



GIVE
WHERE
YOU LIVE
FOUNDATION

STORIES OF MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

2024/2025

Stories from Give Where
You Live Foundation's
community grant program.



givewhereyoulive.com.au

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WE GIVE THANKS TO THE WADAWURRUNG PEOPLE OF THE KULIN NATION FOR THEIR ONGOING CUSTODIANSHIP OF THE LAND ON WHICH WE LIVE AND WORK.

Acknowledgements

WITH THANKS TO ALL WHO MADE THIS REPORT POSSIBLE.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the volunteers, staff, Board members, and beneficiaries from the following community partners who generously shared their stories with us:

- 3216 Connect
- Christ Church Community Meals
- Drysdale Family Support
- Farm My School
- Geelong Foodshare
- Hesse Rural Health
- Lazarus Community Centre
- Samaritan House
- The Good Neighbourhood Project
- The Outpost
- Thread Together
- Uniting Vic.Tas
- Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation

Impact Forum 2025

The stories were reviewed at the Give Where You Live Foundation's Impact Forum held at The Aviary Centre in Norlane in May 2025.

Special thanks to all who participated, our corporate partners, Loaned Executive alumni, community grant review and business panellists, community organisations, and Give Where You Live Foundation staff - all who share our vision of creating a fairer and more equitable community.

Images

Images used throughout this report reflect the spirit of the stories, they do not depict the individuals interviewed. Stories are shared without names of the individuals to protect their privacy.

What is Most Significant Change?

THE FOUNDATION IS COMMITTED TO USING DATA RESEARCH AND EVALUATION TO ENGAGE AND EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY AND ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE.

In 2024-25, the Give Where You Live Foundation implemented Most Significant Change evaluation method with grantees to collectively explore and learn about the impact and changes enabled through the Foundation's grant funding.

What is Most Significant Change

Most Significant Change (MSC) is a participatory, qualitative evaluation approach. It involves gathering stories from people who have been impacted by your work - focusing on the changes they consider most meaningful. These stories are then collectively reviewed by a group, who discuss and select the stories they believe reflect the most significant change. This shared reflection helps deepen understanding of the program's impact and brings to light what change matters most to the people involved.

MSC was developed by Jess Dart and Rick Davies in the 1990s, who were working in India and Bangladesh respectively.

Rick Davies was working in a very complex international development project in Bangladesh with around 5000 women's groups. The traditional methods of evaluation didn't work very well, because the women were working on very diverse activities and projects.

Jess Dart was working in India trying to evaluate a project that was using participatory planning with 50 villages and came across the same challenge.

They combined thinking and approaches and developed the MSC technique, and in 2005 developed the MSC guide, available online:

https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resources/guides/most_significant_change

Our approach and change themes

As part of our commitment to building capability among community partners, the Give Where You Live Foundation offers opportunities to explore, learn about and apply diverse evaluation methods to help our community grant partners assess their social impact and identify meaningful change.

The Foundation ran a MSC training session and worked with partners who received grants in 2024-25 to collect the stories of change. Partners nominated the interviewee - which included staff, volunteers, beneficiaries and Board members. Stories were collected in first-person narrative form.

The 13 stories reflect a wide range of change - across individual, organisational, community, and multi-layered levels. In this booklet, stories are grouped according to two of the Foundation's priority areas, food security and homelessness assistance, as well as our broader Theory of Change principles. They are not 'good news stories,' nor are they comprehensive accounts of each grant's full impact. Rather, they are illustrative stories - intended to demonstrate the MSC approach and offer a window into how change is experienced by individuals and communities and what change is considered valuable by stakeholders.

Participants who reviewed the stories, were diverse stakeholders who contribute to the Foundation's work - community grant partners, community grant review panellists, corporate partners, and Loaned Executives alumni - and went through an adapted version of the final stages of the MSC process.

People were seated at mixed tables, to review and discuss four stories, identify which changes mattered most and why. All stakeholders involved in the Impact Forum share a common interest in creating a fairer and more equitable G21 region, and each plays a unique role in supporting that vision. By coming together to explore the stories, the Foundation is ensuring our collective efforts are grounded in shared values and that we continue learning from the changes brought about by our grant making.

Each group selected one story they felt represented the most significant change and shared their reasons for choosing it. Following the group discussions, the participants came together to reflect on the shared themes that emerged across the selected stories.

Summary of Most Significant Changes identified at the Impact Forum

1. Empowerment and Self-Determination for First Nations People

This story stood out as the only one selected by two groups. The Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation story powerfully highlights the significance of being seen, known, and heard. The most valued change was not just the activities enabled by flexible funding (e.g. language apps, truth-telling), but the shift in power and recognition—moving towards self-determination.

"We are now seen, known, and heard."

2. Reframing Community Identity

The Good Neighbourhood Project showed how changing narratives—from stigma to strength—can transform both personal identity and community pride.

3. Connection and Dignity through Food Security

Stories from Drysdale Family Support, Hesse Rural Health's Foodbank and many other programs highlighted how food support, delivered with empathy, reduced isolation, fostered belonging, and built inclusive leadership.

4. Shared Ownership in Addressing Homelessness

Samaritan House demonstrated the power of community mobilisation—turning supporters into partners and creating lasting impact through collective effort.

Cross-Cutting Themes

- **Being seen, heard, and valued** was central across all stories.
- Relational elements—**trust, dignity, connection**—mattered more than technical solutions.
- **Inclusive leadership and cultural change** were key enablers.
- The most impactful changes occurred at **multiple levels**—individual, community, and systemic.

The changes that mattered most were those that affirmed identity and agency, fostered connection and belonging, mobilised collective action and replaced deficit narratives with stories of strength. Ultimately, impact was defined not just by what changed—but **how, for whom, and who had power in shaping it.**

Most Significant Change stories presented here are grouped by either their relevant Theory of Change principle or the Give Where You Live Foundation's priority area. For each selected story, we have included the reason it was chosen as 'most significant'.



Walking alongside us

STAFF MEMBER - WADAWURRUNG TRADITIONAL OWNERS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

I am a proud Wadawurrung woman and General Manager of the Ngarrwa (knowledge) Cultural Strengthening Team. Nearly eight years ago, I established our Djilang office—reflecting a strong commitment to partnerships, engagement, and respect for Wadawurrung Country. It has since become a vital base for our people working across Country, especially in building relationships with corporations, not-for-profits, and government agencies.

At the time, we had limited capacity to be present in Djilang, Surf Coast, and Bellarine due to Cultural Heritage responsibilities and no dedicated funding. I had to build a fee for service model to establish the office and cultural services. we still today rely on that model to stay afloat—a constant challenge, especially through the impacts of COVID-19 and today’s economic. Our work is cultural, communal, and personal pressures—like running a family business that honours our members and responsibilities. Despite financial uncertainty, our commitment to culture and community has never wavered.

For generations, we’ve fought for fairness, understanding, and recognition. Yet progress remains slow—blocked by barriers

and bias. That’s why our partnership with the Give Where You Live Foundation has meant so much. They backed a model of self-determination, empowering us to decide what’s needed and where funding should go.

From the start, GWYL listened deeply. They understood the importance of Wadawurrung voices at the table and sat with us to ask what we needed—offering flexibility instead of a fixed project model. That freedom made all the difference.

With their support, we’ve directed resources where they matter most. Just some examples include: creating the Journey on Wadawurrung Country exhibition to amplify Elders’ voices and educate community; growing our January 26 truth-telling event Pilk Purriyn to over 3,000 people; developing a more accessible language app; delivering cultural engagement for aligned not-for-profits; purchasing ceremonial items; supporting staff and Traditional Owner development; and reconnecting our unfunded Elders group with Country and language.

This support also enabled us to take part in regional conversations, cultural education, and professional development—allowing

us to give back to community at scale. But this has never just been about funding—it’s about heart. GWYL walks alongside us with humility and care, embedding cultural learning, supporting Treaty and the Referendum, and ensuring First Nations voices are heard.

This is true partnership—grounded in listening, built on trust, and centred in relationship. We have grown stronger, become a respected voice, and uplifted our community. We are known, seen, and heard. That is self-determination. That is the most significant change.

Why was this story most significant?

We selected this story because it powerfully articulated change. It began with a striking statement: “For generations, we’ve fought for fairness, understanding, and recognition, but progress remains slow, often blocked by barriers and bias.” It then described how working with the Give Where You Live Foundation enabled the organisation to be truly listened to and heard. The Foundation’s flexible funding model supported community priorities —like building visibility, holding truth-telling events, creating language apps, and running cultural programs. The story ended with a clear conclusion: “The most significant change is that we are stronger—a respected participant. We are now seen, known, and heard because of the ongoing support and model of the Give Where You Live contribution.” At its heart, they saw this as self-determination.



From the inside out: rewriting our story

VOLUNTEER- THE GOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD PROJECT

I have been involved with this community-I have been involved working with The Good Neighbourhood Project (formerly called Norlane Community Initiatives) for about 15 years, recently as staff and volunteer. Norlane is a diverse community, with long-time locals, newcomers, and those facing challenges. Living in Norlane, I've worked with local schools, TAFEs, and neighbours to shift how our community is seen—not just by outsiders, but by ourselves. The most significant change? Moving from a narrative of deficits to one of strengths. My journey began as a single parent volunteering at the local school. Encouraged to study community services, I lacked qualifications and money until someone helped cover my course fees. That small act opened a new chapter. Over the years, I juggled study, casual work, parenting, and volunteering. Through coursework, I gained language and tools to support my neighbourhood.

A defining moment came at a GROW launch when I challenged the repeated use of “disadvantaged.” I reminded them that language shapes how people see themselves. This opened doors—Give Where You Live invited me to help co-develop local data profiles and supported our Norlane Neighbourhood Survey. During COVID, concerned that council consultations wouldn't reach those with limited internet, we proposed an alternative, collecting over 80 community submissions during lockdown. This gave real insight into residents' hopes and concerns. Frustrated with “average” stats, we revisited a 2014 report where locals interpreted data. We secured funding to repeat this with updated data. At a community meeting, residents spoke of shared gardens, local businesses, and mutual aid. Housing issues led to a local

survey digging deeper. We asked: What's working, and how can we do more of that? Strength-based language now appears in council reports, funding proposals, and project names. I've seen a shift from deficit to opportunity-led narratives. Community data should be honest but also highlight people's resourcefulness. Locals say, “We might not have much, but we know how to stretch it and support each other.” When an agency slipped back into deficit language, I spoke up. Protecting trust means standing firm. Real change happens when people own the data, their strengths are seen, and language uplifts. Being trusted means showing up consistently—welcoming neighbours, speaking up, and saying no when needed. Through this, we build a neighbourhood story we're proud to share.

Why was this story most significant?

The story we chose came from someone in Norlane determined to challenge the stigma attached to their place and bring out the strengths. It's not just about their own personal journey, but what's possible when we speak up for our community. What it highlighted was the need for better language—how we speak about people and places matters. Everyone deserves to feel proud of where they live. This story challenges how we think about place and people. What if we flipped the script and replaced negative language with stories of strength and transformation? That's powerful. This person could have given up but didn't—and in doing so, inspired not just me, but all of us. This isn't a small story—it's a whole-community story. That's why we chose it: because it reminds us what's possible and pushes us to do better.



Food as a bridge to connection

CARE WORKER - 3216 CONNECT

I've been a care worker with 3216 Connect for almost three years, working two days a week. People drop in to see me in the office and we chat about what they might need. Sometimes it's just a food relief voucher... but often there's a lot more going on. We take time to understand what's happening in their lives and look at how we can meet those particular needs—right there in that moment.

Food relief is often just the beginning. My own experiences with family illness have taught me how overwhelming daily challenges can be. I want to ease the stress of food insecurity so people can focus on other critical parts of their lives—whether it's a single mum dealing with health issues or an older person simply needing company.

Food is more than physical sustenance. It creates emotional connection. We make food personal—asking about household size, dietary needs, even individual preferences. We might add a chocolate to Tom's bag or remember a client's favourite brand of tuna. It's our way of showing people they are seen, valued, and cared for.

The food relief program is really about connection. We've created a non-judgmental space where people can receive help without shame. It's personal, flexible, and grounded in dignity. We often find that people come for food, but what they really need is someone to listen. Just last week, an elderly man shared something deeply personal—something he said he had never told anyone. And he was only coming in for a bag of fruit and veg.

That's the most significant change I've seen : food becoming a doorway to human connection. It's not just about hunger. It's about reducing loneliness, building trust, and creating community. We don't just distribute food—we offer care and presence.

I am passionate about addressing disconnection. One day, we would love a community centre with a café next door—so people can come for food but stay to connect. Because the power of what we do isn't just in the bags we hand out. It's in the stories we hear, the trust we build, and the community we create.

More than a foodbank

BENEFICIARY - DRYSDALE FAMILY SUPPORT

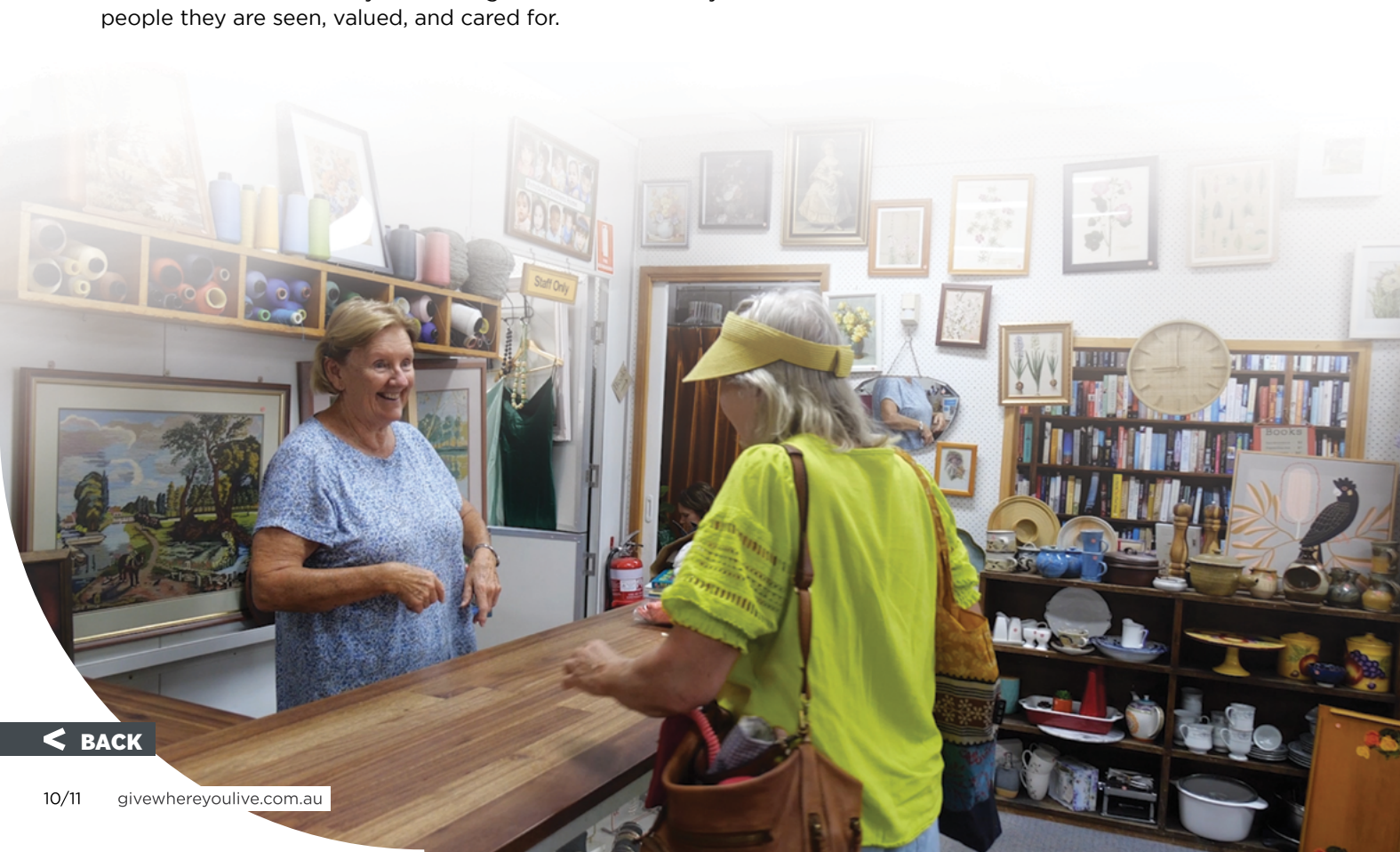
I am a mother of two boys. My partner can't work due to long-term illness and is now their full-time carer, which has placed financial strain on us. The Foodbank has been a lifeline, freeing up money for rent and essentials.

Before discovering Drysdale Family Support, I went to another Foodbank but often felt judged and talked down to. Hearing about this one through word of mouth changed everything. Here, I feel welcomed, respected, and treated with dignity. Staff and volunteers remember what I share—it makes me feel seen and heard. The café area offers more than food; it's a place to chat, laugh, and connect. Sometimes I stay for hours, giving my partner a break.

This place has become a source of comfort, especially on hard days. I look forward to coming—it sets the tone for my week. I no longer feel ashamed to talk about my circumstances. Here, I can share with others who have similar experiences, who truly understand and offer genuine

emotional support. I've started telling my family and friends about it—something I didn't do before. I don't feel embarrassed anymore. In fact, I've even encouraged someone else to come along and welcomed them here. I feel more confident and supported now, and I'm supporting others too. The sense of connection has had a positive impact on my mental health—I feel less isolated. The Foodbank provides a supportive network not just for me, but for others as well, including friends from nearby towns who now feel a sense of belonging here too.

The Foodbank's point system allows me to choose fresh, high-quality food, supplemented by extras like bread, milk, and produce from the organisation's own garden with little to no waste. The food and essential items takes away so much stress—I can fill my boys' lunchboxes and no longer feel like we're constantly struggling to meet our basic needs. It also enabled us to reintroduce some activities and outings that were previously cut due to financial constraints.



For me, the most significant change has been regaining stability for my family through the food, which gives us just a bit more breathing space. But just as important is the sense of community, the friendships and dignity and improvement in my well-being I have found here through the kindness of the staff and volunteers. Thoughtful gestures, like the Christmas hampers, remind me that we are valued. This isn't just about food—it's about dignity, connection, and hope.

Why was this story most significant?

This story was selected for its focus on the human experience and the respectful, dignified way food was delivered—a theme we saw across several stories. It wasn't just about the service, but how it made people feel. In this case, the individual hadn't received that same level of dignity elsewhere, making the impact even more powerful. It was also a story of hope and connection—about feeling seen, valued, and supported. It showed how this positively affected her mental health, helping her feel more grounded, less isolated, and part of something that mattered.



Giving back, gaining belonging

VOLUNTEER - HESSE RURAL HEALTH

Volunteering at the Food Bank lifts me every time.” I might come home tired, but I always feel better—less lonely, more connected, and part of something that really matters. Living with a chronic health condition can be isolating. Before I started volunteering, I often felt alone. But now, I feel part of a community. I’ve made new friends and met more neighbours—some I now walk with or help with food box pickups. It’s given me a sense of purpose and belonging I didn’t realise I was missing.

I first heard about the Food Bank through a local newspaper and decided to attend a volunteer day. I remember chatting with the coordinator and feeling drawn to the idea of helping with food. Food and water are the most basic things we all need, and I thought—why not be part of something that helps people in that way? I live just around the corner and, because of ongoing treatment for secondary breast cancer, I can’t work as much. I’ve received a lot of help on my own health journey, and I wanted to give something back—something local and meaningful.

Being here gives me hope. With so much negativity in the world, I wanted to be part of something grounded in kindness and stability. I want people who walk through our doors to feel that someone is thinking of them—that they’re cared for. Sometimes, we’re the only people who speak kindly to them all week. I love chatting with guests—helping them find what they need, sharing recipe ideas, and hearing their stories. I’ve seen pensioners who were cutting down on meals now eating properly again. Some guests are even trying new foods and making better choices. It’s making a real difference.

I also love that we’re helping reduce food waste. So much good food would go to landfill, and now it’s going to people who truly need it. It just makes sense.

Our coordinator is wonderful—kind, flexible, and organised. She makes us feel encouraged and valued. The other volunteers feel like extended family. Many have their own health challenges, so I don’t feel so different anymore. I’m not the only one.



For me, the biggest change has been my own wellbeing. I feel more uplifted, less alone, and more connected to the people around me. I wanted to be part of something that brings hope—and now I am.

Why was this story most significant ?

This story stood out because it came from a volunteer who had experienced health issues. The main change she described was feeling less lonely, more connected, and part of something meaningful.

But through her story, she also highlighted other significant changes that came through the program. The change wasn't just within her—it was also in the people receiving the food and how she enjoyed chatting with guests, helping them find items, sharing recipes, and supporting healthier choices. She spoke warmly about the volunteer coordinator—describing her as kind and flexible, and saying all the volunteers felt encouraged and valued. That support is critical to any volunteer-run program. We chose this story because of its multi-layered impact: on the volunteer, on the guests, and on the strength of the program through its leadership.



The power of two pieces of fruit

VOLUNTEER - CHRIST CHURCH COMMUNITY MEALS

I've been a volunteer with this community meal program for over 30 years—now the last remaining member of the original team. We started small, mainly serving men experiencing homelessness. Today, we support a broader group, including families and individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Before COVID, we served sit-down meals. Now, we offer takeaway: two toasted sandwiches (vegetarian on Wednesdays), tea or coffee, Up & Go drinks, and—importantly—fresh fruit. Nutritious, high-quality food is a priority, as this might be the only meal some guests have that day.

Choice is central to our approach. It gives people a sense of dignity and control—something many lack in other areas of life. That includes the option to choose their sandwich fillings and whether or not to take fruit.

Thanks to Give Where You Live, we can now offer two pieces of fruit per guest each day. It's become a valued and expected part of breakfast. In the past, most donated fruit was apples—many guests couldn't eat them due to dental issues. But through open conversations,

we listened when guests asked for softer options like bananas—and we made that change. It wasn't just about fruit. It showed their voices matter.

While many people across Geelong struggle to meet the daily recommended fruit intake to crucial for health and wellbeing, our guests—some of the most vulnerable—can now rely on healthy, appropriate options. Just as important as the nutrition is the dignity that comes from being able to choose what fruit to take, or whether to take it at all. That choice has become the norm.

What keeps me going is the need. I wish we weren't needed—but if I were in their shoes, I would want someone doing this for me. People open up to us here. They share their stories. That's what matters most: being there, offering healthy food, showing people they're respected, heard, and cared for and ideally have them leave them better than how they came.



Growing food, health, & a new future

BENEFICIARY - FARM MY SCHOOL

I have been part of the growing food program for nearly two years, starting in Year 10. I originally wanted to be a diesel mechanic, but after moving with my family to a small property and starting a veggie garden, I shifted my focus to horticulture. Now, I work two to three days a week on the farm, gaining hands-on experience and learning organic farming techniques.

At first, I didn't want to move. But once we got there, I started gardening—and then helping neighbours with their gardens too. Being part of the farm program at school opened up even more opportunities. It's changed how I think about food. I try new vegetables, eat healthier, and understand where my food comes from—planting it, watching it grow, and eating it. I've even started cooking more and choosing veggies over lollies.

A big motivation for me is my health. I was diagnosed with a heart condition and knew I had to start eating better. This program has helped me do that—and it's helped me stay active and outdoors instead of sitting around.

I used to be really sporty, but after an injury, things went downhill and I started eating badly. This brought me back. It reminded me how to take care of myself—what I need to do to feel better. I've noticed the ripple effect too. Now kids at school are asking for healthier lunches, and some are even telling their mums to pack organic fruit and veggies. It's making a real difference.



Feeding others, nourishing myself

VOLUNTEER - GEELONG FOODSHARE

I've been a dedicated volunteer with this organisation. I am from Iran, and moved to Australia in 2014. I have two sons. I love cooking.

When my family needed help, a support agency gave us a food voucher from Geelong Foodshare. I wanted to improve my English, so I started volunteering there. However, I decided to leave and I took some English classes instead.

Later, through one of my neighbours in Norlane, I got the chance to volunteer here again last year. This time, it feels completely different — I feel safe, valued, and part of a wonderful team. They're really looking out for the volunteers.

I work with really good people. I cook for the shop and for the other volunteers. Making people happy through food makes me happy too. I volunteer one day a week, but I would love to be there every day. Right now, that's not possible because I've moved to Melbourne, and I'm still learning English and looking for a paid job.

I love being part of this organisation. Everyone is so kind. It's helping me with my English, and I get to do what I love — cooking.

The Most Significant Change is definitely the people I get to work with. When I'm not there, I really miss them. At home, I still feel a bit lonely as I am settling into my new place and don't know many people yet. Here, I cook, sit with my colleagues, we laugh, we enjoy each other's company, and we eat together. I often take some food home for my kids. I am finding a sense of belonging, connection, and confidence through volunteering here, where I feel safe, valued, and supported while doing what I love.

My dream is to one day open my own restaurant, serving Turkish and Iranian dishes, because cooking is my passion.



For her, for me

VOLUNTEER - UNITING VIC TAS

I'm a single parent to a young daughter and a resilient, compassionate member of the Uniting Vic Tas community. Seven years ago, I underwent a kidney transplant, which has had a lasting impact on my health. After that life-changing experience, I wasn't sure when I'd be ready to return to paid work. I was drawn to volunteer here because I wanted to engage with and contribute to my community in a meaningful way.

I've now been volunteering for four years, primarily interviewing clients to understand their underlying needs—mainly food relief and clothing vouchers. I enjoy many aspects of the role: creating connections, the sense of purpose and accomplishment, feeling valued, and being part of a supportive environment.

My manager was incredibly supportive when I needed a break. She wasn't judgmental—just said, “take as much

time as you need.” I didn't want to admit I needed it, but I did. I kept pushing through—because that's what my life has always been about.

The most significant change I've experienced since volunteering is my personal growth. I've completed studies in community services and mental health and am now open to future job opportunities. I feel more confident, motivated, and self-aware. I can better recognise my own limits, seek support when needed, and support clients more effectively. It's also improved my wellbeing—coming here fills my cup, so to speak.

These changes have had a ripple effect on my relationship with my daughter. I want her to look up to me and say, “Yeah, my mum had all these challenges, but she never gave up—and she worked really hard.”



A home built by community

BOARD MEMBER - SAMARITAN HOUSE

I'm the deputy chairman of Samaritan House, established 14 years ago to address homelessness among men in the region. We began with an acre of land and a four-bedroom home, which has expanded to a nine-bedroom home, seven independent living units, a basketball court, and a bocce pitch. The Salvation Army has managed the facility for six years, and we raise around \$300,000 annually from philanthropic trusts and private donors. Our service supports 100 men a year.

Our core program supports men for an average of three months, offering life skills training, financial planning, and job assistance. Many of the men face mental health challenges—we help direct them to services, write CVs, find jobs and secure permanent housing. We see incredible stories every day. One former guest was a barrister who had faced addiction and personal lows—his time with us helped turn his life around. The love and care people receive here make a real difference.

Over the past 14 years, our organisation has woven a remarkable tapestry of community support that extends far beyond simple financial contributions. Local schools like Sacred Heart, St Joseph's, and Geelong College have embraced us in their fundraising. Philanthropic trusts, foundations, and businesses—including Give Where You Live, Geelong Community Foundation, Anthony Costa Foundation, Bisinella family, Percy Baxter Foundation, and local banks—have all backed our mission. Deakin University and The Gordon TAFE have offered practical and intellectual support through student projects.

What makes this support special is its collaborative nature. Students have designed units, local businesses manufactured accommodation, and community foundations have helped spread the word. We've built a database of 800 engaged supporters who donate through our appeals. These aren't just donors—they're partners in a shared vision.



They feel pride and ownership, knowing their support helps men rebuild their lives. That care is deeply felt by our guests. Strong relationships are key—keeping partners involved, showing progress, and reinforcing their connection to the impact. While good governance matters, it's those relationships and financial backing that have truly enabled us to transform lives. As we say: with money, you can do a lot—but it takes community and commitment to bring a vision to life.

Why was this story most significant ?

For us, it was really about a sustainable, collaborative network. It stood out because of the strong, diverse community support. There was a shared vision and a shared problem that the community came together to solve, and we really liked that. I think they mentioned they have a database of 800 supporters—a genuinely diverse network coming together. That alignment of purpose across such a broad community felt really important.

The other key factor was the breadth of change. The story showed that the supporters, not just donors, had become true partners in a shared vision of transforming lives. They feel a sense of ownership and pride, knowing their contributions directly help homeless families rebuild their lives. So again, it was that breadth of change—across individuals, the community, and different sectors in the region—that really resonated with us.

This is what we stand for

STAFF MEMBER - LAZARUS

As Community Centre Manager at Lazarus, I bring over 25 years' experience in community services and disability support. Growing up in the country, I was shaped by a strong sense of community—instilled by my parents, who fostered hundreds of children over two decades. I entered the sector at 15, driven by a simple belief: I can only do work I'm truly passionate about—work that uplifts others.

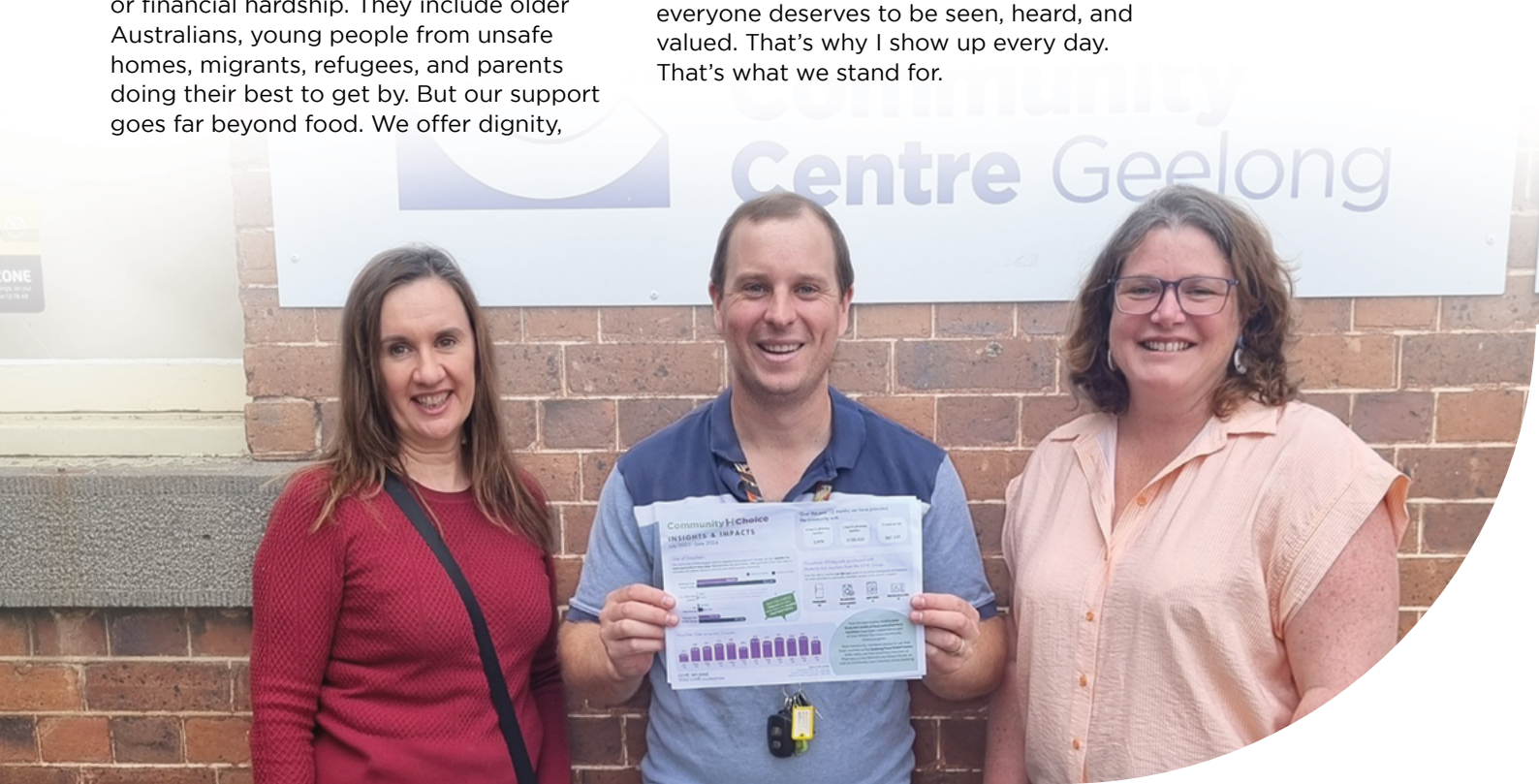
When I stepped into this role in September 2024, the homelessness, addiction and isolation space was new to me. I quickly realised the most vital skills in this role aren't technical—they're human: being approachable, listening without judgment, and creating a safe, respectful space. That's what I aim to offer every day to our guests, staff, volunteers, and visitors. I'm not here to "fix" anyone. I simply ask: "While you're with us today, how can we support you?"

Many in our community are denied their most basic needs. We do what we can to change that. In 2024, we served 13,884 meals; in 2025, we're on track to exceed 16,000. Daily attendance has grown from 30-35 to 45-60.

Our guests come from all walks of life—people experiencing homelessness, family violence, trauma, addiction, mental illness, or financial hardship. They include older Australians, young people from unsafe homes, migrants, refugees, and parents doing their best to get by. But our support goes far beyond food. We offer dignity,

stability, and connection—greeting guests by name and providing meals, showers, clean clothes, rest, and laundry facilities. These are fundamental rights—Maslow's hierarchy in action. Many arrive in survival mode. We offer them a rare moment to exhale, feel safe, and simply be. Beyond immediate needs, we focus on long-term support—partnering with OPSM, HairAid, counsellors, and outreach services. We're expanding in-reach care to include podiatry and nursing. Our newly renovated space will help us meet needs with even greater care and flexibility.

One of the biggest changes I've seen is the shift in energy. Guests say it feels safer. Critical incidents are down. More women, families, and refugees are coming through the doors. That tells me word is spreading—this is a place where people are treated like people. With warmth. Respect. Dignity. I often remind our team: "We might be the only ones who really listen to someone today." That matters. Our energy matters. Even when someone walks in overwhelmed or defeated, we respond with kindness, consistency and hope. That human connection can be life-changing. I'm proud of the culture we're building. We're not just a drop-in centre. We're a community. A sanctuary. A reminder that everyone deserves to be seen, heard, and valued. That's why I show up every day. That's what we stand for.



Opening the doors wider

STAFF MEMBER - THE OUTPOST

I joined The Outpost as the Engagement and Operations Lead in August–September last year, motivated by the opportunity to grow, learn, and contribute to strengthening the organisation. Prior to joining, I wasn't familiar with the organisation and found it quite "hidden." I wanted to help bring it more to the forefront. What excites me most about the future is the potential for the organisation to have an even greater impact on the community.

My role includes rostering, food coordination, and developing partnerships. I joined at a critical time — the organisation was in the process of securing a new venue and be part of exciting things such as Pitch Up and the establishment of our Lived Experience Advisory Forum, designed to gather feedback and ideas from our guests to improve our services and space.

Once we secured the new venue, I also took on the responsibility of managing the trades and renovation work to prepare the space. It was important to create a homely, welcoming environment for our guests. This aspect of my role pushed me to grow and develop new skills in areas like project management. We also provided

opportunities for guests to contribute to the renovation, including helping to paint the new venue, which was very special.

The vision that drives me is to build stronger community partnerships, particularly with local businesses and schools. I want us to offer more programs that provide guests with tangible experiences beyond food, while also taking the broader community on a journey of building empathy and understanding for the challenges our guests face.

I'm already seeing the interest from businesses, schools and the community — for example, The Geelong College has expressed a desire for their Year 8 students to complete community service hours by cooking in our kitchen. In the past, limited space restricted the types of volunteer and engagement opportunities we could offer. Now, with the new larger venue and commercial kitchen, we have much greater capacity for community involvement and improved operations. Looking ahead, I would love to explore establishing a social enterprise in coffee-making and offering skill-building activities for our guests, further strengthening the support we provide.



More than clothes

STAFF MEMBER - THREAD TOGETHER

I'm the CEO of Thread Together. I began my career helping big companies grow profits, but became disillusioned—too often, gains came at the cost of people and the planet. I wanted to use my skills for something more meaningful. That's what brought me to Thread Together six years ago.

At the time, we had a bold vision but limited capacity: collecting brand-new, unsold clothing from fashion retailers and distributing it to people in need—restoring dignity through choice. Using my background in consulting and supply chain, I helped develop a scalable, efficient, human-centred model.

Before receiving the Pitch Up grant, we had only a few partnerships in Geelong and lacked the resources to grow. The funding gave us vital capacity and helped broker key relationships. A single breakfast at GMHBA Stadium introduced us to 50 local organisations. From just 3 partners, we've grown to nearly 50—including Meli, Genu, The Outpost, Lazarus, and the Salvation Army.

Previously, services like Lazarus offered second-hand clothing—often outdated and unsuitable for someone rebuilding

after trauma. Now, they provide brand-new, modern clothing selected by the individual—meeting both practical needs and restoring dignity. Our online ordering platform makes it easy and personal. Choice is central to our work. Whether someone is fleeing violence, coming out of prison, or newly arrived as a refugee, choosing clothing helps them reclaim identity.

The Pitch Up grant also helped us pilot a mobile wardrobe—a walk-in wardrobe on wheels. We've taken it to places like Lazarus, Geelong Foodshare, and The Outpost, and we're now working to make it a regular, community-based service, with a local team member on board.

The most significant change? People once given outdated clothes now choose new clothing that reflects who they are and who they want to be. And local organisations have a more dignified way to support their clients. Thanks to Give Where You Live, we've expanded our reach across Geelong—delivering real choice, confidence, and impact.



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For helping us create
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