

BALLARAT NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT 2025





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In the spirit of reconciliation we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.





Our Vision

resilient connected neighbourhoods

Our Mission

to enrich our community by providing opportunities to connect, participate and learn

Our Values

We take a person-centred approach to:

- Equity: creating opportunities with fairness and consideration of each individual's needs.
- Empowerment: Enhancing individuals' capacity to have control of their own lives.
- Inclusion: Embracing diversity in a respectful, safe and welcoming environment.
- Collaboration: Working together to achieve common goals.

Our Commitment to the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Our Learn Local Adult, Community and Further Education courses ensure everyone has access to **QUALITY EDUCATION**, can build skills to get **DECENT WORK** and enjoy in **ECONOMIC GROWTH**. With our community we work together to build a world with **NO POVERTY** and **ZERO HUNGER**, where we can all enjoy **GOOD HEALTH and WELLBEING**.



Living in our **SUSTAINABLE CITIES and COMMUNITIES**, we will be kind to the environment taking **CLIMATE ACTION** and leading the way with **RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION and PRODUCTION** in our organisation and our programs.



We are committed to **GENDER EQUALITY** and **REDUCING INEQUALITIES**, working with other like minded organisations, we promote **PEACE and JUSTICE** through **STRONG INSTITUTIONS** and long-term **PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS**.

From the Committee of Management

In 2025 it is hard to escape the constant, reminders of the hardship our communities continue to experience. 2024 had brought no real sense of relief of the cost pressures stretching household budgets to breaking point, nor is there a clear sense of when, or how, the situation might begin to ease.

From a Neighbourhood House perspective, the effects reach well beyond the financial impact. There are clear and tangible indications of the erosion of resilience, heightened senses of isolation, and plain desperation. All of which fall squarely within the bounds of Our Vision, Our Mission, Our Purpose, and Our Values.

At the most basic level, our commitment to Adult Education has always been about removing the barriers on the pathway to job-readiness. It is heartening to see an abundance of willingness among those at the edges of our society to find gainful employment. Often impeded by skills shortfalls; from language, literacy, and resume writing, through to more hands-on areas such as food preparation, garment repair, growing their own food and so much more. Our houses deliver so much in these areas and it is privilege every time another success story passes through our doors on the way to a better life.

The less tangible, yet still visible impacts of our current social predicament are also catered for within our Houses. Social isolation is mitigated, at times removed, by craft groups, community gardens, craft sheds, and social activities, community lunches, markets and mini festivals. Cultural diversity is celebrated and it is a pleasure to watch as the far corners of our rich community collide, combine and share their backgrounds and delicious foods.

It bears special mention, that our houses continue to deliver meaningful and significant food relief in several ways. Providing a sit-down location for Soup Bus patrons, redistribution of donated foods thanks to the generosity of a number of partners, from home gardeners and community gardens, through to food retailers committed to supporting the community and mitigating food waste.



Committee's report continued

Finally, through skill enrichment, participants learn how to purchase, prepare, grow and cook nutritious, delicious meals for little expense.

We as an organisation are continuing to explore ways for our houses to be able to reach deeper into the communities they serve. Ideas such as more diversified delivery models which take advantage of community spaces over a wider area. Of course, always being mindful to ensure we engage with these communities to ensure our offerings are relevant to the needs of any community we serve.

2024 has been another relatively stable year from a Committee of Management perspective. We farewelled Lisa Robinson who has been a fantastic contributor and community advocate during her long stay with the Committee. We wish Lisa all the best and thank her for her boundless efforts over the years.

The Committee's commitment to reach ever-deeper into our communities continues to be a priority. 2024 in Delacombe we saw the first steps towards making this a reality with very positive results so far. We also have two sites now operating in Wendouree with a number of hosted community groups enjoying the benefit of the extra capacity of a second facility. The City of Ballarat has shown positive & demonstrable support for this which is greatly appreciated.

It almost goes without saying that as the needs of our communities' increase, so too do the demands on committee members. None have shied away from this, indeed, all have doubled down, such is their commitment to the roles they have taken on. I feel it is past due to thank all of The Committee members for their tireless volunteer work in the service of our communities. I am proud of the remarkable diversity of skills these members bring, and the generous way they share their time for causes that they feel passionate about. It is an honour to serve alongside such an esteemed group.



Chair's report continued

As mentioned in previous years, it is an inconsistency of the current economic climate that sharp increases in the need for what our Houses provide for the community, coincides with a contraction of both philanthropic and statutory funding. Grants and funded programs are more hotly contested by greater numbers of applicants as governments struggle to rein in costs and meet increased demand. What we have seen over the past 24 months is a drastic decline in the income streams available to our Houses.

Just as Neighbourhood Houses seek to impart resilience into the communities, it is something that abounds within the Houses. In what would otherwise be a bleak, disruptive backdrop the Houses shine and lead by example through their own resilience. Cutbacks and mitigations have had to be made over the past 12 months. Hard decisions have had to be taken, yet somehow, as ever the Houses manage to continue to deliver to their communities with almost no perceptible decline in the level or quality of service.

Sometimes at breaking point our Houses somehow, almost magically manage to reinvent, dig ever-deeper, and find increasingly creatively-complex ways to continually deliver vital, quality outcomes to the communities they serve. These neighbourhood miracles are unquestionably the result of the dedication of incredible House Managers, the teams that support them and the multitude of volunteers who somehow, inexplicably, make all this good happen.

My thanks to each and every one of you; you are all true, community heroes. As we celebrate volunteer week in 2025 we are again reminded that the extent of the current volunteers that support the Houses activities is immeasurable.

Cameron Duthie
Acting Chair, Joint Committee of Management
Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre & Wendouree Neighbourhood Centre





Committee of Management as at 31st December 2024

On behalf of everyone at the Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre we take this opportunity to thank the COM members for their ongoing support and recognise how fortunate we are to have such a fabulous group of community minded people leading the organisation.

We would also like to thank Lisa Buckland, who resigned after the AGM, and thank her for her time as our Committee Secretary.

Chair Glen Crompton

Deputy Chair Annie de Jong

Secretary Laura Le Marshall

Treasurer Jane Jens

General Members Cameron Duthie
Bradley Smith
Alan Labas

Executive Officer/ Public Officer Vicki Coltman



From the Executive Officer



We continue to be supported by a growing number of community members who volunteer their time, turn up whenever we need their help, and attend our activities to meet people and have fun. They are the reason we exist and placing them at the centre of what we do is key to the Centre's success.

It is also not possible to do all the wonderful things we do without the ongoing support of local businesses and philanthropic organisations. 2024 was no exception with our garden programs helped by the Community Bank Buninyong, Ballarat Foundation, and Bunnings; Coles, Aldi and PFD supported our food relief programs; and Sebastopol businesses supported the community newsletter promotions, projects and distribution.

Interestingly for the first time our demographics changed: participants generally range in age from playgroup preschoolers to volunteers aged in their 80's. However in 2024 we experienced more young people engaging in our programs, with almost half of our participants aged under 40 years old. A trend which has continued into 2025.

Due to the nature of Work & Learning Centre funding, disruptions and changes are common for this program and our focus is always to help those most in need. The change to the contract eligibility criteria in late 2023 caused many clients to become ineligible for the program. The team spent the first part of the year helping these clients into other services and developed new employment focused training courses.

In addition, we reviewed the price of training courses in August, making most of the short and work ready courses free. This resulted in higher enrolment numbers across all courses and led to an increase in general community participation in events. However increased external cost pressures meant courses with 5 or less enrolments and unfunded activities were cancelled, and community lunches increased slightly.

Finally, it goes without saying, the organisation has a passionate team of staff, tutors, volunteers and supporters who together make what we achieve possible and inspire me everyday with their dedication. Once again we achieved some outstanding outcomes in social value and community impact for the year which we are all extremely proud of.

To our Committee Chair Glen Crompton, your strategic leadership over the past 6 years has enabled the organisation to thrive and I thank you and the other Committee members for your ongoing support.

Vicki Coltman



From the Treasurer



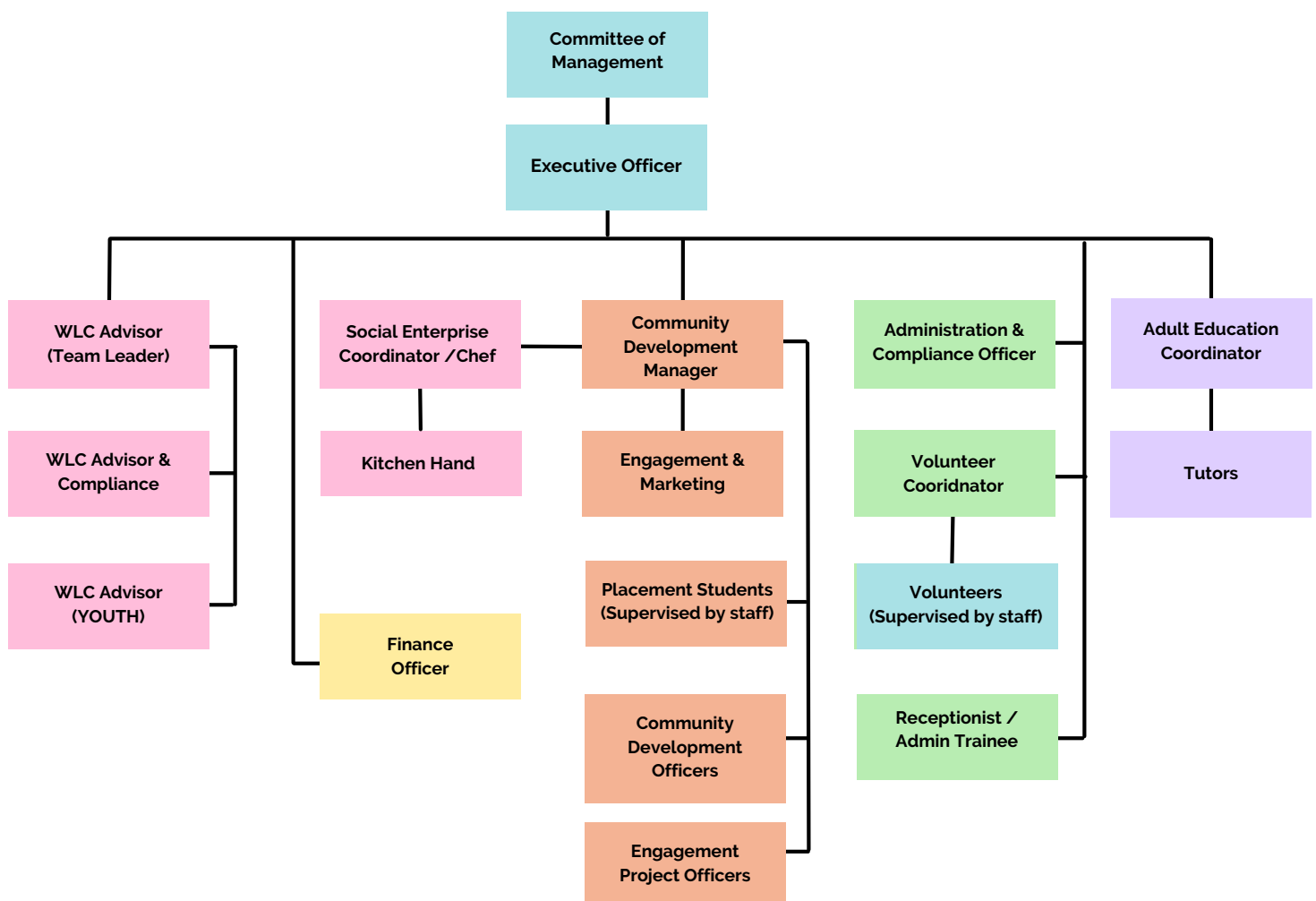
For the 2024 year, Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre (BNC) had a net deficit of \$346,653 compared to a net deficit of \$99,657 in 2023. This resulted in a decrease of total member's funds to \$101,059 compared to \$447,712 in 2022.

Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre received \$242,668 in ACFE Grants and \$738,899 in Government Grants, which is significantly lower than previous year. Also during the financial year 2022, 2023 & 2024, Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre incurred expenditure total to \$541,237 on the Spotlight on the Sebastopol Garden Project. This contributed to the overall financial losses incurred in 2023 & 2024 financial years.

A full copy of the 2024 Financial Statements can be downloaded from the Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre's website or contact the Executive Officer for a copy.

Jane Jens

Organisational Chart





Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre 2024 Reflection

BNC programs clearly demonstrate our place in the community as a safe and trusted community organisation where you can go for support and services. This year our calculated Social Impact for every \$1 of Neighbourhood House funding was \$4.87 in community value, up from \$3.61 in 2023. Overall our activities contributed \$6,029,104 in community value almost 30% higher than 2023.

During the year we restructured our volunteer programs adding more employment training opportunities leading to an increase in volunteers but a reduction in total hours volunteered. The Justice of the Peace services expanded to be available every work day. We maintained high visitor numbers and room hire grew with many community groups now using the Delacombe and Sebastopol facilities. Our social connection activities contributed significantly to reducing social isolation.

In 2024 we had:

- 950 visitors use the Hub in an average week
- 1294 activities, with 500 people in an average week participating in activities
- 15 different types of volunteer roles: garden, office, social enterprise & classes
- 90+ organisational supporters, partners and sponsors of our programs
- 53 different organisations used the facility for meetings, training and activities
- Users hired 260 hours of facility hire in an average month
- 22 different community groups using a room in the Centre in an average month, 5 of these groups are supported in some way by BNC



**107
volunteers**

**5520+
volunteer
hours**

**45,000+
visitors**



Jobs Victoria Work & Learning Centre



The eligibility change for clients to access support in the new Work & Learning Centre contract, along with a decrease in funding, changes in staffing ratios and a focus on supporting priority cohorts, impacted the number of people we supported into employment in 2024. Unfortunately, with the contract due to end in June 2025, we also experienced changes in staff as they moved onto more secure employment. This is a common outcome of the way these programs are funded and the team did a great job in navigating these changes with little impact to the clients.

As WLC clients can now only work 12 hours or less, making many of our former clients ineligible, we introduced several new pre-accredited employment focused courses to support them. Our training courses combined with our volunteer program are highly regarded by our clients. Designed to rebuild confidence, social connection and employability skills, all our programs focus on giving a WLC client real and sustainable employment outcomes

Achievements for current contract 31/12/2024*:

- Total active clients in system 95
- Total number of employment placements 107% to target
- Clients unemployed for >12 months (at intake) 36%
- Employment placements retained for 26 weeks 210% to target
- Number of non-accredited training placements 107% to target
- Number of accredited training placements 130% to target

* since contract commenced 1st November 2023



**95
clients**

**44
employment
placements**

**86
training
placements**



Our Kitchen Social Enterprise



Our Kitchen (OKSE) is a Workforce Integration Social Enterprise (WISE) with a primary purpose to provide pre-employment training and prepare people to enter the workforce. With a hospitality focus, 3 pre-accredited employability courses underpin this training: Cooking Up Jobs, Cooking for the Community and Front of House. In 2024, there were 113 enrolments across these three courses plus 79 students completed their Barista training.

Participants in OKSE develop amazing self confidence and pride by producing weekly community lunches for our older community members. Volunteers support the program by helping in the kitchen and with our food relief program. In 2024, through SecondBite, Coles and Aldi, volunteers significantly increased the amount of food we rescued and distributed over what we have done in previous years.

The social enterprise:

- held 31 weekly community lunches, averaging 71 people at each lunch or 2200 people per annum, plus provided 15+ take away meals after each lunch
- rescued 9500kg of food from landfill
- donated 3500kg of food to community members
- employed a kitchen hand trainee role for a year 12 student
- had 26 volunteers who contributed 1000+ hours of support to the social enterprise



**9500kg food
rescued**

**2665+
meals**

**1000+ hours
volunteered**





Learn Local Adult Education & Training

It was pleasing to see high levels of diversity in our learner cohort with learners coming from 42 different countries and representing many diverse cohorts from our community. Business Administration, Digital Literacy, Sewing and Hospitality courses continue to be the most popular. We know many of our learners face systemic barriers, long term unemployment and have low literacy and numeracy skills. We offer a safe and inclusive space for them to thrive and have many stories of how our wrap around approach has changed lives. You can find these stories [on our website](#).

In 2024 we completed 22,476 hours of pre-accredited training with 606 learners, This demonstrates our continued commitment to learning when compared to just under 9,000 hours of training delivered in 2017. It is clear the restructure of our courses to be employment focused micro-modules (5-20 hours in duration) was the right decision in 2017. This strategic direction has created flexibility in our delivery where people can gain a quick micro skills or complete multiple courses to build their entry level employment skills over several terms.

Overall we achieved:

- Increased delivered hours from 19,607 in 2023 to 22476 in 2024
- 914 enrolments for 606 unique students
- 126 courses were delivered, covering 35 different course topics
- Courses were delivered across 11 sites and 4 Local Government Areas (LGAs)
- Learners identified as 58% women, 54% over 40 years old, 2.5% as ATSI
- 22% of students were born overseas, coming from 42 different countries
- 17% of learners live outside of Ballarat, in 21 other Local Government Areas
- 27% of learners were looking for employment



46%
students
under 40yo

22476
student
contact
hours

914
course
enrolments





Employment Supported Playgroup

In 2024, we received funding from the Department of Education to deliver a Family Learning Partnerships program. Established at the Delacombe Community Hub, the Learning Together Playgroup encourages parents to engage in their children's early years learning. The structured environment is designed to introduce families to early literacy, numeracy and language concepts through fun, engaging activities with family, community and well-being the focus.

Running weekly on Mondays for 2.5 hours, the playgroup provides an opportunity for parents to:

- learn more about the adult education courses they can do to help them return to employment;
- engage with the Work and Learning Centre team who assist them to identify new employment and training pathways;
- gain support from the Parent Pathways team who also refer parents to the playgroup; and
- is also a great way for otherwise isolated parents to meet other parents and form new friendships, including intergenerational representation with grandparents, parents and children.

New playgroups take a while to grow, and whilst the numbers have been relatively low, we have seen a notable increase leading into 2025. Our playgroup is a great example of local agencies working together to support local families.



80%
multicultural
families

12
families

14
children





Strategic Partnership Program

in 2024, Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre received funding to partner with Federation College to deliver a Department of Education Strategic Partnership Program.

Over 9 weeks, year 11/12 Vocational Major (VM) students were introduced to employment opportunities in several industries. They were given hands on skills and knowledge in hospitality, horticulture, creative arts, and job skills including interviews, communication and personal presentation. Place based activities included barista and kitchen skills in the commercial kitchen, administration office skills in the computer lab, and gardening skills in the community garden.

The program was designed around Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre's successful Adult Education work ready courses. It was adapted to meet the requirements of the vocational major curriculum, addressing 8 nationally recognized employability skills, and the interests of the students.

One additional benefit of the program was introducing the students to our organisation and the not for profit community sector more broadly. By being involved in the community lunch program students learnt about the value of learning new skills and building confidence, and how volunteering can be rewarding and help them find employment.

For the pilot, 24 young people successfully completed the program. In 2025, the program will be expanded to include Federation College and Phoenix P12 Community College year 11 students.



**24
year 11
students**

**9
industry
activities**

**8 VM
job skills
covered**





Volunteering to Build Skills

Saranya joined the Work & Learning Centre program in late 2023 after being a student in some of the Learn Local pre-accredited classes at Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre.

She was originally from India but had settled in Ballarat as a Permanent Resident with her family.

Saranya is a very intelligent and friendly person with a tertiary education, but she had never worked in her entire life.

Saranya was very interested in working in administration but without any work experience or Australian qualifications, she was not work ready. She also needed school hours as her son is still very young.



The first step her WLC Advisor took was to create a basic resume. After this Saranya and her advisor discussed training options and she enrolled in the Become Work Ready course and the Business Administration course. This was in addition to her studying the short Artificial Intelligence course and continuing her English and IELTS studies to improve her language skills.

With a lack of any work experience Saranya's advisor recommended volunteer work so she commenced administration work as a volunteer with Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre and Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council.

This experience has been helpful for Saranya to build her skills and confidence. With support from her WLC advisor, Saranya has started applying for employment and BRMC appointed Saranya as their Volunteer Coordinator, it is only a volunteer position but will provide excellent experience.

Saranya continues to volunteer at Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre every week and is a great community contributor and team member.

Read more stories on our website: <https://www.ballaratnc.org.au/about-m/testimonials>



Working towards a Goal

Neil joined the Work & Learning Centre many years ago when he and his family moved to Ballarat after arriving in Australia by boat as Tamil refugees. For many years Neil was not allowed to work or study due to the status of his visa. Neil and his family spent their years in limbo being very active members of the Ballarat community as volunteers. Neil has become a well known refugee advocate and founded the Union of Australian Refugees. Neil also became a captain in the VicSES and learnt many useful skills while he was unable to work.

In 2023, the Australian government granted Neil and his family permanent residency. Neil was able to get a manufacturing job immediately through a friend but after a three month trial, he realised that the job wasn't the right fit for him. He came to see his advisor at the Work and Learning Centre for some support with getting another job.

Neil's advisor created a new resume and cover letter for him, as well as supporting him with job applications. Neil also applied for the police force, a lifelong dream for him. Currently, Neil is undergoing testing for the police force, and enrolling in a Diploma of Community Services. In the meantime, he has secured another manufacturing job and started his own small business. Neil's dream is to work in a community engagement role in the police force, or for another organisation, and he continues to work towards that goal with the support of the Work and Learning Centre.

Footnote: in 2025 Neil completed his first Diploma of Community Services Vocational Placement at BNC

Read more stories on our website: <https://www.ballaratnc.org.au/about-m/testimonials>





Community Development

In 2024, we completed the last Spotlight on Sebastopol (SOS) place-based community development activities. This was a major undertaking and our thanks go to all the groups and people who helped achieve these fabulous outcomes for our community.

In addition to this we delivered a range of our small 'in-house' community development activities which are co-designed by our participants and community, sometimes over multiple years. These included:

- Connecting Sebastopol Newsletter, won best newspaper at the Community Newspaper Awards 2024,
- Distributed 4 quarterly Connecting Sebastopol Newsletters (13,200 hard copies)
- Delivered community events including a harmony week celebration, International Women's Day morning tea, Sing Australia afternoon tea & weekly Chatty Cafes
- 7 JP's volunteered 600 hours signing documents for 1048 people
- Completed the last Spotlight on Sebastopol Community Garden and Public Art projects.
- Supported 7 vocational placement students, 3 who required 500 hours of placement
- Applied for 27 grants, with a 48% success rate
- Maintained 2000 subscribers to the quarterly BNC Newsletter
- Increased our social media followers to 3000+
- Convened 6 Connecting Sebastopol Meetups with 11 people on average attending
- Continued to provide a range of services to the community including free computer access, and help with accessing government services



600
JP hours
volunteered

4700+
activity
participants

7
placement
students



Community Development: Sebastopol



A small band of project workers has been delivering the Spotlight on Sebastopol (SOS) projects since mid-2021, so it was with some happiness, and some sadness, we finalised the last of the projects this year. Along the way we met some fabulous community members, farewelled several team members and delivered four public artworks, installed the Historic Sebastopol signage and walking trail brochures, established a community garden, connected the Sebastopol community, and created the award winning Connecting Sebastopol Newsletter!

The **SOS Connecting Sebastopol** community group continued to grow and engage new members during the year. They play an important part in developing the stories for the newsletter and worked together to deliver a Children's Week Family Fun Night. This was such a success they hope to do similar activities in the years to come.

The final **SOS Public Art** project was installed at Totally Workwear Ballarat, Albert Street Sebastopol. CaxOne was inspired by his experiences of living and growing up in Sebastopol. Featured on page 2, this vibrant piece of street art has quickly become a favourite for many and brightens up the local streetscape.

The **SOS Community Garden** completed installation of the buildings, including an accessible toilet and a sewer upgrade. Due to project delays, increased construction costs and changing timelines, the initial garden beds could not be delivered. This created an opportunity for our Adult Education classes to be hands on in the garden space in terms 3 and 4 where participants created a compost area and planted tomatoes and other vegetables. We are committed to growing this space for the community and have plans and funding to add a Greenhouse in 2025.

With the completion of the projects and the end of this community development funding, we now move into a management role, embedding these projects into our normal organisational activities.



Community Development: Delacombe



The provision of services and activities at the Delacombe Community Hub (DCH) continued to change during 2024 and the Delacombe Community Garden, neglected for several years, was completely removed as most of infrastructure was unsafe and unuseable. We focused on offering the facility to groups looking for free and low cost room hire including the Justice of the Peace members, Ballarat and District Community Register volunteers and the Chatty Cafe community group. Funding is difficult to find in the current climate which prevented other community development or engagement activities being delivered for the community in this area.

Working with the Department of Education, we introduced an employment supported playgroup which helped 50% of parent participants return to employment. A small group of volunteers and students from the BNC horticulture courses spent several days cleaning up the gardens, moving old dirt and garden beds, and planting new fruit trees. The City of Ballarat and the Hidden Orchard assisted the BNC team with these activities and we would like to thank them for their ongoing support. It was also great to have the Parent Pathways staff begin working in the Hub two days per week from November.

Unfortunately after managing the Ballarat and District Community Register since 2019, changes in government funding for aged care providers and new funding requirements, saw demand for the service decline dramatically during 2024. With no available funding and an aging volunteer base, the small group of volunteers voted to close the program at the end of 2024. On behalf of the Ballarat Community, we would like to recognise and thank the volunteers for making the thousands of welfare phone checks to help those living alone in our community. Over the years, their regular phone calls became the highlight for many of the participants and helped address social isolation and connection for some of our most isolated community members.

Finally the DCH is now ready to be re-established as a community hub. We have plans in 2025 to turn the building into an employment support hub with community groups using it to connect and meet up.





Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre

Partners and Networks

A very special thank you to our major funding partners for their continued support.

- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industries and Regions
- Department of Education
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Phoenix P12 Community College
- City of Ballarat & Regional Development Victoria

We received philanthropic project grants from:

- Community Bank Buninyong
- Ballarat Foundation
- Good Things Australia
- StreetSmart Community Grants
- Ballarat Connected Communities

We partnered with employment organisations to deliver their services from our hubs:

- Parent Pathways
- Asuria
- Are able

Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre staff convene the following networks:

- Delacombe Chairs Forum
- Jobs Victoria Work & Learning Centre Local Advisory Panel
- Connecting Sebastopol

Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre staff are members of the following networks:

- Central Highlands Association of Neighbourhood Houses Committee
- Neighbourhood Houses Victoria Board
- City of Ballarat Safety Committee
- Food Access Network
- Ballarat Youth Services Network
- Spotlight on Sebastopol Committee
- BRMC Education & Employment Working Group
- DET South Western Victoria Regional Engagement Forum
- Volunteer Coordinators Network
- WHG CORE Alliance
- Work & Learning Centre Network
- Social Enterprise Victoria Network (SENVic)
- Ballarat Local Jobs Program

To support our community we rely on many people and organisations to help us with not only the big things but also the little things our community needs. 2024 was no exception and we are grateful to everyone who helps us to support our community.



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