



Whittlesea  
**Community  
Connections**

# Annual Report 2023-24



**making a positive difference everyday**





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

**Telephone**  
03 9401 6666

**Locations**  
Shop 111, Pacific Epping,  
571 High Street, Epping VIC 3076  
Thomastown West Community Hub,  
98 Main Street, Thomastown VIC 3074  
Mernda Neighbourhood House,  
2 Heals Road, Mernda VIC 3754  
Food Collective,  
Melbourne Polytechnic Epping campus,  
Dalton Road, Epping, VIC, 3076

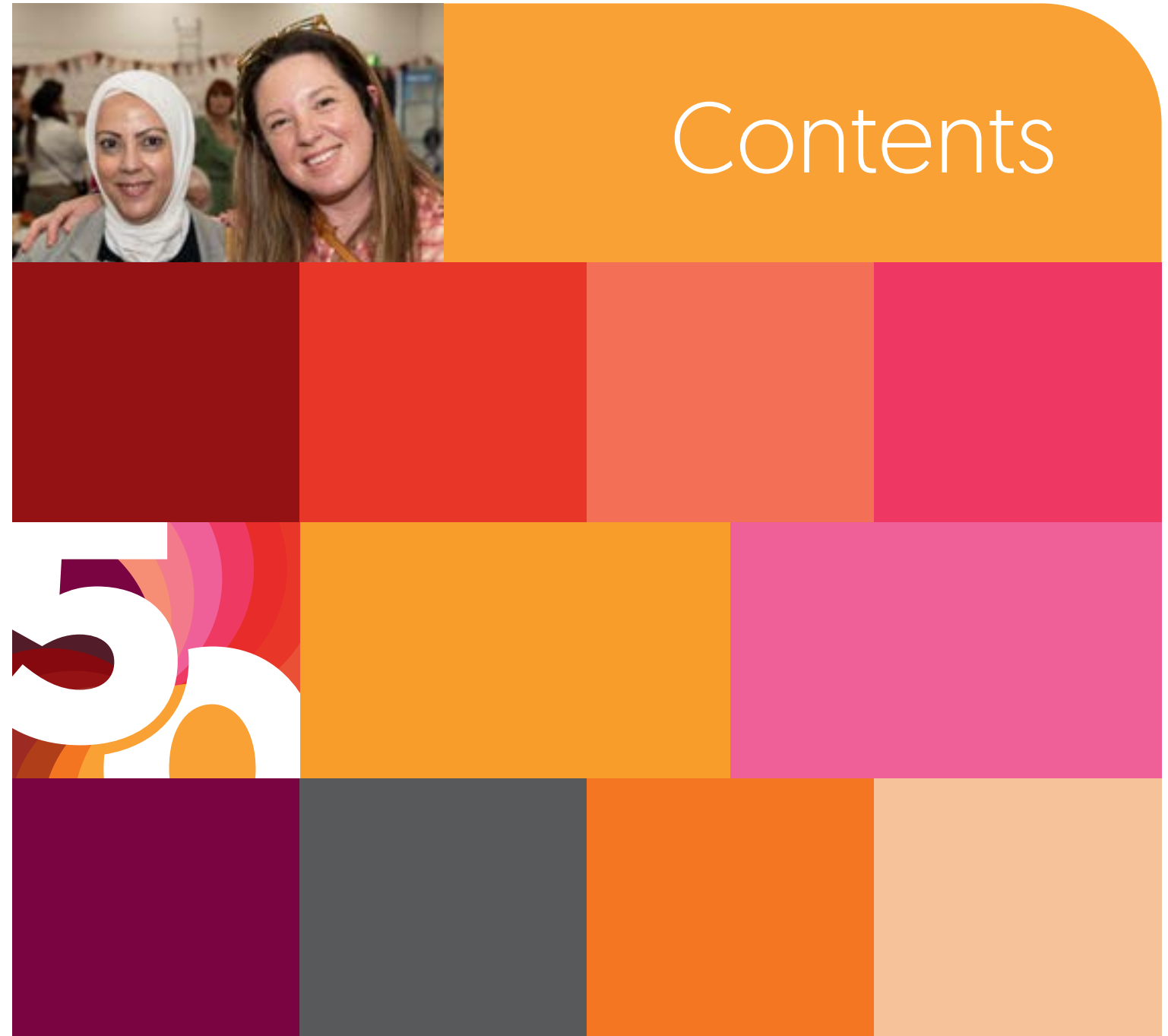
**Website**  
[www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au](http://www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au)

**Social Media Links**

-  **Facebook**  
[www.facebook.com/whittleseacommunityconnections](http://www.facebook.com/whittleseacommunityconnections)
-  **LinkedIn**  
[www.linkedin.com/company/whittleseacc/mycompany](http://www.linkedin.com/company/whittleseacc/mycompany)
-  **Instagram**  
[www.instagram.com/wcc\\_connect/?hl=en](http://www.instagram.com/wcc_connect/?hl=en)
-  **YouTube**  
[www.youtube.com/channel/UC7WJ3f0cRTrC\\_nI2WEBz09A](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7WJ3f0cRTrC_nI2WEBz09A)
-  **Sound Cloud**  
<https://soundcloud.com/user-560210663>

Whittlesea Community Connections acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we provide our services, the Wurundjeri Woi- Wurrung Clan of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and confirm our commitment to reconciliation, justice and the recognition of the living culture of all Aboriginal people.

Cover Photo: Faces of WCC Photo credit: Anthony McKee



# Our Board

As at 30 June 2024

Thank you to Harry Jenkins, Peta Fualau, Teresa Farid, Vicki Selvaggio and Lambrina Gimian for their contribution to the Board.

<b>Emmanuel Gauci</b>	President
<b>Richard Schwartz</b>	Treasurer
<b>Suzi Duncan</b>	Secretary
<b>John Fry</b>	Volunteer Representative
<b>Susmita Dhakal</b>	Volunteer Representative
<b>Andrew Morrison</b>	Member
<b>Susan Nikolaidis</b>	Member
<b>Ray Rosales</b>	Member
<b>Sylvia Tran</b>	Member
<b>Sandra Natale</b>	Member
<b>Ewen Luc</b>	Co-opted Member
<b>Jacqui Ellul</b>	Co-opted Member

# Our Community Advisors

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 insights 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 and more connected community.



## Women’s Advisory Group (WAG) and Community Leader Working Group (CLWG)

- Amrita Gurung – CLWG
- Barbara Minuzzo – WAG & CLWG
- Entissar Aasi – WAG & CLWG
- Hisham Aburghif – CLWG
- Jamuna Adhikari Rijal – WAG & CLWG
- Krishanthi Liyanage – WAG & CLWG
- Manvir Kaur – WAG & CLWG
- Praveena Rajkopal – CLWG
- Roslina Maharjan – CLWG
- Susmita Dhakal – WAG & CLWG

Funding from Sunshine and Crocodiles Pty Ltd enabled the CLWG to continue to provide a community and lived experience lens to WCC’s gender equity and family violence programs.

## LOT (Leaders of Tomorrow) – Youth Advisory Group

- Haleemah Inam
- Halimah Sheikh
- Jack Sapardanis
- Kimberly Chu
- Marie Eitel
- Mily Elambasseril
- Noor El Mohammed
- Nour Maqsodi
- Sanjiah Ullah
- Shreyalina Victoria
- Theodore Williams
- Alaa Alrahal
- Ayn Jayesh
- Fizza Yazdani
- Marianne Bottroos
- Sophia Ocon
- Victoria Winata
- Zara Khan
- Hayley Thomas

Planning their 100<sup>th</sup> meeting since forming in 2018, the LOT have remained an integral part of WCC. They have helped design youth programs, helped to facilitate youth forums and continued to advocate for locally accessible safe youth spaces, highlighting key issues experienced by young people in Whittlesea. The LOT have focused on media bias and misinformation in the media and are currently working on a community education workshop. This year the Youth Advisory Group informed WCC’s decision-making in areas including food insecurity and participated in projects including affirmative consent, RUOK day and the Youth Awards event, recognising young people’s contribution to the City of Whittlesea.

## Mernda Neighbourhood House Advisory Group

- Carrie Chen (Chairperson)
- Krishanthi Liyanage
- Muhamad Abduh
- Soo Hoon Chua
- Glen O’Brien
- Emerie Agunwah
- Liz Buckley (Secretary)
- Angela Roper

Our Advisory Group plays a pivotal role in shaping and advancing Mernda Neighbourhood House. Comprising dedicated local residents, this group provides vital guidance, advocacy, and representation across various government and community platforms. Whether longstanding members or new contributors, their professional and personal experiences are invaluable. As we embark on exciting changes, including transitioning to an independent, incorporated entity, their expertise will be crucial. We appreciate their ongoing support and look forward to navigating this significant transformation with them.

# President's Report

It is a privilege to present the annual report for the 2023/2024 financial year.



Whittlesea Community Connections has been celebrating a major milestone this year – our 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.

- 50 years of service to the community;
- 50 years of volunteering by people of good will who care about their community;
- 50 years of listening to the community and working with local people to develop solutions;
- 50 years of partnering with local and other community organisations, and with all levels of government and philanthropy, to develop and implement initiatives to respond to those challenges; and
- 50 years of advocacy, creativity and innovation.

We commenced our celebration with a birthday party in December to mark when, as the Whittlesea Citizens Advice Bureau, we opened our doors. During the year, we recognised the contribution of our volunteers and held a special celebration acknowledging the contribution of women to the success and longevity of WCC and recognising the gender equity activities that WCC has initiated over the years.

Throughout our history, our volunteers have been the backbone and bedrock of the organisation. Their passion, dedication, energy and commitment to service have enabled WCC to broaden its reach while remaining connected to local people and local needs. Their generosity is awe inspiring and humbling – a real reflection of the social capital that exists in our community.

Complementing our volunteers has been the dedication, creativity and professionalism of our staff, empowered by our CEO Alex Haynes. Across all our program areas we have seen significant developments that respond to the growing demand for services, the increasing complexity of our clients' needs and the diversity of our clients' circumstances. At the same time, we have invested in our social enterprises, not only as avenues for employment and training for local people but also as a long-term means of increasing our financial independence.

Change has been a constant theme in our history, and this year has been no exception. This change is driven by the need to respond to a growing and diverse community who live with significant economic, social and psychological challenges. This report will outline some of these challenges and our programmatic responses.

I am indebted to my fellow Board members for their confidence, guidance, support and contribution. I would like to thank Andrew Morrison, Ewen Luc, Jacqui Ellul Gardner, John Fry, Ray Rosales, Richard Schwartz, Sandra Natale, Susan Nikolaidis, Susmita Dhakal, Suzi Duncan and Sylvia Tran. I also want to acknowledge the enormous contribution of long term Board members, friends and volunteers of WCC who retired from the Board during the year - Harry Jenkins, Peta Fualau, Teresa Farid and Vicki Selvaggio. I also thank Lambrina Gimian for her contribution as a Board member this year.

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.

It is an honour and a privilege to serve as the organisation's President and to work with such an extraordinary group of people.

**EMMANUEL GAUCI**  
*President, Whittlesea Community Connections*

# CEO's Report

Place based community led organisations are becoming very rare which makes celebrating 50 years of Whittlesea Community Connections even more special.



It's a 50 year journey of harnessing community passion, participation, practical support and hope and it was made possible by over 3,000 volunteers.

While our values and our partnership approach have stayed with us and are embedded in who we are, the community and environment in our outer metropolitan region have changed so quickly we are always listening and learning. Our connections to the people of our region help us to respond to what our communities really need and want from us and hold us to account. Our strategic priorities guide us and help to identify the gaps and frame the things that we are well placed to do. Over 50 years we have learnt to harness our connections and creativity to make something good from our hard work, determination and advocacy.

This year we aligned our organisational structure with our strategic priorities to give us the best chance of real and sustained progress over the coming years. All our new partnerships and funding relate directly to our priorities and this has helped build strong teams and internal collaborations.

Some of the highlights

- Celebrated ten years at Thomastown West Community Hub and the Women's Group grant program which was only possible because of the extraordinary generosity of two long term philanthropic partners
- Expanded our Economic Pathways for Refugee Integration program to support 150 refugees into pathway into training, job readiness, and English
- Launched our Social Justice Project and La Trobe Law School clinics
- Extended our employment services to the City of Hume supporting 250 long term unemployed people into work
- Established nugal biik plants and seeds and grew our first 30,000 indigenous plants for Hanson Australia
- Redesigned our intake system to improve clients experience

We can only have the impact we do because we are so well supported by volunteers and partners. Thank you to everyone who calls us a friend and I hope you can see yourself in our success and the community outcomes we contribute to. And I can only do what I do because I am so well supported by the incredible WCC staff and the Board, particularly our Chair Emmanuel Gauci.

The foresight, empathy and hard work of all those community champions who contributed to WCC's success over the first fifty years has changed thousands of lives and futures of people in our region. Here's to an even more successful and enriching next 50 years.

**ALEX HAYNES**  
*CEO, Whittlesea Community Connections*



Alex Haynes , Deirdre Worn , Jemal Ahmet

# 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
- 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
- CALD women's groups grants
- Community development activities and events
- Children & Young People Services (programs, support & child safe training)
- Community support, information and referral
- Community transport
- Employment support
- Family violence prevention
- Financial assistance, NILS and material aid
- Food Collective
- Hardship Help
- Legal information, advice, casework and advocacy
- Mernda Neighbourhood House
- Migration advice and casework
- Pre-accredited learning through Learn Local (ACFE)
- Road safety, L2P and adult and women's driving programs
- Settlement advice, casework and support groups
- Tax help

- Thomastown West Community Hub
- Volunteer Resource Service
- Women's Employment & Empowerment Project
- Wollert Community Farm

Social Enterprises

[www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/community-enterprises/](http://www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/community-enterprises/)

- driverED driving school
- nugal biik plants and seeds
- Food Collective café and catering
- Women in Work mobile childcare

Collaborative networks facilitated by WCC

- Whittlesea Emergency Relief Network
- Whittlesea Family Violence Network
- Whittlesea Anti-Racism support Network
- Whittlesea Volunteer Partnership and Engagement Network



Highlight

# Celebrating 50 Years

Whittlesea Community Connections opened its doors as the Whittlesea Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in December 1973 in an office above a shop at 274 Station Street in Lalor.

The creation of the CAB was an initiative of the local Inter Church Council where 20 people came together - ministers and members of the congregations from St Paul's and St John's Church of England, from Presbyterian and Methodist churches in Lalor/Thomastown and from St Luke's Catholic Church in Lalor – to set up the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Over those 50 years, the organisation has grown enormously, supported over that time by more than 3,000 volunteers and staff.

We began operating from one site with 18 volunteers, 7 of whom were trained Community Information workers, opening for 10-12 hours per week and with an operating income of not much more than \$1000.

The 1970s, was a period of establishment for the CAB. Within 12 months the office moved to an upstairs office at 284 Station Street, at the invitation of Mr Tony Comito – a local solicitor. Between 1974 and 1979, the CAB handled over 1000 enquiries. Operating with an average of around 20 volunteers, for two hours per day, Monday to Friday and with minimal funding. Volunteers went across town to Hawthorn once a week to attend a 13-week training course. Volunteer numbers fluctuated and in the early years the CAB also relied on volunteers from the Preston and Diamond Creek CABs. Preston also allowed Whittlesea volunteers to participate in their training sessions. The CAB quickly gained a reputation for being a valuable source of information about local community resources.

The first grants, totalling \$1000, came from the Thomastown Rotary Club and from the Council. Fundraising became an important source of income for the CAB. By 1978, a Monday night free legal aid service was commenced with the support of Mr Tony Comito. The 1970s also saw the appointment of the Coordinator Deidre Worn.

By the 1980s, the CAB was dealing with an average of 2000 cases per year, reaching a peak of 3590 in 1989/90. Two thirds of clients were women, and the issues most commonly presented were family and personal relationships, income support, legal issues and emergency relief. Operating hours doubled to 20 hours per week, although volunteer numbers remained low, averaging around 20 per year. There was a core of volunteers who remained from the early days, people such as Jean Denman, Margaret and Jim Gloster, Mary Goodwin, Evelyn Heims, Wilma Mason, Deirdre and Peter Worn, Rita Hawkins and Glenys Williams. Many of these individuals continued into the 1990s, committing twenty years or more to the organisation and several also served on the Committee of Management.

The CAB's financial resources also increased although still small, at less than \$10,000 per year. The Shire was a major funder with annual grants of between \$3-4,000. Fundraising continued to be an important source of income. The most significant event for the CAB in the 1980s was the move to the new Lalor Library Complex, at the invitation of the Shire of Whittlesea.

The impact of this relocation is reflected in the substantial increase in individuals who presented to the CAB, from 1760 cases in 1986/87 to 3590 by 1989/90. Cr Harry Jenkins represented the Shire on the Committee of Management from the 1970s until his election as the Member for Scullin in the mid-1980s.

In the 1990s the CAB, now known Community Information Whittlesea, broadened its operations with the appointment of a social worker, Nilufer Yaman, dedicated to improving access to members of our multicultural communities. Funded by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration & Ethnic Affairs, this was the commencement of a dedicated settlement service that has continued to this day. Through Nilufer's efforts, the organisation developed new policies and procedures, produced multilingual information and trained bilingual Community Information workers through the Lalor Living and Learning centre. The service dealt with over 50,000 cases in that time, increasing steadily from 5702 in 1990/91 to 11,486 in 1998/99. The proportion of clients from multicultural communities increased from 13.8% in the mid-1980s to 39.8% by 1997/98



During the 1990s, Community Information Whittlesea:

- held the first International Womens' Day event and first Refugee Week celebrations,
- began a free Taxation service supported by volunteers and students from La Trobe University's Accounting School.
- expanded the settlement services with dedicated Macedonian workers
- began working with refugee young people, and with African communities and,
- created a Women's Health and Domestic Violence Service.

Importantly in 1996, the organisation moved to Epping Plaza, with support from Council. Council substantially increased its annual grant and we secured additional income from the Commonwealth Government for settlement services. The organisation's income had grown from just over \$9,000 in 1990/91 to over \$330,000 by 1999/2000.

As we moved into the new century, Community Information Whittlesea, under the leadership of Jemal Ahmet, and the chairmanship of Peter Cleeland, began to expand its range of services, attracting funding from a range of State and Commonwealth departments. The organisation's income had increased to \$1.6m by 2009/10. In that year, there were 260 volunteers and over 30 paid staff, including casuals.

During the first decade of the new century:

- Emergency Relief services were introduced, filling a gap created by the decision of the Brotherhood of St Laurence to close its emergency relief service
- Public access computer facilities were established with the assistance of Commonwealth funding
- Settlement services were expanded with a dedicated Arabic speaking settlement support program and support for refugees
- Whittlesea Volunteer Resource Centre established
- Whittlesea Community Legal Service commenced
- Thomastown West Community Hub created
- A community transport service introduced and later the commencement of a Hire Out Bus social enterprise
- And a name change to Whittlesea Community Connections.

Over the last dozen years, under Jemal's and then Alex Haynes' leadership, supported by Maureen Corrigan and Nessie Sayar as Chairs, WCC has continued to broaden and deepen its service offerings and to strengthen its connections with community, including with residents in the new suburbs that have emerged. Some of these initiatives include:

- Learning support programs for children
- Learner driver education programs, including the L2P program
- Learn Local pre-accredited training

- Women in Work and Driver Ed social enterprises
- student clinics in partnership with La Trobe University's Law School
- Mernda Neighbourhood House
- Wollert community engagement
- Family Violence Housing brokerage project
- Whittlesea Food Collective
- Wollert Community Farm
- Jobs Victoria Advocates and Jobs Victoria Employment Service
- Anti-Racism project with Victoria University
- Bicultural Health Navigators
- nugal biik plants and seeds, and
- Hosted the inaugural Whittlesea Pride Festival

Now, WCC is a multifaceted place based organisation with 183 volunteers, 75 staff, 101 partners, 78 funders and donors, and partnering with 20 government departments. Operating with an income in excess of \$7m, across eleven sites, delivering 22 distinct programs, four social enterprises and leading several collaborative networks as well as being informed by over 40 community advisors.

We have pivoted when crises arose, for example, responding to the 2009 Bushfires and to the 2020-2021 COVID pandemic when we continued to deliver services and kept our most vulnerable community members connected and supported.

We continue to deepen our connections with young people, with recently arrived migrants and refugees, and we are building connections with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities.

We are present in our new and emerging suburbs and actively engage local people in identifying and delivering local solutions to local issues.

Over the last 50 years, over 3,000 people have volunteered or worked at WCC and its predecessors. Many of you have committed ten, fifteen and even 20 years of service to this organisation and this community. This is our strength. I cannot name you all but I would like to acknowledge our debt to you.

As a place based organisation, our strength lies in our connections with our community, the connections that our volunteers bring, create and nourish, connections that are supported and sustained by a professional work force.

The continued financial support we receive from Council, and from a range of Commonwealth and State government, philanthropic funders and partners is testament to the impact of our work and your capacity – our volunteers and our staff - to create a Whittlesea in which people and agencies work together to make a positive difference to their community, ensuring that everyone has equal access to the community's resources and services.

**EMMANUEL GAUCI**  
WCC President



# Strategic Directions

WCC remains committed to delivering on its strategic priorities and in 2024 introduced a new priority to help build a climate resilient community that is empowered to protect and adapt to the local environment.

Climate change will increasingly and disproportionately impact on vulnerable communities, placing greater responsibility on place-based organisations like WCC to take action. Achievements within this new strategic direction included supporting conservation efforts along Curly Sedge Creek in partnership with Narrap and producing 30,000 seedlings grown from native indigenous seeds. WCC was also successful in receiving funding to establish a Climate Resilient Community Action Group that will help build community capability and leadership in response to community identified needs and opportunities.

The community of Whittlesea and surrounds is proudly diverse and growing. To ensure that we continue to engage with and respond to communities in the most accessible ways, WCC uses an inter-sectional approach to its work understanding that people may experience overlapping forms of discrimination or disadvantage. Inter-sectionality is embedded across each of our strategic priorities as we seek to make a difference to the lives of priority groups such as First Nations People, people seeking asylum, people who identify as LGBTQIA+ and victim survivors of family violence.

WCC recognises its role in response to these complex social issues in relation to working with local partners, specialist services and peak bodies across different sectors. Each of WCC's strategic priorities are delivered in partnership with other stakeholders in an effort to maximise resources and outcomes for local communities. Our valued partnerships, new and well-established, have been built over 50 years of service delivery and community engagement.



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION

# Women achieve equitable life outcomes and are safe from violence

1

On average  
**58%**  
of clients accessing  
WCC programs and services  
**identified as women.**



The highest representation of women was in the **Economic Pathways for Refugee Initiative program** (84%) and **Hardship Help** (73%).

**412**  
**legal services provided to women** victim survivors of violence across 10 different legal issues including family violence order, parenting plan and child contact orders.



**Working Together project connected 32 migrant and refugee women** victim survivors of family violence to mainstream family violence service system through outreaching bi-cultural engagement workers.



Family violence remains one of the most significant issues that women and children experience. Migrant and refugee women face disproportionate challenges that increase their vulnerability to family violence. Throughout the past year WCC's Gender Equity and Family Violence team strengthened their collaborative approach in working with local family violence services, organisations and community members to better ensure the safety and wellbeing of women and children.



Family violence information session  
– members of Lalor Carers Group with members of the WCC

## Improving family violence responses

### Multi-Service Coordinated Family Violence Response Project (MSCFVRP)

Funded by Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Family Safety Victoria) 2022-2026

In its second year, the MSCFVRP provides a coordinated response to support local women and children experiencing family violence. WCC's bilingual FV system connectors (BFVSC) act as a conduit between multicultural community and FV services outreaching at 16 different mainstream locations, including community centers, libraries, The Orange Door and Melbourne Polytechnic. The team engaged with a total of 1,260 women and provided case management and secondary consultation to those women experiencing FV. They were able to build trust and rapport with women over a period of time enabling them to provide essential guidance.

The Connectors facilitated warm referrals to specialist family violence and sexual assault services, as well as external support organisations such as Uniting's financial program, Haven Home Safe, and various counselling programs. Advocacy efforts also included connecting individuals with faith services, reducing isolation through social group connections, and enhancing social capital via employment opportunities. Financial capacity was bolstered by linking clients with legal services, financial counsellors, job mentors, and women's employment programs. The Connectors delivered family violence information sessions to local multicultural community groups, co-facilitated by The Orange Door and Victoria Police.

The Connectors cultural sensitivity and deep understanding of the barriers faced by victim-survivors, including issues of shame and self-dignity, were pivotal in building trust. The time invested in these relationships allowed victim-survivors to gradually disclose their experiences. As one team member noted, *"At the beginning, she wouldn't tell the whole story; it took 5-6 meetings for her to feel safe to disclose."*

“  
**You helped me so much, my children and I are safe now. I am so thankful I found you. You made such a big difference and found all the right places, thank you so, so much.**

#### QUOTE FROM CLIENT

Many women approached the Connectors specifically because of the focus on the South Asian community, though services were provided to all who sought help.

Another noted, *"I have been going through this for a long time. I reached out to you because I know you will understand the kind of problem I am going through, and you understand my culture."*

### Safe Journeys Health Justice Partnership

Funded by Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety under the National Partnership Agreement and Legal Services Board and Commissioner

The Safe Journeys Health Justice Partnership has continued to offer holistic and wrap-around legal services to women facing family violence in the City of Whittlesea. Phase One of this project saw the growth of a thriving partnership with the Whittlesea Maternal and Child Health Service and assisted close to 100 women and their families to obtain legal support in areas including separation and divorce, family violence, intervention orders, parenting arrangements, victims of crime and limited property law advice. Lawyers, social workers, nurses, family violence workers and community support workers have worked collaboratively to assist women and their families on their legal journey and beyond to ensure they are safe from violence.

Legal Help



**Safe Journeys**  
A Health Justice Partnership

Safe Journeys is a health justice project of Whittlesea Community Connections.  
Linking families with fast track legal support, we provide free legal services to those who live, work or study in the City of Whittlesea and surrounding suburbs.

## Prevention and early intervention

### Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project

Funded by Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, 2020-2024

WCC continued making strides in its prevention work to better support multicultural communities. Key highlights included:

- Delivering the second pilot program of the *Strengthening Family Relationships in Australia* program, along with completing two professional development sessions to 100 Adult Migrant Education Program teaching staff and showcasing the final teaching and student resources and program to more than seventy teachers and service providers. The program has now been taken up by teachers across seven adult education organisations to be delivered to their newly arrived adult EAL students in order to support their understanding of family violence and to increase help supporting behaviours.
- Development and delivery of a second pilot program to young newly arrived adult learners. Topics included: respectful relationships, affirmative consent and knowing your rights and responsibilities within Australian workplaces.
- Delivery of a family violence workshop to twenty imams and community members in partnership with the Board of Imams.

EAL teacher Craig Wight with AMEP students – Melbourne Polytechnic (Epping Campus) following the delivery of the second pilot program 'Strengthening Relationships in Australia'



## Highlight

# Celebrating 10 years of Multicultural Women's Grant Groups

*Funded by Sunshine and Crocodiles Pty Ltd*

Since its inception in 2014, the Multicultural Women's Groups Grants program, funded by the wonderful Pam Usher from Sunshine and Crocodiles Inc., has supported over 60 women's groups and 700 refugee and migrant women in the City of Whittlesea and surrounding areas. This program has significantly enhanced social participation for women who face isolation due to language, culture, visa status, or recent resettlement. By organising activities such as cooking classes, sewing classes, Zumba, dance, and parenting workshops, the program has fostered supportive relationships, reducing isolation and loneliness among participants.

“  
When group members have problems or are facing difficulties, they have somewhere to talk and seek for help.

**QUOTE FROM GROUP MEMBER**

A key outcome has been the development of connections among multicultural women, allowing them to share stories, increase self-confidence, and form supportive networks. The program has encouraged women to take on leadership roles within their groups and the broader Whittlesea community.

The program also provides the opportunity to deliver family violence information sessions on women's rights, legal services, and support services. These sessions, conducted separately for group leaders and members, dispel myths about family violence and increase awareness about it, helping women recognise and respond to family violence. The women's groups, therefore, have become safe spaces where women can openly discuss issues without fear of stigma. Facilitators and participants find these information sessions to be incredibly useful as:

“  
Before this most women did not know anything about family violence. Things that they thought were normal actually come under family violence – like controlling money.

The program culminated in the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 'Women in Whittlesea Gala' held in June 2024, celebrating a decade of achievements. This event highlighted the program's success in providing a celebratory space of belonging, inclusion, and participation.

CEO Alex Haynes with WCC staff and local women at the Women in Whittlesea Gala



## Providing practical support for women

### Women's Employment & Empowerment project

Funded by Australian Government Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2021-2024

The Women's Employment & Empowerment project objectives include supporting women to return to paid work, overcoming barriers to enter male-dominated industries, and starting their own business.

Since 2021, 335 local women and gender divergent people have been supported to build their confidence, explore new career opportunities, and prepare themselves for recruitment processes. Between July 2023 and June 2024, 74 participants participated in the program through attending group workshops, industry visits, and receiving individual support to take steps toward their goals. Employment outcomes for some participants included starting new jobs in real estate, public safety, horticulture, accounting, and early childhood.

In addition to structured learning, women were provided with a safe space where they could share their stories of career, migration, disability, parenting and relationships. Providing women-only, strengths-based employment programs allowed participants to feel free from judgement and share their insecurities, ask for help understanding Australian cultural expectations, and talk about how issues such as family violence had impacted their career stories. Hearing the journeys and challenges of other women in their community provided social connections and reduced the feelings of isolation experienced by many women seeking paid employment.

“  
Every session was far beyond the expectations and answering the [interview] questions was excellent.

#### CLIENT QUOTE

“Just wanted to share an exciting news with you that today is the beginning of my dream career. Without your support, I wouldn't be where I am today. I cannot thank you enough for making it possible.”

Students at Becoming a facilitator course by Jennie Barnes



### Women's Driving Program

Funded by Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, WCC, Sunshine and Crocodile Inc.

Now in its fourth year, the Women's Driving Program continues to support women, particularly those with refugee background and those who have experienced, or are at risk of, family violence. This year alone, the program has supported over 190 women, to learn to drive and get their licence. Having a licence enables women, and their children, to access essential services, employment, education, and volunteering opportunities and plays a key role in facilitating social connections within the Australian community, enhancing their mental health and sense of safety.

WCC staff and students at the Road Safety Information Session



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

# Young People have a sense of belonging & voice in their community

# 2

**On average 19% of clients accessing WCC programs and services are young people.**

The highest representation of young people was in casework services (35%), supporting young people to connect to education, training and community.

**65 young people**

were provided with information and support to connect to local volunteer opportunities & 86 law and social work students were provided a placement with WCC.



## Preventing disengagement

### Bridge Builders Program

*Funded by Victorian Department of Education*

In partnership with the Department of Education and the Schools Focused Youth Services, Bridge Builders was designed to prevent disengagement for at risk students by creating opportunities for young people to develop leadership and mentoring skills.

43 students in Year 7 and 8 participated in the program, building their confidence to be leaders. As a result of participating in Bridge Builders, students experienced increased connection to school, social networks and peers.



All of us have really warmed up to each other, trust each other, open, kind, teamwork, encouraged, supported each other

89% of students indicated they feel more settled at school as a result of participating in Bridge Builders, a primary intervention to reduce absenteeism.

### Engage!

*Funded by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Youth Fest & Australian Government Department of Social Services*

277 young people had the opportunity to engage in programs including an advocacy group, training, youth voices in media, debate club, design thinking workshops and an inaugural youth voices award for recognition in community achievement.

We hosted the inaugural Youth Voices Awards, an event specifically created to celebrate and recognise the achievements, voices and contributions of young people who work, live or play within the City of Whittlesea. The WCC Youth Voices Awards are designed to empower and celebrate young people, through recognising their contributions to the Whittlesea community. A Welcome to Country by Wurundjeri Elder Aunty Diane Kerr opened the night and as well as winning the awards, young people from the Whittlesea LGA performed as the live DJ, and hosted as MC. These Awards provide young people recognition, celebration and a sense of pride in their achievements.

Youth Voices Award Winners



**Highlight**

# Celebrating 10 years of Thomastown West Community HUB

Supported by Ward Ambler Foundation

## Thank you

### to the Ward Ambler Foundation

Words will never be enough to thank you for all the support, commitment & kindness you have given to the students at The Thomastown West Community Hub.

On behalf of the children you have helped, from our family at Whittlesea Community Connections and Thomastown West Primary school along with Thomastown Meadows & Edgars Creek Primary School to your family, thank you eternally.

## \$863,999

Grand Total contribution from Ward-Ambler Foundation since 2013



### AGGELOS

**Year 9/Age 14 attended the hub over all his primary education.**

"I contributed a lot in activities in the hub. It helped me grow my social skills, speaking skills and made me feel more confident in class to ask questions & contribute.

I made lots of new friends at the Hub & TWCH provided lots of support in my learning capability. The reading program I was in helped a lot with my literacy, the podcast group I was in, I was with all my friends & we were able to speak our opinions freely & it also improved my social skills. The gardening program I was in made me love plant life & I could also use my gardening skills that I learnt, at home.

Overall, the hub helped me a lot & provided great programs & opportunities. I wish I joined more programs when I had the chance."



### MARAM

**Year 12/Age 17 attended the hub in grade 5&6 and for a several years after worked at the hub as a volunteer.**

"By being part of TWCH I have been able to develop skills that have made me grow as a person. I have been able to increase my communication skills and engage with people more closely and in an interactive manner. It also made me more interested in engaging in my community as an individual.

I was an extremely shy and quite individual in primary school, and by being part of TWCH I have become more outspoken and extroverted. I could tell that many of the people involved are easy to interact with and pure hearted, which has therefore reflected back to me as a result and made me make a lot more friends.

I also was able to participate in leadership activities, such as speaking in public events and directing for younger participants on what to do. Therefore making me feel a sense of responsibility and greater confidence due to these practices."

### SINEM

**Year 11 age 18 attended the hub grades 4-6 Volunteered at the hub for 2 years.**

"Sinem has benefitted enormously from all that the WCC Hub has offered over the years. A past student, Sinem attended the Art Studio holiday program regularly, where her interest, talent and skills were extended. She was involved in a range of projects, including the mural at the front of the Hub, as well as a number of personal and community projects. Her involvement continued throughout her secondary years as she became a volunteer and mentor to other TWPS students.

Attending these holiday sessions enabled her to continue making connections with friends and volunteers, including Eisa , and the strong bond she developed with Suzi.

The Hub became a safe, nurturing place where Sinem felt valued, and could openly share with supportive facilitators. Sinem often commented on how much she enjoyed the opportunity to attend sessions at the WCC Hub."

## 90%

Attribute The Hub for gaining more Confidence at school



## 157

Volunteers



## 30

Young volunteers (incl. past Hub Students)



## 280

Family member help



## 96,996

Program hours



## Early intervention to support participation

### Helping young people understand their rights and access to justice

Funded through National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP)

Health and youth workers are often the first people young people approach with issues and challenges including legal needs so this year we embedded a youth lawyer within our youth team. We have:

- Started discussions with four partner schools to establish a Lawyer in schools program
- Delivered Community Legal Education sessions on social media legal rights and responsibilities to 400 Year 7 and 8 students
- Developed Community Legal Education sessions and resources on legal issues relevant to young people based on a survey of 400 young people and wellbeing teams
- Created new working relationships with other youth law organisations including: Balit Ngulu (Victoria Aboriginal Legal Service), Youth law, Westjustice, Q+ Law, Victoria Legal Aid, Barwon Community Legal Centre and School Lawyer Network.
- Provided casework and legal advice to young people in the areas of consumer law, criminal law, infringements, vilification / discrimination, young people's legal rights.

### Empower

Funded by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

Through Empower we provide case management support to young people 12 to 25 who are disengaged, or at risk of disengaging, from education, work and/or family life. Aspirational plans are co-designed with young people to help them develop meaningful connections. Issues like mental health, housing or family relationships are identified and supported referrals are made to relevant and accessible services.

Now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year, the Rainbow Group is an important way to support young people from culturally diverse backgrounds who identify as being part of the LGBTQIA+ community. The group is guided by the needs and interests of young people, which include history, music, TV/film, fashion week, art/design activities, exploring queer identity, consultation, advocacy and planning of IDOHOBIT Day.

**45 clients**

69% of which have returned to school



**100+**

referrals made to GPs, health, mental health, education, food relief, housing and homeless services and community organisations



**100%**

of clients exited the program have completed their aspirational goals



### Supporting young people to get their licence

Funded by TAC

WCC's TAC L2P program works with young people between 16 and 23 from the LGA's of Whittlesea and Murrindindi (southern region). Transport disadvantage is one of the largest barriers to young people seeking employment. The continuity of mentoring support provided by the L2P program helps young people feel safe to seek help, facilitating connections to other support services.

25 learners successfully acquired their probationary licence this year. This will positively impact on their independence and pathways to employment, education and community connections.

**93**

Active Learners



**30**

Active Mentors



**7,562**

Supervised Driver Hours by Participants



**25**

Learners achieved their probationary license



Raad worked with the WCC TAC L2P mentors to pass the driving test.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

There is equitable access to employment opportunities within a sustainable local economy

3



Supporting unemployed people into work

Jobs Mentoring Employment Service

Funded by the Victorian Government Department of Jobs, Skills Industry and Regions.

The JVMS program supports long-term unemployed people living in Hume and surrounding areas to prepare for and successfully maintain employment. Targeted community engagement initiatives promote the program to priority groups in different locations across Hume and the northern region. This includes outreaching from shopping centres, community organisations and hubs, TAFEs, Learn Local and Workforce Australia providers.

Employment Mentors provide individual and tailored support, brokerage, training, and pre and post-employment mentoring as well as providing information and support to access services including housing, family violence and legal. Post- placement mentoring increased the success of participants' ability to sustain employment.

These achievements did not go unnoticed when the Minister for Employment Vicky Ward MP and Bronwyn Halfpenny MP met with the WCC employment team, recently placed jobseekers and representatives from RMAA Australia.

CASE STUDY

Nasser\*

Nasser, an 18-year-old asylum seeker completed Year 12 but due to financial constraints was not able to pursue higher education. Determined to overcome this hurdle, Nasser sought assistance from WCC, expressing the need for financial support and employment. However his lack of work experience and transportation posed as challenges in securing a job.

Recognizing Nasser's potential, WCC provided internal training to prepare him for interviews. Capitalizing on an opportunity with a company that accommodated public transport, WCC facilitated his interview for an entry-level cabinet-maker position. With WCC's guidance, Nasser successfully secured a full-time manufacturing position. WCC supported Nasser by providing work clothing and assisting him with his tax file number application. WCC continues to maintain regular communication with him, offering post-placement support to ensure his sustained success in the manufacturing role.

Currently content with his job, Nasser harbors aspirations to pursue a Diploma in Business. In line with his ambitions, WCC aims to secure a Business Traineeship for him, paving the way for eventual enrolment in a Diploma program and providing a pathway to fulfil his educational goals.

\*Please note name has been changed.

1081

Referrals received for the JVMS program



695

Participants registered on JVMS



167

Number of placements



40

Completed 6 months of employment



Data from October 2023 to end June 2024

## Supporting unemployed people into work (continued)

### Economic Pathways for Refugee Integration (EPRI)

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs

#### Outline of participant journeys

##### Employment pathways to refugee integration (EPRI)

While English proficiency is the biggest significant barrier most EPRI participants face multiple and intersecting barriers, including low confidence, mental and physical ill-health, lack of local work experience and limited understanding of working in Australia. To help us individualise our EPRI program for greater impact we use the following categories to tailor engagement and develop relevant and achievable activities.



- Category 1**  
**Low English and low skills:**  
 The focus is on intensive English language support along with support from family members to navigate language barriers. Category 1 participants have achieved success in our small business program which has attracted predominantly women over 40 with less than 5 years of residency and also in WCC social enterprises; Women in Work childcare, the Food Collective and nugal biik plants and seeds nursery.
- Category 2**  
**Low English and some Australian skills:**  
 Many participants, particularly women, obtained study certificates from private Registered Training Organizations (RTOs) during or after COVID-19 without a suitable level of English proficiency or work placement. The focus is helping participants improve their English skills focused on their sector (e.g. childcare) and supporting them to find placement opportunities. Job opportunities have included working through our Women in Work childcare enterprise, and as support workers for NDIS and Aged care.
- Category 3**  
**Medium English and No Australian skills or experience:**  
 The focus is on supporting committed participants to build transferable skills from their existing skills and experience, understanding Australian workplaces and identifying employment pathways.
- Category 4**  
**Medium English and Australian skills:**  
 The focus is supporting participants (Level 2 and 3 only) to be job ready and by working with our partners to give our participants the opportunity for their first job in Australia. We have greater success when participants are below 30 years old. They learn language and new skills more quickly, and employers are more welcoming of younger workers.

Designed to support people with low English levels and/or low skill levels our EPRI program involves structured intake and assessment, tailored supports that build individual pathways to employment including English language and digital literacy skill building, understanding Australian workplace culture and job readiness workshops, pre-accredited training, volunteer opportunities, paid placements and casual employment.

EPRI is working across our 4 WCC social enterprises – Women in Work (WiW), driverED, Food Collective café and catering, nugal biik plants and seeds - and a small business project (SBP)

84% of our EPRI program participants are women and our program has developed in response to the barriers women with refugee backgrounds face; it is responsive and multifaceted and takes into account cultural, linguistic, religious, and psychological factors and includes:

- Providing integrated wrap around support
- Ensuring access to EPRI opportunities through the provision of childcare, transport and weekend activities
- Targeting and encouraging female participation including women only groups/sessions
- Offering one-to-one support to tackle any obstacle and build confidence
- Leveraging peer learning and support

#### PARTICIPANT CASE STUDY

##### Hala

Hala is a 37 year old refugee from Syria who was a primary teacher, but her qualification is not recognised in Australia. Hala, widowed soon after arriving in Australia, is a single mother with two children. She required support to understand Australian workplaces, write her CV, improve her English, and learn interview skills. As part of the EPRI program, she attended a one-day training with VicRoads to become a volunteer mentor through WCC's driverED social enterprise, which was a path chosen by 20 EPRI participants.

After four months of volunteering and program participation, we enrolled her to pursue a Certificate IV in the Motor Vehicle Driver Training Course. Her goal is to become a driving instructor. Being a teacher in Syria, this transferable skill is a strong foundation for her success in Australia.

We are engaging with EPRI Community of Practice, facilitated by Social Enterprise Australia, to share learning, referrals and build the ecosystem of opportunities for EPRI participants and others experiencing barriers to meaningful work.

##### Bana

Bana arrived in Australia from Syria in 2019 when she was 21 years old. She pursued a Certificate 3 in Childcare during the COVID 19 pandemic but she faced challenges in finding employment in childcare due to her limited English skills (Level 2).

Through EPRI Bana secured a placement and paid work through our WiW childcare enterprise. She was assigned shifts with experienced WiW workers who provided her support and guidance, focusing on improving her English and understanding of workplace culture. We helped Bana prepare for interviews and the workplace, ultimately leading to her securing a permanent job after six months of working with her EPRI mentor.

### Developing skills and confidence – Learn Local

Funded by Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE)

WCC Learn Local provided over 740 hours of ACFE-funded pre-accredited training to 299 attendees participating in courses including Introduction to Fashion Sewing, Computer Basics, Introduction to Community Services, Digital Essentials, Sustainable Gardening, Safe Food Handling, Horticulture, Sewing for Employment, and Barista Training. Class sizes are often small, with training provided by highly experienced professionals in relaxed, safe and supportive environments.

The Learn Local program plays a crucial role in enhancing the social and economic well-being of our community members. By providing practical skills and fostering a supportive learning environment, we empower participants to pursue further education, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities. Beyond skill development, our courses offer social benefits by bringing community members together and fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support.



Kathleen with the Sustainable Gardening students

# Building a strong local economy

## Social Enterprises

WCC believes in the potential of social enterprises to tackle serious local issues comprehensively and over the long-term. We use social entrepreneurship alongside our other program activities to achieve our strategic objectives.

This year saw the enterprise team deep dive into its portfolio of established enterprises, analysing business and operational models, revisiting purpose, and exploring how we might build on social impact into the future. We developed WCC's social enterprise position statement to guide these endeavours.

We were very excited to launch nugal biik plants and seeds, our social enterprise wholesale nursery in late 2023 and the Food Collective café and catering enterprise in June 2024.

## WCC's current social enterprises include:

**driverED**  
– multilingual driving school



**Food Collective**  
– café and catering, market and food boxes



**Women in Work**  
– mobile childcare service



**nugal biik plants and seeds**  
– production plant nursery



Getting on the road with **confidence**

## Purpose:

driverED is a multilingual professional driving school that provides high quality, low cost, culturally appropriate lessons to learner drivers experiencing barriers to obtaining their driving test due to language, income or a limited understanding of Australia's road laws and regulations.



driverED professional instructors

More than just a driving school, driverED provides employment to female instructors from migrant and refugee backgrounds, supporting them to establish their own businesses and achieve economic independence.

Now in its fifth year of operation, driverED delivers lessons across the northern suburbs of Melbourne, covering the local government areas of Whittlesea, Nillumbik, Merri-bek, Hume, Banyule and Darebin.

Its pool of female multilingual instructors are trained to work with people who are culturally and linguistically diverse or newly arrived to Australia, and can deliver driving lessons in Kurdish, Arabic, Kashmir, Kokani, Russian, Farsi, Hindi and English.

## IMPACTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

**2448**

Lessons delivered  
(100% increase from 22-23)



**500**

Number of learners



**9**

Number of instructors employed



# FOOD COLLECTIVE



## Purpose:

to increase access to affordable, healthy, locally sourced and culturally appropriate food for local community members experiencing food insecurity

## Market + Food Boxes:

Our weekly fresh produce market continued to operate this year, running out of the Food Collective at Melbourne Polytechnic in Epping. Students and staff, and as well as local community members, flocked to the market weekly to stock up on affordable, culturally appropriate and locally grown fruit, veggies and produce.

The produce, primarily produced by local growers, is sourced fresh on the morning of the market from the Melbourne Wholesale Market in Epping. On average, our fruit and vegetables are 52% cheaper than Coles and 70% Victorian grown.

This year saw the Food Collective expand its service offering to trial a food box delivery service. Local residents and businesses, including people in surrounding LGAs, have been enjoying receiving weekly drops of delicious produce to their front door.

## Café and catering:

We have been working towards establishing café and catering activities at Melbourne Polytechnic Epping that will focus on healthy, culturally diverse, tasty food for staff and students, as well as catering to local organisations, schools and businesses. Our purpose is to offer training and employment pathways, prioritising young people and people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, supporting them to build confidence to work and develop skills in hospitality. We're excited we opened the café in July 2024 and hosted our first group of AMEP students for training shortly after.

# Women in Work



## Purpose:

Employment pathways for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.



Established in 2010, Women in Work is an affordable mobile childcare service that provides care for children of all ages at workplaces and venues.

Its fully qualified and accredited childcare professionals provide a safe and caring environment for children, enabling parents to participate in events, programs, appointments and training and education activities.

Women in Work employs recently arrived migrant and refugee women as its childcare educators, providing them with on the job training, professional development and pathways into permanent and meaningful work, increasing their economic participation and equitable life outcomes. In addition, this unique service facilitates the inclusion and participation of parents in community services.

## IMPACTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

9

Number of childcare workers employed



480+

Number of hours of childcare delivered



945

Number of children



# nugal biik

plants & seeds



## Purpose:

Generate revenue to support First Nations led initiatives and biodiversity and revegetation programs at WCC's Wollert Community Farm.

nugal biik plants and seeds is a Wollert-based production wholesale nursery specialising in indigenous flora of the greater northern region of Melbourne.

The nursery is part of WCC's Wollert Community Farm, an ambitious project being delivered in partnership with Yarra Valley Water.

This year saw the nursery open for business and take its first orders. It was a busy start to the year, overseeing the seed collection season, establishing the new site and propagating thousands of native seedlings.

Our first customer, Hanson Heidelberg Cement Group, ordered 25,000 tube stock to supply the boundary planting project at their Wollert landfill and quarry site, with most of the seed collected from their established plantings.

Currently operating from an interim site on the Farm, the nursery will move to its permanent site later in 2024, which will enable production of 500,000 tubestock per annum over time.

## IMPACTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

### January 2024

Interim nursery site opened its doors with first orders taken



Permanent nursery site well underway, with delivery of nursery infrastructure in late 2024.



### 25,000 plants

Successful propagation and delivery to Hanson



### 31,000

Number of plants grown



Won the Sustainability and Environment Award at the City of Whittlesea Business Awards in partnership with Hanson.



### 30

Number of First Nations-led learning and training sessions



### 50

Number of conservation volunteering activities



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

# People lead healthy lives connected to community and services

# 4

## 10,000+ local community members

were provided with information, referral and advocacy to connect to support services. This includes over the phone, in-person and community help services such as form filling, energy assistance and hardship help.



## Providing information, referral and practical help

### Community Help

Funded by City of Whittlesea

Supported by the City of Whittlesea, Community Help provides information, referral, advocacy and practical support such as form filling to people who experience barriers navigating service systems, which are becoming increasingly more complex and remote. In 2023-24 Community Help clients included 65% women, 57% culturally and linguistically diverse and 37% over the age of 65 years.

WCC responds to community enquiries over the phone, in-person and on-line at our office and through a number of outreach locations and partner organisations across the municipality including Whittlesea Community House, Thomastown Neighbourhood House, Kirrip Community Activity Centre and Mill Park Library.

Sisters Woodwork engaged First Nations women to connect, have a yarn and learn new skills in design and using different hand tools.

The group runs every Wednesday from Mernda Neighbourhood House and over the next 6 months women will focus on making wooden serving trays and wood branches – wind chimes or mobiles their grand children

“ Really enjoying it and excited to start making the things – Trying things out – drills, hand saws, drop saw, jig saw, sanders.

**SISTERS WOODWORK**  
 @ Mernda Neighbourhood House  
 Wednesday mornings: 10am – 12.30pm  
 Mernda Neighbourhood House  
 2 Heals Rd, Mernda 3754

Learn how to use tools and make creative things out of wood. A fun, skills building program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

For more information: rhippi@whittleseacc.org.au or 0499 747 852

<p><b>10,000+</b> community enquiries through our contact centre</p>	<p><b>327</b> community help clinic appointments</p>	<p><b>100</b> community members assisted with energy bill health checks via the Energy Assistance Program</p>	<p><b>106</b> community members assisted to lodge their tax return via the Tax Help Program</p>	<p><b>24</b> social work students provided with placement experience</p>
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## Providing information, referral and practical help (continued)

### Hardship Help

Funded by Australian Government Department of Social Services and community donations



This year we welcomed Aisha Khurram as our Hardship Help Coordinator bringing with her five years of direct volunteer experience in the program.

1,091 Hardship Help appointments were provided to 819 clients this financial year compared to 761 appointments provided to 383 clients last year. An additional 110 clients were provided food vouchers. With the cost of living continuing to rise the Hardship Help program saw 43% increase, which does not include unmet demand.

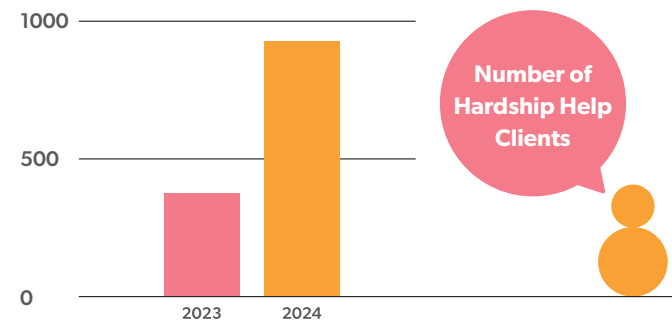
Other support provided through Hardship Help included:

- \$21,328 of emergency relief provided through Queens Fund applications for 49 women in distress of crisis and \$3,647 of overdue utilities bills waived for a single client.
- 2,715 food packages were provided to 844 households, benefitting at least 916 adults and 540 children. At \$75 per food package, value of emergency relief assistance through food packages was at least \$203,625.

Hardship Help operates from the Food Collective. Based at Melbourne Polytechnic in Epping, the Food Collective is creating a more equitable food system in the growing outer north by supporting households experiencing financial hardship, strengthening community connections, improving health and wellbeing, and increasing training and employment opportunities through community based food production and distribution.

In addition to our free supermarket which operates from the Food Collective twice weekly, we deliver a range of activities and events from the space including Learn Local hospitality and horticulture courses, school excursions, multicultural community events and food growing workshops.

Our volunteers are at the heart of what we do and fulfil a number of critical roles including gardening, warehousing, driving, client assessments, administration and coffee making. They provide a welcoming space for all visitors to the Food Collective and their commitment to their community is second to none.



### Legal Help

Funded by Community Legal Services Program (CLSP)

Lawyers and Leads from Whittlesea Community Connections

WCC lawyers have had a brilliant and busy year providing legal services to the community and this continues to grow. Over the past financial year, the WCC have reimagined the way we deliver legal services to the community with a focus on intersecting legal needs. In order to address growing community legal needs, WCC have adopted an integrated approach to the delivery of legal services with the appointment of a new Youth Lawyer in the Children and Youth team, a new Multicultural Communities Lawyer in the Healthy and Connected Communities team and two lawyers in the Gender Equity and Family Violence team.

We have assisted clients in over 1,000 civil law matters to help with infringements and fines, debt matters, motor vehicle accidents and neighbourhood disputes.

The demand for family law services remains strong representing almost 30% of our legal work with the top family law services including:

- Divorce and separation
- Parenting plans
- Property in marriage
- Family or domestic violence

WCC lawyers continue to deliver accessible legal services with more than 40% of our clients speaking a language other than English as their main language at home.

The stories our clients tell us reveal the complex legal needs within our community. In one case, 'Su' (de-identified) a mother of three children, approached WCC for help to visit her elderly and isolated parents (children's grandparents) overseas. Su had separated from the children's father due to family violence and the father refused to sign the passport applications for the children. WCC lawyers assisted the client with her Court documents to successfully pave the way for the Court granting Su's request to visit her parents with her children.

In another matter, \*Noah\* approached WCC after they were injured in a motor vehicle accident. Homeless and an asylum seeker, Noah was not able to work due to their injuries and to make it worse, the other party's insurance company was chasing Noah for damages. WCC engaged in

advocacy with the insurance company which was seeking \$20,000 for the repairs of their client's vehicle. WCC argued that the debt be written off on the basis of Noah's extreme financial hardship and that they were judgment proof. The insurance company waived the \$20,000 debt providing much needed relief to Noah.

Lawyers from WCC continued their successful engagement with Whittlesea Community House for Fix-It Fridays. In a unique initiative, service organisations across the municipality offer a one-stop-shop for local community members to address community needs. Our lawyers provided legal advice and assistance each month to help clients across diverse issues including fines and infringements, neighbourhood disputes, family law, criminal matters, motor vehicle accidents and consumer issues.



Social Justice project Students

## Helping people connect and participate

### Community Lunches

Funded by the Aged Persons Welfare Foundation & City of Whittlesea

We facilitated a series of 8 senior's lunches for 250+ people in Mernda, Thomastown and Epping from October 2023 to June 2024.

The lunches targeted newly arrived migrants and refugees, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and isolated, vulnerable and transport disadvantaged seniors. The lunches provided an opportunity to connect over a two course meal and increase awareness of community resources available and connect to a range of services focused on social, health, and financial wellbeing.

14 support services attended at least one lunch and included City Of Whittlesea Positive Ageing Team, HealthAbility, Centre of the Ageing, Services Australia, Yarra Valley Water, Uniting Financial Counselling, DPV Health, U3A, Thomastown and Mill Park Leisure and Aquatics Centres, Mernda Community House and our own Legal, Community Help and Transport teams.

#### SENIORS FEEDBACK

“ Meeting new people, the food was delicious, the services were so helpful, the staff running the lunch were very caring and nice

“ It was very helpful talking with Yarra Valley Water, and the financial counsellor

“ Being able to talk directly with services was very helpful. DPV Health were able to answer many questions I had regarding my husband's My Aged Care package and wait times for health services such as Podiatry

“ a good opportunity to connect with other elderly people

Community Lunch Team



### Community Transport

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care

WCC's popular Community Transport Service provides subsidised transport for older local residents to attend medical appointments, shopping trips, social gatherings and other essential appointments in and around the City of Whittlesea.

Our service is powered by our volunteer drivers and driver assistants, all local community members who dedicate their time on a weekly basis to transport our clients from door to door. More than just a transport service, we enjoy close relationships with clients and their families, providing welfare checks and regular assessments, and referring them to other services when required. In response to client demand, we trialled the transportation of clients to medical appointments outside of the City of Whittlesea, including the CBD.

This year saw us join 32 other community transport providers from around Australia to take part in a two-year trial designed by the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Australian Community Transport Association (ACTA) to help design key policies for the sector. As part of the trial, we have implemented a new booking and scheduling platform, which allows



Staff with Transport Volunteers

us to deliver our service more efficiently, and to provide a greater level of connectivity and care for our clients and volunteer drivers.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our dedicated team of volunteers, who are an integral part of our community transport family. We could not deliver this service without you.

We acknowledge the contribution of our volunteer Dennis Walker, who passed away in May 2024. We extend our deep sympathy to his family and friends.

**14,000+**

Trips delivered



**250+**

Number of active clients



**19**

Number of volunteers



## Helping people connect and participate (continued)

### Mernda Neighbourhood House

Funded by the Victorian Government Neighbourhood House Coordination Program, City of Whittlesea and WCC



In response to community feedback and to better align with the broader Neighbourhood House sector, Mernda Community House has rebranded to **Mernda Neighbourhood House**. Despite the name change, our mission remains steadfast. We continue to be a central hub for learning, connection, and a sense of belonging—a true second home for many.

Mernda Neighbourhood House thrives thanks to our committed volunteers. From the Advisory Group to those involved in the Repair Café, Community Lunch, Mini Op Shop, and beyond, our volunteers dedicate an average of 57 hours per week. Their roles span administration, class support, gardening, website development, social media, event coordination, and more. We extend our heartfelt thanks to each volunteer, whose efforts help foster community and belonging—core to our mission.

We offer a diverse range of weekly classes, including woodworking, English Conversation (provided by Prace), sewing for employment, horticulture, sustainable gardening, and children's art.

### Mernda Community Lunch

In its second year, thanks to the support of Hanson Australia, the Mernda Community Lunch program has continued to deliver nutritious and delicious meals. Volunteer cooks have prepared diverse cultural dishes, including Iraqi, Italian, and Sri Lankan cuisines, serving over 500 people. The positive feedback highlights the community's appreciation for both the food and the opportunity to connect. We are grateful for the volunteers, students, and WCC staff who make this program possible.



### Mernda Community Shed

Since its initial community consultation in 2020, the Mernda Community Shed has expanded its offerings. Our programs now include beginner woodworking classes for women, general woodworking, and Indigenous women's woodworking classes. These programs provide valuable opportunities for skill-building and creativity.



### Mernda Community Gardeners and Mini Op Shop

A special thanks to our community gardeners for their ongoing work in maintaining a productive garden. Additionally, our Mini Op Shop, while still finding its footing, offers affordable clothing and household items, contributing to our community's well-being.



### Whittlesea Volunteer Resource Service

Funded by City of Whittlesea and Australian Government Department of Social Services and WCC

Around 155 community members were given individual volunteering information to find a local volunteer role, suitable to their interests and availability. In response to local needs we employed bi-cultural workers that support Hindi and Arabic speaking communities, in language with a better understanding of formal volunteering. We surveyed around 60+ community members who accessed the service to gain a better understanding on the impact of volunteering in the municipality and beyond.

Community members were given information on volunteering at senior lunches, expos, employment agencies, TAFEs, neighbourhood houses, schools, and universities, the Whittlesea Disability Network, the City of Whittlesea Emerging Leadership Program, and the Whittlesea Community Festival.

We worked closely with six schools to support 200+ young people between the ages of 12-25 in a range of informal and formal volunteering roles, thanks to partnerships established with volunteer involving organisations across aged care, local neighbourhood houses, food relief, Volunteering Victoria and environmental organisations.

Social media campaigns were created and launched to celebrate International Student Day, International Volunteer and Volunteer Manager's Day and National Volunteer Week. Volunteers across programs and departments were celebrated on WCC socials to showcase the diversity of volunteers and volunteer roles in the City of Whittlesea. Flyers with information on volunteering have been translated to another 3 community languages, now provided in 8 community languages supporting one of the most multicultural and fastest growing municipalities in Melbourne.



## Helping new arrivals settle well

### Settlement, Engagement and Transition Support (SETS)

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs and delivered in collaboration with Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre

Our settlement programs offered crucial assistance to more than 1,285 clients. We played a vital role in supporting migrants and refugees as they confront various challenges during their first years in Australia and facilitating their transition and integration.

Through intake and assessment, advocacy, support, information, advice, and referrals and one-on-one casework each newly arrived migrant receives assistance tailored to their specific needs.

Our partnership with Melbourne Polytechnic has been crucial in supporting students in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC). Our team works from the campus three days a week, helping new arrivals navigate their settlement process while working towards their educational goals.



Some of the most important and popular initiatives include:

- Citizenship Course, a comprehensive 12-week program aimed at equipping individuals for the citizenship test through an exploration of Australian laws, systems and culture.
- Learner Permit Course designed to prepare students for the learner permit test. The course provides in-depth coverage of road rules and builds students' confidence and readiness for the test and to be safe on the road.
- Settlement Homework Program supports recently arrived refugee secondary students with their homework and exams while providing a space to practice English conversation.
- Youth and family support initiatives cover a wide range of topics, from study techniques and exam preparation to career choices and transitioning to university.
- School holiday programs are a testament to our commitment to providing diverse experiences for the community. These programs, which cater to different age groups, include a wide variety of activities such as movie days, city trips, science experiments, and sports tournaments.

Our collaborations and community engagement efforts are extensive. We organised nine information sessions with Services Australia (Centrelink) engaging over 150 recently arrived refugees mainly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

During Refugee Week, we came together to partner and host a diverse range of events, including Zumba and orientation session for Thomastown services in collaboration with the City of Whittlesea and TRAC. At Lalor Secondary College over 120 students learned about the refugee journey, heard from a young person about their lived experience and learned about WCC services. An event at Lalor Library as part of Melbourne Polytechnic Volunteer Tutoring Scheme, which attracted over 100 attendees and an Adha Eid Celebration that drew over 250 people from diverse cultural backgrounds, genders, and ages.



### Digital Sisters program

Funded by the Good Things Foundation

The Digital Sisters program delivered two extensive courses which have delivered a significant improvement in the digital literacy of at least 40 refugee and migrant women. These courses provide tailored digital literacy training that considered women's needs and challenges. The curriculum was carefully crafted to be inclusive and accessible, accommodating participants with diverse backgrounds and varying levels of digital proficiency. This approach ensured that every woman could benefit from the training regardless of her starting point.

In addition to our focus on digital literacy, the Digital Sisters program provided targeted support to 30 women, equipping them with the skills to better understand and utilise Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their daily lives and professional activities.

The impact of the Digital Sisters program goes beyond immediate learning outcomes. By empowering women with digital skills and AI knowledge, we contribute to their long-term socio-economic advancement. The success of the Digital Sisters program highlights WCC's commitment to fostering digital inclusion and supporting women's empowerment in our community.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

# Whittlesea is resilient community empowered to protect, prepare and adapt to a changing local environment

# 5

As a place-based organisation embedded in community, WCC is relied upon to provide support before, during and after emergencies. WCC has a critical role to play in helping build individual, household and community resilience to prepare, respond and recover from disasters. This includes building resilience for future disasters in ways that are locally and culturally responsive.

As an emerging area of work, WCC will continue to learn about its role, opportunities and actions that are most effective and impactful. Over the next year, WCC will review activities and outcomes to identify new and on-going initiatives that best achieve a more climate resilient community.



## Mernda Repair Café

Sponsored by Hanson in 2024 and grant from City of Whittlesea 2023

The Mernda Repair Café has had another successful year thanks to our dedicated repair volunteers who continue to provide valuable repair services to the community. In the past year alone, we've diverted over 711 kg of items from landfill, bringing joy to countless community members who leave with their items repaired and repurposed.



## Community Education

7 introduction to horticulture and sustainable Learn Local courses delivered to 45 participants

30 nugal biik Rangers Programs delivered connecting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people to land and culture through conservation and land management training and experiences. This was delivered from Wollert Community Farm, where the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Narrap rangers are conducting existing land management activities.

**FACT SHEET** **nugal biik Rangers**

**Ranger Programs**  
nugal biik ranger programs connect local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community members to Country and culture through conservation and land management training and hands on learning experiences.

The Ranger Programs provide cultural strengthening opportunities for young people through a deeper appreciation for Country and cultural and practical skills development. The program contributes to healing the community by healing the land through a cultural lens, following traditional practices and the old ways. Traditional land care and conservation practices include cultural burning, water care to protect, land gardening in growing, planting in lak season.

**nugal biik Ranger Programs**

<p><b>Mini Rangers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For primary school aged children from Prep to Grade 6</li> <li>Focus on Aboriginal students but open to non-Aboriginal students to learn about Aboriginal culture</li> <li>Outcomes include increased cultural understanding and connection, health and wellbeing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Junior Rangers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For Aboriginal secondary school students from Year 7 to 12</li> <li>Opportunities to undertake cultural mapping and lead the Mini Ranger program</li> <li>Outcomes include increased sense of self confidence and leadership skills</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community Rangers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A voluntary program for any Aboriginal person 16+ years</li> <li>Cultural and practical management training and learning</li> <li>Outcomes include increased land care skills, training and employment pathways</li> </ul>
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## Community Action

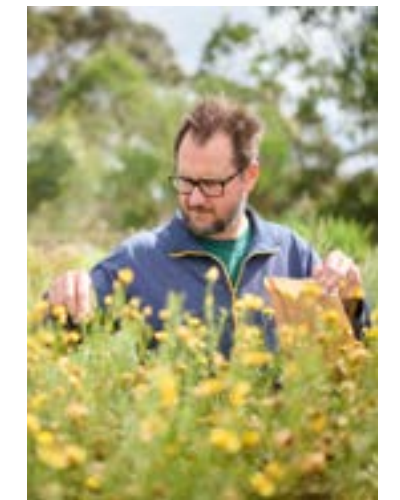
Promoted volunteering in emergency management by providing information to new arrival communities about disaster preparation that included a site visit to Epping CFA. Five community members registered to become emergency management volunteers.

Funding was secured through the Lord Mayor's Charitable Trust to develop a Climate Resilient Community Action Group that will increase awareness of the impact of climate change, confidence to participate in and lead local climate action initiatives.



## Conservation

More than 500 grasses and sedges were planted along Curly Sedge Creek, with 250 regionally endangered Curly Sedge ready to go in the ground this summer. With community volunteers we have been able to do monthly water surveys and regular weeding of noxious and invasive weeds.



## Highlight

# Social Justice Project and La Trobe Law School Clinics

Informed by a vision of impact, the Social Justice Project aims to build our understanding of how to address the social conditions that give rise to hardship and conflict with the law at a broader social level and develop strategies and ways of working that are likely to have the greatest impact on individuals, groups and communities across our region.



In the establishment phase we are working to develop a strong and thoughtful program of engagement, communication, information and referral, education and activities to enable student learning and increase community access to social justice and develop more client centred ways of working together to engage and support people to make informed choices and access relevant and respectful services in a timely manner.

WCC's Social Justice Project is a way of helping us to **think** about and **act** on the social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental factors that adversely affect places and communities of people within our region. We will develop our ways of working and approach to target our priority groups and work across all our strategic priority areas.

In early 2024 WCC, together with La Trobe University, launched the Social Justice Project and Law School Clinics. WCC CEO Alex Haynes together with Law School Dean Professor Fiona Kelly welcomed La Trobe's Deputy Chancellor Meredith Sussex and the Hon. Andrew Giles, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs to launch the clinic.

The launch was a community affair with representatives attending from the Federation of Community Legal Centres, Victoria Legal Aid, Uniting, La Trobe University, local partner organisations, staff, volunteers and current students.

Andrew Giles with WCC and Latrobe staff at the Social Justice Hub Launch



Since January 2024, WCC have offered five legal clinics including two Civil Actions Clinics, Divorce Clinic, Family Violence Clinic co-located at our partner organisation Uniting, and a Wills and Wishes Clinic. Recognising a community need for fines and infringements support, the Civil Actions Clinics saw over 100 clients alone and were able to withdraw fines for clients (specifically those from a CALD background or family violence victim-survivors) equal to 327 weeks of grocery bills!

# Financial Statement

Whittlesea community connections inc  
ABN: 49 881 724 827

## Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income for the Year Ended 30 June 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>Income</b>			
Grants received		7,568,322	6,612,860
Funding received from ACFE Board		92,170	76,256
Donations		15,782	31,339
Interest		121,082	61,871
Service generated income		363,445	284,205
Other revenue		5,624	-
		<b>8,166,425</b>	<b>7,066,531</b>
<b>Expenses</b>			
Accounting & book-keeping fees		25,100	16,100
Advertising & marketing		28,295	9,712
Audit fees		11,500	10,150
Bank charges		3,023	644
Depreciation		150,727	143,097
Home loans forgiven		-	14,740
Interpreting services		4,730	4,029
Information technology		157,442	176,046
Insurance		3,713	3,751
Interest Paid		82	12
Legal practicing certificate		2,877	2,108
Meeting expenses		2,400	7,074
Motor vehicle expenses		112,986	87,938
Printing and stationery		37,888	32,175
Police and working with children checks		5,130	3,800
Postage and couriers		3,695	2,474
Program costs		784,302	831,341
Rent and outgoings		127,460	130,784
Repairs and maintenance		12,214	5,054
Subscriptions and memberships		22,212	17,544
Sundry expenses		9,916	6,509
Telephone and internet		41,188	51,308
Volunteers' expenses		8,600	12,964
Wages and related costs		6,607,369	5,403,561
<b>Total expenses</b>		<b>8,162,849</b>	<b>6,972,915</b>
Operating surplus (deficit) before income tax		3,576	93,616
Income tax expense	2(e)	-	-
Operating surplus for the year		3,576	93,616
Other comprehensive income		-	-
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>		<b>3,576</b>	<b>93,616</b>

# Financial Statement [continued]

## Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2024

	Note	2023 \$	2023 \$
<b>Current Assets</b>			
Cash and cash equivalents		2,808,328	3,278,289
Trade receivables		352,895	715,646
Sundry receivables		74,980	89,906
		<u>3,236,203</u>	<u>4,083,841</u>
<b>Non-Current Assets</b>			
Plant and equipment	4	385,128	316,342
Investments		60	60
		<u>385,188</u>	<u>316,402</u>
<b>Total Assets</b>		<u><b>3,621,391</b></u>	<u><b>4,400,243</b></u>
<b>Current Liabilities</b>			
Trade creditors		249,669	277,611
Sundry creditors and accruals		284,084	318,038
Grants to be carried forward	5	714,147	1,331,079
Provision for employee entitlements	6	652,000	755,600
		<u>1,899,900</u>	<u>2,682,328</u>
<b>Non-Current Liabilities</b>			
Secured loans		-	-
		<u>1,899,900</u>	<u>2,682,328</u>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>		<u><b>1,899,900</b></u>	<u><b>2,682,328</b></u>
<b>Net Assets</b>		<u><b>1,721,491</b></u>	<u><b>1,717,915</b></u>
<b>Equity</b>			
Accumulated surplus brought forward		1,717,915	1,624,299
Current year surplus		3,576	93,616
<b>Total Equity</b>		<u><b>1,721,491</b></u>	<u><b>1,717,915</b></u>

## Statement of Changes in Equity for the Year Ended 30 June 2024

	Accumulated Surplus \$
Balance as at 1 July 2022	1,624,299
Surplus for the year	93,616
Balance as at 30 June 2023	<u>1,717,915</u>
Surplus for the year	3,576
<b>Balance as at 30 June 2024</b>	<u><b>1,721,491</b></u>

## Statement of Cash Flows for the Year Ended 30 June 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>Cash flows from operating activities</b>			
Receipts from operations		8,524,469	8,282,219
Interest received		<u>128,473</u>	<u>19,741</u>
Cash inflows		8,652,942	8,301,960
Payments to suppliers and employees		<u>(8,909,014)</u>	<u>(7,869,658)</u>
<b>Net operating cash flows</b>	3(b)	<u><b>(256,072)</b></u>	<u><b>432,302</b></u>
<b>Cash flows from investing activities</b>			
Net payments for plant and equipment		<u>(213,889)</u>	<u>(98,076)</u>
<b>Net investing cash flows</b>		<u><b>(213,889)</b></u>	<u><b>(98,076)</b></u>
Net (decrease)/increase in cash held		(469,961)	334,226
Cash at the beginning of the financial year		<u>3,278,289</u>	<u>2,944,063</u>
<b>Cash at the end of the financial year</b>		<u><b>2,808,328</b></u>	<u><b>3,278,289</b></u>

# Collaboration for greater impact

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. We collaborate with over 160 services and community groups across a growing number of key networks.



## Whittlesea Family Violence Network (WFFVN)

The WFFVN connects service providers across the City of Whittlesea in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of women, children and others experiencing or at risk of family violence. A key highlight for the network members is an annual forum which this year featured advocate Tarang Chawla. Tarang discussed strategies to engage men and communities in order to better frame the discourse to more effectively engage and mobilise communities at a local level.

If you would like to be involved or would like more information about the Whittlesea Family Violence Network please contact Katriece Bolden [kbolden@whittleseacc.org.au](mailto:kbolden@whittleseacc.org.au)

## Whittlesea Emergency Relief Network

The Whittlesea Emergency Relief Network is an active group of local emergency relief service providers from across Whittlesea, facilitated by Whittlesea Community Connections. The ER Network aims to collaboratively address issues and concerns around disadvantage in the local community. These services work with vulnerable people in the municipality of Whittlesea who are in financial crisis and seeking assistance. Each year, these services assist thousands of local families with community lunches, breakfast programs, food hampers, financial assistance, housing support, case management, food and petrol vouchers and other material aid assistance. Much of the service delivery is provided by dedicated volunteers.

If you would like to be involved or would like more information about the Whittlesea Emergency Relief Network please contact Ginette Beguely [gbeguely@whittleseacc.org.au](mailto:gbeguely@whittleseacc.org.au)

## Northern Metro Informal Volunteering Network

This network was established and launched after hours, to support small to medium volunteer involving organisations with a better understanding on best practice in volunteer management. Information on volunteer recruitment and onboarding, child safety, police checks and council grants were shared.

## Whittlesea Partnership on Volunteering and Community Engagement Network

The partnership continued to meet and grow in membership with over 80 organisations signed up to the Whittlesea Volunteer Resource Service Network newsletter sharing information on the latest news and activities on volunteering, locally and state wide. Workshops on Volunteer to employee, child safety, youth volunteer participation and family violence were organized and delivered for volunteer involving organizations and volunteers.

If you would like to be involved or would like more information about the Whittlesea Partnership on Volunteering and Community Engagement Network or the Northern Metro Informal Volunteering Network please contact Emma Navarro [enavarro@whittleseacc.org.au](mailto:enavarro@whittleseacc.org.au)

## Whittlesea Anti-racism Support Network

In December 2022 local organisations and community groups committed to addressing racism and discrimination in Whittlesea came together to discuss how to progress the establishment of a Whittlesea Anti-Racism Support Network to create more safe spaces to talk about racism, raise awareness and advance local measures to prevent and respond to racism. The role of the Whittlesea Anti-Racism Support Network

- Raise awareness of existing reporting services and pathways in Whittlesea
- Build capacity of member organisations to identify and respond to incidents and disclosures of racism and discrimination
- Build capacity of community groups to identify and report incidents of racism and discrimination
- Participate in activities that promote anti-racism, non-discriminatory practices including community events, information provision and advocacy

If you would like to be involved or would like more information about the Whittlesea Anti-Racism Support Network please contact Emma Antonetti [eantonetti@whittleseacc.org.au](mailto:eantonetti@whittleseacc.org.au)

## Whittlesea PAGE Working Group and Pride in the North

The WCC Pride Awareness and Gender Equity (PAGE) Working Group has continued to advance work in promoting LGBTQIA+ inclusivity & gender equity both internally and externally. A highlight from PAGE achievements this year is planning and delivery of 34 Rainbow Group sessions to LGBTQIA+ secondary school students.

PAGE group members have also been active in the Pride in the North network including co-planning and delivering the inaugural Pride in the North Summit in November 2023 attracting 196 attendees from 73 organisations and community groups and actively participating in the Midsumma Carnival and March, and presentation at this year's national Better Together conference in Geelong.

# Thank you to our volunteers

This year marks a significant milestone for Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) as we celebrate 50 years of partnership with our community and dedicated volunteers. For five decades, WCC has been a welcoming space for individuals seeking to make meaningful connections and foster lasting change.

Through countless projects and programs, WCC has built a legacy of support for the most vulnerable, rooted in a strong culture of volunteerism. Our volunteers come from diverse backgrounds, enriching our organisation and enhancing our ability to connect with and support those in need.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our volunteers. Your passion, commitment, and loyalty have been instrumental in establishing WCC as a cherished resource within our community. Together, we have created a lasting impact that will continue for many years to come.

Thank you for being an essential part of our journey!

- Abarna Ahilaeswaran
- Abdul Mansur
- Abdullah Siddiqui
- Aliaa Sadoo
- Andrew Emery
- Andrew Morrison
- Andrew Tim Goodwin
- Angela Bausch
- Baldev Singh Gill
- Basel Aldeeb
- Bassam Nassour
- Behroo ALAIE
- Bill Hutchins
- Brett Mclatchie
- Carl Reid
- Carrie Chen
- Christine Garbutcheon-Singh
- Colin Spencer
- Dalia Kalous
- David Whelan
- David Williams
- Debra Graham
- Denis Fitzgibbon
- Devika Chandrar
- Diane Pearl
- Emmanuel Gauci
- Eromi Anton
- Erwin Zuber
- Ewen Luc
- Fadhil Albakri
- Fahd Hanna Alhawati
- Fatima Al Sekafi
- Firas Dawood Al-daweri
- Fotini Argyros
- Frank Torcasio
- Garry Sloan
- Glen Ballinger
- Grace Alsliman
- Gregory Luttick
- Hirohito Guerrero
- Iman El-Mohammad
- Jack Burke
- Jacqui Ellul
- Jana Saeed
- Jasmine Grech
- Jihan Hodroj
- Jill McKeever
- Jing Yi
- John Donnelly
- John Fry
- John Neal
- John Shanahan
- John Sveticic
- Joianan Mendoza Newman

- Jose Mari Marco
- Joseph Battista
- Judith Franklin
- Karen GailMcKenzie
- Karen Ooi
- Kathryn Wilson
- Keng Tan
- Kerryn Burgoyne
- Kowselya Sivakumar
- Krishanthimala Liyanage
- Kumar Pradhan
- Lambrina Gimian
- Lavina Hambidge
- Leanne Leonard
- Leeanne White
- Leigh Barrett
- Leigh Bradstreet
- Lena Matulin
- Lisa Edwards
- Liz Buckley
- Louisa Bartolome
- Maria Vella
- Mariah Pengelly
- Mia Ormiston
- Michael Siciliano
- Michelle Garvan
- Michelle Mbala Hikolo
- Mohammad Nazmul Huda
- Monireh Rostamihaskandi
- Mufeeda Colampadanna
- Muhamad Abduh
- Mulham Ghaith
- Muzna Siddiqui
- Nadia Youssef
- NahidS oltanlo
- Najmeh Yazdanpanah
- Nancy Dablan
- Nandraj Saggoonoo
- Nasser Alghezy
- Neil Marshall
- Niaz Khan
- Nibras Abed
- Nick Parisi
- Nicola Parisi
- Niel Hazeldene
- Noriko Khan
- Paolo De Vincentiis
- Paolo Treccia
- Paul Russell
- Priya Rajiv
- Puneet Tikoo
- Priyanka Kashkari
- Ramya Murugesan
- Ray Rosales
- Rebecca John
- Richard Schwartz
- Robyn Keane
- Ronald Williams
- Roy Smith
- Rozan Almassri
- Sadaf Rehman
- Sami Shtewi
- Sanaa Trkeeh
- Sandra Natale
- Sara Asareh
- Sarah Dobson
- Satyaveer Keeroder
- Shaimaa Kadhemi Hussien Al-Tammi

- Shane Kaluza
- Sharon Fode
- Shenali Fernando
- Shiron Warnakulasuriya
- Shoukry Sidrak
- Shreyalina Victoria
- Skye Anderson
- Sofia Gerales Enes
- Sokmom Sun
- Soo Hoon Chua
- Stefan Dimeski
- Stephanie Watt
- Stephen Middlebrook
- Steve Parry
- Steven Howell
- Steven Lim
- Susan Nikolaidis
- Susan Perkins
- Susmita Dhakal
- Suzi Duncan
- Sylvia Tran
- Tareq Alomar
- Vicki Ann Selvaggio
- Victoria Lee
- Waleed Yousif Shamoona
- Wayne Leech
- Wendy Flannery
- Wendy Gillard-Bowles
- William Hutchins
- Xin MinLow
- Yasemin Temelat
- Zain Ayyad
- Zainab Muladawilah



We remember the generosity and dedication of Dennis Walker (1949-2024) and his gentle nature with the team and loving being part of the community.

Thank you Dennis for your commitment and your contribution to WCC.

CELEBRATING

50

YEARS

1973-2023



# Staff who contributed to our success this year

<b>Aiman Said</b>	Employment Mentor
<b>Aisha Khurram</b>	Hardship Help Coordinator
<b>Alex Ashmore</b>	Law Graduate
<b>Alex Haynes</b>	CEO
<b>Al Wicks</b>	Food Collective Coordinator
<b>Anas Qishta</b>	Data and Evaluation Advisor
<b>Andrew Mitrovic</b>	Community Lawyer
<b>Basant Ahmed</b>	Settlement Worker
<b>Bobby Lama</b>	Women's Leadership & Development Project Worker
<b>Caroline Matanhire</b>	Intake Officer
<b>Caterina Angelis</b>	Student Placement Coordinator
<b>Cecilia Moses</b>	Employment Mentor
<b>Charlotte Gordon</b>	Conservation Coordinator
<b>Cud Armanazi</b>	Youth Food Hub Worker
<b>Dalia Kalous</b>	Settlement Worker
<b>Dean Marando</b>	Children and Young People Lead
<b>Deepty Cusima</b>	Early Help Family Coach - Kids First
<b>Edie Schmutter</b>	Youth Food Hub Worker
<b>Edmond Babatunde</b>	Road Safety Team Leader
<b>Emma Antonetti</b>	General Manager Equity and Access
<b>Emma Navarro</b>	Whittlesea Volunteer Resource Service Coordinator
<b>Entissar Jabbar Aasi</b>	Settlement Worker
<b>Eric Du</b>	Account Officer
<b>Fadi Shedid</b>	Food Collective Worker
<b>Farah Haddad</b>	Settlement caseworker
<b>Fukuko Matsumoto</b>	Mernda Neighbourhood House Support Officer
<b>Georgianna Brooks</b>	Community Transport Assessment Worker
<b>Ginette Beguely</b>	Community Help Team Leader

<b>Grozda Nedeljkovic</b>	Immigration Advisor
<b>Hala Alkhoury</b>	Intake Officer
<b>Harpreet Singh</b>	driverEd Coordinator
<b>Hayley Thomas</b>	Youth Food Hub Worker, Youth Worker
<b>Hiba Ayass</b>	Settlement Team Leader
<b>Hiyah Rahman</b>	Lead Healthy and Connected Communities
<b>Hisham Aburghif</b>	nugal biik plants and seeds Worker
<b>Irina Zdraveska</b>	Community Engagement Coordinator
<b>Jackie Mathew</b>	Office and Communication Coordinator
<b>Jad Saeed</b>	Settlement Youth Worker
<b>Jennie Barnes</b>	Women's Leadership & Development Project Coordinator
<b>Jennifer Shaw</b>	Food Collective Café / Catering Coordinator
<b>Jenny Nicholls</b>	Employment Mentor
<b>John Yacoub</b>	Food Collective Cook / Trainer
<b>Katricee Bolden</b>	Lead Gender Equity & Family Violence Team
<b>Kim Lai</b>	Finance Manager
<b>Kimberley Chu</b>	Employment Mentor
<b>Lama Sankari</b>	Transport Support Officer
<b>Laura Brookes</b>	Youth Lawyer
<b>Luma Alhendi</b>	Youth Food Hub Worker
<b>Michelle Martinez</b>	Community Lawyer
<b>Michelle Patching</b>	Learn Local Administration Worker
<b>Mohammad Al Ayoub</b>	Food Hub Worker
<b>Mohammad Alnayef</b>	Settlement Caseworker
<b>Moses Florendo</b>	Coordinating Lawyer Law Clinics
<b>Nadia Teran</b>	Youth Worker
<b>Narelle Sullivan</b>	Lead Employment and Participation (Social Enterprise)
<b>Nawal Semaan</b>	EPRI Small Business Project Officer

<b>Nnedimma Ikeme</b>	Intake Officer
<b>Norma Medawar</b>	Employment Mentor
<b>Pablo Gimenez</b>	Social Enterprise Advisor
<b>Paras Christou</b>	Mernda Neighbourhood House Coordinator
<b>Pooja Dewan</b>	Multicultural Communities Lawyer
<b>Rabab Ourabi</b>	EPRI Program Worker
<b>Rahaf Hasan</b>	Women In Work Coordinator
<b>Randa Rafiq</b>	Community Lawyer - Family Violence and Family Law
<b>Rennie Ervinawati</b>	Community Help Worker
<b>Rita Hippi</b>	Community Help Worker
<b>Sadia Amjad</b>	Intake Officer
<b>Sarah Daly</b>	Lead Climate Resilient Communities (Food Collective)
<b>Scott Tunbridge</b>	nugal biik Plants and Seeds Nursery Manager
<b>Sean Robertson</b>	Community Lawyer
<b>Serdar Tackiran</b>	Youth Project Worker
<b>Sharna Brown</b>	nugal biik ranger Coordinator
<b>Shawn Lee</b>	COO
<b>Sonali Sehgal</b>	Intake Officer
<b>Souvik Chakraborty</b>	Evaluation Coordinator
<b>Sreyasi Chaudhuri</b>	Communications Coordinator
<b>Suneeti Sharma</b>	Community Help Worker and Climate Resilience Project Worker
<b>Suraj Walson</b>	Lead Employment and Participation (Employment)
<b>Tanya Stelmach</b>	Principal Solicitor
<b>Toni Bentley</b>	Primary Prevention Projects Coordinator
<b>Viktor Faulknor</b>	Lead Climate Resilient Communities (Wollert Community Farm)
<b>Wesley Hauler-Winterford</b>	Food Purchaser
<b>Wisam Dindo</b>	Community Transport Driver

Thank you to Susan Dejersey for supporting the development of our 50 year archive.

## Women in Work – Childcare Workers

Ahlam Mina  
Ruqaya Ghulam  
Rachel Kori  
Lina Salem  
Rasha Komar  
Haya Sankari  
Safaa Dib  
Entidhar Al Sayab  
Tagrid Saman

## Driving ED Instructors

Anees Yaqoob  
Aziza Issa  
Hajirah Dalwai AL Wardighi  
Irina Galileos  
Kumar Pradhan  
Masoomah Khavari  
Noor Alsaedi  
Sayran Rostam

## Facilitators and Teachers

Ajith Weerakoon  
Carolyn Dunell  
Caroulin Sabe  
Eromi Anton  
Jason Dall  
Karen Thompson  
Kathleen Tants  
Matthew Stephenson  
Natalie Lim  
Tanya Stone Maylei Hunt  
Soo Hoon Chua  
Marina Thacker  
Jaq Pierce  
A Grade Resumes  
Sharkie Marketing  
Barbara Minuzzo  
Karen Thompson

# Our Partners & Supporters

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

## Activity Partners

- AFL
- Al Siraat Secondary College
- AMES
- Baseline
- Banyule Community Health
- Berry Street
- Big Group Hug
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre
- Cabrini Outreach
- Cancer Council Victoria
- Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)
- Centre for Participation Horsham
- CERES
- CFA Wollert
- Community Grocer
- Community Information and Support Victoria (CisVIC)
- Connecting Home
- Creeds Farm Living and Learning
- Cricket Victoria
- Cube Sports
- Cultural Perspectives
- Dardi Munwurro
- DPV Health Limited
- Edgars Creek Primary School
- Edgars Creek Secondary College
- Encompass Care
- Epping Cricket Club
- Epping Secondary College
- Fareshare
- Federation of Community Legal Centres
- Federation University
- FoodINC
- Football Australia
- Football Victoria
- Foundation House
- Hanson Australia
- Haven Home Safe
- Home Ground Real Estate
- Hope Street
- Housing Choices Australia
- Hume Grammar Anglican Primary School
- Hume Whittlesea LLEN
- InTouch - Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
- Islamic Council of Victoria
- JewishCare Victoria
- KidsFirst Australia
- Kinglake Neighbourhood House
- La Trobe University Law School
- Lalor Landcare
- Lalor Neighbourhood House
- Lalor Secondary College
- Launch Housing
- Lendlease (Aurora)
- Marymede Secondary College
- Melbourne City Mission
- Melbourne North Food Group
- Melbourne Polytechnic
- Melbourne Victory Football Club
- Merri-bek L2P
- Merri Creek Management Committee
- Merri Outreach Support Services (MOSS)
- Mernda Uniting Church
- Mill Park Leisure
- Mill Park Secondary College
- Multicultural Centre for Women's Health
- Neami National
- Narrap Rangers, Wurundjeri Cultural Heritage Corporation
- Neighbourhood Houses Victoria Inc
- Nillumbik Shire Council - L2P
- NorthLink
- Northern Centre for Sexual Assault (NCASA)
- Northern Health
- Northern Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Service – Berry Street
- Northern Pride Netball Association
- Northern School of Autism (Lalor)
- Open Food Network
- Parkers Auto Plus Pty Ltd
- Pavilion School Epping
- Pets for the Homeless
- Plenty Valley Lions
- Plenty Valley Retirement Village
- PRACE
- River Plenty College
- Reservoir East Primary School
- Reservoir High School
- Safe and Equal
- Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre
- Services Australia
- St Mary's Parish Primary School
- St Monica's College
- The Lakes Secondary College
- The Orange Door (NEMA)
- The Smith Family
- The Queens Fund
- Trust for Nature - Warreen Beek
- Thomastown Bears Football, Cricket and Netball Club
- Thomastown Language School
- Thomastown Meadows Primary School
- Thomastown Neighbourhood House
- Thomastown Primary School
- Thomastown West Primary School
- TRAC
- Uniting
- Villawood Properties
- Victoria Police
- Victoria University
- Volunteering Victoria
- Volunteer West
- Whittlesea City Basketball Association
- Whittlesea Community House
- Whittlesea FoodShare
- City of Whittlesea Maternal and Child Health Service
- Whittlesea Secondary College
- Women's Health in the North
- Women's Property Initiative
- Yarra Plenty Regional Library (Thomastown, Lalor, Mill Park)
- Yarra Valley Water
- Yarra View Bushland Nursery
- Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
- Your Community Health
- YMCA
- Zenobia Association
- 3knd radio

## Donors and Sponsors

Thank you to all the people and groups who generously donated throughout the year. Thank you also to all those clients who supported our community enterprises.

- Alison Pernek
- Amanda Ravaneshi
- Amy Mooney
- ANZ
- Andy Grant
- Arilla Retirement Village
- Australian Communities Foundation
- Barbara Jackson
- Bunnings (Epping and Mernda)
- Bupa
- CityLife Church (Lalor)
- CMV Staff Foundation
- Colin McDonald
- Commonwealth Bank (South Morang, Plenty Valley, Epping, Thomastown )
- DataSquad Consulting Pty Ltd
- Decathlon
- Dennis Family Corporation
- Elizabeth & Wilf Thorsen
- Emad Attie
- Emanuela Savini
- Enjoy Church North
- Equity Trustees Limited
- Fiona McDermott
- First Nations Traffic Management
- Ginette Beguely
- Goodyear Autocare Essendon
- Grace Rose-Miller
- Hanson Australia
- Harpreet Singh
- Harry Jenkins
- Highways and Byways Ltd.
- Holding Redlich
- Honda Foundation
- Jackie Mathew
- Jane Schinas
- Jay Sharma
- Jaydo Construction
- John Fry
- Kymberleigh Rice-Newbury
- Lama Sankari
- Lea Thornton
- Lendlease Communities (Australia)
- Liberty Financial
- Lisa Ehrenfried
- Lisa Stoddart
- Lynette Parker
- Mainwest Forklift Service
- Margaret Burggraaf
- Maria Axarli-Coulter
- Maria Kunnumpurath
- Merlin Jose
- Mernda Multicultural Women's Cooking Group
- Michelle Cook
- Montmorency Asylum Seekers Support Group
- Narelle Sullivan
- Natasha Grozdanov
- Northern Kia
- NSM Importers & Wholesalers
- Pacific Epping
- Parham Soleimani
- Patrick Arnold
- Paul Bailey
- Pauline Morrow
- Ray Beaton
- RePurpose IT
- Rosemary Iacono
- Rotary Club of Bundoora
- Rotary Club of Whittlesea
- Sadia Amjad
- Safa Chebbou
- Sandhurst Trustee Aurora
- Sandra Natale
- Sandra Scarfe
- Sarah Daly
- Sasha Preece
- Saula
- Scanlon Foundation
- Sony Antony
- St Monica's College
- Stantec
- StreetSmart Australia
- Sunshine and Crocodiles Pty Ltd
- Sylvia Tran
- Tegan Miller
- The Loan Room
- Trio Plumbing
- Uncle Lionell Dukkakis
- Victorian Women's Trust
- Ward Ambler Foundation
- Westpac (Whittlesea)
- Wettenhall Environment Trust
- Wisewould Mahony
- Yuzhen Chen

## Government Partners

- Australian Department of Health and Aged Care
- 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)
- Major Road Projects Victoria
- Melbourne Water
- Parks Victoria
- Sustainability Victoria
- Transport Accident Commission (TAC)
- VicHealth
- Victorian Department of Transport and Planning (DTP)
- Victorian Department of Education - Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE)
- Victorian Department of Education – Health, Wellbeing & Specialist Services
- Victorian Department of Energy, Environment, Climate Action (DEECA, formerly DELWP)
- Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)
- Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS)
- Victorian Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR)
- Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC)
- Victoria Legal Aid
- Yarra Valley Water

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# Get Involved

## Volunteer

Volunteers are essential to our services and programs. More than 200 people of all ages and backgrounds work alongside our staff in a variety of roles and we welcome new volunteers. If you are interested in becoming an active member of our team we would love to hear from you.

[www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/community-services/volunteer-resource-services/volunteer-registration](http://www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/community-services/volunteer-resource-services/volunteer-registration)

## Donate

By making a financial contribution to Whittlesea Community Connections you are contributing to the work of an organisation committed to meeting the needs of disadvantaged members of Whittlesea's communities. You are also assured that all of your donation will be spent locally to meet local needs and that 100% of your donation will go directly to service delivery. Donate via our website or contact our Finance team on 9401 6666 or email [finance@whittleseacc.org.au](mailto:finance@whittleseacc.org.au).

## 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.

[www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/get-involved/contact-us](http://www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/get-involved/contact-us)

## Buy from us

Our website has a range of products and services you can purchase through our enterprises – catering, food boxes, driving lessons, plants and childcare. Buying from us helps us provide training and employment opportunities and invest in conservation.

[www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/community-enterprises](http://www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/community-enterprises)



Whittlesea  
Community  
Connections

Making a positive difference everyday



**making a positive difference everyday**