

2024

Annual REPORT



**CENTRE for
PARTICIPATION**

Table of Contents

CEO & Board Chair Message

1 - 2

What we do

3 - 4

People

5 - 14

Planet

15 - 17

Performance

18 - 21

CEO AND BOARD CHAIR MESSAGE

This year has been characterised by remarkable achievements and strategic advancements at the Centre for Participation, propelling us forward and reaffirming our commitment to our mission values.

As we reflect on the past year, it is with immense pride and gratitude that we celebrate the strides our organisation has made in transforming lives and communities. Every step we take is guided by our unwavering commitment to creating opportunities through community support, volunteering, learning, and partnerships. This year has demonstrated the power of collaboration, innovation, and resilience in addressing complex challenges and embracing new opportunities.

Advocacy has been at the heart of our efforts this year, particularly in the aged care and volunteering sectors. We have worked tirelessly to ensure our voice is heard at local, state, and federal levels. Our engagement with national stakeholders, including meetings with government leaders and contributions to critical discussions such as the proposed Support at Home Program, underscores our determination to shape a more equitable future for our community.

Participation in the National Variable Pricing Matrix Pilot demonstrates our commitment to driving systemic change. Led by the Australian Community Transport Association, this initiative brings together community transport organisations, key partners, and the University of South Australia to advance sector-wide improvements. As one of the participating organisations, our involvement has enhanced our advocacy efforts, influenced policy, and reinforced our reputation as a trusted voice in aged care reform.

Our commitment to innovation remains steadfast. The second year of the VicHealth-funded initiative, the Wimmera Food Collective, highlighted our continued commitment to addressing food insecurity. By exploring culturally responsive practices and advocating for systemic change, we've reinforced the powerful impact of collaboration and shared purpose. Additionally, the transformation of our office space will further enhance the Food Collective's operations in the coming years, creating a welcoming, multipurpose environment for staff, volunteers, and consumers.

Similarly, our social enterprises such as MyCareCrew and Laneway – Café without Borders highlight our ability to respond to critical gaps in the workforce and create inclusive opportunities for individuals with disabilities. These enterprises not only meet immediate needs but also lay the groundwork for sustainable, community-led solutions.

Volunteers are at the core of our mission, and this year we have intensified our efforts to strengthen and support their work. The launch of our 10-year Regional Participation Plan marks a significant milestone in our strategic planning. Developed in partnership with Think Impact and our Community Drivers Groups, this plan identifies opportunities to revitalise volunteering, ensuring it remains a thriving pillar of our community. With support from both state and federal governments, the plan enables us to provide tools, training, and capacity-building to volunteer-involving organisations. We remain deeply committed to fostering a culture of participation and inclusivity, recognising the profound impact volunteers have on the social fabric of our region.

This year, we embarked on a comprehensive review of our organisational strategy, gathering insights from staff, clients, and stakeholders to inform our direction. This process ensures we remain aligned with community needs and positions us to adapt to an evolving landscape, while also setting us up with an informed position for the development of our 2025-2028 strategic plan.

Our investment in cyber security and IT infrastructure marks a significant step in futureproofing our operations. We have begun the transition to a cloud-based system, which will enhance both security and efficiency, allowing us to allocate more resources to our core mission. Meanwhile, our forward-thinking infrastructure planning, including a proposed rebuild of our building frontage, underscores our commitment to innovation and sustainability.

None of these achievements would be possible without the extraordinary dedication of our team and volunteers. This year brought challenges, including staffing transitions, and the demands of an increasingly complex operating environment. Yet, our team's resilience, creativity, and flexibility have ensured we continue to meet the needs of our community.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to those who have moved on and warmly welcome new talent who bring fresh perspectives and energy. Their contributions are already shaping our future, and their passion drives us to achieve even greater outcomes.

Our deepest gratitude also to the outgoing members of our Board for their unwavering commitment, invaluable insights, and tireless contributions. A special thank you to Leigh Cooksley for his leadership as Chair, and to Brendan O'Loughlin for his guidance as Deputy Chair. We also acknowledge Ray Kingston, whose three terms of service as Chair and Board member have left a lasting impact on our organisation. Arun Shunmugam and Mike Wall's expertise and dedication have been vital in advancing our mission, and we are grateful for their time and service.

As we said farewell to these exceptional leaders, we are excited to welcome new members who have brought fresh perspectives and energy. We welcomed Raghavendra Vasudeva Upadhyaya, Venetia-Maria Kardogeros, and Bernie O'Shannessy. Their skills, experience, and passion for our community will be instrumental as we continue to build a stronger, more connected organisation.

We look forward to working together to drive positive change and achieve our shared goals.

The coming year holds great promise. As we continue to navigate aged care reforms, funding shifts, and societal changes, we are prepared to meet these challenges head-on. Our organisational review and strategic planning efforts are equipping us to evolve, while our partnerships and collaborations continue to unlock new possibilities.

As we reflect on this year's achievements, we are filled with gratitude for the trust and support of our community, partners, and stakeholders. Together, we are building a future where everyone can participate and thrive. With a clear vision, dedicated team, and strong foundation, we look forward to the year ahead with optimism and determination. By continuing to collaborate, innovate, and advocate, we are confident in our ability to create lasting, meaningful change.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we are transforming lives and strengthening our communities.

**John Martin – Board Chair
Robbie Millar – CEO**

WHAT WE DO

Snapshot of our services



The Centre for Participation -
offers a wide range of services and initiatives to support many people in our community,



My Care Crew -
Helping people live independently through home gardening and cleaning, social support, community transport and home meal deliveries.



Community Transport -
helping people overcome transport limitations so they can access essential services, maintain social connections, and get out and about.



Laneway - Cafe without Borders
provides opportunities for people with disability and from CALD backgrounds to gain work experience in hospitality and meal production.



Wimmera Food Collective -
A space for the community to sell, purchase, and celebrate locally sourced, affordable, and culturally preferred produce.



Licensing the Wimmera -
A program supporting youth and migrants to obtain their driver's licence.



Adult, Community & Further Education - Encouraging students to become life-long learners with courses in health, languages, business, hospitality and more.



Carer Support -
Offering tailored support for carers of all ages through taxi vouchers, accommodation, respite and more.



Social Enterprise pathways -
A work experience and training program giving people the work-ready tools they need to go on to gain employment.



School Leaver Employment Support -
Helping school leavers overcome barriers to employment and start their career.



Youth Connections -
Helping young people at risk of disengagement or offending find employment or education and pathways back in to the community.



Meals on Wheels - Coordinating local volunteers to deliver Meals on Wheels to the elderly in the Horsham (LGA) area.

WHAT WE DO

'MyCareCrew social enterprise, enabled people to live independently while fostering social connections and skills development, making a positive impact on people and our community.'

The Centre for Participation offers a wide range of services and initiatives to support many people in our community including **youth, the elderly, migrants and people with disability**.

Our services underpin our mission to change lives and strengthen communities through local opportunities that foster growth, inclusivity, and a sense of belonging for everyone in the Wimmera region and beyond.

Snapshot of our services

Aged services

- Who:** Elderly people over 65 years of age who live in the Wimmera
- What:** Community support, lifelong learning, volunteer opportunities, in home assistance
- How:**
- MyCareCrew
 - Community Transport
 - Meals on Wheels
 - Digital literacy
 - Carer support
- Why:** Providing essential services and a friendly face enables us to help individuals live independently and stay connected.

Community support for the elderly remains a major focus. Many of our 400-strong volunteer team are retirees themselves, working to give back to their community through opportunities including our Community Transport services, as well as help delivering thousands of nutritious meals to the elderly and vulnerable with Meals on Wheels.

Our MyCareCrew team help people live independently by offering gardening, cleaning, transport, meals and social support.

Digital literacy courses empower students of all ages to stay connected and promote lifelong learning.

Disability services

- Who:** People with disability
- What:** Community support, education, food services, driving lessons, hospitality skills, employment support, NDIS services, volunteer opportunities
- How:**
- MyCareCrew (recipients and participants)
 - Laneway Café (recipients and participants)
 - Adult, Community, and Further Education
 - Carer support
 - Community Transport (recipients and participants)
- Why:** Opening pathways to participation enables people with disabilities to build social connections, self-confidence and skills.

Our social enterprises open pathways to participation by providing opportunities for people with disability to gain valuable work experience and build social connections and skills while supporting the community.

Many initiatives support community members by engaging them on both sides of the equation. For example, Laneway – Cafe without Borders offers a supportive environment for people with disability to gain experience cooking meals which are then delivered to other vulnerable community members, generating funds that can then be spent on further training and support.

Youth services

- Who:** Youth aged 15 to 25 years old who live in the Wimmera
- What:** Community support, volunteering opportunities, employment support, driving lessons
- How:**
- Wimmera Food Collective
 - Youth Connections
 - Licensing the Wimmera
 - Social Enterprise Pathways
 - School Leavers Employment Supports
- Why:** By supporting our youth with employment and civic participation, we're investing in the community for the long term.

We support youth to reach their goals and forge connections with the community by offering support for learner drivers with experienced mentors through the Licensing the Wimmera program. We engage young people aged 12–25 in the Horsham region who are at risk of disengagement or offending/reoffending through our Youth Connections group work and training, and we support school leavers who have barriers to employment to find secure work through School Leavers Employment Supports (SLES).

Migrant services

- Who:** Migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers
- What:** Community support, adult education, meal delivery, employment support, food programs
- How:**
- Wimmera Food Collective
 - Laneway – Cafe without Borders
 - Friendly staff and volunteers to support people settle in
 - English classes
 - Micro business classes
 - Licensing the Wimmera
 - Social Enterprise Pathways
- Why:** Assisting newcomers to arrive, survive, and thrive fosters a welcoming and inclusive community for all citizens.

We are proud to support our migrant, refugee and asylum-seeker communities to enable them to 'arrive, survive and thrive'. Our designated Migrant Support Worker offers assistance and information about the variety of programs and courses available. These include Licensing the Wimmera – supporting new migrants to obtain their driver's licence, as well as English language, digital literacy, and microbusiness classes.

Our Social Enterprise Pathways Program provides workplace training in customer service and hospitality, and the Wimmera Food Collective is an inclusive space that offers various culturally relevant food.

PEOPLE

Empowering Communities

At the Centre for Participation, empowering individuals to become active, engaged members of society is central to our mission. Our community-driven programs work to break down barriers, provide critical resources, and promote inclusion. In 2023-2024, we continued our efforts to create accessible, meaningful opportunities for education, volunteerism, and social engagement.

Volunteers are essential to our mission and success. Through the **Volunteer Management Program**, we work to recruit, support, and train volunteers who are passionate about contributing to the community. This year, 421 volunteers contributed 8,434.65 hours to our various programs, each volunteer making a tangible impact on the lives of the people they serve.

Volunteer Engagement and Training

- We offered ongoing training and workshops to ensure volunteers were equipped with the skills they needed for their roles. This included community drivers, training, volunteer orientation, and workshops on health and safety and effective communication. Volunteers received the resources and support to deliver services like Meals on Wheels, transport assistance, and social support.
- Volunteers were involved in a wide range of activities from helping disadvantaged youth gain access to education and employment pathways to delivering meals and social support to elderly community members.

Regional Participation Action Plan

- This year marked the launch of our Regional Participation Action Plan, developed with local Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) as part of a Community Drivers group. The plan aims to increase volunteerism and social participation across rural regions by establishing best practices, addressing barriers to involvement, and promoting diverse volunteer opportunities.
- Ross Wyatt, Founder and Director of Think Impact, collaborated with us to develop the plan and was a keynote speaker at the Volunteering Victoria State Conference. We hosted a regional hub in June, where we co-presented alongside Ross in the session titled

***“Everyone In! The Revolution in
Volunteerism for a Post-Colonial World.”***

Youth Engagement and Education Programs

Our youth programs are designed to provide young people, particularly those at risk of disengagement, with opportunities to succeed academically and socially. These programs aim to equip youth with the skills and confidence needed to pursue further education, employment, and positive community participation.

Youth Connections Program

- o In 2023-2024, we supported **57** youth through the Youth Connections Program, a personalised mentoring and guidance service aimed at reconnecting youth with education and employment opportunities. Through one-on-one mentoring, workshops, and group activities, participants developed essential life skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and goal setting.
- o We worked closely with local schools and community organisations to ensure these youth had access to the resources they needed, including career counselling, work experience placements, and skills-building workshops in areas like teamwork and time management.

School Leaver Employment Support (SLES)

- o The SLES Program provided **26** young people with the tools to transition from school to work. We focused on building workplace readiness through activities such as resume building, job interview preparation, and networking. These programs are specifically designed to assist young people with disabilities or those facing significant barriers to employment.
- o By helping these young people develop essential skills, we opened pathways to meaningful employment and independence.

School Holiday Programs

- o Our School Holiday Program continues to engage 15 youth during school breaks, providing opportunities for personal development, leadership training, and social interaction. These programs are designed to keep youth engaged in positive activities and provide structure during a time that can often lead to boredom and disengagement.
- o Through various team-building exercises and life skills workshops, participants not only learned new skills but also developed a sense of belonging and community connection.



Meals on Wheels, Social Support and Support for Carers Programs

The Meals on Wheels Program, in partnership with Grampians Community Health, provides nutritious meals from our Laneway, Café without Borders social enterprise, to elderly and vulnerable community members. In 2023-2024, we delivered over **15,843 meals**, improving the health and well-being of hundreds of residents.

Key Impact Areas

- o Meal Deliveries and Volunteer Coordination
- o Our dedicated volunteer drivers helped deliver meals across Horsham, Dimboola and Natimuk. Through 40 volunteer drivers each week, we coordinated over 15,843 meals during the year to residents who may otherwise be isolated or without access to nutritious food.
- o The meals not only provided essential nutrition but also served as a tool to foster social connections. Volunteers who deliver meals often check in on clients, providing companionship and ensuring their well-being.

"Anne's Lifeline through Meals on Wheels"

Anne, an elderly resident of Horsham, has been a Meals on Wheels recipient since mid-2023. Living alone, Anne relied on these daily deliveries for her nutrition and as a vital point of social interaction.

When volunteer Sarah noticed that Anne seemed increasingly withdrawn, she alerted the program coordinator. This observation led to the activation of additional social support services.

With regular visits from volunteers and staff, Anne's spirits improved, and she expressed renewed confidence in living independently at home.

"Meals on Wheels is more than just food; it's my connection to the outside world," Anne said during a recent feedback session. Her story highlights the profound impact of volunteer vigilance and the holistic approach of the program.



Carer Support

Carer Support Services

- o Provided **2,817** hours of assistance to unpaid carers, helping them manage their responsibilities and maintain their well-being.
- o Delivered tailored support, including meal preparation, gardening assistance, and financial contributions for respite care, enabling carers to take much-needed breaks.

Weekly Carer Support Group

- o Facilitated a weekly Carer Support Group, offering carers a safe and confidential space to connect, share experiences, and receive peer support.
- o Organised guest speakers and shared resources to empower carers with valuable information on local services and stress management strategies.

Carer Respite

- o Offered respite care services to give unpaid carers a break, with support provided in homes, community venues, or other settings based on individual needs.
- o Delivered respite services flexibly on weekdays, weekends, and for episodic or regular care needs, reducing the stress and pressure of caregiving responsibilities.

These programs ensure that unpaid carers are recognised, supported, and empowered to continue their essential roles with improved well-being and resilience

Social Support Services

- o Beyond meal delivery, our Social Support Program has had a profound impact on the community by assisting individuals with mobility challenges or limited access to transportation. In 2023-2024, our volunteer drivers did **1,683** transports to medical appointments, social events, and community gatherings. These services help reduce isolation, encourage social engagement, and improve overall quality of life for elderly and vulnerable individuals.
- o Additionally, our Social Support program provided **3,124** hours Social Support Telephone/Accompanied/In Home Social Support and **97** hours of advocacy.



Migrant Support Programs

The Centre for Participation remains committed to fostering an inclusive community where people of all backgrounds feel welcome. Our Migrant Support Program helps migrants and refugees integrate into Australian society by providing education, skill-building opportunities, and access to resources.

English Language Programs (ELP)

- o Our English Language Programs supported several migrants in improving their language skills, increasing their confidence and employability. These programs offered beginner, intermediate, and conversational English classes, providing essential language skills for employment and community participation.
- o Throughout the year, we saw an increase in demand for these services, especially in regions with large Karen refugee communities. As a result, we expanded our beginner classes and recruited additional tutors to meet this need.

Micro-Business Training

- o This year, our Micro-Business Course helped migrants from CALD backgrounds develop entrepreneurial skills to start their own businesses. Participants were guided through the process of creating a business plan, understanding marketing strategies, and managing customer relations. These courses equip migrants with the tools necessary to run successful businesses, fostering economic independence and contributing to the local economy.
- o By empowering migrants with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed, we are promoting diversity and innovation within the region.



Supporting People with Disabilities

The Centre for Participation is dedicated to fostering an inclusive society where people with disabilities can access meaningful opportunities for employment, education, and community engagement.

Through a combination of social enterprises and educational programs, we empower individuals with disabilities to develop skills, gain confidence, and make valuable contributions to their communities. Our three social enterprises—**MyCareCrew**, **Laneway Café Without Borders**, and **Wimmera Food Collective**—serve as vital platforms for growth, providing training, hands-on experience, and pathways to employment.

13 disability employment outcomes were achieved through our social enterprises, enabling individuals to gain meaningful employment in the community. These employment opportunities help participants build essential life skills, enhance their independence, and contribute to the local workforce.

MyCareCrew

MyCareCrew provides essential support services, including gardening, cleaning, and maintenance, while offering people with disabilities the chance to gain practical skills and paid employment in a supportive, community-based environment.

- Employees acquire skills that boost their confidence and give them a sense of purpose, including basic maintenance, gardening techniques, and customer service. These skills help participants transition into broader employment opportunities.
- MyCareCrew focuses on assisting elderly residents to remain living independently at home. By delivering essential services like lawn care and home maintenance, participants contribute directly to community well-being while showcasing their abilities as active, valued contributors to society.
- The work done by MyCareCrew highlights the importance of inclusion by demonstrating that people with disabilities can engage meaningfully with their communities, fostering a culture of understanding and collaboration.



Laneway Café Without Borders

Located at Federation University's Horsham campus, Laneway Café Without Borders is a central part of our social enterprise initiatives, offering individuals with disabilities the opportunity to develop skills in hospitality and customer service. The café doubles as a key partner in our Meals on Wheels program, which produced and delivered 15,843 meals last year to elderly and vulnerable residents across the Horsham and Hindmarsh LGAs.

- Participants receive hands-on training in food preparation, barista skills, and customer interaction while learning essential workplace competencies like time management and team collaboration.
- The café plays a vital role in producing meals for the Meals on Wheels program, which delivers nutritious food to residents who may face social isolation or mobility challenges. Volunteers delivering meals provide an added layer of care, offering companionship and conducting welfare checks to ensure recipients' well-being.
- The café creates an inclusive environment where individuals with disabilities can engage with customers, build confidence, and develop social connections, while customers are reminded of the impact of their support on the local community.
- By providing employment and training opportunities, the café contributes to local food security and strengthens the region's economy. Its success demonstrates the power of socially impactful business models to drive positive change.

Wimmera Food Collective

The Wimmera Food Collective combines a café and retail space to offer individuals with disabilities a chance to develop skills in customer service, sales, and food handling. The collective is a welcoming environment where participants gain valuable hands-on experience, building a foundation for long-term employment.

- Participants engage in activities such as managing the register, preparing food, and assisting customers. These tasks build critical skills, including cash handling, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are applicable across the hospitality and retail sectors.
- The collective collaborates with local businesses to align training with real-world job demands, helping participants successfully transition into the workforce. The program not only prepares individuals for careers but also provides access to professional networks and mentoring opportunities.
- The Wimmera Food Collective is more than a café; it's a hub of social inclusion, where people with disabilities can interact with the community and gain recognition for their contributions. Customers play an active role in supporting inclusion by patronising a business that empowers individuals through meaningful employment.
- For many participants, the collective serves as a first step into the workforce. It offers a supportive environment where individuals can develop self-confidence, gain work experience, and prepare for future roles in various industries.

Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) Programs

We have several Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) programs that are tailored to meet the diverse needs of people with disabilities, providing them with the education and training necessary to live more independently and secure employment.

- ACFE programs provide foundational education in areas such as literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy, ensuring participants develop essential skills for daily life and work.
- Workshops focus on practical topics like money management, personal care, and goal setting, empowering individuals to take greater control of their lives.

Vocational Training

- Courses in office skills, customer service, and retail training prepare participants for roles in growing industries, enabling them to pursue fulfilling careers.
- ACFE programs act as a stepping stone, equipping participants with the tools they need to enter the workforce or advance into further training opportunities.

*As we continue into the next year, the Centre for Participation remains focused on expanding our reach and deepening our **impact** across the Wimmera. We plan to enhance our **youth programs**, **volunteer training**, and **social support services** while also scaling up our **migrant support** initiatives to meet the growing demand. With a continued emphasis on **diversity**, **inclusion**, and **community engagement**, we aim to create lasting, **positive change** in the lives of individuals and the wider community.*



Licensing the Wimmera (L2P Program)

The Licensing the Wimmera Program (L2P) plays a pivotal role in improving opportunities for young people who face significant barriers in obtaining their driver's licenses. This program is designed to provide disadvantaged youth with access to the needed 120 hours of supervised driving, essential for achieving a probationary drivers license.

Program Reach

In 2023-2024, the L2P program successfully supported **76** learner drivers, providing them with the over **3630** hours of supervised driving. This not only improves their mobility and independence but also significantly enhances their employability prospects.

Mentor Support

The program relies on a network of trained volunteer mentors who provide the necessary supervised hours and guidance to young drivers. In total, 6 new mentors joined the program in 2023-2024, helping to expand the program's reach. These mentors receive comprehensive training in VicRoads mentor training, ensuring that they are equipped to provide consistent, high-quality support to learners.

Increased Access to Opportunities

The ability to drive opens a wealth of opportunities for young people in rural areas where public transport options can be limited. By enabling young people to gain their licenses, the L2P program helps them access employment, education, and social activities, which they may have otherwise been unable to reach. This program is crucial in addressing the unique challenges faced by young people in the Wimmera, providing them with the independence and flexibility they need to thrive.

Driver Safety and Education

In addition to providing supervised driving hours, L2P offers participants access to driver education workshops and road safety programs. These initiatives focus on creating safer drivers who are aware of the challenges and responsibilities of driving. This year, the program held a Road Safety / Getting Your L's training session during the school holidays in April 2024, benefiting **3** young drivers who successfully gained their licenses.



Empowering Youth with Skills

Beyond the practical aspects of driving, L2P instils important life skills such as responsibility, patience, and self-reliance. These skills are transferable and can be used in various areas of life, including in workplaces and educational environments.

By empowering young people with the ability to drive, we help them build confidence in their abilities and self-esteem, which are critical factors in their personal and professional development.

Supporting Vulnerable Youth

L2P serves many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those who may not have access to a car or a supervising driver. By connecting them with volunteer mentors, the program ensures that every eligible young person can work towards obtaining their license, regardless of their financial situation. This inclusion aspect of the program is vital for ensuring equitable opportunities for all young people, regardless of their socio-economic status.

Looking Ahead

As we continue to support young people in achieving their full potential, the Centre for Participation remains committed to expanding and enhancing the services we provide. In the coming year, we plan to build on the success of programs like L2P and Youth Connections, while introducing new initiatives aimed at improving youth mental health, career guidance, and social inclusion. We aim to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, have the support and opportunities they need to succeed.

By expanding access to programs like SLES, L2P, and School Leaver Support, we will continue to make a positive, lasting **impact** on youth throughout the Wimmera region.

“Maria, a single mother from Warracknabeal, overcame mobility barriers through the Licensing the Wimmera program. Paired with mentors Rodney and Bear, Maria completed over 120 hours of supervised driving, culminating in her earning her probationary license in March 2024. Her success was celebrated with a car gifted through Bear’s “Cars4Youth” initiative, enabling Maria to secure a delivery driver position with a local business. “I feel like I can finally provide for my family without relying on others,” Maria said. Her mentors praised her determination, calling her journey a testament to the program’s life-changing impact.”



Planet

Environmental Stewardship

At the Centre for Participation, our commitment to sustainability drives actions that protect the environment while strengthening community resilience. Across all our programs and operations, we integrate practices that reduce carbon emissions, conserve resources, and promote sustainable living. These collective efforts resulted in saving 30,320 kilograms of CO2 emissions last financial year, showcasing our role as a leader in environmental stewardship in the Wimmera region.

Laneway Café Without Borders

The Laneway Café Without Borders exemplifies sustainable practices within the hospitality industry, incorporating eco-conscious strategies that benefit both the environment and the community.

Mug Library Initiative

- Customers are encouraged to borrow and return reusable mugs, significantly reducing single-use coffee cup waste. This initiative aligns with our commitment to waste reduction and a circular economy.

Composting and Organic Waste Management

- Organic kitchen waste is composted, reducing landfill contributions and generating nutrient-rich compost for local gardens and projects.

Sustainable Sourcing and Operations

- Ingredients are sourced locally whenever possible, reducing transportation emissions and supporting regional suppliers. Eco-friendly cleaning products and packaging further minimise environmental impact.
- Our Meals on Wheels program, supported by the Laneway Café, delivers over **15,843** meals annually to elderly and vulnerable residents in the Horsham and Hindmarsh LGAs. Alongside providing vital nutritional support, the program incorporates sustainable practices to minimise its environmental footprint.

These practices make **Laneway Café Without Borders** a model for sustainability in hospitality, while engaging customers in the broader mission of environmental responsibility.

Wimmera Food Collective

The Wimmera Food Collective combines a café and retail space, serving as a hub for sustainability education and practice in the Wimmera region. Its operations emphasise waste reduction, local sourcing, and community education on eco-friendly living.

Local Food Systems

- The collective prioritises offering locally produced goods, reducing the environmental impact of long-distance transportation and supporting the regional economy.

Reducing Food Waste

- Unsold food items are repurposed for community meals or composted, creating a closed-loop system that benefits local gardens and reduces landfill contributions.

Sustainability Education

- Workshops focus on practical sustainability topics, such as waste reduction, sustainable cooking, and food preservation, empowering community members to adopt greener practices in their homes.
- By providing high-quality, eco-friendly products at accessible prices, the collective ensures that sustainable choices are available to everyone.
- Customers are encouraged to borrow and return reusable mugs, significantly reducing single-use coffee cup waste. This initiative aligns with our commitment to waste reduction and a circular economy.

The Wimmera Food Collective integrates sustainability into every aspect of its operations, making it a community leader in environmental responsibility.

E-Bike – Promoting Sustainable Transport

The Centre's e-bike program offers staff and volunteers an environmentally friendly transportation alternative.

Reduced 5.69 kilograms of CO2 emissions last year.

- Encouraged active, eco-conscious commuting, promoting both personal and environmental health.

Organisation-Wide CO2 Emissions Savings

Across all programs and operations, the Centre for Participation achieved a total saving of 30,320 kilograms of CO2 emissions last year. This significant milestone reflects a combination of efforts, including

- Solar-powered facilities that reduce reliance on non-renewable energy sources.
 - Efficient delivery systems that minimise vehicle emissions.
- Waste reduction and composting initiatives that decrease methane emissions from landfill.

Looking Ahead

The Centre for Participation is committed to leading the way in environmental sustainability by continuously improving our practices and inspiring others to act. Guided by short-, medium-, and long-term goals, we aim to create a lasting positive impact on our planet and community.

Short-Term Goals

In the immediate future, our focus is on practical changes that will reduce waste and improve efficiency.

- Expanding plastic reduction initiatives by adopting more environmentally friendly products.
- Transitioning from paper-based processes to digital systems, minimising resource use.
- Increasing support for carpooling initiatives and eco-friendly transportation options to further reduce emissions.
- Scaling up the use of renewable energy sources to lower our carbon footprint.

Medium-Term Goals

Over the next few years, we will focus on embedding sustainability more deeply into our operations and building stronger community partnerships.

- Adopting more energy-efficient technologies and practices across our programs.
- Expanding efforts to educate and engage the community in sustainable living.
- Establishing partnerships with like-minded organisations to amplify our environmental impact.
- Systematically monitoring and reducing waste generation in all aspects of our work.

Long-Term Goals

Our long-term vision is to position the Centre for Participation as a leader in sustainability while achieving measurable milestones.

- Attaining carbon neutrality, eliminating our net contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.
- Deepening our commitment to waste reduction through recycling and responsible disposal practices.
- Investing in sustainable infrastructure and adopting green building designs to further reduce environmental impact.
- Becoming a recognised advocate for sustainability within our community and industry, driving positive change on a broader scale.

“ By setting ambitious goals and taking deliberate action, the Centre for Participation will continue to build a future that prioritises the health of the planet and supports a more sustainable way of life for all. ”

Performance

Delivering Impact Through Social Enterprise

The Centre for Participation is committed to delivering on its purpose through sustainable growth, effective partnerships, and strategic use of resources. Central to our mission is the success of our **social enterprises**, which not only generate significant revenue but also empower individuals and strengthen our community. By combining innovation, fiscal responsibility, and a deep understanding of community needs, we have achieved impactful results in 2023–2024.

Financial Highlights

In the 2023–2024 financial year, the Centre for Participation recorded strong financial outcomes, enabling the continued delivery of essential services and programs across the Wimmera Southern Mallee region.

Total Revenue: **\$2,723,748** Total Expenditure: **\$2,522,686**

\$201,062, reinvested into expanding programs and improving service delivery. Our ability to achieve a surplus reflects our careful financial management and our commitment to ensuring long-term sustainability while delivering high-quality services.

Revenue Sources Breakdown

Social Enterprises

Revenue generated by our three social enterprises totaled **\$1,024,430**, representing **37.6%** of total revenue. This significant contribution underscores the success of ventures such as Laneway Café Without Borders, MyCareCrew, and the Wimmera Food Collective, which provide meaningful employment opportunities while driving our financial sustainability.

Victorian State Government:

Funding of **\$858,067** from the Victorian State Government supported a range of critical programs and initiatives. These include the Support for Carers Program, efforts to enhance and increase volunteering across the region—highlighted by the development of the 10-year Regional Participation Plan—and programs such as Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE), Youth Justice, L2P, and Home and Community Care (HACC). Additionally, this funding enabled the continued growth of our social enterprise, the Wimmera Food Collective, through VicHealth's Future Healthy initiative, fostering both health and sustainability in the region.

Commonwealth Government

Contributions totaling **\$626,988** from the Commonwealth Government supported vital services and programs, including Strong and Resilient Communities (Volunteering), the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP), and Information Linkages and Capacity Building for people with Disabilities and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities. These funds helped deliver initiatives that promote social inclusion, support independent living, and enhance education and employment outcomes, ensuring meaningful participation for all members of our community. Additional funding through grants and donations totaled **\$214,263**, reflecting the trust and support we receive from other funding bodies and philanthropic organisations.

Social Enterprises – Driving Purpose and Impact

Our social enterprises continue to play a pivotal role in delivering on our purpose. They are more than revenue streams—they are platforms for creating employment, building **skills, and fostering inclusion.**

MyCareCrew

- Delivered essential support services to the community, including gardening, maintenance, and cleaning, while employing people with disabilities.
- Generated income while directly addressing community needs, enabling elderly residents to live independently and safely at home.

Laneway – Café Without Borders

- Produced **15,843 meals** as part of the Meals on Wheels program, supporting elderly and vulnerable residents across the Horsham and parts of Hindmarsh LGAs.
- Trained individuals with disabilities in hospitality, helping them develop transferable skills and transition into employment.

Wimmera Food Collective

- Operated as a café and retail space, offering people with disabilities hands-on experience in customer service and sales.
- Contributed to local food security by providing affordable, high-quality food options while promoting sustainable practices.

“These enterprises exemplify how trading activities can align with a social mission, delivering measurable benefits to individuals and the wider community while generating vital revenue”

Innovation and Digital Transformation

To improve efficiency and better serve the community, the Centre for Participation has embraced innovation and digital transformation.

Cyber Security Enhancements

- o Continued to act on the recommendations from the cyber security audit, implementing measures to strengthen systems, protect data, and improve overall resilience against cyber threats.

Digital Processes

- o Transitioned many paper-based systems to digital platforms, enhancing communication, reducing resource use, and improving service delivery speed.

CRM Systems

- o The continued investment in Better Impact and Alchemy has streamlined operations, enhancing the coordination of volunteers and consumers. These systems improve efficiency by simplifying workflows, better matching individuals with opportunities, and optimising the use of resources across programs.

Program Efficiency

- o Digital tools enabled more accurate tracking of outcomes, ensuring that resources were directed where they were needed most.

Enhancing Service Reach

In 2023–2024, we extended the reach of our programs to serve more individuals and communities.

- o Over **15,843** meals delivered through Meals on Wheels.
 - o Supported **421** volunteers, who contributed **8,434.65** hours to community programs.
 - o Assisted 76 learner drivers through the Licensing the Wimmera Program, improving mobility and employment opportunities.
 - o Provided **4,802.5** hours of training through our social enterprises for people with disabilities.
- These figures demonstrate our commitment to maximising the impact of every dollar invested in our programs.

Looking Ahead

Our focus remains on building a resilient and inclusive organisation that delivers lasting value to the community.

Future priorities include:

- o Expanding the capacity of social enterprises to create more employment opportunities and increase revenue.
- o Strengthening digital systems to enhance efficiency and service delivery.
- o Growing partnerships with government, businesses, and philanthropists to amplify community impact.
- o Continuing to align financial sustainability with our social mission, ensuring every initiative

Total revenue – 2023–2024
\$2,723,748

Total Expenditure
\$2,522,686

Total social enterprises
\$1,024,430

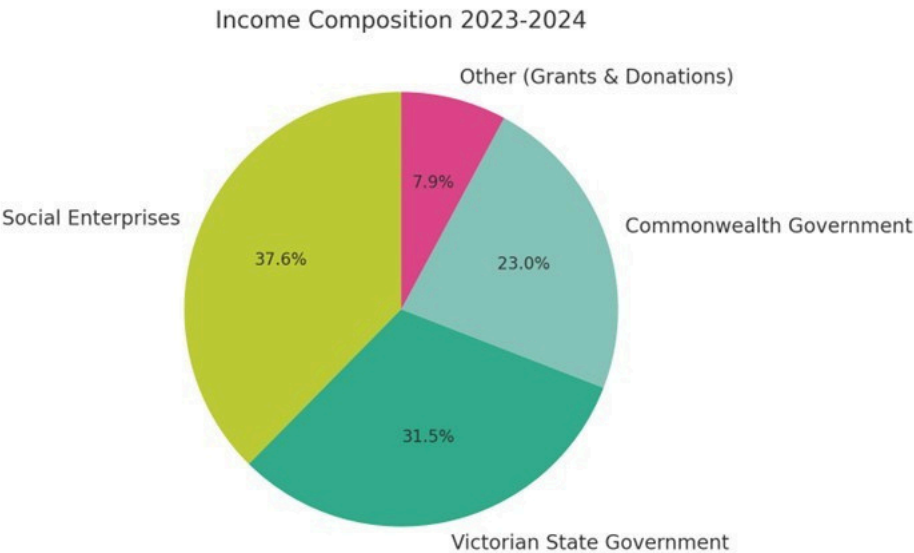
Total Victorian State Government
\$858,067

Total Commonwealth Government
\$626,988

Other - grants and donations
\$214,263

Total revenue – 2023–2024
\$2,723,748

- Social Enterprises
- State Government
- Federal Government
- Other Grants & Donations



Revenue – social enterprise
\$1,024,430

- Trade
- State Government
- Federal Government

