Whittlesea Community Connections

Making a positive difference everyday

Annual Report 2025–26



We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung Clan of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the lands within the City of Whittlesea, where we live and work.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and recognise the continuing connection of First Nations peoples to Country, culture, community, land and waters.





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Left: Visitors exploring the ongoing restoration of Curly Sedge Creek during a field visit at our farm.

About Whittlesea Community Connections

Top left: Jude, our Staff Support Officer, helping ensure our events run smoothly.
Top Right: Gloria, our Food Collective Café & Catering Manager, who has supported many trainees on their journey to success.
Below left: Suni and Paras at the Mernda Neighbourhood House Independence Celebration.
Below right: Norma, Senior Mentor with Parent Pathways, at a community celebration.









Whittlesea Community Connections works alongside local people, families, and communities to remove barriers, build connection, and make it easier for people to access the support, services, and opportunities they need.

Since 1973, we have grown with the Whittlesea community. Through that growth, our focus has stayed the same: standing with people experiencing disadvantage, listening to local voices, and supporting the strengths and aspirations of the people who call this community home.

This Annual Report shares a year of work across our five strategic directions. It tells the story of how we responded to local needs, worked with partners, strengthened programs, and supported people across Whittlesea. Through key outcomes, community stories and program highlights, it reflects the people, purpose and impact behind our work.

Left: Wes, helping our Food Collective team prepare fresh produce for the community.
Top right: Olivia, one of our Parent Pathways mentors, supporting parents on their journey.
Below right: New volunteers making a difference through our conservation activities at nugal biik Plants & Seeds







CEO & President Message





This year we have continued building a healthy and dynamic ecosystem of integrated services and partners. This place-based ecosystem creates more supported pathways for community members to improve their circumstances and helps us increase our social, economic, and environmental impact. Thank you to everyone who contributes to this – volunteers, staff and students, peers and peak bodies, partners, collaborators and funders and community leaders.

After enjoying 25 years in Shop 111 thanks to a long-term partnership with the City of Whittlesea, WCC moved to a fabulous new space in October 2025. We are still at Pacific Epping to maintain access and visibility, but we have better amenities and helpful neighbours, Orange Door and DPV Health.

We also established a presence in Wallan, with the support of Wallan Neighbourhood House, to increase local access to Parent Pathways across the southern part of Mitchell Shire. This will grow in 26-27, with WCC establishing a Community Information and Referral service to help people access services and support, funded by the Victorian Government and delivered in partnership with CISVic and Mitchell Shire Council.

It was our first full year at Wollert Community Farm, enabling us to really plan and develop our nugal biik conservation activities and increase nursery production. With Yarra Valley Water, we secured funding to complete the Farm masterplan and engage Aboriginal-owned TVN On Country to build a new community space for volunteers, visitors and staff, which will be open in the first half of 2027.

We are proud of the broader community strengthening role we play, encouraging community leadership and building capability and independence across the region.

Along with our long-running Multicultural Women's group grants and Advisory Groups, we celebrated at the end of this year both Mernda Neighbourhood House and Whittlesea Climate Action Network becoming independent.

With Mernda, we felt ten years ago that the growing area needed more connection and opportunity, and today we have a vibrant, welcoming, independent Neighbourhood House led by local people, for local people. Creating the conditions for an independent, hyper-local, community-led organisation to develop, grow, and build capacity, capability, and confidence takes time. In our disconnected, rapidly changing, and uncertain world, community development and safe, welcoming spaces have a strong voice and a strong role in how communities operate and flourish.

We officially recognised climate action and resilience as one of our strategic priorities in 2023 to reflect growing community interest and concerns, and our work with the Wollert Community Farm, conservation activities, Mernda Repair Cafe, and food systems. The Whittlesea Climate Action Network was enabled by Greater Melbourne Foundation and Mernda Neighbourhood House and grew through community-led action, information sharing and learning.

While we always have new initiatives and services to highlight our strength, agility, and community insight, most often they come from our core Community Help, Emergency Relief, Settlement, Youth, Legal, and Volunteering services and supports. Every year these develop more targeted and effective ways to engage and support community members. We also continually improve our systems and processes to improve community accessibility and safety. A highlight this year was achieving Rainbow Tick accreditation in early 2026.

We ended the year with the Board, CEO, executive team, staff, and volunteers working effectively together to support and strengthen communities across the outer north, helping them withstand external social, economic, and environmental pressures and systems change. This positive momentum is important to carry into 2026–27 as conditions worsen for both communities and not-for-profit organisations.

Alex Haynes, CEO
Richard Schwartz, Chair
Whittlesea Community Connections

Our Impact This Year

In 2025–26, we supported people to move from crisis to stability, from isolation to connection, and from barriers to opportunity.

Behind every number is a person, family or community taking a step towards safety, independence, justice, confidence or belonging.

23,618
enquiries answered through our Contact Centre, connecting people with information, referrals and support.

9,409
one-on-one support sessions provided, including casework support for refugees, recently arrived migrants and parents of young children.

8,481
attendances to group activities, including training, education, youth programs and community connection activities.

3,381
emergency relief cases opened, including food support and practical assistance for vulnerable families.

15,816
community transport services provided, supporting older people's access to medical appointments, social outings and essential services.

1,204
legal matters opened, including support with fines, family violence and access to justice.

187
volunteers helped bring our work to life.

54
people employed through our social enterprises.

Together, these outcomes reflect our role as a trusted local organisation working alongside the community to create practical pathways to safety, justice, connection, opportunity and resilience.



Right: Lama, our wonderful Community Transport & Client Services Officer, helping keep our community connected.

Two of our wonderful volunteers supporting conservation efforts at Wollert Community Farm.



Our Strategic Directions

Our strategic directions guide how we work alongside the Whittlesea community to respond to local needs, strengthen connection and create pathways to safety, opportunity and resilience.

Across five priority areas, our work focuses on supporting women's safety, young people's voice and belonging, employment pathways, community wellbeing, food security and climate resilience.

1 Women achieve equitable life outcomes and are safe from violence.



2 Young people have a sense of belonging and voice in their community.



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



4 Everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy life connected to community and to be food secure.



5 Communities are climate resilient and better able to prepare, respond and recover from disasters and climate impacts.



Strategic Direction 1

Women achieve equitable life outcomes and are safe from violence

Every woman deserves to feel safe, supported and able to make choices about her own life.

In Whittlesea, family violence continues to affect many women and families, especially those facing additional barriers such as language, financial stress, isolation or limited access to support. When someone is experiencing violence or uncertainty, it can be hard to know where to go, what help is available, or what steps to take next.

This year, we continued to work alongside women to build safety, confidence and stronger connections to community. Through legal support, family violence prevention, community education and practical programs, we helped women understand their options, access culturally safe support and take steps toward greater independence.

We also worked with local partners and community members to strengthen how our community recognises, responds to, and helps prevent family violence.



Our Impact

312 legal services opened for women experiencing or at risk of family violence.

35 member organisations, including government departments, family violence services and multicultural organisations, strengthened prevention, response and recovery through the Whittlesea Family Violence Network.

50+ women from diverse cultural backgrounds attended family violence capacity-building sessions, with 75% reporting improved knowledge.

4 new family violence resources were developed in **6 languages**, improving access to information about child protection, coercive control and separation/divorce.

120 women participated in the Multicultural Women's Grants program, with **75%** reporting **increased capacity, confidence and leadership skills**.

We delivered **8 community legal education sessions** focused specifically on family law or family violence.

Left: Randa, WCC's Family Law and Family Violence Lawyer, received an Emerging Lawyer Award from the Law Institute of Victoria for her outstanding work in expanding health justice partnerships.



CASE STUDY

Jenny: rebuilding safety after financial abuse

Jenny came to us after being left with $34,000 in fines connected to her former partner's abusive behaviour.

Most of the fines were for driving offences her former partner incurred between 2010 and 2017 while driving her car. Other fines were linked to his abusive behaviour and drug-fuelled volatility.

For Jenny, the debt was more than a financial issue. It was part of the ongoing impact of family violence and made it harder for her to move forward.

Our legal team supported Jenny to apply for a review through the Fines Victoria Family Violence Scheme. As a result, Fines Victoria withdrew all but four of the infringement notices.

We then helped Jenny apply for a refund for some of the money she had already paid. Her application was successful, and she received a partial refund.

The outcome reduced the financial burden left by family violence and helped Jenny take a practical step towards greater stability.

Jenny's story is one of 312 legal services opened this year for women experiencing or at risk of family violence. It shows how legal support can help victim-survivors understand their rights, address the long-term impacts of abuse and begin to rebuild safety and control over their lives.



Top: Multicultural Women's Group Grant 2026 launch event, June 2026.
Above: Financial Wellbeing Session at Kangan Institute, bringing together 160 students, teachers and educators, delivered in partnership with Kangan Institute and Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand.

Key Programs and Supporters

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Family Violence Project – funded by Family Safety Victoria

Safe and Empowered: multilingual family violence resources – funded by Family Safety Victoria

Multicultural Women's Grants Program – funded by Sunshine and Crocodiles and WCC

Whittlesea Family Violence Network – funded by WCC and City of Whittlesea

Community Legal Education: family law and family violence – funded by Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria, and The National Access to Justice Partnership through the Commonwealth and State governments

Health Justice Partnership – funded by Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria

Family Violence Legal Support – funded by the Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria, The Community Legal Centre Family Violence Fund, and The National Access to Justice Partnership through the Commonwealth and State governments

Multicultural Women's Driving Program – funded by Sunshine and Crocodiles, Australian Department of Home Affairs

Strategic Direction 2

Young people have a sense of belonging and voice in their community

When young people feel like they belong, they are more likely to do well.

Recent local research and feedback from young people show that connection, inclusion, and meaningful participation are key to their wellbeing and sense of community. That's why we help young people build confidence, learn practical skills, and connect with others in their community. We also work to support young people so their voices continue to shape the places, programs, and services that matter to them.



Our Impact

1,339 attendances to 141 youth group sessions.

115 young learners accessed more than **3,629 supervised driving hours** through L2P, with 16 getting their licence.

108 young women took part in our Get Active program, with 81% reporting they were more likely to play sports after taking part.

219 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people participated in our Junior Rangers program, connecting kids to Country and culture, and teaching them about traditional plants.

We delivered **25 Rainbow Group sessions** and consultation across 6 schools, building safety for LGBTQIA+ young people

120 students completed placements with us across disciplines including law, social work, youth work, criminology, marketing, conservation biology, data science and AI.

Left: An L2P learner celebrating her progress towards getting her driver's licence.





CASE STUDY

Annam's L2P journey

When Annam joined the L2P program in 2024, learning to drive meant independence, family, and more confidence in everyday life.

Annam was paired with our volunteer mentor Louisa Bortolome. What started as supervised driving practice soon became a supportive mentoring relationship that helped Annam build confidence behind the wheel and in everyday life.

Louisa learned Annam's interests and tied their drives to her love of photography, taking her to scenic places across Melbourne while helping her build confidence behind the wheel.

For Annam, getting her licence also meant she could better support her family. Her father lives away, and her mother can't drive, so learning to drive made it easier for Annam and her family to move around more independently.

Gaining her licence helped Annam reduce her daily commute and gave her more time for personal growth, family and the things that mattered to her.

Annam's journey shows that L2P is not only about learning to drive. With the right support, driving practice can become a pathway to confidence, independence and stronger connection to community.

L2P helps learners build confidence in real driving conditions. Through four structured stages, learners practise their skills across different roads, situations and weather conditions, with safety at the centre of every lesson.

Key Programs and Supporters

Whittlesea TAC L2P Learner Driver Mentoring Program – TAC funded, administered by the Department of Transport and Planning

Young Women Get Active – funded by the Australian Department of Health through the Play Our Way Initiative

Homework Club – funded by Ward Ambler Family and Centre for Multicultural Youth

Empower Her girls' groups – funded by Ward Ambler Family

Rainbow Groups and Rainbow Collective – funded by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing through the Engage! Initiative and Sunshine and Crocodiles.

nugal biik Rangers – funded by Yarra Valley Water and WCC

Top left: Daniel, one of our amazing L2P volunteer mentors who helped make this work possible.
Top right: WCC team members proudly participating in the 2026 Midsumma Pride March, celebrating inclusion and diversity.







Top: Judy, our amazing volunteer driving mentor, supporting an L2P learner.
Left: Community Lunch at Food Collective Café & Catering, bringing people together through fresh, seasonal food and meaningful connections.
Above: Norma and Olivia from our Parent Pathways team, connecting with local families at a community event.

Right: A little girl enjoying face painting at one of our Parent Pathways events.
Middle: Celebrating IDAHOBIT and our commitment to Rainbow Tick accreditation, promoting inclusion, visibility and belonging for LGBTQIA+ communities.
Below: Young people making a difference at our Youth Volunteering Day, supporting food relief and community initiatives.









Strategic Direction 3

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

Work, learning and participation can change what feels possible for a person.

Across Whittlesea, not everyone has the same access to employment, education or economic opportunity. Many people face barriers linked to language, migration experience, caring responsibilities, disability, transport, financial stress or limited local pathways.

This year, we supported people to build skills, confidence and clearer pathways into education, employment, volunteering and community participation.

Through tailored support, training, mentoring, placements, volunteering and social enterprise, people were able to take practical steps towards independence, connection and participation in the local economy.

Above: Sunisa, a member of our Food Collective Café & Catering team, getting hands-on to prepare a large order!

Our Impact

4,699 appointments to **308+ parents**, supporting them into education and employment.

64 Learn Local courses were attended by **410 people** across Whittlesea, Hume and Nillumbik councils, building skills in English, digital literacy and job readiness.

272 Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration (EPRI) clients received support through **1,530 one-on-one sessions**, with **95%** of participants reporting increased skills, confidence and English language proficiency, and **58%** experiencing paid placements and employment.

52 people from migrant and refugee backgrounds completed on-the-job hospitality training with 61% finding employment.

Key Programs and Supporters

Parent Pathways – funded by the Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

Learn Local – funded by the Victoria Government Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, ACFE program

Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration (EPRI) – funded by Department of Home Affairs

Volunteer Resource Service – funded by City of Whittlesea and Australian Department of Social Services

Social Enterprises: driverED, nugal biik plants and seeds, Women in Work and Food Collective Café & Catering (whose Hospitality and Training Program is funded by the Scanlon Foundation)

Our Social Enterprises





driverED

driverED is a multilingual professional driving school operating across Melbourne's northern suburbs.

It provides high-quality, culturally appropriate lessons to learner drivers facing barriers to obtaining their driver licence because of language, income, or limited understanding of Australian road laws.

driverED also supports women from migrant and refugee backgrounds to run their own businesses as driving instructors.

Impact

2,300+ lessons delivered to **450 learner drivers in 10 languages,** reducing barriers to people getting their licence.

10 female driving instructors supported, building economic equality.

$115,850 paid in income to driving instructors.

Food Collective Café and Catering

Food Collective Café and Catering supports local people into employment through practical hospitality training and work experience.

Located at Melbourne Polytechnic in Epping, the café and catering service provides on-the-job skills training and employment pathways for young people and people from migrant and refugee backgrounds experiencing barriers to employment.

Impact

21 people employed, with **$275,799** paid in wages

60 people trained, with **61% finding employment** and **86% increasing their confidence.**

Above: Participants in our Food Collective Hospitality & Training Program building new skills!

Below: Scott, our Nursery Manager, alongside one of our wonderful long-standing volunteers, Liz, caring for native plants at nugal biik Plants & Seeds.





nugal biik plants and seeds

nugal biik plants and seeds is a wholesale production nursery specialising in Indigenous plant stock across Greater Melbourne.

Based at the Wollert Community Farm, it supplies plants for urban greening, biodiversity and conservation projects. As it grows, profits will support First Nations-led initiatives that connect people to Country and build biodiversity, conservation and climate resilience.

Impact

100,000 indigenous plants sold

11 people employed

32 conservation projects supported and **128 diverse species** grown, building biodiversity across the region

Women in Work

Women in Work provides flexible mobile childcare for organisations that support parents and families.

The service removes barriers for parents to participate in programs, appointments and community activities, while creating employment pathways into the childcare industry for women.

Impact

9 childcare educators employed

283 children cared for

224 hours of childcare delivered

CASE STUDY

Nicole: Skills that opened new doors

Nicole joined our Hospitality Training Program at the Food Collective Cafe and Catering social enterprise after an internal referral by our Parent Pathways team.

She had always enjoyed working with people and saw the program as a chance to turn her interest in customer service into practical skills, real-world experience and future work opportunities.

Over the course of three months, Nicole got to experience all aspects of working in a busy cafe and catering business. With the support of a mentor, she built her confidence around working in a commercial kitchen, including knife handling, food preparation and how to communicate and problem solve with others in a dynamic, fast-paced professional environment. As she gained confidence, she then moved to front of house, operating equipment, taking orders, using point of sale technology and making coffees.

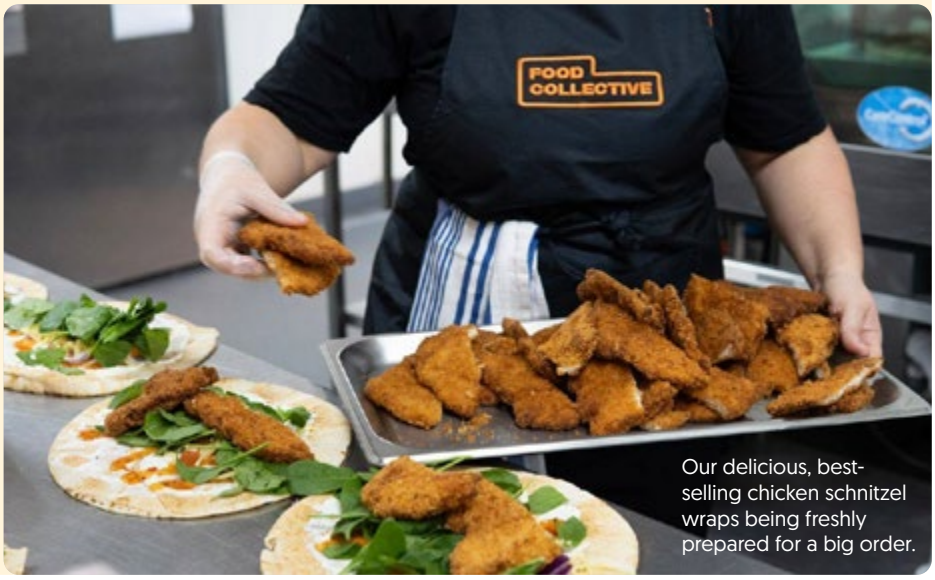
For Nicole, confidence was one of the biggest changes. The training helped her feel more comfortable speaking with different people, adapting to new situations and staying calm when things got busy.

"It is an amazing feeling, and I believe my success is a direct result of the preparation and support I received during the program."

With support from a dedicated job mentor, Nicole began to recognise her own strengths. She felt more confident applying for jobs, preparing for interviews and taking the next step towards employment.

Nicole has since secured a role as a Program Associate at WorldStrides Travel, where she continues to use many of the skills she developed through the Hospitality Training Program, including communication, organisation, problem-solving and working with people.

Nicole's story shows how supported training can open doors beyond the program itself, helping people recognise their strengths, build confidence and take the next step towards new opportunities.



Our delicious, best-selling chicken schnitzel wraps being freshly prepared for a big order.

CASE STUDY

Omar: From skills to self-employment

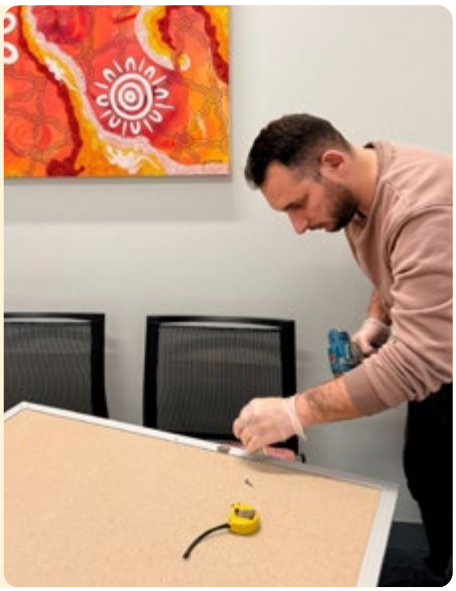
Omar is a skilled door and cabinet maker who came to us with experience, ambition and a clear goal: to establish his own business in Australia.

Starting a business in a new country can be difficult, especially when trying to understand local requirements, build networks and reach new customers.

Through our Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration (EPRI) program, Omar received practical support to set up his business in Australia, including licensing requirements, planning, budgeting and marketing. We also linked him with opportunities to build local networks and promote his services. Omar's business is now up and running, with a growing client list.

Omar's story shows how targeted support can help people use the skills they already have, build confidence in a new environment and take practical steps towards financial independence.

Right: Omar putting his practical skills into action, working on a hands-on project.



Strategic Direction 4

Everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy life connected to community and to be food secure

When people are under pressure, everyday life can become harder. Putting food on the table, getting to appointments, filling out forms, finding the right service or staying connected to others can all feel overwhelming.

Across Whittlesea, many people are experiencing overlapping challenges, including food insecurity, financial stress, settlement barriers, housing stress, transport needs and social isolation. Some need support in a moment of crisis. For others, it means having someone walk alongside them as they navigate unfamiliar systems, access practical help, and build connection in their community.

This year, we worked alongside people and families to respond to immediate pressures while supporting longer-term stability, wellbeing and belonging. Through food relief, community programs, casework, referrals and help navigating services, we made it easier for people to access the right support at the right time.

Our Impact

We supported **703 clients** with emergency relief, **brokering 544 referrals** to essential services and financial supports.

2,414 fresh food packages were provided for vulnerable families facing hardship.

We dished up **18 community lunches** to **540 participants**, reducing loneliness, increasing access to services and connecting them to others.

2,952 settlement casework sessions were delivered to **753 recently arrived refugees and migrants,** supporting them to feel more at home.

76 outreach sessions were delivered, providing AMEP students with accessible settlement support at their place of learning.

9 community education activities were delivered across 80 sessions, engaging **160 clients** and providing accessible information, education and support on key settlement needs.

255 Community Help Clinics were delivered to **166 clients**, focused on support with form-filling and navigating services.



Left: Julia, Tayba and Lamees sharing their experiences of building a life in Australia at the SCOA Settlement Report Launch.
Right: A Zumba event bringing refugee women together to build connections and a sense of belonging.



CASE STUDY

Maryam: supporting a single parent to achieve settlement and independence

When Maryam arrived in Australia through the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot, she was starting again in a new country as a single mother of three, with limited English and no local support network.

After relocating to Whittlesea, Maryam was referred to our Settlement Support program. Our team worked alongside Maryam to understand her most pressing needs and connect her with the right support. Together, we developed a settlement plan that included housing, essential services, school enrolments, health referrals, English language support through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), community activities and pathways into future education and employment.

Transport was one of the biggest barriers to Maryam's independence. Through our Women's Driving Program, she completed her lessons and successfully obtained her Victorian driver's licence, giving her more freedom to move around, support her children and take part in community life.

Today, Maryam is more confident navigating services, her children are enrolled in school, and she is connected to education, employment and community opportunities.

Maryam's story shows how coordinated settlement support can help families move from immediate pressure to greater stability, confidence and independence. With the right support, people can begin to feel more at home and build long-term opportunities for themselves and their children.





CASE STUDY

Daniela: finding support in a time of immediate need

Daniela contacted us as she was experiencing significant financial distress.

A recent victim-survivor of family violence, she was relying on a Single Parenting Payment to pay the rent and bills, and put food on the table.

Daniela was matched with a dedicated caseworker, and supported by an interpreter due to her limited English. A safety screening was completed to ensure that Daniela and her children were not in any immediate danger.

Daniela was struggling to feed her kids, so we organised a delivery of fresh produce boxes and food staples to tide her over until she could get on her feet. Our Hardship Help team negotiated utility bills relief with service providers, and provided essential items to take the pressure off.

Daniela had been out of the workforce for some time due to her family situation and caring responsibilities. We connected her with our Parent Pathways team, who supported her to think through options around re-skilling, future employment and building longer-term stability.

We also referred Daniela to relevant specialist services, including housing and ongoing family violence support.

WCC provides a supportive, responsive, coordinated service for people like Daniela who are experiencing multiple, complex issues. Our caseworkers are skilled at identifying hidden safety concerns, responding to urgent needs with practical solutions, and connecting vulnerable families with ongoing support.

Top left: Celebrating our Learn Local Community Services graduates, building skills and confidence for future training and employment.
Top right: Our Settlement Team connecting with over 90 students at Melbourne Polytechnic's O-Fest, sharing information about WCC's services and support.
Right: Our amazing Food Collective volunteers helping pack fresh produce for local communities.

Key programs and supporters

Hardship Help – funded by the Australian Department of Social Services through the CISVic consortium

Food Collective Wholesaler and community lunches – funded by VicHealth and Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

Whittlesea Anti-Racism Community Project – funded by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Sunshine Crocodiles & Spectrum WCC

Settlement Engagement and Transition Support – funded by the Australian Department of Home Affairs through subcontract with Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre

Community Help Clinics – funded by the City of Whittlesea

Contact Centre – funded by the City of Whittlesea

Community Transport – funded by the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care through CHSP program

Multicultural Women's Driving Program – funded by Sunshine Crocodiles and Spectrum

Mernda Neighbourhood House – supported by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the City of Whittlesea







Strategic Direction 5

Communities are climate resilient and better able to prepare, respond and recover from disasters and climate impacts



Whittlesea sits between growing suburbs and natural landscapes, so our community is already feeling the impacts of climate change, extreme weather, and bushfire risk.

For some, these impacts are felt more deeply, especially for those already facing barriers to safety, information, resources or support. That is why climate resilience is not only about the environment. It is also about people, connection, culture and helping communities feel ready and supported when challenges arise.

This year, we worked alongside First Nations knowledge holders, diverse communities, volunteers, and local partners to strengthen community-led climate action, conservation, and connection to nature, supporting people to build knowledge, care for local environments, and strengthen resilience in practical, culturally responsive ways.

Our Impact

7,091 native trees, shrubs, grasses and wildflowers planted at Wollert Community Farm and Curly Sedge Creek, storing an estimated **50.6 tonnes of carbon** by 2035.

42 local residents joined our **Whittlesea Climate Action Network (WCAN)**, with 43% from multicultural communities, committed to building local climate resilience.

Our social enterprise indigenous plant nursery grew **100,000 plants**, spanning **128 diverse species,** building local biodiversity.

18 conservation volunteers contributed **1,600 hours,** with **85%** increasing their ecological skills and knowledge of Volcanic Plains grasslands.

242 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people participated in our **nugal biik Rangers** program, connecting mob to Country and culture, and teaching people about traditional plants.





Key Programs and Supporters

Whittlesea Climate Action Network (WCAN) – funded by Greater Melbourne Foundation

nugal biik rangers – funded by Yarra Valley Water and WCC

Wollert Community Farm – funded by Yarra Valley Water and the Australian Department of Industry, Science & Resources

Conservation programs – funded by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust under the Urban Rivers and Catchments Program; the Victorian Government through the Greenlinks program; Melbourne Water; Yarra Valley Water; and the Peppercorn Hill Community Fund

nugal biik plants and seeds social enterprise development funded by WCC

Top: Liz, one of our dedicated volunteers, showcasing native plants grown at our nursery. **Above:** Community members coming together to shape the Whittlesea Climate Action Network (WCAN) Action Plan.







A Small Sign of Big Change

Sometimes, change shows up in small leaps.

This year, an endangered Growling Grass Frog was spotted in WCC's section of Curly Sedge Creek at Wollert Community Farm for the first time in around 20 years.

It might seem like a small moment, but it tells a much bigger story about what happens when a forgotten creek is remembered again.

Over the last few years, across Curly Sedge Creek, different groups have been working to restore and improve habitat. Wurundjeri have been managing the creek upstream, Melbourne Water has restored a significant wetland downstream, and Merri Creek Management Committee has been carrying out restoration work in the sections in between.

At Wollert Community Farm, we have been contributing to that group effort, managing a 400m section of creek, doing weed treatment, planting and habitat improvement. At the Farm, this work also creates opportunities for people to learn practical environmental skills and connect with and take part in caring for the land we live on.

The return of the Growling Grass Frog is a wonderful sign of what sustained environmental care across an entire creek system can make possible.

Left: Volunteers and staff working together on conservation activities at Wollert Community Farm.
Above: A Growling Grass Frog spotted at Wollert Community Farm, a welcome sight for local biodiversity.

Financial Summary

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 30 June 2026

	NOTE	2026 $	2025 $
Revenue	3	8,926,311	8,692,116
Other income	4	2,364	-
Expenses			
Employee benefits expense		(6,253,537)	(6,538,561)
Depreciation and amortisation expense		(110,700)	(132,887)
Program costs		(952,102)	(933,489)
Services costs		(291,022)	-
Occupancy costs		(291,524)	(234,238)
Other expenses		(842,777)	(721,699)
Surplus before income tax expense		187,013	131,242
Income tax expense		-	-
Surplus after income tax expense for the year attributable to the members of Whittlesea Community Connections Inc		187,013	131,242
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax		-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to the members of Whittlesea Community Connections Inc		**187,013**	**131,242**

Statement of financial position as at 30 June 2026

	Note	2026 $	2025 $
Assets			
Current assets			
Cash and cash equivalents	5	3,646,040	3,493,127
Trade and other receivables	6	295,267	672,560
Inventories		5,227	-
Other		114,544	138,094
Total current assets		4,061,078	4,303,781
Non-current assets			
Property, plant and equipment	7	268,549	287,856
Intangibles		24,914	9,576
Total non-current assets		293,463	297,432
Total assets		4,354,541	4,601,213
Liabilities			
Current liabilities			
Trade and other payables	8	152,783	417,357
Contract liabilities	9	1,446,086	1,594,250
Employee benefits	10	487,096	610,386
Other	11	145,048	48,996
Total current liabilities		2,231,013	2,670,989
Non-current liabilities			
Employee benefits	10	83,782	77,491
Total non-current liabilities		83,782	77,491
Total liabilities		2,314,795	2,748,480
Net assets		**2,039,746**	**1,852,733**
Equity			
Retained surpluses		2,039,746	1,852,733
Total equity		**2,039,746**	**1,852,733**

Whittlesea Community Connections Inc Statement of changes in equity for the year ended 30 June 2026

	Retained profits $	Total equity $
Balance at 1 July 2024	1,721,491	1,721,491
Surplus after income tax expense for the year	131,242	131,242
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	131,242	131,242
Balance at 30 June 2025	**1,852,733**	**1,852,733**

	Retained profits $	Total equity $
Balance at 1 July 2025	1,852,733	1,852,733
Surplus after income tax expense for the year	187,013	187,013
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	187,013	187,013
Balance at 30 June 2026	**2,039,746**	**2,039,746**

Whittlesea Community Connections Inc Statement of cash flows for the year ended 30 June 2026

	Note	2026 $	2025 $
Cash flows from operating activities			
Receipts from customers		9,059,257	11,788,631
Payments to suppliers		(8,887,858)	(11,153,207)
		171,399	635,424
Interest received		96,183	98,419
Net cash from operating activities	15	267,582	733,843
Cash flows from investing activities			
Payments for property, plant and equipment	7	(117,033)	(49,044)
Proceeds from disposal of property, plant and equipment		2,364	-
Net cash used in investing activities		(114,669)	(49,044)
Net cash from financing activities		-	-
Net increase in cash and cash equivalents		152,913	684,799
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the financial year		3,493,127	2,808,328
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the financial year	**5**	**3,646,040**	**3,493,127**

This financial summary provides an overview of WCC's financial performance and position. The complete audited financial statements and Independent Auditor's Report, is available through the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) website.



Left: Aerial view of the nursery at nugal biik plants and seeds, one of our social enterprises.
Middle left: Catering by our Food Collective Café & Catering, offering a delicious and culturally diverse range of food.
Middle right: Celebrating fresh, seasonal asparagus and community connections at our Food Collective Community Lunch.
Bottom: Community members and partners coming together to strengthen local climate action through the Whittlesea Climate Action Network (WCAN).







Top left: Hiba and Lamees from our Settlement Team sharing the experiences of newly arrived refugees at the SCOA Forum.
Top right: One of our Food Collective team members.
Bottom right: Our volunteers helping prepare and distribute fresh produce to support local communities.









Our Board

Richard Schwartz
Chair

Lando Antonelli
Deputy Chair

Christopher Le
Treasurer

Sandra Natale
Secretary

Emmanuel Gauci
Member

Jacqui Ellul
Member

Roslina Maharjan
Member

Ellen McNaught
Member

Puneet Tikoo
Volunteer Representative

Mily Elambasseril
Volunteer Representative

Bridey Cameron
Westpac Board Observer

Maggie Arnold
Member (Retired June 2026)

Image: nugal biik Rangers participating in our Learn Local program.



Volunteers

- Abdul Mansur
- Abdullah Dewaneh
- Abdullah Siddiqui
- Aliaa Sadoo
- Amanda Shields
- Amrutha Rajendran
- Angela Bausch
- Angelo D'Amore
- Anna Taran
- Annam Rashid
- Anthony Holding
- Baldev Singh Gill
- Basel Aldeeb
- Bassam Nassour
- Bavandeep Singh
- Bhupender Singh Sahni
- Bill Hutchins
- Bridey Cameron
- Bushra Alani
- Caitlyn Jackwitz
- Carl Reid
- Carmel Silva
- Carrie Chen
- Charlotte Wood
- Cheng Lee
- Chin fai Ng
- Christine Garbutcheon-Singh
- Christopher Le
- Christopher Marett
- Claire Woodall
- Colin Spencer
- Cong Ha Nguyen
- Cong Phuong Khai Tran
- Craig Parker
- Damien Kelertas
- Damjana Gjorgievska
- David Jesser
- David Whelan
- David Williams
- Debra Graham
- Denis Fitzgibbon
- Devika Chandrar
- Dharmasiri Dassanayake
- Dhekra Heshmat Al Dalawi
- Diane Pearl
- Doaa Al-Medhaje
- Dora Psimaris
- Elaheh Haj Hashemi
- Elena Avraam-Maroun
- Elizabeth Buckley
- Ellen McNaught
- Emmanuel Gauci
- Fadhil Albakri
- Fahd Hanna Alhawat
- Firas Dawood Al-daweri
- Franca Bellobuono
- Frank Torcasio
- Genieva Hafiz
- Glen Ballinger
- Gregory Luttick
- Guldar Ali
- Hayley Perkins
- Iman El-Mohammad
- Jacqueline Dickens
- Jacqueline Gardner
- Jaime Massard Llinas
- James Meneilly
- Jana Saeed
- Jane Farnan
- Janeeta Molla
- Janelle Collins
- Jeanette Pettifer
- Jennifer Barnes
- Jiaying Jiaying
- Jobe Sharp Hollard
- Joel Baade
- John Fry
- John Shanahan
- Jose Mari Marco
- Joseph Battista
- Joulia Philip Alnakoula
- Joyce Koshy
- Judith Franklin
- Julie Nguyen
- Justina Sampath
- Karen Gail McKenzie
- Karen Ooi
- Kerri Goodman
- khadija Tul Kubra Rasheed
- Kim Lorraine Kocijan
- Kowselya Sivakumar
- Krishanthimala Liyanage
- Lando Antonelli
- Lauren Young
- Lea Antich
- Leeanne White
- Liam Briginshaw
- Linda Rayner
- Louisa Bartolome
- Lyndall Harrop
- Madeline Cefai
- Magdalene Arnold
- Mai Al Ayoub
- Malsa Ghafoor
- Marcello Mastroianni
- Maria Vella
- Mary Middlemo
- Mathew Humphreys
- Meghann Charles
- Melina Skidmore
- Mia Ormiston
- Michael Bryan
- Michael Siciliano
- Miguel Mora
- Mily Elambasseril
- Mohammed Shubbar
- Muhamad Abduh
- Mustafa Celiker
- Mustafa Khraim
- Muzna Siddiqui
- Nadia Youssef
- Nahid Soltanlo
- Najmeh Yazdanpanah
- Nasser Alghezy
- Natalie Caven
- Natasha Fama
- Neil Marshall
- Nick Zaidan
- Nicola Parisi
- Nitish Gautam
- Noriko Khan
- Nour Maqsodi
- Paolo De Vincentiis
- Paolo Treccia
- Patrizia Martin
- Paul Russell
- Puneet Tikoo
- Raisan Azam
- Rama Wael Hussein
- Richard Schwartz
- Robert Petruccelli
- Roberto Florez Berrio
- Ronald Williams
- Rosie Miller
- Roslina Maharjan
- Roy Smith
- Rozhin Hosseini
- Ruth Wilkinson
- Sadaf Rehman
- Sam Marriot
- Sandra Natale
- Sarah Alrajeh
- Sarah Donst
- Satyaveer Keeroder
- Senulya Ruwanpathirana
- Shane Kaluza
- Sharon Fode
- Shayan Khurram
- Shenali Fernando
- Sherrie Harries
- Shoukry Sidrak
- Sindy Amaya
- Skye Anderson
- Stephanie Watt
- Stephen John Morson
- Stephen Middlebrook
- Steven Howell
- Steven Lim
- Sucharitha Sripathi
- Suzi Duncan
- Sylvia Carnovale
- Talia George Tallo Hawil
- Tarandeep Kaur
- Tareq Aloma
- Tessa Campisi
- Tiffany Basta
- Tileisha Maree Dobson
- Vicky Waymouth
- Wayne Leech
- Wayne Mann
- Wendy Flannery
- William Lee Withers
- William Mahon
- William Thomas
- Xin Min Low

Abdullah and Muzna, two of our amazing Community Transport volunteers, who help local community members stay connected and independent.





Image: Minister Andrew Giles MP, Natalie Foeng (Yarra Valley Water), Bronwyn Halfpenny MP, Jebb Hutchison (TVN On-Country) marking the beginning of Stage 2 construction at Wollert Community Farm, creating a new hub for learning, volunteering and community connection.

Funders & Partners

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

Service and Project Partners

- AFL
- Al Siraat Secondary College
- AMES
- AOGCCOS House of Bread Thomastown
- Arabic Welfare
- Austin Health/NCASA
- Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights
- Banyule Community Health (now Holstep Health)
- Belgravia Leisure
- Beconnected
- Berry Street
- Big Group Hug
- Board of Imams Victoria
- Broadmeadows Broncos Basketball Club
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre
- Cabrini Outreach
- Cancer Council Victoria
- Catholic Care
- Centre of the Ageing
- Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)
- City of Whittlesea
- CERES
- CFA Wollert
- Connecting Home
- Community Grocer
- Country Wide Community Missions
- Creeds Farm Living and Learning
- Craigieburn Basketball Association
- Collingwood English Language School (Craigieburn, South Morang)
- Cricket Victoria
- Cube Sports
- DPV Health Limited
- Edgars Creek Primary School
- Edgars Creek Secondary College
- Empower Australia
- Encompass Care
- Epping Cricket Club
- Epping Secondary College
- Epping View Primary School
- Fareshare
- Financial Independence Hub of Good Shepherd
- Foodbank
- Football Australia
- Football Victoria
- Foundation House
- Friends of Grasslands
- Greensborough Family Relationship Centre
- Good Things Australia
- Haven Home Safe
- Hazelglen College
- Health Ability
- Home of the Matildas (Women's National Football Team)
- Hope Street
- Hope Centre
- Housing Choices Australia
- Hume Grammar Anglican Primary School
- Hume Whittlesea LLEN
- Hume Youth Services
- Indian Care
- InTouch – Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
- Intelligent Training Solutions
- Islamic Council of Victoria
- JewishCare Victoria
- Kangan Institute
- Kids First
- Kinglake Neighbourhood House
- La Trobe University
- Lalor Landcare
- Lalor Neighbourhood House
- Lalor Secondary College
- Lalor North Secondary College
- Launch Housing
- Love in Action
- Love Thy Neighbour
- Marymede Secondary College
- Medicare Urgent Care Clinic
- Melbourne City Mission
- Melbourne Polytechnic
- Melbourne City Football Club
- Mernda Neighbourhood House
- Merri Creek Management Committee
- Merri Outreach Support Services (MOSS)
- Mill Park Leisure
- Mill Park Secondary College (Senior and Junior)
- Mill Park Baptist – The Shak
- Mitchell Shire
- Mount Ridley Secondary College
- Multicultural Centre for Women's Health
- Narrap Rangers, Wurundjeri Cultural Heritage Corporation
- Neami National
- NEMA Respectful Relationship of Department of Education
- 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 Door
- Open Food Network
- The Orange Door
- Parkers Auto Plus Pty Ltd
- Parks Victoria
- Pets for the Homeless
- Pinchapoo
- Plenty Valley Lions
- Plenty Valley Retirement Village
- PRACE
- River Plenty College
- Reservoir East Primary School
- Reservoir High School
- Respect Victoria
- Safe and Equal
- Salvation Army
- Services Australia
- Share the Dignity
- Social Policy Group
- Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre
- St Mary's Parish Primary School
- St Monica's College
- St Vincent De Paul Society

- The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)
- The Lakes (P-12) South Morang
- The Pavilion – Epping
- The Smith Family
- The Y Community School – Epping
- Thomastown Bears Football, Cricket and Netball Club
- Thomastown Meadows Primary School
- Thomastown Neighbourhood House
- Thomastown Primary School
- Thomastown West Primary School
- TRAC
- Uniting VIC
- University of Melbourne
- Victorian Complaints Ombudsman
- Victoria Police
- Victoria University
- Vittle Feast Project
- Volunteer West
- Volleyball Victoria
- Volleyball Coaches Collective
- Wallan Neighbourhood House
- Whittlesea City Basketball Association
- Whittlesea Community House
- Whittlesea FoodShare
- Whittlesea Secondary College
- Whittlesea Tech School
- Wollert Secondary College
- Women Health in North WHIN
- Women's Legal Service Victoria
- Yarra Plenty Regional Library (Thomastown, Lalor, Mill Park)
- YMCA
- Your Community Health
- Youthlaw
- 3knd radio

Pro Bono Supporters

- Holding Redlich
- Nola Tudball
- Anthony McKee Photography
- MinterEllison

Donors and Funders

- Aminata Hamadi
- Andrew Giles MP
- Arilla Retirement Village
- Ashley Park Primary School
- Australian Community Foundation
- Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA)
- Bunnings (Epping and Mernda)
- Bupa
- Cedar Woods
- CityLife Church (Lalor)
- CMV Staff Foundation
- Commonwealth Bank (South Morang, Plenty Valley, Epping, Thomastown)
- Connecting Home
- Costa Group
- DataSquad Consulting Pty Ltd
- Decathlon
- Dennis Family Corporation
- Dora Psimaris
- Elizabeth & Wilf Thorsen
- Enjoy Church North
- Equity Trustees Limited
- First Nations Traffic Management
- Georgia Geary
- Gertz Avenue Pharmacy
- Grace Rose-Miller
- Greater Melbourne Foundation
- Guat Im Lee
- Harry Jenkins
- Heidelberg Materials
- James Harper
- Kapil Bros (Vic) Pty Ltd
- Liberty Financial
- M'Connell Dowell
- Major Roads Victoria
- Mary MacKillop Today
- Meera Radha Krishnan
- Melbourne Water
- Northern Kia
- NSM Importers & Wholesalers
- Parham Soleimani
- Peter & Phyllis Coffey
- Ray Beaton
- Rotary Club of Whittlesea
- Sandhurst Trustee
- Sarah Harvey
- Satyanarayan Aggarwal
- Scanlon Foundation
- Share the Dignity
- St Monica's College
- StreetSmart Australia
- Sunshine and Crocodiles Pty Ltd
- The Loan Room
- The Queens Fund
- Trio Plumbing
- Victoria Law Foundation
- Victorian Women's Trust
- Ward Ambler Family
- Westpac (Whittlesea)

Peak Bodies

- Community Information and Support Victoria (CisVIC)
- Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria
- Neighbourhood Houses Victoria Inc.
- North Link
- Settlement Council of Australia
- Social Enterprise Australia
- Volunteering Victoria
- Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

Community Leaders List

- Amrita Gurung (Women Advisory Group members as well)
- Babara Minuzzo (Women Advisory Group members as well)
- Dixsha Dhar
- Entissar Aasi (Women Advisory Group members as well)
- Hsham Abughif
- Jamuna Adhikari Rijal
- Krishanti Liyanage (Women Advisory Group members as well)
- Manvir Kaur
- Muhamad Adbuh
- Praveena Rajkobal
- Susmita Dhakal
- Savesh Kumar Soni

Government Funders

- Attorney Generals Department
- Australian Department of Industry, Science and Resources
- Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- Department of Health
- Department of Home Affairs
- Department of Industry, Innovation and Science
- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Department of Social Services
- City of Whittlesea
- Nillumbik Shire Council
- Victorian Department of Education
- Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
- Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – Family Safety Victoria and Neighbourhood House Coordination Program
- Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety
- Victorian Department of Jobs, Skill, Industry and Regions – Jobs Victoria and Adult, Community and Further Education
- Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet – Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion and Office of Youth
- Victorian Department of Transport and Planning – VicRoads
- Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner
- VicHealth
- Victoria Legal Aid







Top: Suni, our Community Resilience Coordinator, sharing insights at a community network event.
Middle: Paul, one of our amazing volunteer drivers, getting ready for the day's deliveries.
Bottom: Community members coming together for a creative workshop, building connections and sharing experiences.

Get Involved

Volunteer

Volunteers are essential to our services and programs. Throughout the year, 187 volunteers of all ages and backgrounds worked alongside our staff in a variety of roles, making a valuable contribution to our community. We always welcome new volunteers. If you are interested in becoming an active member of our team, we would love to hear from you.

Join

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

Partner, support or donate

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 across outer northern Melbourne.

To have a conversation about how we can work together, please contact our CEO Alex Haynes on 0408 255 266 or email ahaynes@whittleseacc.org.au.



Right: Kids enjoying face and arm painting activities at one of our Parent Pathways events.
Far right: Amanda with food relief boxes packed by our young volunteers during our School Holiday Youth Volunteering Day.


FIRE
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Community
Connections
Rocky Lamattina
Carrot Growers
& Sons Pty Ltd
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Whittlesea Community Connections

Level 1, Tenancy 1B Pacific Epping
571–583 High Street, Epping VIC 3076
Telephone: (03) 9401 6666

whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au

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