



The DSC

Your Meeting Place

DONALD SIMPSON COMMUNITY CENTRE LTD

Chairman's Report to AGM - 23rd Sept 2024

As with my report in 2023, I will leave the details of our operation to CEO Thomas and Treasurer Paul. As a general comment, though, I have to say that our operating outlook for 2024-25 and beyond is now rosier with the commencement of the five-year contract with the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services and Multicultural Affairs funding us for \$100,000 annually for those five years. If you've had time to check your AGM booklet for the Auditor's Report, you might have been surprised by our apparent financial position for 2023-24. It's not as dire as it looks but all will be explained in later reports or in the Auditor's notes if you are able to follow them.

It's my intention to speak today about some history and the future. The history is to set the scene for the future because it's often difficult to envisage the future without some understanding and evaluation of the past. Naturally, I won't be foretelling the future though I wish I could. Instead, I will be presenting some ideas about how the Board would like to see the future of the DSC develop in terms of what we know. Some of us have now been active in the Redlands and sometimes broader seniors' sector for some time. In particular, we have operated or been intrinsically involved in this Centre in one way or another for a considerable time. In that time, we have collectively learned much and developed our expertise in how we believe the Centre is best operated to serve the Redlands community. All that has given us insights which assist in trying to plan for the future.

The Donald Simpson Community Centre opened in 1987 as the *Donald Simpson Over 50s Leisure Centre* and is now 37 years old. In that time, additions have been made resulting in the current building that is **owned by the Redland City Council on behalf of the citizens of Redland City**. As those who attend the DSC would realise, the building is a little like Dr Who's Tardis, much larger than it looks. It is also showing its age, a hotch-potch collection of spaces of various sizes and designations with access to some spaces only available through others hosting activities. Some rooms are too small to conduct the activities necessarily located in them because of unavailability of other suitable spaces. Other rooms are not sufficiently proof against exterior noise or sounds from adjacent rooms, particularly for some whose hearing is a little worse than it used to be. In terms of our current and future membership, the building is too small with not enough suitable spaces. There is a lack of important spaces in a centre for seniors, such as a first aid room and spaces for changing needs as new generations progress to membership such as consulting rooms, a computer lab, a gym and a large activity room for a wellness and activity program without locking out large meetings and events in our auditorium.



The DSC

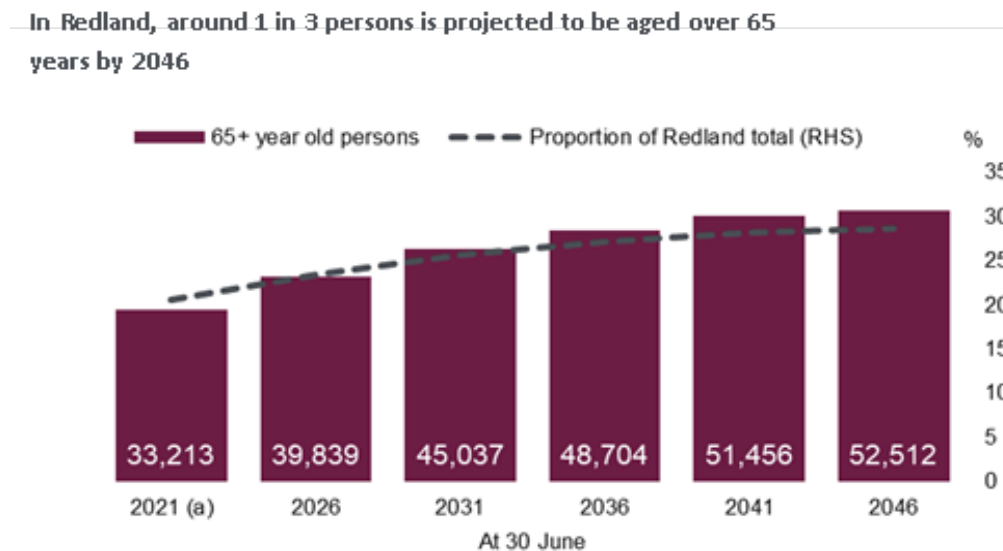
Your Meeting Place

DONALD SIMPSON COMMUNITY CENTRE LTD

A growing membership means that there is a need for more paid staff and more volunteers because community centres depend largely on volunteers as the cost of sufficient paid staff would simply make them impossible to operate without charging much higher membership and activity fees and café prices. Many of our members who need this Centre would not be able to afford to participate. The paid staff number at the DSC has grown to seven, with some fulltime and some part-time staff. The volunteer numbers are at around 140 with the impossibility of an exact number as volunteers come on board as others leave and most are part-time. They include the Board, receptionists, kitchen volunteers, volunteers for setting up and dismantling furniture for activities, gardeners, trip organisers, qualified wellness convenors and a range of volunteers who perform occasional tasks. **It is important to note that all of this exists to support a community service for the Redlands.**

It is well known that the population of seniors is growing Australia wide and Redland City and surrounds is no exception. The following table provides some idea of what our population growth might look like.

Projected populations (Qld Govt Statistician's Office 2023 Projections)



The growth of the seniors' population and the changing needs of future members and the community make it clear that the current building is not suitable to cater for future needs. The carpark alone is a problem. Because, at the outset, the Centre was placed in the care of the then Redland Shire Council, the carpark has changed from a small, sealed area to accommodate Centre visitors to a public carpark. With the growth of residences in the near vicinity, the number of services just across Bloomfield Street and parking restrictions in the Cleveland CBD, it is highly likely that the growth of public parking will further encroach on the ability of Centre users to find a park. Any decent



The DSC

Your Meeting Place

DONALD SIMPSON COMMUNITY CENTRE LTD

rain soon makes parking difficult off the sealed portion as water pools and the ground becomes muddy reducing carparking space. Even in fine weather, on a busy day, cars can be seen driving through the carpark and leaving, unable to find a park. This is not suitable for a Centre designed to ameliorate social isolation and loneliness.

The DSC Board has, over time, been developing a business plan for the future of the Centre. We are aware that Redland City has a small population and that Council budgets do not extend to building large facilities without significant external funding. It seems much more reasonable for the Council and the DSC to collaborate to develop the future of this Centre by jointly preparing a business case and seeking external funding to build a forward-looking Centre that will serve the Redlands community for the foreseeable future. In this plan, it would seem that the use of the Centre's facilities by like community groups should be considered and allowances made in consultation with them. The needs of Redlands U3A and RDCOTA would be well worth considering in this process if they are willing but we firmly believe that introducing much larger organisations into the mix would lead to an unworkable venue to combat social isolation and loneliness. U3A already uses DSC space and more cooperative arrangements might be possible.

To move in this direction, the relationship between the Redlands Council and the Centre, including cooperating groups, should be considered. The current relationship with the DSC is that of lessor/lessee in a strictly business relationship. It is our belief that, when the Centre was built as a community facility with funds from three levels of government and the community, it was placed in the care of the Redland Shire Council ***as a community facility.***

Included in the history of the DSC, written from the minutes of the Redlands District Committee on the Ageing, is the following:

a motion was passed on the 21 October 1982:

“That the Council immediately make application to the State Health Department for funding towards the building of a Senior Citizens Centre in the Redlands and that an amount of \$35,000.00 be applied for in the Council's 1983/4 Loan Program as the Council's contribution towards the construction of the Centre.”

This was the culmination of discussions between the Shire Council and community organisations beginning from the RDCOTA minutes in around 1977.

It has been, since the outset, a community facility, placed in the care of the Council, run by a volunteer Board and a large number of volunteers. Until the first DSC lease,



The DSC

Your Meeting Place

DONALD SIMPSON COMMUNITY CENTRE LTD

all members of the twelve-member board were either chosen by the Council or had to be approved by the Council in the case of six members elected by members. Until the recent Queensland State Government Social Isolation and Loneliness Program, there has been no operational funding for centres such as ours apart from the generous funding agreement we had with the Council as an acknowledgement of their obligation towards a community facility. We are not now seeking a return of that funding but a partnership to run this Centre on behalf of our community. It would not be possible to operate a Centre such as this without the valuable input of its total volunteer contingent. That would seem to be the basis for a worthwhile partnership - the Redland City Council, with its resources, the ownership of the building and carpark and the regulatory authority over the property in which the Centre exists and the Donald Simpson Centre membership, Board and volunteers to manage and operate the Centre free of charge in the interests of the Redlands community.

In summing up, I believe that the Council could not realistically operate the Centre successfully alone and neither can the membership, Board and volunteers of the Donald Simpson Centre. The Centre is an intrinsic part of the Redlands community and should be community run in partnership with the Redlands Council which is an ideal arrangement for a cooperative effort to operate the Centre. Working together to ensure that a Centre lacking in the requirements to satisfy current and future needs is redeveloped as a modern Centre to service many of the essential needs of an increasing senior community as well as those aspiring to be seniors.

A better-designed Centre will allow us to pursue issues such as occasional professional visitors such as medical, legal and other professionals to assist members, assistance accommodation seekers, provision of occasional meals or food parcels and disaster advice and relief. Two areas that we are currently seeking to develop involve multicultural understanding and increased dialogue in the area of domestic and family violence and elder abuse. We are currently in discussion with other groups to further develop these ventures. Our Centre is unable to cater for some of these much-needed services because of its size and design.

Tony Christinson
Board Chairman