



ANNUAL Report

A community where everyone can participate and belong

2023-24

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2026

VISION

A community where everyone can participate and belong

PURPOSE

We work with local communities to ensure the support, connection and care people need throughout their lives

VALUES

Integrity · Respect
Valuing people · Excellence
Innovation · Partnership



EMPOWERED PEOPLE

People are connected to their communities through support, care and new opportunities

WE WILL DO THIS BY:

- > Delivering care in community transport
- > Facilitating volunteering and skills pathways
- > Connecting people with employment and training



STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Local communities and organisations are effective and influential

WE WILL DO THIS BY:

- > Growing volunteering locally and across Australia
- > Establishing place-based collaboration that supports local communities
- > Supporting organisations to improve their governance, planning and practice



EQUITABLE SYSTEMS

Policy and systems change in ways that improve people's lives

WE WILL DO THIS BY:

- > Convening local networks to drive positive change
- > Advocating for policy, systems and funding reform
- > Building community capacity to advocate and engage with government



INNOVATIVE GROWTH

We continue to develop as a sustainable and effective organisation

WE WILL DO THIS BY:

- > Piloting and evaluating innovative service models
- > Developing our practice in collaboration and system change
- > Maintaining strong governance, financial and management systems

WHAT WE DO



COMMUNITY
TRANSPORT



AGED CARE



VOLUNTEERING



EMPLOYMENT



PLACE-BASED
COLLABORATION



EARLY
CHILDHOOD

Message from our patron

Simon McKeon

It's with no small degree of admiration that I look back over a year that has once again been marked by change and innovation for EV in a challenging environment. Now, with a full year of rebranded services it can very much be said that EV is strengthening communities in purpose and action.

Strong Communities are ones where people are connected, work together, can share purpose, and have the range of needs that span their lives met. There's more, obviously, but if I think of these elements, I see with pride the way EV continues to evolve, innovate and consolidate to strengthen the communities in which it works.

The change of brand to "EV Strengthening Communities", together with the work done last year on defining the strategic direction for the organisation has seen EV clearly establish its role and how there is synergy in the broad range of services provided. EV is an organisation that, at its heart, is defined by its purpose statement to "work with local communities to ensure the support, connection and care people need throughout their lives".

I am pleased to see that purpose continue to deliver tangible outcomes for a broad range of members of the community, no matter their life stage. In a challenging environment with ongoing changes in the aged care sector, uncertain funding and dynamic community needs, the fixed vision on our purpose is what produces the results of which I am so proud.

There are, as always, so many things that are noteworthy in a year of achievement, but there are two initiatives in particular that I'd like to mention.

The year has seen EV become an accredited Early Years Manager, using existing expertise in the sector to step directly in to the management of community based kindergartens. We all understand how central to community children and education is. EV's skills and purpose ensure that the kinders it manages remain strong and vibrant, and that their key role in community will continue for many more young people and their families.

Innovation remains a hallmark of the EV journey and this past year has been no different. It remains clear that volunteering is another hallmark of strong communities. The defunding of volunteering would have been an easy way for EV to step back from its role of promoting volunteering and enabling volunteers and supporting volunteer involving organisations.



However, in the face of these challenges, rather than stepping back, EV has stepped up and launched re-imagined services delivering training and learning on-line, diversified ways for individuals to engage with volunteering.

EV is currently looking in to new ways that it can support organisations that use volunteers to connect and share information. This is a lot of ambition, work and innovation for a program with no funding, but the purpose and value is clear: volunteering strengthens communities.

In addition to the new and innovative services, the existing and ongoing programs of Community Transport and the Local Jobs Program remain strong pillars of EV's purpose. Demand for transport for the aged and disadvantaged in community remains strong and our ongoing commitment to community support has seen us increase service delivery. This has happened in an uncertain environment of aged care reform and funding changes, but the focus on purpose is steadfast. Additionally, the Local Jobs program has continued to connect employer groups with the employment needs of the community, creating opportunity for job seekers throughout the North East region of Melbourne.

We all live in a community. We all benefit from stronger communities. This year, and ongoing, EV provides and develops programs that evidently strengthen community.

**I am proud to be Patron of
EV Strengthening
Communities.**

Message from the Chair

Ranjit Gajendra

Dear Members, Partners and Friends of EV Inc,

Dedicated to strengthening the fabric of our community, EV Inc continues to expand services, creating partnerships, empowering volunteers, innovating service delivery, nurturing relationships as it collaborates with you, local communities and local businesses to ensure that individuals receive the support, connection, and care they need to thrive at every stage of life.

It is a privilege and I do this with great pride born from having been a member of the Board since 2012 and experiencing first-hand the challenges, growth and evolution of this organisation, EV Inc's culture of integrity, respect, ethical practice, of successful efforts to build resilience, foster inclusion, commitment to social justice, empowering people, addressing the challenges of inequity, develop capacity and respond to local needs, that I serve as Chairman of the Board, for this my fifth year, and assure alignment of governance and strategy for community impact.

EV strengthening communities at its heart, is defined by its purpose. The Board goes beyond just extending support for purpose-realisation, and continues to explore avenues to engage, lead, guide, and strengthen capacity, capability and profile, for impact-delivery and achieve outcomes. Board members connect with EV Inc's strategic priorities, programs and initiatives, not only serving as representatives but also a sounding board, offering advice, networking, opening doors for partnerships, and fostering collaboration. It is expected that their individual contributions enhance program effectiveness, assure quality, and support business development, ensuring that we continue delivering high-impact services that strengthen our communities, all the while sensitive that their role is of governance and that management is by employed staff.

Through a transparent process of strategic oversight, resource stewardship, and fostering innovation, the Board assures alignment with purpose, avoid straying from that purpose, often a challenge in our sector due to changing priorities, recognises the importance of public and community trust, reduces financial vulnerability and over-reliance on unstable funding sources, invests in its people, and avoids staff burnout that leads to service disruptions.



With changing laws and governance regulations the Board stays committed to compliance, and to continuous improvement of purposeful governance, building expertise particularly around human resources and talent, fundraising, safety, security, data protection, confidentiality, aged care, disability care, legalities and service delivery.

Last year, with defining the strategic priorities and change of brand to EV Strengthening Communities I highlighted that EV Inc was actively diversifying its services and recruiting specialist staff to manage these new initiatives. We recognized that governance is shifting from being solely compliance-driven to one that is purposeful and aligned with our purpose. In response, we ensured that the expertise and skillset of our Board closely aligned with our strategic priorities, allowing us to better serve the evolving needs of the community.

A highlight this year and evidence of that diversification is EV Inc becoming an accredited Early Years Manager and being assigned the management of community-based kindergartens. EV Early Years collaborates and partners with local families and staff to nurture community connections and community identity of these kindergartens. Other highlights of strengthening communities include the Volunteer Navigation Hub, an online Learning and Support platform and a platform for our Volunteering Communities of Practice.

Message from the Chair

Ranjit Gajendra

Having acknowledged that diverse initiatives, innovative programs and new partnerships are indeed an impetus to expand the expertise and skills profile of the Board, we welcomed three new members, Colin Bostock, Sally Hoffmann and Kathy Walker OAM, bringing to the Board their wealth of experience across the community services sector. Staying current with expectations, and as a matter of good practice, we reviewed the role description of Board members and have adapted EV Inc's revised and edited Governance Manual. I look forward to implementation of a process of self-reflections, peer evaluation, benchmarking best practice for performance development and enhancement of the Board. Embracing normative shifts, being responsive and compliant with new and revised standards governing the sectors in which we are active now and will be in the near future is an essential practice that we, a volunteer Board, subscribe to.

Allow me to acknowledge, thank and celebrate colleagues Sue Edmonds, Colin Bostock, Dr Raju Adhikari, Kathy Walker OAM, Sarah-Jane Terril, and Sally Hoffmann for aspiring conversations, support and critical review on the Board. Their insights, expertise, commitment to purpose, meticulous attention to detail and sense of humour have contributed to Board's progress. A special acknowledgement of Sarah-Jane Terril, for taking on the responsibilities of the Secretary. A special mention and gratitude to my colleague Sue Edmonds, a valued member of this Board for almost fifteen years and a core member of our Finance Committee, for her service. Sue is stepping away from Board duties to pursue other interests.

I want to take this opportunity to thank our incredible teams of management, staff and volunteers, whose dedication to our purpose is truly inspiring.

For EV strengthening communities' progress, development and increasing impact it relies on the commitment of people like you, members, our volunteers, donors, partners, friends and advocates. Your contributions through time, expertise, funding, and advocacy, are the driving force behind its impact. I extend to you the Board's deepest gratitude for your continued support.

I want to thank the senior management team of Viv Cunningham Smith the CEO, Charles Cox, Vik Naidu, Elizabeth McFarlin, Dr Shona Bass, and Adele Braun the Executive Assistant, and their incredible teams of staff and volunteers for their dedication to our purpose. What they do tirelessly every day is challenging, but it expands outreach, responds to the growing needs of those facing mobility, social and economic hardships, builds resilience and wellbeing, and makes a meaningful difference in the lives of thousands.

Let me conclude by assuring you that while market-driven responses to community and social challenges can generate innovative solutions, not every need has a market-based answer. We have seen for-purpose organizations build 'solutions in search of a problem' and chase funding into initiatives that sometimes cause more harm than good. At EV strengthening communities, the Board remains committed to the values of integrity, respect, valuing people, excellence, innovation, and partnership. These values will continue to guide the Board as we support and respond to the needs and aspirations of the people and communities we serve.

Together, collaboratively, we will build a resilient, more inclusive, and supportive community where no one is left behind.

Best wishes.

Ranjit Gajendra
Chairman, Board of Governance
October 2024

<https://ev.org.au/about-us/governance/>



Our Board



Ranjit Gajendra: Chair



Kathy Walker OAM



Sally Hoffman



Dr Raju Adhikari



Sarah-Jane Terill
Secretary



Colin Bostock



Sue Edmonds
Treasurer
[retiring]

In practice EV Inc expects management, staff and the vast numbers of volunteers from diverse backgrounds to appropriately balance risk and reward in a manner that is sustainable longer-term, contribute to a culture of honesty and integrity, and provide an environment that is safe, secure and inclusive.

For many years EV Strengthening Communities successfully navigated structural and operational turbulence, unprecedented changes in funding, and expanding reporting- mechanisms within the sector on the one hand, and increasing demands for services from a vastly changing demography on the other, and during that journey realigned practice from one that was primarily governance for compliance to purposeful governance.

The Board of EV ensures Purposeful Governance as the foundation for integrity and ethical conduct essential for strategic direction, operational effectiveness, meaningful engagement, transparency and accountability. It enables the not-for-profit community services and social enterprise pursue its Mission, embrace innovation, develop new approaches to addressing community needs, implement activities that positively impact the communities it serves, and facilitates the Board, the CEO and senior management, staff, members and volunteers to ensure that EV's activities and decisions continuously deliver meaningful outcomes.

Purposeful governance ensures EV upholds confidentiality, privacy and safety of staff, members, clients, stakeholders and whistle blowers.

Complimenting this is the construct of an effective Board, with member competencies and expertise bringing cultural connection, inclusivity, and ensuring a diversity of skills and perspectives, commitment to greater transparency, and practices that are fundamental for sustainability. Governance practices will continue to define the roles and responsibilities of Board members, ensuring they provide effective oversight and guidance. The Board in their commitment to continuous improvement, assess their own contributions and performance on an annual basis.

EV is committed to invest in the continuous development of its people, including members of the Board, and practice governance that serves its purpose.

Message from the CEO

Viv Cunningham-Smith

2023-2024 has been a year of growth and consolidation of our new brand and sub brands. The common thread in all our services is that we work toward strengthening communities through working with individuals, communities, organisations, businesses and government. In order for people to understand what we do we have a range of sub brands: EV Community Transport; EV Early Years Management; EV Volunteering; EV Employment Services and EV Consulting.

Our sector is changing rapidly and this year we kept abreast of the Commonwealth Aged Care Reforms impacting our Community Transport Services as well as advocating for the return of place-based Volunteer Resource Centres across the nation to assist people back into volunteering. These Centres were defunded by the Commonwealth in 2020 and when we returned out of lockdown they were not there to help people navigate back into volunteering.

I am very proud that EV's response to this situation has been to develop the online Volunteer Ecosystem with an online Volunteer Resource Services which we call the Volunteer Navigation hub which is currently funded for full implementation in the Manningham LGA and partial implementation in the Maroondah LGA. Since May 330 people have come through the hub without widespread promotion. At the heart of the hub are our volunteer assessors, themselves volunteers, who assist people to find the right volunteer opportunity through our partners SEEK Volunteering. We have a 10 hr/week co-ordinator for 26 weeks and our challenge is now to roll this out across Victoria to assist all Victorians to find volunteering opportunities in their local communities. We work closely with our VMA5 partners and local government funded VRC's where they exist. Supplementing the Navigation Hub is our online EV Learning and Support platform and our Volunteering Communities of Practice platform, We are launching these in late 2024 and developing content and application further in 2025.

We were excited to become an Early Years Manager and welcome 3 inaugural kinders in January 2024. We intend to build this service over the coming years to a workable size of 20-25 kindergartens. We welcomed our new EYM team commencing with General Manager Vik Naidu who returned to EV in September 2023 to lead the development of this service. Lisa Rich returned to EV also as the PAG Liaison and Administration Officer for our EYM. People always seem to return to EV. Read more about the new team and their achievements in this report.



Our Volunteer Management Activity 5 program continues to strategically work on inclusive volunteering in the eastern region and what a successful Inclusive Volunteering Awards we held in May 2024 to recognise the great inclusion work already being undertaken in the region and to build a sense of peer support and learning for those organisations wishing to become more inclusive. This work spilled over into our inclusive employment program as we implemented the national Tourism Navigator Pilot assisting tourism businesses to become more inclusive of people with disabilities as employees. Read below about the achievements and challenges this program has had. Work both in inclusive volunteering and employment led us to develop a series of online modules for organisations through our Learning and Support platform which we are very proud of. These are available as part of the Volunteer Ecosystem to organisations in Maroondah and Manningham at this stage.

We rolled out the new Manningham Community Transport services with funding from Manningham Council and continue to refine these services. The Manningham social support program has proven to be a huge hit with people with regular over subscription to the array of great places we take our older residents to. Manningham Council also fund us to deliver the Manningham Volunteer Resource Service which our new Volunteer Ecosystem will super charge in the coming year and the Manningham Youth Employment Pathways Program focusing upon using volunteering as an employment pathway. Both of these contracts finish in June 2025 and we hope to be able to continue the good work beyond that. We completed the third State of Volunteering Report for Manningham and presented our MVRs and Transport work to councillors.

Private transport - own or family/neighbours/friends

Public Transport - buses, trains, taxi, ride share including on demand models

Client Transport - provided by services to take clients to their services or to meet treatment and care plans. Delivered internally by the services.

Community Transport

Patient Transport - highly specific, limited to access to health services for those with complex needs

Message from the CEO

Our community transport team continue to offer a quality service in the eastern region. Community Transport is supported transport utilised by those who are transport vulnerable and cannot use their own transport, public transport or ride share/taxi's. Community Transport is an external facing service providing the transport glue for people with mobility challenges to move around in their community and world.

Community Transport is not client transport – where an organisation receives funding to transport people to its own services or where a particular service uses its existing staff to transport a client to an appointment or experience as part of their organisational case plan / treatment. Community Transport keeps people mobile in their communities and this year we highlighted the fact that mobility and Community Transport as a service is in fact a social justice issue.

We serve people who experience social exclusion because of their limited to non-existent mobility options: *Transport related social exclusion [TRSE] – “[t]he process by which people are prevented from participating in the economic, political and social life of the community because of reduced accessibility to opportunities, services and social networks, due in whole or in part to insufficient mobility in a society and environment built around the assumption of high mobility” (Kenyon, Lyons et al. 2002, p 210-211).*

Unfortunately, the Commonwealth has not understood the difference between community and client transport and we have experienced a reduction in available funding for Community transport which in turn limits people's capacity to remain mobile and socially included as they age or experience disability.

Our paper to the National Community Transport Conference in June this year explored these issues in greater depth and can be obtained on our website.

I commend all of the great work our teams do for our communities. I work with an exceptional integrated team of paid staff and volunteers who remain committed to achieving outcomes for our communities. We achieve collectively and collaboratively.

We said goodbye to a few this year also and I want to acknowledge in particular Marnie O'Loughlin who resigned as Manager Community Transport in December 2023 after 7 years of building this service throughout the turbulent aged care reform process. She has been ably replaced by Liz MacFarlin who brings enormous aged care and disability experience to the role. We kept Marnie involved in project work throughout the year though as we just couldn't let her go that easily.

I would like to thank our Board for their continued stewardship and governance of our organisation. Their sage advice is always welcome. They too face increasing pressures under the Aged Care Reform Act which has recently passed into law to ensure that there is a high standard of governance over our aged care services. In the coming year EV faces the choices of diversification in its aged care services as the new Support at Home programs roll out. We also face the need to diversify who we service in community transport as many people are missing out on much needed mobility. We want to ensure those living with disability in the community whether they have an NDIS package or not can access affordable supported community transport to live their lives. We also want to ensure that communities served by volunteer workforces in the past can continue to receive much needed community services into the future from new volunteer workforces. Volunteering is at the heart of healthy communities and our innovative Navigation Hub will ensure future volunteers can find those opportunities.

WHAT DID WE DO IN 2023-2024?

Community Transport



20%
increase in volunteer
numbers for the
Transport service

Delivered over
500 hours
of social support to our clients



140

residents attended a
Manningham social
outing in 2023-24



Delivered over
30,000
trips to our clients

2830

Trips were delivered
to Manningham
residents in
2023-24



734

residents received
Manningham community
transport in 2023-24

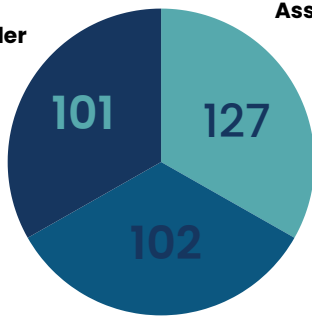
Central Volunteer Bank

7 hours week- precursor of the Volunteer Navigation Hub

Referred an average
25 people per
month into
volunteer roles

Supported an
average
34
organisations per month with their
volunteer workforces

Remainder
33.2%



Assessed and referred
33.2%

requested support
33.6%

Volunteer Navigation Hub

330

Volunteers have submitted
a form to the Navigation
Hub to get support in
finding volunteer
opportunities since May
2024.

Of that 330..

102

Volunteers requested support in
completing their registration to
find volunteer opportunities since
May 2024

127

Volunteers have been assessed and
referred to volunteer opportunities
since May 2024.

Manningham Volunteer Resource Service

15 hrs/week

166

Volunteers were
supported to find
volunteer opportunities
in the Manningham
region over the past 9
months.

An average of
15

organisations a month
were supported with
their volunteer
workforces.

40

Volunteers requested support in
completing their registration in
the Manningham region to find
volunteer opportunities in the
past 9 months.

Manningham Youth Employment Pathways Program

15 hrs/week

33



young people into volunteering

Assisted

43



organisations with aspects of their volunteer workforces related to young people.

Volunteer Management Activity 5

Worked with an average of

75

organisations a month on inclusive volunteering

Assisted an average of

30

people a month from priority groups on issues of inclusive volunteering.



Assisted

5

communities with their advocacy on inclusive volunteering

Assisted an average of

4



networks a month during the year

Tourism Navigator Pilot



3-5

people with disabilities placed into employment

Presented the pilot to **2500+** organisations

100

tourism organisations connected to the pilot through newsletter, email and social media campaigns

10

business' expressed interest in learning more about the pilot and went through to the recruitment phase.

30



staff of tourism business completed online inclusion modules.

12

staff completed in person inclusion workshops

Local Jobs

Supported

300

people with retrenchment and placement in new employment, retirement or volunteering roles

Supported **387** businesses, organisations and government bodies

Assisted

12

organisations/communities with their advocacy

Supported

30



networks

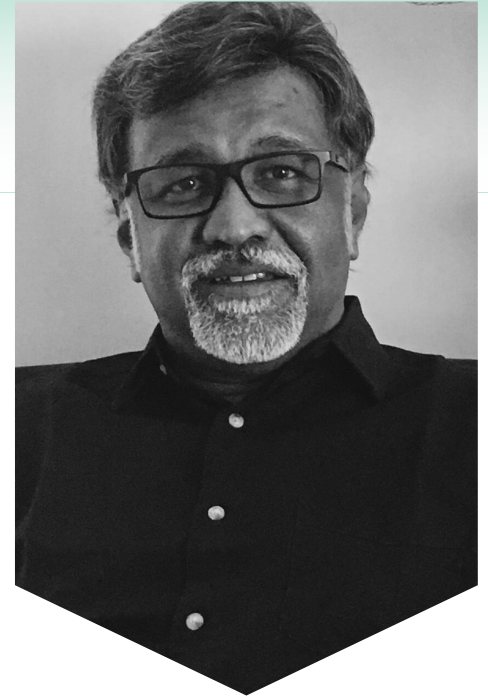
Early Years Management

Provided

164

children and their families with quality 3 and 4 year old kindergarten





EV EARLY YEARS

General Manager: Vik Naidu

In 2024 EV Inc. became an Early Years Manager [EYM] supplementing the 5 years of intensive consulting work it had undertaken with strengthening and transitioning kindergartens to other EYM's. General Manager Vik Naidu returned to EV to craft a new team to take on our first 3 kindergartens in January 2024. We welcomed Rachel Connolly as our Early Years Advisor, Julie Beattie as Enrolments Officer, Lisa Rich as administration/PAG Liaison Officer and Melanie Pont as Accounts and Payroll Officer.

We welcomed Kallista and The Patch Kindergartens from Yarra Ranges as well as Doncaster Gardens Preschool in Manningham. We were delighted to welcome their dedicated teams to the EV workforce at the EYM Staff Conference held in January.



EV Early Years values the community based identity of our kindergartens and works with local families and staff to maintain its individuality, philosophy and community connections. We are very proud to ensure that all fundraising monies earned by hardworking parent volunteers in the Parent Advisory Groups stay with the kindergarten to improve its facilities and programs for their children.

We have provided early years services to **164 children** through **1800 hours** of 3 and 4 year old kindergarten programs from January–June 2024. Doncaster Gardens increased their 3 year old kindergarten program from 7.5hrs/week to 15 hours week. Congratulations to the team.

Kallista Kindergarten is known for its Nature Kinder program in the lovely George Tindale Memorial gardens and **43** children enjoyed the program during the year.

Daniella De Martino State Member for Monbulk supported Kallista Kindergarten in obtaining a new Shade Sail for the outdoor area. (As pictured)



The Patch underwent a building refurbishment and well done to staff who continued to provide their quality programs through the tumult of a new roof. The Patch provided after school kinder for **36** children during the year. A further **\$10,000** grant was secured for The Patch to increase engagement, improve learning outcomes and strengthen inclusive early childhood learning environments for children of all abilities.

The Patch Kindergarten was the recipient of the Junior Landcare grant worth **\$1,000**, awarded by Landcare/Woolworths, which was used to create an Indigenous Garden.

Daniela De Martino, State Member for Monbulk and Senator for Victoria Raff Ciccone donated new flags for the garden.

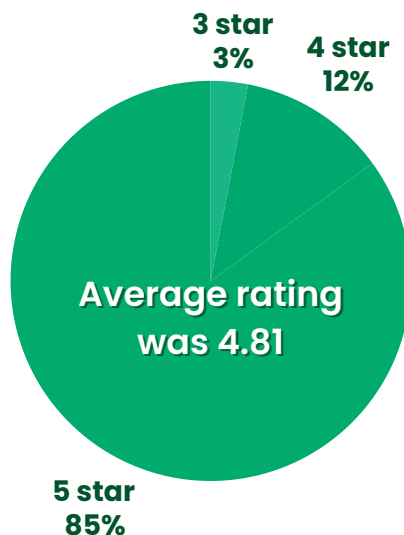
We value the input and engagement of families and in our first 6 months family feedback. Our surveys have shown that we provide inclusive and welcoming kinder environments and children enjoy their kinder time with us.

85% of parents believe the kinder environment is inclusive and welcoming.

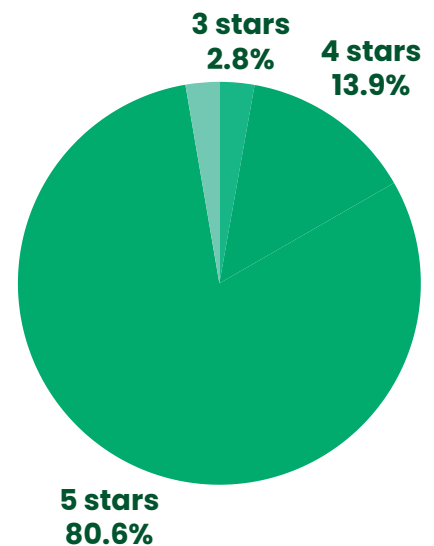


EMPOWERED PEOPLE

Do you believe the kinder environment is inclusive and welcoming to all children and families?



Do you feel your child enjoys their time at kinder?



*In the first 5 years of life, positive experiences and warm, responsive relationships stimulate children's development, creating millions of connections in their brains. In fact, **children's brains develop connections faster in the first 5 years** than at any other time in their lives. This is the time when the foundations for learning, health and behaviour throughout life are laid down.*

Raising Children Network

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/development/understanding-development/development-first-five-years>

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES



STRONGER
COMMUNITIES

Manager: Dr Shona Bass



Local Jobs North East Metropolitan Region



Local Employment Facilitator: Brad Byrne



Support Officer: Rachel Salesse

Workforce Australia
Local Jobs

North Eastern Melbourne

In the past year our Local Jobs program has worked with **267** organisations and participated in **444** meetings with external organisations. It has created **640** connections between organisations with mutually beneficial purposes. It participated in **17** Advisory/Working/Action Groups.

Our Local Jobs program was Involved in either leading or being a contributing partner in **24** Collaborative Initiatives. We supported over **300** individuals facing retrenchment across **11** organisations.



Local Jobs Plan

North Eastern Melbourne Employment Region | VIC | July 2024

Workforce Australia Local Jobs (Local Jobs) is a program that supports tailored approaches to accelerate reskilling, upskilling and employment pathways in response to current and emerging local workforce needs.

Local Jobs elements

Local Jobs Plan

The Local Jobs Plan sets out the skills and employment challenges and priorities of the region, and associated strategies that will drive the design and implementation of activities to be implemented to address these challenges.

Employment Facilitators

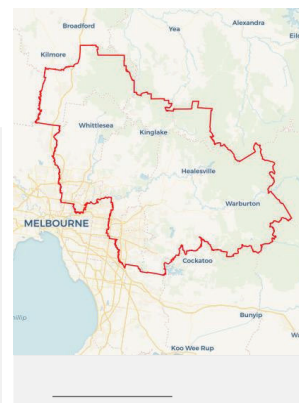
Employment Facilitators and Support Officers support the delivery of the program by bringing together key stakeholders including businesses, employment services providers, higher education and training organisations.

Local Jobs and Skills Taskforce

Each Employment Region has its own Taskforce. Representatives include local stakeholders who have demonstrated experience in upskilling, reskilling, and an ability to represent, connect and collaborate with others in the region to meet labour market needs.

Local Recovery and National Priority Funds

The Local Recovery Fund supports projects that meet the priorities identified in the Local Jobs Plan. The National Priority Fund provides funding for innovative local solutions to address structural barriers to employment.



Some examples of how we met the first strategic pillar of EV's strategic plan:

Carer's Cuppas

In partnership with Different Journeys and Glen Park Community Centre we delivered a series of events supporting unpaid carers of those with a disability. These sessions were tailored by Peer Support workers from Different Journey to support participants to understand the range of support programs available through the NDIS and Services Australia. Through connected carers to these supports we have seen their ability to engage in community increase vastly. Participants came from all backgrounds and benefits ranged from increased capacity to participate in community, enrolment in training courses, referral to employment opportunities and more.

Try A Trade Events

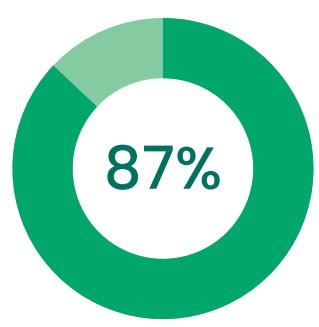
In partnership with Swinburne TAFE we delivered 4 Try a Trade sessions promoting career pathways in Carpentry and Plumbing. The events were facilitated by an experienced teacher in partnership with a first year apprentice to ensure that participants gained a relatable understanding of what they should expect.



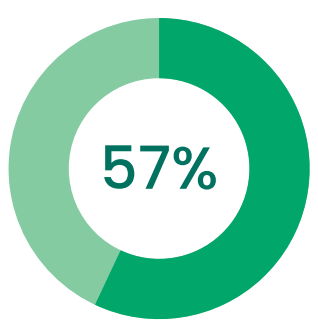
Figure 4 Try a Trade Carpentry Classroom Session



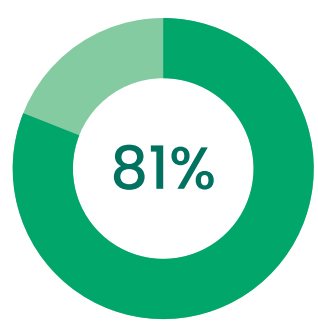
48 Participants took part in the sessions and provided excellent feedback, including:



of participants reported that this event helped them to find a trade pathway that they wanted.



of participants book a follow up careers counselling session to learn how to enrol in a course.



will look in to school-based apprenticeships to commence in 2024.



Examples of how the program addressed Strategic Pillar 2 during the year are:

Provider Collaboration – Regional Manager Roundtables

In July 2023 we commenced multi-provider Regional Manager Roundtable (RMR) routine networking meetings. These meetings run monthly, are held face to face at a rotating venue utilising service provider meeting facilities across the region, and bring together regional/state managers from all 5 major Workforce Australia (WFA) Providers, as well as the Transition to Work (TTW) provider in our region. Core members of the RMR are:

- Mary-Beth Melton, Regional Manager, Salvation Army Employment Plus
- Patricia Thomas, Regional Manager, SYC Pty Ltd
- Ashlee Gervasi, Regional Manager, WCIG
- Desiree Kora, Transition to Work Project Leader, AGA
- Adrian Jenkins, State Manager, Sarina Russo Job Access
- Ali Sakkour, Region Lead, AMES Employment Services

Through these meetings we have been able to facilitate a substantial increase in collaboration between providers who previously worked in isolation. Despite a service contract structure which can create incentives to remain isolated, providers in our region quickly saw the benefit to collaborative work practices, and began delivering a range of initiatives as a group to benefit the regions jobseekers, businesses and training organisations.

Some notable activities delivered by the group include:

- Northern Region Jobs Expo – a joint expo coordinated by all 6 providers (led by SYC) which hosted 40 employers and was attended by 340 WFA/TTW participants.
- Collaborative training activities – due to low caseload numbers and challenges attaining minimum cohort numbers for training course deliver, providers were able to effectively work together to meet requirements by combining caseloads. As such a wide range of training programs have been delivered to participants across the region that would not have been able to be delivered in isolation.
- The 'Deadly Jobs Expo' – an employment expo focused on providing culturally safe career pathways to First Nation's Individuals, will be delivered as a collaborative initiative in August 2024. Five providers have committed to support the initiative and have been working with lead provider WCIG since early 2023 to deliver the event.



Figure 9 Northern Region Jobs Expo

- Providers in the NEMER region were able to substantially increase the utilisation of complementary training services through working with program leads to develop a collaborative method of service delivery. One example of this is the 'Employability Skills Program' delivered by training organisation Create, Train, Achieve. This Workforce Australia funded training program had been running programs in isolation focusing on the online cohort and struggling to fill viable groups to deliver training. Through working with providers they developed a more functional method of delivery which included:
 - Reduced costs through the utilisation of service provider facilities to host the programs.
 - Increased participation by working with multiple providers to source participants.
 - Increased quality of service of delivery by working with employment coaches to understand the specific needs of individuals being enrolled in training.
 - Increased quality of service by tailoring course content to meet the needs of local industries facing staff shortages.

Through this collaboration the program is now running routine intakes across our region and has been delivered to several hundred jobseekers in the first half of 2024.

Net Zero Careers Summit

In partnership with the Outer Eastern Local Learning and Employment Network (OELLEN) we delivered the Net Zero Careers Summit in May of 2024. The summit brought together School Career Teams, Employment Service Providers, Local Businesses and Government to discuss the challenges and opportunities that would be presented through the Net Zero Economy Transition.

Throughout the event attendees heard from speakers from the Clean Energy Commission, the Victorian Skills Authority, Jobs and Skills Australia, the Australian Renewables Academy and more. The program was tailored to deliver meaningful advice to both businesses looking to begin the transition to Net Zero operations, as well as careers professionals looking to advise people on predicted and current labour market trends relating to the transition.

Feedback was extremely positive, with 93% of participants rating the event as 'Excellent or Very Good', 87% rating the information provided as 'Extremely Useful or Very Useful', and a range of responses indicating that we had been able to dispel several common myths related to the Net Zero Transition. Feedback also indicated substantial appetite from schools for more work in this space, which we will work to deliver in the next financial year.



Figure 7 Net Zero Summit



EQUITABLE
SYSTEMS

Local Jobs advocated for equitable systems firstly through its:

Local Jobs: Supporting Paid Work Experience Program Policy Development.

In late 2023 we were approached by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Youth Employment Policy Team to provide insights into his experience delivering work experience-based employment programs. We met with the Policy team shortly after and discussed how we had found appropriately designed workplace-based programs assisted individuals overcome a range of barriers to community and economic participation. Shortly after the May 2024 Budget release we received a follow-up letter from the Director of the Youth Employment Policy team thanking us for our feedback. The letter informed us that our feedback, in combination with 2 other Local Jobs teams feedback, and been utilised to develop the \$54m WorkFoundations Paid Employment Pathways Package.

The programs delivered through this package will allow vulnerable individuals to gain access to paid and supported work experience programs designed to support those facing intergenerational disadvantage and complex barriers to employment. This program was provided as an example of how the on-the-ground insights gained through engagement with Local Jobs Employment Facilitators can be utilised as to develop responsive policy.

Commencement of Himilo Futures Program

In May we supported Himilo Community Connections to Launce the Himilo Futures Program, and employment based capacity and engagement building project funded through the Local Jobs Program's Local Recovery Fund. Himilo are a community based and led organisation that utilise their place-based services to support their community across a breadth of social justice issues. This program aims to co-deliver employment services tailored to the needs of the African Muslim Community in partnership with traditional employment service providers.

Traditionally the cohort Himilo support have a greater than 60% disengagement rate from traditional employment services, and a data driven analysis of community need suggests there are very few jobseekers from these communities who would take up such a service. Working with Himilo we identified that this was not the case, and that systemic barriers were preventing individuals from engaging in traditional support systems, and therefore the data was not providing a complete picture. We faced challenges in gaining appropriate funding with resistance from the funding department who suggested there may not be sufficient demand for services. We reassured the funding body that this was not the case, and that we would keep intake numbers modest in case there were unforeseen challenges with engagement.

The first cohort commenced in May, aiming for 15 participants. 74 community members registered for the first program intake, and as of EOFY the program is running well above capacity and supporting members of the African Muslim community to engage with a broader range of support services, and ultimately, to gain employment.

'Optimising Your Coaching Skills'

In partnership with Bounce Global we developed and delivered the 'Optimising Your Coaching Skills' Program to Workforce Australia and Disability Employment Services Employment Coaches across our region. The program was co-developed with regional managers through our RMR meetings as a response to the increasing challenges many providers were facing with staff retention.

The Employment Services Sector currently places substantial stress on staff due to substantial output demands, client aggression, vicarious trauma and lack of access to suitable training and support. This program was designed to support an increase quality of service to clients through increasing employment coaches' (EC) resilience skills. The program aimed to provide a range of useful tools to ECs which would allow them to de-escalate aggressive or distressed clients, reduce the negative impacts of stereotyping and build active engagement from clients who are being mandated to attend through Mutual Obligations Compliance Frameworks.

The sessions were well attended with over 40 participants in each workshop, and we received uniformly positive feedback. We have since seen an increased in focus on developing the Employment Services Workforce, and similar workshops have been built into larger programs to support developing professionalisation of the workforce.



Tourism Navigator Pilot



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The Disability Employment – Tourism Local Navigators Pilot Grant was funded by the Department of Social Services and AusTrade in response to the 2022 Jobs and skills summit. The objectives of the grant opportunity are to help small and medium sized tourism businesses address barriers they have previously identified in recruiting, retaining and progressing employees and jobseekers with disability.

Our approach to engage small to medium sized enterprises (SME's) to participate in the pilot was through connection, education, and support. Our team was well equipped for this project with experts from the tourism and disability sectors, and the Local Jobs Employment Facilitator for the North Eastern region.

100+ businesses were introduced to the pilot (67 face-to-face) through presentations and direct contact. In addition, 2,500+ were connected through network/provider newsletters and social media campaigns. Ten business expressed interest in learning more about the pilot and went through to the recruitment phase. Three people with disability were employed and two completing qualifications prior to appointment. Thirty individuals completed one of the online modules (Disability Inclusion – (i) Context and Concepts, and (ii) Preparation). One business engaged our team to deliver the Disability Inclusion Training to 12 of their staff.

We expected challenges with business engagement, but perhaps not of the exact nature and extent that we encountered. Whilst many organisations did not demonstrate any interest in the pilot there were also many organisations who demonstrated an appetite to be involved in the pilot. Of these organisations there were a proportion who viewed this opportunity as a sales pitch (“disability washing”) rather than an authentic commitment to being inclusive. There were other organisations who authentically wanted to be more inclusive however they were unable to undertake the required cultural shift without substantial time and support (if at all). Those businesses who did engage often required substantial support to gain buy in with decision makers throughout their organisation. Whilst high level management and HR functions may see the benefits, translating this to outcomes at a hiring and department manager level was an additional challenge. These factors together reflected a culture within the industry that was not a good fit to enable successful engagement into the pilot in such a short timeframe.



The project team redesigned our existing workshops on Inclusive Volunteering into our Inclusive Employment Modules utilising a disability expert. These modules formed the basis for delivery of the program to Tourism enterprises.

“I thought it was an incredible session and so beneficial to open these conversations up in our workplace. I think if we are all consciously making decisions of proactive inclusion it will make for a better workplace and world! I hope that we can assist the program by filling our recruitment gaps with people with disability. As we learnt, these staff do not need more assistance and look to be very loyal staff members which is exactly what we are looking for. Both of the facilitators were fabulous, and I think having the training session face to face really helps our cohort because of the face-to-face nature of our industry. I really hope we can roll out the training to all staff.”

Quote *Balgownie Winery*



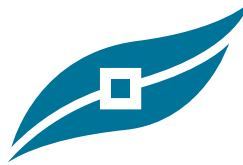
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SERVICES



STRONGER
COMMUNITIES



Volunteering



MANNINGHAM



Manningham Volunteer Support Services

The Manningham Volunteer Resource Service (MVRS) works towards the following 4 outcomes:

The Volunteer

- 1 People are socially included and have a sense of wellbeing.
- 2 People acquire the skills and experience they need to achieve their goals.

The Organisation

- 3 Organisations have an adequate supply of the right volunteers to deliver their services.
- 4 Volunteer managers are confident to manage their workforces.

Outcome 1: People are socially included and have a sense of wellbeing

Strategies -

1.

Promotion of volunteering in the community through Ambassador program

2.

Promotion of volunteering in Council initiatives

3.

Focused promotions using evidence base to attract people who have never volunteered.

Notable Achievements

- Manningham Volunteer Ambassador program was developed and launched during Volunteer week (May 2024). Two ambassadors for Manningham are working with MVRS to promote volunteering in Manningham.

- Twenty-six volunteer promotional events have been conducted across a diverse range of events and venues.

- One hundred and ninety-five prospective volunteers have contacted MVRS about volunteer opportunities (increased from 85 in 2022-23). The following table provides information related to the pathway of these prospective volunteers and opportunities in Manningham.



Manningham Mayor Cr Carli Lange at the MVRS booth at Park Orchards Market

195 people seeking a volunteer position in Manningham

Information about volunteering and opportunities sent to volunteers	22
No Response from Volunteer	47
Volunteering/Placed	37
Decided not to volunteer	13
Assessed and referred - in process	54
Interviews Booked with VIO's	6
Rejected applications/opportunities	3
No info provided on outcomes	4
Pause in volunteering/leave	3
Being assessed	11

- EV Strengthening Communities have developed a sophisticated online Virtual Volunteer Resource Service (virtual-VRS) that was launched in May 2024. This has been specifically customised to include a MVRS hub for volunteer assessment, matching and referral. Manningham volunteer assessors are currently being recruited and will be trained to assess and refer volunteers in Manningham.

- National volunteer week was used to promote volunteering in the Manningham Community. This included two real estate boards, daily social media posts before, during and after the event. In addition, there were volunteer pop-up promotions each day during volunteer week at a variety of Manningham venues and events.

- There has been continued weekly messaging about the importance of volunteering and the social impact through social media and hard copy advertisements. Messaging was also delivered at key events including but not limited to: Clean Up Australia Day, International Women's Day and this Girl Can Campaign.

- Corporate volunteering with Yarra Valley Water & Anderson Creek Landcare.



Corporate volunteering: The team from Yarra Valley Water spend a day with Anderson Creek Landcare.

Outcome 2: People acquire the skills and experience they need to achieve their goals.

Strategies -

1.

Focused promotions of volunteering as an employment pathway.

2.

Work with VMA5 to implement volunteering opportunities for people with disability, newly arrived migrants and first nations people in Manningham.

3.

Work with Council initiatives on inclusion and diversity to promote volunteering.

Notable Achievements

- Volunteering as a pathway to employment was promoted through social media posts and pop-up volunteering at events and venues.
- Volunteering as a pathway to employment promoted to young people at 3 events (MYS network meeting, Youth participation Practice Network meeting, Doncaster secondary College, Whitefriars College).
- Good news stories promoted on social media of 6 volunteers progressing to employment
- The delivery of three inclusive volunteering workshops/events where 18 Manningham organisations attended.
- Working relationships with at least 7 Manningham organisations who engage volunteers.
- Collaboration with Volunteer Management Activity (VMA5) to promote inclusive volunteering included:

Burke & Beyond Volunteer Experience

MVRS worked in collaboration with VMA5 and team members from Burke & Beyond (a local disability support service) to create a one-off volunteering opportunity for a small group of participants with a disability.

Through this experience Burke & Beyond's participants gained valuable skills and insight within an open employment environment.

This also provided EV and Burke & Beyond an opportunity to show case employability skills displayed by a group of individuals living with a disability and support them along their employment journey.

Inclusive Volunteer Awards

The VMA5 eastern region supported by MVRS delivered an Inclusive Volunteering Awards Conference. The conference was a great success with 120 people attending. There was a strong representation from Manningham with 14 organisations in attendance. Eight organisations were awarded for being an inclusive workplace and 20 organisations were commended for "working towards being an inclusive workplace". This included the Manningham Walking group for carers.

Manningham Walking Group for Carers were commended for "working towards being an inclusive workplace". Manningham Mayor Cr Carli Lange and Cr Anna Chen recieved the awards on behalf of the Walking Group.



Outcome 3: Organisations have an adequate supply of the right volunteers to deliver their services

Strategies -

- 1. Implement a new volunteering network with specific focus on capacity building for needs of organisations.**
- 2. Conduct a campaign to engage organisations utilising volunteer workforces to identify as VIO's.**
- 3. Assist organisations with recruitment and retention.**

Notable Achievements

- Two community network meetings conducted and attend by a total of 12 organisations
- The launch of the virtual Volunteer Resource service for Manningham in May has streamlined the process for volunteer assessment, matching and referral. This has increased the number of volunteers in Manningham being assessed by 30%.
- Volunteer Assessors – a model for volunteer assessors has been developed, including induction, handbook, toolkit and mentoring program. We are currently recruiting for a pool of Manningham volunteer assessors to contribute to the assessment-matching-referral of volunteers in Manningham.
- The development of an online Community Network platform to be launched in Manningham October 2024. This online network will be moderated by the MVRS Project Officer and will complement face-2-face network meetings to continue to build relationships with and between VIO's in Manningham.

Outcome 4 Volunteer managers are confident to manage their workforces

Strategies -

1.

Provide specific professional development for Volunteer Managers

Notable Achievements

- EV Strengthening Communities has launched their online Learning and Support platform with three free modules “strengthening your workplace: Disability Inclusion” available to VIO’s in Manningham
- Three Inclusive volunteering workshops have been presented with 18 Manningham organisations attended.
- Volunteer managers have been supported through 2 network meetings, customised support and the development of an online Volunteer Community Network.
- Successfully conducted surveys of volunteer’s and VIO’s to gain insight into the changing state of volunteering.

State of Volunteering in Manningham Report

Since our first year of operation we have produced the State of Volunteering in Manningham report and presented it to Council. For the full copy please refer..



Manningham Youth Employment Pathways Program MYEPP



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MYEPP is funded by Manningham City Council to:

1.

Deliver school based workshops, youth volunteer placements which will provide job readiness experience refer youth to employment support, youth employment pathway opportunities and counselling services as required.

2.

Deliver an expo to promote employment pathways

MYEPP has successfully engaged with local high schools through 2 Principals Breakfasts and was able to deliver a volunteer workshop on the Benefits of Volunteering at Templestowe College. The program is working collaboratively with Doncaster Secondary to place students into Volunteering opportunities in Term 4 of 2024. One of the challenges is that many organisations will not accept young people as volunteers and this is a focus for MYEPP in 2025 to address.

Working closely with Manningham Youth Services we were able to create a focus around young people and the Gen Connect Program.

MYEPP has its last year of funding in 2025 and with new vigour plans to offer 4 online learning modules to high schools which they can use to encourage volunteering, demonstrate how it can benefit young people, help assist them in finding employment and how to find the right opportunities. To date a total of 25 youth volunteering opportunities have been provided with local nonprofits, with several successful placements, including ongoing roles at Living and Learning @ Ajani and EV Community Transport.

MYEPP participated in various community events to promote youth volunteering, including markets and panel discussions, and has actively shared success stories on social media.



Volunteering

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY 5



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Manager: Viv Cunningham-Smith
Project Lead: Adele Braun



The VMA5 2022–2026 is a Commonwealth funded initiative through Volunteering Victoria. The program involves:

- breaking down barriers to volunteering for the priority groups – People with Disability, First Nations People, Newly Arrived Migrants, Young People, Vulnerable Women, and the Unemployed; and
- online services to build the capacity of Volunteer Involving Organisations.

The second year of the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) project has been busy and action-packed. In September 2023, the original project lead, Anna Tait, moved on to a new and exciting opportunity at Cultivating Community, and remains in close contact with the subsequent project lead, Adele Braun. Adele officially started the role in January 2024 and has worked with various community groups, in particular newly arrived migrant groups from Swinburne University and Box Hill TAFE, speaking to numerous groups and at careers expos about volunteering as a pathway to employment – and how barriers can be broken down within organisations so that they are more inclusive with their volunteering opportunities.

We have conducted in person inclusive volunteering workshops facilitated by our CEO, Viv Cunningham-Smith, and the feedback has been fantastic from the 8 organisations who attended. The in-depth process of developing and then presenting their inclusion action plans really solidified their thinking and steps needed to become fully inclusive of all people looking to volunteer within their organisation. Further in person and online workshops will be held in the second half of 2024 and start of 2025.

The First Nations cultural awareness workshop that took place in conjunction with WISE employment and MMIGP/Dungala Dreaming was a great start to an ongoing relationship and further invitations to participate in cultural awareness training is evidence of this partnership.

The launch of the Volunteer Community Network meetings for the MVRS & VMA in June 2024 with a workshop hosted by AJ Kulatunga was a great start to future events where we aim to encourage inclusive volunteering within all volunteer involving organisations and community groups.

The regional strategy developed for the VMA included the delivery of the Inclusive Volunteering Awards to celebrate VIO best practice and to establish peer-based learning on inclusion within the Eastern region. The inaugural Inclusive Volunteering Awards debuted on 1 May 2024, and were presented at the IVA conference which was attended by 120 people.



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There were 28 applications from a diverse range of VIO's at various stages of implementing inclusive volunteering programs. There were 8 organisations who received an award for being an Inclusive Volunteering Workplace for 2024. The judging panel assessed these organisations, as having met 80% or more of the selection criteria. These 8 presented their work at the Awards conference.

8 Awarded Inclusive Volunteering workplaces for 2024 are (in alphabetical order):

- Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
- Baptcare
- Feed One Feed All
- Foothills Community Care Inc.
- Melbourne AMEP Volunteer Tutor Scheme
- Newhope Baptist Church
- Puffing Billy Railway
- Wellways Australia

In addition, the following organisations received a certificate for working towards being an Inclusive workplace for 2024 (in alphabetical order):

- Australia Chin Community (Eastern Melbourne) Inc.
- Ben's Place
- Benwerren
- Carenet
- Community First Responders Foundation Ltd
- Ferntree Gully Tennis Club
- Living and Learning at Ajani Inc
- Manningham Walking Group For Carers
- Maroondah Winter Shelter
- Melbourne All-Abilities Lions Club
- MiCare Ltd
- Mooroolbark community Garden
- Mountain District Radio Inc 3MDR
- MVC Boxing
- Neuma Church
- Ringwood Church of Christ-
- Temple Society Australia- CHAMPION Community Hub
- The Boroondara Family Network
- Women Support Incorporated
- Yarra Ranges Council TAC L2P Program

Each organisation received 2 decals for their organisation [depending upon the status they attained] to display and a certificate of attainment.

The feedback from participants at the event was overwhelmingly positive and inspirational – that “hearing the stories of how VIO's developed their programs to become inclusive was just inspirational”.

“Really impressed with the day, found the keynote engaging and the organisations who gave presentations were inspiring, provided information from varied perspectives and I think each person in the room would have gained some practical knowledge to take back to their organisation. It was also clear that the event was extremely well organised, kudos to the team”

“This was a great inaugural event to recognise the work organisations are doing to be inclusive. It was great that all nominees were awarded and recognised. It was great to network with other organisations and to learn about their achievements through their presentations. Overall it was a great award ceremony to attend and look forward to attending the next ”

“The energy in the room was electric and conversations buzzing with hope. As a migrant woman of colour and faith, I find it heart warming that the messages of Diversity and Inclusion are meaningful. That we are on the path of reaching out to the Hardly Reached Voices rather than dismissing as Hard To Reach. That we are being flexible, adapting to all ages, genders, abilities, faiths and cultures, being truly intersectional. That we welcome all Volunteers as having a seat on the table, treating each other with respect.”

IVA INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING AWARDS



We will be continuing to work with all award winners to highlight their great work and share their journeys to celebrate and inspire others to become more inclusive in their volunteer programs.



As a VMA representative, EVSC belongs to the Volunteering Victoria VMA Network which brings together the team of VMA partners across the state, and meet virtually once every 6 weeks to share the work being achieved in each region and collaborate and share resources where possible.

The VMA Eastern Region consortium consists of organisations in the Eastern region and includes; Mullum Mullum Indigenous gathering place (MMIGP), Interchange Outer East, the Boroondara Volunteer Resource Service (BVRC), Migrant Information Centre – East (MICE) and Eastern Region of Councils. The consortium meets on a quarterly basis and the networks of each member are utilised to share the work of the VMA in the region. The VMA is pleased to work together with the MVRS, BVRC and Volunteer for Knox, as key council funded volunteer resource services in the region, and proudly supports and promotes the volunteer network meetings within each of these services regularly.

Volunteer Ecosystem

Manager: Dr Shona Bass



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Victorian funded research into revitalising future volunteer workforces found people still wanted to volunteer to make a difference to their community and world but the key barriers experienced were that they did not know how to find the right opportunity, time and family commitments. Navigation support that is place-based is a critical component if we are to stem the decline in volunteering and build a sustainable volunteer workforce. The absence of place-based support and the reduction of the volunteer workforce is compromising service delivery and resulting in an increased economic burden. In response to these challenges facing the volunteer workforce in 2024 EV built an online volunteering ecosystem which can be regionally delivered in response to the:

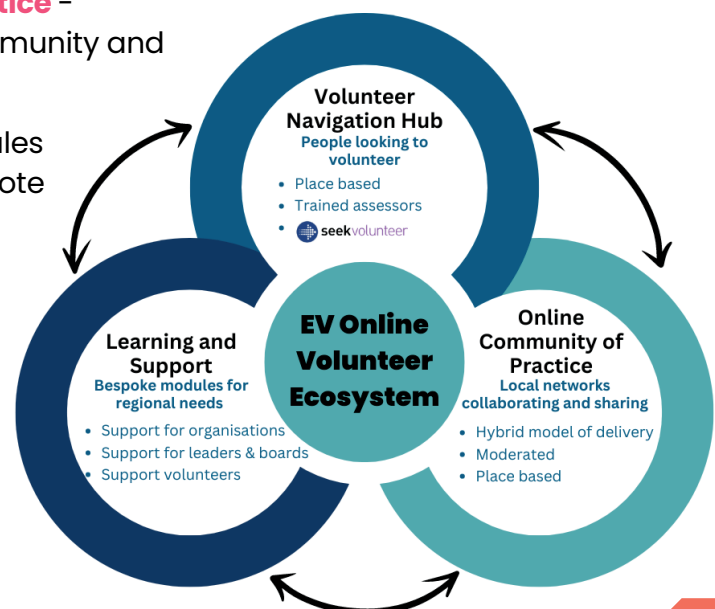
- lack of equitable locally based navigation services across Victoria
- lack of collaborative networks to influence how organisations were responding to the changing trends in volunteering
- strength of local word of mouth in renewing volunteer workforces ie need for local initiatives and
- retention of a skeleton volunteer support infrastructure which could be built upon regionally

This ecosystem contains 3 elements:

1. Victorian Volunteer Navigation Hub - powered by volunteers helping others into volunteering

2. Online Volunteering Communities of Practice - supporting big and small organisations, community and sporting groups at the local level.

3. Learning and Support platform with modules to assist volunteers to be successful, to promote inclusion and diversity, and develop bespoke regional modules to assist with capacity building of organisations and community groups.



Volunteering

The Volunteer Navigation Hub was launched in May 2024 and with minimal promotion over the past five months has assessed 330 people from the Manningham and Maroondah LGA's wanting to volunteer. Many assessed and supported into volunteer roles faced barriers and social isolation.

The online learning and support platform has successfully launched six modules in the past six months. We have received fabulous feedback in particular for the three modules related to diversity and inclusion in the workplace for paid and volunteer workers.

Strengthen Your Workplace: Inclusion



Strengthen Your Workplace: Understanding Diversity and Inclusion

Welcome to the Understanding Diversity and Inclusion Module. This module introduces key concepts of diversity in the workplace. Participants will be encouraged to consider their own experience and intersections of diversity, as well as considering how they can contribute towards an inclusive workplace.

[Read More](#)



Strengthen Your Workplace: Disability Inclusion Contexts & Concepts

This is the first of a three-module course that introduces concepts, contexts, and perceptions of living, working, and volunteering with a disability. This module provides the background that participants will build upon in module 2 and 3.

[Read More](#)



Strengthen Your Workplace: Disability Inclusion Preparation

This is the second of a three-module course that introduces the key components of an inclusive workplace and the tools required to conduct an audit of inclusivity. Participants will be taken through the next steps towards implementation including a disability action plan.

[Read More](#)

The online Learning and Support Hub and the Communities of Practice provide opportunities for local organisations including professional development and support, networking, and resource sharing. Learning from evidence based professional development and the experiences of others helps organisations to become more effective and influential.

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT



Managers:

Marnie O’loughlin June–December 2023

Elizabeth McFarlin from January 2024



This year we said goodbye to Marnie O’Loughlin who served EV as the Manager of Community Transport for over 7 years, and has since moved to working with the Australian Community Transport Association (ACTA) on the Victorian Mapping Project.

In January 2024, we welcomed Elizabeth McFarlin as the new Manager of Community Transport. Liz comes to EV with an extensive background in Aged Care service management, and disability service planning and implementation. She is well supported by the Community Transport team including Team Leader Mariyam Millwala and Volunteer Coordinator Cameron Lenton.

Volunteer engagement

Following a significant drop in numbers of volunteer drivers in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, this year adopted a strategic and targeted approach to rebuilding our volunteer driver pool. We were fortunate enough to engage a Communications and Marketing Lead who has built links with several community and employment agencies and has streamlined the recruitment pathway to our service. We created a ‘Day in the life’ video which demonstrates the role of a volunteer driver, and has proven a valuable tool for promoting voluntary opportunities. In accordance with changing government advice and relaxed mandatory requirements for Aged Care workers, we updated our COVID safe plan which has led to improved community inclusion and volunteer engagement. This multifaceted approach has led to a 20% increase in our volunteer pool this year.

Volunteer reward and recognition

Further to this, we remained unwavering in our view on the extensive benefits of volunteering. We heard from volunteers who continue to relay stories about their volunteer role as a key factor in their wellbeing, community connection and social purpose. We celebrated Volunteer Week in May, where we acknowledged the value of our Volunteers and promoted the important role that volunteering plays in our service. There was an evening dinner event as well as a planting workshop, to support volunteer connection and wellbeing. In addition to our regular driver training sessions, this year we introduced Volunteer awards to acknowledge years of service.

We plan to continue this focus on volunteer growth and support into 2025.



Community Transport activity

EV has seen unprecedented service demand this year, and we have introduced a waitlist facility whereby we can make effective use of trip cancellations in order to assist as many clients as we can with their transport needs. We have continued to provide transport services to clients connected with the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP), Home and Community Care (HACC), Home Care Packages and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). We have developed and maintained good working relationships with Home Care Package and NDIS providers and Case Managers, and have been able to work in partnership to facilitate a high quality service for their clients. These relationships are invaluable for us as we support the community and begin to navigate the Support at Home model in 2025.

Manningham Community Transport partnership

This year, we continued our partnership with Manningham Council as we delivered regular bus services to Manningham residents to connect them to a range of activities including shopping, libraries, aquatic centres, exercise groups and culturally specific social groups. We delivered an average of 23 bus services per week over the year. We also committed to the coordination and delivery of a series of outings for Manningham residents. Since October 2023, we have designed and provided outings to 140 residents. Outing destinations have included Pentridge Prison, the State Library, Williamstown, Alwyn gardens and the Mordialloc beach. The outings have been extremely popular, and by necessity waitlists were put in place to ensure that we can engage new community members



Food deliveries for disadvantaged community members

EV has been supported by the Department of Transport to trial the utilisation of an electric van to collect and deliver fresh foods to the community. Each week we support Feed One Feed All (FOFA), Outer East Food Share and Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place to service the community. Our volunteer drivers pick up fresh foods from markets and greengrocers, and deliver it to community kitchens who create fresh and nutritious meals. In turn, we then pick up these meals and deliver them to collection points for disadvantaged members of the community. We also assist in delivering food hampers to disadvantaged First Nations' families each week.



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Upper Yarra Community Transport trial

A time limited trial of a township-based community delivered volunteer transport model was held between November 2022 and October 2023 in the Upper Yarra region of the Yarra Ranges local government area. This trial was designed to leverage reports of existing community practice where residents would take people who did not have transport in their township down to Yarra Junction or Lilydale. This trial was to test formalisation of such a solution.

It was found that privacy concerns were a major barrier to successful implementation of this model in the Upper Yarra and that cost effective public transport which maintains anonymity for people who are mobile and living in a vulnerable community is more likely to be a viable solution. These trial findings have provided valuable learnings for the 'Improving Transport Access' working group which has been established for the Yarra Ranges in 2024.

Yarra Ranges Aged Care service transition

We continued to see local councils relinquishing their Aged Care services in response to mounting compliance requirements under the proposed Aged Care Act. EV Community Transport successfully transitioned clients who were previously connected with the Shire of Yarra Ranges council bus service, and completing new assessments and care plans for clients and orienting them to our service.

National Variable Pricing Matrix pilot

EV is thrilled to be participating in the National Variable Pricing Matrix pilot for Community Transport this year.

The aim of the pilot is to identify and quantify the variables that best represent the cost of providing community transport across Australia. In a changing landscape of Aged Care reform where compliance costs are rising, it is vital that we understand the true cost of community transport to enable funding models to be realistic and sustainable in the long term. To do this, we are working with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, the Australian Community Transport Association, the University of South Australia and a range of Community Transport providers.

Until July 2025, EV will be collecting data and trialling a pricing model whereby high quality community transport can be accurately costed which can ultimately inform Aged Care reform initiatives and national policy settings.

This work is especially pertinent in light of the new Aged Care Act and will underpin the arrival of the new Support at Home model in July 2025. Aged Care reform is on its way, and this year we rose to the challenge in navigating and planning for a new Aged Care Act, and the Support at Home model being introduced in July 2025.

Trips software implementation

On a more practical level, the EV Community Transport team transitioned to the use of the Trips software system this year, which has ultimately streamlined our booking system and scheduling process. While the system is in its development phase, with ongoing updates and improvements each week, it is providing EV with a platform to better support our clients and streamline our service activities. This implementation has required regular staff training, advocacy workshops, and liaison with software developers to ensure the software is able to grow and adapt to our changing service environment and compliance obligations.



EQUITABLE
SYSTEMS



EQUITABLE
SYSTEMS



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EV Strengthening Communities provides a range of consulting services in the areas of:

- Governance for Board and Committees of small to medium community organisations
- Early Years consulting- organisational troubleshooting, governance, practice development.
- Volunteering- evaluation of volunteering programs, inclusive volunteering preparation and implementation , workforce design and troubleshooting
- Employment- preparation and implementation for inclusive employment

During the year EV has supported a range of organisations and communities.

EV Strengthening Communities works to ensure policy and systems change in ways that improve people's lives. We do this through:

- Advocacy
- Involvement in policy development and influence
- Collaborative research
- Involvement in and support of our peak bodies

This year EV has been actively involved :

- In the national Community Transport Variable Pricing Matrix Pilot as part of the Aged Care reform
- As Chair of the state Community Transport peak VTCTA and in collaboration with members is transitioning this to join the national peak ACTA.
- As Chair of Victorian Community Transport Special Interest Group
- In VTCTA Media Campaign to promote recruitment of volunteer drivers
- In the Victorian Community Transport Mapping Project
- In the National Network of Volunteer Resource Centres- advocacy on restoring place-based Volunteer Resource Centres nationally. This included a Commonwealth budget submission.
- With raising issue of Community Transport as a social justice issue.
- In mapping project of place-based volunteer support in Victoria
- With the evaluation of the Victorian approach to Volunteer Management Activity 5.
- Providing commentary on Home Support Program and community transport services as part of aged care reform.
- Participating in the Workforce Australia's CEO Forums annually
- As a member of the design team for the implementation strategy of National Volunteer Strategy

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