

our people,  
our community

## Chair's message

We know that it's people that make our organisations, communities and regions thrive. On the back of some significant challenges, we've achieved a lot at the Centre for Participation over the past year – largely due to the dedication, hard work and support of our people and local community.

Having the right people in place to lead is critical to an organisation's success, and an important function of our Board over the past year was recruiting a Chief Executive Officer. After former CEO Julie Pettett moved on in mid-2020, Robbie Millar took on the role of Acting CEO. Since then he has guided our organisation skillfully and compassionately throughout the unparalleled COVID pandemic. With high-quality support from his team, Robbie has stabilised our financial position further after leading significant recovery in the previous 12 months, and despite the impacts of COVID. The Board was therefore delighted to formally appoint Robbie to the ongoing role of CEO in early 2022, having been selected from a strong field of applicants for the position.

*'Having the right people in place to lead is critical to an organisation's success.'*

# Our year in review

This commitment to sound financial management has continued to be a key focus for the Board during 2021–22. Our approach has included establishing a Finance and Risk Committee, including two skills-based independent members, in addition to Board representatives. This committee has provided a higher level of scrutiny and advice to the Board on budget development and review, financial management, policy development, and risk control – meaning we're well placed for the long-term to help shape and support our community.

The combination of solid program planning and development, led by Robbie, and the improved governance arrangements have established a strong foundation for us to rebuild in the post-COVID world. We are grateful to all those that have contributed to our achievements, and thank our staff and volunteers for their ongoing commitment to our organisation and the community. We particularly acknowledge the efforts of our former Chairs, Bronte Maddeford and Ray Kingston, and welcome our four new Board members who joined at the last AGM – Sally Marcroft, Leigh Cooksley, Sally Boyd and Meredith Knoop.

It's through the ongoing contribution of our team of people that we'll continue to see positive change in our community, and we look forward to more exciting developments in the year ahead.

**John Martin**  
Chair

## CEO's message

What a year this has been for our organisation! Once again, it has been the significant efforts of our people that have made our progress possible. We've been able to continue rolling out our strategic priorities, whilst also stabilising our financial position further and strengthening our long-term viability.

I was pleased to be formally appointed CEO during the year and thank the Board for their ongoing support. Their leadership has been exceptional, especially through tough times. I'd particularly like to thank our previous Chairs Bronte Maddeford and Ray Kingston, and current Chair John Martin, for their guidance and support.

As an organisation, our approach hasn't shifted as we remain focused on our long-term vision to change lives and strengthen the communities we serve. Since launching our strategic plan in early 2021, we've continued to take action on many of the goals and priorities we put in place.

Highlights over the past year include diversifying our revenue streams through numerous programs, and in particular using our work as the Grampians Local Lead for Social Enterprise Network of Victoria (SENVIC) to look at initiatives through an entrepreneurial lens. We've also connected with and supported other social enterprises, and have assisted our third intake of migrants to successfully complete microenterprise training.

*'Our approach hasn't shifted as we remain focused on our long-term vision to change lives and strengthen the communities we serve.'*

While diversification of revenue streams has been one plank of our improved service delivery, so has our approach to building partnerships and limiting mission drift. Embedding an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach across our strategy, operations, and program planning and implementation has been critical to this progress, and strengthens our ability to support our community using existing community assets.

Consolidation of programs has also assisted with our ongoing viability. This work is continuing, with our focus now shifting to support older members of the community. Following the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and subsequent changes through the Support at Home program, we're working to ensure the Centre for Participation is well placed to adapt and lead the way in how we assist older local people.

Another key achievement has been our work and advocacy around the redesigned Volunteer Management Activity (VMA). Through this initiative we've formed a strong regional partnership with the Ballarat Foundation to deliver the redesigned program across the Grampians. This partnership has also strengthened our collaborations with other regional consortium members – Bendigo Volunteer Resource Centre, Volunteering Geelong, and Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau – helping share learnings and resources to harness the power of volunteering across diverse communities.

We also welcomed 241 new volunteers into our organisation this year, taking our total to 376 by 30 June 2022. This is an incredible effort by many people in our community to put up their hands to help out. In a time where volunteer numbers are in decline, we have bucked the trend and I truly thank all our team for their hard work to make this happen, along with every person who gives up their time to volunteer.

A further highlight was our involvement in an external evaluation of the Connecting the Service Puzzle Project, funded as part of the Youth Crime Prevention Grant Program. The grant is part of the Victorian Government's response to youth offending, and aims to strengthen local communities to intervene early and reduce the chance of young people getting involved in criminal activity. The evaluation has led to changes in our approach, opening up new ways of working with young people.

Our focus on building community capacity was also highlighted through our partnership formed in January 2022 with Federation University's Horsham campus to operate our Laneway – Cafe without Borders social enterprise. This partnership not only gives our programs and learners a public interface and opportunity to connect with community, but helps break down barriers to participation and strengthen pathways to higher education. Looking ahead, we're exploring further opportunities to work together with the university, including through fresh-food production on campus.

This progress comes on the back of our other support and programs for people with disabilities, young people, and the migrant community. For many, this work has been lifechanging, with amazing results and connections to further education and employment.

The impact of our work in transforming people's lives and the broader community is what continues to drive us as an organisation. While the challenges we have faced over the past year have been immense, we'll keep moving forward to help build a resilient, thriving, vibrant community.

**Robbie Millar**  
CEO

241

NEW VOLUNTEERS WELCOMED

12,199

MEALS ON WHEELS DELIVERIES

600+

CARE PACKS SHARED WITH OUR COMMUNITY

644

LEARNERS GREW NEW SKILLS AND OPPORTUNITIES

*'In a time where volunteer numbers are in decline, we have bucked the trend and I truly thank all our team for their hard work to make this happen, along with every person who gives up their time to volunteer.'*





# MyCareCrew launched to connect our community

With isolation, a lack of support services and an ageing population all major issues for people in rural communities, this year we launched MyCareCrew 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.

**‘I enjoy interacting with people, working as a team and seeing someone’s garden after we fix it.’**

– Garth, MyCareCrew Home Help

**‘With isolation, a lack of support services and an ageing population all major issues for people in rural communities, this year we launched MyCareCrew to help people live independently and stay connected.’**

# Bringing people together

## Snapshot: Social Support

MyCareCrew’s Social Support service is built around the motto ‘getting together and achieving outcomes together’.

We know that being active, engaged and connected brings many health benefits, with happiness and improved health at the top of the list. That’s why the activities and events we run through Social Support are all about bringing people together, having fun and growing friendships.

Our range of different initiatives and activities are designed to cater for a wide range of likes, needs and interests. We help with things like individual outings that support daily living, such as an accompanied visit to a medical appointment as well as shopping and general bill paying.

We also offer a weekly ‘cuppa and chat’ event, where a group of local people catch up over a cake and hot drink to discuss the happenings of their week. Many have come along regularly over the years, and we have seen strong, ongoing friendships form as a result.

For those who are less mobile, we also offer a ‘friendly visitor’ program. This involves a volunteer visiting a person in residential care or their own home for a cuppa, chat and catch-up.

Other Social Support activities include the Men’s Outing program, where a group of likeminded gentlemen head out on a bus to stop at different places of interest. So far they’ve visited the Sheep Hills Silo Art Trail, Woods’ Farming and Heritage Museum (Rupanyup), Murtoa Stick Shed, Warracknabeal Lions Park, Pink Lake, and Natimuk Lake. Through these opportunities to get out and about, we’re helping people stay active, build connections, and enjoy their local region.

## Meals made easy: Lyn’s story

Lyn is an 80-year-old local Horsham resident who lives alone. She has meals home-delivered twice a week through our MyCareCrew Laneway meal service.

‘I was told about Laneway as a good place to get meals about two years ago, and I thought I’d try it out. I’ve found it very, very nice so I’ve kept going. They’re lovely meals and everything is home delivered – it really is just a wonderful service.’

‘You get quite a lot of choice, including fish, chicken, roast, beef stews, pasta dishes, sweets and salads. There really is great variety. I put in an order for what I want each week. Laneway also do boxes of slices and that sort of thing, so if you’ve got visitors coming for the weekend you can order a box of slices, which is great.’

**‘It makes my life so much easier not having to worry about cooking.’**

‘The meals help me tremendously. I find it awkward cooking with anything really hot – I’ve had a couple of burns and don’t want anymore. It makes my life so much easier not having to worry about cooking. I live on my own and a lady helps with my shopping, but I just find it hard keeping different foods in the fridge that will keep and don’t go off before I get around to cooking. It’s a great help.’

‘It’s generally the same people that deliver the meals, so you get to know them. They’re all really helpful and good if you need something little done. It’s also just nice to have someone to say hello to! I really enjoy it.’

## Green thumb: Peter’s story

Peter is 64 years old and lives in Horsham. About 18 months ago he joined our gardening team, and is now helping deliver gardening services to local people through MyCareCrew.

‘On Wednesdays and Fridays I do things like whipper snipping, pulling out weeds on paths and driveways, planting, and mowing people’s lawns for them.’

‘We go to local houses nearby and we meet other people when we go to their houses. We make a big difference to the houses. It feels pretty good when we’re done.’

‘I really enjoy being outside in the fresh air working in people’s gardens. I also enjoy using the lawn mowers.’

‘The Centre for Participation has been good at helping. It’s fun being with other people. I feel good when I do a good job.’

**‘I really enjoy being outside in the fresh air working in people’s gardens.’**

– Peter, MyCareCrew Home Help

# 296

GARDENING JOBS  
DELIVERED

# 704

HOURS OF GARDENING  
BY NDIS PARTICIPANTS



# Creating positive change through volunteering

Volunteering is at the heart of so much of what we do at the Centre for Participation. As well as drawing on the talents, expertise and experience of volunteers for our own programs and initiatives, we also focus on creating resources, training and collaborations that strengthen other volunteer-involving organisations.

A significant achievement at the Centre for Participation in the past year was recruiting 241 new volunteers, of which 4% were from a CALD background, 1% were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and 22% identified as having a disability. We're delighted to not only have boosted our volunteer numbers at a time when recruiting volunteers generally is difficult, but also to welcome aboard a diverse group of people with different skills and backgrounds.

As part of our commitment to quality volunteering opportunities and initiatives, over the past year we supported all our volunteers in the Meals on Wheels program to undertake full induction training and compliance checks. We also supported 20 local volunteer-involving organisations to boost volunteer numbers, enhance their existing volunteer programs, and promote the benefits of volunteering.

With so many programs offered by the Centre for Participation involving volunteering in some way, the impact of our volunteers on lives and local communities continued to be significant. One key initiative where volunteers helped make a difference was through our Community Transport program. As well as offering bus services connecting local towns, this program helps people get to things like vital medical

appointments that they would otherwise not be able to attend. In the past year, more than 12 volunteers have assisted with over 546 transport trips to enable people to attend medical appointments in Horsham, Ballarat, Stawell, Nhill, Ararat and Bendigo.

Another program which could not run without volunteers is L2P – an initiative helping young disadvantaged people get the driving experience they need to get their licence. Trained volunteer mentors are matched with learners for driving practice in cars provided by the Centre for Participation, helping learners develop the safe driving skills they need to 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.

*'Volunteerism is a great act of kindness. You give and share a part of yourself, as well as time to achieve the purpose of helping others. You also learn from the experience and build connections with others.'*

– Celia, volunteer

English class students spare their lunchtime to make Meals on Wheels deliveries to the community.

# People helping people

## On the road: Shania's story

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

Shania joined the L2P program at the age of 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 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 that path where it could go very wrong or you can choose the path your mentor shows you is possible,' Shania said.

'My mentor had a lot of life experience as a parent so he had empathy for my situation. 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.'*

Key L2P achievements 2021–22:



Meals on Wheels impact...





# Micro Business program unlocks opportunities

Our pre-accredited Micro Business program helps people particularly 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 particularly 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.

*'I've learnt so much by being in the class and I'm not a migrant, but I've never felt like I didn't belong or wasn't welcome – everyone is so nice.'*

– Teena, Micro Business graduate

*'Learners were able to put into practice their marketing and customer service skills, as well as build their confidence by connecting with customers and locals.'*

Since February 2022, eight students have taken part in the course, with opportunities for hands-on learning at events including the Wimmera Steampunk Festival in Dimboola, the Art Is... festival, and Jung Market. Learners were able to put into practice their marketing and customer service skills, as well as build their confidence by connecting with customers and locals. These opportunities gave them a chance to prove that anything is possible when there is determination, teamwork and support.

Key achievements in learning 2021–22:

**22,568**

TOTAL LEARNING HOURS

**644**

TOTAL LEARNERS

# Pathways to

## Laneway boosts learning and connections

Laneway – Cafe without Borders 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, opening up pathways to learning, and providing new opportunities for participants in the wider community.

A major achievement for Laneway in the past year was opening a cafeteria for students and the public in partnership with Federation University, Horsham campus. This initiative means that those working at Laneway can get hands-on experience in a public-facing hospitality setting, helping them build their customer service skills and grow connections with the local community. Participants were also able to put their learning into practice at events held by Federation University throughout the year, including their open day.

Another highlight was supporting the Centre for Participation's Micro Business class at the Art is... festival event. Here, Laneway participants helped prepare and sell meals, while also running our Social Pantry – mobile cafe for festival attendees to buy coffee and cakes.

In a big year for Laneway, other initiatives included cooking for Pancake Tuesday in collaboration with Uniting Wimmera, hosting Meals on Wheels and volunteer celebrations, supporting Bunnings with NAIDOC Week, and providing catering services at the Pride Prom in support of the LGBTIQ+ community. Laneway participants also got involved in staff support days at Wimmera Health Care Group, creating over 1,000 cupcakes and 600 servings of scones with jam and cream for healthcare workers to enjoy.



**6,600+**

MEALS HOME-DELIVERED

**740**

HOURS OF MEALS DELIVERIES MADE BY VOLUNTEERS

**756**

LEARNING HOURS FOR YOUTH PARTICIPANTS



*'Those working at Laneway can get hands-on experience in a public-facing hospitality setting, helping them build their customer service skills and grow connections with the local community.'*

**1,213**

LEARNING HOURS FOR LANEWAY NDIS PARTICIPANTS

# participation

## Inclusion through cooking: Allana's story

Allana has been a participant at Laneway since October 2021. Besides assisting Allana to boost her practical skills in cooking, reading and counting, getting involved has helped grow her self-esteem and confidence under the guidance of our cook mentor, Lyndelle, and the rest of the team.

Allana has been supported to achieve many personal goals over the last six months, and has particularly flourished through opportunities created by the opening of our cafeteria at Federation University. She's been able to create her own signature pizzas, learn a few recipes by heart, and enjoy spending time socially with customers, other learners and mentors.

According to Allana's mother, Sandy, the benefits of participating in Laneway have been enormous for her daughter. 'Allana has once again found her mojo for life,' she said. 'She has found something fun to do and where she feels she fits in.'

*'Allana has once again found her mojo for life.'*

– Sandy, mother of Laneway participant Allana

**7**

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES THROUGH LANEWAY PATHWAYS

**200**

LANEWAY CATERING JOBS IN OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY



# Building community capacity through collaboration

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 course was designed to help address a range of issues across the region, including very high childcare waitlists, limited opportunities for educators throughout the sector to take part in professional development and administration due to a lack of casual relief staff, and a need to improve the quality and available pool of additional assistants employed in the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Program.

*'The course has created a meaningful pathway for students taking part.'*

In partnership with WDEA Works, we came on board as the Learn Local provider to deliver the Introduction to ECEC pre-accredited course in February 2022. Through the collaboration, we were able to employ a casual trainer from the sector for study support, to complement the course content and experienced trainer provided by WDEA Works.

The course has created a meaningful pathway for students taking part. Importantly, students already participating in our Learn Local programs were comfortable studying at the Centre for Participation, setting up several students to then transition to the Certificate III ECEC course to further develop their skills and help address workforce gaps throughout the region. Sixteen students across two cohorts undertook the initial introduction course, with 12 continuing to enrol in the Certificate III program.

*'The course was designed to help address a range of issues across the region, including very high childcare waitlists.'*

# People working collectively

## What people have to say about the Introduction to ECEC course...

### Highlights from students

#### Trish

Trish has lived in Horsham for five years, and is originally from the Solomon Islands. With previous studies reaching approximately year 8 level, Trish completed the course because she loves kids and wants to contribute to the community. She now works with her Australian husband running a Horsham-based freight business.

*'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.'*

#### Arzen

Arzen is previously from the Philippines and has lived in Horsham for about a year. She studied to year 12 level in the Philippines and has previously worked in retail. Arzen currently works for a flower farm, bunching flowers from home.

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

### Highlights from partners

#### Debbie Moerkerk

Early Childhood and Improvement Manager, Department of Education and Training

*'[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.'*

#### Robbie Millar

CEO, Centre for Participation

*'Partnering with WDEA Works assisted existing and new students to take on the opportunity in a safe and comfortable place. This expanded their understanding of the sector and created new relationships and connections with another training provider, that at the conclusion of the course they were comfortable with.'*

# 16

STUDENTS COMPLETED INTRODUCTION TO ECEC COURSE

## Ardoch Learning Through Lunch impact...

# 85

MEALS PREPARED

# 54

MENTORED HOURS OF INVOLVEMENT FROM LANEWAY NDIS PARTICIPANTS

# 1

SOCIAL INCLUSION EXPERIENCE TO REMEMBER

## Partnerships to inspire the next generation

In July 2022, we partnered with children's education charity Ardoch to help deliver the unique pathways program 'Learning Through Lunch' for primary school students around Horsham.

Students were treated to a tour of Federation University's Horsham campus, where they were introduced to a range of courses and got to see first-hand educational opportunities possible to them in the future. Students took in the purpose-built workshops for plumbing, electrical and mechanics trades, while some even had the chance to practise CPR on dummies in the nursing learning area. After the tour, students enjoyed a three-course dining experience provided by our Laneway – Cafe without Borders participants. Through this opportunity, participants showcased their cooking expertise and honed their customer service skills by giving all the children attending an experience to remember.

The partnership with Ardoch meant we could build on our mutually beneficial priorities to boost student engagement and pathways. Through this shared commitment, we worked together to support children and young people experiencing disadvantage with an opportunity to grow and achieve through education.

*'Learning Through Lunch gives children an opportunity to imagine different future pathways all while trying new foods through a fine dining experience.'*

– Megan Newcomb, Ardoch Education Partnerships Coordinator, regional Victoria



> COMMUNITY > VOLUNTEERING > LEARNING > PARTNERSHIPS

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