

MAKING A
POSITIVE
DIFFERENCE
EVERYDAY

Annual Report 2020-21





Whittlesea Community Connections is a place based non-for-profit incorporated association and an income tax exempt organisation endorsed as a Public Benevolent Institution and a Deductible Gift Recipient.

ABN 49881724827 Registration No. A0008867P

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Locations

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571-583 High Street, Epping VIC 3076
Thomastown West Community Hub,
98 Main Street, Thomastown VIC 3074
Mernda Community House,
2 Heals Road, Mernda VIC 3754
Whittlesea Food Collective,
Melbourne Polytechnic Epping campus,
Dalton Road, Epping VIC 3076

Website www.whittleseacc.org.au

Facebook www.facebook.com/whittleseacommunityconnections
LinkedIn www.linkedin.com/company/whittleseacc/mycompany

Instagram @wcc_connect

YouTube www.youtube.com/channel/UC7Wj3f0cRTrC_ni2WEBz09A

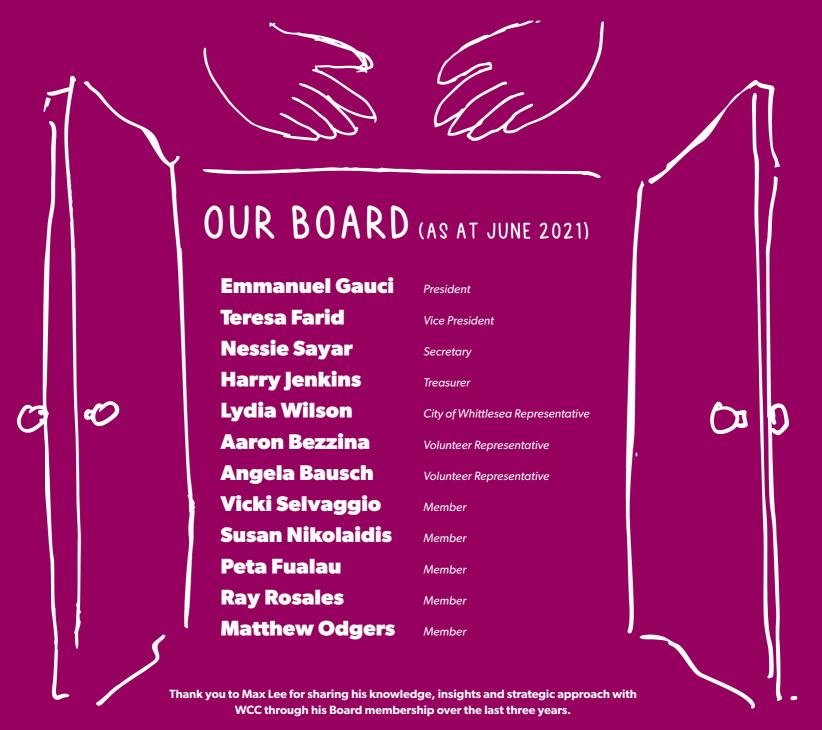
Email admin@whittleseacc.org.au

Whittlesea Community Connections acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which we provide our services, the Wurundjeri Willum Clan of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and express our hope for reconciliation, justice and the recognition of the living culture of all Aboriginal people.

MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE EVERYDAY

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PETER MURRAY

It is with a heavy heart that we honour the contribution of our good friend and Community Transport volunteer, the late Peter Murray (aka Surfy).

Our organisation is made up of people of different ages and different backgrounds, but we all admired the man who was committed until the job was done. That man, of course, was Peter Murray.

I met Surfy about seven years ago when I started my role as the WCC Transport Coordinator. I was impressed with Surfy from day one - he was a straight talker, knew the history of the local community inside out and had a keen ability to understand people. I knew immediately that this was someone I wanted to know and we became friends and work colleagues.

Surfy grew up and lived most of his life in Lalor. He helped many people get to know this local community better, sharing stories about the fun and struggles of life growing up in the working class North. He knew the high and low points of Whittlesea's history and all the colourful characters who had been and gone over the years. Surfy could tell you when the first settlers came and who's family had lived in which street. He knew the local spots - where to eat, what to drink, when to play and where to escape. He knew the local news before it was printed in the paper, and he kept his hand on the pulse of the community better than anyone else I knew.

Surfy didn't just look around and see things that weren't fair. He took hold and told you what he thought! He saw opportunities to raise money and recruit volunteers where the rest of us didn't. He set up donation tins at the Lalor bowls club and put up volunteer recruitment flyers on the bathroom doors. Surfy's words and enthusiasm gave the rest of us what we needed most and that was people working together to make the transport team a success.

On behalf of WCC, I'd like to say thanks to Surfy for being a man of action and meaningful words. You helped get the Transport team started, rallying many people to work together to make the service what it is today. It would never have happened without you.

Parry Williams, September 2021





As a place based organisation with a strong community development approach our work is always informed by people in our community.

In addition to the insight we get from our amazing volunteers we have a number of Community Advisory group structures that provide opportunities for us to work closely with people across our communities. Over the last year we have been fortunate to have had the insight and engagement of many talented and driven people who join with us to make Whittlesea a fairer more connected community.

Women's Advisory Group and Community Leader Working Group

- Ariarti Ariarti WAG & CLWG
- Barbara Minuzzo WAG & CLWG
- Bobby Lama CLWG
- Fatima Aman CLWG
- Kalvani Baskaran WAG & CLWG
- Krishanthi Liyanage WAG & CLWG
- Michael Kinyuna CLWG
- Nathalie Nzouakeu-Njako WAG & CLWG
- Roslina Maharjan CLWG
- Sydea Sadia Amjad CLWG
- Yousef Alhawat CLWG
- Manel Rouma former WAG member

LOT (Leaders of Tomorrow) - Youth Advisory Group

- Aron Raward
- 7ara Khan
- Marianne Bottroos
- libreel Rafiq
- Aya Cheikh Hussein

- Zianeb Ramadan
- Hanin Ramadan
- David Bottroos
- Seneli Wijeratne
- Maree Pastouras
- Hansikaa Sharma
- Fatemeh Tanzadeh
- Thao Tran
- Aanya Bhutani
- Terri Potter
- Malu Faatele

Mernda Community House Advisory Group

- Muhamad Abduh
- Jackie Mathew
- Naomi Spence
- larrod MacDonald
- Barbara Vaughan
- Sooma Nosratpour

Whittlesea Food Collective Community Advisory Group

- Sally-Ann Delaney (Chair)
- Alex Fabiano, Infinity Church, Community Meals Kitchen
- Gianna Donato, Encompass care
- Joanna Borg, the Shak
- Kevin Potter, Countrywide Mission

Whittlesea Community Farm Advisory Group

- Pablo Gimenez
- |ane |uliff
- Sharna Brown
- Michael Longmore
- Sally-Ann Delaney
- Harry Williams
- Sunshine Cross
- Ahmed Alsabe
- Shruti Malavde
- Vinay Nair
- Viktor Faulkner

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It gives me great pleasure to present this report for a year that has seen WCC demonstrate its resilience and innovation in delivering safe and effective services and programs that continue to respond to the changing dynamic of our community.



WCC is an amazing community organisation built and sustained by a valued and committed pool of volunteers, staff, management and Board. It has been a privilege to serve as the organisation's President and to work with such an extraordinary group of people.

The past year has challenged all of us, both personally and professionally. The impact, on our daily lives, of living with the COVID pandemic has been subtle but profound. At WCC, volunteers, staff and management, led by the CEO Alex Haynes, have responded to this situation with energy and a determination to ensure that our clients continue to receive the support and assistance they need. In the past year, we have seen our client footprint grow as new needs emerged during the lockdowns. At the same time, the organisation used this opportunity to implement new service delivery models, such as a central contact centre and virtual bus trips, and improving access to services and information with the launch of the Financial Literacy Booklet.

We have continued to deliver on our strategic priorities, expanding our advocacy efforts for a safe and dedicated youth space, improving access to homelessness services, engaging with Wollert residents and working with CALD communities on family violence prevention. We have also attracted additional resources to improve our accessibility and services to

members of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities and to expand our employment programs.

It was especially pleasing to be able to recognise and acknowledge the valuable work of our volunteers during Volunteer Week and to have the rare opportunity (in these unusual times) to celebrate with our volunteers. On behalf of the Board of Management, I would like to express our heartfelt and deep appreciation for the passion, commitment and loyalty of our volunteers. Their contribution has been instrumental in making Whittlesea Community Connections a valued resource in our community. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of one of our valued volunteers, Peter Murray, who passed away unexpectedly this year.

It has been a pleasure to work with CEO Alex Haynes. Alex is an energetic, strategic and focussed leader who genuinely engages and empowers those around her to do their best, creating a positive organisational culture within WCC. Alex has built and sustained valuable partnerships and relationships that not only contribute to the achievement of the organisation's strategic goals but also build and enhance the organisation's reputation and credibility and create a platform for long-term sustainability, making WCC one of the leading grassroots organisations in our municipality.

I am pleased to advise members that the Board is confident WCC is in a good financial position and can meet its obligations on time or when required as evidenced in our Audited Financial Statements

The Board has worked tirelessly this year on a continuous improvement journey to enhance our governance capacity and performance. We have invested time working together, setting up subcommittees to progress the work of the Board and developing policies and procedures to formalise our activity. I would sincerely like to thank all the current Board members for their dedication to this organisation as without them and the guidance they provide this would not be the best community organisation in the City of Whittlesea. I have been proud to serve as Chair. I would like to thank the Board Members of 2020-2021 - Angela Bausch, Aaron Bezzina, Teresa Farid, Peta Fualau, Harry Jenkins, Susan Nikolaidis, Matthew Odgers, Ray Rosales, Nessie Sayar, Vicki Selvaggio and our Council representative Lydia Wilson. I also want to acknowledge the unique and valued contribution of Max Lee who retired from the Board during the year. Max is a valued friend of WCC and we wish him all the very best for the future.

EMMANUEL GAUCI

President, Whittlesea Community Connections

CEO'S REPORT

Exceptional not perfect, that is what this year has been about.

We have seen exceptional efforts by WCC staff and volunteers to listen, anticipate, respond, innovate and act. We believed in ourselves, trusted our instincts and just kept doing. Doing more or different things to address the escalation of hardship in the community created momentum, helped us learn, adapt and attract support to grow stronger. Our long standing commitment to work with and for our community was really visible through our doing and we can be very proud of the way we stood up together and took on the challenges that COVID created for our community, but also leveraged the opportunities. We did all that while experiencing personal difficulties and the loss of, and disconnection from, family and friends, many of them overseas.

We have enjoyed exceptional support from our Board, partners, funders and supporters of all shapes and sizes. We were really fortunate to have had an additional 45 staff through the Victorian Government's Working for Victoria initiative during 20-21 and the City of Whittlesea's Emergency Relief fund was a critical support for our food and material aid response. Our local networks, particularly the Whittlesea Emergency Relief network, have been a great support and force for collective action.

We maintained our future focus and leveraged many of the changes we made to respond to COVID challenges into permanent improvements, like designing and implementing a new contact centre to manage the incredible increase in calls. We have developed a new strategic priorities plan, started our Anti-racism project, built a strong focus on employment support and continued the exciting development of the Whittlesea Community Farm. We have seen existing inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic so we are even more committed to addressing inequality and improving equity across the community and in our institutions.

I am writing this as I reach the end of my fifth year at WCC. We have grown from 28 to 70 staff over that time which is marker of the extra support we have been able to provide to our communities across our diverse and growing range of programs and services. Our growth leads directly to an increase in local access to services and support but also leads to more opportunities for community members to participate, and lead community initiatives.

Our future is bright despite the current challenges. Over the last year we have seen the incredible relevance and effectiveness of place based governance, relationships and connections. The need for place based insight and local community connections is crucial to design and implement effective responses when new challenges emerge.

ALEX HAYNES

CEO, Whittlesea Community Connections

Men Haynes



ABOUT US



OUR VISION

Our vision is for a Whittlesea in which people and agencies work together to make a positive difference to our community, ensuring that everyone has equal access to the community's resources and services.

Our values

- Self determination
- Independence
- Confidential
- Non judgmental
- Diversity

Our approach

- We welcome everyone in our community
- Our services are free
- We keep your information private
- We have bilingual workers and volunteers and use interpreters
- We support your rights
- We stand independent from the government or any other organisation
- We support you to build hope and confidence

What we do

WCC identifies and breaks down barriers to accessing information and specialised support services and works towards building individual and community resilience. As a client-centred, community-led organisation, WCC works alongside individuals, families and groups to create opportunities to access information and services and to build and strengthen connections.

We achieve outcomes through providing

- Asylum seeker support including Pharmacy Waiver program with Cabrini Outreach
- CALD Women's groups grants
- Community Development activities and events
- Community engagement, learning and participation through Mernda Community House
- Community Support, Information and Referral
- Community Transport
- Community Visitors Scheme
- DriverED driving school social enterprise
- Employment support through Jobs Victoria Advocates (JVA) and Employment Service (IVES)
- Family violence Housing Brokerage Program
- Family violence prevention
- Financial assistance, NILS and material aid
- Food through Whittlesea Food Collective
- Friendly Connections
- Health Navigator program
- Housing brokerage support and no interest loans
- Legal information, advice, casework and legal education

- Migration advice and casework
- OurBUS community bus hire social enterprise
- Pre-accredited learning through Learn Local
- Road Safety, L2P and Adult Driving Programs
- Settlement advice, casework and support groups
- Tax Help
- Schools programs through Thomastown West Community Hub and Whittlesea Food Collective
- Volunteer Resource Service
- Youth work, Homework support and one + one tutoring
- Women in Work childcare social enterprise
- Women's Driving Program
- Women's Employment & Empowerment Project

And, leading several collaborative networks:

- Whittlesea Multicultural Issues Network
- Whittlesea Housing and Homelessness Action Group
- Whittlesea Emergency Relief Network
- Whittlesea Family Violence Network
- Whittlesea Aboriginal &/or Torres Strait Islander Workers Network

STRATEGIC RESPONSES



This was the final year of our strategic plan, Strategic Priorities 2018-21

DURING THIS
YEAR WE ASKED
WHETHER THESE
PRIORITIES ARE
STILL IMPORTANT
OR NEED TO
CHANGE TO
REFLECT CURRENT
CONTEXT?

Internal discussions indicated that current strategic priorities continue to remain important to the Whittlesea community and indeed some issues have been further highlighted as a result of the COVID19 pandemic. Consultations in July 2020 identified that mental health, isolation, poverty, family violence and employment were significantly impacting on people.

Further staff discussions (September 2020) similarly identified that in response to COVID19 and as we move into the recovery phase having specific strategies that address mental health and social isolation, family violence and poverty due to loss of employment will be important. These issues are already priorities in WCC's strategic plan in addition to other underlying drivers of community need. WCC's management group and Board felt that continuing with the same priorities but with a particular focus, based on prior learning and outcomes, would be beneficial to achieve medium to long term outcomes.

Throughout the last 12 months we have moved to incorporate this strategic reflection into our work:

- Stronger emphasis on employment and not primarily through enterprise but by delivering employment services and support, and addressing racism and discrimination.
- Broadening the gender equality priority area to include a focus on equity and family violence prevention.
- Expanding from a mental health focus, where we have improved referral pathways and acted as a link helping others to navigate services and systems, to addressing social isolation and developing prevention approaches.
- Designing specific projects like Anti-racism and embarking on our first Reconciliation Action Plan.
- Adopting equity of access as a lens that
 we apply to each of the strategic priorities.
 It is also important to reflect on those not
 accessing our service and continue to review
 how we deliver equity of access better.



1. Improve access to housing and reduce homelessness

Whittlesea Housing and Homelessness Action Group

The WHHAG has a vision that people in Whittlesea have access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing that recognises their place in and connection to community. Together the group works on joint advocacy on Whittlesea's Affordable Housing and homelessness service needs, shares opportunities to work together and builds a collective understanding of the housing and homelessness service needs in Whittlesea. Achievements in 2020-21 included sharing information and opportunities in response to the Big Housing Build initiative and best practice models and approaches that can be applied locally, communicated with Minister for Housing about the WHHAG action plan and opportunities for the Big Housing Build initiative in Whittlesea and responded to the State government's 10 Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy Discussion Paper. The WHHAG has updated its' action plan for the next year and acknowledges a lot of work still needs to be done to support housing needs in Whittlesea

Family Violence Housing Brokerage Program

We know that the leading cause of homelessness for women and children is family violence. This program aims at addressing this by providing intensive support and access to brokerage funds to women experiencing family violence in obtaining and sustaining private rental accommodation. During this financial year, 27 women received support from this program. Furthermore, the Lead project worker has established links with local real estate agents and future focus on raising awareness of family violence with local real estates.

Funded by Ian Potter Foundation, 2019-2021 and WCC

"PFOPLF IN WHITTLESEA HAVE ACCESS TO SAFE. AFFORDABLE AND APPROPRIATE HOUSING THAT RECOGNISES THEIR PLACE IN AND CONNECTED TO COMMUNITY."





















2. Actively engage in strengthening multiculturalism

Build adequate support and reporting services for Whittlesea residents experiencing racism

A collaborative initiative of Whittlesea Community Connections and Victoria University.

Despite ongoing efforts to tackle discrimination and racism in Victoria, many people and communities across the state and beyond continue to experience stigmatisation, marginalisation, harassment and abuse because of their ethnic, cultural or religious background. Emerging evidence confirms what affected communities have long known: very often these experiences of racism remain unreported, as many people either do not know where to turn to or deliberately refrain from seeking support.

Non-reporting can aggravate people's sense of disempowerment and have severe long-term effects on their sense of belonging. It can harm their mental health and disrupt their community relations. In addition, the problem of underreporting limits our understanding of the specific nature of racist incidents within our local community – hampering the development of effective measures to counter these forms of exclusion and discrimination.

In this project, Whittlesea Community Connections partners with Victoria University (VU) to explore the gaps in support service provisions and reporting barriers for residents who have experienced racism. VU is contributing its research expertise and its experiences and insights gained during a local pilot project (in partnership with Wyndham City Council; 2019 – 2021). The Wyndham Pilot confirmed that adequate support services need to be locally based, connected to exiting community groups and organisations that enjoy high levels of trust within the communities affected by racism.

The Whittlesea partnership project builds on these insights. We are engaging closely with minority communities and local providers of community services to analyse the local landscape of support structures, identifying general and locally specific barriers that may discourage individuals from reporting their experiences of racism. Based on these empirical insights into the specific local situation in Whittlesea, the project will develop pathways towards a multi-level and low-threshold support structure that:

- increases the availability of adequate and targeted support;
- reduces underreporting; and
- in doing so, helps gain better evidencebased insight in the scope and nature of racism, which can then be used for more targeted anti-racism measures and advocacy.

Funded by WCC







Pathways for refugees, people seeking asylum and new migrants

The Road 2 Work program has two key objectives:

- 1. To give skilled refugee job-seekers the opportunity to:
 - Gain Australian work experience through an internship
 - Get referees in their preferred sector of work
 - Learn about Australian work conditions and expectations
 - Receive advice about searching and applying for work in Australia.
- 2. To give businesses hosting internships the opportunity to:
 - Strengthen their capacity to reflect and engage people/clients/customers from diverse communities
 - Access highly motivated and skilled interns that can make a positive contribution to their business
 - Demonstrate corporate social responsibility
 - Make a tax-deductable charitable donation that will help people from a refugee background overcome employment barriers.

The community supported through this project were women and young Arabic speaking humanitarian entrants predominantly from Syria and Iraq. Many in these new arrival communities come from educated and professional backgrounds including health professionals (doctors, pharmacists), engineering, teaching, accounting and community services. Despite their education many experienced common barriers entering mainstream employment in Australia such as language, cultural adjustment, learning how to navigate new systems, trauma and racism and discrimination. The community we worked with were very excited and passionate about exploring ways they could build their skill and employment networks and really just wanted to contribute to their community.

During 2020 we placed two women with Northern Health for an internship. This was very successful and our partnership with Northern Health continued to develop in 20-21. Part of this work was in partnership with Melbourne Polytechnic and the development of the Health Navigator program.

WCC will continue to foster these partnerships and explore on-going opportunities for new arrival humanitarian entrants, particularly women and young people, to participate in the mainstream workforce.





3. Improve equity of access to information, support and services

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Engagement

This year we welcomed our first Aboriginal Engagement and Caseworker at WCC. This role has supported WCC to

- Strengthen sector engagement with Aboriginal community for improved access and equity of service/resources for people in CoW.
- Strengthen our organisational response to Aboriginal social issues and undertake any relevant advocacy activities.
- Strengthen staff practice working with people that identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- Increase WCC's access and equity of service for people that identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- Provide Casework support to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community members.
- Facilitate access of internal programs.
- Local advocacy to agencies to assist Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander access services.
- Our first efforts have focused on internally building our workforce capacity increasing our knowledge and understanding in order to provide a culturally safe and responsive service. Staff have completed knowledge surveys attended regular cross-cultural training and workshops.

- Currently we are focused on updating the organization's policies and guidelines to include Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander specific needs.
- We have established an internal Reconciliation Action working group and have recently registered to develop our first Reconciliation Action Plan. We are excited and ready to start this journey.

In the past year, we have also:

- Employed a part time Aboriginal youth programs worker- who supports the children at Koori Club and facilitates mentoring programs at Epping Secondary.
- We have welcomed our first Aboriginal volunteer, who is gaining experience in reception and contact centre.
- Pilot a Kids lunch's program with VCAL students for Koori kids at Epping Secondary College.

Over the next year we will

- Develop our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) expanding our knowledge, cultural understanding and capacity.
- Undertake 'Healing on Country' research project, which will tie in with our Whittlesea Community Farm initiative.
- Continue to build community relationships with local services to create smooth access for clients

Funded by WCC

SHARNA BROWN

Aboriginal Engagement and Caseworker

Whittlesea Community
Connections is committed to
reconciliation through educating
ourselves, sharing learnings and
building meaningful partnerships
with Traditional Owners and
Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander communities.



3. Improve equity of access to information, support and services - continued

Contact Centre

Launched in January 2021 8,651 calls were answered by the contact centre in its first 3 months

Learnings from our initial pandemic response in 2020 highlighted the urgency for a streamlined intake system that provided an immediate internal referral for food relief, financial assistance and casework support. With this experience, knowledge and evidence WCC went on to develop, invest in and launch the WCC Contact Centre. The model provides a streamlined integrated response to all enquiries. The IPSCAPE software we invested in connects to the database systems placing the client at the centre of our approach to enquiries. The contact centre is delivered through a combination of students, volunteers and 2 contact centre coordinators.

An internal 3 month review was conducted and findings included:

- WCC is both accessible and responsive. Clients reported challenges trying to access other services over the phone often having to leave voice mails or messages.
- Our intake approach explores client needs and often identifies information/supports the client wasn't aware of.
- It's very rare that WCC have nothing to offer clients as a solution, whether it's referral internally, externally or providing information and/or direct service.
- Universal feedback from volunteers and students is that the role is rewarding, satisfying, challenging and huge opportunity for growth and development.
- Training and coaching of new contact centre volunteers and students by peers has created a welcoming environment, provided on the job step-by-step support.

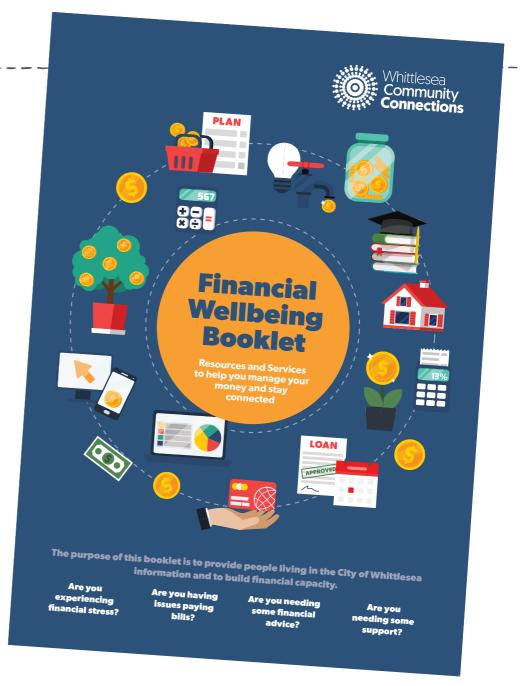
Funded through our Service Agreement with City of Whittlesea



Since its inception almost 50 years ago, Whittlesea Community Connections has worked in partnership with City of Whittlesea. This partnership covers a range of areas, programs and services that are focused on building a connected community that is socially cohesive, healthy and safe and where everyone is able to contribute. The partnership has both a population wide focus and a targeted focus on those most marginalised in our community. Specifically, the collaboration between CoW and WCC focuses on:

- **1.** improving residents' health and wellbeing through increasing equitable access to health and support services
- **2.** building individuals' capacity to contribute to decisions that are made locally
- 3. delivering volunteer and leadership services
- **4.** delivering services that help people to connect and participate.

This year we produced a Financial Wellbeing Booklet to provide information, resources and support to people living within the City of Whittlesea, who may be experiencing hardship.

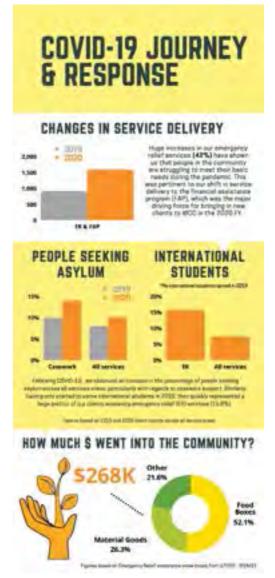


3. Improve equity of access to information, support and services - continued

Wollert Community **Engagement**

The Wollert Community Reference Group made up local organisations, community members and the local MP continue to meet to identify local needs and collectively develop strategies in response. This year the group inevitably focused on the impact of COVID19 with the Wollert community experiencing significant job losses, reduced income, food insecurity and high levels of disconnection. With a high Indian population it was also recognised that support for dealing with what was happening to friends and family overseas was also needed. The Group and WCC planned a series of community information and engagement sessions including a spiritual and meditation session with the support of the Brahma Kumari. A partnership with Edgars Creek Primary school was developed in order to deliver weekly art and craft sessions to students during lunch time. Sessions planned for 2021-22 included women's small business and employment, yoga, multicultural art and craft, healthy cooking and gardening. We look forward to continuing to get to know the community of Wollert and building on people's strengths and the community's diversity.





4. Increase Gender Equity in community settings - continued

Sector Capacity Building Project - Multicultural & Settlement Services:

The Sector Capacity Building Project is a 15 month funded project beginning in April 2021. WCC are working in a consortia with JewishCare and AMES to support Multicultural and Settlement Services being prescribed to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Management (MARAM) Framework and Information Sharing reforms in Phase 2. The purpose is to support prescribed organisations in increasing capability, skills and practice knowledge in identifying and managing family violence risk and information sharing. WCC is included in being prescribed to MARAM and are committed to aligning the whole agency to this Framework.

Funded by Family Safety Victoria, 2020-2022

Family Violence Community Information:

For the second half of the year WCC had the opportunity to employ 4 Working for Victoria roles with a focus on delivering family violence community information. Across the 6 months the team delivered multiple sessions to Pacific Islander, Pakistani and South Asian community. Session included Healthy Parenting and Communication Techniques, Employment Sessions, Education and Legal system in Australia, and delivery of our 'Recognise, Respond & Respect: Family Violence Training'.

Across 2020 to 2021 the 'Recognise, Respond, Respect: Family Violence Training' delivered by Katriece Bolden (social worker) and Emma O'Neill (FV Lawyer) to approximately 65 community members; inclusive of staff, volunteers and community leaders.

Whittlesea Indian Women's Group / South Asian Women's Driver Program:

The Whittlesea Indian Women's Group was established in response to a suicide cluster among South Asian women in Whittlesea. They setup a closed multi-lingual Facebook page to share information and meet online. The women in the group identified the importance of gaining more confidence and independence and a practical way to do that was to gain their license. In response WCC started the Indian Women's Driving Program as a pilot. We supported 5 women to gain their Learners permit and 10 women went on to complete 6 free driving lessons each with a professional driving instructor from our driving enterprise driverED. The success of this pilot has led to a funded program for 20 women with the support of the Eastern Metropolitan Primary Health Network (EMPHN).

Whittlesea Family Violence Network (WFVN):

The WFVN was re-established in September 2020 and is convened by WCC. This network has over 60 members who are committed to the alleviation of family violence in our community. The network has had engagement from peak bodies in the sector, delivered training such as Tech-facilitated abuse training delivered by Victoria Police, and overall strengthening of collaboration and support between members.



5. Improve opportunities and outcomes for young people

Adaptation was key and learning on the run has given us more tools in engaging children and young people.

We conducted research to measure the impact the pandemic has had on children and young people. Young people felt socially isolated and disconnected from other children and young people in their community. There was an identified need for programs and activities that engaged children and young people's interests, while also providing an avenue for them to maintain social connections to one another.

We quickly responded to the lack of face time engagement through our Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation prevention program. We hosted a soccer program online and face to face, we were able to deliver gambling prevention information sessions to our participants. Melissa Barbieri Former Matilda's captain of the Australian football national team worked with children and created video content for training from home.

"SAVE OUR WORLD,
DON'T HURT IT,
DON'T MAKE US DESERT IT."

The LOT (Youth Advisory Group) went from strength to strength, continuing with their advocacy for Dedicated Safe Youth Spaces in the LGA, meetings with MP's like Hon. Ros Spence and Council. They also helped to apply for a grant for youth week. The group also were intrinsic in every part of the youth week program; research, planning and development & delivery to which they replicated great work ethic in a project like 16 Days of Activism which endeavoured to tackle gendered violence, creating an online short film night that created discussion and engaged young people.

We hosted a series of workshops with an art facilitator Suzi Duncan that supported young people while creating their artwork. Passionate and talented young people produced several pieces of art that focused on the future, the planet and freedom.

"Save our world, don't hurt it, don't make us desert it."

The Empower program continued to support young vulnerable and/or at risk of disengagement people. The Engage program continued to work with young volunteers to support their journey with training and placement.

A massive thanks to our staff members for all things children and young people across this last year; Sarah Wassouf, Zianeb Ramadan, Hiba Ayass, Eva Mumbler, Ruvee Ratnayake, Kate Halstead, Audrey Dalton-Power & Peta Duncan.

We look forward to many more of the programs, events, activities and projects continued success in the forthcoming year along with replicating our work at TWCH and mobilising our model, facilitating several RESP programs in primary school. We are also getting ready to respond to the Victorian Youth Strategy to which we were a part of consultations with youth which will be heavily focused around mental health prevention.

Volunteering is the focus – Jibreel

I have volunteered with The LOT (Youth Advisory Group) since its inception in 2018 and have had a range of experiences from event planning to activism for youth in Whittlesea. A key focus throughout my time on The LOT has been advocating for Dedicated Safe Youth Spaces. This has gained some momentum via meetings with Members of Parliament and Council inclusive of planning what this space would look like. Through this I have felt empowered since I am heard and have learnt how to conduct myself in formal meetings.

We have also run events such as a Multicultural Dance Night and a short film night to raise awareness for 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence. These have been successful, fun and inclusive events with a worthwhile message behind them. I have been able to connect with the community, learn and become a more well-rounded person. From these contributions I have been fortunate enough to receive a volunteer award presented by Andrew Giles.





6. Increase local employment through enterprise

Social Enterprises

driverED is a Social Enterprise driving school that delivers impacts beyond safe driving lessons. We provide opportunities for driving instructors who are looking for experience to develop a career in the industry. In its second year of operation this enterprise has grown. driverED now provides lessons across three Melbourne LGAs, Hume, Whittlesea and Nillumbik. Even though there was growth it was a difficult year for the team - stopping and starting lessons for learners at short notice - working with snap lockdowns and changing restrictions. However, a high point was securing lessons for the Hume L2P program and participating in the South Asian Women's driving program. Our instructors helped participants learn the skills to become independent and confident drivers.

Women in Work is a mobile childcare service that provides qualified women from migrant and refugee backgrounds to provide care to children whose parents are attending services, programs, education and training group activities. This program had limited demand this year due to covid19 restrictions in the local community impacting inviting external workers on site. We still provided 7 women with casual employment. The workers deliver an interactive safe and caring environment for the children which enables parents to participate in programs or appointments. The women are fully qualified childcare workers with WWC, First Aid, Anaphylaxis and current Police Checks.

Our Bus hire service continues to provide low cost, safe and reliable buses for community organisations. We have 23 community groups that regularly use our vehicles.

The Whittlesea Community Farm

Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC), Melbourne Polytechnic, the City of Whittlesea and Yarra Valley Water (YVW) are working in partnership to create the Whittlesea Community Farm and Food Collective (WCFFC). WCFFC will be an integrated model for community food production and distribution.

WCFFC is supported by the Victorian Government. In July 2020, the Victorian Government committed \$1.5 million to commence infrastructure development for the farm at Yarra Valley Water's 160 ha Aurora Treatment plant site, Wollert. The partners have committed a further \$0.9 million to the farm.

WCC and partners are working to finalise design of the first stage and obtain the necessary planning approvals. The design includes detailed farm and enterprise planning, which involves discussion with existing farmers, local stakeholders, networks, nurseries, conservation groups and interested residents



A Farm Community Advisory Group (CAG) has been established to engage, inform and facilitate broader community involvement in the project. The Farm CAG meets monthly.

Planning for farm enterprises and activities was conducted in late 2020 and during 2021, first with Hydra Consulting outlining our land-use options and then with YVW commissioning RM Consulting Group (RMCG) to create a Farm Management Plan based on those options. In analysing the environmental conditions of the site and the economic potential of farm activity options, certain activities have been deemed unfeasible (e.g. fruit orchards, large-scale in-ground annual horticulture), while the conservation zoning made others impossible (e.g. farm forestry). From this work, and from additional research by WCC, we have narrowed in on which activities could be financially viable commercial enterprises. Other activities are for different purposes, will achieve different outcomes and rely on grant funding.

While Melbourne Polytechnic will be managing their own on-site activities around education (agronomic research, livestock grazing, conservation and land management, and beekeeping), there is much potential for collaboration with WCC in the project.

Through involvement in the WCFFC, WCC aims to create a more equitable food system in the City of Whittlesea, by supporting households experiencing financial hardship, strengthening community connections, improving health and wellbeing, and increasing training and employment opportunites through community based food production and distribution.

WCC are proposing to develop an indigenous plant nursery, organic vegetable seedlings nursery, and trial a native seed/wildflower production area (SPA) and community horticulture area. These activities are the most appropriate combination that meet the sustainability and participation objectives while being suitable to the site. The nurseries will be structured as enterprises, with the intention to research and trial the SPA to determine how it can expand to commercial scale in the future.



6. Increase local employment through enterprise - continued

Employment support

Industry Connect Mentoring

Industry Connect Mentoring pairs adults from migrant, refugee and asvlum seeker backgrounds who are looking for pathways into professional employment, with volunteer mentors with knowledge of their industry. Beginning February 2021, mentors have helped participants to improve their industry knowledge, connections and confidence for employment in Australia. To date, two participants have secured employment related to their professional skills with their mentors' support.

Funding: Scanlon Foundation

Jobs Victoria Advocates (JVA)

The JVA team assists community members with pathways into employment, education and training, and informs people about employment support, local employment opportunities, emergency relief and mental health support.

Since May 2021 our WCC JVA team have supported over 300 community members with referrals into other WCC programs including employment, financial assistance program and volunteering, as well as to other community organisations and education providers.

In response to the COVID-19 lockdowns the JVA team has run online workshops and information sessions addressing new and emerging industries, TAFE and Learn Local courses, and building job seekers capacity.

In the next six months JVA plans to expand its information session topics and offer a wide range of Learn Local courses that can support people with gaining skills for 2022. The team will be working closely with new and existing businesses who are hiring, and support job seekers to access training in high demand industries.

Funding: Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions

Gender GG% FEMALE 34% MALE

Age

15-25: 14% 26-35: 18%

36-50: 55%

51-82: 13%

Top 3 Languages ENGLISH

ARABIC SINHALA

39

Rennie's Success story - Lani Sylva

I meet Lani at Westfield Plenty Valley when we had our JVA stall. She said she was confused about what to study. She was considering a Diploma in Community Services but she was not sure that would be something she would be interested doing. I mentioned that she could volunteer at a community services organisation like Whittlesea Community Connections so she could learn the skills to work with diverse backgrounds, practice her professional communication skills and more. Then she could make a decision about study. I supported her to obtain a volunteer role with WCC, and now she is studying Community Services at RMIT.

"YOU SAVED MY LIFE, YOU WERE THE ANSWER OF MY PRAYERS," THAT'S HER QUOTE. "YOU GAVE THE RIGHT GUIDANCE WHEN I WAS LOOKING WHAT TO DO, NOW I FOLLOW YOUR STEPS, I WILL FINISH MY STUDY AND WILL EXPLORE MY OPPORTUNITY IN COMMUNITY SERVICES. I DO ENJOY MY TIME VOLUNTEER WITH WCC."

LANI SYLVA



7. Mental health, connection and wellbeing

Between January 2021 and June 2021, CASI supported

64 client over 65,

186 born overseas,

176 who speak other than English at home,

120 identified as living with disability, and/or 5 who identified as Aboriginal Or Torres Strait Islander.

CASI provided 154 food parcels and gym memberships to stay active during the pandemic.

Community Activation and Social Isolation (CASI)

In June 2020, the Victorian Government announced the **Community Activation** and **Social Isolation (CASI)** initiative to help people who might be feeling lonely or have lost their regular networks during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. CASI aimed to help these people in building social connections and networks of support in their local communities. This initiative has benefit lots of communities who live in the city of Whittlesea to meet their practical, emotional or social needs in the context of COVID-19 and particularly those who have minimal social connections and informal supports.

The CASI program was able to connect with people who are feeling isolated and affected mentally, physically, socially and emotionally by COVID. Between January 2021 and June 2021, CASI provided support to 239 clients in linking them with emotional support where we provided a safe and confidential space for clients to share their stories and finding the suitable path for referral and ongoing support.

Funded by Victorian Government Department of Families Fairness and Housing.



The Friendly Connections Program

The Friendly Connections Program saw a steady pace addressing social isolation during the tough time of restrictions imposed by Covid. Friendships created from the start of the program in April 2020 continued to develop and strengthen while others came to an end and new friendships just begun. Overall 25 matches were sustained during the period. With one phone call being made each week by each volunteer this equates to 1300 phone calls.

The Community Visitors Scheme grew from five to twelve friendships. Three hundred and ninety phone calls were made with 44 face to face visits. Face to face visits did not take place during restrictions. Volunteers were so caring and generous with their matches.

Here are some comments from participants:

I LOOK FORWARD TO HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE, IT HELPS YOU ERASE THE MEMORIES OF THE SUICIDAL ATTEMPT AND FEELING OF LONELINESS.

I FEEL GOOD. WE HAVE GOOD CHATS AND LAUGHS. I DON'T KNOW, BUT WE LAUGH. I HAVE FAMILY IN SANDRINGHAM & THEY CAN'T COME. I FEEL BETTER WHEN I TALK TO HER. I FEEL DOWN BECAUSE OF MY SICKNESS. I FEEL BETTER TODAY, THANK GOD.

I THOUGHT IT'S VERY GOOD. I LIKE TALKING, MAKES ME FEEL BETTER.

HE IS LONELY, ISOLATED &
HAS SOME HEALTH ISSUES.
HE LOOKS FORWARD TO MY
PHONE CALLS EVERY WEEK.
THIS PROGRAM IS GOOD FOR
HIM AS HE STAYS HOME
MAINLY DUE TO MEDICAL
CONDITION, SO, IT'S NICE
FOR HIM TO HAVE SOMEONE
TO TALK TO.

A poem by Carolyn Kerns that captures the spirit of the Friendly Connections program:

A BUSY DAY, A BUSY WEEK
FOR MY FAMILY, MY FRIENDS, TOO
BUT NOW IT'S TIME TO STOP AND SAY
"HELLO, AND HOW ARE YOU?"

BUT NO ONE ANSWERS THE PHONE IT'S ANOTHER ANSWERING MACHINE ARE THEY IN CHURCH? AT A PARTY? OR THE BEACH? I'M FEELING ANYTHING BUT SERENE

I WANTED TO TALK TO SOMEONE
I HAVE A SECRET TO TELL
I GUESS IT WILL HAVE TO WAIT
MAYBE IT'S JUST AS WELL

NOW I HAVE SOME NEW FRIEND
I AM BLESSED IN MANY WAYS
WE REALLY CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER
THAT'S MORE THAN JUST OKAY

TOO BUSY WE ARE NOT
IT'S ALL ABOUT "MAKING TIME"
GETTING TOGETHER, TALKING
AND LAUGHING
IT'S NO LONGER AN UPHILL CLIMB.

CVS funded by the Australian Government Department of Health



Moving in to a second year of the COVID pandemic the Whittlesea Transport service focussed on safely assisting the community to attend essential shopping, allied health and medical trips.

In addition, the service strengthened its commitment to the wellbeing of our clients by conducting 6,421 welfare check phone calls.

We continued to maintain a thorough hygiene regime in all our vehicles to keep passengers and volunteers safe. With the help of a committed team of volunteers who courageously kept the service running throughout the year we delivered transport solutions five days per week enabling people get to where they needed to go. The service quickly adapted to changing restrictions to provide transport options for people in crisis.

We scaled up our service to deliver welfare check phone calls to our most vulnerable passengers. We made sure our clients didn't feel alone and that they knew who to call for help.

We continue to offer a free service for community members and are very grateful to have received further funding until 2023. Aside from our direct services we provide an opportunity for community members to volunteer as drivers and assistants. This offers volunteers a practical and meaningful way to help out and meet a diverse group of passengers at the same time. We continue to assist people who live as far north as Humevale, Whittlesea Township, and Doreen and a growing number of community members in growth suburbs are using the service. We have a fleet of five modern Toyota Hiace vehicles with leading edge safety features and navigation tools so we can carry our passengers safely and efficiently to where they need to go.

Funded by Australian Department of Health

9,560

Number of outputs completed

6,421

Number of Welfare phone calls

340

Number of Active Clients

24

Number of Volunteers



Mernda Community House

Mernda Community House opened its doors in the early months of 2019.

Since then our program has grown as have our valued community connections. Those connections allowed us to develop a community vision for the House which guides our purpose and direction. This vision embraces the ethos of social inclusion and connection, multi-culturalism, wellbeing and learning. Guided by ongoing community collaboration and engagement, we have focused on delivering engaging programs that meet the aspirations of our Neighbourhood and surrounds. Our programs areas include Health and Wellbeing, English Conversation, Gardening, Art and Craft, Home Work Club and Community Shed classes and activities.

Over the course of 2020/21 and due to the global pandemic and lockdown measures, we went on a steep learning curve which saw us adapting to technologies that allowed us to deliver our programs online.



This gave us the opportunity to stay connected to our core participants and meet other people who might otherwise not have participated in activities at the Community House. Through the first lockdown of 2020 our children's art program was one our most requested classes. Online classes allowed us to engage tutors from interstate and saw our first ukulele classes delivered. Further classes and programs were developed to engage more community members and to relieve some of the isolation and disconnection due to lockdown measures.

In this period we also delivered an online Multicultural Dinner Party celebration, our Weaving Community Harmony yarn bomb and community singing event and started the Women's Shed. This was all made possible through the collaborative efforts of volunteers, Advisory Group members and staff including two Working for Victoria Community Development Officers. With a newfound awareness of the importance of online communications the House also developed a website, finally launching it in December 2020.

We have much to look forward to despite the hurdles of the global pandemic. We are embarking on our Pathways for Carers program aimed at supporting local carers; expanding our popular Women's Shed program into our Community Shed program including, our upcoming fix-it program - Mernda Repair Café and other initiatives. Our enthusiasm for meeting, connecting and supporting local community never wains. We look forward to 2022 and a renewed opportunity to be a thriving community hub once again.

Unfortunately we were not able to proceed with our new community building due to Council's decision to complete a masterplan for the Mernda Recreation Reserve. This meant we had to return the infrastructure funding received from the Victorian Government which was included in our previous annual report. While this has significantly curtailed the anticipated community space available for the Mernda community we are working hard to find alternatives.

Funded by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and City of Whittlesea with project funding



Whittlesea Food Collective

ORESTE POMPETTI

Whittlesea Food Collective Coordinator

COVID continued to dominate the second half of 2020 but we emerged out of lockdown for most of the first part of 2021.

The first half of the reporting period saw the continued effort to provide emergency food relief support through packing and delivery of food boxes. A significant change at the Food Collective (and for WCC) was increase in staff for six months through the Working for Victoria State Government initiative. This introduced wonderful people and new opportunities for work activity to occur. Continued community support through financial and food donations assisted the effort and saw changes in our building with new asset and equipment purchases able to be made. As we transitioned into 2021 and out of lockdown living, the food relief model moved from delivering food boxes to allowing community members to come and access food directly from the shelves of our food relief Supermarket. The Schools Program also moved from an online focus group involving school staff representatives to face to face engagement with primary and high schools in the community. Food Collective activity encompasses Supermarket food relief (Wednesdays and Fridays) including the community garden activity, Schools Program, Settlement engagement among students at Melbourne Polytechnic and an emerging strengthening community focus around wellbeing and connection.

Volunteers continued to be an important part of the Food Collective effort assisting throughout the reporting year in the Supermarket and Garden. Two of our regular volunteers (Fadi Shedid & Issa Alchadaydah) were able to obtain Working for Victoria positions and continued on as volunteers after their contracts were completed. Steve Crennan, another regular volunteer, took up short term employment as our Supermarket coordinator. The commitment of our volunteer drivers meant we were able to continue providing support to make Big Group Hug deliveries for Council's Early Years team and WCC as a regular Thursday activity.

Partnerships continued to be an important part of our food relief effort with strong support from City of Whittlesea through its COVID relief funding and continued encouragement, support and collaboration with the Whittlesea Emergency Relief Network. This saw Encompass Care & Infinity Church continue in the collaborative shared use of Food Collective facility and systems to enable a greater level of food relief to reach the Whittlesea community.

Several financial and food donations have been made throughout the year by community members and organisations. This enabled the purchasing of pallet racking through a generous donation from CityLife church. Other donations were in the form of food and toiletry packs.

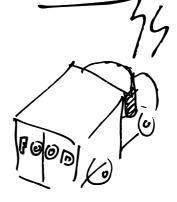
We were successful in obtaining grants as follows – the Honda Foundation that allowed us to purchase a forklift, a Stronger Communities grant with support from Andrew Giles MP to allow improving access and entry to the building and a Government COVID relief grant to support our work.

As we head into 2022 we will begin focused work on strengthening community connection - we received an Australia Post Grant in partnership with 3000 Acres with a focus on mental health and wellbeing to assist in this area.

The Grow to Give initiative received a grant from the Wanless Family Fund through the Australian Communities Foundation to enable sourcing of community fresh produce.

We delivered

173 tonnes dry goods/staples,
97 tonnes of fruit and vegetables,
7,200 doz eggs,
69,705 frozen meals,
11,160 food deliveries and
2,378 deliveries of baby and
children's items to households from
May 2020 to September 2021



It has certainly been a very challenging year for the volunteer sector in general, and in Whittlesea, to continue to operate given the health restrictions.

However, volunteer managers have demonstrated remarkable resilience and the ability to adapt to new models of virtual and safe volunteering which has helped keep our communities connected and safe. Interestingly, we have seen an increase in younger people and women take up remote volunteering; for example through the WCC contact centre,

financial assistance program, tutoring, social support and mentoring roles with other volunteer involving organisations. Also, informal volunteering has seen a sharp increase with community responding to supporting others with food insecurity and peer support to those suffering isolation.

Through volunteer training and volunteer manager training, the Whittlesea Volunteer Resource Service focused its work on keeping community members connected with a focus on Accidental Counsellor training, Inclusive volunteer practice and Effective Volunteer Engagement in a post-Covid environment.

Furthermore, the WVRS continued to facilitate the Whittlesea Volunteer and Community Engagement Network and strengthened its partnership with the Council of Whittlesea and Melbourne Polytechnic through a myriad of new projects to strengthen volunteering in Whittlesea

Volunteers have once again showed selfless commitment towards supporting the community in facing the continued pandemic challenges. With a surge in volunteers recruited to work in the contact centre to emergency relief and transport volunteers, Whittlesea Community Connections continues to attract volunteers from all walks of life and backgrounds. We want to thank our volunteers for exceeding their support to our community during these difficult times.

Funded through Australian Government Department of Social Services and City of Whittlesea



Thomastown West Community Hub

DEAN MARANDO

Children and Young People Team Leader

We continued our great work at Thomastown West Community Hub (TWCH) by going online, hosting our standard, yet popular Hub programs, such as Fun Reading Club, Young Voices in Media, STEAM, Homework Club and Crazy Art Club. We built a 'Hub' website that is dedicated to resourcing children and families and allowing them to be part of these programs from home.

The Koorie Kids Group program shares expertise through facilitation and passes on knowledge to the students within the program through meaningful activities that tie to Aboriginal culture.

The school holiday program is a four-day event that we facilitate every school holidays. These programs are a great opportunity to engage students in recreational activities during their holidays, who otherwise may not have been able to. We facilitated the "Art Studio programs", along with "Thursdays are for Thriving" and "Fun-Filled Friday."

Our partnership with Thomastown West Primary School continued to grow, along with schools like Lalor Secondary College as we supported young volunteers to tutor students in homework and Epping Secondary College as we co-facilitated a Koorie Mentoring program for students.

A program for newly arrived families was developed that provided community information, connection and English support for parents and carers whilst their children participated in a supported homework program at the Thomastown Language School. This is creating an ongoing partnership and access to helping those families in a settlement sense. We also worked with teachers to coordinate swimming lessons for students.

Funded by the Ward Ambler Family Foundation



Legal



That sentence, or words to that effect, are heard often around this legal service.

With eight solicitors and a Migration Agent, the fact that they are, is no accident. This service has been running off-site since April 2020, with no loss of services on offer to the hard pressed and the vulnerable of the City of Whittlesea.

Students in our La Trobe University Fines Clinic, for instance, took a story from 'Ms M', who had 117 fines. The money owed was \$37,000. For a decade from 2009, she bore up under all sorts of abuse by her partner, which included the fact that every one of these fines were his. With her IVO in hand, Chris Ryan, Moses Florendo and their team of Uni Students of the 'Fines Clinic', applied to Fines Victoria in August 2020, to cancel every one of these fines. By February 2021, Fines Victoria reported the success of the application, freeing Ms M from a crushing debt, so unjustly passed on to her.

Laws can respond to just demands.

Intervention by lawyers can change lives, preserve and benefit the kids of those who are stuck and fix entrenched injustice, because when there's a victory, everybody breaths easier. We all know how that is.

A case like that one, doggedly pursued by Chris, Moe and their team, proves it, as do so many cases we have brought this year.

Like the sum of \$20,000 awarded to a client of Moses Florendo, by the Victim's of Crime Assistance Tribunal, for loss of his earnings due to injury from assault. Sure it took a while. The other party was charged in the County Court for the crime and was finally convicted late last year. But on the 24th December 2020, the tribunal offered \$3,500 for pain and suffering, \$3,000 for a security system and \$6,600 for respite holiday, plus that handy sum of \$20,000, for loss earnings, as a result of which, the prospect of getting on with things, for this person, were rather enhanced.

Then there was the \$10,000 for a victim of sexual assault. And the \$3,200 for a car for a client assaulted near his home, together with further financial help. These are just a handful of the tens of thousands of dollars awarded to victims of crime, due to thorough and timely applications, prepared and prosecuted by every member of our team.

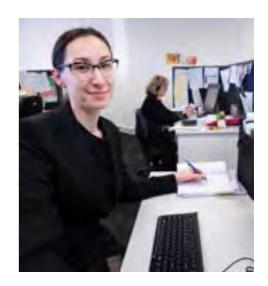
A single mum of 2 kids, who migrated from Zambia in 2000 with her former husband, was subjected to coercive control and other forms

of family violence. Then her dad died. His hospital bill was \$24,000. The hospital had got her to agree she should pay it. Wrongly. That was when she saw solicitor Jenny Williams at our place. Jenny told the hospital that they can't make a woman pay the debt of somebody else, and made the hospital to waive the debt. In full.

It was this mum who uttered to Jenny, the words with which this report began, and, in the name of our team of advocates, saints, misfits and holy people, it should also end...

"God bless you and the job that you do."

Funded by Victoria Legal Aid through the National Partnership Agreement between the Australian and Victorian Governments, and the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety



WCCs settlement services offers support and address the needs of recently arrived migrants and refugees in the first five years of their time in Australia.

WCC's committed caseworkers, worked with individuals, families and communities to navigate their journey into the Australian way of life by assisting with language skills, housing, community integration, financial hardship, immigration procedures and more. Despite the pandemic, Settlement team has delivered a wide range of group activities for the SETS clients in this reporting period.

Our Civics and Citizenship Group remains our most attended activity across the organisation. We also use the group to provide important information to the community, including civic rights, referrals, COVID-19 restrictions, and vaccinations. We also engage in topics that are considered taboo within the community, including sexual health, age of consent, and family violence.

Similarly, social groups including the Women's Group and Men's Group were well attended. These channels are used to provide important information and referrals and connect members of the community. This is especially important as refugee clients have reported feeling extra isolated and lack confidence in engaging in relevant support services during the lockdown. These groups include various activities, from mental & physical health services to financial counselling and housing literacy, including navigating Australian services. This year, WCC delivered specific sports activities for Women such as Yoga, Zumba and Pilates, as a response to reporting feelings of isolation and depression during lockdown.

Other group activities have been designed to target specific needs within the community, such as Computer classes, English-speaking classes, Homework Club, Retail Training, and Driving lessons. These activities involve the development of skills that are crucial for our clients' settlement journeys. Shared outcomes include increasing our clients' confidence, independence, and awareness of and engagement with relevant support services. We also engaged with Melbourne Polytechnic on a range of projects supporting SETS-eligible clients, including the Health Navigator Program with Northern Health. This program facilitated employment for 7 of the participants.

Funded by the Australian Government SETS program in partnership with Spectrum



TAC L2P and Road Safety

Despite the continuous interruption to the operations of the TAC L2P program and the loss of some volunteer mentors in the program due to restrictions, the program was able to rebound successfully. We recruited 21 new volunteer mentors to support learners who were severely impacted by the inability to drive during prolonged lockdown.

A fifth vehicle has been acquired and garaged at Mernda Police station to serve the growing demand from young people in the suburbs of Mernda, Doreen and Laurimar and reduce the travel time for mentors who live in the community.

Thirteen learners in the program were successful in gaining their probationary licence. The volunteer mentors also contributed a total number of 895 mentoring hours. The program was able to meet its annual target of 70 learners in spite of all the COVID challenges and restrictions.

Funded by Transport Accident Commission (TAC)



Community Road Safety

The Community Road safety program continues to deliver learner permit courses to our new arrived adult clients. With the ongoing support of VicRoads Bundoora 26 out of 30 participants acquired their probationary licence. A total of 15 learners successfully transitioned into the adult driving program. Over 150 professional lessons were purchased and offered with additional supervised driving support from volunteers. Due to COVID, 7 out of the 15 clients in the program were able to access tests from VicRoads and were successful in gaining their probationary licence.

Funded by Victorian Department of Transport











Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income for the Year Ended 30 June 2021

Note	2021 \$	2020 \$
Income		
Grants received	4,376291	3,743,043
Donations	32,429	51,610
Interest	19,989	21,958
Service generated income	61,682	142,132
Other revenue	645,262	421,827
Profit on disposal of fixed assets	-	23,182
•	5,135,653	4,403,752
Expenses		
Accounting & book-keeping fees	20,650	18,177
Advertising & marketing	65,739	17,526
Audit fees	6,000	5,650
Bad Debts	· -	200
Bank charges	540	1,409
Depreciation	121,861	104,159
Interpreting services	17,320	6,149
Information technology	112,401	65,609
Insurance	3,722	3,665
Interest Paid	2,329	3,100
Legal practicing certificate	2,682	1,921
Meeting expenses	1,230	1,278
Motor vehicle expenses	40,278	54,197
Printing and stationery	13,124	14,427
Police and working with children checks	3,571	1,294
Postage and couriers	2,544	3,242
Program costs	708,163	378,052
Rent and outgoings	81,982	89,231
Repairs and maintenance	2,380	1,281
Subscriptions and memberships	16,648	27,847
Sundry expenses	5,385	5,564
Telephone and internet	32,649	24,225
Volunteers' expenses	2,832	9,708
Wages and related costs	3,305,889	3,173,545
Total expenses	4,569,919	4,011,456
Operating surplus (deficit) before income tax	565,734	392,296
Income tax expense 2(e)		
Operating (deficit) surplus for the year	565,734	392,296
Other comprehensive income		
Total comprehensive income for the year	565,734	392,296

		Note	2021 \$	2020 \$
Statement of Financial Position	Current Assets			
as at 30 June 2021	Cash and cash equivalents		3,621,038	1,878,967
,	Trade receivables		157,543	187,459
	Sundry receivables		33,147	146,350
	Housing loans		18,319	10,727
		-	3,830,047	2,223,503
	Non-Current Assets			_
	Plant and equipment	4	380,444	410,794
	Investments		60	60
			380,504	410,854
	Total Assets		4,210,551	2,634,357
	Current Liabilities	-		
	Trade creditors		180,894	81,458
	Sundry creditors and accruals		124,203	73,593
	Grants to be carried forward	5	1,663,315	822,501
	Provision for employee entitlements	6	592,300	539,500
	Secured loans	_	33,200	33,200
		_	2,593,912	1,550,252
	Non-Current Liabilities			
	Secured loans		3,620	36,820
			3,620	36,820
	Total Liabilities	_	2,597,532	1,587,072
	Net Assets	_	1,613,019	1,047,285
	Equity			
	Accumulated surplus brought forward		1,047,285	654,989
	Current year surplus		565,734	392,296
	Total Equity	-	1,613,019	1,047,285
			Accumu	lated Surplus \$
Statement of Changes in	Balance as at 1 July 2019			654,989
Equity for the Year Ended	Surplus for the year			392,296
30 June 2021	Balance as at 30 June 2020	-		1,047,285
	Surplus for the year			565,734
	Balance as at 30 June 2021	-		1,613,019
	-	-		, -,

Statement of Cash Flows
for the Year Ended
30 June 2021

r	Note	2021 \$	2020 \$
Cash flows from operating activities			
Receipts from operations		7,513,613	4,467,158
Interest received	_	16,619	23,073
Cash inflows		7,530,232	4,490,231
Payments to suppliers and employees	_	(5,696,650)	(3,942,171)
Net operating cash flows	3(b)	1,833,582	548,060
Cash flows from investing activities			
Net payments for plant and equipment		(91,511)	(243,345)
Net investing cash flows		(91,511)	(243,345)
Net (decrease)/increase in cash held		1,742,071	304,715
Cash at the beginning of the financial year	-	1,878,967	1,574,252
Cash at the end of the financial year	=	3,621,038	1,878,967



THANK YOU TO THE AMAZING PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT HAPPEN





OUR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Whittlesea Community Connections. We have over 300 volunteers, who enable us to deliver an enormous range of activities and programs.

Our volunteers come from all walks of life and backgrounds, and bring this rich diversity into our organisation enriching our capacity to connect and support the most vulnerable in our community.

Their dedication, loyalty and care for the people we serve and support has been brought sharply into focus this year as we have come in and out of lockdowns. Through their remarkable flexibility and resilience we have been able safely to continue to deliver and support our community throughout the pandemic.

On behalf of the Board of Management, I would like to express our heartfelt and deep appreciation for the passion, commitment and loyalty of our volunteers. Your contribution has been instrumental in making Whittlesea Community Connections a valued resource in our community.

- Aaron Bezzina
- Suzi Duncan
- Vicki Ann Selvaggio
- Diana Condello
- Nicole Smith-Walker
- Nessie Sayar
- Patricia Nibete Munyad
- Oliver Navlor
- Rima Faisal
- Aisha Khurram
- Patricia Munyao
- Ana Prado
- Sasha Sullivan
- Mayank Sharna
- Chuang Kong
- Avman Mahli
- Katherine Baverstock
- Shahin Yazidifar
- Jamie Sagaran

- Ray Wyatt
- Narjas Albahrani
- Hansikaa Sharma
- Gregory Luttick
- Issa Alchadaydah
- Janelle Collins
- John Fry
- Judy Franklin
- Karen Gail Mckenzie
- Ronald William
- Steph Samsa
- David Whelan
- lesse Mann
- Kinan Alayche
- Suzan Makhoul
- Avneet Kumar
- Muhamad Abduh
- Naomi Spence
- Maria Rafferton

















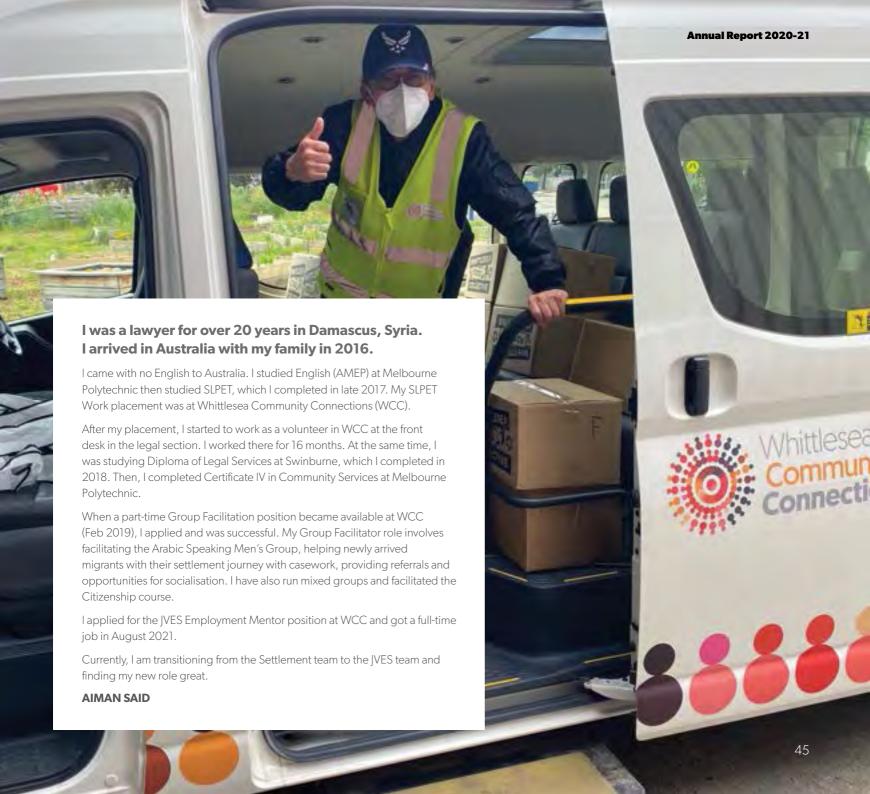


- Barbara Vaughan
- Dalia Mahmoud
- Fred Venturini
- Jennifer (Jenny) Delaney
- lose Mari Marco
- Julie Parry
- Murray O'Callaghan
- Nicola (Nick) Parisi
- Owen Stanley Waldie
- Steven Howell
- William Hutchins
- Denis Fitzgibbon
- David Williams
- Linda Rayner
- Angela Bausch
- Carmel Sannino
- Leeanne White
- Samar Fouda
- Shoukry Sidrak
- Zianeb Ramadan
- Aya Cheikh Hussein
- libreel Rafig
- Marianne Bottroos
- Aron Raward
- Hadi Ehtsham
- Abby Shaker
- Alees Awadecean
- Christopher Siderakis
- Gurneet Kaur
- Humeyra Yildiz

- Jennifer Haarsma
- lessica Barnes
- Jessica Dixon Elliot
- Ionathon Samuel
- Julie Harris
- Luma Alhendi
- Patience Masawi
- Peter Coad
- Rahul Rajrana
- Rama Kadrou
- Rana Faez Hazim
- Shrishti Nambiar
- Tom Ward
- Tomah Arrad
- Kaif UI Wara
- Anne Mouawad
- Chelsea Lo Giudice
- Elyse Weidlich
- Poornima lywan
- Reham Alzin
- Sonay Dilekcan
- Anna Karoutsos
- Devika Chandrar
- Lauren Powell
- Michelle Davies
- Prabhjeet Kaur
- Kawaliit Kaur
- Rhea Velasco
- Rimah Wassouf
- Fadi Shedid

- Louise Bartolome
- Mia Woodward
- Rani Pentecost
- Lauren Maruff
- Marcelle Burkitt
- Tracey Greig
- Wayne Leech
- Hettiyadura Fernando
- Fars Saeed
- Nazryn Azhar Samat
- Michelle Garvan
- Robyn Keane
- Lisa Baldini
- Mark D'Alessandro
- lackie Roberts.
- Naga Meghana Korada
- Jenny Nicholls
- Leigh Bradstreet
- Lucy Watson (nee Krzewski),
- Harry Williams
- Sooma Nosratpour
- Anna Sinclair
- Holly Cannon
- Isabella Rizzo
- Preranaa Khanna
- Mariam Almusawy
- Bronwyn Dooley
- Sandra Hannaashmony
- Juwange Fernando
- Hassan Rasool

- Prakriti |nawali
- Michael Damcevski
- Richa Sharma
- Rommy Noeth
- Elizabeth Anagnostou
- Elzbieta (Ella) Gruntowicz
- Nilam Kothari













OUR STAFF (AS AT JUNE 2021)

Aiman Said Group Facilitator & Settlement Worker

Alex Haynes CEO

Anas Qishta Data and Evaluation Support

Ann Lightowler

Belinda Leon Community Support Manager Caterina Angelis Student placement coordinator **Charlotte Gordon**

Chris Howse Principal Solicitor Chris Rvan Community Lawyer

Dean Marando Children & Young People Team Leader

Deepty Cusima Family Violence Response and Prevention Worker

Dixsha Dhar Community Engagement worker **Edmond Babatunde** Team Leader - L2P Program **Emma Antonetti** Equity and Impact Manager

Emma Navarro Whittlesea Volunteer Resource Service Coordinator

Emma O'Neill Family Violence Lawyer

L2P Coordinator Kinglake Ranges and Whittlesea **Erwin Zuber**

Eva Mumbler Aboriginal Youth Worker

Georgianna Brooks Community Transport & Assessment Worker **Ginette Beguely** Emergency Relief Coordinator/Caseworker

Grozda Nedelikovic Immigration Advisor **Hassan Rasool** lobs Victoria Advocate Settlement Team Leader **Hiba Ayass**

Community Connector Coordinator/Caseworker **Hiyah Rahman** Administration Support Mernda Community House lackie Mathew

Jennie Barnes Jobs Victoria Advocate **Jenny Williams** Community Outreach Lawyer

Katriece Bolden Gender Equity & Family Violence Team Leader Kim Lai

Leila Dashti

Michael Damcevski Office Coordinator

Michelle Newton Volunteer Engagement Coordinator

Michelle Patching

Moses Florendo Community Outreach lawyer

Norma Medawar **Employment Pathways Coordinator Oreste Pompetti** Whittlesea Food Collective Coordinator

Pablo Gimenez Development Manager

Paras Christou Coordinator Mernda Community House **Parry Williams** Manager Operations and Enterprise

Pradeep Timalsina Finance Support Officer

Community Support Worker and Contact Centre Prakriti Inawali

Coordinator

Community Lawyer **Rema Panaligan** Rennie Ervinawati lobs Victoria Advocate San Rupasinghe lobs Victoria Advocate Sarah Wassouf **Hub Support Worker**

Sharna Brown Aboriginal Engagement & Caseworker

Sonali Sehgal Community Transport Administration Worker

Sreyasi Chaudhuri

Whittlesea Food Collective Supermarket Coordinator **Steven Crennan**

Tanya Stelmach Family Violence Lawyer

Toni Bentley Community Primary Prevention Projects Coordinator Contact Centre Coordinator & Transport Admin Vanessa Galea Viktor Faulknor Whittlesea Community Farm Coordinator

Vivian Butler Team Leader Job Advocates

Zianeb Ramadan Hub Support Worker

Farewelled

Abril Garcia Negron
Ahmed Alsabe
Audrey Dalton-Power
Casey Godinez
Fadi Shedid
Hannah Chubb
Holly Cannon
Hugo Pinzon
Kat Mullen
Kathleen Halstead
Katie O'Brien
Khaled Ali
Kyrie Nunan-Jackson
Mandy Giannarelli
Michael Kinyua
Micheline Erbes
Mina Pedanesi
Pabitra Sharma
Peta Duncan
Ruvee Ratnayake
Sadia Amjad
Stephanie Scherping
Stuart Luscombe
Tavebeh Haiizadeh

Women in Work Childcare Workers

Ahlam Mina Fawzia Abuka Gemila Nur Lina Salem Nagwa Kori Rachel Kori Raifa Hussein

Driving Instructors

Ekueta Anelita Fono Issa Alchadaydah Zeinab Adelpour

English Teachers/Learn Local Facilitators

Hazel Rice Mina Gebraeel Rohan Kioney Shruti Malavde Taleisha Wakelin Tania Stone

Health Navigators

Basant Ahmed Fatima Ait Bela Ou Ali Ferdaous Farjallah Morteza Fayyazi Muhamad Abduh Saadiya Khan



OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

Thank you to all the people and organisations who partner with us to deliver better outcomes for our community.

Service and Project Partners

- Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau
- Banyule Community Health
- Big Group Hug
- Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre
- Cabrini Outreach
- Campbell Page Disability Employment
- Cancer Council Victoria
- Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)
- Centre for Participation Horsham
- City of Whittlesea
- Community Information and Support Victoria (CisVIC)
- Creeds Farm Living and Learning
- Deakin University
- DPV Health Limited
- Eastern Metropolitan Primary Health Network
- Encompass Care
- Epping Secondary College
- Kinglake Neighbourhood House
- Haven Home Safe
- Home Ground Real Estate
- Hope Street
- Housing Choices Australia
- Hume Whittlesea LLEN
- Infinity Church Community Meals Kitchen
- InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence

- La Trobe University Law School
- Launch Housing
- Merri Outreach Support Services (MOSS)
- Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre
- Thomastown West Primary School
- Thomastown Language School
- PRACE
- The Smith Family
- Melbourne North Food Group
- Melbourne Polytechnic
- Northern Centre for Sexual Assault (NCASA)
- Northern Health
- Northern Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Service – Berry Street
- Victorian Legal Aid
- Victoria Police
- Volunteering Victoria
- Whittlesea Community House
- Whittlesea FoodShare
- Women's Legal Service Victoria
- Women's Property Initiative
- Yarra Plenty Regional Library
- Yarra Valley Water
- Edgars Creek Secondary College
- Melbourne Polytechnic (Koorie VCAL program)
- St Monica's College
- Epping Secondary College
- Ashley Park Primary School
- Hume Grammar Anglican Primary School

• St Mary's Parish Primary School

We also appreciated the support of our local MP's – Andrew Giles (Federal Member for Scullin), Rob Mitchell (Federal member for McEwen), Bronwyn Halfpenney (Member for Thomastown), Lily D'Ambrosio (Member for Mill Park) and Danielle Green (Member for Yan Yean)

Funding Partners, Donors and Sponsors

- Alpaslan Ocal
- Andrea Babon
- Arilla Retirement Village
- Ashley Park Primary School
- Australian Communities Foundation
- Barbara lackson
- BAS Foods
- Bendigo Bank
- Bonnie Gill
- Brite
- Bunnings (Epping and Mernda)
- Bupa
- Cadell Food Services
- Capital Tyres South Morang
- CityLife Church (Lalor)
- City of Whittlesea
- Connecting Home
- Craig Parker
- Commonwealth Bank (South Morang Plenty

Valley and Thomastown)

- Downer Group
- DPV Health Limited
- Dyson Group
- Enjoy Church North
- Fruit2Work
- GenesisCare Oncology Victoria (Epping)
- Hume Whittlesea Primary Care Partnership
- Ian Potter Foundation
- JMD Australia (Epping)
- Fareshare
- Greek Orthodox Church Thomastown
- Honda Foundation
- Mainwest Forklift Service
- Major Roads Victoria
- Melbourne City Mission
- Montmorency Asylum Seeker Support Group
- Northern Kia
- NSM Importers & Wholesalers
- O'Brien Electrical Thomastown
- Pets for the Homeless
- Procal Dairies
- Rotary Club of Bundoora
- Rotary Club of Whittlesea
- Siobhan Steven
- Tamil Women's Intercultural Organisation
- The Queens Fund
- Trio Plumbing
- Scanlon Foundation
- Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre
- SunRice
- Sunshine and Crocodiles Pty Ltd
- Victor Lee
- Ward Ambler Foundation
- Westpac (Whittlesea)
- Yarra Valley Water
- Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

Government Funding Partners

- Australian Department of Health
- Australian Department of Home Affairs
- Australian Department of Industry, Innovation and Science
- Australian Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Australian Department of Social Services
- City of Whittlesea
- Family Safety Victoria (FSV)
- Transport Accident Commission (TAC)
- VicRoads
- Victorian Department of Education Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE)
- Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) – Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)
- Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety (DICS)
- Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR)
- Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion
- Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, Office of Youth (DPC)
- Victoria Legal Aid
- Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation

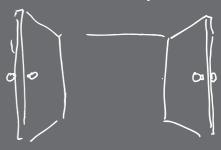
Thank you to our key suppliers including ID Yours, Impact Digital, Finrea, Anthony McKee Photographer, ARZO Consulting and Allen Gerson for their ongoing support.

Thank you to all the people and groups who generously donated throughout the year, particularly those who enabled us to extend our support during COVID. Thank you also to all those clients who supported our community enterprises.









Volunteer

We are always looking for new volunteers of all backgrounds and experience to join our WCC team. If you are interested in finding out more about volunteer opportunities in Whittlesea give us a call on 94016666 and someone will get in touch with you to organise an interview or else log onto our website and fill in the below volunteer registration form -

www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/community-services/volunteer-registration

Donate

Please contact our CEO, Alex Haynes, if you would like to invest in the work we do with the residents of the City of Whittlesea. You can also donate via the link on our website.

GET INVOLVED

Information

whittleseacc.org.au

facebook.com/whittleseacommunityconnections

Become a member

Members of WCC contribute to the community ownership and direction of this unique local and independent organisation. Our strength lies in the support given by local people. Joining is easy. Contact us or complete a membership form from the website.

Partner with us

The needs and aspirations of our growing community are significant and we cannot respond alone. Get in touch if you are interested in partnering with us to deliver services, activities or create new opportunities for Whittlesea.

