

PARTICIPATE

GET INVOLVED > STAY CONNECTED

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ISSUE
08



Introducing MyCareCrew!

A new local initiative to support independent living

WELCOME to the June 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.

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COVER:

Alice and Elinor enjoy a cuppa together as part of Social Support – one of the services available through MyCareCrew.



> COMMUNITY > VOLUNTEERING > LEARNING > PARTNERSHIPS

CEO WELCOME >

How great it is to bring our community together!

As lockdowns and restrictions continue to ease, it's been a joy to help our community reconnect. The pandemic really highlighted the power of community and what can be achieved when we work together – and we're continuing to build on these foundations and broaden the ways we're strengthening our local region through new opportunities.

One of the ways we're doing this is through the launch of MyCareCrew – a new initiative providing local support to help people live independently, build connections, and be active in their community (see page 3). With services delivered by local staff and volunteers, MyCareCrew is all about local people looking after local people – helping to shape a strong, connected Wimmera region.

Many of the services provided through MyCareCrew support community participation and meaningful work experience, creating a skilled workforce to meet the needs of an ageing population. Volunteers involved in delivering the services have the opportunity to grow their own networks, boost their skills, and open up new pathways to future employment.

The incredible possibilities volunteering represents were also showcased recently through National Volunteering Week. Here we were able to honour our volunteers and all they do in creating a better community for everyone. You can read more about our celebrations and latest initiatives to support volunteers everywhere on page 4.

Other highlights include marking Neighbourhood House Week (page 13) and recognition of our ongoing commitment to lifelong learning at the Learn Local Awards (page 8). We were honoured as a finalist for our Micro Business program, which helps break down barriers to employment for our local CALD communities in particular, creating wide-reaching opportunities for people to learn new things and thrive.

As always, there's been a lot happening at the Centre for Participation! We hope you enjoy reading more about all we've achieved and our plans for the future to help individuals, organisations and communities to flourish.

Robbie Millar
CEO
Centre for Participation



COMMUNITY: Coming together to connect our local region

INDEPENDENT LIVING >

'MyCareCrew makes it easier for people to choose the support that suits them – all through the one place.'

– Robbie Millar, Centre for Participation

Bringing MyCareCrew to the Wimmera

With isolation, a lack of support services and an ageing population all major issues for people in rural communities, the Centre for Participation is launching a new initiative to help people live independently and stay connected.

MyCareCrew supports older people, those with disability, and people with other health issues to get the extra help they may need to live in their own homes, get around, and participate in their community.

The initiative brings together a variety of services already delivered by the Centre for Participation to make it easier for people to choose the support that suits them – all through the one place. Our range of local services offered through MyCareCrew include:

- **Home Help** – gardening, cleaning and minor home maintenance and repairs
- **Social Support** – accompaniment to take part in activities like shopping, appointments, outings, meals, movies and other social events
- **Community Transport** – access to bus services connecting local towns, as well as transport to an accompanied activity such as non-emergency medical appointments
- **Laneway meals** – home meal deliveries and events such as our local community lunches.

With opportunities for local volunteers to take part in delivering services, the impacts of MyCareCrew go far beyond a regular support program. Volunteers can develop their own skills through valuable work experience that paves the way for further training and employment, helping shape and equip the local workforce.



MyCareCrew

Local support for independent living

How MyCareCrew can help...



HOME HELP



SOCIAL SUPPORT



COMMUNITY TRANSPORT



LANEWAY MEALS

VOLUNTEERING >

Celebrating our volunteers

In May we marked National Volunteer Week with the theme 'Better Together', recognising that volunteering brings people and communities together and helps create a better society for everyone.

With volunteering forming the backbone of many programs and services offered through the Centre for Participation – including Meals on Wheels, Licencing the Wimmera, Social Support, Migrant Support, and community meal deliveries – we had many volunteers to thank! We celebrated the occasion with an afternoon tea at Laneway – Cafe without Borders at Federation University, Horsham, where guests enjoyed delicious scones, great company and some laughs over our trivia quiz.

We've also continued our ongoing support for volunteering generally in our role as a volunteer resource centre. We work to assist other volunteer-involving organisations to decrease barriers to volunteering, especially for people from migrant backgrounds, those with disability, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Our initiatives include helping organisations to be inclusive, open and transparent in their volunteer position descriptions, and to provide the ongoing support volunteers need to do their roles well.

Other ways we help include facilitating regular Volunteer Coordinators and Managers Network meetings, where we discuss common challenges to volunteering, new resources or policies and best practice guidelines, as well as celebrate our successes. Our dedicated Facebook group page is another opportunity for volunteer coordinators to connect and stay up to date with the latest resources and information, helping coordinators take action to boost volunteering across our region.



BETTER TOGETHER: Afternoon tea to mark National Volunteer Week 2022

460

HOURS OF DRIVING BY COMMUNITY
TRANSPORT VOLUNTEERS TO HELP
GET LOCAL PEOPLE AROUND

1,426

HOURS CONTRIBUTED BY MEALS
ON WHEELS VOLUNTEERS TO BRING
PEOPLE FRESH MEALS

53

HOURS OF OFFICE SUPPORT
VOLUNTEERS TO HELP DELIVER THE
SERVICES OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS

1,261

HOURS VOLUNTEERED THROUGH
LICENCING THE WIMMERA, SUPPORTING
LEARNERS TO GET ON THE ROAD

276

NEW VOLUNTEERS COMING ON
BOARD ACROSS THE REGION IN
THE LAST YEAR

523+

SOCIAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES
DELIVERED BY VOLUNTEERS TO
HELP KEEP PEOPLE CONNECTED

L2P program

Our L2P program helps young disadvantaged people get the driving experience they need to get their licence.

Trained volunteer mentors are matched with learners for supervised driving practice in cars provided by the Centre for Participation, helping learners develop the safe driving skills they need to successfully obtain their licence and get around in the region. With vast distances to cover and limited access to public transport options, having a licence is vital in increasing opportunities in employment, study and social activities.

Although lockdowns over the past year made it extremely challenging to help learners with hands-on driving practice, we still managed to support **44 drivers to acquire their mandatory driving practice hours**, of which **13 now have their probationary driver's licence**.

'Shania is a wonderful example of the difference this program makes for the youth in the Wimmera – especially in further opportunities in education and employment.'

– L2P Program Coordinator, Wimmera



Case study: Shania's story

Shania joined our L2P program in early 2016 aged 17. The eldest of six siblings from a single-parent family, Shania's mum did not have her driver's licence – leaving Shania without a suitable vehicle or supervising driver for practice.

As a part-time worker at a bakery with shifts beginning at 5.00am, it was difficult and at times dangerous for Shania to get to work without her licence. When Shania joined the L2P program, she was matched with her mentor 'Bear' (Gavin) and the pair drove most weekends to help Shania get the driving practice and mandatory hours she needed to sit her licence test.

Through the support of Bear, Shania achieved her licence and developed a long-standing friendship with her mentor. She credits Bear and the L2P program with the possibilities now before her, including being able to take up study for a degree in Community Services. Shania has also been able to transport and assist her mum and siblings, and has given back by volunteering for the Centre for Participation herself.

According to Shania, the L2P program is essential in supporting disadvantaged youth who would not otherwise be able to get their licence – especially in remote and regional locations. It's also opened up opportunities for Shania far beyond simply being able to drive.

'You can get to the fork in the road and choose to go down that path where it could go very wrong or you can choose the path that your mentor shows you is possible,' Shania said.

'My mentor had a lot of life experience as he is a parent so he had empathy for the situation I was in. It takes just one good person, one good role model, to change your life.'

'It takes just one good person,
one good role model, to change
your life.'

– Shania, L2P participant



MENTOR: Shania can now get around independently thanks to volunteer Bear

LEARNING >

Early Childhood Education and Care

With a workforce shortage in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) across the Wimmera Southern Mallee, the Department of Education and Training along with local partners and providers identified a need for a pre-accredited Introduction to ECEC course.

The Centre for Participation came on board as the Learn Local provider to deliver the Introduction to ECEC pre-accredited course in February 2022, helping participants understand more about the sector. Ten people were recruited for the course, with seven then enrolling in the Certificate III ECEC course to further develop their skills and help address workforce gaps throughout the region.

With a particular focus on supporting women, youth and people from CALD backgrounds to take part, the introduction course also helped marginalised and disadvantaged groups to grow their knowledge base and tap into new possibilities for employment. Seven of the participants completing the course were from CALD backgrounds.

Looking ahead, the Centre for Participation and partner By Five are developing a pre-accredited study support program to run in conjunction with the Certificate III ECEC course. This initiative will continue to support CALD people and students with lower levels of formal education with assistance to overcome any difficulties in the literacy and/or numeracy components of the Certificate III ECEC.

Impact highlights



'Doing the Introduction to ECEC course opened my mind to working in the industry... I didn't realise that it was such a big industry and that there are so many jobs.'

'I now have more confidence to stand with parents and talk to them. This course encouraged me.'

– Trish, student – Horsham resident and previously of the Solomon Islands

'The industry meet-and-greet was really helpful, hearing about the placement and information about working in the industry. I would like to work and study at the same time.'

– Arzen, student – Horsham resident and previously of the Philippines

'[We've] been excited to see the collaborative approach of stakeholders in our area to drive this pre-accredited training as part of a range of initiatives aimed at increasing our early childhood workforce.'

'By getting the buy-in from training and service providers, government agencies, and Learn Local partners, we have seen an exciting pre-accredited program developed that will support an increase in quality early childhood workforce.'

– Debbie Moerkerk – Early Childhood Improvement Manager, Department of Education and Training

EXPAND SKILLS GROW OPPORTUNITIES

'We know that Learn Locals play a critical role in creating safe learning environments, where learners can move at their own pace and when they are ready. This was definitely the case for the Introduction to ECEC course...'

'Having existing connections has also meant that many are comfortable to take part in study support while undertaking the Certificate III ECEC.'

– Robbie Millar – CEO, Centre for Participation

Snapshot: Stories from other learners

Here's an insight into the experiences of some of the learners involved in our other education and training opportunities...



CONNECTED: Learning opportunities have helped Sokan be part of the community

Sokan

Sokan arrived in Australia nine months ago from Cambodia with her son and husband, who is originally from Horsham. She enrolled in three courses at the Centre for Participation, including our English class and Micro Business program. Since May 2021, Sokan has worked at the Centre for Participation as a receptionist, and is also doing research for a social enterprise.

'I am very thankful that I found the Centre for Participation because here, I feel at home,' Sokan said. 'I met a lot of beautiful people and I learned a lot about Australia.'



VALUED: Ayantu is now part of the Centre for Participation team

Ayantu

Ayantu enrolled in our English Conversation class and Micro Business program in February 2022, where she has been very dedicated to attending classes and open to learning more. As a result of her strong work ethic and determination, Ayantu was offered a job as a receptionist at the Centre for Participation. As well as contributing to the running of our centre, Ayantu has also had the opportunity to hone her communication skills and grow her confidence with the support of our staff and management.

HANDS-ON TRAINING >

Micro Business program

Our pre-accredited Micro Business program helps people from multicultural backgrounds learn skills, build confidence and find employment in the field of hospitality.

The program has been designed as one solution to help break down employment barriers people in our local CALD communities may face. We've seen first-hand the impact that initiatives like these can have for people from CALD backgrounds, with the benefits of financial empowerment flowing through to immediate households, the greater community, and society as a whole.

Nineteen students are involved in the program from a range of countries, including Japan, Italy, Zimbabwe, Thailand, Vietnam, Argentina and Pakistan. Students grow their understanding of the basic principles to set up and run a micro business, and are supported to create a business in line with their field of interest.

Part of our approach includes exposing students to practical, real-life training through our hospitality enterprises Laneway – Cafe without Borders and The Social Pantry – Mobile Cafe for Purpose. This training gives students the chance to gain hands-on, job-ready skills in customer service, food preparation and more.

Through this work experience, employment opportunities have been offered as a next step for some students. The program has also opened up pathways to further education and training, as well as equipping students with the knowledge to take their own business to the next level.

Our achievements and success in building the capacity of our community was also recognised in the Victorian Learn Local Awards. We were honoured as a Finalist in the Pre-Accredited Program Award category, acknowledging our role in opening up access to training and employment opportunities for vulnerable people across our region.

The Centre for Participation was a finalist in the Victorian Learn Local Awards



SPECIALTY: Josephine with her signature *ensaymada*

Case study: Josephine's story

Josephine arrived in Australia in 2010 before moving to Horsham in 2015. She joined our Hospitality Pathways program in 2017, where she honed her cooking skills and learnt to be a barista.

In July 2020, Josephine decided to build on her interest in hospitality by enrolling in our Micro Business program, with a vision to start up a small business in the food industry. As part of the course, she participated in the Laneway Cafe Taster Program where she volunteered in the kitchen for approximately 15 hours. Josephine also volunteered in The Social Pantry – Mobile Cafe for Purpose, at the local 150km Feast event, and at our Harmony Day celebrations where she helped prepare her specialty *ensaymada*. With the hands-on opportunities made possible through the program, Josephine is pursuing her passion in hospitality. She's continuing to apply and grow her barista, food preparation and customer service skills, including through her role working at the food van at Murra Warra Wind Farm.

> LEARNING

EXPAN
SKILL

REAL-WORLD LEARNING:
Students from our Micro
Business program prepare
meal packs and sell
products for local events



COMMUNITY MEALS >

Meals on Wheels

The National Meals on Wheels Conference was a fantastic opportunity to hear from amazing speakers and connect to people from across Australia – all with the shared vision of providing nutritious meals to help people live independently at home for longer.

Two delegates from the Centre for Participation joined the conference in Brisbane in May 2022, learning more about the latest innovations in meal provision and building networks with other service providers in the field. We had the chance to look at new ways of cooking, packaging and delivering meals to the community, as well as exploring different software and administrative processes in the context of changes to the Support at Home program in 2023.

The conference was a great opportunity to stay ahead of the latest developments and possibilities, giving us the knowledge and inspiration to keep delivering the best service possible for our community. We remain committed to supporting Meals on Wheels and its significant role in social infrastructure, providing front-line assistance and reducing both the malnutrition and social isolation risks faced by many older Australians.

‘The conference was a great opportunity to stay ahead of the latest developments and possibilities.’



HERE TO HELP: Meals on Wheels volunteers continue to support vulnerable people in our community



COLLABORATION: The National Meals on Wheels Conference connected people from across Australia

Laneway – Cafe without Borders

Our community meal delivery service offered through Laneway has continued to grow from strength to strength, helping bring tasty, quality meals directly to local people.

As a social enterprise focused on opening up pathways to participation, Laneway also provides opportunities for people with disabilities and from CALD backgrounds to get involved. Participants gain valuable work experience preparing and delivering meals, helping build social connections and skills. The service was particularly important in supporting our community throughout COVID and lockdowns, with many local people finding it challenging to otherwise get meals.

A major highlight for Laneway this year was setting up our partnership with Federation University, Horsham, in early 2022. This collaboration means we now have an onsite cafe presence at the university, creating opportunities for people working at the cafe to boost their front-of-house serving experience.

‘I loved being at Laneway Cafe and learning to work with different types of people.’

– Ben, Laneway work experience participant

723

HOURS OF MEAL DELIVERIES TO OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH LANEWAY



PARTNERSHIP: We now have an onsite cafe at Federation University

EXPERIENCE: Participants learn hospitality skills and build connections

CONNECTIONS >

Community Transport

After two years of COVID disruptions, passenger numbers are building again on our Community Transport service, helping people get out and about across the region.

It's been great to see regular travellers on the Kaniva to Horsham return-bus service, with other passengers from Nhill and Dimboola frequently joining the route as well. We've had a new crop of passengers come aboard over the past year as people look to become more mobile post-lockdowns and reconnect with their community.

In recognition of the important role of our Community Transport initiative in linking people and services in isolated regions, we received in 2020 funding from the Victorian State Government to further develop our service. We've put part of this grant towards developing a 'Community Transport Tile' in partnership with My Community Directory. This tile will be an option for people to select on the 'Access My Community' app on digital devices.

Development work commenced last year, and we've since been testing the tile internally into the early part of 2022. The tile has a range of different portals for different users, including drivers and potential passengers. Drivers can register routes they regularly drive and their ability to accept passengers, while people looking to travel with the service can view upcoming routes nearby and then quickly and easily get in touch about joining the ride.

Initiatives such as these will continue to open up access to our Community Transport service, which plays a vital role in helping people stay connected. With public transport limited in the region, combined with the vast geographical spread of people across an area equal to one-fifth of Victoria, it is essential for community members to come together to support others in our community that experience transport disadvantage.

The Community Transport Tile project also has the potential to help solve transport issues in other rural and regional areas like ours throughout the state, and possibly across the nation as well. We're now encouraging local LGAs across the Wimmera Southern Mallee to get involved in the next phase of testing, with Horsham Rural City Council expressing interest in coming on board.

Social Support — Men's Outing returns!

With many face-to-face activities put on hold throughout COVID, the Men's Outing group has relished the chance to get back together and reconnect in person.

The group's latest adventure involved eight men hitting the road on a Centre for Participation bus and heading out to Lions Park in Warracknabeal for a barbeque, banter and visit to see the park animals. Other favourite events over the years have included visits to the Pink Lake, the Silo Art Trail, the Murtoa Stick Shed, and the Murtoa Neighbourhood House for cake and a cuppa.

The outings offer much more than just a chance to see the sites and ride on the bus. With many men in the group attending for over five years, we've seen many great friendships form and thrive as a result.



OUT AND ABOUT: Men's Outing group off to see the sights

LOCAL HIGHLIGHTS >

A new Multicultural Community Hub

We're now in the final stages of upgrading our Multicultural Community Hub at the Centre for Participation.

Through this upgrade, we'll have new facilities to help us broaden the programs we offer to multicultural communities, to help grow work readiness. The new space will enable us to:

- build migrant-employer and business connections
- increase migrant readiness for work experience
- boost access to pre-accredited learning, volunteer programs and other training initiatives.



A BRAND NEW SPACE: The upgraded Multicultural Community Hub will open new opportunities to support local people

Neighbourhood House Week

This national celebration recognises the important contribution neighbourhood houses make in local communities across Australia.

As a registered neighbourhood house, we marked the occasion by showcasing our programs designed to build local connections, including our English language classes, Micro Business program, and Woman's Journey class. We also displayed the artworks created through our participation in this year's Art Is... festival, which involved partnering with artist Adie McDermott to run a series of workshops about community participation, self-expression and belonging. Beautiful individual pieces were created to form a community artwork of collaboration across different groups, which will be displayed at the Art Is... festival from late June until early July.



CREATIVE: Showcasing artworks developed for the Art Is... festival

**FLASH MOB: Our
multicultural community
performs at Steampunk**



MIGRANT SUPPORT >

55

PEOPLE FROM CALD
BACKGROUNDS PERFORMED
AT STEAMPUNK

Wimmera Steampunk Festival

At the Centre for Participation, we're always looking for ways to help our migrant communities feel welcome, supported and part of the local community. Without a sense of belonging, it's impossible to thrive and settle happily.

One of our recent initiatives was getting involved in the Wimmera Steampunk Festival in April 2022 – an inaugural event in Dimboola attracting more than 2,500 visitors from as far away as Adelaide. This event celebrated all things steampunk by showcasing costumes, vintage cars, live music and more.

There were 55 people who performed in the Steampunk event from CALD backgrounds, from countries including the Philippines, India, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Kenya. Participants came from our English language programs, as well as the Wimmera Filipino-Australia Club, Oasis Wimmera and Wimmera Settlement Services.

The highlight of the night was the multicultural group's flash mob performance, crafted on the back of rehearsals held at the Centre for Participation. Our Micro Business students and other volunteers also had the opportunity to get involved by preparing meal packs for the performers.

Tidy Towns

Other ways we've been getting alongside our migrant communities include supporting our Conversational English Class to take part in the local Tidy Towns awards. The class entered a project which involves using donated sewing machines to create Boomerang bags (borrow bags) that are distributed throughout the local community. Judges from the Tidy Towns awards came to meet with the class to see the creations first-hand, chat with participants, and find out more about the impact the initiative is having for our local community.



CRAFTY: Our community bags project was recognised in the Tidy Towns awards

Harmony Day

Our Harmony Day events in March 2022 brought together our multicultural community for afternoon tea and celebrations. We heard from business owner Chan Uoy from the Dimboola Imaginarium, with guests also treated to the launch of a multicultural music festival recorded during lockdown. The celebrations were a huge success, and we thank the Wimmera Development Association and Mayor Robyn Guline for also taking part.



BELONGING: Celebrating Harmony Day together

OPPORTUNITIES >

Social Enterprise Network of Victoria

The Social Enterprise Network of Victoria (SENVIC) was established in early 2018 to build a connected community of social enterprises, facilitate access to learning and development opportunities, and give practitioners an independent and collective voice.

As the Grampians Local Lead for SENVIC, we had the privilege recently to hold a Social Enterprise Event in Ballarat – a chance to finally meet face-to-face after the challenges of COVID restrictions! This event brought together people from across the sector to discuss issues and opportunities, develop links and possibilities for partnerships, and nurture ideas for making change happen through social enterprise.

We were fortunate to have a strong contingent of community leaders and groups available to take part in the event, including Jaala Pulfor MP, who spoke about the State Government's Social Enterprise Strategy. Other participants included Juliana Addison MP, Ballarat City Council's Councillor Peter Eddy and CEO Evan King, Nick Verginis of SENVIC, Mike McKinstry from Social Traders Australia, and David Edwards and the team at Ballarat Group Training/Barkly Square.

If you are a social enterprise in the Grampians region, please reach out to us at grampians@senvic.org.au or call **5382 5607**. We want to learn all about you and hopefully share with you some of the amazing things the social enterprise sector is up to!



CREATING CHANGE: Shaping the future through the SENVIC Social Enterprise Event

Wellbeing grant success

As part of our focus on supporting better wellbeing, the Centre for Participation was recently awarded a \$15,000 grant in the Mental Wellbeing of Business Communities Grant Program from the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions.

This grant will enable two staff to attend training to help shape an action plan to improve wellbeing within organisations and communities locally. In forming this plan, we'll also draw on wellbeing literacy, evaluation, action and determination as key guiding influences, as well as the six wellbeing factors of the PERMAH framework: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment and health. It's all part of our commitment to assisting organisations and communities to increase wellbeing, resilience and joy, especially after the challenging years of COVID.

'Very great change starts from very small conversations held among people who care.'

– Dr Margaret Wheatley

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