

our
impact

Welcome from Chair and CEO

It's been another year of making an impact for our local people, organisations and communities.

And in the face of the continuing global pandemic, this impact has never been more important. Through these challenges we've really seen why what we do matters, and how a strong, resilient and connected community is crucial – especially in tough times.

Our commitment to opening up opportunities to participate remained stronger than ever, as we explored new directions and built on existing initiatives in our key focus areas: community support, volunteering, learning and partnerships.

In response to changing needs, our on-the-ground work with and for our community shifted. Many volunteers in programs put on hold due to COVID restrictions were keen to assist however they could, with several coming on board to deliver meals to vulnerable people through our Laneway – Cafe without Borders community meal program, transporting people to non-emergency medical appointments, and helping out with essential shopping.

With the impact of volunteering more clear than ever, we continued our work strengthening other volunteer-involving organisations, and promoting the act of volunteering itself. A significant achievement included launching the Think Impact report *Volunteering, Participatory Action and Social Cohesion*, which examined broadening the scope of the volunteer support sector to build social cohesion. The report sets out how the current national volunteer support infrastructure can transition to better contribute to all dimensions of social cohesion, and will underpin our position as a place-based organisation working to strengthen and mobilise individuals, community groups and organisations to build on our community assets.

'We've really seen why what we do matters, and how a strong, resilient and connected community is crucial.'

Like many organisations, the global disruption of this year also gave us the chance to review all parts of our business with our long-term direction in mind. While any disruption can be difficult to manage, it gave us the opportunity to rethink what we do and finesse our vision for future development and stabilisation, so we can continue to deliver sustainable programs for our community in the years to come.

This review resulted in taking early action across a range of financial measures to offset the effects of losses in the previous financial year, combined with the impact of continuing COVID restrictions. Measures included ceasing non-financially viable programs, selling non-essential assets, changing the business model for Laneway Cafe, and reviewing expenditure and staffing structures. Through these steps and the tremendous work ethic of our team, we've been able to reduce our liabilities and set the Centre for Participation up to continue to meet the needs of our community in the long-term.

This year also saw the Board and management team further develop our vision for the future through the completion of our 2021–24 strategic plan. 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.

As we reflect on the year that was and the impact we've made, we're incredibly grateful to our Board, team, volunteers, partners and wider community for their part in making it happen. By building on the impact we've made and the stability we've achieved, we know we have a strong platform to help us continue to grow and support our community – well into the future.

– Robbie Millar, Acting CEO and Ray Kingston, Chair

Opening up new pathways

Our learning programs help people build their capacity, grow skills and confidence, and uncover new opportunities to thrive.

We believe that anything is possible for anybody, and that learning is the key to opening different doors and helping people create the future they want. By offering training and practical experiences through diverse courses and activities, we're helping people boost their literacy and numeracy, develop specific technical and vocational skills, and become equipped for different job options or further lifelong learning.

The past year was one of growth, with programs focused strongly on pre-employment education and training. We enhanced our accredited and non-accredited education offerings, with **933 participants** undertaking **26,680 hours of learning**. Learners' knowledge, confidence and work-ready skills grew with practical, hands-on opportunities combined with class-based learning.

Our accredited partnership programs continued to exceed the benchmark for high-quality service delivery for vocational learners, while our pre-accredited programs moved from strength to strength. Key highlights for our pre-accredited programs include:

- **81 people with a disability** enrolled
- **72% of learners** were women
- **61% of learners** were aged over 40
- **54% of learners** hadn't completed year 12, with **13% having never attended school** at all.

Strong connections with community and businesses meant participants could take part in real-life learning experiences, and that our programs remained in step with changing needs. Migrant and lifelong learning programs were a priority with citizenship, social enterprise and workforce development pathway programs unfolding over the past year. We now have **100 migrants from 19 different countries** enrolled in learning programs, helping strengthen their connections and skills for work and volunteering within the community.

The SARA financial literacy program was another initiative we introduced to broaden the scope of learning opportunities on offer. This program helped participants increase their resourcefulness and problem-solving skills, assisting them to take action to manage their money and finances, and work towards their goals of being financially secure.

In addition to delivering strong learning programs to meet community needs, we also explored ways to make accessing and managing our programs simpler. Through implementation of the Learning Management System (LMS), we streamlined the online enrolment process, and can successfully track student details and progress. We've now made paperless enrolments easier to manage, and simplified the data submission process to the Department of Education and Training (DET).

Looking ahead, we'll continue to seek new ways to ensure we're meeting our community's learning needs. By providing accessible and affordable learning opportunities for people of all ages, we'll keep supporting learners to develop the knowledge and skills needed now – and into the future.

our year OF LEARNING

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.

The program assists participants to develop more skills, knowledge and confidence in setting up and running a successful business in our local area. Our micro-business classes help participants learn the foundations of managing a business, while our established local networks and partnerships help foster the new businesses through work experience opportunities and mentoring from experienced business leaders.

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, Hunter Volunteer Centre, and Volunteering Victoria (program adviser). Each organisation has put in place projects specifically designed to meet the needs of people experiencing marginalisation within their local communities.

At the Centre for Participation, our place-based projects include the Social Pantry – mobile cafe with purpose, where participants take part in hospitality training and work experience. A highlight for Social Pantry participants was putting their hospitality skills into practice at the 150km Feast – an annual fundraising event and showcase of local produce sourced within 150km of Horsham. One participant highlighted how the opportunity not only helped boost her learning but also strengthened a sense of belonging, saying 'I got to know others in the same community, and use the skills that I learned'.

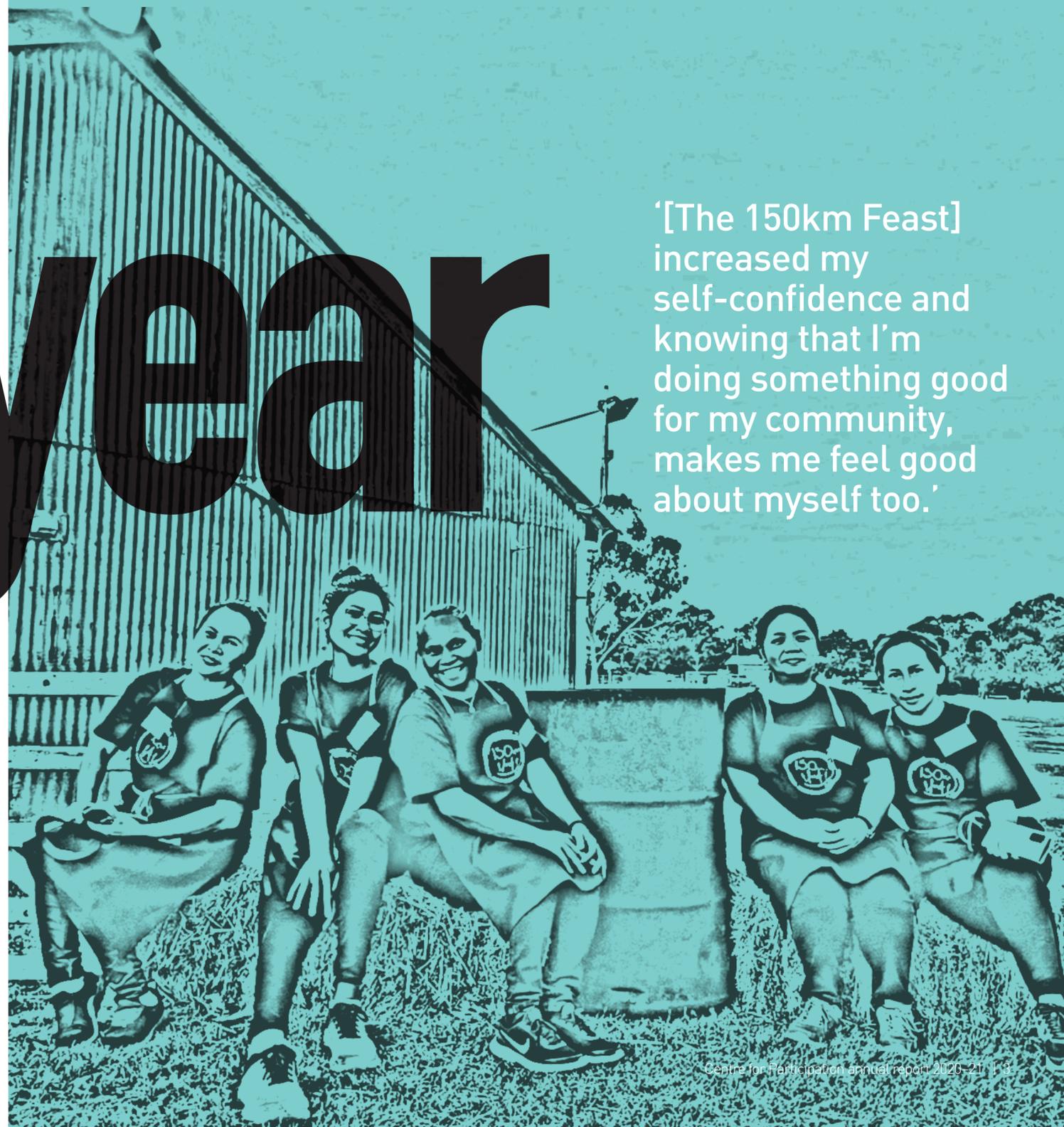
933 26,680 100

LEARNERS SUPPORTED TO UNLOCK THEIR POTENTIAL

HOURS OF LEARNING UNDERTAKEN

MIGRANTS TAKING PART IN PRE-ACCREDITED PROGRAMS

'[The 150km Feast] increased my self-confidence and knowing that I'm doing something good for my community, makes me feel good about myself too.'



Strengthening volunteering to create positive change

We know that volunteering is at the heart of thriving, resilient communities. That's why at the Centre for Participation, a key focus is to connect volunteers with meaningful and rewarding volunteer opportunities. We also support and strengthen volunteer-involving organisations to put in place volunteering practices that make them more inclusive and well-run, build community connection and sustainability, and help everyone get the most out of volunteering.

Although COVID continued to pose challenges over the past year, it also opened up different opportunities for volunteering. Our volunteers have played a crucial role in keeping our community connected, ensuring vital services could still run, and providing a helping hand during difficult times.

Many of our existing volunteers that could not assist in usual ways stayed on board during lockdowns to help out in other capacities. Several volunteers from our L2P program stepped up to deliver fresh meals to vulnerable local people through our Laneway – Cafe without Borders community meal delivery program. Students from Horsham College also made a difference by delivering meals, setting the foundations for making volunteering a lifelong positive habit.

The incredibly generous donation of a brand new car from Apex Horsham Club 15 was also vital in helping volunteers support our community throughout this time. Volunteers used the car to make meal deliveries and transport people aged over 65 to non-emergency medical appointments across our region.

Other shifts due to COVID included a change to our volunteer induction process. New volunteers are now brought on board through our user-friendly, online Introduction to Volunteering training session. Volunteers have the flexibility to complete the training when and where it suits them, with the online platform helping us reach more people interested in making a difference through volunteering. We also developed a specific introductory volunteering session for people with disabilities, who have become a valued part of our community meal delivery program.

As well as supporting volunteering through the Centre for Participation, we also continued our focus on strengthening other volunteer-involving organisations. We assisted **18 other organisations** with volunteer-management enquiries and began a formal mentoring relationship with a local organisation via the Volunteering Victoria mentoring program. Our volunteering team also partnered with the Wimmera Development Association and Wimmera Sports Assembly, helping sports clubs on hiatus due to COVID to enhance their volunteer systems and be ready to come back stronger when sport seasons returned.

Other initiatives included building capacity with the Way to Go Plus program in partnership with Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau, and a volunteer managers' workshop with international volunteer management guru, Rob Jackson. This training provided a great opportunity to hear world-class, up-to-date insights about re-engaging volunteers after COVID and COVID-safety for volunteers.

Our support to navigate COVID also extended throughout our regular regional volunteer coordinators and managers' network meetings. We provided vital information about COVID from peak bodies to help guide

organisations' responses, while the networking opportunities opened up discussion about creative volunteering ideas during and after COVID.

'We were delighted to launch the *Volunteering, Participatory Action and Social Cohesion* research report.'

As part of our commitment to championing volunteering, we were delighted to launch the *Volunteering, Participatory Action and Social Cohesion* research report. Developed in partnership with consultancy Think Impact and guided by the National Network of Volunteer Resource Centres, the research explored the contribution that volunteering makes to social cohesion.

The past year has shown us the incredibly vital role of volunteers – especially during challenging times. We look forward to continuing to support volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations as they help shape stronger, more connected communities.

L2P program

Our L2P program helps young people get out on the road, with 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.

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. Although the program was not able to run during COVID lockdowns due to restrictions, we still assisted **14 learners to gain their probationary licence**, delivered **3 mentor training sessions**, and supported **15 new volunteers** to become L2P mentors. With more than **496 hours volunteered** throughout the program, our mentors are continuing to make a big impact on our young people's mobility and connection across our vast region. As one participant said, 'Having my licence has made employment so much more accessible'.

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.

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, over the past year we assisted **708 clients** to be involved in their community. This was made possible through the generous support of **29 volunteers** contributing over **4,200 hours of volunteering** – a particularly significant achievement when restrictions caused by COVID meant many face-to-face services were put on hold.

Our team's many innovative ways to support people throughout the pandemic included weekly phone calls to check in with clients, face-to-face catch-ups when regulations permitted, and socially distanced 'verandah visits' to boost connectedness. Volunteers also contributed **41 hours shopping** for clients, and **travelled over 34,500km** transporting people to medical appointments.

volunteering

'I really enjoy catching up for a cuppa and chat – it gives many of the ladies an opportunity they wouldn't otherwise have to engage socially.'

Community Transport

Our Community Transport service helps isolated and disadvantaged 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.

With the program suspended due to the pandemic in March 2020, we were delighted to be able to bring back the weekly Kaniva to Horsham bus service in May 2021. Before the service resumed, our Horsham- and Kaniva-based volunteers undertook infectious disease training via an online program provided by the Department of Health, plus in-house COVID-safe training. Volunteers also completed driver refresher training to prepare them for return to service.

Although Victoria was unfortunately again forced into statewide COVID restrictions in late May 2021, we were able to start up the service again in late June with limited passenger numbers. Throughout this time, our **6 volunteer bus drivers travelled 1,170km** to connect people from remote parts of the Wimmera to Horsham. We were fortunate to welcome **3 new volunteer drivers** based in Horsham and Kaniva, standing us in good stead to continue to meet community need into the future.

We're also investing in our long-term vision for the program through ongoing collaborations with the Victorian Government. The Centre for Participation has provided a mid-program report to the Department of Transport highlighting our progress with the funding we received in April 2020, with a view to expand the existing program.

We've seen the impact Community Transport has had on our community, and are keen to keep growing that impact. Here's a snapshot of 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

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

– Sylvia and Brian Adams, passengers

76

NEW VOLUNTEERS COMPLETED INTRODUCTION TO VOLUNTEERING TRAINING

4,200+

HOURS VOLUNTEERED THROUGH WIMMERA SOCIAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

496

HOURS OF DRIVING PRACTICE VOLUNTEERED BY L2P MENTORS



Laneway and Social Pantry

Laneway – Cafe without Borders and Social Pantry – mobile cafe with purpose are the Centre for Participation’s key hospitality social enterprises. As places where anyone can work, they play a valuable role in breaking down barriers and creating opportunities for people to participate in their wider community.

A particular focus at Laneway and Social Pantry is working with young people with additional needs, and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. These groups are a priority for us as we know they are more likely to face social isolation, economic exclusion and barriers to employment. Through training opportunities and structured work experience in hospitality, we’re helping disadvantaged people boost job readiness, increase their social networks, and improve their confidence.

This year saw us consolidate our operations at our commercial kitchen at the rear of the Centre for Participation Horsham office. This transition laid the foundations to connect with other programs and services on offer through the Centre for Participation, bringing together more opportunities for people to participate and get involved.

Although some of our work needed to be paused at times due to COVID, we also explored different ways for the social enterprises to continue to support both participants and our broader community. Through Laneway, we produced **8,320 homestyle meals** that were then delivered to more than **390 local people** in need, and provided the Christian Emergency Food Relief with **300 ready-made meals**.

The flexibility of our mobile Social Pantry cafe van meant we could station it at Wimmera Health Care Group, where we continued a food service for hundreds of essential workers. We also took the van to Murra Warra Wind Farm from October 2020 through to July 2021, feeding an **average of 100 isolated staff and contractors**.

Through these social enterprise initiatives, we’ve provided work experience and an opportunity to participate in community life to **36 women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**, with 5 of these women supported to find paid employment with local organisations including Woodbine, West Wimmera Health Service and Rook Indian Restaurant. We also had **22 young people with additional needs** take part, opening up paid employment for 3 participants at Nourish’d Eatery, Lister House Clinic and Aroma. With funding secured to support delivery of Laneway and Social Pantry until June 2022, we’re exploring long-term sustainable income streams to continue to bring these initiatives to our community into the future.

‘We’re helping disadvantaged people boost job readiness, increase their social networks, and improve their confidence.’



Good Governance

Our Good Governance social enterprise 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. Over the past year, we partnered with key community leaders to deliver the program in Ballarat, Albury Wodonga and Mildura, with partners (known as hosts) including Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council, Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau, and the Christie Centre.

Our hosts 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 assists our hosts to ensure they have the resources and knowledge to undertake the program with success. Since the program first began, it has engaged **33 community organisations, trained 30 prospective mentors, and matched 15 community groups with mentors**.

With funding from the Australian Government’s Department of Social Services, this year we **trained 30 mentors** and equipped them with the skills to share their governance knowledge with **18 community organisations**. We also developed resources to support hosts and mentors to deliver the program, facilitated two Strengthening Communities forums with hosts, and put in place an evaluation framework to help develop a pipeline of community organisation participants and strengthen the program moving forward.

A key highlight was delivering the Change our Game Regional Workforce Development pilot program in partnership with Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly. Funded by the Victorian Government’s Department of Jobs,

Precincts and Regions, this program aims to increase the participation of women in sport’s governance roles in Victoria. We supported Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly with a train-the-trainer program to help build their staff’s knowledge of governance and in turn, share that knowledge with others. Staff are now delivering governance training to female sporting leaders who wish to take the next step in their leadership roles, with higher than expected participation at online and face-to-face governance training workshops.

‘Working with the Centre for Participation has given us the structure and support to help community organisations with tailored governance expertise.’

– Sarabjit Kaur,
Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council

SOCIAL enterprises

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.

Over the year we’ve had the privilege of working as the SENVIC Grampians region local lead. Through this role, we’ve set out to engage with rural and regional social entrepreneurs to make sure the network is effectively representing the interests of the diverse social enterprise sector across Victoria. Our work is progressing well with new partnerships and new projects being developed, including with the Christie Centre, who we met as the Mallee region local lead.

Other initiatives we’ve taken on as the local lead include facilitating access to the SENVIC online learning and development delivery model, helping **11 local people upskill** through the flexible learning program. We’ve also supported social enterprises and community groups considering social enterprise models with their governance through the Centre for Participation’s Good Governance program in partnership with Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council.

With COVID making things particularly tough for social enterprises over the past year, we put in a submission for the Victorian Government’s Working for Victoria initiative – a fund designed to connect workers with new opportunities that will help our community and contribute to Victoria’s ability to respond to the pandemic. This initiative was embedded throughout our organisation to provide support during this challenging time.

Another key focus has been supporting others to create stronger, more effective social enterprises. We’ve been doing this by designing, delivering and evaluating a pre-accredited training program in enterprise development. This training program uses skilled volunteers as business mentors to help others sharpen their social enterprise nous for greater impact and more sustainable initiatives. We had **21 participants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds** complete the Micro-business Training program, with 4 people from this course already putting their new-found skills into practice and commencing trading.

Other initiatives

Our Social Garden and new Home Help pilot were two other social enterprises we brought to our community.

In partnership with the Horsham Agricultural Society, the Social Garden continued to develop and grow. Raised garden beds were built at Maydale Reserve so people of all abilities could get involved, learn gardening skills, connect with others, and help grow food to supply our Laneway and Social Pantry social enterprises.

COVID restrictions limited the number of people we could support through the Social Garden, but we were still able to have **3 people with a disability** take part and contribute at the site. We also supported a participant to develop and run his own gardening business – Wimmera Garden gurus – with the participant’s long-term goal to create income-generating opportunities for other people with additional needs.

The newly launched Home Help social enterprise is also designed to increase job readiness, strengthen networks and build skills – all while supporting our wider community to live independently at home for longer. We’re currently looking at expanding and strengthening the enterprise for the long-term, to make even greater impact in our community.

‘I’ve had lots of experiences. I’ve had a really good time at the Centre for Participation.’

THE CAFE WITH PURPOSE
SOCIAL PANTRY

New opportunities: Ben’s story

Ben began work experience at Laneway – Cafe without Borders in 2019, while he was still a school student.

‘When I was volunteering there I would help prepare and sometimes help cook the meals, and plate the meals up and take them out to customers. I would also help the cafe clean up after it closed for the day.’

‘When COVID hit I had to stop volunteering there for a while, but when they moved to the Centre for Participation I was able to go back and help

them again. When I was there I would help prepare meals for the elderly and also help make some meals for the [Murra Warra] Wind Farm.’

‘On Melbourne Cup day, I got the chance to work in the Social Pantry out the front of the local hospital. I also helped prep the ingredients for the two-day 150km Feast event.’

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



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