

The issues surrounding the alarming rate of homelessness are complex and often at the heart of the other support services we are delivering. We are seeing an increasing number of Territorians with serious gambling problems which impacts on their lives and the lives of their families and friends. Somerville is able to offer collective supports, counselling, advocacy and overall assistance as a one stop shop which is a more efficient and streamlined experience for clients.

The past 12 months have been notable as we have navigated numerous new systems, reviews, undertaken a further accreditation process, negotiated complex funding agreements and importantly continued to strengthen the quality of our interactions with staff. Somerville's most valuable assets are our staff. We continue to review how we express appreciation of and recognise the work they do. Employee recognition is part of our culture, we have long recognised the quality of our service delivery is determined by the level of employee satisfaction. Remaining an Employer of Choice has occupied our thinking, planning and actions each day over the last year.

Our Services

Each of our services has again delivered focused programs with an ongoing commitment to quality. It is pleasing to note an increase in demand for No Interest Loans particularly in the Katherine region. These loans are for household items, it is a safe, fair and affordable option for people on low incomes. Having new essential household items acquired through a service like Somerville helps people to feel valued, accepted and empowered and certainly in control of their own finances without the burden of interest payments.

The Family and Financial Services staff have never been in more demand to the extent from time to time we have had waiting times of over 3 weeks for an appointment.

Funding Compliance (Red Tape)

During the year we worked tirelessly to be able to continue the same level of quality service delivery with less funding.

Our Commonwealth Grant funding significantly reduced from the Department of Social Services in December 2015, it was necessary to refer Territorians presenting for financial counselling to other organisations when the waiting list became unmanageable, this was a "first" for us.

Our Northern Territory funding agreements continue without any reductions to the ledger, but without adequate increases to meet the day to day increases in expenditure. The constant challenge of negotiating for the real cost of service delivery this year has been all encompassing.

Compliance schedules and reporting are more rigorous, complex, repetitive and unrealistic than ever before, the burden of red tape sits heavily. We are hopeful the ACNC Charity Passport, report once, use often approach will provide the necessary information and interface reducing unnecessary regulatory obligations.

As we embark on a new journey with the NDIS we hope and pray for a system that is akin to focussing upon outcomes as opposed to creating layers of unnecessary documentation.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The NDIS trial commenced in the Barkly Region on 1 July 2014. Since then many lessons have been learned about the mechanics of service delivery in remote parts of the Northern Territory. A community development approach has built a level of capacity and improved networks, but progress has been slow with limited providers and workforce capacity challenges.

Somerville welcomes the signing of the Bilateral Agreement between the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory Government for transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme from 1 July 2016. We remain hopeful the financial investment will deliver services to many people who are missing out on the supports they need and ultimately ensure all Territorians with a disability have increased choice and control in their lives.

Somerville continues to reassess our current practises and put in place new structures that will assist with the transition to this new way of doing business.

Financial Performance

Somerville ended the year in a reasonable financial position. This is encouraging when a significant part of the year was taken up with renegotiating service agreements.

We look forward to an era of reduced red tape and longer service agreements that will underpin our stability as we transition our Disability Services into the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

We are committed to embedding integrity, quality and sustainability into everything we do as part of our strategy to provide ongoing, robust services to Territorians.

Our Gratitude

Somerville appreciates the support we receive from our major funder, the Northern Territory Government. We also acknowledge the support from the Australian Government, corporations, local business, families and individuals.

The incredible team of 260 “Somervilleans” has again worked tirelessly to ensure our organisation is performing with integrity and at the highest level in all of our programs.

First class patrons, the Hon Austin Asche, ACQC and Dr Valerie Asche AM and the Board of Directors headed by our President, Daphne Read AO, continue to strategically lead Somerville with a high level of attention placed on good governance.

Somerville appreciates the professional, cohesive approach to the work undertaken by Managers, Coordinators and teams in each program. Your efforts are commendable as we work towards improving the lives of fellow Territorians.

I would like to particularly acknowledge the tireless efforts of my Executive Assistant, Elaine Castles.

The Northern Synod of the Uniting Church and UnitingCare Australia has again provided guidance, leadership and support.

Vicki O’Halloran AM
Chief Executive Officer