

metro assist



annual report
2015-2016

Our mission

To empower individuals, families and communities of diverse backgrounds through innovative, professional and responsive services.

Chairperson's Report



As we enter our 30th year of service, I am proud to present the Metro Assist Annual Report for 2015-16. There is great cause to celebrate the organisation's extraordinary achievements throughout its history and I am pleased to report that this year's efforts further strengthen our position into the future.

This year we embarked on an overhaul of our governance structure from an Incorporated Association to a Company Limited by Guarantee. At the time of writing this report, the process is nearing its conclusion and I hope to be speaking to you at our AGM as the Chair of Metro Assist 'Limited'.

While the change was largely prompted by regulatory requirements, we also considered changes in the nature of funding and contracts, trends in the not-for-profit sector, a heightened duty of care and accountability in respect to the complex work the organisation undertakes. We need look no further than some of the complex cases in the settlement and family services areas and the advisory roles of our tenant advocates and financial counsellors. A strengthened governance structure will ensure that the organisation has the right platform for the future.

As I reflect on the past year and the statistics contained in this report, I am proud of the way our teams respond to people's needs and are pro-active in pursuing key areas of business development. For example, our expanding role in delivering employment related programs such as SkillME

address some of the barriers migrants and refugees experience when looking for work. In its second year as a demonstration project, we are seeing positive outcomes for participants.

We are also considering the opportunities that the NDIS brings along for CALD communities. These communities have historically had low take-up rates of disability services and we are already working with carers and people with disability to help them understand the NDIS and how to access support.

It is important for us to acknowledge that these are also tumultuous times for many of our clients and communities with the continuing conflict in Syria and other parts of the world. Others are experiencing housing stress, homelessness, domestic and family violence and mental health issues. I speak on behalf of our Board in always seeking to highlight and combat inequities and to continue supporting people through difficult times.

I wish to acknowledge my fellow Board members, the management team, staff and volunteers for their diligence and commitment to the organisation and to the people we work with. Organisations like ours do not exist alone and I am grateful to the many partners and collaborators across all of our programs. Of course, none of this would be possible without the support of our funding bodies and sponsors and I am grateful for their continued confidence in the services we are able to deliver on their behalf.

A very happy 30th anniversary to everyone.

Elena Berrocal Capdevila
Chairperson

CEO Report



As CEO, I am proud to share some of the highlights and challenges of the 2015-16 reporting year. From a management perspective, I can confidently say that we are in a strong position; financially, operationally and more importantly, in our capacity to deliver quality services to our clients and

communities. We have made significant decisions around resources such as office locations so that we can become more accessible to clients and we are committed to strengthening our workforce through training and recruiting people with skills that are commensurate to the needs of the organisation. We are also looking at technology upgrades that will support the work of teams across our various sites and in the field.

The past year has seen significant initiatives such as the overhaul of our governance structure and the exploration of business opportunities within the NDIS. We are closely monitoring major reforms in the area of Family and Community Services which are expected to have significant impacts on the future role of providers. We are also working closely with our sister Migrant Resource Centres and Settlement Services International around strategic positioning and potential areas of work.

Highlights

In September 2015, the Government's announcement of the additional intake of 12,000 refugees from Syria and Iraq triggered a profound and positive response in the Australian community. For us, it led to the establishment of a wonderful relationship with the community of St Michael's Anglican Church in Vaucluse. The church was very gracious in hosting a lunch for some of our existing refugee families which resulted in a wonderful day with bonds of friendship made across language, cultures and religion. The day was reciprocated with a Syrian feast in the back yard of one of the families in Roselands and women from both groups meet regularly to exchange needlework tips and to engage in conversational English.

Metro Assist and Settlement Services International (SSI) hosted a forum for services and community groups in South West Sydney to prepare and map services in readiness for Syrian and Iraqi refugees who would be resettled in the region. More than one hundred people participated in the Bankstown forum and were briefed by Professor Peter Shergold, the NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement.

Last year we reported the commencement of SkillME, a demonstration project funded by Multicultural NSW, to support migrants and refugees into employment. A year down the track and the collective impact nature of the project has proven highly effective in assessing jobseekers' needs, getting them into training, assisting in the process of skills recognition and general job-readiness. SkillME adopts a collaborative approach by working with employers, training organisations and JobActive. The Hon John Ajaka, Minister for Multiculturalism, Aged and Disability Services, attended a graduation of trainees in the furniture removalist industry and was able to see first-hand what the project could deliver to employers and to the industry.

Each year Metro Assist celebrates Refugee Week to highlight the journey that refugees in our community have experienced, and to make them feel as part of our community. With Refugee Week falling during Ramadan, we combined the event with an Iftar dinner and presented awards to a number of recipients for their outstanding work in supporting their community. The event was held in the company of The Hon. Tony Burke MP, Federal Member for Watson and Sophie Cotsis, NSW MLC.

Challenges

Increases in the cost of living, under-employment and housing vulnerability are leading causes of family breakdowns, domestic violence, homelessness and mental health issues. The challenge to our caseworkers is working with more complex and intense cases and trying to find solutions when there are extensive waiting lists for many services that we would normally refer to.

In the family services and housing area, Metro Assist is engaging with stakeholders at all levels to establish what proposed reforms might look like and what changes we need to make in readiness. We have been able to work in partnership with a number of agencies to maximise the benefits to the community, including the United Muslim Women's Association in the Going Home Staying Home program, Rosemount Good Shepherd in delivering financial counselling, and a host of other organisations with which we collaborate and deliver outreach services.

As a Member of Settlement Services International, we continue to foster strong working partnerships in delivering the Settlement Services Program as part of a state-wide network of agencies. We are also a partner in delivering the Commonwealth Government's ParentsNext program targeting parents whose children will become of school age and to assist them in developing work skills.

Fit for the Future

The organisation's growth and complexity means that we have to look at our governance structure. As we have surpassed the threshold for Incorporated Associations, the Board has embarked on the process of registering Metro Assist 'Limited' as a Company Limited by Guarantee. The change will mean greater accountability and reporting requirements, but will ultimately put us in a stronger position in terms of what future funding arrangements might require.

Acknowledgements

Metro Assist acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we operate and we pay our respects to elders, past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We also wish to acknowledge the Board, staff and volunteers.

The organisation is financially strong and we continue to explore new revenue streams. The year also saw the engagement of a part-time HR Manager which has resulted in streamlined processes and guidance for our management team in dealing with staff matters. We are also investing in training for our staff to stay abreast of new and emerging challenges in each field of work.

During the year we engaged external consultants, Tim Childs Consulting, to undertake workshops with staff around team building, person-centred care, and establishing organisational values as part of our strategic review process. We also engaged Optimum NFP to deliver a workshop with the Board and management around changes to the governance structure.

In conclusion, I wish to thank our staff for their unwavering commitment to our clients and the community. Each day they are able to assist and touch the lives of others, which is something to be proud of. I thank our Board members and in particular, our Chair, Elena Berrocal Capdevila, for their support and guidance. And a huge thanks to our partners and collaborators without whom, we would not be able to do many of the things we do, and to our funding bodies who provide us with the resources to undertake this incredibly important work.

We look forward to next year.

Lou Bacchiella
CEO

The Board

Elena Berrocal Capdevila (Chair)
Mohamad Issa (Deputy Chair)
Jacob Carswell-Doherty (Treasurer from 3 Dec)
Jon Soemarjono (Secretary)
Anna Schinella (Treasurer until 2 Dec)
Thuat Nguyen

Key Statistics

Client served 24,605

Settlement Services 9,008

36% Information, advice and referral
17% Outreach
11% Education and Skills training
10% Facilitate Employment Pathways
13% Community Capacity building
4% Child and Youth focussed
5% Advocacy and support
4% Intake/assessment

Family & Children's Services 688

150 families - Inner West Families Connect engaged and supported
50 families - Brighter Futures works intensively with families
488 families - Child Youth and Family Support provided

Community engagement (through the Ashfield & Homebush Community Hubs) 6,566

6120 people received information & referrals
354 services Coordinated with the Hubs
10 events were organised with the Hubs
82 collaborations/partnerships with the Hubs

Tenancy assistance 2,916

1175 Information and referral
1276 advices (322 tenancy termination, 224 rent issues, 192 bonds and compensation & 164 repair issues)
301 duty advocacy (136 advice only, 144 assisted in conciliating & 21 assisted in hearing)
164 NCAT (50 general applications, 38 assistance with preparations, 40 representation at NCAT and
16 NCAT appeal)

Financial inclusion 3,638

1021 clients received financial counselling
217 NILS loans approved, valued at \$211,357
395 individuals/family assisted, 1,890 EAPA (energy) vouchers issued, valued at \$94,000
350 Telstra vouchers issued, valued at \$17,500
160 assisted with emergency relief

SkillME 409

409 clients assisted through one on one employment support and vocational training

Dress for Work 1,380

1280 clients dressed
Referrals from 62 service providers

Settlement Services



In 2015-16, our settlement services team delivered high quality support for newly-arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants. Our settlement services form part of the NSW Settlement Partnership (NSP), a consortium led by Settlement Services International delivering settlement services across a wide area of NSW and is funded by the Department of Social Services Settlement Services Program (SSP). Highlights from the year are presented below.

Community and sector development

Our local Refugee Week Awards night recognised individuals who have made a contribution to local refugee communities and the event hosted 200 community members and guests in a combined awards presentation and Iftar dinner at the Orion Centre, Campsie.

We worked with Petersham TAFE to put participants through a lawn mowing and property maintenance course. The next phase is to establish a social enterprise to further on-the-job training and create pathways to employment.

Citizenship Test preparation supported 125 people from 10 countries to sit for the test in collaboration with the Khmer Welfare Association, Chinese Australians Services Society, Australian Korean Welfare Association, Korean Society of Sydney and the Multicultural Network Bankstown.

Pro-bono migration advice by our in-house migration agent supported hundreds of people with immigration issues and was instrumental in gaining successful outcomes for refugees and migrants.

The Multicultural Social Support Group in Ashfield is in its fourth year and the group attracts many people to connect with the local community and gain new skills and knowledge on parenting, arts and crafts, employment, mental health and life skills.

Women from Vietnamese background learned floral arrangement skills while the Korean Family Fishing, Boating and Water Safety workshop addressed water safety with families at the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, with the support of NSW Fisheries, Surf Life Saving Australia and NSW Police.

Small & emerging communities

Two seniors groups were established for new-arrivals on Parent Visas in Burwood and Marrickville in partnership with the NSW Multicultural Seniors Association. Their activities aim to provide support that would normally be available to other seniors in the local area.

Building community leadership continued for Bangladeshi, Indian and African groups and 15 leaders received training on community action and planning which resulted in a number of successful small grants applications to run cultural, volunteer and mental health programs.

Staff administered the Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) scheme funded through NSW Department of Industry Energy and Resources for people experiencing short-term financial hardship and are unable to pay utilities bills.

More than two hundred families and individuals, many from crisis zones in Syria and Iraq, received emergency assistance with food, bill payments, household goods and emergency accommodation and 170 food packages were distributed.

Women

Women's groups targeting Bangladeshi and Arabic women provided educational and skills development programs such as computer classes, assistance with overseas qualifications, volunteer training and information on health, domestic violence, family law and how to access key community services.

We also acknowledge the support of the women's group from St Michael's Anglican Church in helping migrant and refugee women in understanding Australian customs and traditions through an ANZAC morning tea and crafts such as quilting. The Condell Park women's group also completed a beautiful artwork to be raffled at Metro Assist's upcoming 30th Anniversary event.

Employment

Some of the team's activities focus on developing strengths and experience as part of creating pathways into training and jobs. See the Employment Support section of this report.

Youth

Fifteen young Koreans participated in Finding Your Dream program in May 2016 which saw them engage in professional life coaching, making a top 100 bucket list, relationship games, exploring identity and character types, and presenting in front of their families.

Twenty eight young Koreans aged 7 to 17 years took part in a two-day Korean Youth Camp, to have fun and develop a sense of belonging. They undertook safety exercises and built friendships among their peers – and it was great respite for their parents too!

Our Dare to be Sensible program was further strengthened with support from the Attorney General's Department and we expanded the program to schools in the Inner West and the Canterbury areas. The four week early intervention workshop helps young people understand the law, and their rights and responsibilities. We acknowledge the support of local schools, Bankstown, Burwood and Campsie Police, the Burwood Local Court, Marrickville Legal Centre and Parramatta Legal Aid.

The Special Tutorial Assistance Program (STAP) is a holistic school-based approach to assisting CALD families with school-aged children and young people. The program engages parents and supports students around learning and study skills. The program is delivered in partnership with Western Sydney University's 'Classrooms without Borders' and Australian Catholic University in five schools: Hampden Park, Punchbowl and Ashfield Public Schools, Bankstown Senior College and the Intensive English Centre at Marrickville High School.

Mental health

To help people in the Arabic-speaking community understand issues around mental health, a DVD resource *Into the Light* was developed. The project involved focus group discussion and was received as a positive contribution to community understanding.

Housing

The Housing Advocacy Project partners with Settlement Services International, Housing NSW, St Vincent De Paul, STARTTS, Mission Australia and specialist homelessness services to assist clients into various housing options such as applying for social housing, seeking affordable private rental and emergency accommodation.

Losena Fuko

Settlement Services Manager





Our family service team provides earlier intervention support to families, vulnerable children and young people at critical times in their lives. Applying its expertise in working with migrant and refugee families, the team seeks to empower them to become resilient and live independently through one-on-one casework, referrals to specialist agencies, information and community education workshops – all with the aim of reducing the risk of children entering the child protection system.

Throughout 2015-16, the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) has been, and continues to be, engaged in major reforms across most of its programs. Metro Assist has been actively engaged in various forums and advocated that services address the needs of CALD families. As we move forward, the Department is working towards introducing a client outcomes framework which explores seven key factors: social community, empowerment, safety, home education and skills, economics, and health.

Inner West Early Intervention Programs

In the course of the reporting period, the organisation has aligned the delivery of early intervention support in the Inner West Sydney region by combining the casework and other roles associated with programs funded through two funding streams: Families NSW and the Child Youth and Family Support programs. Jointly, the programs have supported over 520 families and young people within the Inner West LGA's (Strathfield, Ashfield, Burwood, Canada Bay, Canterbury, Marrickville, Glebe, and Leichardt). This includes information, referrals, case management, and case support. Our service is experiencing a significant increase in complex case support needs among families and a higher incidence of homelessness, domestic violence, financial hardship, unemployment, relationship breakdown and family members with a disability.

We also engaged with more than 150 families through parenting programs such as Triple P, Tuning into Kids, and Achieving School Success. Part of the success of our parenting programs is due to collaborations and partnerships with key services such as Australian Catholic University, Burwood Council, Inner West Council, Child Abuse Prevention Service, Strathfield Council, Connect Marrickville, Lakemba and Punchbowl Schools as Communities Centres. Such collaborations have enabled us to deliver 30 parenting programs across eight LGAs which have been well received by the community.



Brighter Futures

Our Brighter Futures program in Bankstown and Fairfield provides for CALD families who are expecting a child, have children from birth to nine years, and who face significant issues or hardships, or at risk of significant harm (ROSH). The year saw a refocusing of the program on ROSH families referred to us by the Department. As a result 50 ROSH families were referred to us during the reporting period.

Families receive intensive ongoing case management support using a strengths based approach. Our experienced case workers recognise that parents and carers have existing skills and expertise when it comes to understanding what works for their family. As a result, services and support will vary according to each family's needs with the aim of reducing the likelihood of the family becoming or remaining involved within the child protection system.

Linked to the Brighter Futures program, we trialed a Local Initiatives project which focused on the involvement of a psychologist to work closely with families over the year. The project saw improvements in the level of engagement by parents and greater confidence in dealing with their issues. Should further funding become available, we would very much like to continue the approach into the future.

Community Hubs

The Community Hubs Programs in Ashfield and Strathfield are also funded by FACS, with the aim of increasing inclusion and social engagement within local communities. The Hubs work with populations that are marginalised or at risk of marginalisation, with a focus on families and socially isolated people. Hub activities include literacy connection programs for isolated adults, home support programs for young children, and seniors' health education sessions. The Hubs also participate in local area planning and coordination with other services and stakeholders including councils.

Over the last 12 months we welcomed external organisations to outreach from our locations in Ashfield and Strathfield, including MOSAIC (Justice Connect), Legal Aid, and Tax Free Help. We also worked with government agencies, councils, and other services to deliver a range of activities and events including Seniors Information Programs, Healthy Families Project, Safe Child, Safe Community and Mental Health Awareness workshops. And we collaborated in events to mark NAIDOC week, Harmony Day, White Ribbon Day, Child Protection Week and International Women's Day.

We would also like to acknowledge the ongoing collaboration with the many educational institutions that provided student placements and have supported our work.

Michelle Lazaris

Manager Family Services

Tenancy and Financial Inclusion

The Tenancy and Financial inclusion team provides individual casework to assist clients facing everyday challenges with renting their homes, managing their finances, seeking short term relief for emergencies and obtaining low cost financial products.

Southern Sydney Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Service (SSTAAS)

The SSTAAS team assisted or represented over 400 clients with matters in the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT), mainly low income households living in social housing. Many of the clients had significant disabilities or chronic medical conditions that limited their capacity to communicate in stressful situations. Others included private rental tenants in dispute with their landlord, under eviction notices, and people at risk of homelessness. Funded through NSW Fair Trading, the team provides advocacy support to people attending the Tribunal, casework, telephone intake, outreach to a number of locations and community education on tenancy and housing issues.

Inner Western Sydney Financial Counselling Service

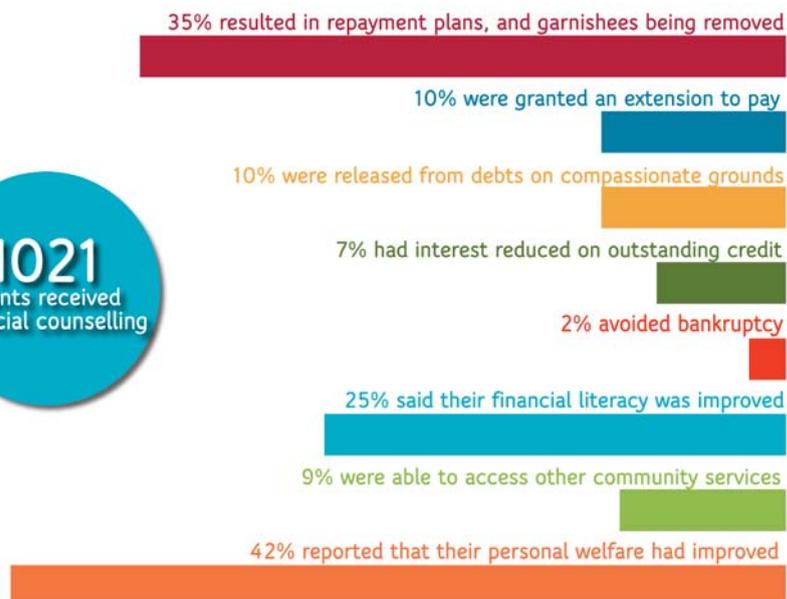
Financial counselling is delivered in partnership with Good Shepherd Australia and works with clients facing financial challenges that impact on their day to day lives. Our team of accredited financial counsellors assist people who find themselves in debt beyond their means and works with creditors to seek a way forward for the client. Much of the credit crisis tends to occur with the overuse of credit cards, purchase contracts and people using pay-day lenders which charge exorbitant fees and interest rates that often put people further in debt. The team also provides community education on managing household budgets, understanding contracts and using credit cards.

No Interest Loans Scheme (NILS)

NILS provides fee-free and no interest loans to low and moderate income earners for necessary household goods and services. Loans are capped at \$1,200 and repaid in small instalments of around twenty dollars per fortnight. NILS not only provides an opportunity to purchase much needed goods and services, but helps clients to achieve improved social inclusion with family and their local communities. The NILS program operates with funding from the NSW Fair Trading, Good Shepherd microfinance and loans capital from the National Australia Bank.



assisted for Energy Accounts Payment Assistance



Employment Support



Metro Assist is growing its employment support services in recognition that getting and keeping a job is a major advantage in the settlement of newly-arrived migrants and refugees. This area of work is a key focus of governments and we have taken some major initiatives in helping people achieve their employment goals.

SkillME

SkillME started in 2015 as a demonstration project funded by Multicultural NSW to assist clients in getting into training and work, and to assist them in having their overseas skills and qualifications recognised. By July 2016, the project had assisted 409 clients, the majority from Asian and Middle Eastern countries. The project is built on collaborations with training organisations, employers and JobActive providers and it applies a person-centred support model to facilitate language learning, vocational skill development and engagement with employers. Some of the partners we have worked with include the Australian Furniture Removalists Association, MTC Australia, TAFE, BCA National and the Chinese Australian Services Society. Participants have engaged in training for aged care, furniture removal, warehousing, forklift and heavy vehicle. We are also developing a program targeting construction. These are all areas where there is strong employment potential.

Each program starts with identifying employer needs and tailoring training so that participants learn the appropriate skills and combine this with English language learning through the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program which is tailored to workplace and industry language. A significant number of participants have gained employment and their English skills have improved dramatically.



Job readiness

Much of employment related support comes through our settlement workers whose roles are funded under the SSP program and include resume writing workshops, presentation tips, interview skills and understanding Australian workplace culture and orientation to different workplaces.

ParentsNext

A partnership between Metro Assist and Settlement Services International is delivering the Commonwealth's ParentsNext program in the Bankstown area. The aim of ParentsNext is to assist people with children approaching school age to re-enter or join the workforce by establishing a personalised plan based on their strengths and aspirations, and guiding them into learning work skills or taking up training that will set them on their journey.

Dress for Work

Dress for Work provides free pre-loved business attire for financially disadvantaged men so that they can attend job interviews and other important appointments. We believe looking good means feeling good about oneself. Referrals have come from all over Sydney and beyond, from employment and welfare services, Juvenile Justice and NSW Corrections. The service continues to develop partnerships with corporate donors including Adobe, Channel 9, Channel 10 and FDC Construction. Over the reporting period, Dress for Work has dressed around 1,500 men and run numerous sessions on personal presentation tips and interview skills. We also attended Job Expos in Macarthur, Liverpool, Hurstville and Bankstown.



Financial Summary

The net surplus for the financial year 2015-2016 is \$166,395 compared to the surplus of \$1,162,804 for the previous year. Last year's surplus included the gain on acquisition of Metro Migrant Resource Centre.

In 2015-16, there was a slight increase in Government grants due to CPI increase and ERO payments received by the funding bodies. The proportional increase in expenses was due to additional employee benefit expenses for CPI and ERO. Interest income remains static.

The equity position of Metro Assist remains strong with total net assets of \$1,343,000.

For the continuity of the services, directors recognise the need for assured funding and the organisation's ability to seek and receive funding from donors.

Acknowledgement to Funding Bodies

Metro Assist acknowledges the continued support of the following funding bodies:

Department of Social Services

Department of Employment

NSW Department of Family and Community Services

NSW Office of Fair Trading Multicultural NSW

Attorney General Department

Local councils and ClubGrants

Charitable Trusts and Foundations for small grants

Metro Assist Auditors

William Buck

Chartered Accountants

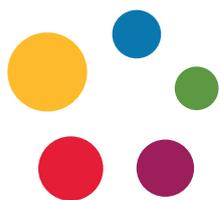
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Metro Assist Incorporated

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2016

	2016	2015
	\$	\$
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	2,729,484	1,704,555
Trade and other receivables	261,893	314,697
Other	75,031	53,930
Total current assets	3,066,408	2,073,182
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant and equipment	148,538	187,179
Total non-current assets	148,538	187,179
TOTAL ASSETS	3,214,946	2,260,361
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and other payables	199,751	78,604
Borrowings	139,524	134,009
Employee benefits	435,716	387,993
Other	1,061,981	454,403
Total current liabilities	1,836,972	1,055,009
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Employee benefits	34,974	28,747
Total non-current liabilities	34,974	28,747
TOTAL LIABILITIES	1,871,946	1,083,756
NET ASSETS	1,343,000	1,176,605
EQUITY		
Reserves	157,472	157,472
Retained surplus	1,185,528	1,019,133
Total equity	1,343,000	1,176,606



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Homebush Community Hub

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Condell Park Office

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