

Ambury Park Centre Inc.



Ambury Park Centre
Riding therapy with a difference

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

2021

Tena koutou, welcome to members, visitors, staff, volunteers, friends and whanau. A very special welcome tonight to Patricia Simeon, our very recently appointed Director/Principal. We are delighted to have Patricia heading the Ambury whanau. Later in the evening Patricia is going to introduce herself and tell us about her journey to date. Nau mai, haere mai Patricia to the Ambury Park AGM.



Ambury Park Centre, like all organisations, experienced a disrupted and challenging year in 2021. Now in 2022 the Centre is operating more normally, still with regard to safety under Orange restrictions for Covid 19. The Centre students and adult clients were back and several of the therapy riders gradually returned, at the beginning of 2021.

Ambury Park Centre began positively in 2021 with good numbers in all programmes - Riding Therapy, the Secondary School, and the Vocational Training. The February and March Covid 19 Level lockdown saw the staff readily slot back into the familiar routine as essential workers for the horses. The teachers and vocational staff communicated with and provided learning opportunities for the students and clients.

The first attempt for Ambury's car boot/gala day was a Covid 19 postponement but on March 20 it was held on a perfect, sunny Autumn Day. It was again a festive occasion with live music, numerous Ambury stalls, more car boot bookings and activities, and the ever-popular horse rides. The occasion had crowds to match. The Centre's staff and volunteers are to be commended for their great efforts before, during and after the event. The Ambury volunteers are a treasure for the Centre with their support with fundraising events, not to mention for our Equine therapy programmes. This event is particularly important as the proceeds go towards the students and adult clients having learning opportunities and simply experiences outside of the Centre. These include swimming, dancing, singing, visiting galleries for exhibitions and other educational experiences, and sometimes just a fun outing.

There was a good period of normality enjoyed by all at the Centre prior to 17 August when Auckland was plunged into Level 4 and the stay-at-home routine again kicked in. The staff were again declared essential workers to tend to the horses in small bubbles whilst the school and the Vocational staff also catered for the students online or with learning packs delivered to homes. The adult clients had access to two of their community groups online – singing and dancing. They were sent creative weekly tasks to do from the staff and shared in a weekly group online meeting. These were a joy to behold as they greeted one another, laughed and shared accomplishments. Of course, riding therapy was not possible, although contact was maintained with whanau. Close to the end of the year the students returned in bubbles, the seniors first so that they were not too disadvantaged with their NCEA credits. Later the younger students returned on rotating days as did the adult clients. To accommodate the returns safely and care for the horses at the same time the Centre was strategically divided into 3 areas. It was not possible to hold the Prize giving but each bubble had a certificate ceremony to celebrate the year. Goodies were also dished out. Now in 2022, except for some Intensive riders, yet to return, the Centre is virtually back to normal. There has of course been the occasional Covid 19 case, arising not from the Centre or spreading at the Centre. The Centre has retained mask wearing indoors and spacing where possible and this seems to have been a positive.

Vicky Cox, the Director/Principal, was amazing in guiding the Centre through all of the phases of Covid 19 ensuring there were teams of essential workers to care for the horses during lockdowns while the students and adult clients were catered for remotely. When the Centre could be open the emphasis on safety measures has been strategic and successful, and excellently communicated with our whanau.

Despite the restrictions the Centre has been safe and continued to offer well planned sessions for its therapy riders, adult clients and students. The staff have worked hard throughout all the phases of Covid 19 and the Centre has been able to fully remunerate the staff. All of this has been possible with generous funding from trusts and with some wage subsidy support.

In 2021 there were very difficult challenges for four staff members under the Health Mandate. The Centre worked closely with the staff involved to seek any possible positive workplace outcomes and make sure there was time and support given to explore these. Sadly all involved agreed the situation could not be solved. The board acknowledges it was extremely hard for the staff concerned but also difficult for their colleagues and the board. There is no doubt Covid 19 has been tough on many levels.

The positives were to see the staff pull together under Vicky's guidance to give our students, adult clients and riders opportunities to achieve and develop physically academically, socially, emotionally and psychologically. Three students transitioned at the end of the year to follow tertiary courses. Key to such resiliency from the staff and all at Ambury were their brilliant attitudes, leadership guidance and the generosity of our charitable and community trusts. The board is deeply grateful for all these things that kept this unique Centre going and thriving. I believe that collectively we know it is worthy.

We mentioned that there was a window of opportunity for the car boot/gala day to be held and later in the year, because the date was brought forward, Ribbon Day went ahead. The excitement mounts amongst the students, adult clients and therapy riders as they practice and then help set up for the day. Other events such as an arena dinner, movie evening, the Gingerbread Horse drive and the prize giving were out of the question.

The holiday programmes that included riding were able to go ahead in three of the 4 holiday periods, slotting in nicely with Covid lockdown intervals. The programme that has been so well promoted by the Office Manager is full on for the Equine staff and is much appreciated. Again, some of our volunteers were there to assist.

There was not very much opportunity for promotional work by the Director/Principal and the Office Manager in 2021. Simply working with agencies such as Oranga Tamariki, Group Special Education, our Alternative Education clusters, the ministries, especially MoE, is promoting of the Centre. Opportunities to go out to promotional days to display what the Centre offers did not arise. The Ministry of Education is particularly supportive of Ambury Park Centre as a private school in including the Centre in valuable professional development such as PB4L (Positive Behaviour for Learning) and working with young people with Autism. The Centre also has free access to subjects and resources from Te Ao o Te Kura Pounamu not usually afforded to private schools. The Centre was also the recipient of extra Teacher Aide hours to generally support students through mostly post the pandemic lockdown periods.

Ambury Park Centre's three programmes, as said, had a substantial period in 2021 when able to fully operate. This was a settled time when the students, clients and the therapy riders who could attend had a normal time following their learning and other activities. They were delighted to be back. The three programmes are Riding Therapy (Intensive and Remedial), an Independent Secondary School that offers education for students who have otherwise not managed schooling elsewhere let alone experienced success and a Vocational programme offering life and work skills learning for adult clients with intellectual disabilities.

The Centre's head intensive therapist, Marjolein Harting, continued to have very positive outcomes for her clients with her winning combination of riding therapy, hippotherapy and physiotherapy. To quote

Marjolein:

"Why the horse? Hippotherapy is combined with other standard therapy tools/strategies in an intervention plan designed to address the treatment needs of the client. Strength, Muscle Coordination and Sensory Processing used for walking, talking, and the use of fine motor skills for activities of daily living and general attention to tasks have all been shown to be positively impacted by



equine movement as a facilitation tool/strategy, when under the direction of a therapist, as part of a larger total plan of care. In addition, increased motivation and participation in treatment and social emotional benefits have been reported.” (Excerpt from Marjolein’ article in Icelander- ‘Bobby, the Islandic horse with a very different career.’

The extended period between lockdowns in 2021 saw the therapy programmes operational again, (there were a few riders for whom venturing out was too much of a challenge), with very positive outcomes for both the Intensive and Remedial riders. The therapy riders present with various conditions such as Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, delayed development, Autism, Mental Health such as anxiety and behavioural challenges, and other syndromes. Many in remedial are associated with mental health, autism and social or generalised anxiety. The feedback from whanau, schools, agencies are so positive. Here I would like to fast forward to 2022 when we have two new therapists, Grace in Remedial and Toni (Second Physiotherapist) in Remedial and Intensive. They are developing excellent programmes as the numbers rebuild. The positive changes for the riders are physical and often dramatically so but also there is increased cognitive, social, behavioural, psychological, and resiliency strengths. There is considerable positive feedback from whanau, schools and agencies.

Grace (Remedial Coach) wrote the following stories about her remedial riders, who have recently begun the programme:

Samantha (14)

“Samantha is new rider with us this term who has joined the Remedial Therapy Riding due to having anxiety. Samantha came in for her first ride and rode Casper at the start of term 2. She was nervous at first to get on and once on was keen to only take things slowly. However by lesson four Samantha was riding around the arena off lead and able to complete warm ups by herself. We have also had a pony change to Smudge as she is able to ride a more responsive pony and guide him through the games and activities. We are working towards trotting and she is progressing awesomely.”

Ayaan (7)

“Ayaan is a new rider from our Mt Richmond Special School group. He is hyperactive and has learning difficulties. On the morning of his first ride, he had trouble waiting in the mounting area for his turn to get on. I was nervous at first about whether he would be able to complete the whole ride as his volume was too loud to safely mount or be safe to ride. He was also having difficulty wanting to stand on his own and required Jane and I to hold him up. However, with some encouragement from Jane and myself he was able to keep quiet long enough to mount. Once on he was a changed child. He sat beautifully and was able to use his voice at a correct volume. He was even able to use walk on prompts and hold the reins. Ayaan has now ridden twice with us and I look forward to his continued improvement.”

The horse is the agent of positive change in all areas at Ambury Park Centre in conjunction with individualised learning programmes.

The Equine staff that also comprise the Head of Equine, Andrea Menzies, another coach, two support staff with Equine experience, a Stable Manager and Stable facilitator are significant in the school and adult programmes. In 2021 they continued to run daily riding instruction for the students, support them with horse care skills and work towards NZQA Equine standards. The equine staff guide the students, often initially nervous of such big creatures, with measured steps and much encouragement. Like the therapy riders it is not long before they are comfortable in the saddle and benefitting from riding and the all-important relationship with the horse. They are soon experts at horse care and mucking out as well. These are also therapeutic activities, not always so keenly pursued. The riding display at the prize givings is graphic evidence of both their progress with riding and the pivotal relationship with the horse. The influence of the horse combined with personal learning programmes work to develop the students’ cognitive, behavioural, social, emotional and psychological well-being

Equine staff also cater for the adult vocational clients. Some of the clients have remedial riding sessions and all are involved with horse care skills and in “mucking out”. The horsemastership skills course developed during Covid restrictions became a permanent part of the programme in 2021. The garden to table programme that culminates in a café experience of serving the staff a meal is also imbedded. Julie

Wharton, the head of vocational, oversees the programme that includes the two Centre based activities mentioned and art, cooking, gardening, horse care, sports, job groups and end of day korero. Community participation is an emphasis in this programme so it is good to see the community activities opening up again, with at this stage swimming, singing and library visits. The clients are also given opportunities to explore their beautiful whenua. The head of the vocational programme is supported by several dedicated support workers. The programme successfully develops the clients' life and social skills.

The school students with their range of complex needs and presentations that can involve learning, mental health, post traumatic issues, various syndromes, disadvantage and accompanying challenging behaviours, have individual learning programmes that are negotiated with the student's voice and whanau input. Elizabeth Warden who left Ambury almost two years ago to travel initially, returned as the Head of School and teacher of English in 2021. We were delighted to welcome Elizabeth back. The Head of School has many skills that contribute to the student's improved learning, social confidence and self-esteem. As said the presentations vary and include high achieving students for whom mainstream has become stressful for various reasons, at least for a time. They too thrive at Ambury. Accelerated learning, thinking about pathways, gaining literacy and numeracy criteria and taking part in project-based learning are foci. Both the students and the adult clients are engaged in garden to table projects. The emphasis is first on gaining literacy and numeracy towards NCEA. The Centre employs a teacher of English (also Head of academic) and a mathematics teacher. Other subjects are sourced through Te Ao o Te Kura Pounamu and supervised by Ambury Staff that also includes 3 teacher aides. Now in 2022 a science teacher has been employed in place of one teacher aide to teach both science and supervise Te Kura subjects. There are Education outside the Classroom opportunities. The school has its share of challenges, but it is uplifting to see how engaged and comfortable the students are. The feedback from Alternative Education, schools, whanau and ERO is positive. An excerpt from a letter from ACES:

"The aim of AE is ensuring there is quality learning in a learning environment that meets the individual needs of the students based on their learning levels, behavioural challenges, strengths and aspirations. Ambury Park School meets this requirement of the MoE Agreement and we have found the strength of the school is offering education in a green environment using the relationship between a horse and a student to enhance students' engagement and their individual learning plan. This is unique and very special to have such a resource in Auckland." Karyl Puklowski, *Manager, Auckland City Education Services*

On behalf of the board, I express its gratitude to the staff for their wonderful work with our rangatahi. Without their hard work, innovative thinking and genuine care for our riders, school students and adult vocational clients none of the positive outcomes would happen. We thank you also for adapting so well to working in lockdown periods in many and various roles.

In mentioning lockdowns, I again thank Vicky Cox for her strategic thinking and extraordinary organisation during the phases of Covid 19. Writing now in 2022, Vicky left her position as Director/Principal at Ambury Park Centre at the end of Term 1. Vicky is living even further from the Centre and she needed to give more time for her two sons. We thank Vicky hugely for much innovation and mahi for Ambury. We have welcomed Patricia Simeon to the position of Director/Principal. Patricia, recently the Assistant Principal of Northland College, brings much experience in supporting rangatahi with learning and pastorally. Like Vicky, Patricia is an experienced and keen rider.

In so much that happens at Ambury, our volunteers are central. The board is indebted to them with their wonderful work in riding therapy as leaders and side walkers. They do more than this as they become involved with the riders. Our volunteers are so generous with their time turning out to help with the Centre's fundraising events (such as the car boot/gala day) and beforehand planning and baking. It is wonderful for Ambury that so many are involved in our whanau events. They also assist with the holiday programme. It is a delight that several volunteers are now riding and helping exercise the horses. We most sincerely thank our volunteers.

The relationships with our referring agencies continue to be positive and often mutually beneficial. The Centre acknowledges the value of the relationships to the Centre and with some we are pleased to be able to offer placements in our programmes. For the school these are Ongoing Resourcing Service (ORS),

Group Special Education (GSE), Alternative Education (AE), Intensive Wraparound Service (IWS), Oranga Tamariki, Youth Justice, schools, special schools, Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS), Child and Family Unit. Several in all programmes are the result of whanau enquiries. Keeping contact and promoting the Centre to the agencies is maintained. There are other agencies such as the Wilson home and medical personnel associated with the therapy riders. The adult clients can be associated with Taikura Trust and other agencies, including residential.

The Centre reports to the Ministries of Education, Social Development and Health and periodically the Education Review Office and MSD report on the Centre. In 2021 the Education Review Office reviewed Ambury Park Centre School and were both intrigued and praiseworthy. The actual review document cannot reflect this now as it simply states whether the school has met the criteria for a registered private school. Covid restrictions have limited reciprocal arrangements with other schools such as we had with Waterlea Primary later in 2020.

Professional development across the Centre continued to be a focus of the board and the Director/Principal. Marjolein joined the Texas Hippotherapy conference online in 2021

This, as previously mentioned, has brought an important dynamic to our riding therapy in using the size and gait of the horse precisely and creatively for the therapy riders. Three Equine staff are enrolled for the two-year coach training qualification with NZRDA. For whole staff PD there were ongoing facilitated workshops in understanding and positively responding educationally and socially to Autism. The board supports professional training opportunities to upskill staff, increase workplace satisfaction and opportunities, and to better enhance the learning and development of our young people. Understanding Behaviours and Responding Safely continued to be reinforced and further imbedded at Ambury. The PB4L has considerable funding this year (2022) to further implement the Centre's commitment to Positive Behavior for Learning. Training in Technology, for the new curriculum also continued with SEED. The NZRDA conference and training did not go ahead in 2021 but is scheduled for September 17 2022, which Andrea (Head of Equine) is to attend. There were further training/information days for changes to NCEA that are currently scheduled to begin in 2023.

Engagement with Centre for Youth Health, which provides a nurse for Ambury once a week continued in 2021 as did the visits from an MOE psychologist. These services are of great benefit to the well-being of the students. The Centre also benefitted from having a psychology student in 2021.

Such high quality and appropriate Professional Development and services for our students and clients supports the quality of the Ambury Park Centre's programmes and best outcomes for our people in meeting their varied and often complex needs physically, emotionally, socially, educationally and psychologically.

Naturally, there are maintenance and projects costs, some planned and some unexpected. The main project completed in 2021 was a bit of both! A populous and simultaneous visitation by rodents and cockroaches in the kitchen followed by a major leaking episode led to a partial renovation of the kitchen, as it happens this partially meets a goal on the Centre's 10-year maintenance and development plan. There were gory details that need not be described here. The work was quite major requiring the virtual, partial replacement of a wall, flooring, bench tops, cupboard fronts on one side of the kitchen and a the replacement of the fridge compliments of the cockroaches. We now have professional monitoring and action for the infestation threat.

The Centre was fortunate to have an upgrade of the carpeting in the Arena building done with donated carpets tiles by Godfrey Hirst Carpets NZ. Otherwise, maintenance was more routine. For some time now one of our staff members in the school has been painting a room in the Arena building in most holiday periods. To date the dining, staff, office, Director Principal's office, foyer (in readiness for an upgrade) and art rooms have been painted. The board is very grateful to Atish Prasad for this contribution.

The Horse Welfare Committee, comprising board, ex board, equine staff and the Director-Principal (set up in 2020) has continued its good work in 2021 to review the horses' health, ability to continue to work at Ambury, exercise programmes and look to further rejuvenate the herd. In 2021 there were several horses added to the herd either purchased, gifted or leased and a number retired to idyllic pastures. The work of this committee has been invaluable in bringing younger horses into the herd. I wish to acknowledge the Centre staff who have given up much weekend time to be first in to come to some purchase arrangement for suitable horses for Ambury. Again in 2021 the Centre received donations from whanau towards the purchase of horses. This is so very much appreciated.

Several staff and volunteers in 2021 enjoyed exercising the horses. Vicky and some staff also took horses on treks or even for breaks away at their properties. The benefit was twofold the riders loved it and the fitness and well-being of the horses was enhanced.

The Centre's volunteers have been acknowledged. Also of great service to the Centre are the corporate groups who donate a day's labour to the Centre for mostly beautifying our outdoor areas. In 2021 these groups included Westpac, ANZ, and Fisher and Paykel Appliances. Covid 19 interruptions for all meant there were fewer groups in 2021. Debra, the Centre's Office Manager, oversees the organisation of these groups and looks after them on the day. Despite the hard work Debra ensures these are jolly times for the groups.

There was further generosity to the Centre. In 2021 the Mangere Markets Trust funded a new van for the Centre as a much-needed replacement for one of the Centre's two.

Marshal, Navtej and the Punjab volunteers donated generously to food parcels the Centre sent out during a lockdown period in 2021. Three board members and staff also donated to this effort.

As always, we were indebted to our neighbours, Brian and Kaye Pilkington who are great friends of the Centre and our watchful eyes on the Centre after hours. Kaye continues to ride and Brian helps with some fix-it things. I acknowledge that Brian also supports the Centre with its applications for funding to the Mangere Markets Trust.

The board acknowledges Vicky Cox, the Director/Principal in 2021, for her dedication and efforts for the Centre in creatively managing a challenging year navigating lockdowns and following restrictions in a complex Centre. There was of course more in guiding appropriate professional development as mentioned, giving up considerable time to travel and view horses possibly suitable for Ambury, for running the Centre smoothly and for her pastoral and educational care with the students, adult clients and riders. Vicky also maintained good relations with our agencies and ministries, achieving much for the Centre in funding support for rangatahi and support for professional development. The development of the Ambury Facebook page continued to be a delight and excellent profile for the Centre. This is equally true of the dedicated Vocational page.

The board who of course did much background work again in 2021, in managing finances, strategic planning, supporting with staffing, overseeing policies and Health and Safety, organising maintenance and project work, sourcing funding, organising fundraising events and more as changes and the unexpected come along. The board included Vice President Neil Rusden, with expertise in marketing, design and events, Treasurer Doug Alexander, Secretary Caroline Grove, Accounts Person Claire Lingman, and Director/Principal Vicky Cox. All members of the board make valuable contributions. Deane Maule as a chartered accountant gives valued advice. In 2021 Christine O'Brien, Auckland Council, Mangere and Otahuhu Local Board remained a support for Ambury Park Centre and Lafulafu Peo was the representative. Paul Wilson represented Parks and Belinda Sharp was the staff representative. Anna Houston, a former Director/Principal brings further

educational knowledge and Silvia Ringler has riding, horse and business knowledge. It also included the writer.

The Centre receives some Ministry funding from Health, Social Development and Education (with the latter being per capita only). ORS (On Going Resourcing) and IWS (intensive Wrap Around) students bring funding for teacher aide hours and the Alternative Education students and Oranga Tamariki are partially resourced for Ambury.

However, Ambury Park Centre is dependent upon further considerable financial support to cover the costs of its programmes that entail high horse expenses, remuneration for a skilled staff and other costs. Several charitable and community trusts have generously over many years ensured that the good work of this unique Centre continues to help change lives for many people in the Tamaki Makaurau area. Over and above, we have community gaming trusts' support. Not infrequently a new trust supports either operational or project costs. Individual donors, including horse sponsors, are so appreciated. The Centre is indebted to all who donated and supported the Centre in 2021. We acknowledge:

Joyce Fisher Charitable Trust, Maurice Paykel Charitable Trust, J M Thompson Charitable Trust, Woolf Fisher Trust, Peter and David Picot Charitable Trust, Foundation North, NZ Lottery Grants Board, Mangere Markets Trust, NZ Community Trust, ARA Lodge No.348 IC Charitable Trust Board, Auckland Council Mangere-Otahuhu Local Board, Blue Waters Community Trust, Lion Foundation, Grove Hardware Ltd, Mt. Wellington Foundation Limited, Four Winds Foundation, COGS, Longmuir Trust, Chenery Memorial Trust, Kelliher Charitable Trust, Geoffrey and Nell Erne Adams Charitable Trust Board, Samar Kand, Trillian Trust, Rotary Club of Mangere, Sara Turbott, Auckland Council Mangere/Otahuhu Local Board, Michael Otto, Vincent Maire, Ross and Cheryl Christian, Shelley Truman, Leigh Skinner, Caroline Grove, Vicky Latta, Gaynor Brown, Lisa MacFarland, Carol Wiltshire, T W Thomas Stone, Chris Bowden, Sue Bowden, Arletta Ven den Bosch, Martin Bourke, Tim Chan, Brian and Kaye Pilkington, Mike O'Connor, and other donors. Sue and Tony Crang, the Tipene family and Melissa Johannsson donated for new horses.

The goal of Ambury Park Centre is to grow its knowledge of the best practices for the Centre's student learning, adult life and social skills and the intensive and remedial riders for them to have the opportunities to grow and thrive. It is important that we retain a skilled staff and a healthy herd of horses, the therapeutic element that along with individualised learning plans work in unison help change lives. The goal is that our people, with the various presentations described, have the best opportunities to develop physically, cognitively, educationally, behaviourally and socially so they can find their pathways in society and be proud. If their goals are realised their whanau and the wider society benefit as well. Ambury Park Centre is proud to offer its programmes to adolescents, children and adults across Tamaki Makaurau/Auckland. We are also proud that we have been evolving since 1983 and extremely grateful that Mary Brook, daughter of Maurice Paykel continues as our Patron since 2002, and that Michael Otto, son of Lionel Otto, is a very close friend and supporter of the Centre. Lionel and Maurice were founders of the Centre. Today we are blessed by the continued support from the associated trusts – Maurice Paykel Charitable Trust, Joyce Fisher Charitable Trust, the Woolf Fisher Trust and periodically the Lou and Iris Charitable Trust. We are blessed by the generosity of all Trusts and individuals who support the Centre. They are responsible for our continued mahi.

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatau katoa



Gaynor Brown – President, Ambury Park Centre