



**NORTH CARLTON RAILWAY NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE**

# **STRATEGIC PLAN 2017-21**



**Committee of Management**

**July 2017**



*North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners of the country in our neighbourhood. Today they remain the custodians of the cultural heritage of this land. North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House also acknowledges that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have lived, worked and contributed to the cultural heritage of our neighbourhood.*

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## **WHY WE USE A STRATEGIC PLAN**

This Strategic Plan gives direction for the work at Railway House for the period 2017-21.

It sets out the key objectives and strategies as a focus for all of us involved at Railway House. The Plan is a guide, not a tight set of rules, and should be modified when a review process so indicates. We will monitor our activities by qualitative and quantitative measures to assess how effective we have been in the actions we have taken to achieve the objectives of this Plan.

The Strategic Plan has been developed by the Committee of Management with thoughtful input from staff, tutors and group leaders, volunteers and people who join in our activities.

Each year, our Manager will seek endorsement from the Committee of Management of an implementation plan of priority strategies and report on progress to the Committee. The Committee of Management will also develop an action plan for the Committee's own work each year.

## **IN BRIEF**

The heritage North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House is a community hub, providing a wide range of well-being and social activities, learning programs and information/referral services. Activities aim to meet the interests and needs expressed by our local community in a welcoming, supportive environment. People do not need to be members to participate in activities or to hire Railway House as a venue.

Railway House is a vibrant Neighbourhood House with a wide range of people who support, learn and celebrate together.

Railway House endeavours to strengthen community through its programs and activities. Our actions connect people across our diverse neighbourhood, contributing to building a fair and just society.

We will achieve this by:

- Strengthening neighbourhood connections
- Building inclusive and resilient communities
- Supporting lifelong learning and well-being
- Strengthening organizational capacity
- Collaborating with other organisations

Railway House is a safe, friendly and welcoming place where the values and principles set out below are followed.

## **OUR VALUES AND PRINCIPLES**

In our work at Railway House, staff, tutors, group leaders and volunteers aim for:

<i>Trust</i>	where people feel safe to be themselves
<i>Honesty</i>	in behavior
<i>Respect</i>	for themselves, each other, their natural environment and Railway House property
<i>Fairness</i>	in distribution of Railway House resources and in the exercise of power
<i>Inclusion</i>	where participation is valued and embraced, regardless of background or ability
<i>High standards</i>	in all our work

In carrying out our work, staff, tutors, group leaders and volunteers aim to:

- ensure that activities are in line with the Strategic Plan and policies of Railway House
- be adaptable, flexible and creative in response to changing circumstances
- strive for continual improvement, through monitoring, assessment and change
- collaborate with other organizations for mutual benefit

## **KEY OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES**

### ***Objective 1. Strengthen neighbourhood connections***

Strengthen opportunities for people across the neighbourhood to participate in activities at Railway House and to develop friendships.

#### *Leading Strategies*

1. Provide a welcoming venue and low cost activities to bring people together for companionship and mutual support
2. Reach out to a wider cross-section of people
3. Develop mechanisms to enable all people, regardless of their personal circumstances, to access Railway House activities
4. Expand volunteer involvement

#### *Performance Indicators for Objective 1*

1. Number of people participating in activities according to demographic characteristics
2. Levels of participant satisfaction with activity
3. Benefit of participation in Railway House activity
4. Evidence of activities targeted to wider range of groups
5. Change in relationships between people who participate in Railway House activities
6. Number of volunteers and type of volunteer work

## ***Objective 2. Build a resilient neighbourhood***

Encourage and support people to act for themselves and their neighbourhood to improve their own well-being as well as to pursue matters important to their neighbourhood

### *Leading Strategies for Objective 2*

1. Encourage people to recognize and draw on their own strengths, knowledge, abilities, skills and experience
2. Through an emphasis on community development approaches, encourage people to implement strategies to help themselves and others
3. Provide relevant information and referral services and systems to support people in their endeavours
4. Provide support to people advocating for change consistent with Railway House Objectives

### *Performance Indicators for Objective 2*

1. Levels of self-awareness and confidence
2. Actions taken by individuals to change their lives attributable to their engagement with Railway House
3. Develop appropriate data collection systems
4. Advocacy actions supported

## ***Objective 3. Actively support lifelong learning and well-being***

Provide activities aimed at educational and skills development and improved well-being for people across the neighbourhood

### *Leading Strategies for Objective 3*

1. Identify and provide activities for learning, particularly for people with the least resources in the neighbourhood
2. Provide targeted activities to enhance well-being of people across the neighbourhood

### *Performance Indicators for Objective 3*

1. Level of satisfaction with quality of activity
2. Degree of change in skill, mobility, well-being

### ***Objective 4. Strengthen organisational capacity and ensure long-term viability***

Enhance the capacity of Railway House to plan, manage and operate effectively for the best long-term interests of people across the neighbourhood.

### *Leading Strategies for Objective 4*

1. Ensure members of the Committee of Management and staff are familiar with the Strategic Plan and that their work is guided by the Strategic Plan
2. Enhance the capacities and skills of the Committee of Management and staff
3. Establish processes for effective liaison between tutors and Manager
4. Establish policy and process for recruitment and retention of volunteers
5. Establish policy and process for recruitment of staff
6. Establish processes for ongoing monitoring and review and ensure change accordingly
7. Establish processes for two-way feedback between Committee of Management and Manager; and, Manager with tutors, volunteers and participants in activities
8. Establish processes to ensure the safety of children who attend Railway House
9. Target promotion of Railway House activities and programs
10. Increase income from earnings and other sources to secure greater financial independence
11. Develop proposals for changes to the current Rules of Association to enable the registration of a Constitution appropriate to North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House- changes to cover membership, nomination of office-bearers, term of office for office-bearers, composition and size of Committee of Management

#### *Performance Indicators for Objective 4*

1. Governance and Management standards and evidence as in *Neighbourhood Good Practice Guide 2012*
2. Feedback from participants
3. Policy and process in place for recruitment and retention of volunteers
4. Monitoring and review systems implemented
5. Promotion targeted to wider number of groups
6. Amount of income according to type of income
7. Total hours of programmed activity each term
8. Proposals to change Rules of Association developed
9. New Constitution agreed at AGM in 2019

#### ***Objective 5: Strengthen connections and collaboration with other organisations***

Strengthen connections with government, non-government and commercial organisations to share ideas, experiences and resources and to develop joint activities

#### *Leading Strategies for Objective 5*

1. Liaise with funding organisations and keep up-to-date with strategic priorities of key organisations
2. Liaise and collaborate with other organisations for inspiration, to share ideas, experiences and resources and to develop joint activities

#### *Performance Indicators for Objective 5*

1. Results of liaison with funding organisations and adaptation to Railway House activities, governance, management and operations
2. Results of liaison and collaboration with other organisations

## **RESULTS WE SEEK**

### ***For people who share Railway House***

1. Interaction and cooperation in the neighbourhood and a strong sense of neighbourhood identity
2. Greater confidence to act for themselves
3. Increased involvement in lifelong learning and well-being pursuits

### ***For the organization of Railway House***

1. Improved planning and operations consistent with long-term viability and legal requirements
2. Stronger connections and increased collaboration with other organisations

## **FINANCIAL OVERVIEW 2004-05 TO 2015-16**

From 2004-5 to 2015-16, income almost doubled from just under \$116 000 to \$224 000. Reserves were held at a comfortable level between \$36 000 and \$85 000 over the same period. Railway House showed a small budget surplus in 2014-15, a good surplus in 2015-16 and is likely to make another small to good surplus in 2016-17.

In 2010, significant incremental wage increases commenced and will continue until the end of 2020. Payroll costs are expected to increase at a much faster rate than both our major grants and inflation. The additional income received over the three years to 2015-16 will help to offset some of the increased payroll costs. Managing this increase in payroll costs is a major financial challenge if staffing is to be maintained at current levels. Additional income will need to be generated.

## Financial Statements 2004-05 to 2015-16

<u>Financial</u>	<u>2004-</u>	<u>2005-</u>	<u>2006-</u>	<u>2007-</u>	<u>2008-</u>	<u>2009-</u>	<u>2010-</u>	<u>2011-</u>	<u>2012-</u>	<u>2013-</u>	<u>2014-</u>	<u>2015-</u>
<u>Year:</u>	<u>05</u>	<u>06</u>	<u>07</u>	<u>08</u>	<u>09</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>
<b><u>Income &amp; Expenditure Statements</u></b>												
Income:	115700	118152	134654	136747	135200	143950	160848	188488	174784	186561	217903	224086
Expenditure:	100963	110334	122927	126060	137138	146500	164182	187436	200024	202652	217794	215898
<b><u>Net</u></b>												
<b><u>Profit/Loss:</u></b>	<b>14737</b>	<b>7818</b>	<b>11727</b>	<b>10687</b>	<b>-1938</b>	<b>-2550</b>	<b>-3334</b>	<b>1052</b>	<b>-25240</b>	<b>-16091</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>8188</b>
<b><u>Balance Sheets:</u></b>												
Assets:	54908	60711	75062	89430	91172	90822	89517	92196	74944	72707	98506	104900
Liabilities:	920	-1095	1529	5210	8890	11090	13119	14746	22734	36588	62278	60484
<b><u>Equity:</u></b>	<b>53988</b>	<b>61806</b>	<b>73533</b>	<b>84220</b>	<b>82282</b>	<b>79732</b>	<b>76398</b>	<b>77450</b>	<b>52210</b>	<b>36119</b>	<b>36228</b>	<b>44416</b>

## **FACING OUR CHALLENGES**

Implementing many of the strategies charted in the 2017-21 Strategic Plan will have particular challenges, as will be deciding on annual priorities among them. Identifying particular groups for targeted outreach raises many issues while reaching an appropriate balancing of resources between community development approaches and more direct activities is never easy. Resource allocation for short-term results must be balanced against long-term results.

## **CONTEXT**

### ***A. Histories***

#### ***Where We Come From***

The majority of residents in our neighbourhood are descended from immigrants from the British Isles. However, many recent immigrants living close to Railway House come from other places, as do some first and second generation descendants. There are a few other residents not far from Railway House who can trace their ancestry to the Wurundjeri who lived here prior to the first European settlement in 1835.

In times past, the Wurundjeri lived lightly on the land extending around Merri Creek and its junction with the Yarra River, land that was integral to daily life for thousands of years. The earth and its features provided life and gave meaning to life. Caring for country enabled survival. In our area today, some modified practices of the Wurundjeri in caring for country are being adopted.

From the late 1830's to early 1840's, British colonization shattered the lives of the Wurundjeri. The total population of Wurundjeri fell dramatically, natural habitat was destroyed and from 1869, traditional lands in North Carlton and Princes Hill were parceled up for urbanites, mainly of British descent.

Our area is still the first home for many among the waves of peoples arriving from other continents. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> C, the glint of gold attracted men and women from across the globe - while later migrants, still predominantly from Britain, also came from northern and southern Europe, Central Europe, the lands around the eastern end of the Mediterranean, south-east Asia, Africa, China and India. Some were students who returned to their homelands after a short-term sojourn in our neighbourhood. New residents arrive with different cultural practices, languages, skin colours and beliefs. Their histories are many and tell of leaving poverty, warfare, religious and political repression and persecution; and also of hope, courage and enterprise by men, women and children seeking a better life in the great south land.

Settling in the area around what is now Railway House, immigrant neighbours discover new ways, acquire new learnings and skills as they make their homes, find work, start jobs and businesses and send their children to schools. Ideas and practices flow in many directions among new and long-time residents and provide an important context for planning at Railway House.

### ***Railway House and the Bocce Area***

The North Carlton Railway Station was a stop along the Inner Circle Railway line running close to three of the Victorian colony's football grounds. Built in 1888, passenger demand for the line fell quickly when tramlines began operating, radiating from the centre of Melbourne. Passenger traffic dwindled until ceasing in 1948. A weekly coal train supplying the Fitzroy gasworks was the sole freight train for many years until the line finally closed in 1981.

A proposal to build a warehouse near the Station was put to the Railways Department and agreed. Works began in 1970. Residents and other organisations did not agree. People resisted. Works ceased. When the railway line closed, the land was turned over to public parklands and the Railway Station preserved being reincarnated as the North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House in 1984.

Bocce courts, adjacent pavilion and barbecues were later additions with neighbourhood immigrants from a small village in Italy along with their descendants making major contributions to these. Joyous gatherings continued around the bocce club until its closure due to the ageing of its supporters. Weekly lessons in Italian language continue in the pavilion with Railway House now having overall management of the pavilion.

## ***B. Railway House Activities & Finances 2012-2016***

### ***Activities***

Around 15-20 activities and programs were on offer each term during the period 2012-16. The total number of people formally enrolled in programs was over 200 but many

people who were not formally enrolled attended functions and activities run by Railway House throughout the period.

Long running programs were knitting, a homework club, art, choirs, and soccer for primary school children, health and fitness classes, a weekly community lunch and a monthly bus trip, reflecting their continuing interest to the community.

Classes in various IT skills offered throughout the period had varying degrees of success with iPad and computers for beginners being very popular.

English language classes for people from non-English speaking backgrounds aimed at improving communication skills, attracted small numbers and was eventually discontinued in mid-2015. A playgroup and support group for families from non-English speaking and disadvantaged backgrounds commenced in 2015 and was well-attended.

A number of self-directed activities operated. At well-attended monthly sessions over seven years, informed speakers opened windows to reconciliation and respect between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people. Reducing carbon emissions was the focus of a self-help group meeting monthly from late 2015 while a group with an interest in gardening began in 2016. Friends of Public Housing, which advocate for the safeguard of public housing, commenced in 2014 as an organization auspiced by Railway House.

Around two thirds of classes were free or low cost. Other classes were charged at up to \$15 a session. Costs to participants took into account operating costs, payments to tutors and activity leaders, the socio-economic situation of participants, and the benefit of the class to the neighbourhood.

Most activities provided in 2016 ran weekly, with 3 or 4 running fortnightly or monthly. Several operated independently under hire arrangements with Railway House, extending the range of activities available to people in the neighbourhood.

During the period, Railway House also organized one-off events including Harmony Day festivals in the grounds of the adjacent public housing estate, end-of-year parties, knitting

and art exhibitions, an Iftar dinner, trivia night fundraisers and Ride-To-Work breakfasts. Railway House participants also joined other local agencies for some events.

### ***Finances***

Operating costs of the organisation were well contained. Annual budgeting of income items were conservative and items of expenditure were close to actual end-of-year expenditures. Payroll costs were the largest item of expenditure, running at 72 to 84 per cent of the total.

After some years of only being able to provide limited support to the neighbourhood, a strategic decision was taken in 2012 to increase the number of permanent staff to enable a more effective service to be developed. Staffing equivalent to 35 hours per week was doubled. To achieve the increased income needed, the financial officer worked fewer hours, budget losses were incurred during 2012-13 and 2013-14 and reserves were run down during 2013-14 and 2014-15. This provided the platform for the extra income that flowed in 2014-15, 2015-2016 and 2016-17.

As a precaution against the risk of reduced funding from governments in future years, new sources of funding to build reserves and increase income were sought from 2013-14. Room hire to outside groups showed good growth, with increased utilisation and charges. Significant grant funds from non-government agencies were obtained in recent years and fundraising also added to the income mix. Provision for long service leave was introduced in 2016-17.

### ***C. Review of the Strategic Plan, 2012-14***

Before embarking on development of the Strategic Plan for 2017-21, the implementation and impact of the 2012-14 Strategic Plan was assessed by a sub-committee of the Committee of Management. The sub-committee examined annual reports and program brochures as well as the financial history of Railway House. The Business Plan was examined in detail by the sub-committee which commented on planned initiatives, assessed the impact of those implemented and made suggestions for future directions.

Findings were informative although limited by the collective knowledge of the sub-committee.

Funding for an independent review of the 2012-14 Strategic Plan by an experienced evaluator was only approved in December 2016. Lengthy telephone interviews with three staff, two focus group interviews of participants in Railway House activities, one focus group interview with tutors and group leaders plus a short mail survey of four organizations which had long-term hire of Railway House rooms were conducted by Diane McDonald. The highly regarded internal report of this independent review provided to the Committee of Management, offered skilled insights as well as an assessment of results of actions taken to meet strategic objectives. This report, along with the Review Commentary on the Business Plan, will be valuable resources during 2017-21.

Much was achieved in the years 2012-2016. Importantly, Railway House held tightly to its guiding principles and commitments. The number of permanent staff in terms equivalent to 35 hours per week, doubled from 2012. Income increased by 28 per cent in the four years to 2015-16. People who came to Railway House appreciated it as a comfortable and warm place where people felt welcomed, met others and expanded their interests and learning while being exposed to people of different interests and backgrounds. It was a place where they found company, became involved in their community or pursued new interests or otherwise took steps to improve their well-being.

It was also a place that helped in managing life with young children, or life alone or life in transition to retirement. Railway House was also a refuge, a place to feel safe. Sometimes, engagement led to advocacy by people on their own behalf or on behalf of their community. For many, Railway House was a place to give to others.

While there were good results against most of the five key objectives, outcomes strengthening organizational capacity and sustainability were limited. Some leading strategies in the Strategic Plan were unrealistic, too ambitious or of low priority. The Review also found that the Committee of Management, staff, tutors and group leaders gave little attention to the Strategic Plan. Members of the Committee of Management were

slowly learning their responsibilities. Few personal development opportunities were accessed by staff. Opportunities for volunteers along with induction programs for them are still to be developed. Engaging with people beyond similar demographic features was a continuing challenge noted by staff and tutors. Feedback, data collection, monitoring, evaluation and adjustment was not a feature at Railway House which meant strong results could not be claimed nor was powerful information to show progress available.

## ***D. Who Resides in our Neighbourhood?***

### ***A demographic profile***

The number of people resident in Princes Hill and North Carlton has changed little in recent decades and the forecast is for little change in the two decades ahead. The estimated resident population was virtually the same in 2017 as it was in 2006 being 8795 in 2017. The forecast population for 2036 is 9006. This is a very rare preservation of population size. In surrounding suburbs, and for Melbourne as a whole, populations have increased around 20 to 25 percent over the past decade or so.

<b><i>From the ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2011: Princes Hill &amp; North Carlton</i></b>	
<i>Total resident population</i>	8274
Less than 5 years of age	386
Less than 17 years of age	1064
Men over 60 years of age	610
Women over 60 years of age	729
<i>Total households</i>	3505
<i>Total families</i>	1870
<i>Total private, unoccupied dwellings</i>	380
<i>People living alone</i>	953
<i>One parent families with at least one child less than 15 years,</i>	
<i>with or without dependent students</i>	142
<i>People severely or profoundly disabled</i>	190
<i>Education- percent of total population over 15 years who finished school:</i>	

University degree	56%
Completed year 12	80%
No schooling beyond year 8	3%
<i>Born overseas</i> - percent of total population	25%
and, from a non-english speaking background	15%
<i>Language</i> - percent of total population	
People who were monolingual	77%
People who spoke a language other than english at home	18%
and, did not speak English well	2.5%
<i>Mode of travel to work</i> for population over 15 years, August 2011:	
Car	37%
Public transport	27%
Bike	15%
Walk	11%
Work at home	6%
<i>Unpaid work:</i>	
Hours of <i>domestic work</i> undertaken within the household, or for others, in the week prior to 9 August 2011:	
Percent of women aged 25-54 years:	
No, or less than 5 hours	42%
5-14 hours	34%
15-29 hours	19%
Percent of men aged 25-54 years:	
No, or less than 5 hours	56%
5-14 hours	30%
15-29 hours	7%
People over 15 years who worked <i>voluntarily</i> for an organisation, between January and July 2011	25%
People over 15 years who provided <i>care</i> to a relative or another person with a disability, long term illness, or who were aged, in the 2 weeks prior to 9 August 2011	9%
People over 15 years who provided unpaid <i>child-care</i> for their	

own, or others' children	20%
Occupied private <i>dwellings rented</i>	51%
<i>Type of occupied, private dwelling:</i>	
separate house	291
semi-detached, row and terraces	2412
apartments	772
<i>Australian citizens</i> in total population	83%

### ***Population of Brunswick, Brunswick West and Brunswick East***

A quarter of the people who joined in Railway House activities in 2013, were residents of Brunswick, Brunswick West or Brunswick East. These suburbs have much larger populations than Princes Hill and Carlton North, are more densely populated and are increasing rapidly in population. In 2011, the estimated resident population of these three suburbs for 2016 was 53 431. Forecast growth to 2036 is 38 per cent.