothing and housing
- the highest possible standard of physical and mental health
- work and fair working conditions
- be safe and free from violence
- be free from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment
- privacy
- family life.”

AGE DISCRIMINATION

Age discrimination is against the law in NSW “when you rent accommodation such as houses, units, hotel or motel rooms and commercial premises”. The law makes it clear that an older person has the right to rent accommodation no matter their age and that the landlord can't refuse accommodation just because they believe that the person is too old to look after the property.

If you are being pressured into accepting care against your will you can make a complaint to the Anti-discrimination Board of NSW by calling (02) 9268 5544.

You can also make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission under the Age Discrimination Act 2004 if you feel you have been discriminated against because of your age when accessing accommodation, employment, education, goods and services or in the administration of Commonwealth government laws and programs by calling 1300 656 419.

Enis Jusufspahic is the Home and Community Care (HACC) Development Officer (Eastern Sydney).

References and further reading can be found in the online version of this article



BOARDING HOUSE REGULATION WHO IS WINNING?

SALLY CHALMERS AND PAUL ADABIE HAVE BEEN WORKING ON A BOARDING HOUSE PROJECT WITH BOTH BOARDERS AND OPERATORS DURING THE INTRODUCTION OF THE BOARDING HOUSE ACT IN NSW. WITH **DIGBY HUGHES** THEY EXPLAIN THE CHANGES AND EXPLORE SOME OF THE CONSEQUENCES.

Talk to anyone about the cost of living in Sydney and they will have their own story about how much rent they are paying, or the journey they took in finding a place that suited their needs and income. Renting an affordable place to call home is tough, particularly so for those on a limited or low income. The bad news is, it's getting worse not better!

Because of the lack of affordable housing, boarding houses are becoming an increasing realistic option for those whom affordability is a priority. This is a form of accommodation where the rent is collected for the use of a single room, but other facilities such as kitchens, bathrooms and toilets are often shared. Boarding houses differ from share house arrangements in that residents are not generally known to each other and each individual occupant has their own agreement with the operator.

Boarding House operators or proprietors are as varied as the individuals living in them: they could be real estate agents, private companies, small businesses or individuals. Some non-government organisations or community housing providers may also manage boarding houses. Operators may live on site or they may have a caretaker

or manager to collect rent and manage jobs such as property maintenance or the cleaning of communal areas.

Historically, boarding houses catered for people coming to the city for a short visit or contract work. They needed a temporary place to stay that was comfortable, affordable and near public transport. Accommodation fees would often include meals and laundry and there would generally be someone (usually female) who managed the day to day operations of the boarding house. These premises were mostly privately owned large houses, generally well managed and clean, with the majority of boarders working full time. Running a boarding house (or rooming house) was a good profitable business.

Today boarding houses cater for different needs and play an increasingly important role in the affordable housing market. As an easily accessible option for people, boarding houses are able to provide immediate accommodation and in many cases do prevent homelessness. They can be a reasonable form of accommodation which does not require a long term lease or a large deposit, compared to private rental. For some people this makes them an attractive option.

Due to the easy accessibility of boarding houses, it is often people on a low income or those with a limited or a poor tenancy history that seek this form of accommodation. Other residents might be those needing a temporary form of accommodation, such as those who have experienced domestic violence, family breakdown, or those just needing somewhere to stay between more permanent living arrangements.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics boarding house occupants are recognised as homeless. Living arrangements can be tenuous and changeable, due to challenges such as lack of regulation and oversight, and residents with low income, mental health issues and/or addictions.

In October 2012, the NSW Boarding House Bill passed the NSW Parliament. In his speech introducing the bill into the Parliament the Minister Andrew Constance said: "The key purpose of the Boarding Houses Bill 2012 is to protect the rights of residents living in all boarding houses through the introduction of major reform to the industry and to promote the sustainability of the boarding house industry in New South Wales. Boarding houses play an integral role in the provision of low-cost, affordable housing, particularly for people who may otherwise struggle to afford private accommodation. Although there is no clear data available on the exact number of boarding houses in New South Wales, it is estimated that there are around 750 boarding houses operating, the vast majority of which are located in the Sydney metropolitan region".

Since July 2013, it's a legal requirement for boarding house operators to register their property with the Department of Fair Trading, and since October 2013, they



are required to provide their occupants with 'Occupancy Agreements', signed by both parties prior to the occupant moving into the house. These agreements need to comply with certain occupancy principles, which should ensure that standards are reasonable for those moving in. As of May 2014 665 boarding Houses have registered in NSW.

Financial Incentives were supposed to be a large part of the reforms to address the fears that operators would just shut down their boarding houses and that there would be fewer properties available. Because of a lack of data it is impossible to accurately ascertain whether many boarding houses have shut because of the new legislation and regulation. Anecdotal evidence from real estate agents would suggest that there has been no great rush to sell. 1

For boarding house operators the two biggest changes have been:

1. The requirement to register by paying a fee of around \$100 and completing a relatively simple registration form. This is not an onerous requirement in itself but the biggest consequence has been a number of boarding house properties have come to light that did not have the correct DA Approval in the first place. Depending on the attitude of the local council some of these have been closed down due to planning regulations with which they were never compliant with anyway – regardless of the new Act.
2. The other significant change for them – is that they are required to offer some basic 'rights' to their occupants. These include the right to a written occupancy agreement, a maximum bond payment and minimum notice of rent increases. None of these changes are onerous – and all are long overdue.

“Living arrangements can be tenuous and changeable, due to challenges such as ... the low income of occupants, mental health issues and/or addictions”

The Act was introduced with the view to improving the conditions and security for residents and ensuring that operators comply with standards. Newtown Neighbourhood Centre's contacts with Boarding House operators however show that operators are finding it difficult to provide the accommodation under these new arrangements, given the levels of compliance and regulation.

Many operators feel undermined by the new laws. Among their concerns are:

1. Incentives were promised with the Act but have not been delivered – in fact the opposite is happening, with the 'registration' and occupancy agreements implemented, tax and costs of operation are rising making it impossible to run viable business.
2. Compared to those who do not register and continue to operate under the radar, the legitimate operators cost structure of public liability insurances, stamp duties and land tax means legitimate operators are at a commercial disadvantage. One operator proposed that legitimate operators who do pay their insurances up correctly/on time be offered some refund for 'doing the right thing' –

an incentive to play by the rules.

3. Under Building Code of Australia boarding houses are classified into 2 types: smaller style houses accommodating around 12 people are classed as 1B; multi-story blocks which are C3. The latter must have back to base fire alarms, which cost \$1250 for each call out, whether accidental or not. Some proprietors have complained that this is an ongoing cost to doing business.

4. Operators are frustrated that they are becoming more like social workers, dealing with mental health issues, addictions and damage to property. If an operator takes a resident to the tribunal for not paying rental arrears, they lose more rent money in the process while waiting for hearings.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre has been working with both proprietors and residents to alleviate many of these issues. We believe that by utilising our service proprietors are able to save both time and money.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre's Boarding House Outreach Project supports residents and operators of Boarding Houses in Sydney's Inner West. It provides casework support for residents needing to maintain their tenancies, and delivers regular information forums for operators, where they are updated about the reform and where they are able to voice their concerns.

For more information about supporting residents or operators of boarding houses in City of Sydney and the Inner West, please visit www.newtowncentre.org or call the centre directly on 9564 7333.

Sally Chalmers and Paul Adabie work on the Boarding House Project at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre. Digby Hughes is the Policy and Research Officer with Homeless NSW.



INNER SYDNEY REGIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The ISRCSD is a non-for-profit organisation providing information, advocacy and community development to local communities and community agencies in the local government areas of Botany Bay, City of Sydney, Leichhardt, Randwick, Waverley and Woollahra Local Government Areas.

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"Save the Rocks"

Millers Point resident groups and their supporters fighting for their community and buildings are walking a well trod path

March
1978

an unfinished saga :
an unpublished letter :

save
the
rocks

In reference to Trust Protection
For The Rocks, S.M.H. 10.3.78:

The National Trust are to be congratulated for speaking out at last.

The Rocks Residents Group, (RRG), formed in 1970, have been going it alone, so to speak. Since our formation, we have been saying many of the same things that appeared in the article. Unfortunately, we do not enjoy the same respectability as the National Trust.

For our efforts to 'Save The Rocks' (our motto), members of the group have been given such titles as communists, ratbags, people with vested interests, low rent payers trying to preserve the status quo, trouble-makers and many other paranoid statements.

In 1973 we were literally at war with the Askin government and the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (SCRA), with green bans, confrontation, arrests ... THE LOT. Resident with unblemished characters are now convicted persons because they dared fight to save their heritage and try to save their community which is their heritage.

"Save the Rocks" was the motto of the Rocks Residents Group in the 1970's. At that time the Government plan was to pull it down and build their city renewal equivalent of today's Barangaroo. Resident action and union green bans saved the heritage buildings and much of the community we see today. You can read a little of struggle in the letter below from this first issue of Inner Voice in March 1978.

An unfinished saga seemed an apt description when the Government recently moved to evict public housing tenants who

The National Trust has our respect for classifying the many historical buildings in the area ... residents do live in some of them, but the sad part is that SCRA was formed in 1968, and in ten years a lot of damage can be done.

In 1968 the residential population was approximately 200 families, in 1978 less than 70 families, brought about by such processes as eviction, natural deaths and 'encouragement' - "You would be so much better off, dear, in a Housing Commission unit" - and then their homes are turned into offices, shops and bistros.

The Residents Group have also protested to the present state government in respect to the demolition of the George Street Edwardian Era shops and hotels. The state cabinet set up a three man inquiry and the cabinet made the decision to demolish these buildings ... without any consultation or participation of the local community. We have lodged further protests to the Premier and his ministers, Mr. Jensen and Mr. Landa. We have requested that no further decisions of this type be made without public scrutiny.

No replies yet.

The Director of SCRA, Mr. Magee, was quoted as saying that SCRA had consulted with the National Trust and that SCRA had no plans for the buildings listed - it should be clearly spelled out SCRA have NO PLANS for anything except to demolish.

For the past 6-9 months that is all the RRG have been told, "We intend to demolish"; we have lodged our protests to the Premier and his ministers, to protest to SCRA is like belting your head against a brick wall ... "We are the experts, dear, you're wrong."

Since its formation SCRA have borrowed \$44 million, more than enough to buy back the few freehold properties and rehabilitate the whole East and West Rocks Area - this

make up the bulk of the residents in Millers Point and the National Trust and resident groups protested that the buildings and the community were both part of the state heritage listing.

One of the people who worked on the People's Plan for the Rocks said it should be relaunched for the new struggle. In summary it said leave it alone; restore, retain and rebuild the vacant sites. Pretty much what resident groups in Millers Point and their supporters are still arguing today about the community and the buildings.



is Public Property; the \$44 million is Public Money - but the Public have NO SAY.

So, Royal Naval House is to be saved. Where are the sailors who stayed at John... Where are the police from the vacant George Street station? We could use them to control the pub crawlers on Friday and Saturday nights. And what about the Sydney Sailors Home, founded in 1863? SCRA, by law, resumed the building for \$1.3 million. The 40 residents of the Home have received their marching orders from the Sydney Sailors Home Council - although some are old and in ill health - but I suppose they could be carried out.

What are SCRA plans for the site? To demolish? What are the Sydney Sailors Home Council plans for the 1.3 million dollars? Who knows?

In 1972 the Residents Group, with voluntary academic assistance, prepared a 'People's Plan' for The Rocks. It simply said: leave it alone; restore, retain and rebuild on the vacant sites.

The state government should call a Public Inquiry - not a three man inquiry that makes secret decisions to demolish history.

I was always taught 'It's never too late'.

Nita McCrae
Chairperson
RRG

INNER VOICE - March 1978



Cover images front and back - Millers Point residents and supporters gather for the first community meeting on 22 March

A publication of:



**INNER SYDNEY
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FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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We are always looking for new voices - opinion pieces, investigative articles, profiles of community organisations, interviews and more. If you have an idea or suggestion then contact us and discuss it with one of the editors.

Contributions are welcome from individuals, community organisations and others about the inner Sydney, eastern suburbs or broader political and social landscapes.

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