



Whittlesea
**Community
Connections**
Making a positive difference everyday

Emerging Issues Report – Community Pulse 2025

Community Trends in the City of Whittlesea

Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC)

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1. Introduction

The Community Pulse provides a consolidated view of emerging community trends observed across Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC). It draws on thousands of annual touchpoints across Community Help, Hardship Help, Youth, Families, Settlement, Legal, Anti Racism Support, Transport, Volunteering, and co located outreach services.

The purpose is to share lived experience insights, inform Council planning, strengthen prevention and early intervention, and support joint responses across the municipality.

This information has been collated by Whittlesea Community Connections and is supported by funding from City of Whittlesea

2. Overview of Council Funded Services

Council funding supports several core WCC services that act as trusted, accessible entry points for residents experiencing hardship, isolation, or complex barriers.

Community Help

Provides information, referral, service navigation and advocacy via phone, online, drop ins and outreach. These services offer early visibility of emerging need and support residents who may struggle to navigate increasingly complex systems.

Volunteer Resource Service

Strengthens volunteering across the municipality, supports organisations to run safe and sustainable programs, and connects residents to meaningful volunteer roles.

Service Networks

- Whittlesea Family Violence Network: a voluntary alliance of services, community organisations and government that are committed to the people impacted by violence and those who use violence, primary prevention, community organisations and services.
- Whittlesea Volunteer and Community Engagement Network: creates space for volunteer-involving organisations to collaborate, share knowledge and respond to emerging trends

These networks improve collaboration, referral pathways, and coordinated responses.

3. Key Output Figures (2025)

CONTACT CENTRE

15,749

calls answered, including:

4,885

legal support enquiries

3,364

Hardship Help enquiries

2,273

community transport enquiries

APPOINTMENTS

313

Community Help
Clinic appointments

42

Energy Assistance
Program appointments

73

Tax Help appointments

2026

duty interactions

VOLUNTEERING & NETWORKS

173 volunteers

referred to VIOs
(166 external)

12

volunteer information
sessions

138 members

– Volunteer &
Community Engagement
Network

70 members

– Family Violence
Network

COMMUNITY GROUPS

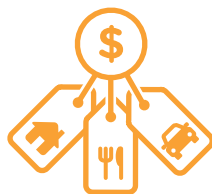
228 attendees at Women's Lunches and Youth Sessions

Weekly Sisters Woodwork Group



4. Emerging Issues & Trends

WCC frontline teams identified five major trends shaping community wellbeing and service demand.



TREND 1: **Cost of Living Pressure**

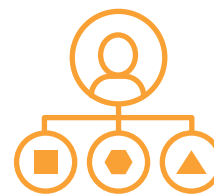
Cost of living stress is the most significant and consistent trend across all services.

Key Indicators

- Material wellbeing and housing are the **main presenting issues** in Community Help Clinics.
- **52% of emergency relief clients were first time service users**, reflecting worsening financial pressure across the municipality.
- **77% increase** in Parent Pathways commencements.
- Cost barriers limiting volunteering participation.
- More young people and jobseekers using volunteering as an employment pathway.

Implication

Financial stress escalates quickly when not addressed early, increasing risk of crisis presentations.



TREND 2: **Increasing Complexity of Needs**

Clients are presenting with multiple, intersecting issues requiring longer and more intensive engagement.

Key Indicators

- **57% increase** in outgoing referrals from emergency relief.
- **Average direct time per casework session increased 33%**, showing that clients are presenting with **more complex, layered issues** that require longer appointments, more intensive support, and additional follow up.
- Interpreter use increased from **73% to 78%**.
- **1 in 5 women accessing emergency relief were experiencing or at risk of family violence**, demonstrating the strong intersection between **financial hardship and safety risks**, and the role of emergency relief as a point of early identification.
- **32% of Community Help Clinic clients were aged 65+**, highlighting that older residents are disproportionately affected by digital exclusion, system complexity, and rising living costs.
- **28% of legal matters involved sole parents with dependent children**, showing that single parent households face compounding pressures including financial strain, housing instability, and caregiving responsibilities.

Implication

Single issue responses are no longer sufficient; integrated service models are essential.



TREND 3:

Delayed Help Seeking & Crisis Presentation

More people are accessing help only once issues have escalated, reducing early intervention opportunities.

Key Indicators

- Legal service wait times more than doubled from 1 week to 2–3 weeks, reflecting increasing demand and reducing opportunities for early intervention.
- Fines and Family Violence Intervention Orders represent over 30% of legal services, showing that penalties and safety related matters are major drivers of legal demand.
- 19% of FVIO matters involved clients experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- 15% of food relief clients were also experiencing or at risk of family violence, reinforcing the overlap between financial stress and safety concerns.

Implication

Stigma, cost barriers, and system complexity delay access, increasing crisis workload.



TREND 4:

Access & Transport Barriers

Transport and digital exclusion continue to limit access to essential services, especially in growth suburbs.

Key Indicators

- Medical transport trips increased from 1,131 in 2024 to 2,672 in 2025, highlighting the critical role of community transport in connecting residents to essential medical care.
- Emergency relief access from remote suburbs increased 29%, showing heightened financial stress and limited local support options in growth areas.
- Community transport trips to Mernda, Wollert and Donnybrook increased from 643 to 1,292, reflecting gaps in public transport availability and affordability.
- Digital exclusion due to literacy, language, and poor website design.

Implication

Services exist, but many residents cannot access them.



TREND 5:

Settlement Pressures with Reduced Supports

Newly arrived communities are presenting with higher complexity and reduced eligibility for settlement support.

Key Indicators

- Increased Kurdish, Afghan and Palestinian client cohorts.
- 69% increase in Cohesion Community Support Program clients.
- More asylum seekers ineligible for settlement support seeking help.
- 73% of EPRI evaluation interviewees identified language as a significant barrier to employment, demonstrating that language proficiency remains one of the most significant obstacles to job readiness and system navigation.
- Majority of EPRI clients accessed multiple WCC services, showing that employment challenges rarely occur in isolation and require wrap around support.

Implication

Without early support, risk of long term exclusion increases significantly.

5. Case Studies



CASE STUDY 1: Volunteering

Volunteering as a pathway to employment

Scenario:

Thomas was a psychology student looking for a volunteer role that aligned with his academic interests and gave him an opportunity to develop his interpersonal skills.

The Volunteer Resource Service Specialist took the time to meet with him face to face and introduced him to a range of potential opportunities and he was eventually linked to the Community Lunch program at WCC

Opportunities created:

- Opportunities to develop interpersonal, teamwork and communication skills
- Strengthen application for further study
- Strengthen community connection for self and family

CASE STUDY 2: Cost of Living & Complexity

Intake Support for a Single Parent Experiencing Financial Hardship and Family Violence

Scenario:

A single parent residing in the City of Whittlesea contacted the intake service seeking assistance due to financial hardship. The client had limited English proficiency and disclosed that they were a recent victim-survivor of family violence.

Support provided:

- Interpreter for clear, culturally safe communication
- Safety screening
- Food and financial support
- Information and referral: SETS, housing, family violence services



6. What's Working

Despite rising complexity, several protective factors are enabling effective responses:

- Trusted, local entry points
- Practical assistance delivered with dignity
- Integrated service responses
- Strong partnerships and co location
- Supported volunteering pathways
- Youth and community led approaches



7. Implications for Council Planning

Key considerations for Council:

- Prioritise early intervention and prevention
- Strengthen partnerships with trusted place based organisations
- Invest in navigation and coordination support
- Address transport and digital access barriers in growth suburbs
- Explore shared data, pilots and ongoing dialogue



8. Next Steps

WCC will continue to monitor trends and share insights through:

- Quarterly Community Pulse updates
- Ongoing collaboration with Council
- Strengthened data sharing and joint planning
- Continued engagement across networks and community groups

Contact Us

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