

# PARTICIPATE

GET INVOLVED > STAY CONNECTED

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**AN INITIATIVE** of the Centre for Participation, our new **Participate** magazine has been created to encourage participation within the broader Wimmera Mallee community and to help readers in staying connected with current events and opportunities across the district.

Formed following the amalgamation of Volunteering Western Victoria and the Wimmera HUB in 2016, the Centre for Participation encourages people from all walks of life and all skill sets to fully participate in their lives and their communities, via the four pillars of Community, Learning, Volunteering and Partnerships.

As such, the theme of our first edition is "Participation".

We are exceptionally proud to introduce the publication to you, our valued stakeholders and welcome any feedback you may have about it.

Please enjoy.

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## DEDICATED:

The Centre for Participation is appreciative of the tireless input of its many, dedicated volunteers like Joe Xerri (overleaf) and couldn't provide the countless remarkable programs without their support.

Photo courtesy Belinda Cookson

# CEO WELCOME >

We are thrilled to bring you our inaugural edition of **PARTICIPATE** ... a magazine in which we can share with you, our vision, our work and our plans.

Through Participate, we are seeking to highlight some of the ways you can take action and participate more by: receiving support that will open new doors for you, learning new skills that will assist you to realise your goals, showing how you can create change through volunteering, and highlighting how partnering with us will make a difference in our communities!

When listening to, or reading, the news we hear many stories of communities, here in our region and further afield, struggling with changes, whether via extreme weather conditions, ageing population, government austerity measures, unemployment, or various other issues.

Whilst all of these issues are real, we must not lose sight of the amazing community led initiatives that have created change, including:

- > Kaniva banding together to create the Kaniva Community Roadhouse when the petrol station closed
- > the Horsham Aeromedical Transfer Station was a community led initiative that built and funded a much needed facility
- > the Rupanyup/Minyip communities getting together and partnering with Bendigo bank to establish the first Community Bank



- > communities coming together to establish the Wimmera Southern Mallee Community Transport, powered by volunteers

We need to remember that an issue creates the space for innovation, and innovation starts with an idea - that idea moves to reality when people see the vision and participate in bringing it to life. As a community if we want to create change... we can! After you have read this magazine I invite you to make contact with feedback, or to explore ideas on how we can work together to achieve the betterment, and participation, of our communities.

**Julie Pettett**  
CEO  
Centre for Participation

27,196  
STUDENT PARTICIPATION  
HOURS IN 2016-17



# WHO ARE WE? >

The Centre for Participation was formed following the 2016 amalgamation of Volunteering Western Victoria and the Wimmera HUB.

Reflecting the organisation's aim of getting people participating in both their lives and their communities, the Centre for Participation serves to link all of the different offerings of our organisation and ways that people can participate while also providing scope for growth as we evolve in the future

Operating under the four main pillars of **Community**, **Volunteering**, **Learning** and **Partnerships**, we aim to help people build the type of community they want to live in, be part of a vibrant, thriving community, open different life doors through education, and work in partnership to achieve more for the communities we serve by bringing together networks with different skills and expertise to strengthen organisations that support the community to be their best.

Employing a strong team of 15 permanent staff, amongst a plethora of vibrant volunteers and tutors, all bring a range of life skills, experiences and viewpoints to the Centre for Participation, and, whether it's a new course, promotion or project, there is always something new happening here.

We don't believe in standing still and are determined to help our communities not just grow and survive, but to thrive.

# 41

**NEW VOLUNTEERS  
TRAINED LAST YEAR**



**PARTICIPATION:** Social Support members enjoy a visit to the Kooka's factory in Donald.

# BIG NEWS >

## \$700,000 to 'turbo charge' volunteering

YEARS of work advocating for the importance of seeing volunteering as a critical component for inclusive communities, and the importance of supporting effective community governance has paid off for the Centre for Participation, which was recently granted in excess of \$700,000 under the Strong and Resilient Communities grants program.

Announcing a total of \$787,500 at the Wimmera Machinery Field Days on March 7, Federal Member for Mallee Andrew Broad said the funding will "turbo charge" volunteering in our region.

Officially announcing the funds, Minister for Social Services Dan Tehan said: "Funding provided under the SARC program enables organisations to build strong, resilient, cohesive and harmonious communities."

"It will ensure that individuals, families and communities have the opportunity to thrive, be free from intolerance and discrimination, and have the capacity to respond to emerging needs and challenges," he said.

"I was pleased to advise the Centre for Participation that it had been selected as a preferred provider for this grant round".

"Receiving funding for community-led projects is always wonderful, but to receive both of these is absolutely amazing," Centre for Participation CEO Julie Pettett said.

### RESEARCH

"\$300,000 will fund a two year research project that will study 'how volunteerism impacts social cohesion'," Mrs Pettett said.

"We were one of 16 organisations across Australia that were invited to submit a closed research tender. Our proposal went on to be one of six national research proposals that were selected," she said.

"Over the course of two years, we will work with colleagues from Think Impact Melbourne to develop a greater understanding of, and report on, how volunteering impacts social cohesion



### WATCH OUR REACTION HERE:

<https://www.facebook.com/centreforparticipation/videos/1540682902715003/>

and the difference volunteer programs make in local communities. To ensure this research is recognised Australia-wide, members of the National Network of Volunteer Resource Centres will form the reference group and contribute to the research."

### GOVERNANCE

Mrs Pettett said: "The Building Cohesive & Resilient Communities project received a total of \$487,500 and will assist us to build cohesive and resilient communities through delivering the 'Good Governance' program in partnership with four organisations in Western Victoria."

"Testing of the Good Governance program has taken place, as a result of the learnings and subsequent work with Social Traders, and the program has been refined and we are now able to roll it out as a program," she said.

"Mentors will be matched with a community organisation for 12 months, during which time they will share their skills and knowledge and, hopefully,

*"Receiving funding for community-led projects is always wonderful, but to receive both of these is absolutely amazing,"*

Centre for Participation  
CEO Julie Pettett



**SURPRISE:** Centre for Participation CEO Julie Pettett (right) and Migrant Liaison Officer Padma Giri thank Federal Member for Mallee Andrew Broad after he made a surprise announcement of \$787,500 funding during the field days.

assist the organisation to successfully achieve their outcomes."

The Centre for Participation is working with Western Victorian organisations, including Northern Grampians Shire and a multicultural group in Ballarat to undertake this next phase of rolling out a program that is of national significance.



# BIG NEWS >

## Volunteering is not immune

INTERNATIONAL volunteering expert Rob Jackson, who will make his third visit to Horsham in June, believes now is an important time for the Australian volunteering movement.

Preparing to host two workshops at the Centre for Participation on June 25, UK based Mr Jackson, whose background includes leading and managing volunteers and volunteering programs for over 20 years, will discuss customer service and volunteering, and myths of volunteer management.

"I'm excited to be returning to Horsham for my third visit in a little over two years," Mr Jackson said.

"I've had the pleasure of working with the Centre for Participation and many other Wimmera organisations in my previous training sessions and I always receive a warm welcome; the hospitality, friendliness and commitment of volunteer managers in the region is exceptional and so welcome when you are on the other side of the world," he said.

The customer service and volunteering workshop will help participants understand the importance of good customer service in volunteer programs, and what they can do to improve the service they provide.

"Whether we like it or not, our societies are increasingly consumer-driven and we all now have higher expectations of our interactions with business and service providers than we did a decade ago," Mr Jackson said.

"We expect fast responses to questions, speedy delivery of purchases and a high standard of professionalism in our dealing with others. Volunteering is not immune to this," he said.

"As the old cliché goes 'you only have one chance to make a good impression', so Volunteer Involving Organisations and Volunteer Managers have to be highly attuned to delivering great customer service to existing and potential volunteers."

"I hope people will pick up some hints and tips about how to deliver great customer service in their work with volunteers and leave the workshop with some actionable steps to further improve their work."

During the Myths of Volunteer Management workshop Mr Jackson will explore some of the common myths about volunteers and volunteering, like "volunteers can't handle confidential information", "volunteers take people's jobs", and "volunteers are less effective than paid staff", in a bid to assist attendees in sharpening their arguments and to stand up for their work.

"This is an important time for the volunteering movement in Australia. The Federal Government is reviewing



how it funds volunteering ahead of the elections later this year and now, more than ever, Volunteer Resource Centres and Volunteer Managers need to work together to make the case for continued investment in volunteer engagement," Mr Jackson said.

At \$40 for one workshop, or \$65 for both, the workshops are invaluable for volunteer managers, organisations and individuals, with Centre for Participation members entitled to attend one workshop free of charge.

For more information, or to register your interest, phone Centre for Participation Community Services and Volunteering Manager Serena Kereopa on 03 5382 5607 or email [serena@centreforparticipation.org.au](mailto:serena@centreforparticipation.org.au).



**VISITING:** International volunteering expert Rob Jackson

# MORE BIG NEWS >

## Shaping the future

INDIVIDUALS and communities have the chance to contribute to research into how volunteer engagement can change the fabric of society, as part of a two year research project now underway.

Centre for Participation has commissioned Melbourne firm Think Impact to undertake the research which will fill a critical gap for volunteer practice and government policy.

Think Impact Managing Director Ross Wyatt said: "Social cohesion is in decline in Australia."

"In fact, the most recent survey by the Monash Scanlon Foundation found emerging signs of increased pessimism and an increase in the proportion of people experiencing discrimination," he said.

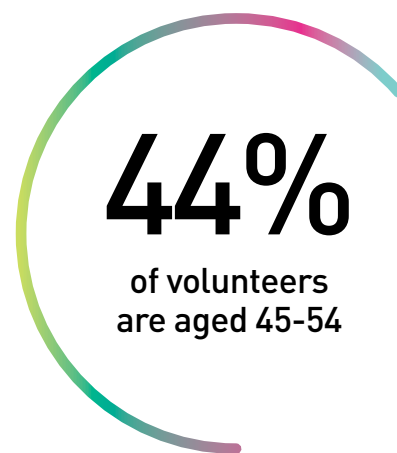
"We know formal and informal volunteering plays a critical role in the

wellbeing and fabric of our society and, yet, volunteering is in decline."

Interestingly, despite this significant contribution, there has been no study undertaken in Australia, to date, that has examined the current role and potential for effective volunteer engagement to build social cohesion and contribute to resilient communities.

That is about to change.

"Think Impact have been studying volunteerism since 2012 and will undertake this research for the Centre for Participation over two years, via the Department of Social Services' Strong and Resilient Communities Research



Grant," Think Impact Director Suzi Young said.

"The research will seek to understand what value is created by the volunteer sector, how this value is created, and best practice to engage and align volunteering with social cohesion to strengthen and grow positive outcomes," she said.

"This is your chance to shape the future of social cohesion in Australia".

If you, or your organisation, would like to make a submission to the research, please email an Expression of Interest to [research@centreforparticipation.org](mailto:research@centreforparticipation.org).



**SHAPING:** Volunteering plays a critical role in the wellbeing of our society

# SPOTLIGHT > MEET THE TEAM

PART  
01



*"At the Centre for Participation, no two days are the same"*

## JULIE PETTETT

Chief Executive Officer

Moving to Horsham in 2011 to take up the CEO position, while Julie's general duties include the day to day management decisions of the Centre for Participation, and working closely with the Board and Program Managers to implement the organisation's strategic priorities, no two days are the same.

One day she might be off to Melbourne or Canberra to meet with politicians or staff from Government departments, the next day it might be preparing papers for the Board and the following day could see her knee deep in reading reports.

If that wasn't enough to keep Julie busy, she also tries to spend time supporting community organisations; this might include facilitating community workshops or meeting community leaders for one on one discussions.

And she says it's seeing the difference the organisation can make for individuals and communities, and advocating to the "powers that be" the amazing work undertaken by the volunteers and community organisations in our region which are her favourite parts of the CEO role.



## ROBBIE MILLAR

Learning and Community Development Manager

Joining the team 7 years ago, Robbie's role is also varied, and includes managing complex programs, developing training programs, leading project staff and trainers, working on grant opportunities to improve outcomes for local residents, managing budgets, working with key stakeholders and funding bodies, involvement in numerous committees of management and constantly looking for opportunities to improve the quality of programs and services.

And Robbie describes his favourite part of the role as working with internal and external stakeholders to create long lasting positive change in our community.



## SERENA KEREOPA

Community Services and Volunteering Manager

Leading and managing multiple programs in an ever changing environment is both challenging and rewarding. Working with Centre for Participation over the last 6.5 years Serena has seen the organisation go from strength to strength and is pleased to be a part of this exciting journey. Born and raised in small rural communities brings an understanding of just how important programs like ours are. The Licencing the Wimmera program is one such program which is vital in assisting people with the ability to participate in their local communities.

Serena says developing and streamlining organisational processes is something she finds enjoyable and sees as important in an such a complex organisation



## JUDY NICHOLS

Grants and Fundraising Manager

Having been with the Centre for Participation for 15 months, Judy generally pops into the office once a fortnight, however, living at Dunkeld she finds it far more effective to utilise Skype, email and teleconferencing to keep in touch from her home. Undertaking research and utilising strategic thinking to join up partners who can contribute to the outcomes the Centre for Participation wants to achieve for the community, Judy's role also involves project development and preparing evaluation systems for accountability to the funders. Understanding the policy context driving the funding opportunity, and the background of funders, her favourite part of the role is being innovative when designing project and joining up partners across sectors to achieve community outcomes.



# VOLUNTEERING >

## Sowing the seeds

WIMMERA volunteer and health groups joined forces at the recent Wimmera Machinery Field Days to target better health in ageing.

Appropriately, the field days theme for the organisations, who are all Wimmera PCP partners, was "Sowing seeds for better health – healthy ageing" and, boy, did they deliver with visitors flocking to the stalls.

The Centre for Participation approached several of the groups to identify, from the perspective of their respective organisations, what value volunteering has in ageing and how they engage volunteers.

And, perhaps not surprisingly, all were united in the view that volunteering is all about social inclusion and having a sense of purpose.

Wimmera Primary Care Partnership Executive Officer and Centre for Participation board member Geoff Witmitz spoke on behalf of the Wimmera Men's Shed Network, which is auspiced by the Centre for Participation, commenting that volunteering at the 23 sheds across the Wimmera gives men a sense of purpose, while offering retired men the chance to mix socially like they did during their working life.

"There is a real sense of fellowship among our members, many of whom either are, or were, heavily involved in their communities already through Apex or the local footy club and so on," Mr Witmitz said.

"For those who have retired, the men's shed fills the void where they have transitioned out of one club, and offers continued learning and community building," he said.

### SHARING

"Skill sharing is also a big part of it and is something our volunteers enjoy, particularly when they mentor primary school students at local schools."

Mr Witmitz said the Men's Sheds started during the Wimmera drought, and was originally aimed at men aged 55 and older.

"However, the program has since expanded to include members from 35 and up. Many have an understanding of the issues facing small regional towns, and the fellowship and connection to their community is a major part of the shed success."

Describing members as "proactive" when it came to the recruitment of more men, Mr Witmitz said there is an induction process for new volunteers, centred around safety, and that the Men's Shed is a safe environment which respects all abilities and cultures.

"We want everyone to enjoy their time here, and to enhance the enjoyment of others".

Wimmera Regional Library Corporation IT and Marketing Manager Leanda Elliott said not only is volunteering a great way to give back to the community, but can also assist with brain health.

"There is the sense of giving back to the community and supporting the library, but the sense of achievement and the social connection that comes with volunteering is so important," Ms Elliott said.

"We have volunteering roles from home library to assisting with programs like Rhyme Time; all anyone needs to do is come in and see us, complete a form and undergo all the usual checks like the Police and Working With Children Checks," she said.

### PURPOSE

Drivers, hospice assistants, day centre and chemotherapy support are just some of the roles volunteers fill at Wimmera Healthcare Group, according to Dietitian Pam Marshman.

"Volunteering gives people a feeling of value and purpose, and enhances their skill development," Ms Marshman said.

And it was a similar story from Rural Northwest Health Speech Pathologist

Kelsey Hamilton, who said the community engagement for both the volunteer and aged care residents was a major positive of volunteering.

"In our smaller, rural communities, many of the volunteers either know someone in aged care or have a family member living in care, some of whom are not mobile. That connection with the outside world has a positive impact," Ms Hamilton said.

For West Wimmera Health Service Home Care Packages and Flexible Respite Care worker Julie Worsley the impacts of volunteering include the volunteer having company and getting out and about in the community, instead of sitting home watching tv.

"Doing something for someone else and having that sense of self-worth is a major part of why our volunteers do what they do," she said.

"Anyone interested in volunteering need only fill out a form and complete the usual checks, and they can assist with many different roles, from assisting our aged care clients on outings to assisting with disability services and the clients' social interaction."

"And Horsham YMCA Fitness Instructor Elly Barnett agreed with the positives of volunteering, commenting that the community connection, social interaction and doing something for someone else was "invaluable".

We couldn't agree more!

For more information on the volunteering opportunities available at the Centre for Participation please call 03 5382 5607.

**CATCH UP:** Centre for Participation CEO Julie Pettett catches up with board member Geoff Witmitz at the field days



# Q&A: >

## Do you need to be sold something to participate?

Deep-rooted rewards, making a difference that contributes to something bigger than yourself, giving back to society, the feel good factor; these are just some of the reasons people volunteer.

It is also about being involved – in life, in society, in a community, in an idea, and using our time combined with our skills or muscles (or both) to contribute.

Asking a volunteer recently why she wanted to volunteer, her response was that her elderly mother, who was not allowed to drive due to illness was being helped by volunteers to get her shopping and have social interaction, which enabled her to remain living at home.

As she was unable to help her mother she wanted to “give back” and help other people’s parents. That’s the reason she came to see me.

So why have I volunteered?

Because I believed in the values of an organisation and wanted to help, to roll up my sleeves and muck in with others. I wanted to be part of something that let me meet new people and work together towards a common goal, and I wanted to use my first aid training.

Everyone’s reasons for participating, or not, are their own.

If you wish to help out there is a number of ways to do so and we can help you identify where you could use skills for the betterment of our society and for your own deep-rooted rewards.

Stephanie Thomson  
Volunteering Program Coordinator

\*\* Following Stephanie’s return to her native New Zealand at the end of March, Centre for Participation would like to thank her for her tireless commitment to the role, and wish her all the best for the future \*\*

# VOLUNTEERING >

## Communities strengthened at forum

FUNDRAISING, good governance and unlocking the power of events was among the information the crowd received during the recent Strengthening Communities Forum.

Hosted at the Centre for Participation, forum speakers Andrea Cross, Pablo Gimenez, Jemma Toohey, Venkat Peteti and Centre for Participation CEO Julie Pettett and staff Robbie Millar and Munya Mugari spoke about a wide range of topics over the course of the 6 workshops.

These included committee of management and risk, grants and fundraising, money matters, recruiting and managing volunteers, community-led change and unlocking the power of events.

A panel discussion on the challenges facing our communities wrapped up the day.

And, with most attendees commenting they had initially attended to expand their knowledge, learn about budgeting, and to learn how to relate to people, the overall feedback was exceptionally positive.

“I attended the forum to improve my knowledge of how to run community groups, and gained a good mix of new information along with affirmation of my existing knowledge and practices,” Andrew George said.

Nhill’s Karen community representative Htoo said the information about budgeting and finances will help the community, while Lyn Powell commented that she had learned ways to get and retain younger volunteers. “I would recommend anybody from small organisations attend these training sessions in future; they’re very rewarding,” Horsham Camera Club treasurer Brian Finch concluded.

“It was a great day, with community leaders attending from across the region, including from both locally and as widespread as Stawell, St Arnaud, Donald and Kaniva,” Mrs Pettett said.

“The saying ‘community organisations are the fabric that holds the community together’ is so true and there is a

fantastic opportunity to assist groups to achieve more; but they need support,” she said.

“And, at a time when services are reducing and issues are getting bigger, community organisations are being asked to step up and support our communities more and more.”

“We all need to invest our time and resources into strengthening them to ensure a successful future for our region”.



**SPEAKERS:** Andrea Cross was one of 7 speakers sharing their wealth of knowledge at the forum



**POSITIVE:** Forum attendees gained a lot of new information on the day

# LEARNING >

## Paving the way

TESTING the waters in her chosen field of interest not only helped former VETiS student Brianna Starick decide on a future career path, but also resulted in full time employment.

Opting to complete VCAL over VCE because she “had no idea” what career path she wanted to take post-school, Brianna, 19 went on to start a VET course which then merged into the current VETiS course.

Completing the Certificate 2 in Community Services on a Wednesday, over the course of 2 years, Brianna was able to gain a better understanding of which field she preferred; children’s services or disability services.

“I love kids. I always knew I wanted to work with them and was leaning towards the disability sector,” Brianna said.

“However, even though my brother has a disability, I thought I might struggle working with severely disabled children, so it was good to have the opportunity to try both fields and see whether I preferred children’s or disability services,” she said.

Describing the program as “well set out” and “easy to understand”, Brianna said her tutor, Dianne, was “awesome”.

“Dianne was so easy to talk to and gave us the chance to interact with a lot of people from varied fields,” she said.

“I really enjoyed the entire course and got a much better understanding of psychology, in particular, and some other areas.”

Now in her second year as a Teacher’s Aide at Horsham Primary School, Brianna, who works with students from Prep-Grade Six with a low IQ or behavioural concerns, said the course helped a lot in her role.

“While I was completing VET I was able to do some work placement at the school, working with the Prep students for a year,” she said.

“That also gave me a bit of an advantage when it came to applying for my job.”

“The course was a lot of hard work, but it has been great to see it pay off and have the training click into place.”

Previously undertaking a professional development day on intervention programs at Horsham Special School,



**WORTH IT:** Completing the VETiS program helped Horsham Primary School Teacher’s Aide Brianna Starick not only decide on her future career, but also to gain employment.

Brianna was so inspired by the training that she implemented a similar program at her school.

“I was very proud to be able to introduce, and run, our Balls and Ladders program which assists students with their hand, eye and feet coordination,” she said.

Born and raised in Horsham, Brianna was excited to learn that she was being offered a 7 year contract at the school recently, and said she hopes to go on and complete a teaching degree in the future.

## Navigating the modern world

A new, engaging, hands-on skilled mentors program for people over 55 years is unfolding in partnership with Horsham Rural City Council and the Centre for Participation.

Communicating in the Modern World involves developing and engaging with members of the community aged over 55 that wish to further develop their learning around technology.

And the program is seeking skilled mentors to deliver the program.

The role of a skilled mentor is a rewarding and fulfilling one, especially in an area that enhances others’ skills for life.

Horsham Rural City Council and Centre for Participation will deliver the program together, and it will include training sessions with a skilled mentor to empower and enhance the digital connectivity of people over 55.

The program will be tailored to the individual learner’s needs, however, previous stakeholder feedback indicates that the current learning areas to explore include: Mygov, My Aged Care and Facebook, along with varying other online platforms.



**LEARNING:** Former Centre for Participation frontline employee Thandi Eltze assists Ron Eldridge with navigating his iPad as part of a new Communicating in the Modern World program being offered to seniors in partnership with Horsham Rural City Council.

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED** in becoming a Skilled Mentor please call the Centre for Participation on 5382 5607.



# LEARNING >

## Fuller takes the lead

WARRACKNABEAL Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre manager Karen Fuller has taken the lead of the Wimmera Southern Mallee Learning Alliance, after being elected as Chair during the last Alliance meeting in February.

Thanking outgoing Chair Jenny Greenberger of Stawell Neighbourhood House for the time and energy she gave to the role, Ms Fuller said: "Working to ensure our learners have the best opportunities and learning outcomes available to them is the most effective way to meet their needs, now and into the future".

"Learners seek learn local training to pathway into employment or for further learning and we endeavour to support them with this journey wherever possible"

The Wimmera Southern Mallee Community Learning Strategy 2016-2021 was developed with the aim of enhancing a sustainable, responsive and effective community learning sector across the region.

The vision for community learning within the region is to enhance and empower those who may have experienced barriers to learning by further strengthening our capacity as Learn Local and Neighbourhood House providers to deliver effective learning outcomes.

During the consultation process the network identified that constraints to learners include: funding models that do not appropriately acknowledge the complexities faced by disadvantaged learners, viability around low student numbers in rural areas, limited community awareness around the "Learn Local" brand and limited connectivity between community learning centres and the community partners.

However, during the consultation process the strength of the Learn Local sector across our region was also identified.

This success and positivity was attributed to the unity and desire of the sector to improve learning outcomes

when networking, sharing resources and ideas, with the first goal of the Strategy focused upon sustainability with regard to the Alliance.

Effective, efficient and sustainable use of all members' time has seen the Alliance meetings scheduled either before, or after, other scheduled Learn Local meetings, offering sustainability, productivity and a chance to network within the sector.

When looking at the strategy goals within goal 2, the network identified that strengthening and collaborating with resource sharing between Community Learning Centres was a positive step as this further strengthened and enhanced Learn Local responsiveness to learners.

This incorporates the Capacity and Innovation Fund grant focusing upon Skilled Mentors in Education which offers Skilled Mentors a chance to "unpack" learning in areas where the availability of resources is light.

Training has already unfolded across the Stawell area with additional mentor training to continue into the future at Horsham and Warracknabeal.

Looking forward, the alliance as a collective is focusing upon strategic goal 6; discussing and advocating for the sector with regard to systemic change that strengthens the community learning sector.

"All members are welcome to attend and contribute to the meeting discussion," Ms Fuller said.

"And members can either attend the meetings in person or via the use of technology including Skype, Zoom or the telephone to be part of the meeting," she said.

**THE NEXT MEETING** of the Wimmera Southern Mallee Learning Alliance is scheduled for June 21, in Horsham.

At the Centre for Participation, we connect people with the learning opportunities that suit them and help them reach their goals.

136

Cultural Training students

267

students obtained RSA statement

1,206

hours of First Aid training delivered

Statistics:  
Centre for Participation  
2017 annual report

# SOCIAL SUPPORT >

# 97

Y.O.

AND STILL DANCING EVERY MONTH!

## Retaining independence

FOR Warracknabeal's Ed and Enid Schultz, giving up driving long distances could have spelled the end of their old time dancing days, were it not for the Wimmera Social Support program.

Fiercely independent at a spritely 97 and 87, respectively, the couple attend dances up to three times per month in Horsham.

"I started dancing when I was 12, and then when our daughter started she wanted us to come along so we both started going to dances," Enid said.

Born and bred in Warracknabeal, the couple have been married for 65 years, still live in their home and are proud to maintain their independence.

"We do all of our own things from cooking to gardening and growing our own vegetables. And, although we both still drive, I have recently discouraged Ed from driving longer trips," Enid said.

"That has made it difficult to get to our dancing," she said.

Both loving getting out and about, the couple are sometimes able to get rides from family and friends, but, as life gets busier and busier, they're not always available. "We also don't like to rely on people for rides all the time so, if we didn't have the Wimmera Social Support transport, we would have to miss out. It's that simple," Ed said.

Having also attended one of the monthly movie sessions the service offers, Enid



**INDEPENDENT:** Enid and Ed Schultz no longer have to miss out on their dancing, thanks to the Wimmera Social Support program.

said she enjoyed it and hopes to get to more movies in the future.

"We are very happy with the transport service. It's great we can access transport while being allowed to stay in our own home," Enid said.

"We feel if we can still manage on our own we will for as long as we can, but sometimes we need a little help," Ed said.

"And that's why the transport service is so great. We'd be lost without it," he said.

## Meeting individual's needs

Meeting the needs of the individual is the focus of the Wimmera Social Support team.

Program Coordinator Marieke oversees the program, writes regular reports to funders, approves referrals, works with statistics and is responsible for the general running of the program.

Client Services Officer Dora handles enquiries from service users about their service specific care plan, goals and services or outings they would like to be involved in.

And Volunteer Engagement Officer Bren meets with volunteers to discuss volunteer opportunities, specific events they have been booked in for, like shopping, and for training opportunities, catch up and any other matters.

In collaboration with their clients, the trio work hard to ensure the needs of the individual are met and everyone is living a life that is as healthy, happy and

socially connected as possible; from regular men's outings, ladies cuppa and chat, outings to the movies and markets, luncheons and craft days, as well as offering clients the chance to attend other functions as they arise, including the recent Harmony Day.

**TO FIND OUT MORE** about Wimmera Social Support, please call the Centre for Participation on 5382 5607.



# SOCIAL SUPPORT >

*"We keep active and get to meet people"*

John and Sandra Bamkin

## 'It's a two way street'

MOVING to Horsham "temporarily" in 2009, John and Sandra Bamkin thought they'd volunteer "while we're here"; nine years on the couple could have never imagined the amazing impact their friendly visiting would have or the ongoing friendships they would develop.

No strangers to volunteering, having given their time to various roles throughout the course of many decades, the couple spent 22 years travelling Australia in their bus and gaining amazing life experiences, before moving to Horsham when John was given the chance to study IT.

Joining the former Wimmera HUB, Sandra was involved in taking clients shopping while John volunteered as a driver, with their roles later evolving to friendly visiting; something the couple's impressive background as counsellors no doubt benefits.

And, aged a spritely 73 and 76 respectively, Sandra and John simply refuse to utter the "R" word...retirement: "We have a laugh when people say they're retired as we refuse to use that word; we have so much still to offer".

"Volunteering as friendly visitors is a lot of fun, and we have developed strong rapport and friendships with the people we visit," Sandra said.

"Plus, we get a lot out of knowing we can still be of use to the community, like keeping active, and get to meet lots of nice people and have fun," John said.

If their counselling background wasn't impressive enough, the couple are also trained in IT, management, natural therapies, massage and training, and, during their travels, spent time living and working with Aboriginal communities.

Visiting a client who was shy, closed off and didn't engage with them to the point he initially refused to let them enter his home, the couple worked on his engagement skills and are proud to now consider the client a friend who has most definitely come out of his shell since they met.



**FRIENDLY:** Centre for Participation friendly visitor volunteers John and Sandra Bamkin get a lot out of their role and believe it is a two way street.

"We've developed such a good friendship with this client, who loves going for coffee and drives, and even asked whether he could spend his birthday with us," Sandra said.

"We used to run meditation classes and brought him along. This helped him get out of the house and meet new people. Prior to our friendly visiting there is no way he would have ever done that," she said.

Citing another of their clients who has some health issues and is socially isolated, the couple said the client is very happy to see them.

"John and Sandra's results with our clients are just amazing," Centre for Participation Volunteer Engagement Officer Bren Gilmore said.

Exceptionally friendly and positive, the couple even have an open door policy at their home, offering young people a safe place to come for a meal or chat.

"We have nothing but praise for the Centre for Participation in their management and encouragement of volunteers," the couple said.

"They go out of their way to ensure clients are matched with a suitable volunteer and, as a result, volunteers can be with the same client for a considerable time."

Encouraging others to give volunteering a go, the couple said: "If people have knowledge and skills they can share with others, self-worth and self-realisation can be a two way street".

# COMMUNITY TRANSPORT HITS THE ROAD >

Wimmera residents experiencing difficulty getting to their non-emergency medical, social and human services appointments welcomed the introduction of an exciting new community transport service in November.

A joint Transport for Victoria and Centre for Participation project, stage one of the planned three stage Wimmera Southern Mallee Community Transport Service enables residents of Kaniva, Nhill, Jeparit, Dimboola and Pimpinio to access a weekly bus service to Horsham, for a small contribution, with stage two now also taking shape.

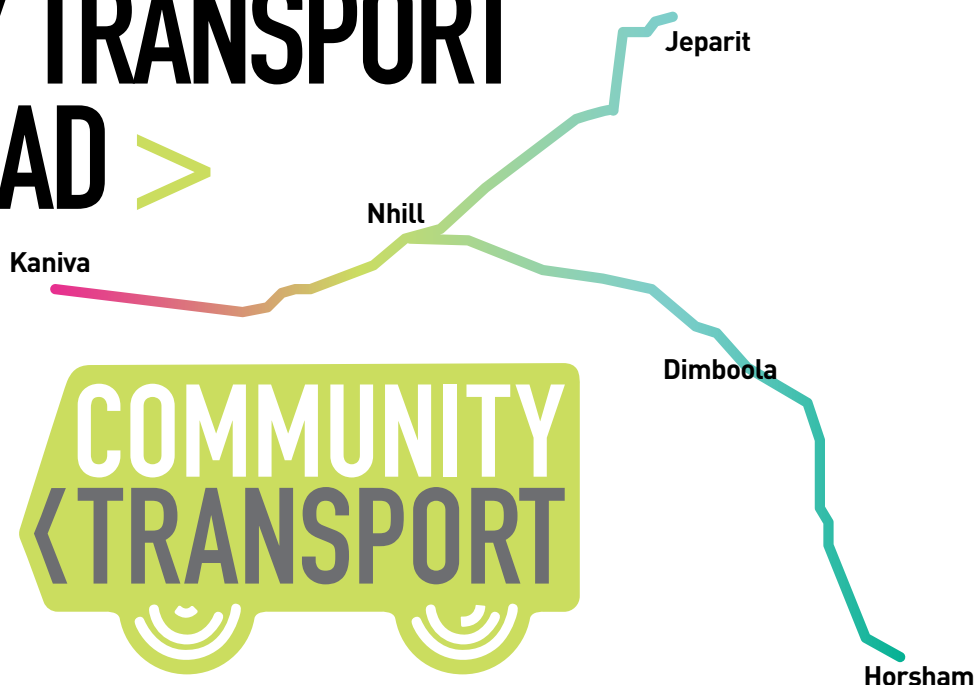
The only Victorian organisation of its kind to receive funding, the Centre for Participation was granted \$125,000 for the first year of a two year pilot service, which aims to increase social connectedness while reducing the regional transport gap.

“Back in 2014 we identified significant transport disadvantage among smaller Wimmera communities and embarked on a project to develop a cost-effective, volunteer based model for community transport,” Centre for Participation CEO Julie Pettett said.

“It was so exciting to see stage one come to fruition, and it’s equally as exciting to see stage two getting closer and closer. We hope our communities will embrace the service and make it their own,” she said.

Working hard to get the service off the ground, including establishing an enthusiastic volunteer driver base, Community Engagement Officer – Rural Outreach Program Christine Picone said: “It was absolutely amazing the lengths people would go to help their communities.”

“Our volunteer drivers, who already gave their time to many other projects,



generously gave up four days of their lives to train for this service,” she said.

“Their enthusiasm and excitement was infectious and has positively contributed to change in our communities.”

“We are happy to be able to again provide a service, where one has been lacking for a long time, and work towards addressing the rural and remote transport gaps.”

Stressing that the Wednesday service is not just for independent, mobile seniors, but also young mums and countless other passengers, Ms Picone highlighted how the service can also connect users with other larger, regional centres.

“We pull up in Roberts Avenue at the exact same time as the V/Line bus; the timing couldn’t be more perfect and will allow our passengers to connect with other transport services, providing a real example of how outreach connects our communities,” she said.

Longer term, the pilot aims to expand across the entire Wimmera to include residents of the Yarriambiack, Northern Grampians, Hindmarsh and Horsham Rural City Local Government Areas.

**BOOK YOUR SEAT**  
**1800 952 211**



**ON THE ROAD:** Community Engagement Officer Christine Picone (centre) chats with volunteer drivers during a practice run in November.



# LICENCING THE WIMMERA >

## Getting you on the road

THERE is no doubt that in rural and remote areas, like the Wimmera, a driver's licence is essential.

Unfortunately, many people lack the support networks to facilitate getting driving experience, or face issues with finance or lack of access to a vehicle; however, that's just where the Centre for Participation Licencing the Wimmera program steps in.

Hosting an L2P program for disadvantaged learner drivers aged 16-21 years, and a P21 program for people aged 21 and older, Licencing the Wimmera matches disadvantaged

drivers with experienced volunteer mentors to help them gain the driving experience required before sitting their probationary licence.

And, while getting the mandatory hours of practice is possible for most people, it can be a real challenge for those who live in regional localities if they don't have access to a car or a supervisor.

All volunteer mentors are fully licenced, undertake VicRoads training and must

have a satisfactory driving history, along with Working with Children and Police Checks, and are matched with a learner by the program coordinator to ensure a safe and supportive relationship; something that is crucial to the success of the learning experience.

**TO REGISTER** your interest in volunteering as a mentor driver, or to find out more about the program phone Coordinator Marieke Dam on 03 5382 5607.

## Confidence and courage

A SERIES of unfortunately timed events in the weeks after Shania Cleaver gained her learner permit led her to the L2P program.

"The week I got my L's my mum had to have surgery and couldn't drive for a few months, then the radiator in my brother's car blew up so that was out of action as well, meaning it was difficult to access either an instructing driver or car," Shania said.

"I joined L2P in August and was matched with mentor Wayne Lentsment who has become a friend and who has been excellent at teaching me the road rules and what to do on different surfaces," she said.

Born in New Zealand Shania, 18, attends Horsham College and finds it easy to fit driving practice around her studies, generally driving with Wayne each Wednesday.

And she says her driving confidence has increased remarkably as a result of the practice: "When I first started I could barely turn the steering wheel, but now we often drive to Murtoa or on gravel roads".

"I am looking forward to doing some night driving as well as getting practice

on other road surfaces, which will help me when I go for my P's," she said.

Praising his charge, Wayne described Shania as "very mature" and said he enjoys both hearing about Shania's life experiences, and sharing his own.

*"When I started I could barely turn the steering wheel"*

Shania Cleaver



**CONFIDENCE:** The L2P program has increased Shania Cleaver's confidence on the road.

# LICENCING THE WIMMERA >

## ‘Experience is wisdom’

A CHANCE to help young people learn basic driving skills attracted volunteer mentor driver Wayne Lentsment initially, but, 6 years on, he has gained so much more.

Spotting an ad calling for drivers in a local newspaper, Wayne, who was already busy with commitments as a Marriage Celebrant, bus driver and arthritis group volunteer, was quick to put his hand up.

Completing a 2 day training course through VicRoads, Wayne has been with the Licensing the Wimmera program since its inception, and says he gets a lot out of the sessions.

“Experience is wisdom. I really enjoy sharing my life experience and skills with the young person, as well as hearing their stories and sharing their lives,” he said.

“Seeing their confidence grow and building a rapport and friendship is wonderful, as is working around different learning styles. It’s definitely a two way thing.”

From hill driving, using the Wawunna Road overpass, to driving on different road surfaces, long distance driving and parallel parking, Wayne, like the other mentors, tries his best to present learners with an overall driving skills package.

“But, while a lot of my mentees are receptive to these interactions and aren’t afraid to ask if they can try something else, I insist they learn to use and trust the vehicle and their own abilities above all else,” Wayne said.

“Licensing the Wimmera benefits the community by getting young people into the driver’s seat not only earlier, but with the correct skills, confidence and a sense of responsibility.”

Volunteering weekly, Wayne said the shortest period he trained a learner was just 2 days while the longest, to date, has been 14 months.

“I get a lot out of these interactions and enjoy seeing the young person learn how to live as a civic person and develop their driving skills. I also appreciate how flexible the program is, I can fit it around my other commitments and the flexibility to change days is there too,” he said.

Telling others about his experiences as a volunteer driving mentor, Wayne said in the past he would leave it up to the individual to sign up as a volunteer if they chose to do so.

“However, after personally experiencing the positive impact the program has on both the young person and the mentor, I would definitely encourage more people to put their hand up,” Wayne said.

**TO REGISTER** your interest in volunteering as a mentor driver, or to find out more about the program phone Licensing the Wimmera Coordinator Marieke Dam on 03 5382 5607.



**SHARING:** Volunteer mentor driver Wayne Lentsment enjoys both hearing, and sharing, experiences with his learners.



# MIGRANT SUPPORT >

## 'Life changing'

DESPITE already speaking “a little” English when arriving in Australia, English Language Program students Phuong, Trish and Ashley have found the classes “very helpful”, particularly when it comes to navigating the Australian accent and slang.

Vietnamese Phuong Ha, who has been in Australia for five years, Trish Inoni from the Solomon Islands, 2 years, and South Korean Ashley Choi, who has been in Australia a mere 1.5 months, are all intermediate class students.

Helping out in her husband's business, Trish said she has found the class useful in terms of being able to speak fluently and understand phrases and words.

“Learning English is very difficult, especially slang and the meaning of words, but I am enjoying the classes,” she said.

And for Ashley, who moved from Sydney with her husband and toddler son Ryan, the chance to go on to further study or to re-engage as a graphic designer was what attracted her to the program.

“I was working as a graphic designer both in South Korea and for a Korean company in Sydney, but, as we lived in Korea Town I didn't need to speak a lot of English,” she said.

“I would like to work again in the design area. And, even though I live here I don't know much about the Australian culture, so I am enjoying learning about that”.



**PHRASES:** : English Language Program Tutor Jan runs through some common English phrases with student Ashley and her son Ryan.

## A cultural melting pot

'PROUD to belong' was the theme of Cultural Diversity Week, March 17-25, which saw people from Caribbean, Mediterranean, European, Asian and Australian backgrounds come together in Horsham to celebrate their respective cultures.

“It is very important to acknowledge the different diversities we have in our region and to celebrate, engage and share all of the different cultures,” Centre for Participation Migrant Liaison Officer Padma Giri said.

“It is a constant process and we learn from each other,” she said.

Hosting a lunch at the organisation on March 22, Padma said she was pleased to welcome 30 people, with a tantalising array of dishes served on the day.

“I was happy with the lunch overall. We are privileged to have such an array of varying cultures in our regional areas as not many towns get that link to other cultures,” she said.

During the lunch guests were invited to add their country of origin to a whiteboard and answer the question “what does cultural diversity mean to you?”, with some of the answers

including “understanding”, “acceptance of other cultures and traditions”, “fitting in” and “confidence”.

And on March 24, Wimmera Development Association played host to Cultural Diversity Day at the Horsham Town Hall, a family-friendly day which celebrated the cultural richness of the Wimmera.

“It was the highlight of the week and a fantastic day which saw more than 200 visitors through the doors,” Padma said.

“The Centre for Participation hosted a stall offering information on our training, in particular the Hospitality Workforce Pathways training for migrant women,” she said.

“There was also a fashion parade and it was beautiful to see the different men's, women's and children's traditional dress in the fashion parade”.



**FASHION:** A range of costumes and fashions from various cultures were displayed during the Harmony Day lunch.



**FRIENDS:** New friends (from left) Leila, Jelly and Jovelyn share a laugh during the lunch.

# MIGRANT SUPPORT >

## Food and friendship

FOR Hospitality Workforce Pathways students the class is about more than developing the skills which will increase their future employability.

Students Carolina Pietsch, Chery Richardson, Josephine Macalinga, Phuong Ha, Trish Inoni, Lea Winfield and Cirila Houston have been students since the program started earlier in the year.

Specifically designed for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to learn customer service skills including barista training, event planning and food handling, the course offers real-time hands-on experience in a safe, culturally supportive learning environment.

"It is very helpful for us all and we are learning new skills that we can use in our daily lives," Trish said.

Learning food handling and hygiene has been of particular interest to Phuong, who, as a mum to 2 children aged under 6, is taking the opportunity to study and upskill before looking for work when her youngest starts kindergarten.

"I have learned a lot of recipes, including dishes from my classmates' countries," she said.

"And I am enjoying learning not only the new skills, but also building treasured, lifelong friendships with my classmates".

**TO FIND OUT MORE** about Migrant Support, please call the Centre for Participation on 5382 5607.



**SHARING:** Trish (left) and Phuong are enjoying learning new skills that will increase their future employability.



# HOW CAN I HELP >

## Your support = ongoing success

Centre for Participation pride ourselves on supporting and strengthening our communities.

We want them all to succeed, no matter their size, and welcome contributions from individuals and organisations to help us ensure this success.

Your contribution will assist us in running our various programs, including the newly introduced Wimmera Southern Mallee Community Transport Service, which offers communities the chance to

get to Horsham to attend their non-emergency medical and human services appointments while maintaining social connections.

Or perhaps it will assist us to help a learner gain the mandatory 120 hours of driving experience needed to gain their probationary licence.



“ Did you know it costs

\$2,537

to put a single learner through the L2P program? ”

If you would like to contribute please go to our website [www.centreforparticipation.org.au](http://www.centreforparticipation.org.au) and click **DONATE**

**THANKS!**

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**ACTIVE LEARNERS  
IN LICENCING THE  
WIMMERA**

## 1,108


hours of supervised  
driving for Licencing  
the Wimmera

## 2,260

participants  
across Centre for  
Participation



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