



# ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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# Values and Mission Statement

## Enhancing the Quality of Life of the People We Support

The primary mission of Golden City Support Services is to enhance the quality of life of the people we support. We support people to have homes in their local communities, develop their own relationships and enjoy the same access to community resources, opportunity to participate and rights as other members of their community.

- > We implement support practices that work
- > We do what we say
- > We make it easy for individuals and families to use and understand our services
- > We are a purposeful organisation with committed staff
- > We work locally within communities
- > We work for social change





# Partnerships 2022

Simon Harvest  
RIAC  
VALID  
National Disability Services  
National Disability Insurance Agency  
Intereach LAC  
Simon Brown-Greaves – SBG Group  
Dr Alan Hough- Purpose at Work  
Living with a Disability Research Centre –  
La Trobe University  
Possability  
Bendigo Venues & Events  
Bendigo Art Gallery

Castlemaine State Festival  
Creative Victoria  
AFS & Associates  
Professional Advantage  
Lumary  
Skedulo  
Agylix  
Marcus Turnbull- Turncode Productions  
Bruce McIntosh- Lionhearted Consultants  
Sunraysia Residential Services  
Bendigo Health  
Bendigo Community Health Services  
Active Ability

## Funding Sources

Golden City Support Services Inc recognises the following main source of funds in the 2021-2022 financial year

### Direct Funding:

- Bendigo Health Care Group
- Department of Health- Commonwealth
- Department of Health – Victoria
- NDIS Participants through the National Disability Insurance Agency

### Requests to provide services funded through:

- Bendigo Health Care Group
- Centre for Disability Studies
- City of Greater Bendigo
- Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources
- Regional Arts Victoria
- Villa Maria
- Emporium Creative Hub





# Chair Report

Golden City Support Services Inc (GCSS) is headquartered on traditional lands of the Dja Dja Warrung people and provides its services on Dja Dja Warrung, Yorta Yorta, Taungurung and Wurrundjeri Country.

On behalf of the board, I wish to pay our respects to the elders past, present and emerging for all the traditional lands upon which we serve and recognise their continued connection and custodianship of the land, waters and skies.

## **Covid-19: yet *another* challenging year**

Golden City Support Services has continued to make the best of the ongoing challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The impact of restrictions and the need for Covid-safe practices saw continued disruptions across the organisation, including board meetings - most of which needed to take place remotely.

January and February saw the most challenging

circumstances GCSS has faced to date in the evolution of the pandemic. A consequence of the easing of many restrictions ahead of the 2021 Christmas break, unsurprisingly, saw a spike in community cases of Covid, including a number of outbreaks at our residences. The team responded rapidly to the unfolding situation, establishing appropriate workforce bubbles in Echuca to limit the spread of exposure whilst continuing to support our residents and avoid staff exhaustion from excessive shifts.

Through this period our staff in both Echuca and Bendigo put in an extraordinary effort to maintain continuity of service – sharing the burden across several regions. The board recognised the efforts of the direct support staff and their Practice Leaders individually at the time of the events, but I wish to take this opportunity to again to thank them for the commitment and demonstration of truly living the values of GCSS.

An unsurprising consequence of the disruption through this period were some temporary limits on GCSS's capacity to

maintain its normal respite service to the families and carers of those we support. The board recognises the value our families and carers place on access to good quality respite and we are deeply grateful for the understanding that was expressed throughout this challenging period. We recognise the significant contribution foregoing respite made to the GCSS community enabling us to ensure we maintained service for those most vulnerable in our support.

I personally wish to thank Ian and Linton, who was acting CEO through part of this period, and the team of senior managers for the effort and care exhibited during these events.

## **Australasian Society of Intellectual Disability conference participation**

The board was actively involved in the annual conference of the Australasian Society of Intellectual Disability (ASID) conference in November, with a number of sessions chaired or

presented by GCSS board members. A key learning of the conference was the need for the health care system to better understand the needs of those living with an intellectual ability.

One glimpse of brightness amidst the gloom of Covid restrictions came from the convening of that conference on-line. This approach enabled a significant number of GCSS practice leaders and coaches to 'attend' the conference. This was followed up with a debrief and discussion between members of the board, the CEO and GCSS's practice leaders and coaches to enable us to discuss the implications of what was presented.

But even more exciting than greater staff participation, was the opportunity for a group of people we support to join one of the 'hubs' set up by the conference organisers to facilitate a more inclusive approach to conference attendance. By all accounts, the people we supported to engage in the hub enjoyed grappling

with the perennial conference dilemma of choosing which conference stream to attend!

I particularly want to thank John Willis for helping to make this all happen and hope to see GCSS's participation continue so long as an online option continues to be offered.

## **Continuing our governance refresh**

The board continued its journey of aiming to meet the professional standard expected of boards, including voluntary board like ours, registered to provide services under the NDIS.

In November and December, Dr Alan Hough of Purpose at Work facilitated two important workshops for the board and senior management. In the first workshop the board and senior management reviewed and updated our purpose statement as part of the broader review of the GCSS constitution. At the second workshop the board was facilitated to identify key elements of reporting and monitoring needed from management to help support

the board's supervisory role. Both workshops were highly productive and we thank Dr Hough for his thoughtful approach.

The Constitution review, initiated last financial year, was completed and resulted in significant updates to the governing document. Whilst much of the revamp was achieved through the adoption of the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 so called 'model rules', some customising was needed to best enable GCSS to continue its vision. In addition to revising the purpose statement, we also streamlined the board roles to now require a Chair, Deputy Chair and Secretary. The amendments to the Constitution were adopted at a Special General Meeting of the members.

Again, the board wishes to recognise the value support of the corporate practice at Lander & Rogers Lawyers, with particular thanks to Alison Davey, Alex Dworjanyn and Rob Neely, in assisting GCSS with this important change.



## Strategic planning

The updates to the Constitution and, in particular, GCSS's purpose statement provided the right backdrop for the board to initiate strategic planning for 2023-2025. Taking into account Covid-restrictions the board sought to convene its strategic planning in a staged approach over the course of four meetings, starting off with a 'strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats' session. The planning process will continue into the current reporting period and will result in a new strategic plan for launch sometime towards the end of this calendar year.

## Significant senior staff and board changes

In April the board bid Linton Ashley, GCSS General Manager of Operations, and his partner a fond farewell – albeit temporarily - to fulfil a dream journey travelling around Australia. In Linton's place, the board warmly welcomed Ashley Griffin to act in Linton's role for the duration of his absence. Ash has been an able replacement and has contributed to board meetings and the strategic planning process.

We also thank Alison Maclaren for her 5 years

supporting GSCC, particularly through the early years of transitioning to the NDIS when GCSS experienced the most significant adjustment to its funding model in decades. Alison brought a much-needed finance and accounting backgrounds to the board as well as important local and disability services knowledge.

The board initiated a recruitment drive in line with its goal to diversify its governance skills and experience as part of 'modernising' under the NDIS. In May, we welcomed a new board member, Ms Nova Marsh, to broaden the Board's depth of experience in the area of mental health. Nova has 12 years' experience as a social worker in the area of clinical mental health working supporting those with complex to live a fulsome life in the community.





# CEO Report

The COVID pandemic remained a constant focus through the whole of last year. We had to adapt our services and way of working to protect the health of those we support and our staff. Checking on the wellbeing of isolated service users, working from home, on-line meetings, on-line induction and training, Personal Protective Equipment and health mandates all became the norm as we brought all of our energy and resources to maintain the consistency and quality of our services when, at times, we had more than ten percent of our staff unavailable.

I thank all our staff, who have provided an extraordinary effort; working with constant changes, covering for sick colleagues and ensuring the people who depend on us for their essential supports were supported; even when those being supported contracted COVID.

Apart from COVID and the intensity it demanded we saw some significant developments in other important projects with the implementing of the GCSS Staff Wellbeing strategy, further developments in the Practice Leader Training and the testing and fine-tuning of the new Customer Relationship Manager/Rostering and Payroll Software.

I commend to you the following report that gives a snap shot of the past year's significant events in GCSS.

I thank Terri Mackay, who left GCSS this year after giving more than twenty years of service to GCSS in her role as Executive Assistant. Terri's commitment to the people we support, families, our staff and Board never waned. I'd like to especially thank Terri for the support provided to my position, as CEO.

I would like to pay tribute to the contribution made to GCSS by Jeffrey McCubbery who passed away July this year. Jeffrey had a long interest and association with Golden City Support Services and was generous with his time and energy as; mentor, trainer and coach. In the early 1990's Jeffrey provided critical support to the GCSS Board of Management to rebuild the organisation after State Government policy changes decimated many similar organisations across the State. Jeffrey's strategic involvement continued through the 1990s and 2000's; training and coaching our managers and staff teams. Jeffrey's support helped strengthen and sustain GCSS in our support of people with disabilities and their families and provided a very significant contribution to the foundation and direction that are part of who GCSS is today.

I thank the GCSS General Manager Executive, Shelley Moore, Neil Sing, Linton Ashley and Ashleigh Griffin (Acting) for their contribution this past year; it has required long hours, sometimes 7 days a week, to provide the mandated compliance

requirements, leadership and development in their respective areas. I would like to thank the members of the Board for their leadership and expertise not just in steering Golden City Support Services through another challenging year but also building for the future.

Ian McLean  
CEO





Communication.  
**Choice**  
& Control.  
**Engagement.**  
Predictability  
& Consistency.  
**Positive**  
& Respectful  
**Language.**





# 2022 Agenda

## Forty-Third Annual General Meeting: 5.30pm Monday 28 November 2022

**Venue:** Boardroom | First Floor 48 Mundy Street

1. Acknowledgement of Country – Dr Dru Marsh
2. Welcome – Dr Dru Marsh
3. Notice of Meeting – Dr Dru Marsh
4. Apologies
5. Confirm Minutes:
  - of the 42nd Annual General Meeting, dated 29 November 2021
  - of the Special General Meeting, dated 16 May 2022
6. Reports:
  - Presentation of Reports:
    - Chair and CEO Report
    - Audited Financial Report
  - All other reports are presented as written in the Annual Report
7. Reception | adoption of Reports and audited Statement of Accounts
8. Election or confirmation for the vacancies on the Board of Management
9. Election of Auditor for the year ending 30 June 2023
10. General Business (of which 7 days notice has been given)
11. Meeting Close

# 2021 Minutes

## Minutes of the Forty-Second Annual General Meeting Monday 29th November 2021

**Venue:** Boardroom | 48 Mundy Street Bendigo  
Monday 29th November 2021

**Meeting Commenced:** 5.35 pm

**Present:** Ross Baring, Christine Bigby, Stacey Bloomfield, Teresa Iacono, Alison Maclaren, Dru Marsh, Jessica Wade  
Ian McLean, Linton Ashley, Shelley Moore, Neil Sing

Minute Taker: Neil Sing

**Acknowledgement of Country:**  
Given by Dru Marsh

**Welcome:**  
Given by Dru Marsh

**Notice of Meeting:**  
Read by Dru Marsh

**Apologies:** Nil

**Minutes of the Previous Meeting:**

**Motion:** That the Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting be confirmed

**Moved by** Ross Baring      **Seconded by** Christine Bigby      Carried

**Reports:**

The following reports were tabled at this meeting as included in the 2021 Annual Report -



**President (Chair) Report** – Dru Marsh  
**Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Report** - Ian McLean  
**Finance Report** – Shelley Moore

Written stories and data are presented in the Annual Report as a snap shot of the year

**Motion:** That all reports be received as presented in the Annual Report and that the audited Statement of Accounts be received

**Moved by** Alison Maclaren      **Seconded by** Teresa Iacono      *Carried*

**Election of Committee Members:**

**8 Positions Vacant**  
**Nominees**  
Stacey Bloomfield  
Alison Maclaren  
Dru Marsh

**Election of Auditor:**

One nomination received for Auditor of Golden City Support Services Accounts for the 2021 | 2022 financial year being AFS & Associates Pty Ltd

**Motion:** That AFS & Associates Pty Ltd be appointed as the Auditor of Golden City Support Services Accounts for the 2021 | 2022 financial year

**Moved by** Jessica Wade **Seconded by** Christine Bigby      *Carried*

**General Business:**

Nil received

**Presentation of Life Governorship:**

Certificates of Appointment of Life Governor of Golden City Support Services Incorporated presented to –

Mr. Ross Baring  
Mrs. Jessica Wade

Meeting Closed: 5.48pm







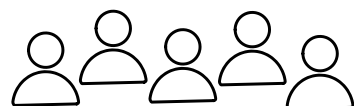


# A Yearly Snapshot



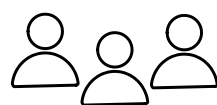
140

Support Staff



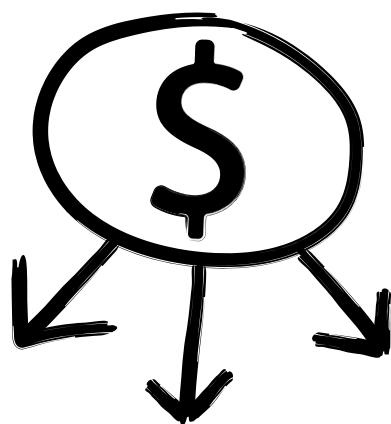
9

Practice Leaders



39

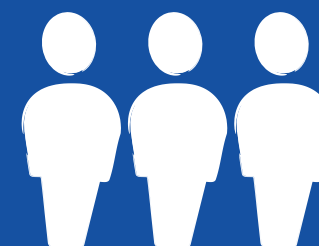
New Support Staff



We had  
\$12,655,235  
in Wages

We had  
\$12,741,359  
in Contracted  
Support Services

We had  
\$1,268,439  
in Government  
Grants



217

Direct Support  
participants



256

Financial Intermediary  
Participants

177

Support Coordination  
Participants



25

New Support  
Participants



49

New Financial  
Intermediary  
Participants



13

New Support  
Coordination  
Participants

We support

28



Supported  
Independent  
Living  
Participants



# Providing Support

## Operations

When looking back over the last year COVID certainly stands out as a major theme with a combined 61 participants and staff infected with the disease. Of those cases we supported 24 participants through their positive diagnosis by providing direct support, welfare checks and ensuring people and their carers had sufficient groceries and food. Thank you to all our staff for the incredible work during these often-demanding times.

We continued our high investment in prevention and response to COVID-19 across the organisation by sourcing adequate supply of PPE, surveillance testing for staff with rapid antigen testing, COVID response meetings as required, and supporting individual participants to access vaccinations and covid treatments through local providers and government agencies.

Statutory reporting requirements to; NDIS, DFFH, Worksafe, and the local Public Health Unit, for COVID positive cases was time consuming, seven days a week, and onerous.

With the well-publicised workforce shortage across many industries and organisations, Australia wide, GCSS have certainly not been immune to workforce shortages. Our workforce shortages led

to the temporary alteration of operational hours within a number of GCSS Respite Services. We do not underestimate the impact this has had on families and we thank them for their understanding during these difficult times.

I thank all staff, across the organisation, for an amazing contribution, looking out for each other, working collectively to provide safe, quality supports to each participant.

The other major development in the past year has been the scoping and testing of our new Client Relationship Management system (CRM) – along with new integrated rostering and payroll systems, Lumary, Skedulo and 2C9. During this scoping/testing phase, we have identified how the new system will make current processes and procedures more fluent. We look forward to the full implementation in early 2023.

## Rostering and Workforce team

Although COVID provided a constant and ever present challenge in all aspects of our work this past year, we were also able to successfully adapt our rostering and workforce systems to meet the new SCHADS Award changes from the 1st of July 2022. A big thank you to Pam Kendrick, the Workforce Planning & Rostering Team led by Caitlin Windridge, the Customer Service Team led by Maddy Niemann

and TurnCode Productions (Software developers), for all working together on this critical project.

Thank you again to our workforce planning & rostering team: Caitlin (Team Leader), Kay, Danielle, Melissa and Megan.

## Practice Leaders

We have been able to maintain and continue to improve the key elements required in developing skilled staff, to provide quality support: our recruitment process, induction, base training, staff meetings, 'on the job coaching' and Practice Leader (front line) training. Our Practice Leaders conducted 655 observations/feedback/coaching sessions 'on shift' with our support staff for the 10 months until Nov 2022; this would have been much higher except for Practice Leaders playing a key part of providing skilled backfill to shifts vacated by staff isolating due to COVID.

Our Practice Leaders continue to lead the way, side by side with their teams, throughout the year; coaching, mentoring and supporting them with whatever came their way.

Thank you to our Practice Leaders: Craig, Amanda, Taiche, Lynette, Sarp, Rosh, Jess, Andrew McGowan, Karen, Bhupinder (until April 22); our lead workers, (who have

supported and backed up their Practice Leaders and staff teams so well): Mary, Laura, Chloe, Bec and Caitlin P; and those that took on specific tasks and projects to support their Practice Leaders: Patrick, Mark, Mel, Marcia, Whitney, Elizabeth, Melissa S, Brad, Maddie.

## Mental Health Services and CHSP Ageing Support

Our mental health services and our supports to people ageing or with dementia saw many changes due to the COVID pandemic. With increased isolation during community lockdowns, some of our groups and community supports turned to contact through phone calls and personal visits to ensure the welfare and wellbeing for those supported by GCSS. Thank you to Andrew McSwain, Karen Roberts and Sally Barnes.

## Practice Team

And finally, thank you to our Practice Team, who span the disciplines of Behaviour Support, Psychology, Occupational Therapy, Social Work, Community Development and more lately Exercise Physiology. This team's expertise is directly focused on developing and maintaining skilled practice by mentoring Practice Leaders



# Providing Support

(and their teams), providing expert knowledge and guidance in both our practice models and the skills required to apply them. Four members of the team have also recently received endorsements by the NDIS Quality and Safeguard Commission to be registered Behaviour Support Practitioners, which has resulted in a number of internal and external referrals for Behaviour Support Assessments and Training.

This past year two of GCSS' Practice Coaches have completed a six-month training course by the prestigious Institute of Applied Behaviour Analysis (IABA). This advanced, competency-based training practicum is appropriate for psychologist, behaviour support practitioners, resource specialist and other qualified professionals charged with assessing individuals who exhibit severe and challenging behaviour and with designing positive behaviour support plans based on a functional analysis of behaviour.

The Practice Team have access to skilled external supervision through Matthew Spicer, Laura Hogan, Gillian Martin and Jade Kohler.

Thanks to Tara (Acting Team Leader), Alex, Claire, Brooke, John, Paige (until April 22) and Linton C (new to the team) for their skill, energy and

commitment to the best outcomes for the people choosing GCSS for their support.

Congratulations to Tara, who graduated with a Masters in Applied Behavioural Analysis with Distinction from Monash University, received the Centre for Positive Behaviour Support Award for Academic Excellence and contributions to the field of Applied Behavioural Analysis and received the Dean's Award for Academic Excellence, as the Highest Graduating Student in the course.



The Potter Family Award for Excellence in Applied Behaviour Analysis





# Finance

The Finance team have worked hard on the introduction of a new integrated customer relationship manager, rostering system and payroll system. This project is due to be completed February 2023 and will provide efficiencies for claiming and processing of financial information and will provide more timely data analytics.

The second stage of the investment in technology will continue in 2023 with new finance and budgeting software. This will compliment and expand the use of Power BI in data analysis.

The team has continued to contribute to NDIS pricing reference groups.

Shane, Elly, Rob, Michelle, Punit and Maria continue to provide GCSS a high level of skill and expertise across the financial spectrum. They all constantly look to improve and become more efficient in their work as well as build on their current knowledge base.

# Financial Intermediary / Plan Management

The GCSS Financial Intermediary/Plan Management service has continued its growth to over 250 participants.

becomes a smooth and effortless part of a participant's NDIS experience and they have shown a high level of commitment and determination to achieve this.

Over the past 12 months new plan management software was successfully introduced, the new software has more timely access to information and access for providers to upload invoices to a portal. Kate, Maria and new team member Sally have worked to ensure Plan Management





# Support Coordination

Support Coordination continues to be a vital resource that connects participants to the supports they need. This has been especially important as we emerge from lockdowns and service disruptions and support participants to reconnect to their communities.

We are continuing to develop the areas of mental health, complex supports, justice, and access to housing. Mental health and housing supports continue to be the areas that have demanded the greatest attention.

The lack of available social housing, especially for those with a psycho-social diagnosis, still continues to be a huge impediment to stability in the life of NDIS participants. The service system (market place) for people with a disability remains underdeveloped, there continues to be a lack of appropriately skilled allied health and behaviour support specialists. There is still a shortage of providers with skilled disability support workers, which means finding providers with the skills to match the requirements of participants is very challenging.

Kirstie, Rozita, Joe, Katie, Sarah, Yvonne,

Cassie and Linton thoughtfully led, engaged and supported by Tammy, continue their dedication to the achievement of a good outcomes for participants. Shane continues to provide the team with valuable financial guidance and support.





# Customer Services

Our Customer Services Team provides a vital link between those we support, their families, support coordinators and NDIS planners and our service delivery and rostering teams. This past year saw a significant change in staffing with three staff leaving and three staff joining the team. For much of the year we have continued to be severely impacted by COVID-19 and sector wide staff shortages have proved a significant challenge.

The team are now in the midst of transition to the new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System,

which is a significant undertaking for a team where customer relationship is at the core of the work.

We farewelled Amelia, Georgia and Michelle and we thank them for their service to GCSS and we welcomed Bridee, Chelsea and Jack who work alongside Norm, Maddy (Team Leader), Molly and Bec.

## Reception

Our reception team welcomed back walk up visitors in the second half of this last year and it has been good to get back to some kind of normal. Reanna leads the team which includes Tania, Makayle and new team member Kendall with back up support from Olivia. With staff working both remotely and in the office and fielding and redirecting calls for our wide range of services, the function of reception requires a high level of focus and understanding. There is also a wide range of administrative function that the team takes on.

Thanks to the team and thanks to Jayne for your short stint in the team.

Also thanks to Terri (Executive Assistant), who departed GCSS mid-year, for all the support provided to reception.

# Information and Communications and Technologies we Deploy

The ICT team have again had a very significant year in not only maintaining our ICT infrastructure, but in implementing new systems across a range of platforms. The most significant development has been preparing for transition to a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System, together with new staff rostering and time and attendance software, fully integrated into the NDIS ready CRM. New Plan Management software has also been implemented in this last year and scoping is now well underway for the procurement and implementation of new financial software and financial budgeting software.

Significant changes to the sector award required upgrading and redesign of our current award interpretation software and further development of our respite booking system, incident reporting and practice observations platforms were undertaken.

Our communications were enhanced with the rollout of a social media presence and

a staff Wellbeing Portal implemented.

System security was further upgraded with the implementation of a whitelisting application, support for data recovery further enhanced with changes to the phone systems and upgraded links between our two server locations. Our main office at Mundy Street saw upgrading to faster internet, improved wifi and the transition to laptops as primary devices.

Thanks to Adam, Alex, Catherine and David (Team Leader) for the implementation of such a wide range of new systems this past year, together with keeping the day to day “show on the road” which takes considerable effort.



# Supporting Our People and Our Culture

This past year has seen the commissioning of a staff wellbeing review undertaken by consultants FBG (lead by consultants Simon Brown-Greaves and Louisa Detez). The extensive review, which involved consultations with staff across the agency and a review of current wellbeing strategies, resulted in the production of a set of recommendations to further enhance the support GCSS provides to our staff. One of the key recommendations was to establish an employee representative, agency wide, Wellbeing Committee, led by Reanna Stanway (People and Culture). Another key initiative has been to implement a wellbeing portal, the development lead by Reanna and Catherine Doherty (Communications). A range of other initiatives, some in collaboration with Bendigo Phycology have also been developed with more to come.

Addressing sector wide workforce shortages and their impact on GCSS has exercised considerable effort this past 12 months. We have managed to maintain our workforce, but not grow the numbers of support staff we need

to expand our services. Strategies to attract staff have been wide-ranging and will continue to be a key focus in this next year.

We are currently implementing a Learning Management System (LMS) to tie together the invaluable paid training we provide to new and existing staff. Again Reanna and Catherine (with some invaluable support from Makayle) have lead the development of the LMS. We expect this to grow considerably in content in the next year.

Thanks to Reanna for a strong commitment and leadership in supporting the cultural development of GCSS.



## Our Infrastructure

For many of our 'office staff', home has been the workplace for more than two years. Now as we make a transition to working in a post COVID-19 workplace our office staff are provided with both a home office and Mundy Street workplace capability. Our offices have been redesigned to further improve COVID-19 safety including the upgrading of air filtration and the provision of portable network devices. Expansion of some teams has also seen some office redesign at Mundy Street and our Creek Street property has increasingly become a hub for CreateA and Mental health group activity. GCSS continues to provide a respite home in the Macedon Ranges and a home supporting mental health recovery in Bendigo.

Thanks to Olivia for continuing to support the maintenance of our properties and vehicle fleet.



# CreateA

After a disrupted year in 2021 CreateA has gradually returned to in-person groups. Difficult decisions have been made over that time balancing the benefits of social interaction with the risks in the potential transmission of serious illness amongst people with vulnerable health. The return of face to face sessions has been very welcome. The experience has reinforced the importance of person to person contact and interaction.

CreateA has also returned to public presentations and performances. Once that became possible there has been a rush of activity. Bendigo's 150th Easter Festival ran a full program this year. Members of CreateA supported an outdoor event, The Bells, performed by 5 Angry Men. We had begun a project with 5 Angry Men in 2020 that was interrupted by COVID-19. They recognised an opportunity to provide some experience in working on the production side of their show this year. Participants formed a stage management team that helped prepare their performance space, run technical aspects of the show and provide 'front of house' welcoming of audiences. The three participants were given training as well as being paid for the work they performed. Later in the year there was another opportunity to continue their work. Two of the team assisted with a creative industries conference, Conflux.

We are keen to continue to offer other opportunities to build skill in diverse aspects of the performing arts industry.

Venous Return is a performance project that CreateA has been developing over the last year. After receiving part funding for this project and the offer of a week long residency at Goods Shed Arts (Castlemaine State Festival) in Castlemaine it was decided to have a public showing of the work in July this year. Set design and fabric artist, Shanrah Austin and electronic musician, Jacques Soddell worked with participants to create visual and auditory aspects of the show. Film maker, Leonie Van Eyk produced video work that was included as well as documenting the project with a short film that will be used to create interest in further developing the show.

As part of our project budgets we are now including payment of participants when they perform in public. This is the case for Venous Return and also for the performance of the work, PhoneHeads, that was part of the Conflux Conference in Bendigo. This conference was a great showcase for the work of CreateA. As well as providing set up and registration desk services and performing in a conference session, CreateA presented some of the short films made by the Saturday Drama Group ('Italy in Bendigo' about a fictional pizza restaurant) and displayed work from Venous Return at

the conference networking event.

CreateA received funding from City of Greater Bendigo to offer an artist residency program with our Wednesday Performance Group. The successful applicant for the program is Heidi Barrett, a dancer and visual artist who will work with participants to explore the crossover between movement based practices and painting. This is an exciting chance to experiment and learn together.

In researching the possibilities of augmented reality and the use of smart devices last year CreateA was invited to create a work as part of the Bendigo ARtrail, an augmented reality exhibition produced by Emporium Creative Hub. A trail of locations around Bendigo's CBD provides outdoor sites where smart devices, like mobile phones, can detect and display artworks. CreateA's artwork can be found outside the door to the old fire station in View Street. It is an animated artwork made from a drawing by one of the CreateA participants, Ben Dubuc-Timson.

The Visual Arts Group that meets on a Saturday was able to put together an exhibition of work at The Capital (Bendigo Venues & Events) at the end of 2021. This is quite an achievement after so much disruption. The group

continues to attract a good number of committed participants who enjoy the social as well as creative opportunities each week. This year they are working towards another exhibition in November.

Choice Voices Choir (Bendigo) and Peace Choir (Castlemaine) have had the greatest impact from COVID-19. Singing is a very effective spreader of airborne viruses and we have been especially mindful of people with underlying health risks. Some Zoom based sessions were run which was helpful for some people but also had limitations. Online it is not possible to sing together as you would hear it in a room together. Only one voice at a time is heard (despite the trickery that can be seen on Youtube). There were some outdoor singing opportunities in early Summer but relying on good weather also has limitations. Finally in the last month both choirs have recommenced. The benefits to mental and physical health in singing together are immense and the choirs look forward to building again to the levels of activity that have previously been possible.

Again this year CreateA wants to acknowledge the important support of our partnerships (Bendigo Venues & Events, Bendigo Art Gallery, City of Greater Bendigo, Castlemaine



State Festival, Emporium Creative Hub, Regional Arts Victoria, Creative Victoria).

CreateA recognises the contribution of artists to the projects and programs that it runs. Their passion drives everyone on to achieve great things. The significant contribution of the Arts and Performer Support roles is also recognised in providing an environment where everyone can feel safe, respected and encouraged.

Thanks to the members of the CreateA Reference Group for their role in helping shape the work of CreateA.

Thanks to all CreateA participants, their families and other workers for their commitment, engagement and contribution.

# Creative Links

The return to face to face group sessions for participants in Creative Links has been very welcome this year. It has reinforced for us the value of social interaction that can only occur when we connect with each other in the real (rather than virtual or online) world.

Social isolation has always been a risk for the people we support and COVID raised that risk higher. Creative Links is an important opportunity for participants to experience interaction with each other and with the general community, beyond the limitations of their interactions solely with staff or family. The program has maintained its focus on building skill in communication, social interaction and meaningful, purposeful activity. Creativity in many forms is used as a means to focus that interaction and expression. Crafts, arts and music are a big part in the daily activities at Creative Links.

The program establishes a 'capable environment' where learning can take place. This means that attention is given to ensuring people feel safe, that their anxiety is reduced and that they can communicate their needs. One of the ways that this is practiced is in the daily relaxation and meditation activities. Their day starts with guided mindfulness meditation and ends with physical stretching and relaxation. This brings participants into a positive frame to start the day with and at the end of the day prepares people for the transition to where they will next be. Participants see these sessions as highlights in the day.

For some participants simply having the predicable schedule of attending Creative Links ensures that they find meaningful activity outside of the house or have positive interactions rather than being drawn into less positive ones in other environments that do not support their best interests. Mary Burke, as Lead Worker, brings a dedicated approach to working with the needs of each individual and ensuring that support is consistent. The workers who also support this program all bring terrific skills in engaging the people they work with.



# Venous Returns

*"There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which, **taken at the flood**, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.  
On such a full sea are we now afloat;  
And we must take the current when it serves,  
Or lose our ventures."*

*- William Shakespeare, Julius Cesar*

Venous Return (a medical term describing the circulation of blood returning to the heart) explores systems of transmitting, communicating, connecting— heart, veins, brain, nerves, lungs, skin.

We see these mirrored in the environment that we are part of- branches, trees, streams, ocean currents, wind, clouds. We observe the movement of energy through our bodies and through our environment. We are connected to the rest of the world through the experience of our body. We are connected in our common experience of the blood coursing in our veins.

Building on the idea of throwing nothing away, Venous Return makes use of ideas that accumulated over lockdowns and Zoom sessions, using items from previous shows and materials that other people have discarded. Everything returns in a cycle eventually, each time being renewed, reinvented or reclaimed.

Venous Return is a performance project where CreateA is trialling new presentation ideas that blend art installation with live performance. Goods Shed Arts (Castlemaine State Festival) offered a week long residency in July where these ideas could be tested. The result was a playful, magical and imaginative event that audiences were led through.

*"I felt like I was taken on a fantastical journey and experienced something very special."*  
- Audience member

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