

HUMAN

CONNECTIONS
IN LATROBE

A local approach for local
communities

2022 Storybook





The Human Connections Project Partners respectfully acknowledge Aboriginal people as the Original Custodians of the land we walk on today – the land of the Braiakaulung people of the Gunaikurnai nation and pass on respect to their Elders past and present, future and emerging.

Cover Image supplied by Tracie Lund, Morwell Neighbourhood House.



HUMAN CONNECTION

"We need more human connection in Latrobe".

Those were the words of a local community member in a conversation with Jane at a bus stop in 2019.

We have since undertaken research and engagement to understand more about what this term might mean. Our research found that there are various terms that can be used interchangeably and that impact our understanding of connections within the community.

We have come to define human connection as something that incorporates the connections we can have with each other, which are often described as social connections, as well as the connections and sense of belonging we can have with places, cultures, animals, technology, music and art.

Everyone has their own needs when it comes to human connection. When these needs are met there are health and social benefits that can be experienced at an individual and whole-of-community level.

FOREWORD FROM THE LATROBE HEALTH ADVOCATE

Human Connections in Latrobe is a collaborative project between agencies operating within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone. It takes a place-based approach to identify opportunities to increase social connections and community participation across Latrobe.

To deliver this work, my office has partnered since 2019 with the Latrobe Health Assembly, Latrobe City Council, Latrobe Valley Authority and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. We have worked together and independently on various initiatives with the shared aim of improving community connections, social participation and mental wellbeing outcomes.

The *Human Connections Report* released in 2021 contains the following five themes with relevant insights and advice:

- 1. The impact of human connections on overall health and wellbeing**
- 2. Human connection with place, people and other**
- 3. Events, activities and experiences**
- 4. Connecting through community groups, clubs, and volunteering**
- 5. Enablers of human connection**

The Report was accompanied by a Desktop Research Report (available at <https://www.lhadvocate.vic.gov.au/publication/human-connections-in-latrobe-research-paper/>) of existing theories of social connection and local and international initiatives to complement direct community engagement and help identify potential opportunities for activities.

Along with other communities internationally and locally, Latrobe is a community that is transitioning to a new future. It is important for us that everyone has an opportunity to benefit from and influence our future vision.

Adjusting to changes in our lives may bring opportunity and excitement, as well as anxiety about the unknown. I acknowledge the impact these changes and that of COVID-19 have on the health and wellbeing of the Latrobe community.

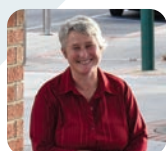
Through social connections, people have been able to cope effectively with large-scale threatening events in the past and have been able to improve their wellbeing. Connecting with others enables people to participate in our community, both socially and economically. Some people have lost significant sources of social support due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and lockdowns since COVID have led them to isolation. Some people have been able to identify new ways of connecting locally and more broadly through technology and innovation and enhanced their sense of belonging and community. It is important that the community of Latrobe is striving to build stronger social connections than ever before, and that it be provided with the support to do so.

I am pleased to highlight the activities of the partners in one single book, the *Human Connections Storybook 2022*. This is an opportunity to promote the great work occurring in Latrobe and to help people recognise the connections that exist.

This storybook is a positively framed 'celebration' style communications piece. All the partners have been invited to contribute stories that showcase the work they are doing to address any of the recommendations in the *Human Connections Report*.

I would like to thank each of the Human Connections project partners, who have demonstrated their commitment to working separately and together to achieve greater social connections for people in Latrobe. We are now well-placed in our response to what we have heard from local communities and will continue to advocate for policy and systems changes to address issues of social isolation and connection in Latrobe.

I would also like to thank the Latrobe community at large, for their continued willingness to connect with and support each other. The stories that follow really demonstrate the community's commitment to supporting each other when it comes to their health and wellbeing.



J. Anderson

Jane Anderson

Latrobe Health Advocate





HUMAN CONNECTIONS THEME OVERVIEW

THEME 1

The impact of human connections on overall health and wellbeing

INSIGHTS

Understanding the value of community connection in Latrobe

THEME 2

Human connection with place, people and other

INSIGHTS

Connection with place

Connection with people

Connection with other

THEME 3

Events, activities and experiences

INSIGHTS

Events, activities, experiences

THEME 4

Connecting through community groups, clubs and volunteering

INSIGHTS

Community groups, clubs and volunteering

THEME 5

Enablers of human connection

INSIGHTS

Connecting Latrobe to the online world

Being connected to 'what's on' in Latrobe

Transport enables connection



THEME 1

The impact of human connections on overall health and wellbeing

This theme focuses on the importance of understanding the value of human connection and the influence it has on overall health and wellbeing. “Social connections can be any meaningful contact with another”¹, however it’s important to note that the ability of individuals to initiate and maintain these connections is not equal, with some having greater assets, tools and services at their disposal to do this than others². Without these connections, and sometimes even with what others might see as abundant social connections, individuals can feel a sense of loneliness. It’s important to note that loneliness is a personal experience and “can mean different things to different people”³.

¹ NESTA, 2021. Reimagining Help, London: Nesta.

² Keyes, C.-L. M., 1998. Social Well-being. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 61(2), pp. 121-140.

³ HM Government: Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2018. A connected society A strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change, London: Crown.

1. Live Well in Latrobe City - Council's plan

Latrobe City Council

Further enhancing the health and wellbeing of all Latrobe City residents is the focus of Council's *Living Well Latrobe Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan*.

Living Well Latrobe is our community's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. It demonstrates Latrobe City Council's longstanding and ongoing commitment to collaboration with our community and health partners to ensure that Latrobe City is a healthy and safe place for everyone.

With a clear focus on our community's strengths, Living Well Latrobe was further enhanced in March 2022 and has four priority areas: safe; healthy and active; resilient and supported; and natural and built environments. Increasing social connection is incorporated across all four priority areas and council continues to explore opportunities for collective impact with the work of other Health Innovation Zone partners.

The Living Well Latrobe activities outlined align with the Human Connections themes and are key examples of how council continues its enduring commitment to ensuring rich possibilities for social connection in Latrobe City.

Latrobe City Council Mayor Kellie O'Callaghan said Living Well Latrobe represents the community's desire to live healthy lives in a safe, diverse and resilient community.

"In developing this plan, we have listened to the aspirations of our community, reviewed what the health and wellbeing data tells us and engaged with our partner agencies and stakeholders. This plan is a culmination of that engagement, as well as a continuation of the ongoing work of our community to improve our health and wellbeing.

"Our community has many strengths. We are rightfully proud of our strong and connected community and natural and built assets. This plan seeks to highlight how we can build on our strengths and the great work that is already happening to enhance health and wellbeing. We do not start this work from a blank canvas. We have existing programs, partnerships and participation that build on the work of this plan.

"We acknowledge the role of our partners in supporting our community's health and wellbeing. Community groups, service providers, community organisations and all levels of government play an important part in our community.

"What we have heard loud and clear is that our community wants and deserves programs and services that are affordable, accessible and inclusive. Affordable because cost should not be a barrier to good health and wellbeing. Accessible because we each have individual needs that impact our access to programs and services. Inclusive because we are a diverse community that is stronger together.

"The plan highlights that some groups in our diverse community face particular challenges to good health and wellbeing. As we deliver on this plan, we are committed to focusing on health equity and inclusion. We also acknowledge the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of storms, floods and fires on our community.

"By listening to each other and working together, I am confident that through this plan we will improve the health and wellbeing of our community. I encourage you to join us on this journey," Cr O'Callaghan said.

Increasing safety, active recreation opportunities, community resilience and connection with our environment were identified as the priority areas. Improving fruit and vegetable consumption, physical activity and mental health were key 'healthy and active' themes, building on Latrobe City's high participation rate in organised sport compared to Melbourne.

In terms of resilience and support there was a focus on increasing secondary and tertiary education rates, digital connectivity (with almost 20 per cent of households currently without internet), job opportunities and support for groups at risk of poor health in the face of climate change and warmer weather.

More walking and cycling paths and fostering a stronger connection between people and their natural and built environments were also identified as priorities.

We also remain committed to our community's safety priorities and we remain focused on continuing our partnership work with our safety-focused partner agencies and our community.

Council surveyed close to 1,500 community members as part of the engagement process and conducted co-design workshops to incorporate the perspectives of local children and adolescents. Council will implement a range of initiatives to address the priority areas and monitor the outcomes.



2022-25
**LIVING WELL
LATROBE**

2. Access Key opens GRAC doors to all Latrobe City Council

Everyone will be able to enjoy the Gippsland Regional Aquatic Centre (GRAC) in Traralgon, regardless of ability or language, with the introduction of an Access Key. Latrobe City Council has delivered the Access Key, which is a customised accessibility guide that provides information about accessing GRAC programs and facilities. It has been designed to assist people living with a disability and their friends, families and carers to enjoy the facility and all its inclusive features.

The Access Key includes navigational information such as how to get there, public transport and parking options, as well as access into and around GRAC, reception and services.

There is also information about how to identify staff, toilet location, features, layout, food and beverage options, programming and other offerings. The Access Key contains photos, maps, a communication board and a sensory guide, and outlines the accessibility and safety features of the whole facility.

"GRAC's Access Key showcases the facility's offerings and provides improved visitor information, benefiting not only people with a disability but the wider community - local and those visiting from afar," Latrobe City Council Mayor Kellie O'Callaghan said.

"It promotes GRAC as a warm and welcoming venue for people of all abilities and provides information to help users determine whether the venue suits their needs before they attend.

"The key also reduces anxiety as people will know exactly what to expect before visiting, which is especially beneficial for people with autism or other sensory impairments."

The Access Key is available on the Latrobe City Council, GRAC and Access Ability Australia websites. For people who are blind or live with low vision, the Access Key is available for free download in large print and formatted for use with assistive technology online at www.accessabilityaustralia.com/access-keys-2/.

GRAC also has 'Social Stories' that provide an explanation of a social situation, including professional photographs and descriptive and cooperative sentences in a PDF form.

These are available online at <https://accessabilityaustralia.com/social-stories-library-page/> so that people can access them before they visit GRAC.

The Access Key and Social Story have been developed with the help of Access Ability Australia.





3. Social prescribing as an enabler of human connection

Latrobe Health Assembly

In July 2021, the Latrobe Health Assembly launched a pilot of a social prescribing model in Churchill that was specifically co-designed to meet the needs of the Latrobe Valley community. Earlier this year, Latrobe Community Health Service signed on to expand the pilot across the Latrobe Valley, looking to start consultation in early 2023.

Social prescribing, sometimes referred to as community referral, recognises that a person's health can be determined by a range of social, economic, and environmental factors and enables clinical professionals such as general practitioners, nurses and nurse practitioners to refer a client to a community connector. Common reasons for referral included loneliness, to improve mental health, to improve physical health, and to enable human connection and connection with others in the community.

The role of a community connector is to spend a greater period of time working with the client to determine their individual needs and assist in making connections within the community through a range of non-clinical services and activities.

Since 2021, the community connector has referred clients from both the Hazelwood Health Centre and Churchill Neighbourhood Centre, finding that each client requires a different approach to the next. In some cases, clients have lacked the confidence to approach a new activity alone so the community connector has joined them – this could include an exercise class, a walking group or an activity or class at the Neighbourhood Centre.

By the community connector attending with them, the client is supported in navigating the activities in an environment that is safe and free of judgement. Clients have found that through taking a relaxed approach to the activity, they are more open to talking to new people and sharing their story of how they came to be at the class. Feedback from clients includes finding joy and purpose from the social connection made in the prescribed activities.

It is known that increasing human and social connections creates a sense of belonging and helps build meaningful relationships. Increased human connection through a social group setting, such as a gentle yoga class, has shown to create a sense of community and belonging and decrease loneliness. From the prescribed activities in the pilot, some clients are beginning to create connections within their community – building relationships over a cup of coffee, organising their own catch-ups and checking in on each other at home. Clients with common interests are connecting each other to other activities and inviting others along to give them a try, even arranging to pick them up if transport is an issue.

Some clients have reported proudly telling their friends and families about what they are doing for themselves, and to not worry about them so much anymore. By opening themselves to the idea of social prescribing, they have been able to feel empowered and positive about their lives once more. Sometimes the only enabler a person needs is to be prescribed a social activity, be supported to try it and open themselves to a new experience and the human connection will flow from there.



THEME 2

Human connection with place, people and other

This theme focuses on the connections individuals have with other people, places and non-human entities. While the importance of connection to other people and the benefits this offers is widely acknowledged, connections that individuals may have to specific places, nature, their community at large or even non-human entities such as pets can deliver important health and wellbeing benefits^{4/5}. With a diverse population in Latrobe, opportunities exist to celebrate and recognise⁶ this diversity and build important new connections within the community.

⁴ <https://lookingforwardlatrobe.com/>

⁵ Swinburne University of Technology: Swinburne Social Innovation Research Institute, 2018. Healthy Social Connections, Hawthorn: Swinburne Social Innovation Research Institute

⁶ <https://lookingforwardlatrobe.com/>

1. New lighting gives Moe's Apex Park a glow up

Latrobe City Council

Recently completed lighting upgrades will help to enhance the safety and amenity of Moe's Apex Park.

Member for Eastern Victoria, the Hon. Harriet Shing MP and Latrobe City Council Mayor Cr Kellie O'Callaghan visited Apex Park in Moe to celebrate the completion of the project.

The project was made possible by a \$60,000 Community Safety Infrastructure Grant from the Victorian Government's Community Crime Prevention Program. Council provided a further \$29,384 in funding, with in-kind support for civil works, project management and community engagement.

19 lights have been installed throughout the park's playground, picnic areas and nature play space, which features wooden animal carvings and a tree house.

Apex Park is frequently used by families and hosts large community events, including the annual Bonfire Night in November each year, attracting large numbers of visitors to the region.

"Improving safety and accessibility is a priority for Latrobe City Council, helping to enhance community spaces and increase liveability," Latrobe City Council Mayor Kellie O'Callaghan said.

"Thanks to the support of the Victorian Government, the Moe Apex Park Public Safety Lighting Project will deliver benefits to our community and visitors to the region at the park for years to come."

The upgrades will help increase confidence for community members using the space and make it more accessible heading into the end of daylight savings.

The project also provided economic benefits to the local community through employment and the engagement of local contractors and suppliers.

Since 2015, the Victorian Government has provided more than \$2.6 million in grant funding for 27 crime prevention projects in Latrobe City to support safety and security upgrades across the community.

Through its Building Safer Communities Program, the government is continuing to provide grants for Victorian councils and community organisations to deliver innovative projects to address the causes of crime and improve community safety.



2. Celebrating Main Streets of Australia Week in Latrobe City

Latrobe City Council

Latrobe City Council celebrated Main Streets of Australia Week during May, which focused on encouraging the community to support small businesses by shopping local.

A national campaign Main Streets of Australia shines a light on the significant contribution that small businesses have on the fabric of their communities.

Council collaborated with local commercial radio station TRFM's street team to bring colour and life to the main streets of the municipality's large towns - Churchill, Moe, Morwell and Traralgon, with kids' activities and roving live local performers keeping shoppers entertained.

"Main Streets of Australia Week is an important reminder to us all to support businesses in our own backyard. Even before the impacts of COVID, our local businesses have faced competition from online shopping and larger retailers," said Latrobe City Council Mayor Kellie O'Callaghan.

"What many don't realise, however, is the enormous amount main streets and town centres bring to both the community and the nation as a whole. It is for this reason we need to ensure the success and survival of these precincts across Latrobe City.

"These businesses are the lifeblood of our community, collectively providing a huge number of jobs, especially to those that rely on local or flexible work, supporting local sporting groups and schools as well as building connections and providing safe spaces," said Cr O'Callaghan.

As part of the celebrations, Council provided the community with an opportunity to share in \$2,000 worth of Latrobe City gift cards. Shoppers simply needed to make a purchase at participating businesses across Latrobe City and fill out the entry form.

The week-long celebration was coordinated by Mainstreet Australia, an organisation that works tirelessly to support our main streets and town centres, in partnership with Mainstreet SA and Town Team Movement, and with the support of Zeller as major sponsors.





3. Looking forward Latrobe

Latrobe Health Assembly

In May-June of 2021, the Latrobe Health Assembly partnered with Urban Scale Interventions to draw on their expertise in creative engagement and innovative cultural and health interventions. The aim of this project was to explore the context, challenges and opportunities around community safety and wellbeing in the Latrobe Valley, with a particular focus on public spaces and design.

Learnings from this consultation were documented in the *Looking Forward Latrobe (LFL) Report*, which outlines a series of wellbeing principles and project opportunities. Of particular relevance to Human Connections are the following principles:

- **Vibrant and connected**, which places an emphasis on helping people feel connected to their place, their community and nature; and
- **Equal and inclusive**, which places an emphasis on helping people to feel included and a part of something bigger, such as local spaces, activities and influencing decision-making.

All four of the wellbeing principles inform the work of the Latrobe Health Assembly, helping to embed wellbeing and opportunities for connection into projects across the Latrobe Valley.

Throughout 2022 three of the Looking Forward Latrobe projects have been prioritised for further development:

- **Creative Latrobe:** The Latrobe Health Assembly has now partnered with Latrobe City Council to deliver this exciting initiative throughout 2023-2024. The project aims to change community perceptions of, and relationships to, spaces across Latrobe City to support improved wellbeing, safety and local pride. It will see a series of creative interventions co-designed with community across Churchill, Moe, Morwell, Traralgon and one of the other smaller townships.
- **Connecting Up:** Scoping work is currently underway on this concept, with the aims of formalising an implementation plan and partnership to deliver the work in 2023. This trails-based initiative will aim to create new and exploratory experiences in Latrobe City to help connect the various townships, increase physical activity, bolster feelings of safety and inclusion and showcase some of the great stories and sights our towns have to offer.
- **Inclusive Latrobe:** Consultation in 2021 highlighted that many groups within the Latrobe Valley feel unsafe in or disconnected from their communities. This multi-phase project will aim to address these issues by building on existing work happening in this area and help to foster increased understanding, cultural safety and accessibility in our community. Phase 1 will commence in 2023, with the Latrobe Health Assembly working closely with relevant partners on ways to strengthen inclusion, cultural safety and accessibility within operations, engagement, and existing projects.

QUICK WINS

Inexpensive and quicker to implement solutions

- Industry Latrobe
- Creative Latrobe
- Inclusive Latrobe

MID-TERM

Solutions which would need larger investment

- Changing Perspectives
- Connecting Up
- Viewpoint Latrobe

BIG VISION

Tying everything together over a longer term plan for the valley

- Looking to the future

4. Morwell Christmas Family Fun Day – the perfect blend of fun and impact

Latrobe Valley Authority

On Sunday 11 December 2022, Team Latrobe Valley Authority donned their festive best and headed to the Morwell Recreation Reserve to participate in the Morwell Christmas Family Fun Day.

The team was keen use the opportunity to undertake engagement to inform the Gippsland and Latrobe Valley Transition Plan, as well as celebrate the many achievements of the community through supporting the Rotary BBQ and donating apples from a local orchard.

It felt important to strike a balance with an approach that was inclusive, fun and light-hearted, while at the same time making sure that people could have a say on what matters most to them.

Through playing a key role in facilitating children's activities - including a football clinic, face painting, storytelling and making Very Hungry Caterpillar headbands – the team used their creative energy to spread some Christmas cheer and well as learn about what matters most to families as the region undergoes transition.

These conversations, along with an engagement activity that involved participants voting on a leaderboard of priorities showed that the things that matter most to people are meaningful jobs and employment, affordable housing, schools and education, access to quality health and community services (including aged care and mental health services) and thriving small businesses.

Feedback from many participants was that they felt welcome to genuinely have a say, and that they appreciated the creative way in which engagement was undertaken.

And with partners and family members of LVA staff also volunteering their time and energy to support activities, the day showcased how human connection can be used to create positive community impact.





THEME 3

Events, activities and experiences

This theme focuses on how events, activities and other experiences within Latrobe can be used to build and foster social connection. Each year, Latrobe City Council issues more than 500 community event permits⁷ and prior to COVID-19, events in Latrobe attracted more than 870,000 visitors⁸. These events provide an important opportunity to build and foster social connection within Latrobe.

⁷ Data provided by Latrobe City Council

⁸ Data provided by Latrobe City Council

1. Latrobe City's eventful start to 2022

Latrobe City Council

Latrobe City started the year in style with a baker's dozen of big events bringing in significant visitation and tourism dollars throughout the municipality.

A suite of major infrastructure upgrades was showcased across an eclectic mix of sporting and community events, highlighting the benefits of recent multimillion-dollar investments from all levels of government.

The upgraded Gippsland Regional Indoor Sports Stadium (GRISS) was in the spotlight with a near capacity 2,634 crowd on hand for the in-season NBL showdown between the South East Melbourne Phoenix and Cairns Taipans.

In February a further 500 people packed the GRISS to watch the Melbourne Boomers play the Perth Lynx in an entertaining WNBL fixture, while 1,500 attended the Melbourne Vixens versus Adelaide Thunderbirds Super Netball double feature.

The sporting smorgasbord also included a special six-term AFL pre-season clash between Collingwood and Hawthorn in front of 4,500 fans at the new and improved Morwell Recreation Reserve.

January's ATP Challenger, ITF Women's and ITF Junior tennis events at the recently upgraded Traralgon Tennis Centre brought in more than \$3 million in estimated economic impact, including substantial bed nights and local spending from athletes and their entourages.

"The quality and quantity of major events staged across Latrobe City in such a short span reflects our growth as a regional sporting and cultural hub of national significance," said Latrobe City Council Mayor Kellie O'Callaghan.

"We continue to gain momentum in this space, activating our world class infrastructure with increasing regularity and attracting a host of new events to our flourishing regional city."

Some new events also emerged on the Latrobe City calendar, including the debut of the AGL Loy Yang Gippsland Cup soccer tournament, featuring the likes of Melbourne Victory and Eastern Lions SC, as well as a Yinnar Food Truck Festival.

Annual Australia Day breakfasts and citizenship ceremonies were again a highlight across the region, as was the recurring Energy Australia Classic and Latrobe City Classic Pairs lawn bowls competitions, which drew a combined 1,400 people to Yallourn and Moe.

The events bonanza played as a precursor for upcoming major events, including Latrobe City's pending participation as a Commonwealth Games host hub.



2. Healthy food keeps benefitting young people's mood

Latrobe City Council

The next stage of a health promotion campaign to benefit Latrobe City's young people has been unveiled.

A project by Latrobe City Youth Council encourages healthy eating to benefit one's physical and mental health.

The Youth Council launched the Fab Food, Marvellous Mood campaign in March to encourage young people to eat a diet rich in whole foods (fruits, vegetables and whole grains) and to eat less sugar, snack foods, take-away foods, high energy foods and highly processed foods, to feel better mentally and physically.

The first stage entailed colourful bus wrap-ups and the second stage has been launched, with new characters appearing in advertisements on Latrobe Valley buses and to also feature on Latrobe City Council's Facebook page.

The characters were created by Luka Wild from Enable Design Studio. The public will be able to see the campaign promoted on t-shirts worn by staff at Council's early learning centres, preschools, supported playgroups and libraries.

The new cartoon characters include fruit, vegetables and a water bottle, and are designed to not only engage but draw attention to the advantages of consuming a healthy diet.

It is well known if we learn lessons about healthy eating at a young age, we are more likely to continue enjoying such a diet into the future, reducing our risk of diet-related medical problems.

Latrobe City Youth Council Mayor Natasha Murcott said, "I am looking forward to the changes that this project makes to the community. I believe it is so important to educate young people about the benefits of healthy eating so they can grow to live happier and healthier lives."

Research shows that healthy diets have been linked to reduced risk of experiencing depression and that unhealthy diets, such as those high in processed foods, are associated with increased depression and anxiety.

In Latrobe City, 17% of people experience high or very high psychological distress, significantly higher than the Gippsland (14.3%) and Victorian state averages (12.6%). More than half of people in Latrobe City do not meet the guidelines for the consumption of fruit and vegetables. The first stage of the Fab Food, Marvellous Mood campaign included posters, magnets and stickers in the community, social media posts on Council's Facebook page and t-shirts for events.

Council received funding from the Latrobe Health Assembly, through Food For All Latrobe Valley, to deliver the campaign which aligns with the *Living Well Latrobe Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan*. Council also contributed funding and in-kind support.

The campaign came about after Food For All Latrobe Valley facilitated community consultation workshops discussing how food security solutions could be implemented locally.

During these workshops, community members raised the issue of mental health as a barrier to people consuming a healthy diet and also a potential consequence of unhealthy diets over time.



3. The Morwell Neighbourhood House People's Kitchen

Latrobe Health Assembly

The Morwell Neighbourhood House – People's Kitchen has been operating since 2019, providing the local community with access to nutritional frozen home-cooked meals along with access to the House's Food Bank. The work of the Morwell Neighbourhood House – People's Kitchen has ensured that hundreds of local, vulnerable households get to enjoy hot meals when support is needed.

In early 2021, the Latrobe Health Assembly was approached by the Morwell Neighbourhood House to provide financial support to assist in the expansion of the People's Kitchen services. The Latrobe Health Assembly appointed Dr Helen Smith to undertake background research in line with the Latrobe Health Assembly's Triple Diamond operating model, and work with the Morwell Neighbourhood House Coordinator and staff, along with Latrobe Health Assembly members to explore opportunities to leverage the Food Bank and People's Kitchen.

The outcome of this Triple Diamond operating model process was the development of a whole-of-person food security, health and wellbeing program. To achieve this, five solutions were developed:

- **Solution 1:** Involving relevant community agencies in People's Kitchen, Food Bank and community garden activities.
- **Solution 2:** Reaching out to communities in the Latrobe Valley who are marginalised in relation to access to resources and services.
- **Solution 3:** Framing the Food Bank and People's Kitchen as a key point of access for clients and volunteers to government, health and community services.
- **Solution 4:** Offering access for People's Kitchen participants to formal training, skills recognition, and vocational qualifications.
- **Solution 5:** Investigating ways to engage secondary schools in addressing relevant aspects of food security and assess the feasibility for senior secondary students to participate in relevant aspects of the People's Kitchen concept.

Implementation of these solutions in the first year of the project will extend the range and level of community involvement in the People's Kitchen and the Food Bank, and through this involvement enable access to government, health and community services at the Morwell Neighbourhood House.

Since the commencement of this partnership between the Latrobe Health Assembly and Morwell Neighbourhood House, the People's Kitchen cooking program has transitioned from a volunteer-based model into a corporate team-building program where local businesses spend a day cooking high volumes of nutritional meals for distribution with availability for the program currently being booked out until early May 2023.

The Latrobe Health Assembly and Morwell Neighbourhood House are currently working towards to implementing all five solutions into 2023.







A large crowd of people is gathered at an outdoor event, possibly a festival or fair. In the foreground, a woman with curly grey hair is clapping her hands. She is wearing a black t-shirt with a rainbow-colored 'May' logo. To her left, another woman with short grey hair is also clapping. In the background, there are various tents, including a prominent orange one, and a large crowd of people. The scene is bright and festive.

THEME 4

Connecting through community groups, clubs and volunteering

With 2.3 million (or 42.1% of) Victorians aged over 15 years involved in some form of volunteering⁹, this theme explores the health benefits this offers. In a recent Victorian Government study, social connection was listed as the third highest motivator for volunteering, with 35% of volunteers reporting that they wanted to meet new people, be involved and develop friends and social networks. The report also found that actively encouraging personal connections and relationship building is both a way for organisations to engage volunteers and also the natural outcome of people coming together with others for the 'common good'¹⁰. In addition to volunteering, the theme also explores the connections offered by being a member of a community group and/or club, such as a sporting club.

⁹ State of Volunteering in Victoria 2020

¹⁰ State of Volunteering in Victoria 2020

1. New thrills at Haunted Hills

Latrobe City Council

The Haunted Hills are home to a new breed of thrills following the official opening of a new mountain bike park on Saturday 18 December 2021.

Riders from near and far can enjoy 12 kilometres of single-track trails now the \$1 million Federal Government funded stage one of the Haunted Hills Bike Park has launched for public use.

The grand opening was the culmination of a decade's hard work by the Gippsland Mountain Bike Club, who has laid the groundwork to develop the Latrobe City Council owned former depot site between Morwell and Newborough. Latrobe City Council Mayor Kellie O'Callaghan applauded the grassroots efforts of the club to transform the underutilised land into a recreation hotspot.

"Gippsland Mountain Bike Club and in particular Nick King have done an outstanding job to create a versatile community asset which will be enjoyed by locals and visitors for generations to come," Cr O'Callaghan said.

"Council is proud to have worked alongside the club to help realise their vision and will continue to support the expansion of trails and facilities at the site.

"The trails currently available cater to all skill levels so there are opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy the park.

"There is also scope to attract major events to the site with interest already mounting from several parties."

The Haunted Hills park is one of seven sites set to form a Gippsland Mountain Bike Hub (G7), envisaged to become a nationally significant trail destination featuring over 250km of tracks.

Parks at Maryvale Pines, Glengarry's Somewhere Good, Blores Hill, Avon-Mt Hedrick, Erica and Mt Baw Baw are earmarked for inclusion in the G7, encouraging tourism and visitation across Central Gippsland.

Haunted Hills has already attracted funding for stage two development – including 15 km of new trails – through the Victorian Government's \$1 million Regional Tourism Investment Fund.

The Victorian Government will partner with Gippsland MTB, Latrobe City Council, EnergyAustralia, Destination Gippsland, Trail scapes, and locally based HCM Constructions to deliver this phase of works.





2. Men's Shed Field Officer

Latrobe Health Assembly

The Men's Shed Field Officer project was presented to the Latrobe Health Assembly in 2018 after being directed from the Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA).

Stage one of the Men's Shed Field Officer project aimed to engage directly with Men's Sheds within the region to provide each shed with resources and training to empower the members to provide suitable support to take in new members whose mental and physical wellbeing could benefit from the type of opportunities Men's Sheds offer.

In September 2021, the Latrobe Health Assembly and Victorian Men's Sheds Association (VMSA) launched the Men's Shed Field Officer project with an initial aim to work with local men, Men's Sheds and other men's groups across Latrobe City to achieve healthier outcomes, both mental and physical.

The Men's Shed Field Officer worked directly with the region's Men's Sheds to identify opportunities within their communities and in doing so, produced a series of initiatives tailored to individual Men's Sheds needs.

The identified priorities that were shared between all Men's Sheds are:

1. Connecting community groups;
2. Increasing shed visibility;
3. Building better pathways;
4. Improving digital literacy; and
5. Encouraging healthier communities.

In the first year of the Men's Shed Field Officer program, a series of initiatives were carried out to promote Men's Sheds, the benefits they offer and highlighting the importance of men's health.

Highlights of the initiatives include:

- Digital Literacy training provided by Maturity Matters;
- The Latrobe Valley Moonlight Market and Winter Festival (aimed at promoting local health support services) which enjoyed crowds in excess of 4,000 people; and
- Building Better Pathways which aimed to provide Men's Sheds with the skills to direct members to the most appropriate services in relation to health/AOD/homelessness matters.

The Men's Shed Field Officer project has been approved to rollout a stage two of the program in 2023 with early priority areas including stronger outreach into CALD communities and widespread marketing initiatives around the mental health benefits of engagement in Men's Sheds.

3. Spartan Kids

Latrobe Valley Authority

The Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA) contributed \$3,500 through the Latrobe Valley Sports and Community Initiative (LVSCI) fund to the two-day Spartan Kids Race held at Drouin's Civic Park. The event was a great fit for the LVSCI funding profile, with strong engagement with the community through participating and volunteerism, supporting all involved to be active and healthy, activating a newly upgraded public space, and drawing economic benefit to the community.

The Spartan Kids race is 1-2kms of pure muddy joy, featuring miniature versions of the adult course while adding a couple of extra kid friendly obstacles - like the massive inflatable slide! Kids enter two different categories - the Spartan Juniors for 3-8-year-olds, or the Big Kids category for those aged 9-13. There is also an option to create a kid's team. Adults can choose to follow along the course and assist their children.

Tickets for the event sold out quickly, with 1,800 children and their families attending over the two days. The event was made possible by a partnership between the LVA, Baw Baw Shire Council and Spartan Australia, attracting families from across Gippsland and the state to tackle the challenging and muddy obstacle course.

The Spartan Kids Race provided a great opportunity for children to get outdoors, be active and spend time with their peers. With the objective of the race being self-achievement rather than group competitiveness, it built self-confidence, social connection and a sense of fun in a non-competitive environment.

Children approached each obstacle with curiosity, happiness and excitement, making the event a joy to observe. Volunteers also enjoyed supervising the obstacles, handing out water to the runners, helping children, and awarding the well-deserved medals and t-shirts at the end.

The event was a safe and enjoyable experience for the participants, their families, the volunteers, and the spectators. Along with the many associated tourism and economic benefits, the health and wellbeing benefits for the participants and onlookers was a key focus and was the obvious winner. The activities undertaken by the participants and volunteers contributed to their physical and mental health and wellbeing and provided a social interaction that had sorely been missed throughout COVID-19 lockdowns.



A photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a green crewneck sweater, speaking into a professional microphone on a stand. He is smiling and looking towards the left. In the background, several children are visible, some looking towards the speaker. The setting appears to be an indoor community space or school hall.

THEME 5

Enablers of human connection

This theme focuses on the enablers of human connection including access to the internet knowledge and awareness of opportunities to participate in local events and activities and access to appropriate transport. The gaps between digitally included and excluded Australians are substantial and widening for some groups¹¹ and building digital confidence to safely and securely use the internet is critical for enhancing digital inclusion¹². According to the last census, 8,674 households in Latrobe do not have internet access¹³. In addition, areas that depend solely on cars for access can isolate people without them – particularly the young and old leading to social isolation, lack of community interaction and overall poorer health¹⁴. There are however opportunities for those without cars to build social connection. Walking increases opportunities for face-to-face social contact and helps people to map their neighbourhood in social terms. Trust, sympathy, respect, understanding, loyalty and co-operation - qualities core to social connection - come more easily through direct contact¹⁵ that activities like walking provide.

¹¹ Measuring Australia's Digital Divide – The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2020

¹² Measuring Australia's Digital Divide – The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2020

¹³ https://www.latrobe.vic.gov.au/City/The_Region/Population_and_Economic_Profile

¹⁴ Barrett and Stanley ,2008, Moving People: Solutions for a Growing Australia

¹⁵ https://www.victoriawalks.org.au/social_benefits/

1. Hello. Campaign

Latrobe Health Assembly

The Latrobe Health Assembly's Hello. Campaign is a Latrobe Valley-based social inclusion initiative, which aims to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of social connection to good health and wellbeing.

The Hello. Campaign launched in 2019 as a joint initiative with Lifeline Gippsland in a bid to encourage people across the Latrobe Valley to say 'hello' to one another in the interests of fostering a healthy, caring and connected community.

Hello. Day was developed as a way of focusing the campaign's core messaging and efforts, as well as increasing community ownership, with the overall goal of increasing the sustainability of the campaign. There was also a conscious effort to step back from a mental health focus and more towards kindness and general wellbeing.

The concept was developed in consultation with the Hello. Campaign reference group and delivered by the Latrobe Health Assembly team. The first annual Hello. Day took place in 2021 on May 22nd — a date chosen to align with the original campaign launch, but with an emphasis on the message that 'any day can be a Hello. Day'.

Hello. Day was designed as an annual celebration and promotion of kindness and social connection in the Latrobe Valley. Its aim is to activate, empower and encourage members of the community to take simple steps to say 'hello' to one another in the interests of wellbeing.

Hello. Day has been celebrated yearly since its inception and in 2022, the Latrobe Health Assembly set about to ensure that Hello. continues beyond May 22nd. From May to November, the Latrobe Health Assembly rolled out a series of monthly events, each with a shared focus on promoting social connections. These included a Men's Shed Winter Festival, a pen pal program between local primary schools and aged-care facilities, social connections with pets, and engaging disengaged youth with boardgames.

Currently the Latrobe Health Assembly is in discussions with Western District Health Service (Hamilton, Victoria) about expanding Hello. beyond the Latrobe Valley.





2. Supporting human connections

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) works to create more inclusive communities; communities where people feel safe and can take part equally. Collaboration and connection with the people we serve and bringing together services and initiatives to support people are essential in being able to make a difference.

Locally, the Inner Gippsland Area's Community Partnerships Team of DFFH has been one of a few key partners invited in to inform the Latrobe Health Advocate's work around the importance of 'human connections'. The Community Partnerships Team is about encouraging community participation through supporting community-led programs and activities that encourage people to engage and become involved in their communities.

The Community Partnerships Team works to promote connected and strong communities through improving access and equity. It works in partnership with communities and stakeholders to strengthen capacity and support communities to achieve their goals.

This happens in a number of ways:

- Strengthening networks across the area and helping partners join up their efforts to create a bigger impact.
- Supporting development and building capacity across local community groups to help them build a more financially sustainable model for future support delivery.
- Listening to the voices of community members and the local service sector to ensure that local needs and aspirations are represented widely.



- Helping community organisations identify their strengths, value their skills and knowledge and promote their offerings to increase engagement.
- Supporting community organisations to consider their succession planning and flexibility in delivery so they can build a sustainable model which meets future and anticipated community needs.
- Responding to the changing needs within the community to readily diversify offerings available.
- Sharing community knowledge to build more networks and opportunities for collaboration.

There are many different creative and innovative examples of how this translates to our communities. Some examples include, but are not limited to; grant readiness support, facilitated programs delivered in settings such as Men's Sheds, collaborative efforts to raise profiles of available points of connection through community events and more consolidated and focused program efforts in particular places of need.

The Latrobe Valley is uniquely designated a 'Health Innovation Zone' which enables us a more creative and innovative partnership with our communities; people can have a voice and be a part of the planning, delivery and implementation of the things they need to live well into the future.

3. Inclusive and safe access to transport as a determinant of health

Latrobe Health Advocate

The Latrobe Health Advocate Jane Anderson and Victorian Chief Accessibility Advocate, Tricia Malowney, jointly hosted a roundtable conference on inclusive and safe access to transport as a determinant of health at the Gippsland Performing Arts Centre in Traralgon in October 2022.

Attendees represented government departments and agencies, major health services, public and private transport organisations, and local community organisations.

The conference created an opportunity for all relevant stakeholders to come together to reach a shared understanding of the known issues and work that had already occurred to improve access to public transport in the Latrobe Valley.

The Advocate noted in her presentation that many people experienced barriers in accessing transport including people with low levels of literacy, people living with disabilities, younger people, parents with prams, people over 60, people who are culturally and linguistically diverse, people who experience mental illness including anxiety and loneliness, people who experience financial stress, people who may not have local knowledge and people who live in regional or remote locations.

The barriers people face when trying to access transport are not unknown and will differ for everyone depending on the context and circumstance. There are examples of past community consultation, government and service system planning and program implementation to learn from and build on.

The conference achieved the aims of :

- Creating an opportunity for all relevant stakeholders to come together to reach a shared understanding of the known issues and work that has occurred/is occurring to improve access to public transport in the Latrobe Valley.
- Understanding what has enabled or prevented progress from occurring, identifying what is getting in the way and what works when it comes to implementation.
- Determining a way forward to progress past and current consultation into further action which may take the form of a whole-of-Latrobe transport strategy that is backed up by a funding proposal, implementation plan or similar.

At the conference, one of the most important topics discussed was raising awareness of ways for people to voice their feedback and complaints.



Event attendees identified the following aspirations to enable inclusive and accessible transport:

1. Translate this conversation into action, strong interest in a place-based project.
2. Find a good way to mobilise the “sleeping fleet” of community health and other service buses.
3. Easier for the community to access transport in a safe and inclusive way.
4. Ensure transport is culturally safe as well as physically safe.
5. Tangible and town-specific projects that address the local need, local solutions.
6. A Latrobe Valley where people can walk, ride and take public transport as a second option.
7. Accessibility plan for Latrobe.
8. Holistic planning, regular reviews, and the ability for ongoing community feedback.
9. Changes within the system to better support people to complain.
10. Regional Network Development Plan aiming for 40 min off-peak trains and 20 min peak trains.

The Advocate is excited about the level of interest and commitment to exploring a place-based project with a focus on the use of community transport options.



How to connect and find out more

To find out more information, get in touch with any of the Human Connections project partners at the details below.



Families,
Fairness
and Housing

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is responsible for child protection, prevention of family violence, housing, disability, multicultural affairs, LGBTIQ+ equality, veterans, and the offices for Women and Youth.

Ph: 1800 650 813

A: 9–11 Hazelwood Road, Morwell VIC 3840



Latrobe City Council has a central role in protecting, improving and promoting the conditions that prevent disease and which support and encourage healthier lives.

Ph: 1300 367 700

A: 141 Commercial Road, Morwell VIC 3840



The Latrobe Valley Authority was established in November 2016 to support the region through sustainable economic transition.

Ph: 1800 136 762

A: 131 Princes Drive, Morwell VIC 3840



The Latrobe Health Assembly is a community-led organisation that seeks to positively shape and facilitate new ways of working to improve health and wellness in Latrobe. This is achieved by facilitating and enabling collaboration among the local communities, local organisations and state-wide agencies and government.

Ph: (03) 5173 8400

A: 256 Commercial Road, Morwell VIC 3840



The Latrobe Health Advocate is appointed by the Minister for Health and provides independent advice to the Victorian Government on behalf of Latrobe Valley communities on system and policy issues affecting their health and wellbeing.

Ph: 1800 319 255

A: 2 Tarwin Street, Morwell VIC 3840





