

# Our organisation

## Our board



**Carol Nolan**  
Chair



**Kirsten Williams**  
Deputy Chair



**Dion Stevenson**  
Treasurer



**Eliza-Beth Brennan**  
Resigned December 2021



**Linda Huzzey**



**Harry Westendorp**



**Diane Flashman**  
Co-opted November 2021



**Graeme Domm**  
Co-opted November 2021

## Executive team



**Felicity Williams**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Kerry Strauch**  
General Manager  
Programs and Sport  
North East



**Carl Durnin**  
General Manager  
Business Operations

## Leadership team



**Sharee Castagna**  
Manager  
Vocational  
Education and  
Training



**Mathew Byrn**  
Manager  
Quality and  
Compliance



**Kerri Barnes**  
Manager  
Engagement,  
Support and  
Employment



**Tim Oliver**  
Manager  
Sport North East  
and Community  
Development



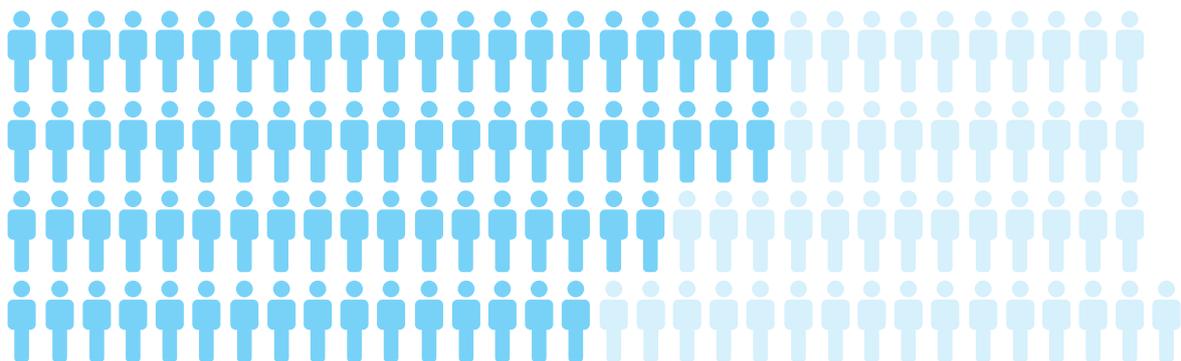
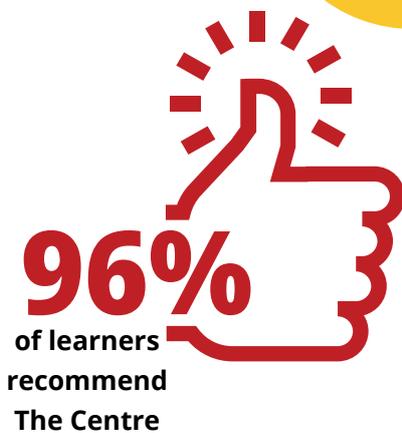
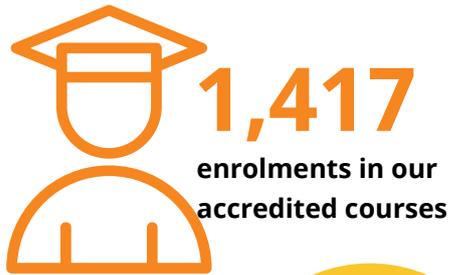
**Elroy Bos**  
Manager  
Marketing

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# 2021 IN NUMBERS





'I feel that every part of this course will prepare me for entering the workforce.'

# Chair report



**Carol Nolan**  
Chair of the Board

I felt honoured to take over the Chair's role this year as we farewelled Rob Carolane from the Board and role of Chair. The Centre's philosophical values resonate well with me and in 2021, in spite of the pandemic, The Centre continued to strengthen its values and programs through the implementation of the new strategic plan. Providing a supportive, responsive environment, enabling individuals to grow and learn at their own pace and in their own way is at the heart of this plan.

The securing of funding from Jobs Victoria Employment Services worth \$2,051,732 will enable continuity of specialised support through our Finding Strengths program beyond 2021. This is an example of the diverse thinking on education and learning by The Centre. The support and need for such programs was reinforced by MP Frank McGuire on his visit to The Centre in November 2021. The work for our staff is both challenging and rewarding. To see adults and youth with unaddressed learning difficulties, low self-esteem, and multiple life challenges grow in confidence and resilience and going on to learn and find employment underpins the essence of The Centre's culture.

New promotional material based on participant experience and their stories has been a credit to our new Marketing Manager. Our new website is highly effective and will be formally launched in 2022.

The Board welcomed Dianne Flashman and Graeme Domm in November 2021. Both bring new and complementary governance skills which were identified in a Board skills review and planning workshop earlier in the year.

2021 was by no means an easy year for anyone and the challenge of multiple lockdowns and regulations became the norm. Online learning enabled most programs to continue during lockdowns and will continue to complement face to face learning into the future. In spite of a reduction in targeted planned enrolments, The Centre remained in a financially sound position and continued to provide effective community supports within the constraints of the pandemic.

This is a great credit to the staff, participants and supporters who continued to adapt to meet these ongoing challenges. We thank funders for their funding and flexibility in supporting our service delivery.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all partners, staff, volunteers, Executive and Board who have contributed to 2021. The passion and commitment of everyone to their work at The Centre should be one of pride. A special thank you to Felicity Williams CEO for her ongoing dedication and determination in making education, learning and self-growth a possibility for everyone in our community. General Managers Kerry Strauch and Carl Durnin have provided solid support to Felicity during this challenging year.

Board members, Dion Stevenson (Treasurer), Kirsten Williams (Deputy Chair) Harry Westendorp, Eliza-Beth Brennan, Linda Hussey, Dianne Flashman and Graeme Domm have provided exceptional leadership, passion and drive, and on behalf of The Centre I thank you all for this. I also thank you for your support and trust in me as Chair during the year.

# CEO report

The year 2021 saw the commencement of our new Strategic Plan, which was the culmination of a series of inspiring and energising sessions with our Board, staff and Leadership Team exploring our values, our aspirations and our strategic priorities for the next three years.

We have now commenced our work towards our vision of **Bright futures, thriving communities** and our aspirations for our staff, learners, clients and communities:

- **Choice** that supports equity, access and inclusion.
- **Empower** clients, learner, employers and staff.
- **Relevance** for our communities.

The Centre continues to provide education, training and community development programs throughout Victoria's Hume region and Goulburn Valley. It is always our intent to enter a new location by invitation and anchored by one or more local organisations, ensuring we are always grounded by local community need and support under-provision. We thank our many partners in the sectors our learners and clients intersect with, who work collaboratively with us to achieve better outcomes for our communities.

Of particular note is the deep relationship we are building with the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) through the leadership of Executive Director Robin Francis and his Executive Team, including Annette Stephens and Rebecca Watson.



**Felicity Williams**  
Chief Executive Officer

Through our shared vision we have been able to successfully establish our Finding Strengths program and together achieve wonderful outcomes with our common clients. Finding Strengths supports adults with learning difficulties such as ADHD or dyslexia to manage those conditions, and identify their strengths - leading to successful employment outcomes. We thank the Federal Government for funding to pilot this initiative through the Try Test Learn fund, which was completed in June 2021. This provided us with the opportunity to develop a business case for future funding to continue the program. Finding Strengths is now funded by the Victorian Government through Jobs Victoria Employment Services.

We are also piloting the Finding Strengths model with youth through funding from DJCS's Building Safer Communities fund. The Finding Strengths Youth team is adjusting our approach to support youth involved in the justice system as well as youth at risk. Research indicates that over 50% of people in the justice system have a learning difficulty, and around 26% of children in out of home care also experience these conditions. While we are supporting these people in our adult community education environment, we are actively advocating for more to be done to support children with learning difficulties in the early years education system.

Through a restructure in June, our Learner Engagement team was combined with the Finding Strengths team to form our Engagement, Support and Employment (ESE) Department. The ESE team provide critical and essential support for our learners and clients to overcome barriers and maintain engagement in their education and training journey.

*I Am*, our positive psychology engagement program, continues to be a vital element of our engagement and support approach. While it was initiated in Finding Strengths, learners from other sources will be able to benefit from this unique program in 2022. A highlight of the year was the two-day *I Am* event that was held for local women in December.

Our Room 2 (the Colin Cave Gallery) was transformed with candles, bush flora and inspirational books and posters. The spirit in the room was bright and energised as the whole ESE team joined around 20 local women as they explored what they want their future life to be through hope-filled goal setting.

Our VET Department continues to establish multi-faceted partnerships with employers throughout our region – not only providing education and training for their clients and workers, but also supporting them with well-prepared candidates for work placement and employment in aged care and disability. We thank our jobactive and disability employment service partners for their continued support and faith as they refer many of their jobseekers into our Foundation programs, including into *Getting There*, our award-winning and highly transformational education program for adults.

Our approach is to support all learners to develop the core skills for work all employers are seeking. We ensure that graduates are able to put language around these skills so they can confidently perform in an interview and present with ideal skills from day one in the workplace.

We are incredibly proud of our Certificates I in Transition Education and Work Education, through which learners with cognitive disability develop independent living skills and employability skills. We have combined these two qualifications, which pathway from pre-accredited programs at Open Door Neighbourhood House under the brand of Pathways2Possibilities.

Our approach is completed by the disability service providers who have partnered with us to provide this effective combination to their clients either at our campus or at their site. Now branded as *Ability Me*, this program is going to be delivered throughout our region with our partners, supporting their clients to achieve their desired goals and inspiring them to be aspirational. Many of 2021 graduates have pathwayed into further studies, which is a wonderful outcome.

One of these graduates, Liam Mossop, was our Anne Pennington award winner for 2021. He is now enrolled in Certificate III in Education Support and is extremely passionate about supporting future learners as he has been supported.

I continue to be in awe of the creativity the Community Development team has contributed to supporting our Volunteer Management Program and Community Visitors Scheme throughout the pandemic restrictions. The Volunteer Management Program is now auspiced by Volunteering Victoria rather than the Federal Government and as a result we are primarily focused on supporting people who are First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, or live with a disability rather than the general community. It was wonderful to see so many of our community visitors achieve years of service awards with Hilda Watson and Val Lockman's 20 years commitment acknowledged. The Community Development team also achieved new funding to support carers through initiating and cultivating carers' support groups and supporting carers into employment. The Carer's Employment program commenced in November – we look forward to sharing rewarding outcomes with carers in 2022.

Sport North East's wonderful accessibility programs continue with Bowling with Babies and innovative participation sports like Pickle Ball. However, Sport North East overachieved with delivery of AFL's *Tackle Your Feelings*, which is an extremely effective grass roots community activation program supporting mental health challenges. The team supported delivery of this program in a range of locations in North East Victoria, including Corryong which has tragically experienced a number of suicides since the bushfires. The community in Corryong provided feedback that this program was one of the most helpful interventions they had participated in since



Coaches from the Wangaratta and District Junior Football League at a Tackle Your Feelings presentation with psychologist Tegan Podubinski

the bushfires. We have funding to continue this program in 2022. I attended a Roundtable with The Hon. Ros Spence, Minister for Community Sport, and shared the Corryong experience with *Tackle Your Feelings* with her, conveying the need for community based and place-based initiatives that build community resilience and self-efficacy.

Our Quality and Compliance Department support the entire organisation by closely watching and monitoring our compliance with contracts and accreditation bodies, and the quality of our service delivery. Particular attention has been paid to building a team of Training Quality Officers who provide support and coaching to our trainers and assessors on a daily basis. They also coordinate professional development opportunities including our internal communities of practice. The Design and Development Team successfully developed new courses including Certificate II and III in Health Support Services, which is an ideal entry-level employment opportunity for many of our learners and job seekers. This qualification develops skills for working in non-clinical roles in a health service, including in food services, cleaning, administration, gardening and maintenance. They have also been working on writing trainer manuals providing guidance for our trainers in how to deliver each program in engaging ways that stimulate learner motivation and success.

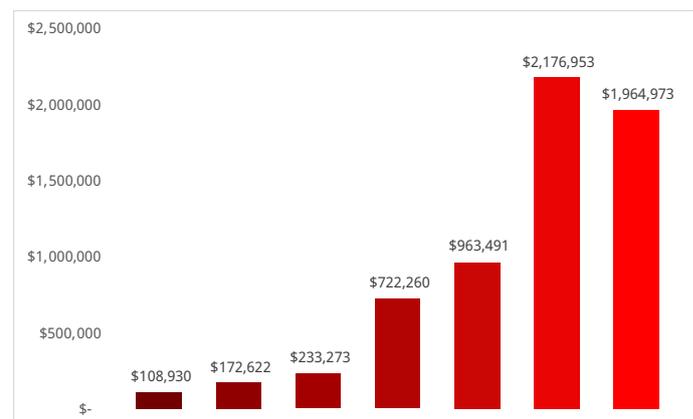
The Business Operations team has been heavily involved in two major system implementation projects. Carl Durnin, General Manager of Business Operations, led the appointment and commencement of implementation of our customer relationship management platform, and also the implementation of our new finance and employment systems. We welcomed Elroy Bos to the new role of Marketing Manager. Elroy hit the ground running and supported our website developer partner in launching our new website in time for the 2022 marketing campaign. The website has new functionality that supports learners, employers and partners to more readily access information, make enquiries and expressions of interest, and enrol in short courses.

Although 2021 was our second challenging year due to COVID, we finished the year with a profit above the Board's target of greater than 5% profit margin. Our profits over the past four years ensure

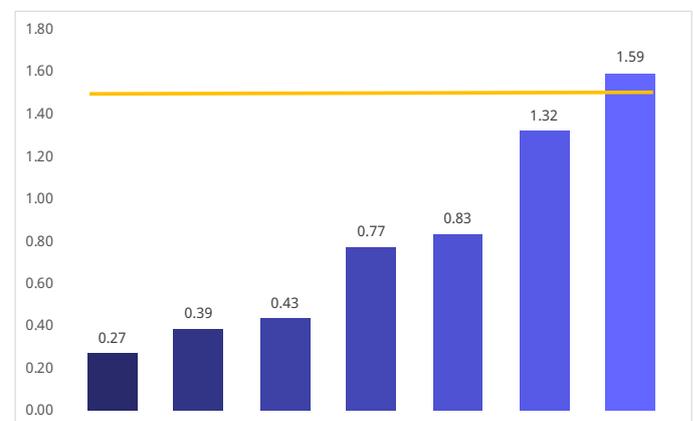
## Profit before depreciation



## Current assets



## Current ratio



## Payroll



that we are able to rebuild our cash reserves and the sustainability and viability of The Centre. We are also able to commit funds towards investment in our programs, facilities and infrastructure for the benefit of our staff, learners, clients and our communities. Our current ratio, which is a measure of the health of our current assets over current liabilities is now tracking over 1.5. We will maintain that target as an element of our finance strategy to ensure that while cash reserves continue to build, we also ensure that an appropriate portion of funds are invested back into the organisation. We are proud to continue to grow our payroll, now contributing over \$4 million into our regional economy through the pockets of our staff.

While we have spent many days over the past year working from home, meeting via Teams or Zoom, we are now benefiting from returning to our workplace and enjoying the moments we are able to spend together in the same room, renewing our connection with each other. While we all managed working from home when we had to – it is not ideal. The connectivity, opportunities for collaboration and supporting each other occur more easily when we are at our other home in Chisholm Street, Fraser Street in Shepparton or Wallis Street in Seymour cannot be replaced.

Our staff and Leadership Team are to be congratulated for holding our wonderful organisation together over 2021 under the continued trying circumstances presented by the pandemic. Their innovative and compassionate commitment to reaching out to and connecting with our learners and clients throughout is inspirational.

I have enjoyed constant support from our General Managers – Kerry Strauch and Carl Durnin. Their contribution to the executive management of The Centre is considerable. I very much rely on their judgement and the leadership they provide to their teams. They work through and with our Managers who diligently ensure our programs and services achieve positive outcomes and impacts in our communities. Our commitment is to work with and alongside our learners and clients supporting them to achieve their goals – whatever they may be. The magic happens when our Managers and their passionate staff work collaboratively and collegiately together to innovate, create, support, encourage and inspire our learners, clients and stakeholders.

I am constantly amazed at the way our wonderful Board functions and truly supports me in my role. Led by our Chair Carol Nolan, our Board is deeply invested in The Centre’s success and committed to ensuring strong and wise governance. I thank Carol and our Directors for their ongoing commitment to The Centre, which will celebrate its 60th birthday in 2022.

This is my final report as CEO of The Centre for Continuing Education. I have made the extremely difficult decision to tender my resignation in order to take up another role within the region. I leave knowing that The Centre is a highly respected and innovative provider of adult community education within Victoria. Its unique blend of education, training and support programs are transformative – we really do walk beside our learners and clients as they change their lives and improve their health and wellbeing.

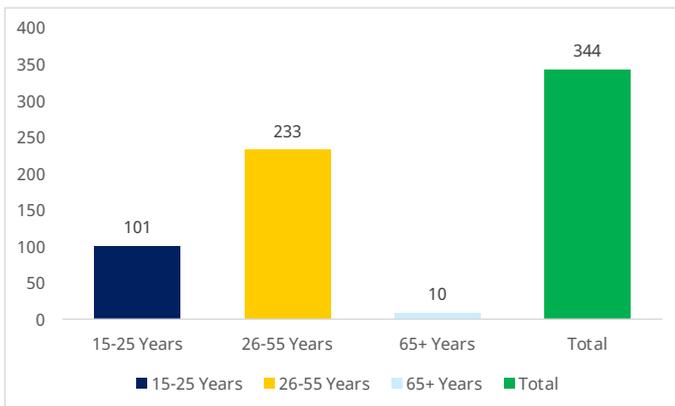


Felicity Williams, CEO, with learner Chloe Dacre

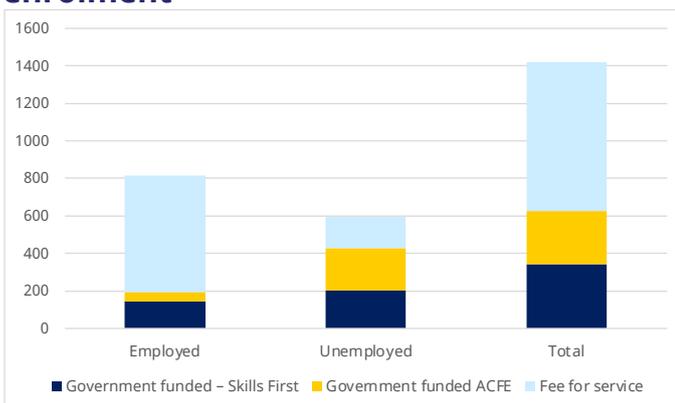


## VET statistics

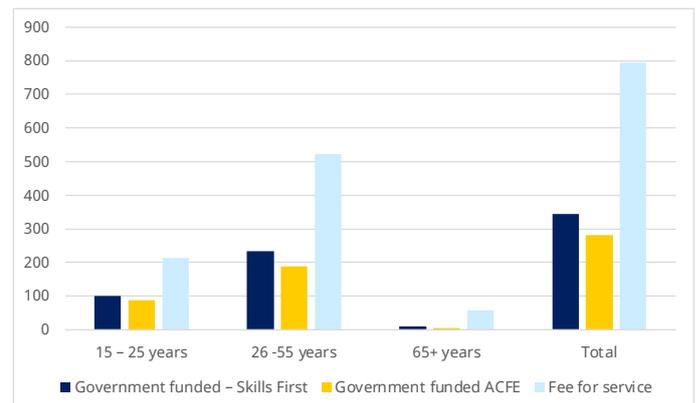
### Age of learners



### Employment status of learners at enrolment



### Funding source by age group



# Vocational Education and Training

## Foundation programs

### ***Ability Me* (22301VIC Certificate I in Transition Education and 22302VIC Certificate I in Work Education)**

Learners from the *Ability Me* program participated in *Pathways2Possibilities* (Certificate I in Transition Education and Certificate I in Work Education) at The Centre in 2021. They worked to increase their independence and confidence for their future, including meaningful employment.

*Pathways2Possibilities* is a Learn Local program developed with Open Door Neighbourhood House. It supports our learners in gaining skills and knowledge needed to continue in our certificate courses. It also involves learners working with their trainer to set goals for their learning – focusing on their goal of further study, work or volunteering.

#### **Liam**

Liam completed *Ability Me*. He then enrolled in Certificate III in Education Support for 2022, because he wants to help others with their learning. He said: 'I am more confident in myself and what I am capable of. I can actually see myself succeeding as a support worker. My family think I have more confidence. They see I am getting smarter, and I can do a lot more work than I used to be able to do. I am more understanding on how jobs actually work out there in the real world.'

### ***Getting There* (22472VIC & 22473VIC Certificates I and II in General Education for Adults)**

Our award-winning program, *Getting There*, is an engaging and supportive learning and education program that helps learners to gain the confidence and skills needed to apply for and gain employment, or go onto further education. Delivered through

Certificates I and II in General Education for Adults, The Centre provides a warm, welcoming, and supportive learning environment that supports learners to develop their skills at their own pace and experience projects that interest and challenge them.

The demand by employers for strong enterprise or core work skills in job candidates is high. These are the transferable skills all employers are seeking in employees. In fact, up to 75% of employers seek these skills above industry skills. Having strong literacy, numeracy and communication skills is also essential in the workforce. Every job requires these abilities at some level, making it vital that job seekers have these skills. They are developed and embedded through the group and individual projects learners complete during their course.

Participants joined in several activities during the year:

- barbeque at Merriwa park, with a fundraiser for the RSPCA
- bowls day Christmas break-up
- boat race on the Ovens River
- Wangaratta township treasure hunt
- trip from Seymour to Glenrowan and Beechworth prison looking at the history of Ned Kelly.



#### **Chloe**

Chloe joined *Getting There* because she needed some help to figure out what work she wanted to do. Her trainer asked her questions and together they discovered her passion was to help. She decided to enrol in a Certificate IV in Disability.

Together with The Centre, *Getting There* has given many of our clients the foundation skills to build on, in readiness to join the workforce. These skills include employment skills, confidence in learning, socialising and studying within a group environment, and realising that they have the ability to use these new skills in the work force.

Sharon Steer  
**MADEC**

The power of *Getting There* is that it is a whole-of-person program that builds self-awareness and supports goal setting and aspiration.

## Industry qualifications

We delivered Certificate III and IV qualifications in aged care, disability and education support throughout our region, including in Baranduda, Benalla, Broadford, Chiltern, Flowerdale, Mansfield, Seymour, Yea and Wangaratta - through face to face classes when not restricted by COVID, and when necessary, through our virtual classroom – B3.

All of these qualifications require mandatory work placement. We thank our many partner employers for supporting this vital element of our learners' journey towards being truly work-ready.

As part of our program design, we include our Learn Local ACFE program *Success4U*. This program gives all our learners a strong start to commencing their study. It explains the vocational learning environment, teaches principles of effective learning and how we learn, helps learners find their best learning style, and improves study skills, including reading, note taking, revision and online learning.

### **CHC30213 Certificate III in Education Support**

Learning Support Officers play a key role in the classroom supporting children who have difficulties with learning. They help children enjoy their learning and grow in confidence as they achieve along with their classmates. Learning Support Officers have been even more important during COVID, as children have faced the challenges of lockdown and isolation.

In 2021, we had 24 trainees and work-based learners working throughout the region in our partnering schools.

### **Abbagail**

Abbagail successfully completed a Certificate III in Education Support as a school-based traineeship whilst completing her VCE program in 2020/2021.

She applied herself diligently to her studies, both in her VCE at Cathedral College and her VET course, delivered via The Centre. These two years were heavily impacted by lockdowns, etc. due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Abbagail took all of this in her stride and continued to remain focussed on her study outcomes at all times. She showed excellent skills of concentration, using all of her "spare" study periods to full advantage and demonstrated a terrific work ethic. She also regularly and willingly made use of the support made available to her to complete her VET assessments.

She clearly enjoyed her interactions when supporting younger students at Cathedral College. So much so that she has decided to continue pursuing a career in this environment.

### **CHC33015 Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing, Home and Community)**

Our Certificate III in Individual Support course operates in two different models. The first combines classes conducted in our classroom as well as classes onsite within an aged care facility. This ensures that learners become thoroughly familiar with the work environment within an aged care facility prior to employment. Members of the facility's leadership team are involved as guest speakers throughout the course to assist our learners understand employer expectations, requirements of the industry and how to be effective, respectful and caring personal care workers. This model results in strong employment outcomes – often with the host facility.

In 2021, we extended this partnership model to work with Rangeview Aged Care Facility. This will see a surge in potential staff to reduce the shortage of staff.

In our other locations, we have delivered our Certificate III in Individual Support followed by our Certificate IV in Disability. The combination of these two qualifications has allowed learners to gain skills across community health in aged and disability care, which provides more diverse opportunities for employment for our graduates.

Our learners develop invaluable community sector links with training being provided in the classroom and onsite within partner organisations.

### Learner

'I heard of The Centre through a recommendation from a friend. I have always wanted to work with the elderly. It's been a while since I've been in full-time work as I was a stay-at-home mum. I have enjoyed getting to know the skills of the trade and I feel that every part of this course will prepare me for entering the workforce. I was lucky enough to be offered employment from the employer where I completed my placement. I finished my course mid-2020 and I am still employed in the field at the employer where I completed my placement.'

Work placement through our partner facilities is also a leading factor in employment success following graduation.

### CHC43115 Certificate IV in Disability

During this course, learners master working effectively and respectfully with people living with disabilities and how to meet their individual needs for care. While some learners undertake this qualification on its own, including existing workers through our flexible work-place model, this qualification is an ideal study pathway for learners graduating from our Certificate III in Individual Support. Learners are able to credit some units from the certificate III into the certificate IV. In 2021 we had 15 learners complete a traineeship which allowed the learners to work and study at the same time.



### Sandra

Sandra was an art teacher, and, when her job came to an end, decided to look at jobs in disability. She chose the course because it was recommended by a friend who had done the course before. She met some really good people, and the course was really interesting. The course made her realise that she was more than a teacher, she is someone who is capable of working in another industry, and it gave her more confidence in her own abilities. She has now found a job where she did her work placement.

## Learner satisfaction

Our courses help improve employment outcomes for our learners. Of those who completed their qualification:

- 51.3% had improved employment status after training
- 38.7% were employed before training; of these, 35.8% were employed at a higher skill level after training
- 61.3% were not employed before training; of these, 32.6% were employed after training
- 52.9% were employed after training; of these, 94.4% received at least one job-related benefit.

Moreover, our learners are very satisfied with their course. Of our learners who completed their qualification:

- 97.2% were satisfied with their training overall
- 96.1% would recommend The Centre.

## Short courses

The Centre delivers short courses, including industry-related and ACFE pre-accredited programs.

### Learn Local ACFE programs

In 2021, The Centre delivered 31,211 student contact hours to learners who face a range of barriers to education and employment. The Centre delivered language, literacy and numeracy, digital literacy and employability skills, and vocational skills to help our learners re-engage in learning and move from pre-accredited training into further study in a qualification or gain employment.

## Short industry related programs

The Centre delivered courses in First Aid, Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA), Food Hygiene, Farm Chemicals Users, and Providing Medication and Infection Control to 688 individual learners. The Centre was funded through the Department of Education and Training to deliver the Infection Control program to assist industry in ageing, home and community care and disability facilities to help employees reduce the risk of spread of infectious diseases. This was a government initiative to help slow the spread of COVID outbreaks.



# Quality and Compliance



The Quality and Compliance Department uses the Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle to continuously improve our performance. We use it to manage change, implement high-quality learning programs, support the development of reporting systems, and ensure compliance with policy, process and guideline requirements in the delivery of training and assessment.

## Quality training and assessment

The Centre has invested in new positions to support quality delivery of training and assessment services. Training Quality Officers coach and support trainer assessors to deliver training that engages our learners and supports them to achieve tangible outcomes, including being skilled and work ready to be successful from day one in the workplace, or to successfully go on to further study.

We have implemented communities of practice, where trainer assessors are involved in learning about contemporary and leading learner-centred teaching practices, and about our compliance requirements and processes. They also support networking and skills sharing to improve learning outcomes across The Centre's delivery of accredited and non-accredited training.

## Feedback and intelligence systems

Feedback is an important tool in understanding the quality of our programs and services, the needs of our participants and the strengths of our organisation. A data matrix, based on our strategic plan, was developed in 2021 to capture qualitative and quantitative data that demonstrates achievement of our Strategic Plan, measures the impact of our programs on learners, clients, and community, as well as measuring the health of the organisation. This information supports the continuous improvement

of our programs and service delivery, ensuring ongoing relevance to the communities we serve. The collection, analysis and review of data, which is captured in a dashboard reporting tool, has improved our reporting and transparency to our Executive Team, Board and stakeholders.

## Course development and design

A review of systems and processes in the design, development and implementation of training programs was undertaken in 2020-21 to look at how well courses and programs meet the needs of individuals, are engaging and supportive, and are delivered in a way that supports growth in learners. We have implemented a Training Design Team that has changed the way we develop our programs and resources to better meet these outcomes. We have refined learning and training methodologies to create accessible materials to support the learner as a 'whole person' through co-design with other departments at The Centre. Trainer assessors now have more detailed trainer guides and process documentation on course delivery, implementation, learner engagement and compliance, which improves learning outcomes for our learners and improves trainer assessor job satisfaction.

A key component of our approach is to embed the Australian Core Skills for Work Framework within all our education and training programs, from Foundation through to entry-level qualifications. These core skills for work are the transferable skills that all employers are seeking from their employees. In 2021, we provided our Foundation program graduates with a Certificate of Participation listing the core skills for work they have developed through their course for inclusion in their resume and portfolio.

# Anne Pennington Award

Liam Mossop won the 2021 Anne Pennington Award, and received the award from Mr Docker, the brother of the late Anne Pennington, on 30 November.

'Liam is like a sponge who takes in what we teach him, puts it into action, and actively asks for feedback,' said his trainer, Michelle Crofts, in his nomination.

The Anne Pennington Award celebrates adult learners who show exceptional dedication to learning new skills, teamwork and helping others, as well as

persistence to overcome personal difficulties.

The other nominees for the award were: Alan Thompson, Joshua Haddock, Aaron Costello, Brydie Kensington, Alan Thompson, Dylan Jones and Helen Katsapis.

These learners all tell inspirational stories of their motivation and ability to learn, and how they overcame personal difficulties. They are shining examples of the thousands of adults in our region – many with learning difficulties, disabilities, or other barriers – who start or return to learning later in life.



Anne Pennington Award Winner Liam Mossop receives the Award from Mr Docker, brother of the late Anne Pennington



# Engagement, Support and Employment

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, the Engagement Support and Employment Department had a very productive and exciting year. New funding was accessed through several different avenues and we saw the finalisation of the Finding Strengths pilot project.

## Finding Strengths pilot project

The *Finding Strengths* project comprised the design, implementation and evaluation of an assessment and intervention program in the Hume region of Victoria for adult offenders with learning difficulties on community corrections orders.

The pilot project addressed psychosocial and learning difficulties of participants to reduce the likelihood of future offending. It also improves their employability, by improving their language and literacy skills and enhancing their self-efficacy for coping and change.

Using a strengths-based approach, this project engaged participants in educational and therapeutic interventions through the co-development of individual learning plans and provision of individually-tailored support to address participants' goals.

Across the Hume Region, 194 referrals were received with 125 Corrections Victoria clients voluntarily choosing to participate in the project. Although undertaking clinical assessments was a challenge due to COVID-19 restrictions, the team worked hard and obtained some outstanding results. Of the 125 participants, 38 gained employment, 38 enrolled in formal education or training, 23 disengaged and 36 were still being worked with at the time the project came to an end.

Following on from the initial project, The Centre was able to secure funding through Jobs Victoria Employment Services (JVES) program to continue

the *Finding Strengths* model. This program enables the team to continue to work with disadvantaged learners to assist them on their vocational journey towards sustainable and meaningful employment. The eligibility criteria were expanded, and the door opened to anyone who has struggled with a learning difficulty or neurodiverse condition. The addition of the JVES funding was the catalyst in restructuring support services at The Centre and our staff numbers increased to accommodate the new programs. Our department expanded to include the former Learner Engagement team, and with this, we saw the creation of the Engagement, Support and Employment (ESE) Department.

### Michael

Michael was referred to *Finding Strengths* by his Community Corrections Case Manager in late 2020. He had little education and self-confidence. He worked with his Learner Engagement and Employment Officers to overcome his barriers and improve his quality of life, on the basis of a plan, and assessments by speech pathologist.

Michael found his strengths when he enrolled in the *I Am* program. He excelled and continued on with *Step Up* and *Getting There* to complete his Certificate I and II in Adult Education. He got prescription glasses with funding from Jobs Victoria to succeed in training and work, and a specialist appointment to get hearing aids.

Michael is now about to receive his certificates for *Getting There*. He wants to continue at The Centre with a Certificate III in Individual Support, and then look for work. His correction order is set to expire in April, and Michael as well as his Case Manager at corrections speak highly of The Centre and the *Finding Strengths* program.

## New funding for *Finding Strengths*

The Jobs Victoria Employment Services (JVES) program commenced on 1 July 2021. At this time, new networks were established and further relationships with employers were forged to ensure we had a collaborative approach to placing our participants into employment. The industry liaison team were able to advocate for participants and work with employers to implement strategies to assist in sustaining the employment placement. Although the first six months of this two-year program was hampered by COVID-19 restrictions, the team is working hard to meet participant, employer and industry needs, and already have seen some incredible results due to the tireless work of both the Learner Engagement and Industry Liaison Officers.

## Start of *Finding Strengths - Youth*

In 2021, the ESE Department also received funding from the Department of Justice and Community Services to pilot our *Finding Strengths* program with youth. Working closely with Department of Justice and Community Safety Youth Justice, the rollout of the program commenced. *Finding Strengths - Youth* is designed for young people in the Hume region aged between 16 and 28, who are engaged with Youth Justice or are considered to be at risk of engaging with Youth Justice and who have disengaged from conventional education channels.

Using an intensive case management model, the *Finding Strengths - Youth* program provides a therapeutic approach to support education and employment pathways for young people. We work with each person to define their individual education and employment goals, provide opportunity for clinical assessment for learning difficulties, and ensure ongoing support, assessment and appropriate learning opportunities as each person moves forward. The ESE team has specific capability and capacity to support learners with learning difficulties with practical strategies to manage their condition both in the classroom and in the workplace.

Embedded in all of our programs is *I Am*, which is a six-week course, designed to encourage participants to develop a strong, positive belief that they have the capacity and the skills to achieve personal goals. It identifies each person's unique skills and talents, discovers how and why each person sees the world as they do, and helps them gain the confidence to try new things and build positive connections.

We have received 19 referrals to date and have been working collaboratively with many organisations including Department of Justice, Department of Families Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection, Victoria Police, Salvation Army, Junction Support Services and North East Support and Action for Youth (NESAY).

### 'TJ'

Early in August, an anxious sister called The Centre. She was concerned for the welfare of her brother 'TJ', 18 years old, who had just come to live with her. He had rarely attended school in recent years, and his life lacked stability and boundaries.

Our staff engaged to determine the best path forward for him. TJ was sceptical at first and did not want to engage with The Centre, but our Learning Engagement and Employment Officer (LEEO) soon broke down his barriers and forged a strong connection. He enrolled in *I Am*, where he slowly became more confident. Towards the end of the course, he found employment. The Centre supported him with a short course to train him in the required skills, and support to buy the necessary clothing. He has also been referred to The Centre's speech therapist and has been accepted at TAFE for further study. TJ stays in contact with his LEEO.

TJ, who never felt supported, has been supported by different people at The Centre over a period of seven months. He is an example of what can be achieved with collaboration, patience, skill, and empathy.

## Strengthening Family Connections

The Centre delivered four face-to-face programs and two online *Strengthening Family Connections* (SFC) programs, funded by the Department of Social Services through the Strong and Resilient Communities Fund. All programs were very successful, with eighteen families benefiting from their learnings in these programs.

SFC was traditionally delivered in school settings, but COVID-19 restrictions made it difficult to continue this way. For this reason, two of the face-to-face programs were held in community settings, and at Barwon Child Youth and Families request, The Centre trialled their new SFC online program with two families and provided feedback on its success.

The Centre supported eighteen families through the SFC program, many of whom were engaged with Child Protection, Justice and Beyond Housing, and had in the past or were currently experiencing family violence, mental illness, generational poverty, and unemployment. The Centre staff facilitated numerous referrals to support agencies while working with these families.

While participating in these programs, the children and adults formed strong, ongoing connections with each other. These trusted relationships, formed while experiencing SFC together, are still evident today and create an ongoing platform among the families for the SFC learnings to be revisited in a supportive way.

## SARA - Financial Wellbeing for Women

SARA (Skilled, Aware, Resourceful, Active) aims to empower women to confidently manage their financial situation, recognise financial abuse and break the gendered stereotypes when it comes to money. Shared stories and experiences in turn facilitate confidence and connectedness around many forms of 'women's issues' including family violence. The Centre delivered SARA in Seymour in mid-April 2021. The program was very successful, and eight women and their children benefitted from the course content.

Most notably one woman gained employment and has subsequently been promoted to team leader where she works. Another regained some confidence and was referred to supports to be able to remove her estranged husband from the family home, thus freeing the children from alleged abuse. Another woman proudly managed to save \$700 from her income support since completing the program.

While participating in SARA, the group were visited by a local lawyer who takes a special interest in empowering women. She provided guidance for women when looking for legal assistance. Also joining in on two occasions was a partner philanthropic organisation who donated funds for the program's facilitation.

Many of the participants from the program are still connected to The Centre and using our courses and programs. Others have referred contacts to The Centre for support for their personal goals. This has built a strong network in the community and is building a positive reputation for The Centre.

## Learner Engagement Team

The Learner Engagement Officers (LEOs) provide support to learners in our courses throughout the Hume region. This team was incorporated into the Engagement, Support and Employment (ESE) team in 2021. Supporting our learners was challenging during COVID restrictions. Many learners and clients felt isolated, fearful, and anxious about their health,

### Kade

Kade wanted to improve his literacy skills and enrolled in Getting There, with the aim of one day starting a small business in gardening and landscaping one day. During enrolment, our staff provided assistance through the Finding Strengths program. Even though Kade found work soon after, he continues his study to achieve his goal.

His Learner Engagement and Employment Officer is helping him register for an ABN, and Kade is promoting his business already. Together, we found funds to get the required licenses and tickets, and other services that can help with his business. In the meantime, Kade continues with his Getting There course to improve his reading and writing.

safety, and the future.

Unable to meet with learners and clients face to face, our LEOs met the increased demand with phone and online consultations where possible. They also helped our learners adjust to online learning and juggling this with supervision of children doing home schooling.

Our Learner Engagement staff continued to distribute care packages of groceries, disposable nappies and personal care goods to clients and learners in the Wangaratta area through The Centre's relationship with FoodShare. We also worked with Upper Murray Family Care to distribute donated Christmas gifts to vulnerable families in the Wangaratta region and Mitchell Shire.

## Christmas gifts for families

Christmas is the time for giving and once again The Centre supported Upper Murray Family Care (UMCF) in the distribution of Christmas gifts to families.

If there is one thing that is great to be part of, it is seeing the sheer delight and joy of others receiving gifts to help with what can be a very difficult time.

Spreading the cheer and Christmas spirit to families is just as much a rewarding experience for staff as it is the recipient families. Thanks to UMFC for such generosity and extending the invitation for us to be part of such an amazing activity. Here is some of the feedback from the gift recipients.

- Call received at The Centre to say "thank you so so sooo much for their Christmas presents that the Centre gave her. She was so thrilled, absolutely over the moon and filled with joy and excitement. Thank you so much. They were very appreciated."
- Another single parent who received gifts for her two children on the Autism spectrum was quite overwhelmed and said no one had done such a thing for her in the past.
- "It's so good to see The Centre sending us a Christmas gift. I am sure my child will enjoy it. We appreciate your efforts and hope everyone in The Centre has a wonderful Christmas".
- "I am so happy that The Centre staff travelled to Benalla and gave the Christmas gift in person. It's always good to see a face when you receive a gift. I will give this gift to my daughter and I am sure she will like it. Thank you for taking your time out and travelling so long. Merry Christmas to you all".



Steve Thompson, UMFC, and Alicia Canning from our ESE team gather the presents for our families.

# Empower

Coming out of lockdown it was identified that there was a strong need for people to be able to reconnect with community and so we decided to host a free, two-day workshop for women, titled 'Empower'. This was one of the most satisfying achievements for the ESE department of the year as we were able to create a platform for women to connect in a safe and nurturing environment. No effort was spared as we transformed one of our classrooms into a beautiful tranquil sanctuary for women to explore themselves and enjoy some 'special' time just focussing on them.

We contextualised the *I am* program for women, and condensed it into two intensive days. *I am* helps

identify individual strengths and aims to build self-confidence and self-awareness. For some, it inspired new aspirations, whether that be toward further education or even just being encouraged to try new things. Old passions that had been forgotten about got reignited and the women who attended reported a new sense of hope and purpose for a more meaningful life.

The feedback received truly made the whole process an extremely worthwhile event and one that we will continue to build and expand upon.



Women engaging to identify their strengths at *Empower*.

# Community Development

## The Volunteer Centre

The Volunteer Centre aims to increase opportunities for people to participate in the social and economic life of their broader community through volunteering. The Volunteer Centre undertakes a range of activities across the Hume Region to help organisations work with and support their volunteers, and to create opportunities and training for volunteers. Special attention goes to creating volunteer opportunities for people with a disability, First Nations Peoples, and newly arrived immigrants.

In 2021, the Volunteer Centre had 64 organisations in its registry. We supported 65 volunteer managers, helped 290 people to volunteer, and attended 9 volunteer management network meetings. We advertised 44 training opportunities, and participants reported 100% satisfaction with that training. We had 3671 hits to our website, produced 13 newsletters for 300 volunteers, and undertook 4 radio interviews promoting volunteering and its benefits to individuals and communities.

Of the 290 individuals who were assisted during 2021 to undertake volunteering:

- 2 identified as First nations People
- 15 identified as culturally and linguistically diverse
- 19 people as living with a disability
- 14 people identifying as experiencing mental health issues.

## Supporting Carers Locally

The Supporting Carers Locally project started in August 2021 with funding from the Victorian Government to provide opportunities for carers to achieve better health and wellbeing, and to meet, socialise and connect with other carers. The Victorian Government recognises how important carers are to the people they care for and whose lives they improve every day, and to the whole community. The *Victorian Carer Strategy 2018-22* aims to improve the health and wellbeing of carers and ensure they receive more support.

Supporting Carers Locally connects with unpaid carers over the age of 55. This includes anyone who provides essential and unpaid support and assistance to someone in the shires of Wangaratta, Alpine, Benalla, and Moira. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, carers were invited to participate in our 'Chat and Win' program – a chat over the phone or online to find out what matters to them, their concerns and needs for support. These discussions have been the basis for developing support strategies to address concerns, build social connection, provide information and referral to relevant services, and most importantly acknowledge their commitment and wonderful work.

Carers - some of whom have had many years struggling on their own - appreciated the listening ear and gifts provided through community donations. The Supporting Carers Locally team met with carers in Mt Beauty at the 'Come Out of the Smoke RU Ok Day', at Wangaratta Men's Shed, and at The Centre's 'Women's Empower Day'. They distributed donated children's toys to carer's families at Christmas.



Supporting Carers Locally Program Coordinator Deb Humphreys presenting a Chat and Win prize to Sherren and Tony Mitchell.

## Community Visitors Scheme

The Community Visitors Scheme (CVS) is an Australian Government funded program that engages volunteers to visit socially isolated residents in an Aged Care Facility or in their own home for people with an approved Home Care package and who are at risk of social disconnection or loneliness.

Our creative CVS volunteers continued to rise to the challenge posed by lockdowns and restrictions. They visited in person when possible, communicated through phone calls, letters, cards, video calls, and sent gifts. During 2021, we introduced the CVS story book, which visually captures the bonds between Volunteer and Recipient.

<b>5 years</b>	Yvonne Laffan Chris Gooden Carol Rivers Bill St Amand Jenny Chuck Noela Hourigan (Wangaratta Do Care Program)
<b>10 years</b>	Mary Covil Karen Blick
<b>15 years</b>	Des Moylan
<b>20 years</b>	Hilda Watson Val Lockman

In 2021, The Christmas gathering for volunteers was held for the first time in two years to showcase the wonderful togetherness, celebration, and dedication of our CVS volunteers. The following volunteers received “Years of Service” awards in recognition of their dedication to community.



## Do Care

The Do Care program is funded through the Rural City of Wangaratta to provide community connection to isolated residents who are registered with My Aged Care living in and around the Wangaratta Shire. Do Care volunteers and residents experienced a challenging year due to restrictions and lockdowns, however they managed to stay in touch throughout.



CVS Program Officer Nanette Collins presents Des Moylan with a 15 Years of Service Certificate.

# Sport North East

Sport North East delivers programs throughout the local government areas of The Rural City of Wangaratta, City of Wodonga and the Shires of Alpine, Indigo and Towong. Below are some highlights of the busy year.

## Tackle Your Feelings

*Tackle Your Feelings* is a joint venture between the AFL Coaches Association, AFL Players' Association and the Zurich Foundation. The program is designed for local football/netball clubs and is delivered Australia wide. It strives to improve understanding and awareness of mental health and build the skills of coaches and club leaders to have conversations about mental health with their players.

In 2021 Sport North East partnered with *Tackle Your Feelings* and local psychologists Matt Ryan, Tegan Podubinski and Lili Korndorffer with support from AFL North East Border to deliver the program in North East Victoria. Presentations were held for Barnawartha Football Netball Club, Wodonga Raiders Football and Netball Club, Wangaratta Rovers Football Netball Club, Wangaratta Junior Football League and The Upper Murray Football League in Corryong. In all, 20 clubs and almost 130 coaches and club leaders completed the program.

## Bowling with Babies

In partnership with Bowling Australia, Bowling with Babies rolled out in Rutherglen, Moyhu, Corryong and Wangaratta. Supported by VicHealth, it aims to assist less active mums to become more active and to focus on their physical well-being in a fun, relaxing and comfortable environment – with their baby. New and expecting mums get together, learn the basics of lawn bowls and enjoy a coffee, a chat and a social roll. Great for the bowls club members too, sharing their love of the game, enjoying time with the toddlers, and ideally recruiting new members to their club. Over 50 new and existing parents had a ball at Bowling with Babies in North East Victoria in 2021.



Poster for Bowling with Babies

## Working for Victoria

Sport North East received funding from the Victorian Government for a six-month program to help sporting clubs in North East Victoria re-engage with their local communities and return to play in a safe way following two years of COVID restrictions. We recruited three new team members, who spoke with more than 120 community sporting club leaders in North East Victoria. This work contributed to the Regional Sport Victoria report – *Insights from Guided Conversations with Regional Sporting Clubs, Associations and Leagues*. We gathered evidence of the impact of COVID on sporting clubs, supported volunteers in meeting their COVID safe responsibilities, and helped clubs attract and engage with members.

## Physical activity and online workshops

Much of the support provided to sporting clubs and our community members craving different formats for physical activity moved online in 2021. Many community sporting clubs attended online workshops on grant readiness, grant writing, alcohol management, volunteer management, governance, communication, gender equity, member behaviour and child safety. Sport North East had over 6,300 views on our Facebook channel for the annual SPORTOBER campaign, providing a range of fun and sometimes challenging activities for those who participated.



A social media post to encourage activity during the SportOber campaign

## Together More Active

We assist community sporting clubs to build capacity and resilience thanks to Together More Active funding from Sport and Recreation Victoria. Specialist club advice is delivered with one-on-one support and through local partnerships with councils, the community sector, disability and health organisations.

We strive to align outcomes for sport and active recreation across the region. Following recent easing in restrictions due to the pandemic our work is building to influence and support sustainable sport and active recreation opportunities that reflect the needs of people with a disability. Building a more cohesive and connected sector that supports the needs of people with a disability is a priority.

## VicHealth

Our VicHealth funding supports co-design of activities with young people up to age 25, providing opportunities for less active young people in our region to be physically active and more connected.

We work with sporting clubs and other community groups to remove barriers that limit involvement in sport and active recreation opportunities. Sport North East has joined RESPOND projects in Wodonga, Indigo and Wangaratta. These projects aim to reduce childhood obesity through better eating habits, drinking more water, and doing physical activity. We are also supporting local government youth advisory groups to collaborate and develop activities that use existing council infrastructure like skate parks, pump tracks and other recreation spaces, to encourage more young people to be physically active.



Pickleball in action

