

PARTICIPATE

GET INVOLVED > STAY CONNECTED

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Volunteering:

Working together, creating positive change

WELCOME to the July edition of PARTICIPATE. Here you can read about what's been happening in the Wimmera Mallee region and stay connected with current issues, initiatives and opportunities to participate.

We believe that volunteering is the lifeblood of communities. That's why the theme of this edition is about celebrating the critical role of volunteering in helping shape thriving communities where people want to live. Through the stories shared here we recognise the achievements of our many programs and initiatives designed to strengthen our region – and acknowledge the importance of volunteering in helping make these things happen.

We hope you enjoy this edition of PARTICIPATE.

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COVER:

COMING TOGETHER: Volunteering at the 150km Feast has increased participants' sense of belonging

CEO WELCOME >

The Centre for Participation works to strengthen individuals, organisations and communities.

We do this by connecting people and organisations with community, learning, volunteering and partnership opportunities that help them flourish and build an active, vibrant region.

As a volunteer-involving organisation, volunteers are vital in supporting us to deliver our mission. And just as importantly, the volunteering opportunities we create also help volunteers themselves to be involved and connected with the local community. All of this work makes a difference to someone's life and contributes to a stronger and more resilient region.

Along with our opportunities for internal volunteering, the Centre for Participation is a critical piece of infrastructure that supports other volunteer-involving organisations, clubs and groups. In our region – like all regions – frameworks that support volunteering, enable people to actively participate in community life, and build social cohesion are essential. This support needs to be grounded in local understanding, so it is place-based and community-led – and that is why localised support organisations like ours are so important.

The impacts of this work are numerous and wide-reaching. Benefits include reduced welfare through social enterprise development and job creation, greater employability by boosting confidence and work skills, improved emotional and mental health, and greater community cohesion through reduced isolation. All of these outcomes can reduce the need for health services and contacts with the justice system by providing outreach and opportunities to meaningfully participate and belong.

We are just one of many organisations that rely on volunteering – an act that is crucial to the long-term viability of rural communities. The incredible efforts of volunteers were celebrated in May during National Volunteer Week, where we recognised all the things volunteers do to make our community a better place to live, work, study and raise a family. We thank these amazing people and encourage everyone in our community to put up their hand next time you see an opportunity to participate.

Robbie Millar

Acting CEO, Centre for Participation



THANK YOU: Celebrating our volunteers during National Volunteer Week 2021

IMPACT SNAPSHOT >

Some of the amazing achievements of our **volunteers** over the last 12 months...

8,320+

COMMUNITY MEALS – delivered through our Laneway – Cafe without Borders community meal program

850+

HOURS OF DRIVING PRACTICE – volunteered by supervisors in Licencing the Wimmera program

1,800+

SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES – to help local people stay connected

8

YOUNG PEOPLE NOW ON THE ROAD – after achieving their driver's licence through our Licencing the Wimmera program

6,360

MEALS ON WHEELS DELIVERIES – since January 2021

4,200+

HOURS VOLUNTEERED – through Social Support activities

34,500km+

TRAVELLED – to transport people to medical appointments

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT >

Keeping the Wimmera moving

The Centre for Participation has been working hard to resume our vital community transport service in the wake of COVID, enabling isolated residents to remain connected to their community.

Transport disadvantage has long been an issue for small communities across the Wimmera Southern Mallee. In partnership with our stakeholders, our community transport program provides an affordable and volunteer-based service for older and disadvantaged local people to access social- and health-related services, maintain social connections, and get out and about in the community.

After the program was suspended due to the pandemic in March 2020, our weekly return bus service from Kaniva to Horsham resumed in May 2021 much to the joy and relief of passengers like the 'Dimboola ladies', who had eagerly awaited its return. For many passengers who use this service, it is an essential part of their lives and their only means of getting out to engage with others in the broader community.

Talks with West Wimmera Shire have resumed about the planned introduction of a weekly return service from Edenhope to Horsham, to further grow our reach and impact. We've also begun discussions with another three LGAs to assist in testing live displays of the community transport smart device app, with the potential to revolutionise community transport bookings across the region.



How community transport is making a difference...

'I've met a lot of people whilst doing this job that I haven't met before, which is unusual for a small town. But a lot of the older people don't get out that often and this is the only time you see them.'

Charlie Ferrier, volunteer driver

'I live alone on a farm, so I really enjoy the company of the other passengers. I look forward to the social connections the bus service provides, as well as the journey to Horsham for appointments or shopping.'

Jo Hayes, passenger, Yanac

'We've been anxiously waiting for the resumption of the bus service, which has been a lifeline for us to essential services only found in Horsham.'

Sylvia and Brian Adams, passengers, Dimboola



ON THE MOVE: Community transport volunteers and passengers are back on board

SOCIAL SUPPORT >

Staying mobile and connected

With social isolation a major issue for those living in rural communities, the Centre for Participation continues to advocate for increased levels of social support across the Wimmera Southern Mallee region.

The Wimmera Southern Mallee is one of Victoria's more remote regions. It covers 15% of Victoria, yet only 1% of the Victorian population resides there. Isolated by limited road connectivity to other parts of Victoria and with no public transport, some townships have also had council-run community transport withdrawn. This situation leaves elderly and disadvantaged residents with very few opportunities for socialisation and connection with the broader community.

In addition to the lack of transport options, elderly residents often face chronic and complex health conditions, making it even harder for them to access and participate in social activities.

The Centre for Participation's longstanding Social Support program provides valuable opportunities for social contact, friendship and independence, helping older and vulnerable residents stay mobile and connected.

Through our program, those at risk of social isolation are matched with a trained volunteer who can help them with shopping, attending appointments, paying bills and support to attend social activities. By matching our volunteers with people with shared interests, many volunteers and clients build strong ongoing friendships.

This one-on-one program provides participants with social support and community transport, enabling them to gain much needed social stimulus and the ongoing positive effects of being connected to the community, which are essential to their wellbeing. Funded by the Commonwealth and State Governments, the program opens up opportunities for people to utilise local services they may not otherwise be able to access without this support.

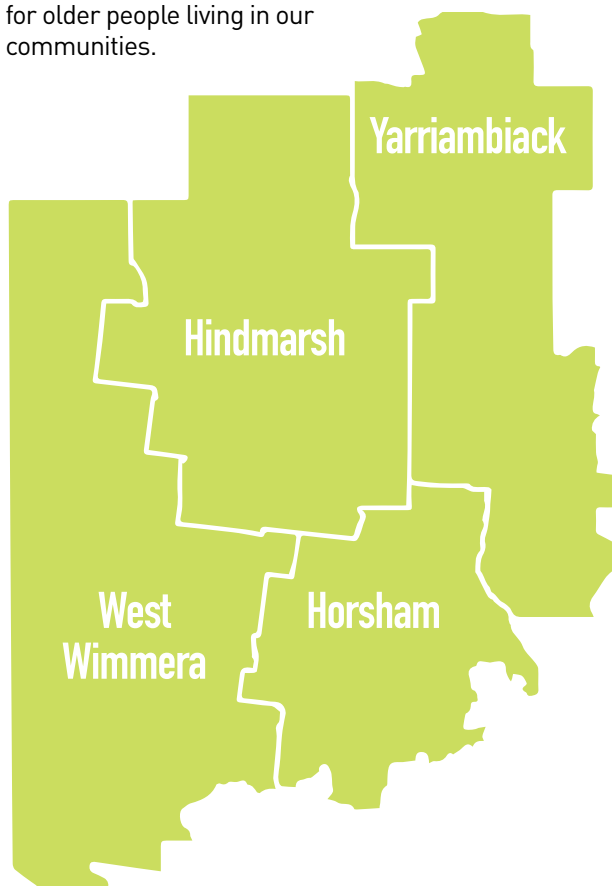
Over the last 5 months, the program has transported over 137 people to medical appointments outside of the Wimmera

area. Non-emergency transport is typically to Ballarat, Stawell, Ararat and Nhill, with people from as far as Patchewollock, Kaniva and Rainbow seeking assistance. Throughout this period, we've also supported 37 carers with assistance when looking after a loved one, fulfilled 23 shopping assistance requests, and connected with people through 93 community-based visits. Although COVID restrictions have unfortunately limited plans for social activities in larger-group settings, we are eager to undertake events when restrictions ease.

Looking ahead, we'll continue to support as many people as possible by recruiting volunteers locally within Horsham and the broader region. Our program provides invaluable social support and transport for clients within their homes and residential care facilities, supporting independence and social connection for older people living in our communities.



CONNECTIONS: Social Support volunteer, Robyn, says 'I really enjoy catching up for a cuppa and chat each week – it gives many of the ladies an opportunity they wouldn't otherwise have to engage socially'



> Wimmera Southern Mallee covers 33,900 km² (15% of Victoria)

> Population: 47,400 – less than 1% of Victoria's population

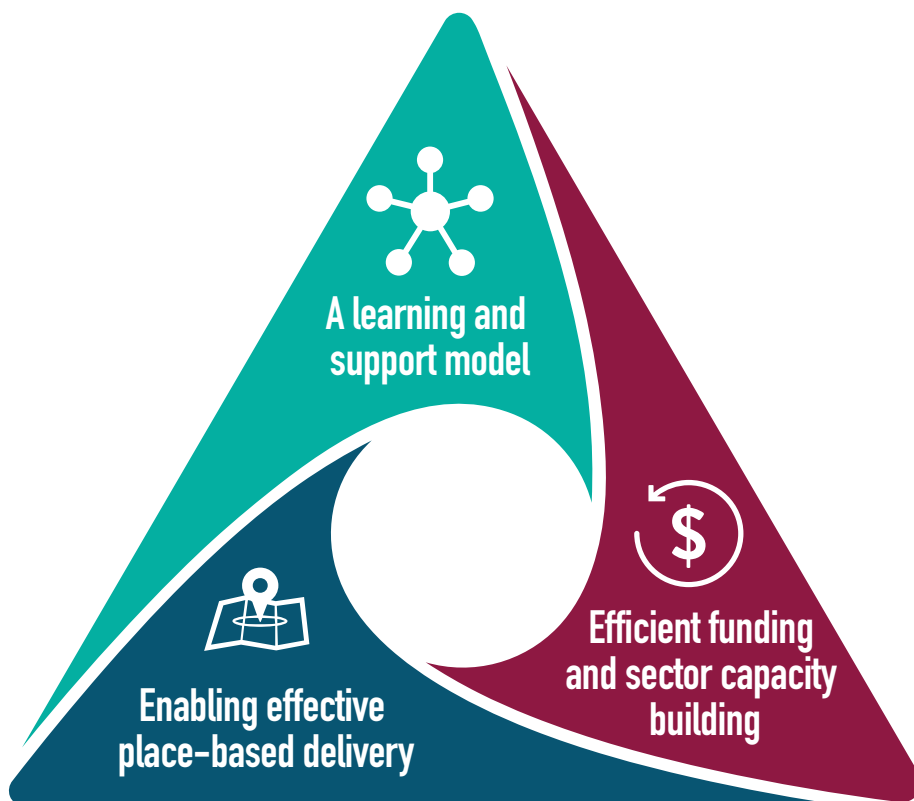
Reference: *Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Profile*

CONNECTIONS >

Rural and Remote Pathways to Inclusion

The Rural and Remote Pathways to Inclusion program was developed to address the growing marginalisation of people, particularly women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, who experience barriers to participation.

Through the program, we work to strengthen social inclusion and economic participation in partnership with three other organisations who have identified similar community needs: Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau (AWVRB), Hunter Volunteer Centre (HVC), and Volunteering Victoria (program adviser).



A learning and support model – collaborative input from partner organisations provides opportunities for knowledge and resource-sharing, peer support, and critical review to strengthen community outcomes

Efficient funding and sector capacity building – having one lead organisation creates administrative efficiencies for government departments, while maintaining opportunities for smaller and diverse place-based organisations to participate in sector networks and deliver government-funded activities

Enabling effective place-based delivery – to address a common community need across three different geographical contexts, four place-based projects involving three organisations share resources and insights to support cultural exchange, strengthened social inclusion, and financial independence for participants

Four place-based projects to drive inclusion

The four place-based projects initiated through the program were developed for implementation over an 18-month period from December 2019 to June 2021. Although the projects all respond to a similar issue, each has been specifically designed to meet the unique needs of people experiencing marginalisation within their local context.

The projects include:

- **Kitchen in the Hood (AWVRB)**: hospitality training and opportunities for participants to volunteer, gain employment skills and participate at social events that promote cultural exchange
- **Social Pantry – mobile cafe for purpose (Centre for Participation)**: participants take part in hospitality training and can volunteer and work in the microbusiness. They also have the opportunity to be mentored as they develop their microbusiness ideas
- **Heartland Horsham (Centre for Participation)**: cultural exchange program where migrants and refugees living in urban Melbourne stay with rural families over a weekend and volunteer time to plant trees through a local Landcare project
- **Pathways towards employment (HVC)**: provides training, volunteering and mentorship opportunities for people experiencing social and economic marginalisation in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie.

Local projects update: more about what's been happening at the Centre for Participation

As part of the Rural and Remote Pathways to Inclusion program, participants have successfully undertaken hospitality training, gained work experience in the Social Pantry van, and put their skills into practice at the 150km Feast – an annual fundraising event and showcase of local produce sourced within 150km of Horsham.

Here's what some of the participants had to say about the 150km Feast...

'This opportunity increased my self-confidence and knowing that I'm doing something good for my community, makes me feel good about myself too... I get to know others in the same community, and get to use the skills that I learned to apply appropriately.'

'Proud to be part of this event and to give back to the community, and them accepting us as migrants.'

What's next?

We've seen the impact of the Rural and Remote Pathways to Inclusion program in local communities, and so a key focus of our partnership will be to identify options for continuing and expanding the program beyond our current funding to June 2021. Along with our partners, we're also looking to understand the implications of recent changes to the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) model, and exploring options for strengthening the financial positions of our organisations.



GETTING AROUND >

Licencing the Wimmera

Our Licencing the Wimmera program helps people get the driving experience they need to get their licence.

Funded by VicRoads and the TAC, the program supports learners with supervised driving practice hours with volunteers and occasional professional driving lessons with instructors. It aims to develop safer drivers and help young disadvantaged people get their licence so they can open up more opportunities for employment, education, social connection, and participation in their local community and beyond.

Each year, we assist between 55 and 65 learners to gain their mandatory hours of driving practice. Trained volunteer mentors skilled in coaching young people are matched with learners, with driving practice taking place in cars provided by the Centre for Participation. The program assisted eight learners to gain their probationary licence in the past year.



MOBILE: Mentor Phil Batchelor with learner Amber

Case study: Kate's* story

Kate was 16 years old when she was separated from her family and town, and placed in kinship care in Horsham. With no close family nearby, Kate had no access to a suitable vehicle or supervising driver for driving practice.

When she had just turned 17 and was completing Year 11 studies, Kate was referred to our Licencing the Wimmera program. In the Christmas break of 2019, the Centre for Participation got her started in the program and further supported her throughout the remainder of her VCE in 2020 – with driving practice fitted in around her studies and part-time job.

Despite COVID delays, Kate successfully completed her VCE and achieved her driver's licence in May 2021. Obtaining her licence has made it possible to work further night shifts at her job and travel safely home, and also accept a position studying secondary education at a university three hours' away.

'Having my licence has made my further education and employment opportunities so much more accessible,' says Kate. 'I loved my drives with my mentor and felt very comfortable in the car. I enjoyed the easy conversation.'

* Not her real name.

'Having my licence has made my further education and employment opportunities so much more accessible.'

VOLUNTEERING >

Strengthening volunteering in our region

The Centre for Participation's Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) program supports volunteer-involving organisations, and assists volunteers to connect with volunteer opportunities in our local area.

The program is designed to help both volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations get the most out of volunteering. Our regular introduction to volunteering sessions (both online and face-to-face) increase volunteers' knowledge about rights and responsibilities while volunteering, and help increase their readiness for their upcoming volunteering role.

We also help volunteer-involving organisations find the right volunteer for their activities and opportunities via recruitment and advertising assistance. In addition, we build these organisations' capacity by establishing the long-term frameworks to enable and support effective volunteering. These initiatives include best practice guidelines for setting up, running and evaluating their volunteering programs through structures, policies and procedures, templates, recruitment assistance, information and advice, network opportunities and workshops.

The program aims to help volunteers be more connected and resilient, support organisations to be more inclusive and well-managed, and increase community networks and sustainability. By promoting and supporting volunteering and participation, we're helping create a stronger and more inclusive region.



VALUED: Maree began volunteering with the Centre for Participation in early 2021

Case study: Maree's story

Maree first contacted the Centre for Participation in January 2021 to enquire about local volunteering opportunities. She'd heard about the centre and liked its philosophy, what it stands for, and how it supports the local community in many different ways.

From February until April 2021, Maree volunteered in our Social Support, Meals on Wheels and Licencing the Wimmera programs. She also volunteered at the Centre for Participation's front reception when there was no receptionist available as the friendly 'meet and greet' person, and providing general administration support.

Maree quickly became a valued member of the Centre for Participation team. With her can-do attitude, friendly demeanour and genuine helpfulness, she rapidly learned about the different programs

on offer and how to assist clients and volunteers with their enquiries. As a born-and-bred local with lots of volunteer experience – especially in the CFA – Maree had the local knowledge and insight to build strong connections and rapport with the community.

When a position became available for a Social Support, Internal and Meals on Wheels Volunteer Coordinator, Maree successfully applied for the position and started as a paid member of the Centre for Participation team in April 2021. Through her volunteering and transferrable skills,

she was able to get a foot in the door, prove her experience and knowledge, and enter into paid work.

'I was super excited to be given the opportunity to volunteer with the Centre for Participation,' says Maree. 'When I commenced in this role I was overawed at the depth of opportunities for volunteering in our community. The support that I received and was then able to provide to other volunteers was so appreciated. The support gave me the encouragement to continue to improve my core values and experience.'

MEET THE TEAM >

Jess, Manager of Laneway – Cafe without Borders



HANDS-ON: Jess helps participants learn work-ready hospitality skills



What is Laneway – Cafe without Borders all about?

Laneway is the Centre for Participation's largest hospitality social enterprise. As a place where anyone can work, it plays a valuable role in breaking down barriers and providing new opportunities for participants in the wider community.

What are some opportunities/innovations you're excited about?

I'm extremely passionate about creating change by:

- challenging young people with additional needs to step out of their comfort zones and expand their skill set in hospitality while experiencing social inclusion
- working with CALD women to achieve their goals by upskilling in hospitality, and building social inclusion while bridging language gaps
- coordinating community events and heavily networking with business owners while developing my own professional skills.

What do you enjoy most about what you do?

I enjoy constantly helping to develop the skills of individuals and seeing them achieve their amazing outcomes. This can vary from building confidence in a group setting to learning a new aspect working in a meal-producing kitchen.

Working with our learners to cook and donate ready-made meals for community relief centres is also an incredibly fulfilling experience.

FUTURE VISION >

'We have a strong plan to lead our organisation into the future.'
– Ray Kingston, Chair,
Centre for Participation

Continuing on our path for growth

The Board and management team at the Centre for Participation have now signed off on our 2021–2024 strategic plan, setting out the roadmap for how we'll continue to meet the needs of our community. It brings together the insights uncovered during strategic planning workshops held in late 2020, exploring where we are now, where we're going and how we'll get there.

It covers **four key themes and priorities** to help us build our impact as an organisation:

CORE THEME 1:
ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE FOR ANYBODY

PRIORITY:
CREATE A VIBRANT, RESILIENT AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

CORE THEME 2:
WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

PRIORITY:
STRENGTHEN OUR REACH AND IMPACT THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCES

CORE THEME 3:
AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

PRIORITY:
LEAD THE WAY – INSIDE AND OUT

CORE THEME 4:
GETTING ON WITH BUSINESS

PRIORITY:
DIVERSIFY REVENUE STREAMS FOR SUSTAINABLE IMPACT INTO THE FUTURE



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT >

Fostering good governance

Our Good Governance program creates stronger, healthier communities by boosting good governance practices in community organisations. Trained volunteers skilled in governance are matched with small community organisations, to act as mentors in governance and empower the organisation.

The program is underpinned by strong partnerships within localised settings, so community organisations are supported in ways that meet their needs and those of their local communities. We partner with key community leaders to deliver the program in Ballarat, Albury Wodonga and Mildura, with current partners (known as hosts) including Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council and Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau.

Our partners select appropriate community organisations, match them to a local trained volunteer mentor, and provide the required support for the mentoring relationship to thrive. The Centre for Participation in turn supports our partners to ensure they have the resources and knowledge to undertake the program with success, which includes:

→ training, interviewing, reference-checking and assessing volunteer mentors to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and experience to participate

→ fortnightly Zoom meetings for hosts

→ delivering governance-themed webinars targeted at hosts, community organisations and mentors

→ developing resources and eLearning modules to upskill participants

→ coordinating the upgrade of the Good Governance website to make it an easy-access storage location for all resources.

Our partners have reported increased connections with their local community organisations and mentors, as well as the benefits of sharing learnings and insights with other hosts when brought together through the program.

‘Collaborating and working with other organisations has meant being able to share experiences and discuss issues and problems,’ says Megs Osborne, Host Coordinator, Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau.

‘Working together helped with gaining clarity and forming ideas to work more productively.’

– Megs Osborne, Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau


‘It has meant feeling supported through shared knowledge and understanding and empathy. Working together helped with gaining clarity and forming ideas to work more productively.’

‘Having the Centre for Participation as the program coordinator arrange the regular Zoom meetings of participating organisations made such a difference to being connected to the project... each organisation got to talk and share, and raise issues if they had them and talk about where things were up to.’

Sarabjit Kaur, Host Coordinator from Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council, agrees that the support provided by the Centre for Participation has helped with the smooth rollout of the program.

‘Working with the Centre for Participation has given us the structure and support to help community organisations with tailored governance expertise,’ she says. ‘The monthly webinars have gained popularity and are attended by individual community members, mentors and community organisations.’

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