



commUnity<sup>+</sup>



Annual Report 2017 – 2018

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We pay respect to all Community Elders and people past and present who have resided in Wurrundjeri Land, who have been integral in the learning that has occurred upon this land over time.

## About **commUnity+**

Comm Unity Plus Services Ltd (**commUnity+**) is a multi-disciplinary state-wide agency located in Melbourne's western suburbs. We deliver our programs from various locations in the West, North-West and Inner Melbourne.

**commUnity+** has grown from a small residents' action group at the Deer Park Neighbourhood House to a large community-based organisation funded by local, state and Commonwealth government departments and other philanthropic trusts.

**commUnity+** delivers a range of early intervention and prevention programs focusing on informing and engaging with our community through high quality Adult Education, Legal (through Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre) and Family Support Programs, as well as community engagement and development activities.

We also partner with a large number of private, community and government agencies to enhance our service delivery and increase access for our communities. Our services are pivotal to building social capital in Melbourne's western suburbs.

To keep up-to-date with the activities and programs of **commUnity+** throughout the year, visit our website:

**[www.comm-unityplus.org.au](http://www.comm-unityplus.org.au)**

or keep in touch via social media on:

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/CommUnityPlusServices](http://www.facebook.com/CommUnityPlusServices)

**Twitter:** [@Comm\\_Unity\\_Plus](https://twitter.com/Comm_Unity_Plus)

**LinkedIn:** [www.linkedin.com/company/community-west](http://www.linkedin.com/company/community-west)





# Strategic Plan 2017 – 22

## Our Vision

Safe and vibrant communities where people are engaged, respected and in charge of their future.

## Our Purpose

To understand the needs of individuals and communities we serve and provide effective and efficient services to increase economic, social and cultural participation.

## Our Values

### Responsive

We will listen to our diverse communities, measure impacts and make informed decisions about the services we provide.

### Empowering

We will respect the strength of our communities and collaborate to deliver holistic services.

### Accountable

We will be responsible and self-reflective. We will acknowledge and celebrate achievements.

## Our Objectives

Connect to, engage with and understand the changing needs of our community

### Strategies

- Develop community needs and engagement strategies for all programs
- Develop and implement a 'theory of change' including co-design, review and evaluation frameworks for all programs
- Build community strengthening programs and strategies to improve student and client retention

Delivering integrated and multi-disciplinary services

### Strategies

- Develop an integrated/multi-disciplinary service planning framework and service delivery plan
- Build collaborative partnerships and multidisciplinary approach to assess client needs
- Provide wrap around services to clients with complex needs building on the expertise of all the programs within **commUnity+** and external agencies

Develop a **sustainable** organisation

### Strategies

- Ensure all programs are financially sustainable and accountable
- Develop and implement workforce development planning to build skills and knowledge of the staff
- Maximize the operational and infrastructure efficiency to support service delivery

Build the **advocacy skills** of and represent the **voice of our community**

### Strategies

- Participate in appropriate policy reform and advocacy networks and research to influence decision makers
- Develop advocacy strategies with community input and participation



Rob Hulls, Director, RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice, with Susanne Legena (Chairperson) and Rachna Muddagouni (CEO) at the Integrated Service Delivery Forum held at Victoria University Sunshine Convention Centre

## Chairperson and CEO Report

The Financial Year 2017-2018, saw a significant growth in our programs, through innovation, new locations and increased funding. This has meant, **commUnity+** has adapted an integrated service delivery model across many of our programs, consolidated and streamlined our services and improved client outcomes. The programs have improved planning process, increased client and stakeholder participation and focused more on monitoring and evaluating our programs effectively.

The Board and the newly established Executive Team focused on developing the operational plan aligning with our strategic plan (2017-2020) priorities and continued to monitor **commUnity+** effectiveness to deliver holistic services that strengthen safe and vibrant communities, where people are engaged, respected and in charge of their future. The overwhelming response of our staff at the Talking Circles Forum - a dialogue with our staff about their engagement and involvement in delivering the objectives of our strategic goals clearly demonstrated the work undertaken clearly aligns with the strategic plan. In other words, our plan is a live document and reflects our work.

The funding from the Commonwealth, State, Local Government and philanthropy agencies have helped the organization to expand our programs and we would like to acknowledge the ongoing support we receive. The funding support has allowed the organization to expand to new regions and started delivering services across Melbourne.

The Commonwealth Funding supported **commUnity+** to increase Skills for Employment and Education (SEE) program in the North-West and Inner Melbourne regions and Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) in the West. We continued to delivery SEE in the west, Skills First – statewide and pre-accredited programs in Brimbank and Hume region. With our consortium members - Learning for Employment (Lfe) our education team deliver English language and settlement skills to newly arrived communities including those arriving due to humanitarian concerns in their home countries. We have also focused this year introducing few Vocational Education and Training Programs in Cleaning and Childcare which have been very well received. The employability skills training of our education programs is highly regarded by our partner agencies and we thank all the Job Active Providers and Employers for their support.

Our Community Legal Centre staff have excelled once again and provided excellent information, advice, casework representation, community legal education activities to our communities in Melton and Brimbank and participated in law reform activities. We continue to deliver innovative projects like the Vietnamese Lawyer Project, Family Violence Projects at Sunshine Hospital, Darley Maternal and Child Health Centre, Bacchus Marsh courts, Clean Slate Project in collaboration with Mental Health Legal Centre at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and innovative Specialist and Generalist Tenancy project with Tenants Victoria.

The volunteers and partner agencies support is greatly valued and contribute to our success.

The Child Contact Centre services have provided innovative approaches to manage our service delivery efficiently keeping the child centric focus in mind. We have been able to reduce significant waiting periods and also provided new innovative group sessions to assist the parents to manage the child contact arrangements.

The Neighbourhood house activities have welcomed many new communities, families and children who participate in a range of activities facilities by the program staff. Church groups, community members, and other partner agencies also support **commUnity+** to incubate a range of programs from our Deer Park Community Hub. This has meant we have many more communities meeting at our centre and building our social capital and addressing social isolation.

The Corporate team staff have provided excellent human resources, finance, infrastructure support including facilities and IT support. We thank the HR Managers Ian Spinney and Yolanda Sutherland for their hard work and Lindim Shaqiri Thuan Nguyen and Mariane Younan for their prompt and timely responses.

We have also met all the compliance, accreditation, reporting requirements for our contracts and committed to ongoing quality and continuous improvement

On behalf of the organisation, we thank all the staff, volunteers for their ongoing commitment and work. Of particular note is the hard work and ongoing commitment of our executive and leadership team: Andrew Burns, Branka Stevanovic, Simon Roberts, Melissa McShane Murphy, Marlene Dixon, Martin Ha, Sharimllah Ramachandran, Shahed Ahmed, Francis Xu, Mat Hines, Enisa Hajdarevic Sangeeta Lata and Laura Dillion.

This year we farewelled one Board member Hassan Ibrahim who had to go overseas due to family reasons. We thank him for his contribution and support. We also thank all the Board members – James McCarthy, Sejla Kadric, Greg Bowers, Kim Nguyen, Nella Buccheri for their incredible commitment and support to **commUnity+** and to the CEO and the Chairperson.

Susanne Legena, *Chairperson*

Rachna Muddagouni, *CEO*



L-R Branka Stevanovic, Simon Roberts, Andrew Burns, Melissa McShane Murphy

## Executive Team

### **Andrew Burns – Chief Operating Officer**

Andrew oversees the operational planning and delivery of the core programs of commUnity+. These include Family (Child Contact Services), Legal (Brimbank-Melton Community Legal Centre) and Corporate (Human Resources) Programs. His role is key to the effort to embed an integrated service delivery approach across the organisation.

### **Branka Stevanovic – Director of Education**

Branka oversees a large team of staff who have the responsibility for the development and implementation of all education programs and ensures all contractual arrangements for Skills for Employment and Education (SEE, Adult Migrant Education program (AMEP), Victorian Training Guarantee (VTG) and Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) programs are met.

### **Melissa McShane Murphy – Chief Finance and Business Operation Officer**

Melissa oversees finance, risk, reporting, contract management, operations, facilities and compliance work of the whole organisation with a team of finance and infrastructure professionals.

### **Simon Roberts – Strategic Program Adviser**

Simon Roberts provides strategic advice and build partnerships in collaborations with the program areas to articulate the value of our existing program and/or develop new programs.

## Board Members



### Susanne Legena, CHAIRPERSON

Susanne was elected to the **commUnity+** board in 2016 and the Chairperson in 2017. She is the CEO of Plan International Australia and an advocate for foreign aid and community development, gender equality and youth participation.

Susanne has held various executive roles at Plan International Australia including Executive Manager overseeing and leading operations, Deputy CEO and Director of Public Engagement leading policy, advocacy and communications efforts. She has previously served as Chief of Staff to the Victorian Minister for Energy, Resources and Community Development where she contributed to key policies on energy and climate change as well as leading the implementation of A Fairer Victoria a whole of government social policy action plan to address disadvantage and promote inclusion and participation.

Susanne has a Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences from Flinders University and a Master of Arts (Professional Communication) from Deakin University. She has had a career dedicated to working on social justice issues and commenced working life as a community development worker for an international youth-led student organisation and for several non-government organisations tackling family violence, poverty, youth unemployment and homelessness.



### Rachna Muddagouni, CEO

Rachna Muddagouni was appointed the Chief Executive Office of **commUnity+** on 12 June 2012. Rachna has over 20 years' management and executive experience in community organisations and public statutory bodies. She has worked in the legal, health and housing sector where she developed an appreciation and passion for innovation, strategic planning, change management and integrated service delivery.

Rachna formerly worked at Victoria Legal Aid as the Manager, Stakeholder Engagement and Innovation, where she managed the Bushfire Legal Help Project and established the Victorian Legal Assistance Forum (VLAF). In 2006, Rachna was awarded Victorian Law Foundation Community Legal Centre Fellowship.



### Nella Buccheri

Nella was elected to the **commUnity+** Board in 2016. She is currently the Associate Director of Legal Practice at Victoria Legal Aid. She has significant experience in criminal law and has over 10 years' experience working in the delivery of legal services through her role in the Legal Practice Directorate. Nella is responsible for the general oversight of the operations of Assignments Unit to ensure that strategic objectives and priorities are being met. Nella provides advice to the VLA Board and the Senior Executive on issues relating to eligibility for grants of legal assistance and expenditure.

Nella is a local resident of the Melton area and has a strong interest in social justice. She is very supportive of the work we do in the west and would like to be part of that.





## Greg Bowers, TREASURER

Greg Bowers joined the **commUnity+** board in early 2017. Greg is currently the Chief Financial Officer at Trust for Nature in Victoria. Trust for Nature is a statutory authority protecting native plants and wildlife on private land in Victoria. A Certified Practising Account with a Business degree from Ballarat University, Greg has extensive experience in financial management. Greg has overseen large scale financial and process management at the Australian Crime Commission and PMSC. A certified TEFL teacher, Greg has worked as an English teacher overseas and is passionate about opportunities that come through adult education. Greg offers **commUnity+** his extensive financial and operational management experience to oversee the next phase of the organisation's growth into the North Western and Inner Melbourne regions.

Greg was appointed to the Board as Treasurer in 2018.



## Kim Nguyen

Kim was elected to **commUnity+** Board in 2013. She has worked extensively in the employment and asylum seeker sector assisting culturally diverse clients find pathways to employment and seek asylum in Australia. Arriving to Australia as a refugee over 17 years ago, Kim is passionate about the rights of culturally and linguistically diverse communities and advocates to remove barriers to employment. Kim has strong professional networks in Melbourne's north and west which add enormous value to her work with our Board. She strongly believes in integrating compassion, respect and honesty into her daily work.



## James McCarthy

James has been a board member with **commUnity+** since 2004 when we were known as Community West and has been the chairperson for 9 years and deputy chairperson for 3 years. James is a Social Worker with over 20 years experience in the social and human services sector, and is currently working with Eastern Palliative Care.

He is involved with several other organisations and is the current chairperson of No To Violence, C-Collective (an organisation started by James) and was the previous president of Interchange Victoria. James has a number of other volunteer roles in the community including being a Justice of the Peace and roles with the Office of the Public Advocate.

James has a range of qualifications in areas including; family violence, governance, AOD, mental health and training and assessment. James has maintained a strong connection with the Western suburbs of Melbourne through the many roles he has held that aim to contribute in empowering and growing resilient communities.



## Sejla Kadric

Sejla was elected to the **commUnity+** Board in 2012. She is an associate director and chartered accountant at ShineWing Australia Pty Ltd. Sejla moved to Australia in 1996 and grew up in the western suburbs. As a Board Member, her financial expertise ensures **commUnity+** has highly developed financial and internal control systems to mitigate any risks. Sejla has significant experience auditing not-for-profit organisations and understands the structures, rules and reporting obligations of incorporated associations.



## Education Program

2017/18 was a year of significant positive changes and growth that occurred in the Education program at **commUnity+**:

- Winning a tender for Adult Migrant English Program and adding this program to the list of existing education programs;
- Securing another 3 years of SEE program delivery and expanding its delivery to Inner Melbourne
- Adding VET courses to the scope which has allowed us to move away from being Foundation skills only provider to VET courses provider.

All these changes created opportunities for our wider community members to access a variety of courses and programs in the areas where they reside. At the same time it generated more interest in our courses from Job active providers, Training providers and recruitment agencies.

We provided access to education program and quality training to over 1500 adult learners. The feedback from stakeholders and program evaluation reports have identified substantial positive outcomes for our students and in many cases enhanced their language and literacy skills, provided further education pathways, and increased practical job search skills.

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provides up to 510 hours of English language tuition to eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants to help them learn foundation English language and settlement skills to enable them to participate socially and economically in Australian society.

**commUnity+** provided a smooth transition to over 350 students, who were transferred from the exiting AMEP providers.

We were able to secure infrastructure, resources, teaching, administration and support staff to accommodate the clients and provide them with the positive, welcoming and supportive experience. It resulted in an ongoing steady number of referrals and enrolments, maintaining 380 students in classes throughout the year by allowing students access to day and evening classes and meeting their needs and expectations.

The Skills for Employment and Education (SEE) program continued to provide a strong foundation for job seeker adult learners to enhance and strengthen their employability skills. The established partnership with the Learning for Employment (LfE) Consortium, enabled **commUnity+** to provide services in the West, North West and Inner Melbourne regions. We have expanded and strengthened our stakeholder relationship with Job Active providers, Centrelink and other stakeholders to increase referrals and address learning barriers for our cohort. Throughout the year **commUnity+** 560 Pre-Training assessments were executed and 78% of the actioned referrals resulted in training being recommended, while 94.4% of those who were recommended for training resulted in commencing the training. Majority of the clients in this program, (70.8%), are females. This gives us an insight to absences as they are generally primary carers in the family.

The Skills First program, subsidised through Victorian Training Guarantee (VTG) funding, facilitated the key achievement of maintaining and developing new strong relationships with Job active providers, Disability Employment Service (DES) providers, communities, as well as local schools through the Learning Link program.





Our drive for community engagement and partnerships continues to be very successful, with new and established relationships with the Chinese, Russian and Greek communities, Deer Park North Primary School, Roxborough Rise Primary School, Campbell Page, Matchworks and AMES Employment in particular.

By adding VET course to the scope, particularly Certificate II in Cleaning, **commUnity+** attracted attention of Recruitment Service agencies which resulted in an ongoing referral process and expansion of our program delivery across Melbourne.

The Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) program continued with its focus on improving employment, literacy and life skills through our Pre-accredited programs. Also, **commUnity+** was successful in its application to provide access to education for Asylum Seekers by offering Asylum Seekers Language program and working closely with Life Without Barriers.

Furthermore, **commUnity+** provided additional support to the learners with complex or multiple needs through the successful Learner Engagement A-Frame Program (LEAP). Through this program we maintained our ongoing, established relationship with Mambourin and Allara.

All these programs aim at improving literacy, employability and engagement skills to maintain pathways and job outcome opportunities for our students and adult learners as well as to minimise social isolation and provide access to a range of programs to the community.

Professional Development and training was priority for our education team. Throughout the year we focused on supporting our trainers and

administration staff to enable them to deliver and provide proper support to the clients.

With the approved VDC Skills First Grants program project on Workforce development **commUnity+** delivered professional development for trainers on Family Violence, to increase their knowledge and understanding of family violence issues in our community, gain information about the laws around family violence, the support services and help available to victims.

Also, **commUnity+** purchased services of a specialist consultant to enhance administration staff, program managers' skills and knowledge of the student management system to minimise the risks of being non-compliant.

Furthermore, another successful ACFE Capacity and Innovation Project with the focus on Women Empowerment – pathway to education and employment, has allowed **commUnity+** to work collaboratively with other community education providers and relevant services and organisations in the region and design and develop programs that will address the learner cohort's barriers and provide support to meet their needs and aspirations to pursue further education and employment. The findings and the fact sheets are collated and published on our website for further references. Also a directory of services has been collated and distributed to the internal staff to support them when providing information to the clients.

We thank our staff and students for their hard work and commitment this year and look forward to another successful year of adult learner growth, development in our courses and programs and sustainability in our outcomes and deliverables.



## Legal Report

This year has seen BMCLC further consolidate its work as a generalist legal service and strengthen its capacity to deliver the services our clients are asking for. Increasingly, across our catchment we are seeing a range of legal issues which stem from demographic change and expansion. Issues around housing, family violence and demand for bilingual legal services continues to increase. In addition, we continue our work in prisons which are concentrated in catchment.

### Prisoner Assistance

The Clean Slate Project entered its third and final phase during the year. This project has been a great success in addressing the civil debts of inmates at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. The project was established to negotiate with creditors using a bulk debt model and remove or reduce the financial burden placed on prisoners when they are released. During the first two intakes \$180,000 of debts was collectively forgiven by creditors. During the third intake conducted this financial year in partnership between BMCLC and Mental Health Legal Centre, almost \$240,000 of debt has been forgiven. In addition a series of modules detailing how to establish a bulk debt project such as this have been developed and will be made available to the sector in the hope that its success will be replicated elsewhere.

BMCLC has also been a founding member of the Prisoner's Working group which was established during the year to facilitate the sharing of information and experiences between a variety of organisations delivering programs and services in prisons or to released prisoners and their families. The working group will continue to meet quarterly.

### Family Violence

BMCLC has been the recipient of funds from the Department of Justice to run two different Health Justice partnerships this year. Outreaching from the Moorabool Maternal Health Centre and the Sunshine Hospital, BMCLC lawyers have provide legal advice to 98 clients through weekly and fortnightly clinics respectively. They have also provided staff at each service with professional development on how to identify and refer clients with legal issues.

### Tenancy

This year BMCLC successfully partnered with Tenants Victoria and secured funding from the Federation of Community Legal Centres to participate in the Generalist-Specialist pilot project. This project is focused on improving referrals and information sharing between specialist legal centres such as Tenants Victoria with generalist services such as BMCLC. Seizing the opportunity to professionally develop our staff in an area of law increasingly needed to assist our clients as well as the opportunity to forge a multifaceted relationship with a well reputed legal services such as Tenants Victoria, BMCLC has successfully built its tenancy capacity through the training and upskilling of our lawyer, Johanna Yee who has now established an ongoing tenancy clinic for clients. We hope to further utilise Johanna's new knowledge and the relationship with Tenants Victoria to further enhance our legal services.





### Vietnamese Lawyer Project

The Vietnamese Lawyer project was successfully run for another year building on the success that our multilingual principal lawyer, Martin Ha, has had in partnering with the Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association in Braybrook where he sees individuals with a range of legal problems for advice and ongoing assistance where required. He also delivers Vietnamese language legal education which addresses the needs of a section of the community that traditionally faces language and cultural barriers to accessing legal help. Martin should be commended on the way he has managed to building an grow this high profile project, forge excellent connections with the Vietnamese community, and maintained flexibility to adapt his approach to suit their needs. The project continues to be a great success.

### Project partners

Community Legal Centres depend on the input of their community to understand how to address the greatest areas of legal need. To this end we are grateful to the assistance of all the partners for helping us to deliver our organisational objectives. Of particular note Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association, who host our Vietnamese Lawyer Project, Western Health, in particular the allied health team at Sunshine Hospital; the Moorabool Maternal Child Health Centre, Mental Health Legal Centre who joined with us to deliver Clean Slate, Tenants Victoria who have provided their expertise and advise under the Generalist-Specialist project and the Federation of Community Legal Centres for funding and providing ongoing support during this project.

### Legal – Snap Shot

Information	447
Advice	1167
Referrals	1809
Cases	447
Clinics	270
Outreaches	86
CLE sessions	76
Duty Lawyer Services	40
Dispute Resolution Sessions	38
Projects	5
Law Reform submissions	2
Lawyers delivering services	6
Volunteers	35
Locations (services delivered from)	7
Professional Development sessions given	14





## Child contact service

The Child Contact Service (CCS) has made great progress this year in improving its ability to meet demand from clients. The design of the centre also contributes to providing a safe experience for all concerned. The CCS provides changeover services and supervised visits to high conflict parents in six local government areas in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The centre aims to ensure children maintain health relationships with all parts of their families. The team carries out its duties with great diligence, professionalism and passion.

The CCS provides these services across a large catchment in the western suburbs of Melbourne, which also has a very high demand for our services.

The CCS team uses strong referral pathways to a range of other services to support post-separation families with not only parenting and relationship issues but on legal, financial and individual counselling for parents and children.

### CCS – Snap Shot

<i>LGA's serviced</i>	6
<i>Caseworkers</i>	3
<i>1 parent applications</i>	46
<i>2 parent applications</i>	53
<i>Supervised visits</i>	215
<i>Changeovers</i>	487
<i>Intake Assessments</i>	165
<i>Student Placements</i>	4



## Case study

The Children's Contact Service commenced facilitating supervised contact between two children (aged 8 and 9) and their biological father, whom they had not had contact with in almost two years. Previously, the children used to stay with their father every second weekend, however this had fallen through due to unfortunate circumstances which had resulted in increased tension between the two biological parents, and feelings of uncertainty with the children. There were no court orders in place, however both parents agreed to make an application to CCS, in order to re-establish a positive relationship between father and children in a safe and contained way.

There was a lot of nervousness and emotion in the first contact, as the children saw their father for the first time in years and vice versa, however CCS staff helped provide a range of activities and aided conversation to flow easily between the children and their father. Within minutes, all had settled and were comfortable with each, joking and laughing. The next several visits proceeded smoothly, and CCS allowed the father's partner and their child (the children's half-sister) to attend contact also, allowing to build positive connections between all parties. CCS staff worked closely with the biological mother, easing her fears and anxieties regarding contact, and over the weeks, developed a plan for the family to progress forward.

Given this was a voluntary case, after only 5 of the scheduled 8 visits, all parties were incredibly happy with the outcome of the visits and the relationship that had been re-established, and all parties agreed to progress to unsupervised contact in the community. CCS staff aided the facilitation of this agreement, by having all parties meet on premises, and engage in a positive, solution focused discussion, which centred around planning for the best interest of the children. After the sixth visit, as per planned discussion, the children started to attend contact with the father at his home once per fortnight, with the help of a schedule that had been developed by CCS with the agreement of all. This schedule allowed for a plan increase in the time the children would spend with their father, starting at a couple of hours, and gradually progressing back to overnight.

The family were so thankful for the assistance and work of CCS staff, that they have been in contact since ceasing with the service, to send photos and updates of the positive time the children have been having back at their father's home.

There have been many positive outcomes like this over the year for families who have been involved with the service, including many whom have transitioned from supervised contact, to facilitated changeovers, before finally no longer requiring the service, which is the ultimate outcome for all parties, in particular the children.





## Neighbourhood House

Our Neighbourhood House program delivered outstanding programs and events to the community under the leadership of Eveit Salib and her team of volunteers. The team was very well supported by all the other programs of **commUnity+** Services. The Neighbourhood House program has seen a significant increase in participation since the introduction of the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) at our Deer Park site. Many newly migrant families have been regularly attending information sessions and children's activities. The Home Work Club and Fun for Children programs are very popular and we are grateful for the support of Woolworths who provide healthy fruit snacks to our energetic children.



Monthly Community Lunches are very well attended followed by information session provided by a range of organisations in our catchment. Events like International Women's Day, Anti -Poverty Week, White Ribbon Day, Cultural Diversity Week, Mental Health Week and Volunteers Week have all been successfully conducted and their important messages communicated to our community members.



We also have been fortunate to have the excellent support and mentoring from Kim Garlick, Community Participation Officer, DHHS and our steering committee members. We thank all the participants of the program who have made it a great success and all the local businesses who have rallied behind our work and provided generous donations. We look forward to another year of community engagement.



# Women's Strategy

## Vision

To increase access and participation for women in our communities to ensure gender equity, equal power, resources and opportunities.

## Values

**DIGNITY   RESPECT   EMPOWERMENT   RECOGNITION   FAIRNESS   CHOICE**

## Objectives

### OBJECTIVE ONE

To engage and connect with women in our communities to understand their needs and encourage co-design and participatory approach to service planning.

#### Strategy

##### Adult Education Program

Plan and identify gender specific adult education programs as required.

Implement the recommendation from the Women Empowerment Project – to increase participation for women at risk in pre-accredited programs with support of wrap around services.

##### Legal Service

Deliver community legal education on employment issues to address gender discrimination and its adverse impact on women.

Continue to deliver gender specific Health Justice Partnership in collaboration with relevant agencies.

##### Children's Contact Service and Neighbourhood House

Advocate and encourage young women to have a voice in our community e.g Youth Parliament project.

Focus on running events to increase opportunities for women to have a voice e.g International Women's Day.

##### Organisational Level

Ensure gender equity principles are embedded in our recruitment policies.

Feedback is sought from female staff on additional barriers that may impact their work and develop policies

### OBJECTIVE THREE

To develop sustainability and viable programs and structures to ensure systemic barriers are addressed for women in our communities.

#### Strategy

##### Adult Education Program

Provide accessible child care support, where possible for women who would like to pursue education

Develop fee waiver policy for women who have financial hardship to support their educational pathways.

##### Legal Service

Explore innovative ways to deliver legal programs in collaboration with probono partnerships and volunteers.

Develop partnerships with libraries and schools to reach women who may not access traditional community legal centre through innovative projects.

##### Children's Contact Service and Neighbourhood House

Develop the flexible fee funded model of Child Contact Centre to increase accessibility for working women.

Enhance the activities in the CU+ Neighbourhood House Program to meet the needs of the diverse communities.

##### Organisational Level

Provide staff the opportunity to attend conferences and professional development which they may often find hard to pursue due to family responsibility.

### OBJECTIVE TWO

To develop integrated service delivery models to address issues of duplication and multiple barriers for women with complex needs.

#### Strategy

##### Adult Education Program

Enhance the skills and knowledge of the trainers and administration staff to recognize the needs of women with complex needs.

Offer wrap around services for women with complex needs by providing internal and external warm referrals and assisting across the continuum.

##### Legal Service

Deliver clinics and community legal education programs for women who may be at risk using a gender specific lens and offering flexibility keeping the needs of the women in mind as a priority.

Developing the skills and knowledge of staff to build capacity to provide appropriate services.

##### Children's Contact Service and Neighbourhood House

Develop Open Day programs for women to feel safe to come to our services and develop understanding of the purpose of the programs.

Increase communities understanding of safe house program within the Neighbourhood House Program.

##### Organisational Level

Provide staff opportunity to build skills set within range of programs for increasing their professional growth.

Providing flexibility in contracts, where possible to recognize multiple roles women have to play.

### OBJECTIVE FOUR

To develop and pursue advocacy opportunities to address gender equity for women in our communities.

#### Strategy

##### Adult Education Program

Publish stories of women who have pursued their dreams and celebrate their achievements for greater visibility.

##### Legal Service

Support staff to participate in advocacy activities to address gender equity issues for women.

Advocate for additional funding for increasing legal access of women in our communities.

##### Children's Contact Service and Neighbourhood House

Advocate and lobby on issues of women's access to appropriate services using the data we collect from our programs and case studies

Participate in advocacy issues related to parental needs for women with multiple barriers and at risk.

##### Organisational Level

Explore low cost policy changes to increase women's workforce participation and retention in employment  
Explore innovation through subsidized child care and holiday programs for employees at commUnity+.



## Strategic Projects

### Stakeholder work embedded in programs

2017-18 saw a large number of new projects and expansion opportunities and therefore we were extremely busy making sure that we were engaging with the stakeholders in a way that ensured the success of our undertakings.

All program areas undertook stakeholder planning and after several years of effort it is now an embedded part of the practice of all areas to assess important stakeholders and have planned approaches to engagement. At the start of each new program or project there is an extensive process of stakeholder planning undertaken and there is now some deep organizational knowledge brought to this exercise.

As discussed elsewhere we:

- Retained our SEE contract through Learn for Employment with exclusive delivery in the North West, consolidation of our sites in the West and a further expansion into Inner Melbourne
- LfE was successful in the AMEP tender round
- We added Skills Reconnect contracts for Hume with Djerriwarrah and Melton, Brimbank and Braybrook with WCIG
- The CAIF Project on bringing vulnerable women back into education
- A new network for organisations working with people in or transitioning out of prisons set up in the West

All of these included a great deal of stakeholder work by the staff in programs and the stakeholder and communications team.

### Skills Reconnect

Skills Reconnect is a state government program is designed to re-engage long-termed unemployed with multiple barriers and low attended education levels with education and training. This was a completely new program for **commUnity+** and it required a complex approach to stakeholder engagement as we had to build relationships with organisations that would refer clients to us, service providers that could help clients with multiple issues and then with education providers.

### The Auto Supply Chain Project

The Auto Supply Chain project in the North and North West was funded by the Victorian Government to look at supporting workers made redundant in related supply companies as a result of the auto industry shutdown. We partnered with Banksia Gardens in Broadmeadows and **commUnity+** provided project management, governance and stakeholder planning advice to the project which successfully ran a number of workshops for retrenched workers.

### The Western Network for Prisoners

A result of our work in Best Start and Clean Slate with prisoners and people exiting prison we became aware of lack of an appropriate body to initiate better collaboration amongst agencies working with people in prison and on exiting the system. We had an initial meeting in June of ten organisations and it was resolved to continue to meet to look at service delivery, projects, funding and partnerships in this area. The Network will be meeting on a quarterly basis.





L – R Binaya Bhatia - Finance Officer, Javed Ahmed - Finance and Operations Manager, Melissa McShane-Murphy - Chief Finance and Operations Officer, Thuan Nguyen - Facilities Officer, Jerome Rodrigo - Facilities Coordinator

## Community Engagement Framework

**commUnity+** also developed a community engagement framework which will become extremely relevant in the expansion of our integrated service delivery and co-design approaches to our work where appropriate community and client consultation will be vital to our successes.

## Corporate Projects

The operations function at **commUnity+** provides essential support to the work of client focused programs. This is provided through professional Human Resources services such as recruitment, performance management, industrial relations, training and OHS. As well as the provision of infrastructure, IT and facilities services through lease, maintenance, procurement and asset management.

The 2017-21 Strategic Plan sets out objectives to develop a sustainable organisation and to develop integrated and multidisciplinary services. In order to do this the Board of **commUnity+** continued to support three large projects in the Operations context during the 2017-18 financial year. These projects were developed to support the organisations expansion in services while improving overall organizational sustainability.

The Human Resources team continued to deliver recruitment to support the establishment of the new AMEP contract, SEE North West contract and both Skills First Reconnect projects. In total 34 new positions were recruited to support the establishment and delivery of these programs.

Parallel to this a site expansion project was finalized by the facilities team which saw **commUnity+** establish sites at 7 new locations across the west and north west of Melbourne containing 19 new classrooms, 21 administration/program staff spaces and ancillary facilities for employees and clients.

The third project rolled out during the year was the IT upgrade highlighted by the Board as a key investment for the year following consultations and reviews conducted while the Strategic Plan was developed. As a result of this work, **commUnity+** now operates a cloud based remote desktop system which provides a standardized, reliable and seamless user experience across all sites and outreach locations. It also operates a two level disaster recovery system and is supported by a 24 hour managed services arrangement with Deloitte. The system infrastructure and design is now capable of supporting any growth needs and business changes of **commUnity+** for the foreseeable future.

In addition to these projects the HR and facilities teams have continued to deliver business support to all areas of **commUnity+** to meet the ongoing maintenance, procurement, IT, recruitment, training and OH&S needs of the organisation. This has occurred, while both teams continue to review and augment their capacity to ensure they are in a position to meet the ongoing needs of the organisation.





# Cross Sectoral Capacity Building Strategy

## Post Release Support

### Vision

To facilitate information sharing about services for prisoners and their families post release to assist with reintegration into their community.

### Values

**Empowering**

**Respectful**

**Responsive**

**Resilient**

### Objectives

#### OBJECTIVE ONE – EDUCATION PROGRAM

To improve engagement and participation in Education by implementing the recommendations of the Women's Empowerment Project.

#### Strategy

Support women who are at risk by identifying the barriers for engagement with education and ensure that they are supported to maximize participation in high quality education programs and address equity and access

#### OBJECTIVE TWO – FAMILY PROGRAM

To support the families of people post release in the local area particularly those facing disadvantage and social exclusion.

#### Strategies

- Implement the Best Start Program providing support to people exiting prison with a focus on reuniting and reconnecting parents with their children
- Provide parenting programs for families that maybe facing disadvantage, social exclusion or have parenting difficulties
- Provide an integrated service delivery centre at the Deer Park Neighbourhood House

#### OBJECTIVE THREE – LEGAL PROGRAM

To offer legal advice and support to people and their families post release in the areas of family, civil and criminal law.

#### Strategies

- Advocate for the rights of prisoners and for more support and services to keep people out of prison
- Provide community legal education in prisons
- Implement phase two of the Clean Slate Project on debt and fines for prisoners pre-release

#### OBJECTIVE FOUR – ORGANISATION

To increase the skills and knowledge of staff at **commUnity+** to work with people exiting prisons and their families and offer friendly a environment for them to participate in our programs.

#### Strategies

- Facilitate cross-sectoral information sharing, through a Cross Sectoral Strategy Network on Prisoner Issues.
- This meeting will provide a platform for networking, sharing information and an opportunity to identify gaps in service delivery.
- Provide internal and external workforce development for staff dealing with people post release

# Funders and Partners

## Funders

Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE)  
 Brimbank City Council  
 Department of Social Services  
 Department of Education and Training (Victoria)  
 Development (DEECD)  
 Department of Health and Human Services  
 Department of Education and Training (Australian Government)  
 Department of Justice  
 Victorian Legal Aid (VLA)  
 Ross Trust

## Partners

All Primary and Secondary Schools in the Brimbank and Melton Region  
 AMES Australia  
 Angliss Neighbourhood House  
 Anglicare  
 Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres  
 Australian Council for Private Education and Training  
 Australian Vietnamese Women's Association  
 aXcelerate  
 ANZ Bank  
 Bacchus Marsh Maternal and Child Health Centre  
 Bhutanese Community Group  
 Braybrook Community Centre  
 Brimbank City Council  
 Brimbank Early Years Reference Group  
 Brimbank/Melton Local Learning & Employment Network  
 Brimbank Neighbourhood House Partnership Group  
 Brimbank and Melton Leader  
 Brimbank North West and Melton Moorabool Star Weekly  
 Brimbank Social Justice Coalition  
 Bunnings Warehouse  
 Campbell Page  
 Caroline Chisholm Society  
 Catholic Care Parenting Order Program  
 Centrelink  
 Centre for Innovative Justice  
 Centre for Multicultural Youth  
 Commonwealth Bank  
 Community Legal Centres (Western Region and state wide centres)  
 Consumer Action Law Centre  
 Cohealth  
 CRS Australia  
 Dame Phyllis Frost Centre  
 Deakin University  
 Derrimut Community Centre

Djerriwarrh Community and Education Services  
 Djerriwarrh Health Services  
 Don Nardella MP  
 Duke Street Community House  
 Each Employment  
 Energy and Water Ombudsman of Victoria  
 Family Mediation Centre  
 Federation of Community Legal Centres  
 Filipino Community Council of Victoria  
 Financial and Consumer Rights Council  
 Fitzroy Community Legal Service  
 Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service  
 Greek Elderly Citizens' Club of Manningham  
 Headspace  
 It Connexions  
 ISIS Primary Care  
 Job Prospects  
 Jobs Australia  
 Justice Connect  
 Lander & Rogers Lawyers  
 Lead West  
 Laverton Community Integrated Services  
 Learning for Employment Consortium  
 Landmark Printing  
 Legal Services Board and Commissioner  
 Maddocks Lawyers  
 Mambourin Enterprises NDIS  
 Magistrates' Court (Bacchus Marsh and Sunshine)  
 Matchworks  
 Maurice Blackburn Lawyers  
 Max Employment  
 Melbourne City Mission  
 Melbourne Remand Centre  
 Melton City Council  
 Melton Health  
 Men's Referral Service  
 MacKillop Family Services  
 Migrant Resource Centre North West  
 Mind Works  
 Moorabool Shire Council  
 National Association of Community Legal Centres  
 Network West Neighbourhood House Network  
 New Energy  
 North Balwyn Senior Citizens' Club  
 No to Violence  
 Parent Education Network  
 Playgroup Victoria  
 RMIT University  
 Saint Francis' Filipino Community Club

Salvation Army Employment Plus  
 Salvation Army Social Housing Services  
 Sarina Russo Employment Access  
 Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre  
 Springvale Monash Buddhist Temple  
 Stepping Up Consortium  
 Sunshine Family Relationships Centre  
 Sunshine Library  
 The Design Bus  
 Tracey Placement People  
 U3A  
 Victoria Law Assistance Forum  
 Victoria Law Foundation  
 Victoria Legal Aid  
 Victoria Police (Western Region)  
 Victorian Children's Contact Service Network  
 Victorian Council of Social Service  
 Visy Hub  
 Volunteer West Network  
 Western Suburbs Law Association  
 Westgate Community Initiative Group  
 Wesley Mission  
 Western Health  
 West Metro Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee (RAJAC)  
 Western Region Indigenous Family  
 Violence Regional Action Group  
 Women's Health West  
 Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI)  
 Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO)  
 Victoria University  
 Violence Regional Action Group  
 Williamstown Community Education Centre  
 Wise Employment  
 Western Integrated Family  
 West Justice  
 Violence Network  
 Women's Health West  
 Wyndham Community and Education Services  
 Yarraville Community Centre  
 Youth Junction  
 Youth Law  
 Youth Now

**Education Additions:**  
 Life without Barriers  
 Asylum Seekers Resource Centre  
 Brimbank Learning and Employment Steering committee (BLESC)  
 Brimbank and Maribyrnong Interfaith Network  
 Brimbank Libraries  
 Think West

Comm Unity Plus Services Ltd thanks the funders, partner agencies, staff (past and present), volunteers, clients and community for their generous support contributions and participation.



## Our Locations

**822 Ballarat Road, Deer Park**

Corporate Services, Childrens Contact Service,  
Adult Education Classes, **Community+ HUB**  
Activities

**Level 1, 811A Ballarat Road, Deer Park**

Adult Education Classes

**Suite 2-4 & 6-8, 30-32 East Esplanade,  
St. Albans**

Human Resources, IT&Facilities, Financial  
Services, Adult Education Classes

**Level 1, 358 Main Road West, St. Albans**

BMCLC, Adult Education Classes,  
Adult Education Reception

**Level 1, 356 Main Road West, St. Albans**

Adult Education Classes

**79 Main Road West, St. Albans**

Adult Education Classes

**81 Main Road West, St. Albans**

Adult Education Classes

**Shop 8-11, 14 Victoria Square, St Albans**

Adult Education Classes

**284 Thompsons Road, Lower Templestowe**

Adult Education Classes

**Watergardens Town Centre,  
399 Melton Highway, Taylors Lakes**

Adult Education Classes

**Melton Library and Learning Hub,  
Level 1, 31-35 McKenzie St, Melton**

BMCLC

**14 Gaffney Street, North Coburg**

Adult Education Classes

**90 Blair Street, Broadmeadows**

Adult Education Classes

**Shop 9, 70-80 Pearcedale Parade,  
Broadmeadows**

Adult Education Classes

**Lynda Blundell Centre,  
185-225 Blair Street, Dallas**

Adult Education Classes

**Craigieburn Tennis Club, Selwyn Avenue,  
Craigieburn**

Adult Education Classes

**Connections Craigieburn,  
59 Craigieburn Road, Craigieburn**

Adult Education Classes

**Comm Unity Plus Services Ltd**

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[www.comm-unityplus.org.au](http://www.comm-unityplus.org.au)

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