



HERE FOR OUR COMMUNITY IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Wimmera Social Support

With social isolation a major issue for those living in rural communities, Wimmera Social Support helps people stay active, mobile and connected through a range of services.

These services are supported by trained volunteers who help people reach their goals. Matching volunteers with people that have similar interests is a key priority and as a result, we've seen many volunteers and clients build strong, ongoing friendships.

In partnership with My Aged Care and as part of the Commonwealth Home Support (CHS) program, in 2019/20 we provided 1,827 hours of services to social support program participants. With the generous assistance of 47 volunteers, the team found innovative ways to support participants in spite of the suspension of many services due to the pandemic, helping participants stay connected with their community.

Community transport

Our community transport service helps isolated residents across the Wimmera Southern Mallee overcome transport limitations so they can still access essential services and medical appointments, maintain social networks, and get out and about in the community. Services across a range of routes are delivered by volunteers to help people get where they need to be.

The previous financial year saw our vehicles clock up over 169,160 km to help people stay engaged and connected. In spite of COVID greatly reducing our capacity to deliver community transport services during 2019/20, our 17 volunteer bus drivers still travelled 7,656 km to connect people from remote parts of the Wimmera to Horsham. Our 47 social support volunteer drivers also stepped up during this period, travelling 34,563 km to help people access greatly needed medical transport from locations all across the Wimmera to Horsham and Ballarat.

Good Governance

Challenges caused by COVID resulted in new and innovative ways to support organisations through our Good Governance program. With many community groups not meeting or more focused on operational issues rather than governance, we adapted our delivery to flexibly support these evolving needs.

Highlights over the past year include holding five mentor training sessions with 25 people attending, and facilitating two Strengthening Communities forums with hosts. We also delivered the Good Governance program in partnership with hosts Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council, Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau, and Mildura Rural City Council, helping organisations strengthen their governance and boost their impact in the community.

Looking ahead, we've secured Victorian Government funding to deliver the Change Our Game Regional Workforce Development Pilot Program in partnership with Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly. This initiative aims to increase the participation of women in the governance of sporting clubs across Victoria.

Food social enterprises

Laneway – Cafe without Borders and Social Pantry – mobile cafe for purpose

Our food social enterprises are designed to increase social and economic participation across the Wimmera. With a particular focus on supporting people with additional needs and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, these initiatives help build connections and skills while overcoming social isolation, economic exclusion and barriers to employment.

Although COVID restrictions meant we had to close the Laneway Cafe premises, we adapted to shift our operations to our commercial kitchen at the Horsham Centre for Participation office. Through this flexibility, we were able to continue producing low-cost home-delivered meals, with many of these meals supporting older people isolated during lockdown.

In April 2020 we moved our Social Pantry – mobile cafe for purpose to the Wimmera Base Hospital on weekends, serving an average of 150 health staff, patients and visitors each weekend and creating further opportunities for people working in the enterprise to participate.

Social Garden

In partnership with the Horsham Agricultural Society, we continued to develop our Social Garden – a social enterprise targeted at supporting people with a disability.

Raised garden beds were built at the Maydale Reserve site so people from all abilities could support us to grow food that supplies our Laneway Cafe and Social Pantry operations. Although COVID restrictions limited the number of participants, we still had three people regularly drop in to contribute, learn new skills, and keep up their social networks.

Social Enterprise Network of Victoria

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

In late 2019, we were delighted to be appointed by SENVIC as the local lead for the Grampians region. Through this role, we've been engaging with rural and regional social entrepreneurs to ensure the network effectively represents the diverse social enterprise sector across Victoria.

Opening up learning pathways

Pre-employment education and training was a key focus over the past year, with programs supporting more than 1,340 learners to grow their knowledge, confidence and work-ready skills. Through both accredited and non-accredited education programs, learners combined practical, hands-on engagement with class-based learning to boost their understanding and shape pathways for the future.

Ongoing consultation with community, businesses and learners remained an important part of our approach, as we ensured our learning programs continued to evolve and meet the needs of the ever-changing environment. A particular priority was migrant and lifelong learning programs, with citizenship, social enterprise, and workforce development pathway programs unfolding over the past year. We currently have 74 migrant people enrolled in learning programs, with these programs helping strengthen connections and skills for work and volunteering within the community.



1,349

LEARNERS PARTICIPATED IN
34,708 HOURS OF LEARNING

25

MENTORS COMPLETED
GOOD GOVERNANCE TRAINING

7,500

MEALS WERE
HOME DELIVERED

1,827

HOURS OF SERVICE DELIVERY
THROUGH WIMMERA SOCIAL SUPPORT

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The Centre for Participation changes lives and communities through local opportunities in **community support**, **volunteering**, **learning** and **partnerships**.

Welcome from Chair and CEO

The past year has been full of challenges and uncertainty. But through it all, our focus as an organisation hasn't changed. We've remained committed to building stronger communities by empowering people of all ages to actively participate through learning, volunteering and social opportunities.

Although the COVID pandemic has disrupted us all, it's also highlighted the power of community. Numerous people stepped up to volunteer in informal ways to help others through the debilitating impact of social isolation. Local community groups also came on board to lend their support, and we are extremely thankful for the generous donation of a brand new car from Apex Horsham Club 15.

Our community's willingness to help has brought the importance of social participation to the fore, and remains core to our work. We'll continue to look at ways to support people through this time, as well as exploring new opportunities to adapt our services, delivery and enterprise to best meet the shifting needs of our community – now and into the future.

This year also marked the beginning of a new era at the Centre for Participation, with the departure of CEO Julie Pettett and the appointment of long-term manager, Robbie Millar, as acting CEO. We are incredibly grateful for Julie's passion, dedication and impact in growing the Centre for Participation, and are excited about what the future holds as we continue to build on these foundations.

Strengthening our work in social enterprise has remained a key focus, with the Centre for Participation appointed the Grampians local lead for the Social Enterprise Network of Victoria (SENVIC). We also deepened our understanding of social enterprises with Robbie successfully obtaining an International Teaching Fellowship, as well as attending and presenting at the Social Enterprise World Forum in Ethiopia. Key learnings have already started influencing our work at a local level, as we look to support, enhance and enable community-led and place-based responses to complex social problems and economic development opportunities.

Other highlights include our continued involvement with the National Network of Volunteer Resource Centres (NNVRC), which saw us collaborate with Think Impact in their report on

volunteering, participatory action and social cohesion. The research showed the important role regional participation centres like ours play in building social cohesion critical to regional development, and in contributing more broadly to local, state and federal government policy goals.

Another exciting initiative is the Rural and Regional Partnerships Project, which we are leading locally and in Albury and the Hunter Valley. These place-based projects are being delivered in partnerships to support people from multicultural backgrounds.

New ways of working have also been explored in our learning programs, which have continued to adapt and shift away from traditional education models. With an emphasis instead on action and experiential learning, we've seen how this approach is empowering individuals through peer-learning.

Through all these achievements across the year, it's been the tremendous hard work and support of our team, Board, volunteers and broader community that have made these things possible. We look forward to continuing to work together to open up local opportunities to participate, and help build a thriving, connected and resilient community.

Ray Kingston, Chair and Robbie Millar, acting CEO

VOLUNTEERING – THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITY

2019–2020 highlights

Volunteering has always been the lifeblood of our community – and never more so than during this year's pandemic. Throughout this period, volunteers have been vital in maintaining social cohesion, keeping important services operating, and offering a helping hand during difficult times.

We introduced a number of innovations and changes to the way we do things, to help keep our volunteers and staff safe. These included shifting to an online induction process for all our new volunteers, to streamline training and sustain our critical volunteer network as much as possible. Covering key topics such as volunteering principles, rights and responsibilities as volunteers, important government laws and policies, and what to expect as a volunteer, our induction sessions offered all the same information delivered through a face-to-face meeting but in the safety of people's own homes. All new volunteers were also supported with information about local volunteering opportunities matched towards the volunteers' skills and interests.

We also drew on the challenges created by the pandemic to find new ways to harness the support of our volunteers. Although our Licencing the Wimmera's L2P program was unable to run due to restrictions, many volunteers were keen to stay on board and help in other capacities. These volunteers were able to assist with our community meal delivery program, operated through our social enterprise initiative Laneway – Cafe without Borders. Twelve volunteers from the L2P program stepped up and started delivering meals through the initiative, with over 7,500 meals delivered to over 100 people in our community – including the elderly, isolated and vulnerable. Students from Horsham College also came on board and played their part through meal deliveries, helping make a difference in their local community and laying the foundations to make volunteering a lifelong positive habit.

The flexibility and resilience of our volunteers was also highlighted by their willingness to switch their support to a range of other programs beyond meal deliveries. These included providing non-emergency medical transport for people aged over 65 years, which was made easier due to the generous donation of a brand new car from Apex Horsham Club 15. All of these vital initiatives were supported by a robust and comprehensive COVID-safe plan, with our team constantly adapting the delivery of services to ensure we could keep meeting the needs of our community in a safe way.

Strengthening volunteer-involving organisations

Supporting organisations that involve volunteers is a key part of what we do at the Centre for Participation.

Throughout COVID, our designated Volunteering Resource Centre (VRC) has fielded many queries from volunteer-involving organisations about COVID safety, risk management, safety plans and reopening of programs. As well as handling these enquiries and staying in regular contact, we've supported these organisations with our volunteer coordinator and managers' network meetings. Through these meetings, we've provided local organisations with vital information in regards to COVID, and helped build connections to discuss challenges and new opportunities opening up during and after the pandemic.

The VRC team has also been working with the Wimmera Development Association and the Wimmera Sports Assembly, providing guidance and training for volunteer management in sporting clubs. With clubs unable to participate fully in the sporting season due to COVID, the training has helped organisations use this time to look at, improve and streamline volunteer policies and procedures, ensuring volunteer management is a valued part – and not just a given – of each and every club.

'The flexibility and resilience of our volunteers was highlighted by their willingness to switch their support to a range of other programs.'

73

PEOPLE COMPLETED VOLUNTEERING INTRODUCTION SESSION

44

VOLUNTEER MANAGERS/ COORDINATORS SUPPORTED DURING COVID

26

INTERNAL VOLUNTEERS INDUCTED

