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VOICE

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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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Delayed from last year due to COVID, the NSW local elections will take place on 4 September.

Among the 126 councils up for grabs is the City of Sydney. As well as electing nine City councillors, Sydneysiders get to vote for lord mayor. Most political analysts — including our own Ben Raue of The Tally Room (see page 18) — predict an unprecedented fifth consecutive term for Clover Moore. After all, Moore easily won the 2016 election with almost 60 percent of the vote and — five years on — appears as popular as ever. Moore’s detractors — baited by talkback gammons and Murdoch hacks — like to portray Sydney’s longest-serving lord mayor as a latte-sipping, tree-hugging, bike-loving, multicultural embracing social justice warrior for the woke brigade. Moore’s supporters view her as a transformative and progressive leader committed to — among other things — greening the city (see page 6) and equal rights for all.

Under Moore’s 17 years of leadership, Sydney has attained global city status — a city of creativity, which protects open space and offers eco-transport options. Running on a narrative of sustainability and liveability, Moore has dedicated herself to reducing the city’s greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed, the City of Sydney was the first local government in Australia to become carbon neutral in 2007 and its operations are now powered by 100 percent renewable electricity. Her championship of design excellence has been described as “pioneering”. In April, Moore was named one of the top 10 people who’ve been most influential in shaping Sydney — ever.

The 2021 mayoral contest had been billed as a battle of the rivals, with Moore pitted against her former deputy Kerryn Phelps. But, in early May, Phelps pulled out of the race for family reasons. Christine Forster was touted as the Liberal candidate but has since announced she will not stand for

preselection. As of writing, this leaves three candidates competing for Moore’s mayoral robes: Labor’s Linda Scott, the Greens’ Sylvie Ellsmore, and independent Yvonne Weldon. Weldon — a Wiradjuri woman and an Indigenous leader — is the first Aboriginal candidate for Sydney’s mayorship. In all reality, it’s unlikely that Clover will be ejected. When Scott ran in 2016 she scored ten percent of the vote; the Greens just five percent. Moore’s nearest challenger was Forster, who secured almost 20 percent. It seems — at least from where I’m clacking away — the election is Moore’s to lose.

Sticking with NSW politics, Fred Nile has announced his retirement from parliament. Two words: ‘good’ and ‘riddance’. I first heard of Reverend Nile not long after arriving in Sydney 20-odd years ago. Back then, I was a freelance journo writing for the gay press. I soon discovered that Nile’s hostility toward the LGBTQ community was long-established — each year he would pray for it to rain on our parade. Literally. Every year, the crimson-faced mouth-frother and his acrid acolytes would get down on their knees and fervently pray for Mardi Gras to be deluged. Imagine how sour your soul would have to be. And imagine the cheers when one year, rather than rain, there appeared a rainbow. Nile’s hang-up with the gays has always amused me. The man is obsessed. Dismissing our innate sexuality as a “lifestyle choice”, Nile thinks us “unnatural and abnormal”. Mardi Gras promotes “indecent and obscenity” and is “a public parade of immorality and blasphemy”. Geez, talk about a party pooper. He once said that gay people have a “mental disorder”. This from a man who believes in an invisible wizard in the sky. Anyhow, come November Nile will depart parliament and the place will be better off without him. Bye, bye Fred. You — and your toxic brand of Christianity — can go to hell . . .

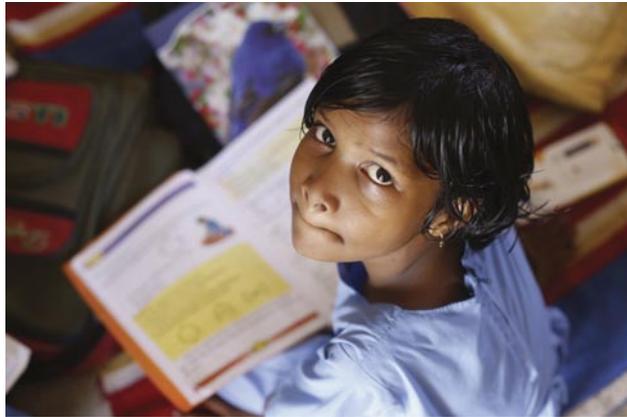
Changing young lives

In 2002, novelist Dave Eggers and educator Ninive Caligari founded 826 Valencia — a creative writing centre for under resourced young people in San Francisco. The impact of 826 quickly spread across the USA, inspiring the launch of seven more 826 chapters in places including New York, Boston and New Orleans.

It wasn't long before this momentum led to the opening of similar creative hubs all around the world. These include The Ministry of Stories, in London, established with help from Nick Hornby; Fighting Words in Dublin, established with Roddy Doyle; 100 Story Building in Melbourne, and of course, Sydney's Story Factory.

In 2011, *Sydney Morning Herald* journalists Cath Keenan and Tim Dick visited 826 Valencia in the hope of finding a solution to the growing concern about literacy rates and limited creative opportunities among marginalised children in Australia. Cath and Tim spent a week immersing themselves in 826 workshops as volunteer tutors and learning all about the 826 philosophy. Once home, they consulted widely with educators, young people, parents, writers, and the broader community on how to adapt the 826 model to local conditions.

In February 2011, the Story Factory founding board was established, including chair Michael Gonski, a solicitor and leading young philanthropist; Professor Larissa Behrendt, who lent her expertise in Indigenous education; and Professor Robyn Ewing, an expert in creativity in education. In April, the very first



volunteer meeting was held with 200 willing people turning up — a flash mob before flash mobs were even a thing!

Support was garnered from prominent writers, including Peter FitzSimons and Markus Zusak and in May 2011, the Story Factory was launched by then governor, Professor Marie Bashir, at the Sydney Writers' Festival, to a capacity crowd. Eighteen months after the first spark of inspiration, in July 2012, the Story Factory was officially opened at 176 Redfern Street, Redfern.

For the first couple of years the focus of the work was specifically Redfern/Waterloo but over time Story Factory volunteers were increasingly asked to work in Western Sydney. To support this work, a second creative writing centre opened in Parramatta in October 2018.

Together with more than 50 other organisations around the world, Story Factory is part of the International Alliance of Youth Writing Centres — a coalition inspired by 826 and united by a common belief that young people need places where they can write and be heard, and where they can have their voices polished, published, and amplified.

Story Factory runs creative writing and storytelling workshops for young people aged seven to 17. Its programs

are delivered exclusively in areas with high populations of young people who are most at risk of poor literacy, leaving school early, and significantly reduced life outcomes. The focus is on young people who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; for whom English is an additional language or dialect; are from under-resourced communities; or marginalised in other ways.

The ethos behind Story Factory is the belief that all Australian young people — no matter their background — should be given opportunities to develop the literacy skills that will allow them to flourish and shape a positive future.

In the wake of the COVID-19 calamity, Story Factory's work is more important than ever before as it is those in the community who are most disadvantaged who are facing the greatest hardships. "That includes the kids who struggle with school at the best of times, who have low literacy and are the least engaged," says executive director and co-founder, Cath Keenan. "They're the ones whose educational outcomes are the most compromised by disrupted schooling. The impact on their future could be catastrophic. We're committed to being there to help them recover lost ground, rebuild their literacy and motivation to learn, and boost their confidence, ensuring they have the best chance of success, in an uncertain future."

After a pause in 2020 due to the pandemic, Story Factory is once again recruiting and training new volunteers.

■ If you would like to volunteer — or make a donation — call 9699 6970 or email info@storyfactory.org.au.

Budget leaves many behind

May's federal budget allocated \$17.7 billion over five years to the aged-care system in a bid to overhaul the discredited sector.

The money will provide older Australians with tens of thousands of additional home-care packages and mandate the time staff spend with aged-care residents. However, while 80,000 extra home-care packages have been promised over the next two years, the number falls far short of the 103,000 older people estimated to be on the wait list.

And — whilst sector orgs have largely welcomed the much-needed cash boost — aged-care advocates say, without reform, the money is meaningless. In a tweet, Aged Care Reform Now said: “If this budget is the response to the royal commission, it is a disgrace. Without financial transparency, unscrupulous providers will continue to put profits before care. We will continue to see neglect, negligence, and abuse in aged-care homes.” The royal commission into aged-care found that one in three people living in aged-care in Australia experience neglect and physical or emotional abuse.

More than \$650 million will be spent to advance and upskill the aged-care workforce including funding an extra 13,000 home-care workers. Yet this number, say advocates — as well as the creation of an additional 33,800 training places — is not enough to stem the workforce shortfall. “We’ve always said, if you don’t fix staffing, you can’t fix the aged-care system,” said the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Association. “Without mandated minimum staffing levels and skills mix guaranteed to meet the care needs of residents, elderly Australians and their families will continue to suffer.”

Meanwhile, from 1 January 2022, migrants will be forced to wait four years before they can access welfare benefits. The cost-saving measure — described as a “blatant money grab” — will deliver the government \$671 million over five years. In response, Australian Council of Social Service CEO, Dr Cassandra Goldie, said: “We are deeply troubled about the cut in income support for newly arrived migrants.”

Perhaps the most criticised aspect of the 2021 budget is the lack of any federal funding for social and affordable housing. “We have called on

the commonwealth to show leadership,” said National Shelter executive officer, Adrian Pisarski. “Instead they refuse to lift their share of investment in social and affordable housing so desperately needed.” Although Goldie acknowledges that the federal budget provides investment in crucial community services, she says it “leaves too many stranded. It does nothing to address the severe shortage of social housing or raise social security payments above the poverty line.”

There was also a failure to invest in renewable energy. Described by the Climate Council as “a national shame”, spokesperson Nicki Hutley said: “The federal government continues to throw taxpayers’ money at polluting industries of the past like gas which provides very few jobs. It should be focused on creating good, clean jobs in renewables.” The budget included \$58.6 million for gas expansion, and support for carbon capture and storage, and hydrogen from fossil fuels as part of a \$540 million package. “Among major economies and our strategic allies,” said Hutley, “Australia is right at the bottom of the pack when it comes to spending on solutions that reduce emissions.”

From grey to green

As part of its continuing strategy to green Sydney, the City council has announced plans to plant 700 trees each year and to cover 40 percent of the city in greenery by 2050.

The initiative includes new and improved parks, an increase in canopy cover, more streetscape gardening, and green roofs. “Trees and other urban greenery are as essential as roads and broadband,” said Sydney lord mayor Clover Moore.

Greening the city has been a priority

for council since the launch of its Sustainable Sydney program in 2008. In that time, Sydney has seen a 24 percent increase in canopy cover and a 13 percent increase in green spaces. “Trees remove thousands of tonnes of pollution from our air, store carbon and help mitigate extreme weather, while also relieving stress, depression and anxiety,” said Moore. “It is critical that we value everything our broad urban forest and greenery can do for us and invest heavily in it.”

There are also plans to reclaim some

of the city’s traffic-choked streets. Broadway, for example, may be downsized to two lanes each way to create a village vibe. Meanwhile, drivers will be discouraged from using Park Street and instead diverted to the cross-city tunnel. Council also wants to modify Botany Road to incorporate trees and walkways, and to widen footpaths along Oxford Street for dining and entertainment.

“We’re looking to create a city that people want to live, visit, work and spend time,” said Moore.

Affordable housing push

An alliance of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations is urging people to support a commitment to affordable housing in Redfern/Waterloo.

The NSW government's proposed redevelopment of the Waterloo estate on Gadigal land has no commitment to affordable housing for the Aboriginal community that has long called the area home.

Backed by local MPs, and with the support of City of Sydney council, the alliance launched the affordable housing campaign in September 2020. The alliance wants a minimum of 10 percent of all proposed housing reserved for Aboriginal affordable housing in each redevelopment site in

the Redfern/Waterloo area.

They want this minimum of 10 percent to be run by a community housing provider that is either Aboriginal owned and managed or, if not, working in partnership with an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation. They also want to ensure that there are agreed upon targets for Aboriginal employment in the construction and provision of ongoing services in all government redevelopments in the Redfern/Waterloo area.

"This is an opportunity to show a commitment to the Aboriginal community remaining in the area that is famous for Aboriginal people, and where our rights movement commenced and is based," said Nathan Moran, CEO of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land

Council. The alliance is calling on the NSW government to walk with Australia's First Peoples by ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to have a place on Gadigal land in Redfern/Waterloo.

"We want to continue a presence of First Nations people around the Waterloo and Redfern area, and how we continue that is through a commitment of housing — both affordable and social," said campaign coordinator Warren Roberts. "We're not interested in murals and street names ... what we are interested in is a policy commitment." Supporters are asked to contact their local member of the NSW parliament and demand action on making Redfern/Waterloo affordable for Australia's First Peoples.

WFH saves time and money

Commuters could save an average of 90 hours (or two-and-a-half working weeks) each year if work from home continues at current rates, according to preliminary findings of a recent survey.

"Our survey shows that work-from-home policies have been the greatest transport policy lever in the last 70 years," said Professor David Hensher, director of the Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies. "It has helped deliver greater travel-time savings than any other infrastructure of transport demand initiative."

Researchers from ITLS at the University of Sydney Business School conducted the national survey between March and October last year with 956 respondents. The study calculated the potential cost savings for commuters



working in the Greater Sydney metropolitan area, using average fare prices for public transport and tolls, and operating costs for car trips. Each commuter could save \$906 in out-of-pocket expenses, and a further \$2,643 in travel time savings each year.

The research team's projections show that Australians from metropolitan areas could save 143 minutes a week compared to those from regional areas who could cut 81

minutes from commutes. "These time savings can be invested into activities that give an individual more value — be it spending more time with family or doing an extra bit of work which benefits business," co-author Associate Professor Matthew Beck said.

When the researchers asked about future intentions, most of the survey respondents said they would prefer to work from home at least one day per week. "The future desires to work from home have been remarkably consistent since July last year, matching the current levels of working from home," Beck said. "This means that on any given weekday there would be up to 30 percent of people working from home, which would result in significantly less congestion on roads and crowding on public transport."

Rallying against anti-trans bill

Trans protesters and their allies took to Taylor Square on 19 April to oppose an education bill tabled by One Nation's Mark Latham.

If passed, the bill would prevent teachers, counsellors and other school staff from offering support or advice to trans and gender-diverse students. If LGBTQ+ issues were to be discussed, staff could face dismissal. Parents would also be allowed to withdraw their children from the class.

At the rally, trans students voiced concerns that the bill would seek to make them invisible. "This bill is pushing for the erasure of trans children and students," said one. "It's hard enough for all students as it is — and it's even harder to be a trans student. We face bullying and isolation

from our peers, and now we have to face that from grown adults."

Also speaking at the protest, non-binary primary school teacher, Sam Guerra: "If I was ever put in a position where a student of mine confided in me about their confusion with their gender or their identity and the law prevented me from supporting them, I would not hesitate to put my job on the line to support this student."

Following the speech, Guerra handed over a petition of more than 113,000 signatures opposing the bill to Greens upper house member, David Shoebridge. "[Latham] has made it clear that he wants to make political capital from marginalising some of the most marginal in our community," said Shoebridge, "and that is a shameful abuse of his position as an MP."

Meanwhile, trans health expert Teddy Cook delivered a powerful testimony to the NSW parliament. Cook — who is vice-president of the Australian Professional Association for Trans Health — told an inquiry examining the bill that transgender people "were not the threat you imagine us to be" and "deserve the dignity of being known".

Cook reminded the committee that trans people are nothing new and have existed in First Nations cultures for centuries. "Whatever the outcome of this inquiry is," said Cook, "we know that we've always been here. We have always been in education settings. And we always will. It's important we know we are valid and that we offer the world an incredible gift." (See page 29)

On the march against sexism

A crowd of 200 people, most of them high-school students and young women, gathered at Sydney Town Hall in May to protest Scott Morrison's ongoing failure to act on sexism.

The rally was called by Youth Survivors 4 Justice — a group of mainly high-school women and survivors formed to confront the sexism that faces us in our schools, workplaces, and daily lives.

Shanaya Donovan, a 17-year-old Darug, Dungutti and Gumbaynggirr woman and one of the rally organisers, laid the blame for sexism squarely at the feet of the Liberal government, telling the crowd: "It starts in government and it trickles down to the rest of society like a giant domino that we can't stop unless we band together."

In the wake of the rape crisis in parliament, the coalition government



has put more Liberal women in cabinet positions but has failed to promise any meaningful change through the funding needed for essential services that support the most vulnerable women in Australia. The rally demanded an increase in the JobSeeker rate to \$80 a day; adequate funding for domestic violence and women's health services; legislating enthusiastic consent; and expanding education around sex, consent, and sexism in schools.

Speeches from survivors drew emotion and anger from the crowd, revealing the depth of pain at the heart of the issue. Survivor and activist Amanda Matthews spoke of her own childhood trauma, emphasising how sexual violence often takes place in the domestic sphere. She called on everyone to "teach young people, teach children that it's OK to speak up" about sexual abuse.

Jenny Leong, NSW Greens MP for Newtown, called on governments to "not pretend any of the traumas that people here have gone through are things we cannot solve. We can solve all of these things. There are people in charge who have an interest in keeping that trauma happening." Wider issues such as homelessness, police violence and privatisation all exacerbated sexism, she argued. (See page 31)

— Matilda Fay courtesy *Solidarity*

‘Save our homes’

Residents from a number of threatened public housing communities across Sydney’s inner city came together at Martin Place in May to call for their homes to be saved from the wrecking ball.

The rally followed the release of the NSW government’s Housing 2041 Strategy (see page 16) and called for the future of a number of inner-city public housing estates to be secured.

Speaking at the rally was Emily Valentine, a resident of the Bay Street public housing site in Glebe.

“Instead of selling off public housing, the government should be building thousands of new public homes each year, providing many urgently needed jobs at the same time,” she said. “Sydney is in the middle of a housing and homelessness crisis. But instead of addressing the causes and effects of this crisis, the government is making it worse by selling off public housing properties.”

Emily explained that the residents in her estate were told they would be able to move into the redeveloped block



when it’s completed down the line but would be shifted out into flats in Western Sydney, far from their workplaces, networks and communities, in the interim. “People should be able to live close to where they work and stay in their community, for a community to function it must include all. The poor are being forced out so that the wealthy can gentrify suburbs,” she said. “The NSW government supports this with its Communities Plus 30/70 policy.”

Under the Communities Plus model, public housing estates are sold off to private developers to create “mixed-occupancy” developments. In an effort to “deconcentrate disadvantage” 70 percent of dwellings in these buildings will be set aside for private properties, and 30 percent for social houses. It is this kind of development that is set to replace a number of public housing

estates in South Eveleigh and Waterloo. The NSW government said the renewed estates will mean a greater number of social housing dwellings will exist. But critics are quick to point out the number of bedrooms will be much lower, with family homes being replaced with one-or-two-bedroom apartments.

Feminist and left-wing activist Judy Munday also spoke at the rally. She — alongside her late husband Jack Munday — were instrumental in the 1970s green bans movement which saved a number of historic buildings in Miller’s Point. She worries that more public housing estates across the CBD will be lost like the Sirius building was. “At the time when the Sirius was built, only some 40 years ago, governments still accepted or believed that citizens deserved quality public housing,” she said. “Public housing built by the government for the people, is no more an extravagant concept than is public education or public healthcare. A home is a basic necessity for a decent standard of living.”

— Allison Hore courtesy *City Hub*

Concerns over NDIS changes

NDIS chief Martin Hoffman “deeply regrets” claimants’ anxiety over the planned introduction of independent assessments for funding.

As part of a major overhaul, the National Disability Insurance Agency is trialling the use of independent assessors who will determine what services — if any — applicants will receive. The initiative has been widely slammed by the disability sector.

“We are extremely concerned that basic funding decisions on an assessment conducted by an entirely impartial assessor who does not know

the individual will likely result in a denial of supports that are required,” said Women with Disabilities Australia. The Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability echoed those concerns: “We believe that the NDIA’s proposal for independent assessments puts the NDIS that people with disabilities and their families fought for in danger.”

While acknowledging that independent assessments — where individuals are evaluated by an unknown health practitioner rather than a specialist of their choosing — had “caused real fear, concern and upset in the disability community”, Hoffman said: “The funding

amount is not unlimited or open-ended — and can’t be.” Independent assessments, he said, were necessary to gather a “consistent, standard and unbiased set of information” on which to make decisions.

When WWDA asked its members their views on the standardised model of assessment, the feedback was negative. “As someone with multiple issues that do not fit into the standard textbook tick boxes,” said one, “I am very fearful of blanket assessments that do not take into account people’s individual needs and circumstances.” (See page 14)

A national shame

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned the following article contains the names of deceased people.

Since the publication 30 years ago of the royal commission's report into Aboriginal deaths in custody, little action has been taken. **CHRISTOPHER KELLY** reports.

As of going to print, William 'Bill' Patrick Alwyn Haines is Australia's latest Aboriginal death in custody. He was found unresponsive in his cell at the Cessnock Correctional Centre in April and pronounced dead an hour later. William was 37. It was also April 30 years ago when the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody were released. Shockingly, three decades on, few of its 339 recommendations have been implemented.

"We have been calling on governments to take the deaths of our people seriously, and end the discriminatory laws, policies and practices that see our people die behind bars," said Change the Record Coalition co-chair, Cheryl Axleby. Describing the inaction as "a source of deep national shame and pain", Axleby said: "If governments are serious about 'closing the gap', and if — as they say — our lives matter, then they must take urgent action to change the discriminatory practices that drive our people behind bars."

The royal commission — which ran from 1987 to 1991 — found that the primary driver of Aboriginal deaths in custody was the mass incarceration of First Nations people. That remains the case today, with at least 474 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people dying in custody in the 30 years since — with eight deaths since the beginning of



At the protest on 10 April: Leetona Dungay, mother of David Dungay Jr, who died in Long Bay jail in 2015 after being restrained and administered a sedative

March this year. "We are amongst the most incarcerated peoples on earth and have been waiting on real government action for too long," said Meena Singh, legal director at the Human Rights Law Centre. "If governments believe that the lives of First Nations people matter, then they would take urgent steps to remove unjust laws and policies that contribute to this crisis of over-imprisonment."

Some of the "urgent steps" being called for include repealing punitive bail laws, mandatory sentencing laws, and prison sentences for minor offending; raising the age of criminal responsibility from ten to at least 14 years; and replacing the practice of police investigating police with independent investigations of deaths in custody. Crucially, all of the royal commission's recommendations should be immediately enacted. "Nothing is stopping state, territory and the federal government taking action today," said Singh.

Meanwhile, on Saturday 10 April, more than 1,500 protesters marched from Sydney's Town Hall to the Domain

during a national day of action against Indigenous deaths in custody. During the march through the CBD, protesters stopped and called out the names of the Indigenous victims who have died. Placards read: "Justice Now", "Shame Australia", "No Justice No Peace", "Stop Killing Us" and "No Pride in Australia's Genocide".

Among the protesters was Leetona Dungay — mother of David Dungay Jr, who died in Long Bay jail in 2015 after being restrained and administered a sedative. Leetona and her family waited six years for the coroner's findings into David's death. NSW deputy coroner Derek Lee concluded that the prison officers' conduct was "limited by systemic inefficiencies in training" and recommended that none of them face disciplinary action. Speaking at the march, Leetona said: "The royal commission didn't get any justice for the families — not a single police officer or prison guard was charged or convicted. No more royal commissions, I want real justice. The life of an Aboriginal man is worth something." (See page 30)

Locked into poverty

Australia's social security net is failing to keep vulnerable families out of poverty, with researchers warning the child poverty rates for single-parent families is set to soar now that the coronavirus supplements have ended. LUKE MICHAEL reports.

A report from the Australian National University's Centre for Social Research and Methods reveals that the coronavirus supplement — which effectively doubled unemployment payments last March — reduced the proportion of single-parent families living below the poverty line from 39 percent to 17 percent.

But now the supplement has ended, ANU modelling estimates the child poverty rates for single-parent families will rise above pre-pandemic levels to 41 percent — even after factoring in the proposed JobSeeker increase of \$50 a fortnight.

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) — which commissioned the research — are now calling for increased income support levels to ensure children are not living in poverty in Australia. They point to ANU modelling that shows a 10 percent increase (around \$12 billion) in welfare spending would slash the poverty rates for people on JobSeeker from 88 percent to 34 percent. This would give JobSeeker recipients an additional \$190 a week and also allow for increases to the Disability Support Pension, and the parenting and carer

payments.

Lead researcher Associate Professor Ben Phillips said this modelling provided the most cost-effective way of investing extra money into social security payments. “It clearly indicates that a modest increase in funding can make substantial reductions in the most severe forms of financial stress and poverty to those who need it most,” Phillips said.

BSL and SVA are also calling for an independent review into the structure and rates of social security payments to ensure children are not exposed to the



long-term harmful impacts of poverty and financial stress. SVA director of early childhood Emma Sydenham told *Pro Bono News* the report was a stark reminder of the invisible discrimination that affected single-parent families in Australia.

“I didn't really think that single-parent families would experience such discrimination. But this report really highlights that being a single parent today in Australia really does create a risk of consigning you to a life of poverty,” Sydenham said. “And that's horrific. It's something I think we need to have many more conversations about.”

Sydenham said childhood

poverty caused major social and economic harm, including increased costs in justice, health and welfare. She noted 2019 research that found Australia spends \$15.2 billion every year because children and young people experience serious issues requiring crisis services. “We spend billions of dollars on late intervention for children, so that's on mental health costs, child protection costs, costs that really would be unnecessary if we invested early to support families and children to be able to thrive,” she said. “And we all miss out when people don't

have the opportunity to lead fulfilling, engaging and productive lives. So yes, there's a cost to our justice system and our health system and our social

welfare system, but there's also a lot of opportunity as a country to draw on the capabilities of vulnerable people and I think that's what we're really missing out on.”

Sydenham added that achieving change in this area required getting the public on board so that governments can no longer ignore the issue. “Unless there's strong public support I think it is really hard to get a significant shift on this,” she said. “But you can't talk about early childhood development and strong outcomes for kids in Australia without talking about our income support system.”

■ Source *Pro Bono News*



DESIGNING FOR FLOOD-PRONE CITIES

As the March floods highlighted, we can't continue to build cities and towns based on business-as-usual planning principles — especially as these disasters tend to disproportionately affect disadvantaged populations. **Elizabeth Mossop** explains what's possible when the political will is there.

It beggars belief this needs to be said, but it is a government responsibility to keep citizens out of harm's way. The ongoing plans for new housing in flood-prone areas such as the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley directly contravene that. Understanding urban flooding requires us to contend with the underlying natural systems over which we have built our cities and towns.

We have learned the hard way we cannot effectively “design out” flooding. Instead, we must find ways to work with the natural systems of drainage and catchments. We must create urban systems to accommodate flood waters. That reduces risk to houses, schools, hospitals, businesses and other key infrastructure.

We have tried channelling rivers with levees and flood walls and it does not work — when these constructions fail (and they usually eventually do), the danger is immense. We need to find

ways to safely allow rivers to expand in times of flood and to contract when the rains subside. This cycle of expansion and contraction is normal and natural for rivers — it is we humans who need to change.

The cities of Rotterdam in the Netherlands and New Orleans in the United States are built on river deltas and are at a very high risk of flooding. The design strategies used by planners in these cities provide effective models for reducing flooding harm in Australia.

Since 2001, Rotterdam has been



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transitioning to become a resilient delta city by rethinking its relationship with water. The city has developed a series of sophisticated plans to address flooding, as well as other climate impacts such as drought and extreme heat.

Some plans are enormous in scope, involving city-wide strategies. Others are much more targeted, small-scale projects that can be undertaken by communities and individual households. You need both. These plans are informed by the idea that it's not just about applying a technical solution. A cultural change is also needed, so communities understand the urgency of the climate crisis and why the way we build towns and cities has to evolve.

The goal is to make the city a better place for all and to promote social cohesion (a necessary ingredient in any effort to build climate change resilience). Water management and climate adaptation should be factored into every urban plan and every project, small or large.

Rotterdam's plans include a range of different approaches. There are "water squares" that use public open spaces to store flood waters during times of heavy rain. These urban sinks can be used as hangout spaces on dry days and can hold vast amounts of water in heavy rain, keeping flood water away from properties. This is very similar to the approach taken in Sydney's Victoria Park, where parks are all at a lower elevation than surrounding streets. This allows the temporary storage of stormwater.

The Rotterdam program also includes other strategies for alternative water storage: the removal of hard surfaces and creation of more green space; and the proliferation of green roofs and roof landscapes. The goal is to create spaces that can hold and absorb rainwater when it falls. Rotterdam's investment in innovation and development in urban water management has led to a new knowledge industry for the city, with businesses and research institutes disseminating their expertise worldwide.

Following the devastation of the levee failures after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, New Orleans has gradually moved to a regime of urban development in which every project addresses the need to deal with stormwater and flooding on site. In the Lakeview neighbourhood, for example, the street system is being re-engineered to use all of its alleyways as green infrastructure. They will have permeable paving and special vegetated channels called bioswales

over large gravel storage beds to absorb and store stormwater. This will take the pressure off the street drainage.

The campus of Tulane University in uptown New Orleans has a stormwater masterplan. This has led to the development of a series of "stormwater gardens" that can filter and store large volumes of water, protecting the rest of the site from flooding.

In downtown New Orleans, where there is little natural ground, new buildings have to find architectural solutions for water management. Underneath the tiny alley that leads into Bar Marilou at the Ace Hotel, massive underground storage tanks manage all of the stormwater for the entire hotel. On the roof deck of the Standard Apartments, a "blue roof" filters stormwater through carefully selected plants. Water is then stored below the paving and above the parking deck.

At the Paul Habans Charter School on New Orleans Westbank, the entire school grounds have been converted to clean and store water. Students are taught onsite about water management and natural systems. In the Green Schoolyard, a formerly flooded area has been redesigned to accommodate planted swales and water storage. In the Habans Stormwater and Nature Centre, a workforce development program for Greencorps youth is building an extensive artificial wetland that will cleanse and store water as well as provide environmental education.

Change is clearly possible. It might not be easy, but as the devastation in NSW showed, it is better than the alternative.

■ Elizabeth Mossop is Dean of Design, Architecture and Building, University of Technology Sydney



LITTLE CHOICE, NO CONTROL

A planned overhaul of the National Disability Insurance Scheme has been soundly rejected by the disability sector. **Christopher Kelly** reports.

The federal government's proposal to introduce independent assessors to review people's eligibility for the NDIS has been slammed by Australia's disability community.

Under the changes — to be implemented later this year — important decisions about whether a person can access the scheme and how much funding they'll receive will be based on a mandatory assessment undertaken by a health practitioner unknown to the individual being assessed.

In written submissions to a joint parliamentary committee exploring the proposal, disabled people's organisations and other advocacy groups have denounced the move as "retrograde" and "fundamentally flawed". "The disability community is deeply concerned with the introduction of independent assessments and the changes the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) is proposing," said Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) in a statement. Describing the reforms as "rushed and opaque", CYDA added: "There is a lack of genuine engagement with the communities who will feel the impacts."

It's a complaint shared across the sector. "People with disabilities and

their representatives have not been sufficiently consulted or included in either the decision to introduce independent assessments or the development of the proposed model of assessments," said People with Disabilities ACT. "The continuing consultation process has lacked a commitment to be responsive to, and inclusive of, the views of people with disabilities." Other areas of concern — and there are many — include: the fixed time limits of assessments (three hours); an assessor's lack of specific disability knowledge or experience; and the use of unproven and oversimplistic standardised assessment tools.

Some background: in 2013, the NDIS was launched to support people with disability to access services and resources. However, since its implementation, the NDIS has come under fire for its confusing and restrictive access processes. Unnecessary barriers have meant that the NDIS supports only a fraction of Australia's disability community — just 10 percent. Following reports of difficulties and dissatisfaction with the scheme, the NDIA decided to trial an independent assessment pilot and review. The first pilot stage began in 2019 across nine regions in NSW. (A second pilot was set to take place in the first half of last year but was discontinued in March 2020 due to the

COVID pandemic.)

Following the first pilot — and despite an acknowledgement that there were "significant limitations" with this initial experiment — a review of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* was conducted. The Tune Review, as it became known, formed the basis for the decision to mandate the introduction of independent assessments for all users of the NDIS — current and future. However, while the Tune Review indicated that the pilot resulted in "more consistent decisions and more equitable plan outcomes for participants", it did not recommend universal and mandatory roll out of independent assessors without user choice or control over who would be assessing them.

Furthermore, the Tune Review not only defended a participant's right to choose an assessor appropriate for their personal circumstance, but also their right to challenge outcomes after assessments were made. So far, neither of these recommendations have been included in the reform plans released by the NDIA. "In absence of protections and flexibility for participants, we are extremely concerned that basic funding decisions on an assessment conducted by an entirely impartial assessor who does not know the individual will likely result in an incorrect evaluation of an

individual's capacity, and in turn, a denial of supports that are required," said Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA).

When WWDA asked its members how they felt about the prospect of being interviewed by a random assessor, the replies demonstrated "high levels of concern" within the disability community. "These [independent assessments] will not help at all," said one. "I need specialists who are trained in and understand my disability." Another said: "I'm terrified. My history is extremely complex and even my GP of 30 years often defers to me on ideas about what might be happening inside my body." A third commented: "Having to explain ten years of what my specialist already knows to an independent assessor who may not specialise in a field relevant to my disabilities seems problematic."

CYDA survey data further reflects community concern, with 80 percent of respondents fearful that independent assessments would affect them negatively. "The proposed reforms will introduce unjust and unreasonable mechanisms that will limit the ability for people with disability to have a say in the decisions that impact their lives," said CYDA. The responses to CYDA's survey are consistent with another conducted by People with Disability Australia. Around three-quarters of its members thought that a rapid roll out of independent assessments was a "bad" or "extremely bad" idea. Half of the respondents reported feeling "overwhelmed" by the changes, and more than 60 percent said they felt "defeated" by the process.

The NDIA also approached the community for feedback. However, respondents were denied an opportunity to voice their opinions on independent assessments. Instead, the consultation process was conducted in such a way that respondents were led to assume that the proposed changes were already very much a given and set in stone. "Despite the clear and warranted concerns of people with

disability and their families and caregivers, the community consultation process offered by the NDIA has been narrow and feels disingenuous, which risks exacerbating existing community distrust of the agency," said CYDA.

The Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability (VALID)—shares such distrust. In VALID's view: "The NDIA has failed to produce clear evidence to justify compulsory assessments. The NDIA has not done the work needed to prove to people with disabilities and their families that compulsory assessments will uphold and protect their human rights. We believe that the NDIA's proposal for independent assessments puts the NDIS that people with disabilities and their families fought for in danger."

It's not just people with disability and their representative orgs that have concerns over the new assessment process. Health professionals are worried too. Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) is calling for further information to be made available about the process and for "robust evaluation measures" to be introduced. Specifically, AHPA is seeking clarity on "whether the independent assessment toolkit is appropriate for all participants and types of disability".

When WWDA asked its members their views on the appropriateness of adopting a one-size-fits-all standardised model of assessment, the feedback was far from positive. "This topic has concerned me greatly," said a respondent. "I feel that those who designed this approach have not really understood the ramifications. Nearly everyone with a disability will tell you there is so much more to their disability to what is seen on the surface." Another added: "As someone with multiple issues that do not fit into the standard textbook tick boxes, I am very fearful of blanket assessments that do not take into account people's individual needs and circumstances."

And as the Tune Review identified, the implementation of standardised assessments would be particularly

problematic for First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women and girls with disability, and other groups such as non-binary people. In its submission, WWDA voiced serious concerns over "the limitations [standardised assessments] hold when accounting for their inherent prejudices towards marginalised cohorts of people with disability". There are fears that standardised assessment tools will fail to accurately capture the experiences and needs of marginalised populations and, in doing so, deny them access.

Socially and economically marginalised individuals are also handicapped when it comes to accessing the NDIS. Research has found that when disability is overlaid with socio-economic disadvantage, the capacity for people with disability to participate in a complex program such as the NDIS becomes challenging to say the least. The system as it stands favours people with strong English and literacy skills who are more likely to understand the process and better able to advocate for themselves. "For the NDIS to be truly more effective and fairer," said the CYDA submission, "targeting inequities in the service system and inequities in navigating the service system must be a priority."

As well as concerns, the sector's submissions to the parliamentary committee include a raft of recommendations. The first of which is for the NDIA to halt the overhaul and cease the roll out of mandatory independent assessments. Then, say sector orgs, the assessment process needs to be re-examined and alternative approaches considered. Crucially, any redesign of the NDIS must include "genuine input" from people with disability and their representative organisations. "This," says CYDA, "is the only way to ensure the process upholds the authority, lived expertise and rights of people with disability, and to maintain the true principle of the NDIS — greater choice and control."

HOUSING STRATEGY FALLS SHORT

As **Hal Pawson** and **Vivienne Milligan** discuss, the NSW government's new 20-year housing strategy gives a broad nod to issues at play while offering few actionable solutions.

With a transition from stamp duty to land tax flagged in treasurer Dominic Perrottet's 2020 NSW budget it appeared that the state could be on the brink of major housing system reform.

Compounding this impression, was the recent release of the government's Housing 2041 strategy and 2021-22 action plan. The state's first-ever long-sighted housing strategy (emulating Western Australia and the ACT) is a welcome recognition of housing as both a major continuing challenge and a core policy responsibility of state and territory governments.

In its scope and aspirations the document refreshingly recognises the range of agencies, powers and policy actions available to state governments to achieve a better functioning and fairer housing system. As well as mooting the stamp duty reform, for

example, it contemplates amending planning guidelines to promote housing diversity and sustainability; stronger consumer protection and support for tenants; "maximising the impact of government-owned land to achieve the housing vision"; and "rejuvenating" social housing.

Another positive inclusion is new governance and coordination arrangements — including an expert housing advisory panel and a housing strategy implementation unit. These could help to confront the policymaking challenge posed by housing as a many-faceted issue badly served by silo government.

These strengths apart, though, how convincing are the documents as a genuine strategy? Qualities fundamental to the credibility of any meaningful strategy include: analysis of the problems to be tackled, setting clear and measurable goals, identifying actions to achieve those goals, and a plan for mobilising resources to implement the specified actions.

Regrettably, few of those features appear in the Housing 2041 documents.

First, they include no precise analysis of current housing market conditions, nor any quantification of existing unmet housing needs and housing system performance challenges. Second, detailed modelling of demographic forecasts, population structure and inter/intra-regional migration is absent. Such projections are essential in planning housing supply targets, and never more so following the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Third, lacking concrete analysis as its foundation, stated strategy goals are extremely high-level in nature. This is revealed by a motherhood vision for NSW to "have housing that supports security, comfort, independence and choice for all people at all stages of their lives" to be achieved via one-word "pillars": supply, diversity, affordability and resilience.

Under these headlines, there is little or nothing in the way of definitive



What is signalled instead is the NSW government’s ongoing enthusiasm to sell off public land and houses to help finance social rental modernisation and replacement. This, unfortunately, is a short-sighted approach, which will result in further loss of public assets and more widespread disruption and displacement for existing tenants in areas attractive to developers. Despite acknowledging the urgency for significant policy change, the strongest underlying message from the Housing 2041 documents is the government’s desire to buy more time. Actions specified for the immediate future are predominantly policy reviews, new administrative processes, and evidence-building through data development and research; the kinds of activities often rightly dubbed “busy work”.

One timely exception is government support, previously announced, for a new build-to-rent-product that offers potential to both improve consumer housing choices and the functioning of the housing system — respectively, by offering longer-term rentals and by diversifying developer options (and thereby reducing reliance on a build-to-sell model).

NSW government advocacy on this topic was also in evidence in planning minister Rob Stokes’s pointed call for complementary tax reforming action from the commonwealth. The promise of an effective long-term housing strategy for NSW has not been fulfilled . . . yet. For now, it appears that citizens will have to wait at least two more years (and until after the next election) to discover whether this state can develop a credible housing strategy. That would be one offering the scale and scope of reform necessary to reverse the renewed trend of worsening housing affordability; and one with meaningful and measurable goals as well as detailed plans and budgets to achieve them.

■ Courtesy UNSW

targets and progressive milestones that would be needed to calibrate outcomes on any of these fronts. While there are numerous stated aspirations for “more” or “improved” levels of activity, these are empty pledges without specifying (a) more than what, (b) how much more, and (c) by when the increased or enhanced activity will be achieved.

Only if defined as such would it be possible to assess future policy impact. For example, what is the current level of affordable and social housing supply across the system against which improvements will be judged? What proportion of such housing falls short of acceptable standards and how much will this cost to fix? What is the target for reducing social housing waiting lists? How many first-home buyers will government aim to assist?

Similarly, there are few numbers for current or required government housing expenditure cited in the documents. Admittedly, these could instead be provided in annual state budgets. But as the November 2020

budget disclosed, relatively little additional direct expenditure in this area is currently envisaged. At a moment when a long overdue expansion of social and affordable housing could supercharge economic recovery, the best the government could come up with on this front was \$400 million for additional new provision (most of the \$900 million pledged in this area being for renovation rather than construction).

This sits in stark contrast to the Victorian government’s Big Housing Build — an all-time record investment of \$5.4 billion over four years to achieve over 12,000 additional social and affordable housing dwellings, as announced late last year. Not only is the NSW equivalent action pale by comparison, a systemic financial deficit of nearly \$1 billion annually for the efficient and effective upkeep of existing social housing (as quantified in 2017 by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal) remains unaddressed in the strategy.



MOORE

THE UNSTOPPABLE

Ahead of the City election in September, **Ben Raue** of The Tally Room reflects on the rise of Sydney's longest-serving lord mayor and wonders what the future will hold.

Clover Moore came to power in the City of Sydney in 2004. Her first tilt as lord mayor followed a dramatic border change that significantly expanded the voter base of the council beyond the CBD and the business vote.

There is a long history of state governments fiddling with the boundaries of the City for political advantage. This dates back to the first big expansion in 1949 when the council extended beyond Surry Hills, Kings Cross and Pyrmont to the borders it encompasses today. That expansion took place under a Labor government.

The next Coalition government reversed most of those changes, handing parts of the council to surrounding jurisdictions and placing most of the southern suburbs into South Sydney council. This left the City with a relatively small residential population, and the CBD.

The Labor state government merged Sydney and South Sydney in 1982, only for a Coalition government to separate the councils in 1989. The South Sydney of the 1990s stretched from Rosebery and Camperdown all the way up to Potts Point. The current council was created in 2004 when the state Labor government amalgamated the suburbs of South Sydney with the business-dominated City of Sydney. Labor had good reason to be optimistic about

their chances in a new City which had been consolidated with a council with strong Labor representation. Labor therefore had high hopes for former Keating government minister Michael Lee who was picked as the party's 2004 mayoral candidate after he lost his seat on the Central Coast at the 2001 election.

However, Clover Moore threw a spanner in Labor's works. Moore — who had been in politics for a quarter of a century — was the state MP for Bligh at the time, having held the seat since 1988. Much to Labor's irritation (whose hierarchy referred to Moore as “the Witch of Oxford Street”), she won the mayoralty comfortably while also bringing with her on the ticket four

independent councillors. The win gave her not only half of the council but — with the lord mayor’s casting vote — effective control. With the prestige and authority of Town Hall, the new council proved to be a formidable power base. Thanks to revenue from rates charged to big business, it had the resources as well as a significantly larger residential population.

Team Moore has remained in power ever since that 2004 win. In an election that was “never in doubt”, the team won a fifth council seat in 2008 with Moore gaining a swing of almost 14 percent on the mayoral ballot. “We are going to keep doing what we have been doing, maintaining that momentum,” Moore said at the time. “We have a blueprint, we have a vision, and we have engaged everybody from locals to the business community.” The Moore party lost its fifth seat in 2012, while the leader herself suffered a small reverse swing. However, Moore still won the mayoralty with 51 percent of the primary vote. Then came the historic fourth win in 2016. In a landslide, Moore polled almost 58 percent of the primary vote and regained a fifth councillor. It was, she said, “a real win for grassroots democracy”.

For most of the past 17 years, Moore’s team has been cohesive and stable with a gradual changeover of councillors. Yet, on more than one occasion, Moore has fallen out with councillors who have struggled to work under her leadership. The biggest split in the Moore team took place in 2017 when the lord mayor fell out with her deputy, Kerryn Phelps. Seen as a potential successor for Clover, Phelps was given the deputy lord mayoralty in 2016 but left the Moore train a year later. Phelps intended to run in this year’s contest but withdrew in May for personal reasons. Remarkably, over four council elections, no one has come at all close to defeating Moore — and there doesn’t appear to be much chance of her losing on 4 September. Perhaps Phelps could have carved off enough of Moore’s base to pose a threat, but we will never know.

Moore’s vote has remained relatively stable over the last four elections. Labor and the Greens, meanwhile, have lost ground while the Liberal Party has gained support. Labor and the Greens collectively polled over 39 percent at the 2004 council election with the Liberal Party polling just under 12 percent. The Liberal vote climbed to 19.7 percent in 2016, compared to just 17.6 percent for Labor and the Greens. This suggests that Moore’s voter base has shifted to the left over that time.

There’s no denying that the Moore regime has been a thorn in the side of the state Liberal government over the past decade. It must have been tempting for the party’s apparatchiks to consider chiselling away the city’s suburbs to reduce the council to a small rump covering just the CBD. Yet the O’Farrell government chose a different direction, instead aiming to tweak the electoral system to unseat Moore.

First, they changed legislation to prevent state MPs from running for local council (the so-called “get Clover” laws). It’s not uncommon for local councillors to run for state parliament. There were dozens of Liberal councillors elected to parliament in 2011, for instance, but usually they retire from council at the first opportunity. But for Moore, the council job was clearly the more prominent of her two roles. The new law made Moore choose between her state seat of Sydney and the lord mayoralty. She subsequently resigned as state MP prior to the 2012 council elections, triggering a by-election for a seat she had only narrowly retained in 2011. The Liberal Party ran hard for the seat against Moore’s hand-picked successor Alex Greenwich, but Greenwich won with a swing of 10.6 percent compared to Moore’s result in 2011.

When that effort to unseat Moore didn’t succeed, the Liberal state government looked to increase the power of the business vote. Non-residents have always had some right to vote in local council elections in New South Wales, but legislation was changed to give two votes to property

owners and to push those owners into actually exercising this franchise. It was largely unsuccessful, however. Although the Liberals managed to bolster the roll by 20,000 businesses, it failed to translate into increased turnout for the Libs. Other capital city councils such as Melbourne and Perth are largely captured by business interests in the CBD, but they have much smaller surrounding residential populations. As long as a large suburban population is included in the City, they will likely hold sway in local elections.

So what of the future? Succession planning is always difficult for independents, both in parliament and in local council. There are numerous case studies of strong independent MPs who retire and pick a successor who often will win the seat but lose at the following election. At a council level there are a number of stories about local independent machines that fell from a dominant position to extinction as the first generation moved on.

If Moore does win an unprecedented fifth run in office, as is likely, she has indicated she will serve the full (three-year) term. Moore has previously flagged that any of her council allies — all of whom are running again — could potentially turn out to be a strong candidate for lord mayor. But once she hangs up her robes, there will be no guarantee that her endorsed successor would hold on to the mayoralty — let alone a working majority on council against three political parties all eager to improve their position. It will be a delicate transition, and it’s unlikely Moore will wait until the end of her final term before hatching a succession strategy. Moore will be 78 in 2024, at which point she’ll have held the mayoralty for more than 20 years. When Clover does decide to descend the Town Hall steps for the last time, she will do so knowing her legacy is secure. As for her successor, you can only hope they have size 14 feet.

■ For more of Ben Raue’s political analysis, visit tallyroom.com.au

TURNING ON THE NEON

Kings Cross is undergoing a metamorphosis, but yet to land in a place that rests easy with its history or provide a pathway forward for its future. A new report sets out a vision to revitalise the precinct.



Alongside images of the Opera House and Bondi Beach, Kings Cross is one of the most internationally recognised places in Australia. Its eclectic history as a bohemian area, a red-light district, home to gangsters and cut throats, movie stars and artists, live music and theatres, dive bars and discos, has made it an intriguing place to live or to visit. For the past century it has built a reputation for being vibrant though also naughty, edgy, and gritty — delighting, and sometimes shocking, an often-conservative Sydney.

Few places in Australia have as rich a history as King Cross. Prior to white settlement the area was home to the Gadigal people who used the area as a meeting place and ceremony ground. White settlement saw the area quickly developed, first as a failed farm, then as home for much of the colonial establishment who built mansions along the ridgeline overlooking Sydney and the harbour. As Sydney grew, development along the ridge intensified, first as grand Victorian terraces, and then, from 1900 onwards,

as federation and art-deco style apartment buildings.

Initially named Queen's Cross, defined by the intersection of Victoria Street and Darlinghurst Road, the precinct was renamed Kings Cross in 1905 after King Edward VII and to prevent confusion with nearby Queens Square. By 1930, it was the most densely populated neighbourhood in Australia (a title it still holds). With the expansion of the nearby Garden Island naval port, the precinct became a playground for cashed-up sailors and

soldiers on furlough.

First during WW2, and then during the Korean and Vietnam wars, the precinct became home to stylish eateries, theatres, burlesque dancers, dance halls and sex workers, as entrepreneurs tried every which way to relieve these servicemen of their dollars. This heady, anything-goes atmosphere soon attracted artists and writers, political and LGBT activists, and the sly grog trade. It became a gateway neighbourhood for new migrants offering affordable accommodation,

An artist's impression of a revived Kings Cross



easy employment, and a tolerant assimilation. And it became a playground for the rich and adventurous seeking a more risqué form of entertainment.

The economic stimulus generated by servicemen saw the Cross develop a thriving night-time economy and it became the place to go when the rest of Sydney closed down. The 1980s saw most of the sailors and soldiers leave, but by then the Cross had a life of its own. Its late-night bars and nightclubs attracted thousands of visitors from across Sydney and across the world. Every night, but especially on weekends, the Cross

became a mass of over 20,000 people seeking to dance and drink the night away, and the local economy became increasingly based on alcohol.

Along with alcohol came drugs as well as crime — organised and disorganised. The combination of “destination drinking,” drugs and vice slowly changed the perception of the Cross. What was once seen as a “naughty-but-nice” place, was increasingly associated with late-night brawling, party buses, and gangs of stranded drunk people looking for a way home. In the late 1990s, the NSW government implemented a number of reforms aimed at “cleaning up Kings Cross”, including the construction of a new high-profile police station and various other place management reforms, ultimately including the first medically supervised safe-injecting centre in Australia. (In 2005, Kings Cross joined Johannesburg as the only two places in the world to have the riot

squad deployed as a matter of routine.)

Sydney’s tolerance of alcohol-fuelled violence eventually reached its limits and the NSW government responded with a series of regulatory reforms. Bars and nightclubs had their hours of operation limited, the type of alcohol they could serve and the music they could play proscribed. No new venues selling alcohol were permitted and patrons were restricted from moving around, as venues were required to ‘lock’ them out when they left. The reforms saw many venues close down and Kings Cross’s night-time economy moved elsewhere. With its economic base — dining and alcohol — now curtailed, the precinct drifted. This decline was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic which forced an even harder lock-down on what little activity remained.

The main streets were struggling even before the COVID-19 lock-down. Years of negative press and the lock-out laws had given the Cross a tarnished reputation. Whether deserved or not, many Sydneysiders still don’t see the Cross as a nice place to visit. The servicemen are long gone, and the Sydney community has made it clear that few want the party buses to return. So how do we support economic revitalisation? How do we attract people to work in the Cross during the day or visit at night?

A precinct that sings

Live performance, in all its forms, could provide a means of attracting new visitors (and their wallets) to the Cross. Live performance — be it music, cabaret, theatre, drama, or comedy — is the mainstay of many urban precincts across the world, and for good reason. People going to a show or performance often stop at a bar or restaurant on their way and will stay for a late-night meal or drink when the show is over. More importantly, they are unlikely to drink to excess or engage in anti-social behaviour.

Here the Cross has a head start. It is home to several small-to-medium-sized

theatres. The many struggling or boarded-up night clubs and adult entertainment venues in the area could also be given a new lease of life if they were repurposed as performance or music venues. If the Cross can develop a critical mass of venues, and across a range of sizes and formats, it could build a vibrant night-time economy servicing theatregoers. It could re-establish its reputation for multicultural food and build a network of ‘eat streets’. It could replace its old night-time economy, which was based on alcohol and destination drinking, with one based on destination eating and entertainment.

Reclaiming the street

The role of the street is too often overlooked in Sydney. In building our neighbourhoods we focus too much on land use, good architecture, and the design of buildings, rather than on the much more important places in between — the street. The street is where the real life of a city happens. Good high streets are people places and their use for cars and transport only ever a secondary consideration. Wherever possible, footpaths should be widened to allow more space for pedestrians and kerbside dining. Footpaths need to be clear of unnecessary clutter to allow more space for those critically important ingredients that make a good high street — trees, furniture, and seating.

Where Darlinghurst Road crosses William Street needs particular attention. The area is festooned with a multiplicity of traffic lanes travelling every which way, which makes the place particularly unpleasant for the pedestrian. The six lanes of traffic could be reduced to a single lane in each direction, reflecting the number of lanes to the north of the intersection, creating greater space for a pedestrian plaza, and reknitting north and south Darlinghurst Road back together. The resultant space can then host cultural, creative, and night-time activities, enticing people to traverse the

currently hostile area. Fixing this intersection — the actual cross from which the Cross gets its name — is a must.

Darlinghurst Road isn't the only street which needs attention. The side streets and laneways also need to be afforded a wider role than just for servicing local buildings, rat-running cars, and waste removal. These are places in their own right. Wherever possible, they should be activated with commercial and social activities including alfresco dining. Dead-end lanes and cul-de-sacs should be extended with through-site links in new

and new development should be incentivised to include green roofs and vertical gardens.

Lighting the way

In the 1950s, the Cross was famous for its neon signs, which lit the main streets and laneways with an array of colour and movement. The famous Coca Cola sign is just a small remnant of what was once a glistening neon boulevard. Last year, the NSW government released its 24-hour economy strategy, setting out an agenda to support night-time economic, social, and cultural activity across Sydney. The strategy is built on

grid would be a network of 24-hour economy hubs that are activated, well-connected and promoted as a whole. Kings Cross, as Sydney's historic night-time hub, should be the start of this grid. Setting a goal to have the precinct be the first location certified would shift the narrative for the precinct as a vibrant place, while providing confidence that a safe, diverse offering is available.

Improving connectivity

If the Cross is successful in building a more vibrant day and night-time economy, it needs to be better connected to the rest of the city. How people get to and from Kings Cross, how they move around once there, needs significant improvement and work. Several reports over recent years have called for the state government to run the eastern suburbs rail longer so visitors are not stranded. While extending the hours of operation of the railway is an important first step, fixing the amenity and experience of the Kings Cross station itself is the next.

This station is the principal gateway to the Cross. It's how most residents and workers get to and from the precinct and it provides the all-important first impression for new visitors. Sadly, this 1970s underground bunker of a structure presents a poor-quality front door. While the station is what it is and won't be rebuilt anytime soon, there are things we can do to improve its functionality and presentation. Better lighting and signage are a must, and the visitor experience could be improved with public art.

The Cross still has all the ingredients for making a great and vibrant place. It has a wonderful street network, intersected with interesting lanes and parks. It has great transport access with connections to the City Rail network, and easy access to the CBD. It has a rich and beautiful architecture. And it has a great and colourful history. In short, the Cross has great bones on which to build a great place and a great future.

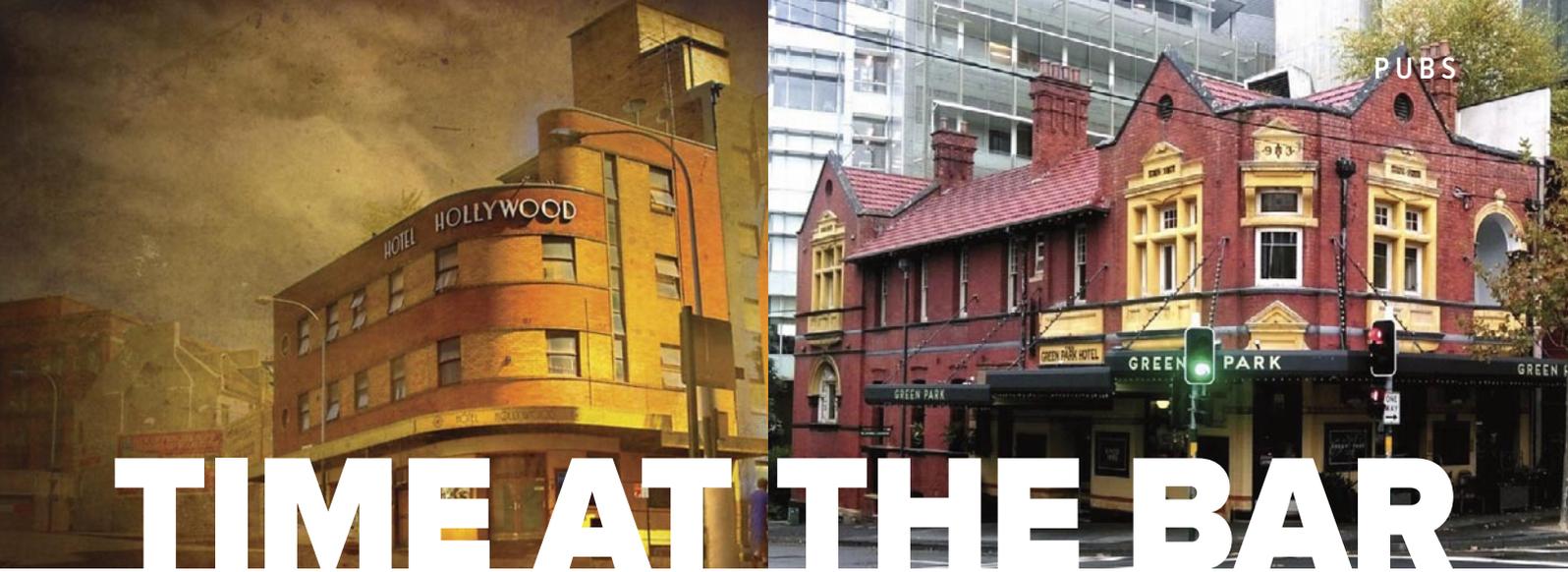
■ Source: Committee for Sydney



The Cross still has all the ingredients for making a great and vibrant place: a wonderful street network, intersected with interesting lanes and parks; great transport access; a rich and beautiful architecture. In short, the Cross has great bones on which to build a great place and a great future.

development. As much as is possible they should be pedestrianised to make them safer and more interesting. Wherever possible, sections of the kerbside lane should be turned into parklets or to provide more space for street trees. Council's current policy of encouraging roof-top gardens and plantings is also strongly supported

community sentiment that Sydney's night-time experience has been getting worse over the years and a desire to diversify the offering away from alcohol-based activities. It sets out a wide range of recommendations to improve our 24-hour economy, underpinned by the appointment of a "neon grid" across Sydney. The neon



TIME AT THE BAR

With the Green Park sold and the Hollywood on the market, **Christopher Kelly** laments the closure of two of Sydney's iconic hotels.

When I heard the news that the Hotel Hollywood was up for sale I could've cried into my beer.

The sale of the Hollywood — as it's affectionately known to locals — follows the death in 2019 of owner Doris Goddard. A one-time Hollywood actress, Doris left Tinseltown in the late 1970s and built up a portfolio of inner-city pubs, including the West End Hotel in Balmain and the Marlborough in Newtown. She purchased the Hollywood in 1977 for \$178,000.

Working in an office directly next door for a number of years, I considered the Hollywood to be something of a second home. Many an evening I'd be supping schooners and sharing yarns with half-cut colleagues. More often than not, you'd find a kaftan-clad Doris propped up on her stool at the bar, a customary red wine in hand. When it was time for Doris (then in her late 70s) to retire for the evening, we'd shout out a cheery goodnight. Doris would respond with a smile and a regal wave before tottering upstairs. Despite its name — and aside from a disco ball — the Hollywood wasn't glitzy or glam. Like its late owner, it had seen better days and had remained "historically intact" for 80 years. But that was its charm. Scuzzy chic we called it.

Now in the hands of HTL Property, the Hollywood is being marketed as "a

very rare city fringe hotel exhibiting all key fundamentals astute purchasers are seeking". The four-storey, art-deco-fronted venue that straddles Foster and Hunt streets in Surry Hills comes complete with a late licence and pokie machines. There's also a first-floor residence, with nine accommodation rooms up above. While no price tag has yet been revealed, similar properties have gone under the hammer for up to \$10 million.

With its "mixed-use repositioning possibilities", what the Hollywood will become once it's sold is anyone's guess. If it remains a pub, it will no doubt be snapped up by a corporate chain and cleansed of all character. More likely than not — with "scope to triple in size and a rooftop with CBD views" — it will be converted into a boutique apartment block. One thing's certain, the Hollywood will never be the same again.

Neither will the Green Park Hotel in Darlinghurst. Sold last year by Solotel to St Vincent's Hospital for between \$5 to \$10 million, "the Greenie" is destined to become a mental health outreach centre. Bought in part because of its "warmth charm", Vinnies plans to turn the site into "an alcohol-free community facility" while "maintaining all the best elements of the local pub".

But as Benedict Brook writes on news.com.au, "The best element of a pub — is that it's a pub!" Brook

continues: "A space that will allow vulnerable members of the community to meet and feel a sense of belonging will come at the cost of losing space that allowed vulnerable members of the community to meet and feel a sense of belonging." It requires a stiff drink to wrap your head around that kind of logic. While acknowledging that "the local area and vulnerable people will benefit from this sort of facility", member for Sydney Alex Greenwich said: "I join locals in mourning the loss of what is a great hotel. The Green Park has been a safe, accepting, and fun space for LGBTQI+ communities."

Particularly irksome for locals was the lack of transparency over the sale; the deal was done quietly and quickly. And questions have been raised as to why St Vincent's couldn't have purchased another venue nearby. "Surely," asked Liberal councillor Christine Forster at the time, "with so much local commercial real estate empty, St Vincent's could find an alternative site and this great old pub could be preserved." Unfortunately, that wasn't the case. Despite a grassroots campaign to save the Greenie, the 128-year-old pub served its last drinks on 20 December 2020. Add O'Malleys Hotel in Kings Cross to the list of recent closures and it seems Sydney's historic pubs are disappearing as fast as schooners during a six 'o' clock swill.

TESTING TIMES

A spate of deaths across Australia has renewed calls for a move away from the current punitive approach to drug taking towards policies of harm-minimisation. **Jake Kendall** reports.

Following an investigation into a cluster of five drug-related deaths in Melbourne, a coroner has recommended the Victoria government implements an illicit drug-checking service as “a matter of urgency”.

Delivering her findings, Paresa Spanos said: “If we accept there are unlikely to be any major changes to drug regulation in the foreseeable future, or any changes in an individual’s preparedness to use illicit drugs, Victorians will continue to be exposed to the risks of unregulated drug markets.” She added: “The evidence available to me supports a finding that there is broad support for a drug-checking service and drug early warning network as evidence-based interventions — at least among those with knowledge and expertise in harm minimisation.”

A similar call for drug checking was made by a NSW coroner in 2019 after an inquest into the deaths of six young people at music festivals over two summers. Back then, deputy state coroner Harriet Grahame described the evidence to support pill testing as “compelling”. “Drug checking,” she said, “is simply a harm-reduction strategy that should be trialed as soon as possible in NSW.”

Public health experts agree. “The evidence presently available is sufficient to justify the careful introduction of pill testing around Australia,” said Paul Komesaroff,



professor of medicine at Monash University. “Specifically, the availability of facilities to allow young people at venues or events where drug taking is acknowledged to be likely, to seek advice about the substances they’re considering ingesting.”

Quite clearly, a different approach to drug taking needs to be explored. High-visibility and punitive policing operations — such as random searches and sniffer dogs — are not only ineffectual and a waste of resources, but counterproductive. A heavy police presence at a festival, for instance, often precipitates panic ingestion and dangerous preloading, increasing the risk of illness or death. “The reality is,” said Miki McLay, a teaching associate at Monash University’s department of criminology, “regardless of the efforts of law enforcement, there continues to be a significant market for illegal drugs in Australia. The primary risks associated with use of party drugs are

related to their illegality.”

The unregulated nature of the drug market in Australia means anything goes when it comes to drug production. “People manufacturing drugs such as ecstasy pills will sometimes cut pills with other substances or substitute other more dangerous drugs entirely,” said McLay. As well, MDMA and other drugs are becoming ever more potent, presenting risks to users in terms of overdosing. “People are often unaware of the health risks involved in consuming MDMA and other illicit drugs,” said McLay. “Drug checking provides us with a unique opportunity to respond to the risks effectively.”

So how would a drug-checking service work at a music festival, say? Well, using overseas models as examples, a typical drug-checking centre would comprise a mobile lab, a sampling area, and a counselling area. After submitting a sample for testing, users would receive unbiased health

information and offered access to a range of services. Once the drug sample has been analysed, the festivalgoer will be told of the risks of consuming the substances identified. Anonymised information about the sample is then usually shared with other consumers, emergency departments and law enforcement. Results from analyses are also retained by researchers for the monitoring of trends in the illicit drug market and used to contribute to scientific research, policymaking, policing, and emergency healthcare.

A common criticism of drug-checking services is that they promote drug use. It's a view McLay firmly rejects. "Evidence would suggest that people don't end up consuming more illicit substances as a result of a drug-checking service. Drug-checking services effectively encourage people who use illicit drugs to modify their behaviours in ways that reduce the risks of harm to their health." Detractors of the scheme also say that drug checking would imply that taking illicit drugs is safe. Again, McLay strongly disagrees. "Every drug-checking service out there operates on a harm-reduction basis. Even with precise testing," said McLay, "service staff never tell users that what they are taking is safe. Because with all drugs the level of risk depends a lot on the characteristics of the person and the environment. Services provide information on contents, the risks involved, and how to reduce them."

It appears sceptics of the scheme are at odds with most Australians, two-thirds of whom are in favour of pill testing at music festivals. About 63 percent of respondents to a survey conducted by the Australian National University agreed that pill testing should be employed at festivals, including 33 percent who strongly agreed. While the findings clearly show majority support for drug checking, the idea has largely been dismissed by politicians across the country — despite high-profile cases of deaths at music festivals.

NSW premier Gladys Berejiklian, for

example, has consistently argued that drug checking sends the "wrong message" to young people and would give them "a false sense of security". She instead thinks people should "just say no" to drugs altogether. However, that campaign sailed and failed a long time ago. Indeed, 2019 data from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey shows drug usage rates in Australia the highest they've been in almost 20 years — particularly among people in their 20s and 30s.

Berejiklian's opposition to pill testing goes against the implicit advice of the commissioner who led the state's ice inquiry. Professor Howard delivered a four-volume report containing 104 recommendations to the government in January last year. The government immediately ruled out five key recommendations, including operating more supervised injecting centres, relinquishing sniffer dogs, and implementing pill testing. "Courage in relation to drug policy reform I think is very weak," said Howard. "This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get this right, and I think we're blowing it, frankly."

So far, only the ACT has introduced a pill-testing policy, the aim of which is "to provide guidelines for event organisers to incorporate pill testing and other harm-reduction measures into event planning to promote patron health and safety". While keen to demonstrate its commitment to the National Drug Strategy, the ACT government considers pill testing to be "a sensible approach to limiting the dangers of illicit drug use at ACT events".

The move to implement a pill-testing policy came after an independent review confirmed a trial in Canberra encouraged users to discard unsafe drugs. An evaluation of pill testing at Groovin the Moo in April 2019 declared the trial of 234 festivalgoers a success because "all those who had a very dangerous substance detected disposed of that drug in the amnesty bin". These included seven people whose pills were found to contain a highly toxic chemical associated with

deaths in the US and New Zealand. "When a patron was told that their drug was not what they expected it to be, they were less likely to take that drug," concluded the report.

The report's lead researcher, Anna Olsen, said the fact the pill-testing service led to harm reduction behaviours was a key marker of a favourable outcome. "For people who went on to take the drug they had tested, we found evidence for risk-reducing behaviours such as taking less of the drug, spacing out their drug consumption and taking other safety precautions like drinking lots of water," she said. The ACT health and youth minister, Rachel Stephen-Smith, has urged other governments to seriously consider implementing a similar drug-checking service. "Across the country we have seen too many avoidable deaths. It is obvious current processes and policies are not working and more needs to be done."

The Melbourne deaths are a tragic example of that. Thinking they were taking MDMA or magic mushrooms, the five young men who died had unknowingly consumed a combination of highly potent psychoactive substances: 25C-NBOMe and 4-Fluoroamphetamine (4-FA). Monica Barratt — a senior research fellow at RMIT University — was an expert witness at the coronial inquest into their deaths. "I argued if the deceased had known the drugs contained 25C-NBOMe combined with 4-FA, it's reasonable to presume they either wouldn't have taken them or may have avoided snorting them in favour of a less risky route, such as swallowing." Barratt believes that — "in the current context of drug prohibition" — drug checking is "the most promising pathway to reduce harm among people who use drugs" in Australia. However, added Barratt: "It's important to acknowledge that if we had a legalised and regulated supply of MDMA, we wouldn't need to analyse samples to work out what's in them."

■ Source material by Miki McLay

BROUGHT TO JUSTICE?

The NSW police officer who was filmed slamming an Aboriginal teenager face-first to the ground in Surry Hills in June 2020 has been charged with two counts of assault.

Alec Smart reports.

NSW Police released a statement on 4 May confirming an as-yet unnamed male constable was issued with a court attendance notice to answer charges of assault occasioning actual bodily harm and common assault. Furthermore, 11 months after the incident, the officer's ongoing employment was now "under review". The officer is due to appear before Downing Centre Local Court in central Sydney on Thursday, 24 June 2021.

The constable, from Surry Hills command, was filmed with a mobile phone on 1 June 2020 reacting violently to backchat from a 16-year-old Aboriginal youth. The exchange, which took place around 5.30pm, ended with the officer employing a "leg-sweep" and kicking the boy's feet out from under him, causing the victim to land face-first on a brick-paved footpath. The boy sustained chipped teeth, cuts to his knee, face and elbow, and a bruised shoulder. He was taken to St Vincent's Hospital afterwards for X-rays to check for possible fractures.

The disturbing mobile phone footage of the original incident — which was posted to the internet and shared widely on social and

mainstream media — took place at Ward Park adjacent to the Northcott Estate high-rise social housing complex in Surry Hills. The footage began during a discussion between youths and police on whether police officers should use swear words while on duty. The altercation involved three police officers — one male and two females — and at least three Indigenous youths (including the one recording the interaction on his phone).

In the video, the male officer (the Surry Hills constable since charged with assault) denies an accusation from the 16-year-old that he'd been swearing. He challenges the lad, saying: "I didn't say that at all mate — you need to open up your ears!" The boy responds: "What? I heard you from over here, I don't need to open up my ears. I'll crack your f**king jaw bro!"

The constable then apparently loses his temper, and marches over to the boy, demanding, "What was that? What was that? Turn around." The policeman quickly spins the boy around and clasps his hands behind his back, and although the boy doesn't resist, the officer suddenly uses his boot to kick the teenager's legs sideways. The teen immediately falls forward and lands face-first on the footpath. The victim is heard moaning in pain while the two female officers assist in restraining him face-down on the ground. Meanwhile, the boy's friends can be heard

remonstrating with the male officer who kicked him over.

NSW Police responded to the public backlash after the video went viral, declaring on 2 June 2020 that the Surry Hills officer who was filmed face-slaming the Indigenous teenager into the ground had been placed on "restricted duties". Police Professional Standards announced they were launching an investigation into the incident. Despite this — and the damage to relations between police and the Indigenous community — senior commanders refused to condemn his actions. NSW's highest-ranked officer, police commissioner Mick Fuller, insisted the constable's actions were justified because he was "having a bad day".

Fuller, who controversially defended NSW Police policy of strip-searching children without parental supervision — including the unethical targeting of girls under 18 made to undress and squat for intimate inspections — told Sydney's 2GB radio on 3 June that his officer was justified. "The fact that this officer doesn't have a chequered history and he has been in [the police] for three-and-a-half years, if the complaint is sustained against him, you would have to say he has had a bad day," Commissioner Fuller said. "I am sure most of the community wouldn't want to see someone who has made a mistake sacked after making such a



Three stills in sequence left to right from footage of the alleged assault

commitment to the community.”

NSW police minister David Elliott, also downplaying the dangerous leg-sweep employed by the police constable, said he was “horrified” by the language the Aboriginal teenager used. “I was just as disturbed about the threat from a young person to physically assault a police officer as I was with the response from the police officer,” Elliott said.

Despite the comments by Fuller and Elliot, NSW premier Gladys Berejiklian said that, after seeing the footage, “we still have a long way to go in our country” towards responsible policing. Mick Willing, NSW police assistant commissioner, also admitted he was “concerned”. On 2 June 2020, Willing hosted a press conference addressing the violent video, stating that “an independent investigation has been commenced by our Professional Standards Command. That investigation will be conducted thoroughly and openly.”

Lawyer George Newhouse, founder of the National Justice Project human rights legal service, said: “The family want charges to be laid against this officer. Not an investigation where police are investigating police. If this was anyone else, you or me or any member

of the original community, we would be charged and let the court decide.”

On 3 June, two days after the face-flinging incident, the victim’s family — who can’t be named for legal reasons — held a press conference and demanded the constable involved be charged with assault. They also called for an end to “police investigating police”. “Because we’re Aboriginal, we see a lot of this all the time. We experience extra obligations to answer to people: who we are, where we’re going, what we’re doing, when we’re just walking along.”

The injured lad’s sister told the media: “When you see the way these people [police] treat our people, it is frightening . . . This highlights the treatment our people have been experiencing for years when there aren’t any cameras around . . . The frustration of being constantly targeted by police is heavy and not being able to place your trust in people who are employed to protect you is sad and worrisome. It comes increasingly hard to feel safe when the police do not have a good connection to their communities.”

After NSW Police revealed on 4 May 2021 that the Surry Hills constable responsible for flinging the Aboriginal

boy on his face was now facing two charges of assault, Karly Warner, chief executive officer of the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW and ACT, said: “You can’t have justice without accountability. Police should be subject to the same laws that apply to the community. We welcome this step towards justice. We are routinely harassed, stopped, questioned, and searched by police for no reason. We are refused bail at higher rates and disproportionately pursued through the courts for minor offences.”

A spokesperson for the boy’s family said in a public statement that they were “happy with the way this is now proceeding, legally and fairly”. “We know we cannot discuss the details of this case now that charges have been laid. We as a family cry and share the grief and pain of the families who have had the lives of their young Black sons and daughters taken away from them violently by police and custodial authorities. Aboriginal people across Australia have been unfairly treated, racially vilified, and systematically oppressed since 1788. We look forward to the law being applied with fairness and justice.”

■ Courtesy *Sydney Sentinel*

The beginnings of a movement

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Aboriginal Legal Service. Here's how it all began.

In Inner Sydney in the 1960s, police were enforcing a curfew at night that solely targeted Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people walking the streets in Redfern, Newtown, Alexandria, and Chippendale were subject to arbitrary, violent arrest and detention by police.

At night, when Aboriginal people met at local hotels, police often blocked the nearby streets with paddy wagons before closing time. They would move into the hotels and force Aboriginal customers out onto the streets. They were then indiscriminately arrested and held overnight in the cells, where they were often brutalised. At this time, no access to effective legal representation existed for Aboriginal people. As a result, many appeared unrepresented in court, and simply pleaded guilty.

“Our people were blatantly targeted, arrested and charged with nonsense offences like public drunkenness, offensive behaviours and offensive language,” said ALS chair Mark Davies — at the launch, in April, of an exhibition marking the 50th anniversary of the organisation. “The ever-present threat of these charges, along with a nightly curfew, were designed to keep us under the thumb of the police and state.”

Influenced by the Black Power movement in the US, a group of Redfern activists — that included Paul and Isabel Coe, Gary Foley, Billy and Lyn Craigie, Gary Williams, Bronwyn

Penrith, Tony Coorey, and James Wedge — started monitoring and recording the everyday experience of police brutality and harassment. They approached white lawyers, trade union groups and university students — none of whom had any idea about the scale of discrimination, nor the notorious curfew imposed on Aboriginal people in Redfern and the surrounding areas. One of the people enlisted to the cause was Hal Wootten — then dean of the UNSW Faculty of Law and, later, a supreme court judge. Wootten and colleagues visited local hotels to confirm the claims made by the Aboriginal community. The allegations of police abuse and intimidation were affirmed.

By the end of 1970, from a single shop-front office in Redfern, a group of practicing lawyers regularly volunteered their time and expertise in support of the activists' mission. Volunteer groups of young law students also offered their time to arrange bail, interview Aboriginal people in lock-up, and prepare defences cases. The goal was to provide representation, reduce incarceration and stop police harassment of Aboriginal people. After having received a \$20,000 grant from the federal government, the activists and volunteers were able to formally establish the first Aboriginal Legal Service in Australia. By early 1971, the ALS had handled over 550 cases, the vast majority criminal.

“The beating heart of Redfern and the self-determination that lives here is because of the legal service,” said shadow minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney, also at the exhibition launch. “I remember myself as a very young Aboriginal woman moving to Sydney from Wiradjuri

Country and being able to absorb the strength of the organisations like the Aboriginal Legal Service.”

The social and individual bravery of those original Redfern activists, which led to the successful establishment of the ALS, inspired others. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people throughout Australia began taking their own steps towards solving community policing and legal problems confronting Aboriginal people.

In 1973, the ALS voted into office its first full Aboriginal council, putting into working practice Aboriginal self-determination. The involvement of Aboriginal people in both management and service delivery was critical to tailoring the ALS to the needs of First Nations communities. Women and men who were leaders in their own communities were elected as field officers, and the same resourcing model applied to staff. What began in Redfern, soon spread throughout the rest of the country. By 1974, there was an ALS in every state and territory throughout Australia.

Today, the Aboriginal Legal Service has a network of 24 offices across NSW and the ACT. The service continues to provide free support and representation in areas of criminal law, family law, children's care and protection, and rental and tenancy advice. “This movement belongs to each and every Aboriginal and Torres Islander people — it is made stronger by the support of many allies,” said Davies. “We are proud of what we have achieved over the years, but the work is not done. We need ongoing support so that we are around for 50 years more.”

■ Source Aboriginal Legal Service

Kill the bill

On 17 April, trans protesters and their allies took to Taylor Square to oppose an anti-trans education bill. At the rally, queer non-binary primary school educator **Sam Guerra** delivered an impassioned speech.



Last August, I discovered Mark Latham had proposed a terrifying education legislation amendment bill in the NSW parliament. If passed, the bill would prohibit schools from teaching that trans and gender-diverse people exist, or that trans kids should even be treated with respect. It will prohibit school counsellors from affirming trans or gender-diverse students and prevent them from providing them with any support or referrals. It will put teachers at risk of losing their job when they support a trans or gender-diverse student.

When I heard about Mark Latham's bill I knew I had to do something, so I started an online petition. After just one week, the petition had received over 10,000 signatures. (By the time it was delivered to NSW Greens and Labor politicians, it had amassed more than 112,000 signatures.) I created the petition in the middle of an important time in my life. I was in my final semester of my master's degree and in the middle of a personal discovery: that I identify as gender non-binary.

Growing up, I struggled with gender. I was born male, but I never felt I fit within the binary of what is perceived to be male. I was made to feel wrong

about my choices and as I navigated my way through school I was bullied and excluded because I was different. My educators in primary school thought the solution was to force me to play only with my male peers . . . but it only made me more confused. I was sent to an all-boys secondary school, which only made it harder for me.

I began to believe something was extremely wrong with me. I had no one to confide in and I began to feel very lost. Unfortunately, I made it all the way through my schooling life, hiding my identity in the closet as I never felt comfortable or supported enough to be my authentic self. As I stepped into adulthood, I realised no one could tell me how to behave, act or identify anymore. I tried it their way and it didn't work and realised that now it's time to do it my way. From that moment on, I've been able to become my fully realised queer, non-binary self — and love who I am.

When I chose to study education, I made it my mission to not only educate students on how to accumulate the knowledge and skills necessary for their later lives, but also to educate them, support them, and guide them through crucial developmental stages that will help them to also realise their true selves and identity. But if Latham's bill passes, I am now afraid the law will prevent me from doing that.

A child spends much of their

developmental years at school with a teacher as their guide. To have the law prevent educators from being able to support their students is wrong and inhumane. To have the law state that teachers cannot educate their students about trans and gender-diverse people and to respect them is cruel. To prohibit school counsellors from affirming trans and gender-diverse students and not be able to offer them support or referrals is evil. To threaten a

teacher's job because they supported one of their students who is coming to terms with their identity is heartless.

Our trans and gender-diverse students already suffer. They don't feel safe, and they haven't for way too long. It is the responsibility of teachers and schools to create a safe space for all their students — no matter how they choose to identify. No law should interfere with that. To Mark Latham and all your supporters, let it be known that if I was ever put in a position where a student of mine confided in me about their confusion with their gender or their identity and the law prevented me from supporting them, I would not hesitate to put my job on the line to support this student.

As I navigate my way through my new journey as a teacher, I will put in my all to create a safe and inclusive classroom and school — one that I needed many years ago when I was a student. To all the trans and gender-diverse students and community, know that I hear you, that I see you and that I am here for you. I will continue to speak and fight for you until we are treated equally and feel safe in whichever community we are a part of. Let's continue to fight until this bill amendment is thrown out of parliament. Let's send a message to people like Mark Latham that we no longer choose to hide. We will fight until we are seen and heard — and cannot be ignored.

A failure to keep us safe

opinion

Until it is properly acknowledged that centuries of ill-treatment of Aboriginal people is linked to our imprisonment and deaths in custody, our circumstances will not improve, writes **Meena Singh**.



When people ask me why Aboriginal people offend so much, I try to look through their lens; to find the question they are actually — or should be — asking.

colonisation is framed as something that happened over 200 years ago. As long as we continue to believe the devastation of colonisation is only in the past, we can never heal. The dispossession of land took away our ancestors'

Governments on both sides of politics tell us that law-and-order policies combat crime; that by charging and detaining more people, by giving ever-increasing budgets to police, by building more and bigger prisons, our communities will be kept safe.

But the evidence tells a very different story. Keeping us safe starts much, much earlier. Our health system knows this. Prevention is far better than treatment. During COVID-19, the public health response has centred on keeping us safe by preventing its spread, because if we prioritise treatment, more people will be exposed, get sick and die. So why doesn't the criminal legal system use the same approach?

When I practised criminal law, I could clearly see the point in a person's life when things started to go wrong; when life spiralled out of control as one negative event — like losing a job or falling sick — led to another, and they became trapped in the revolving doors of the justice system. Financial instability led to repeatedly moving for employment or cheap housing, which led to children missing out on school. Trauma from family violence or child abuse led to disconnection from family

which led to homelessness and low self-worth which led to self-medication and criminal activities.

Any of these experiences could upend a life that was otherwise on track to be long and healthy. With so much evidence reinforcing the connection between socio-economic disadvantage, trauma, disability, family violence and abuse with behaviour that traps people in the criminal legal system, we need to ask why society does not look after its most vulnerable better.

Thirty years ago, the royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody found that Aboriginal people were more likely to die in custody than non-Aboriginal people because we were more likely to be in custody in the first place. Sadly in these 30 years little has changed. Aboriginal people are still being locked up and dying in prison at alarming rates. In the month to Easter, five Aboriginal people died in custody.

Right now, we represent three percent of the Australian population, but make up nearly 30 percent of the prison population. If non-Aboriginal prisoners were dying at the rates that Aboriginal prisoners are, there would be outrage. But — as we've seen too often — black lives truly don't matter. Most of the 'events' that could upend an individual life 30 years ago continue to destroy Aboriginal lives today.

Why? Because of colonisation, and the racism at its core. Too often,

connection to home. The same land was given to white people to use and prosper from; to pass down to their children and create intergenerational wealth.

Policies to stop Aboriginal people speaking their own language prevented cultural practices and intricate knowledge being passed between generations. Aboriginal children who were removed from their families were often abused and forced into slave labour. This undermined cultural and familial identity and was often accompanied by the deliberate and sustained entrenchment of disadvantage through the denial of wages and exclusion from work.

When a community sustains this kind of ill-treatment for over 200 years, the trauma is long lasting and deep. Until it is properly acknowledged as the source of Aboriginal overrepresentation in arrest rates, imprisonment and deaths in custody, our lives will not improve.

When people ask me why Aboriginal people offend so much, I try to look through their lens; to find the question they are actually — or should be — asking. What keeps us safe, and what will stop more deaths in custody? The answer most definitely is not the quick fix of big prisons and tougher bail legislation.

Instead, we need to invest in social

continues page 31

Women are fed up

Federal MP for Sydney, **Tanya Plibersek**, says violence against women in Australia is a 'national crisis'.

The revelations of sexual assault in federal politics, the Marches 4 Justice held across our cities and towns — these events have sparked an outpouring of sadness, frustration, anger, and ultimately hope.

I attended the Canberra march with our leader Anthony and the rest of my federal colleagues. Not since Kevin Rudd's Apology have I seen a bigger crowd on the parliament lawns.

At the March 4 Justice and on International Women's Day, I've spoken to people from around Australia: working women and high-school students; mums and dads; grandmothers who were protesting in the seventies — and who are now marching with their grandkids. Unionists and party members who've been fighting sexism all their political lives. These conversations have been raw. Women and men have disclosed abuse they and their loved ones have experienced. There's been exhaustion ("are we still having this same conversation?") and some guilt too ("we thought we would have it fixed by now — or at least closer to fixed than it is").

When one in five women over the



age of fifteen has experienced sexual assault, and 72 percent of women have experienced sexual harassment, and one in three women has experienced domestic violence, and around one woman a week is murdered by a former or current partner, violence against women is a national crisis.

The march might have been prompted by events in parliament, but it was about all women: the new army recruit, the doctor doing her internship, the bus driver, the cleaner or nurse or factory worker or shop assistant experiencing harassment at work. It was about the girl feeling uncomfortable at school; or the woman being abused in residential aged care; or the women abducted by a stranger or bashed or murdered by someone who said he loved her.

It's time to change attitudes and it's time to change laws. Government has a role in both. Our justice system is stacked against victims of sexual assault and harassment. Giving evidence, going through an adversarial court process, speaking about trauma

— these can all be excruciating. And even then, only a tiny fraction of these cases ever ends in conviction. An estimated one in ten rapes is reported to police in the first place. In NSW, of the 15,000 alleged sexual assaults reported to the police in 2018–19, just three percent ended in guilty verdicts. This is a broken system. I want more rapists in gaol. Most importantly, I want to prevent rape from being committed in the

first place.

These aren't new problems. There are decades of reports sitting on the prime minister's desk about women's safety. I began work on the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children in 2007. Since then, we've had reports by the Family Law Council, the Law Reform Commission, the Human Rights Commission. We've had state-led reviews and royal commissions. We've had parliamentary committee reports. The recommendations are there. The work has been done. What we really lack is a government willing to act on them.

Yet for all the sadness and anger, there's also hope. The generation of inspiring young women whose bravery has made this possible will need our backing in coming months and years. Women like Grace Tame, Saxon Mullins, Brittany Higgins, and many, many more are demanding change. We must deliver for them — and with them.

■ An edited extract courtesy *Challenge Magazine*

A failure to keep us safe from page 30

and legal infrastructure that doesn't remove Aboriginal people from society, but supports us to engage and grow — education, family, housing, mental

health and wellbeing support. Aboriginal people need our lives to be valued, and our history and culture to be known and accepted. This is the investment that lays the foundations for generations to grow stronger.

This is what keeps us safe.

■ Meena Singh, a Yorta Yorta and Indian woman, born and living on the land of the Kulin Nations, is the legal director of the Human Rights Law Centre.

■ An edited extract courtesy of *Indigenous X*



THE ALPHA CITY

Modern, urban economies produce a distinctive kind of city life — one where wealth appears to be high in general. However, as **Rowland Atkinson** discusses, the reality is that many middle-income and poorer residents are negatively affected.

Cities are where our economies, wealth and a range of positive outcomes are forged. Yet in many cities around the world, a particular kind of economy exists — dominated by finance, international property investment and growing inequalities. Many people are affected by the way property and finance help those to make more money, while the many who struggle are excluded from prosperity. Even worse — in a city looking to attract further wealth and the wealthy — we see decisions made that worsen pressure in the areas of housing, education, health, and community life.

Meanwhile, many working in politics can be seen to represent the interests of the wealthy and corporate groups — those in law, real estate, property development, think tanks and so on. Many working in these sectors promote

the idea that investment and the presence of the wealthy are necessary for the city to benefit all citizens. But this argument is increasingly criticised. This is because it fails to recognise (and often conceals) how development and finance does not benefit poorer and middle-income citizens. While many discuss the way that the rewards of work are unevenly distributed, in reality, the biggest divide is between those who work for a living and those who own land and other assets. Owning such wealth is a way of making much more money, while those who work have seen their lives become increasingly difficult.

Many who support free-market principles often push for pro-development planning legislation. In many ways, ideas about how the city economy should work become accepted as simply how things are so that they are rarely challenged. These codes have underpinned a kind of capitalist revolution. This has been in place since the early 1980s and only accelerated over time. During this time,

the rich have got richer, corporations and wealthy individuals have paid less and less tax, public housing has been degraded and sold-off, welfare systems have been withdrawn or eroded, and most forms of social investment have been popularly described as wasteful. All of this begs the question — who is the city for?

The alpha city is a term used to describe the kind of city that brings together many of the wealth elite (the richest people), their often, wealthy enablers (those at the top of the property, corporate and political systems), unending rounds of development (in the land and housing markets), and the prominent role of finance. The term is also a description of how those with power tend to privilege property and wealth while doing much less to intervene or to support those in more challenging situations as well as the city's middle classes. While being an alpha city may sound like a winning formula, the reality is that these gains are almost only to the wealthy.

Many of us, looking up from positions of hardship and the struggle of daily life, sense that something is wrong with how the city works. How can we defend the endless production of staggeringly expensive homes, the many empty homes alongside them and their position next to scenes of homelessness and overcrowding? We are often told that we need to pursue the rich, international investors and to promote a low-regulation environment because this will contribute to the rest of the city and nation. Such arguments also underpin changes brought to many communities through regeneration, estate “renewal”, and wholesale demolition of thousands of homes.

These areas of land and housing become the raw material of the property-finance machine, assisting developers to create more, high-cost housing sold on what is essentially an international market to many cash-rich buyers. Those protesting the loss of social, and remnants of affordable housing, essentially compete with the forces of international investment. The last financial crisis helped these arguments because it seemed that there was no money available for social causes (though in reality there is great corporate and personal wealth). At the start of a new financial crisis on the back of COVID-19, we again face important questions about where and how we get money to restore life in our cities, communities, and economy.

In an alpha city, space is made for capital, often more than it is for people. This involves building large numbers of high-cost homes; demolishing public housing estates to make way for open-market housing; and challenging any request for social or affordable housing or social infrastructure such as schools.

The city acts like a pincer squeezing the poor. Its heavy dependence on a finance economy and the attention of the world’s rich delivers little for many. In fact, it brings increasing calls for the removal of poorer and less wealthy households to make way for those with more in the form of estate demolition,

sales of public land and the absence of social housing in almost all new housing. The alpha city creates a hostile environment to those on no and low incomes, but it is also a challenging place for those on decent salaries.

These problems are not new, but they have been worsened by the way the city acts as a kind of machine that sifts out the poor from the wealthy. It is essential that we understand how the wealthy and the poor and middle-incomes are ultimately all connected — they share the same city, the same government and society. This fact is too often concealed by the overstated social and economic value of investment and finance. This often fails to connect that activity to the ultimate role of all business and commercial life — to provide opportunities, care, and wellbeing for all members of the city. This role is too often lost in calls to see business as a means of private wealth creation. Worse, it seems that such rewards are seen as something to be placed beyond the reach of those who contribute to its creation. This is not sustainable, nor socially just.

The poor and middle-income households form the fuel of the alpha city machine. But they also become, as they work and try to survive, its waste product — people who are stressed and straining, working for corporations, borrowing more and more to buy — which helps to fuel rises in house prices — paying more and more of their income to rent, trying to maintain a place in the city. Many of these people are not catered for, included in, nor benefit from a property, finance, and wealth economy that cities have become.

Right now, this city machine seems broken or at best idling. But its components are all ready to start working again when the conditions are right. COVID-19 has mothballed it, but it

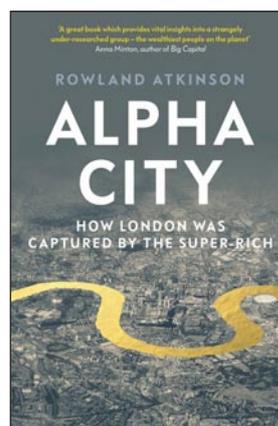
is hardwired to keep working the same way as soon as possible. The interests of those who have money or who invest it are immensely powerful and altering this direction will be extremely challenging.

One of the first things we need to face down is the argument that we somehow need the rich and property development in order for the city to be the best of all possible places. We need to tackle this myth because it is clear that life is worsening for large numbers of its citizens. We are told that the rich are essential, and to fear the exit of the rich to places where tax is lower. It is often said the rich benefit many through investments or buying services, that the property taxes they pay support core social services and so on.

Of course, there is a kernel of truth to all of these arguments. But these arguments quickly fall apart when set against the self-evident inequalities of the city and the sense of massive winners and crashing losers. This is a game overseen by a political elite who have helped to ensure wealth remains untaxed to any significant degree.

A much better set of outcomes can easily be imagined, but this requires a basic proposal — that the wealthy should make a more significant contribution. This should come through taxes on property and wealth, and that of developers and corporations. This should be done because it is right and overdue. This would enable a fairer and socially sustainable city to be created. The preferable alternative for a future city is one that delivers for a much greater number of its citizens and a more balanced economy, for social investment, greater social protections, a revised urban equilibrium in which property prices deflate and where affordable housing is guaranteed in all new development.

■ The paperback version of *Alpha City* by Rowland Atkinson is available from Verso Books





‘I did not wake up one day and decide to become a carer. It just happened — I was suddenly a carer.’

One-in-eight Australians provide unpaid care and support to a family member or friend. But what is it really like to care?

Nick

Ever since I can remember, I have been helping out at home, caring for my mum who has depression and a heart condition. I also help care for my older sister who has been diagnosed with ODD, autism, Asperger’s and epilepsy; and my younger brother who has been diagnosed with ODD, autism, ADHD and Asperger’s.

As a young carer I cook, clean, and mentally and physically support my mother and siblings. Until April last year, I didn’t identify as a young carer. I’ve just grown up with my siblings, helping them out and being there for them — I didn’t realise that what I was doing was caring.

I now know that there is support available to me and other young carers. Meeting other young carers has also made me realise that I’m not so different to other people my age and that there are lots of people who have grown up caring for their family and friends — sometimes without even knowing it.

Like life itself, there are challenges that come with caring: these can be emotional, physical, and mental challenges — sometimes there are social challenges or challenges at school too. I think being a young carer has made me more mature and tolerant — and I’ve definitely learnt good leadership skills. Caring for my family

and experiencing things that not all young people go through has definitely helped shape me and made me a kind-hearted person.

Anne

I did not wake up one morning and decide to become a carer. It just happened — I was suddenly a carer. I was a mother with a beautiful, healthy baby boy and all of a sudden he needed constant care and support and, above all, lots and lots of love. And so began my journey as a carer. I remember, at 20 years old, receiving the terrifying news that our baby may not make it past his third birthday. I remember the pain and anguish of thinking my beautiful boy’s life may be limited.

To make a very long story short, our boy Patrick surprised everyone. Not only did he survive past his third birthday; he also learned to walk and ride a push bike and joined the local athletics club. Patrick is now 41 and still needs many hours of support each day — as a carer you really are on duty 24/7.

My life has been greatly influenced by my son Patrick: he has taught me humility, compassion, and patience. Through the need to gain better services and recognition for people with a disability, I also learned to be assertive and confident to lobby at all levels of government for better outcomes for those that need help.

Being a carer is often not a choice, life circumstances put you there. What keeps you going is knowing the care you give your loved one is making a big difference to their wellbeing. I do my very best every day and — although it

can sometimes be overwhelming — I quickly overcome my emotions and realise there are always others worse off than me. Especially when I look at Patrick and see that big wide smile, his eyes shining with love and happiness.

Rachel

My sudden role change into a carer occurred when a surgeon phoned from America asking for my consent to perform decompression surgery on my daughter, Emily. She had fractured a neck vertebra in a fall, resulting in a spinal cord injury, which rendered her quadriplegic. After three long weeks more than 16,000km from home, Emily returned to Australia. While resident at Royal Rehab in Ryde, Emily was busy with physio, occupational therapy, psychology sessions and vocational training.

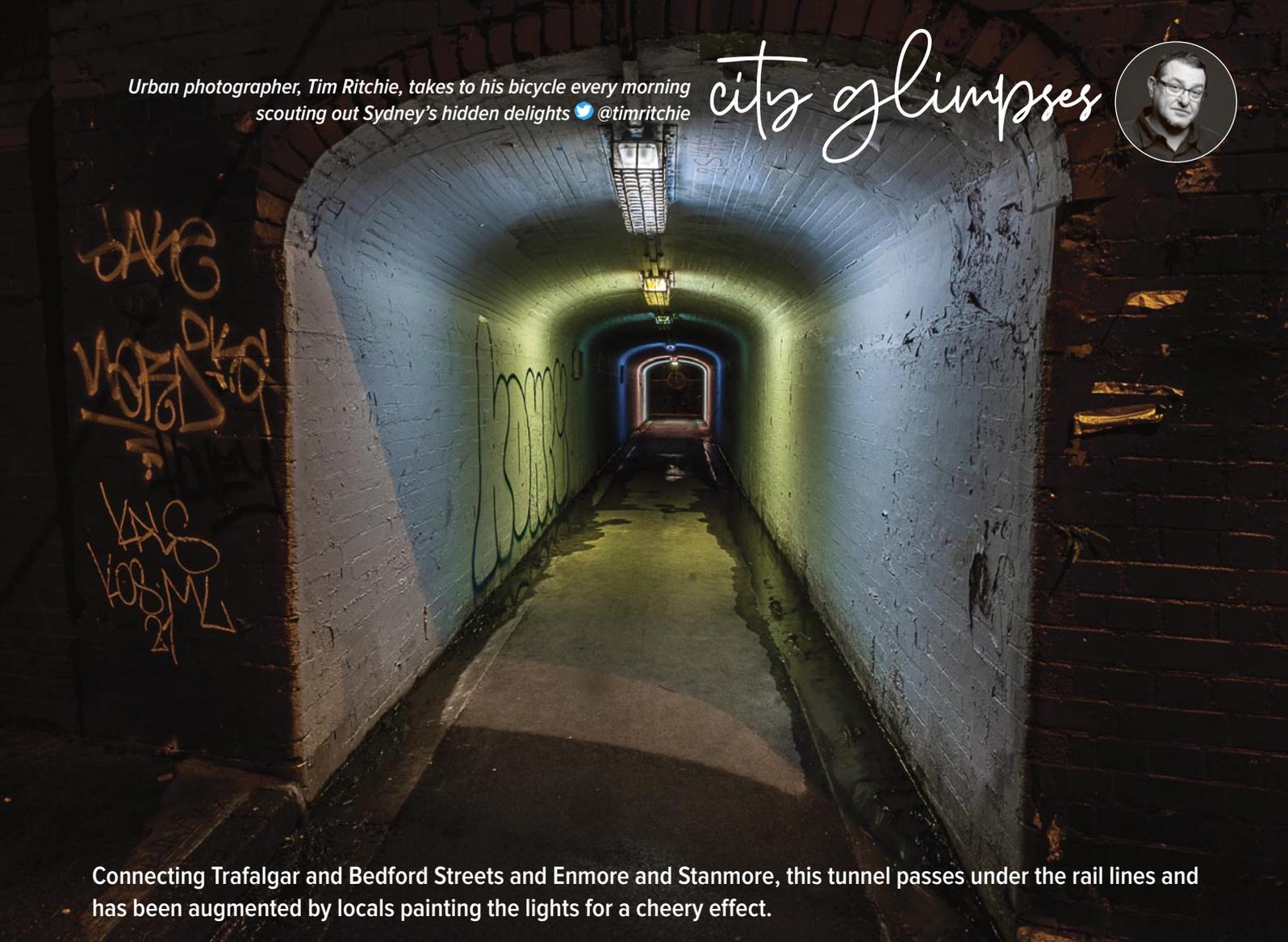
From the outset I collaborated with Emily as her most ardent motivator as she worked hard to regain independence: applying to return to university, negotiating public transport and domestic and international travel; and embarking on new sports and relationships. Over time, my role as facilitator dwindled and I’m delighted that my involvement has subsided — my primary aim was always to initiate independence and self-belief in Emily.

Four years have passed since Emily’s accident. I have learnt we can’t fix all that confronts us in life but through sharing, and with support, we can retain perspective and manage our everyday demands with resilience.

■ Source: Carers NSW Australia

Urban photographer, Tim Ritchie, takes to his bicycle every morning scouting out Sydney's hidden delights 🌟 @timritchie

city glimpses



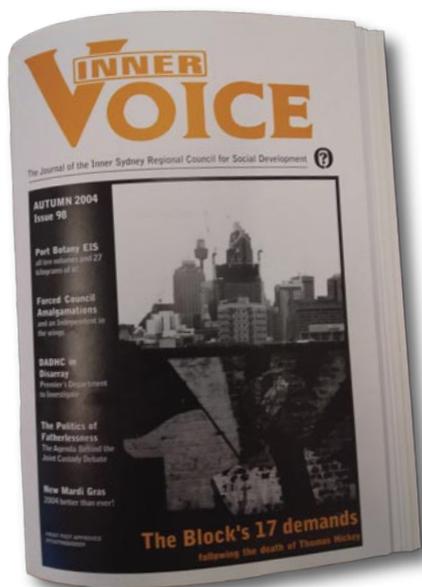
Connecting Trafalgar and Bedford Streets and Enmore and Stanmore, this tunnel passes under the rail lines and has been augmented by locals painting the lights for a cheery effect.

FROM THE VAULT **AUTUMN 2004**

Ahead of the upcoming City of Sydney election, Charlie Richardson assessed the likely outcome.

Ms Moore is a hard-working, highly experienced and tenacious politician. She is seen — even by Labor branch members — as a true independent, uninfluenced by developers. Ms Moore has rapidly assembled a team of six candidates to run for council and declared she might run for mayor. This must be a nightmare scenario for Labor. Many see Ms Moore as the favourite to win. There are ten positions to be filled on the new council, including the mayor's. It is unlikely that Ms Moore's team would all be elected. However, there are other independents running, as well as the Greens. There is every possibility that an alliance of Clover Moore's team of independents, other independents and the Greens could form a majority on council. It seems unlikely that Labor will control the mayor's position and have a majority of councillors. It may be that Clover Moore wins the mayoralty but also without the majority of councillors. Whichever way, a grouping of Greens, independents, lefty-Labor, and the odd Civic Reform councillors will have voting patterns that would be difficult to predict, and there would be many interesting debates. We can be sure that the goings on at Town Hall will have us all agog.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Charlie's 2004 election assessment proved pretty much correct. Clover Moore was elected mayor. And City councillors comprised of a mix of four independents, three Labor, one Green and a Liberal.



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Working in an office directly next door for a number of years, I considered the Hollywood to be something of a second home. Many an evening I'd be supping schooners and sharing yarns with half-cut colleagues. More often than not, you'd find a kaftan-clad Doris propped up on her stool at the bar, a customary red wine in hand. When it was time for Doris (then in her late 70s) to retire for the evening, we'd shout out a cheery goodnight. Doris would respond with a smile and a regal wave before tottering upstairs.

Christopher Kelly

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