



Mountain District

Women's Co-op Ltd.

trading as

Mountain District

LEARNING CENTRE



50th ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Contents

Chairperson’s Report	3
CEO’s Report	3
Board of Directors Committee Reports	5
Marketing & Growth.....	5
Finance and Facilities Report.....	6
Policy and Compliance.....	7
Asset Management.....	8
Members/Volunteers & Fundraising.....	8
Registered Training Organisation (RTO)	9
The Cottage Program.....	10
YES Project	12
ACFE Learn Local Pre-Accredited Training.....	13
Reconnect	14
Community Services.....	15
Home and Community Care (HACC) and Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP)	16
Social Support Groups	16
Community Hi-Rise Garden.....	24
Volunteer Garden Program	24
Ferntree Gully News Report	25
Partnerships and Affiliations.....	26
Acknowledgement of Funding Bodies	26
Annual Financial Report	

Chairperson's Report

It gives me great pleasure in writing up this report, as in some cases it has been a difficult year with Mountain District Community College relocating to Boronia, but with our wonderful CEO and all the staff being so positive in looking at a good outcome we have surged ahead.

Mountain District Learning Centre received advice that we were finalists in the Victorian Training Awards category of Community Training Provider of the Year.

Alison Percy and her Cottage team are to be acknowledged and congratulated on the power of work they do for the students who participate in this program.

Our partnership with the libraries in offering a range of literacy development programs has been very successfully run by Barbara Buxton and is so popular with the public the Centre has had to increase classes to accommodate everyone.

Our Cottage Students participated in a new community garden project with Foothills Community Care and FTG Uniting Church which was funded through the Empowering Communities Grant. The Uniting Church, garden is coming along in leaps and bounds.

The Centre was fortunate to receive funding for a Men's Shed, planning is already underway to update the shed behind the Centre and we are looking forward to the space being utilised in the near future.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff at MDLC who go over and above their duties for our students and to the running of a very successful Learning Centre. Janet Claringbold, our CEO is to be commended for the way she runs the Centre with compassion and professionalism. I would also like to thank the Board for their diligence on the Governance for the Centre.

Robyn Burke

Chairperson, Board of Directors.

CEO's Report

Some things change and some things stay the same! 2023 was no different from many others, here at MDLC.

We have had our usual challenges and frustrations, but so many things to be grateful for and there are so many rewarding aspects of being involved in our wonderful organisation.

MDLC has many strengths. Many are deeply rooted in our history, through our values and our ambition to be an organisation that strives for social justice. It is this aspect of our philosophy that is common in many Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres.

Neighbourhood houses use a community development model which involves identifying areas of inequity and responding by seeking to address them. MDLC has been addressing inequity in education for nearly 50 years by creating opportunities for those whose needs are not aligned to the mainstream education system.

MDLC strives to improve the circumstances of people who benefit from opportunities to connect with others so they can build resilience by making friends, sharing interests, learning new skills and being involved.

Our ambition to support people to improve their literacy skills continues through our outreach program, where we are connecting with people in libraries, op shops and other community facilities. We value our partnership with Your Library (formerly known as Eastern Regional Libraries) with the introduction of the Leap into Literacy volunteer tutor program, assisting people who need extra support or alternative support to classroom-based learning. This partnership helps to reach more people who are looking to build their literacy and improve their lives.

Throughout the year we have seen numbers grow in our social support programs as people get back into life after the interruption of COVID 19. It is good to see the normal rhythms of life return. However, many people are still struggling to pick up the threads of their pre-COVID life and are not returning to regular activities. This is showing up in reports of increased loneliness and ongoing isolation. We are utilising our outreach model to engage with more people and connect them to activities and hope to do more of this work into the future.

An absolute highlight of the year was being a Finalist in the Community Based Provider Category at the 2023 Victorian Training Awards held in August. It is a remarkable achievement, and I am very proud of Alison Percy and the Cottage Team for the work they do that was recognised through this award.

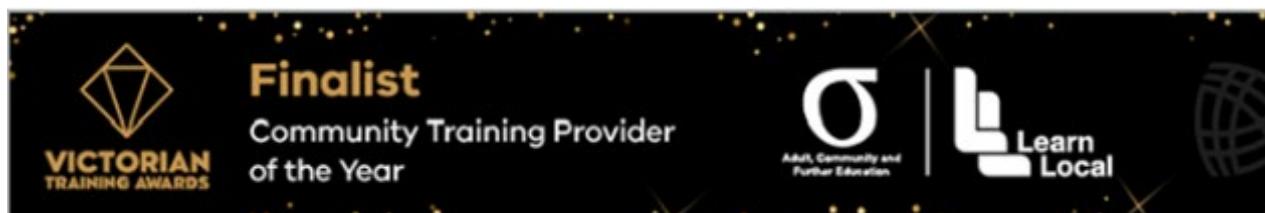
At the end of 2023, Mountain District Community College made the decision to re-locate to a new site in Boronia and take a path independent of MDLC. While this was not the direction we saw for the school, we wish them well in their ambition to provide alternative education to disengaged young people.

With that outcome MDLC has decided to register a new school, under a different governance structure, in order to provide a continuing education pathway to the young people in The Cottage Program. We hope we will have the new school operating in 2025.

Finally, I would like to thank all the people who contribute to MDLC including our dedicated Chair, Robyn Burke our loyal and supportive Board Members, the staff team and our volunteers. I thank you for your passion and commitment over 2023.

Janet Claringbold

CEO



Board of Directors Committee Reports

Marketing & Growth

The Marketing & Growth Committee began 2023 by preparing a list of philanthropic organisations that may assist Mountain District Learning Centre. The list also included a schedule for when submissions needed to be lodged, and over the year some organisations were deleted and others added.

As such, MDLC is extremely grateful to the following for their ongoing support:

- | | |
|---|----------|
| • UEthical Fund | \$1,000 |
| • Knox City Council – Empowering Communities Knox | \$46,500 |
| • Knox City Council – Grant for Resilience Project | \$10,000 |
| • Knox Community Development Fund | \$10,000 |
| • Knox City Council – Ferntree Gully News | \$3,500 |
| • Jack Brokhoff Foundation
Continuing Education for People with High Anxiety | \$49,250 |
| • Victorian Government – to establish a Men’s Shed | \$37,377 |
| • ACFE – Family Learning Partnership Grant | \$35,000 |

Ross Corben had an excellent article published in the April edition of the Ferntree Gully News titled “Did You Spot the Solar Panels at MDLC?”. In the same edition there was an article addressing comfort and health in an energy efficient home.

In October a feature article was published in the Star/Mail, FTG News, the Boronia Basin News and the MDLC Newsletter. The article featured a photograph of Janet and Robyn and was another opportunity to highlight our wonderful organisation.

MDLC’s suite of promotional material now includes a postcard with a QR Code to link the interested person to the MDLC website.

MDLC were also proud of being nominated as a finalist in the Victorian Training Awards as a Community Training Provider of the Year 2023. The Board is in no doubt that this award is due to the hard work and dedication of CEO Janet and her loyal staff. Sadly, MDLC did not win this category, but were thrilled to have been nominated.

In November a very successful Artisan Market was held and it was all hands on deck. The success of the day was down to many long hours of planning and hard work behind the scenes by the staff and volunteers.

The Marketing & Growth Committee is Robyn Burke, Janet Claringbold, Ross Corben, John Gerrard and Pat Rivett.

John Gerrard
Convenor

Finance and Facilities Report

Centre Risk Profile

Although we can, again, only report a small surplus our Financial Status is still sound with the result for 2023 being a surplus of \$4,335.96. With the departure of MDCC and the inevitable loss of that income which contributed to our overheads, it has been necessary to put some savings measures in place to help with our cashflow. We are taking steps to recoup some of the losses caused by MDCC's premature departure and are currently awaiting the outcome of the surrender of the lease negotiations.

Donations:

As in previous years, we have received financial donations from some wonderful members of our community.

All donations go towards the running of educational programs in our centre. In 2023 we would like to thank:

- Rotary Club of Ferntree Gully
- P Rivett
- Ferntree Gully Uniting Church
- And one very kind anonymous donor

We would also like to thank The Corben Family for their generous donation towards our 50th Anniversary commemorative book that is in progress.

Grants:

- Knox City Council – Empowering Communities Grant (in conjunction with Dept of Justice & Community Safety)
- Knox City Council – Teen Mental Health & Wellbeing Grant
- Knox City Council – Minor Grants Program– Carers Week & Artisan Market
- Bendigo Bank - FTG News Volunteers Grant
- Bendigo Bank – Artisan Market Donation
- Maroondah Council Community Development Grant – Youth Empowerment
- North Eastern Public Health Unit – Community Housing Food Sessions Grant
- Community Housing Ltd – Impact Grant
- Good Things Foundation – Be Connected Grant

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance from the above Councils and businesses, along with our ongoing Commonwealth and State Government operational funding.

Fundraising:

The Fundraising team worked hard during 2023. In addition to organising Lunches, Mothers and Fathers' Day raffles, and the Artisan Market (and various other things), they also spent considerable time making plans for the 2024 50th Anniversary of the Co-op.

We owe our grateful thanks to all our fundraisers, including (but not limited to), the Crafty Ladies, Mountain Treasures and the Sit n Sew group. These people make an important contribution to our organisation.

Venue and Facilities:

MDCC's re-location has opened up the possibility of number of classrooms for us and MDLC's Board of Directors has therefore made the decision to repeat the process of establishing a school. This time it will be a little different in that the new school will be a subsidiary entity for MDLC's school operations. This means that, while being a separate entity on a day-to-day basis, it will also come under the umbrella of the MDLC Board as far as governance goes.

12 Victoria Street:

The house was recently rewired and will remain a residence for the foreseeable future. However, the property was originally purchased with the intention of redeveloping it to encompass the school. Those plans are still being considered and will be implemented eventually.

Enid Hughes

Treasurer

Policy and Compliance

The Policy and Compliance Committee continue to work hard reviewing essential documents for MDLC.

Each year, the Committee review Strategic and Risk Management Plans and submit them for the approval of the full Board of Directors.

Priority policies for the year included Anaphylaxis, which requires an annual review and the full suite of Child Safety and Wellbeing policies and procedures in light of the introduction of new Standards for Child Safety issued by the Victorian Government.

All Board members have participated in Child Safety training and will be undertaking cultural awareness training in the coming year.

MDLC's registration as a RTO (Registered Training Organisation) is due for renewal every five years, with re-registration due in May 2024. The Victorian Registrations and Qualification Authority (VRQA) undertook an audit in November. MDLC was assessed as compliant in all areas and approved for re-registration until May 2029.

I would like to thank the Policy and Compliance team of Robyn Burke, John Gerrard, Pat Rivett and Ross Corben for their comprehensive work in 2023.

Sue Roberts

Convenor

Asset Management

I am pleased to report to members that, as a result of on-going diligent scrutiny, the buildings and associated equipment of the Mountain District Learning Centre have been maintained throughout the year in excellent condition. This has enabled the Centre to provide its various services safely, efficiently and in an attractive learning environment.

This year, with regard to our premises, the Board was alerted to the need to rewire our property at 12 Victoria Street to ensure it met the legal safety requirements of the rental agreement currently in place and this action has been satisfactorily completed. Security arrangements at our Studio building were enhanced with the installation of an additional door which facilitates a lock-down of the building should the need ever arise. In recent months, attention has been given to renovating and repainting classrooms rendering them more attractive to our students. Some of this activity was the focus of a working bee but the bulk of the project was undertaken by Ray Hollis to whom the Board is most grateful. Working bees were held regularly throughout the year on the first Saturday morning of each term holiday and by this means, a great deal of the routine maintenance periodically demanded by our suite of buildings was carried out. On those many occasions when maintenance issues cannot be deferred until a working bee is scheduled, we are fortunate to have available the services of Ron Bast, our “handyman”, to whom the Board is also grateful.

Visitors to the Centre will have noticed that our property is now a participant in the City of Knox “Gardens For Wildlife” scheme. This comes as a result of a submission prepared by our Garden Program Co-ordinator, Luise Topma, and follows a rigorous selection process by Council staff taking into account such issues as biodiversity and sustainability within the garden. It is a significant achievement which contributes strongly to the preservation of local native fauna and flora populations and demonstrates that MDLC is a caring, responsible corporate neighbour. Our garden, as is well known, has long been the focus of learning activity at the Centre and its development, guided by Luise, has been of substantial personal benefit to many people who would not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in such a valuable and dynamic activity. The Board thanks Luise and her group of industrious helpers, including Terry and Geoff, for their work and it applauds their achievements in contributing so significantly to the ambience of the campus.

Ross Corben

Convenor

Members/Volunteers & Fundraising

Mountain District Learning Centre is celebrating 50 years of service to the Community, under the guise of both Mountain District Women’s Co-op and the Learning Centre.

Our Committee started planning for an event in August 2023, and have been working on different ideas to mark this auspicious occasion. A luncheon will be held with a guest speaker who was associated with the Co-op in the early days.

The Artisan Market was huge, thanks to Rachel Bast and Luise Topma who put in a power of work to make it such a success. The idea is to give local people a chance to “show their wares”.

Our Red and Green afternoon tea was very popular, it seems to get bigger every year.

Christmas is a time when we can socialise and think back on all the good things that have happened over the previous months.

To all the Committee members a big thank you. To Heidi for preparing the newsletter every quarter, thank you. The staff put in their reports with photos and Heidi puts it all together. I really look forward to reading what the Centre has been doing over the previous 3 months.

Robyn Burke

Convenor

Registered Training Organisation (RTO)

As a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), Mountain District Learning Centre (MDLC) is committed to delivering high-quality training programs while adhering to regulatory requirements and contractual obligations, particularly under the Skills First Funding contract with the Victorian Government.

Throughout the reporting period, MDLC dedicated significant resources to ensure compliance with the Skills First Funding contract and other regulatory frameworks governing vocational education and training (VET) in Victoria. This included:

MDLC diligently monitored changes in the Skills First Funding contract to ensure alignment with program delivery and reporting requirements mandated by the Victorian Government. Regular reviews were conducted to identify and address any discrepancies or updates in contractual obligations.

Internal audits, including the 2023 Skills First Internal Audit, were conducted to assess compliance with regulatory standards, internal policies, and contractual obligations. Findings from these audits were used to identify areas for improvement and implement corrective actions.

In November 2023 MDLC participated in a Re-registration Audit which lasted two days. The audit reviewed policies and procedures, course structures, assessment tools, staff allocations, qualifications and a variety of other key compliance areas. We were pleased with the outcome with only a few minor non-compliance to rectify. MDLC was granted renewal of our registration in March of 2024.

MDLC maintained comprehensive documentation, including annual Program Delivery Plans (PDPs), Training & Assessment Schedules, and student reporting records, to demonstrate compliance with regulatory requirements and contractual obligations.

My thanks to Sue Dunn – RTO Compliance Manager for her steadfast and diligent work in this compliance space, this type of work often goes unnoticed but is critical to the efficient functioning of our organisation. Her dedication and expertise are instrumental in ensuring that MDLC remains compliant with regulatory requirements and contractual obligations.

Alison Percy

Education & Training Manager

The Cottage Program

22472VIC Certificate I in General Education for Adults (CGEA)

22473VIC Certificate II in General Education for Adults (CGEA)

22474VIC Certificate III in General Education for Adults (CGEA)

The Cottage Program is designed for young people who suffer from acute social anxiety (social phobia) or who may experience barriers to attending education within a mainstream School environment. The Cottage Program provides a quiet and supportive learning environment developed to support and encourage young people to complete their studies, reengage back into education and to actively work towards career pathways or employment.

It is important that we build relationships with our young people based on an ethic of care, trust, and respect. To reconnect and reengage young people we need to provide them with a quiet, safe, and supportive setting which caters for individual learning styles using different learning methods.

The key feature of our programs is to provide a strong youth worker presence. We are very fortunate to have the experience and skills of our youth workers to support our students. Our youth workers do a vital job within our programs, they help young people to make informed choices in areas such as education, wellbeing, and healthy relationships. Our youth workers also assist young people with tools to overcome challenges like poor mental health through support & referral and to encourage our young people to take up positive opportunities to build their skills, become independent, and contribute positively within their communities.

In 2023 we had a strong focus on engaging with our communities, building confidence in travelling and spending time amongst the wider public, we provided opportunities for our young people such as the Resilience Project & Teen Mental Health First Aid to assist our young people to gain new skills and how to react during stressful situations.

The Resilience Project & Teen Mental Health First Aid was supported by a grant from Knox City Council. Teen Mental Health First Aid training gave our young people the skills they needed to recognise and help with mental health problems and crises in their friends, it taught them how to get the help of an adult quickly. As a result of this training our young people increased their confidence, this assisted in reducing stigma associated with ill-mental health and increased their ability to know what support to offer their peers.

The Resilience Project is about teaching positive mental health strategies to prevent mental ill-health and to build young people's capacity to deal with adversity. Through an evidence-based Teaching and Learning Program and inspiring digital presentations for students, staff and parents/carers, the school partnership program worked to support mental health in the classroom, MDLC environment, and the family home. We acknowledge Knox Council as the provider of funding for this Project.

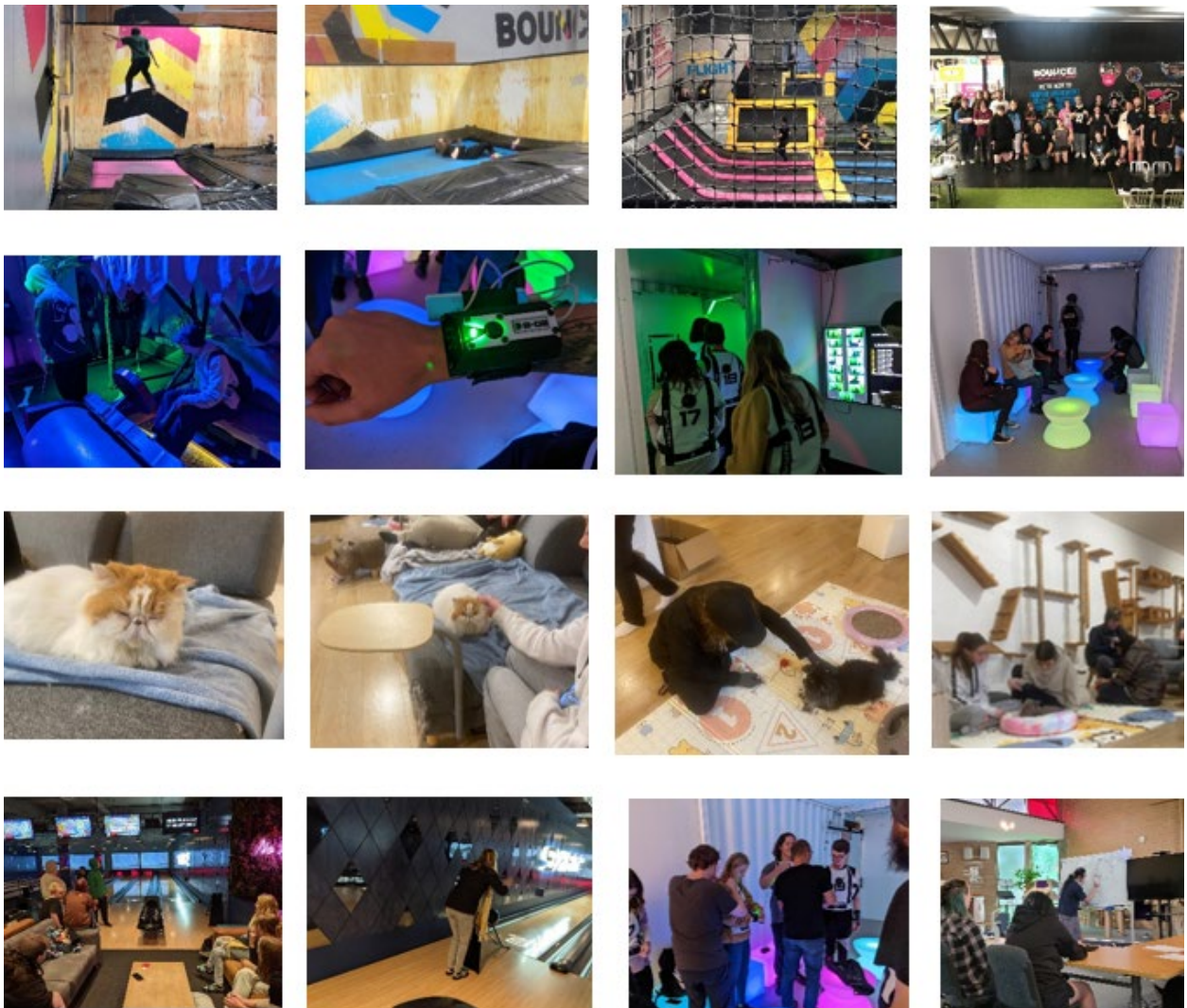
This year we added a 5th Cottage Program to help once again support the growing need for alternative education. We are grateful for the partnerships we have with our local schools, Uniting, Navigator, Maroondah Council & Knox Council who add additional layers of support for our young people, giving them the opportunity to thrive within a supportive and safe environment.

We would like to acknowledge Maroondah Council for funding the Cottage Program to deliver the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP). The YEP Project allowed us to provide a range of social activities and experiences designed to empower young people through providing information, guidance, and resources, they require to take charge of their lives and to make healthier decisions.

Several of our young people have also embarked on undertaking voluntary work placement at the Hills Church op Shop to gain skills and knowledge in the retail industry. Our thanks to Jenni the Manager for her support and willingness to provide this wonderful opportunity for our students. Which includes a reference to add to their resumes. We hope to build on these opportunities with other local businesses, in the near future.

A heartfelt thank you to the Cottage Team for your incredible dedication and compassion. Your unwavering care and support for our young people is truly remarkable and makes a profound difference in their lives. Your commitment to providing a safe and nurturing learning environment is second to none, and we are immensely grateful for the positive impact you have on our community. Thank you for your extraordinary work and for embodying the values of empathy, kindness, and excellence every day.

Alison Percy
Education and Training Manager



YES Project

The YES Project is funded by a grant received from Empowering Communities Knox to support the perceptions of safety in the community of Ferntree Gully. The YES Project (Youth Empowerment for Success) run by MDLC, aims to provide activities and experiences for the young people that will support their social emotional and educational development, increasing their potential to succeed and reduce their vulnerability to harmful influences and ongoing disengagement and isolation.

Following wide consultation with the Young People in The Cottage Program, we have delivered a variety of activities for the young people throughout 2023 including activities with animals such as the Lizard Wizard, Cat Café and Chesterfield Farm and a variety of physical activities like Laser Tag, Bowling, Mini Golf, Dodgeball, Bubble Soccer, Archery Tag, and a Beach Day. Going into 2024, we ran another beach day and also introduced a cooking class (chocolate making).

We ran some workshops to help with some of the issues regarding disengagement including with a group called “Toolbox” to deploy a program around Thinking Traps and how to recognize, handle and mitigate negative thinking.

Our most recent Family/Carer was an end of year celebration with a Colour Run. All friends and family were invited to the event which was held locally at the Aboreteum. We had a family BBQ in the summer holidays to help students and families get to know each other and staff.

Over the school holidays, students and families have been interacting, including birthday parties, so we see this natural development of community and friendship.

Thank you to Knox City Council, the Department of Empowering Communities Knox for this opportunity.



Michael Porter

YES Project Youth Worker

The Youth Empowerment for Success (YES) program is a Knox Empowering Communities project funded by the Victorian Government's Empowering Communities initiative as part of the Building Safer Communities Program.



ACFE Learn Local Pre-Accredited Training

Mountain District Learning Centre (MDLC) is a Learn Local funded through the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board in collaboration with the Department of Job, Skills, Industry and Regions. The pre-accredited training space provides opportunities for adult learners to increase their literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and employment skills across a range of courses in a safe and supportive community space with the aim of leaving no learner behind.

2023 started out with solid enrolments. Learners were more confident to get back in contact with their peers and new learners in the fact to face learning space, across the local government areas of Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges. We continued with new learning in the digital literacy space through using the data from digital photographs and how this can be used to access the location of the photo via the internet. The group studied debit card use for purchases online and the benefits of some cards over others. Foreign exchange rates were examined for best time to purchase currency and at the best rates as some of the learners were taking trips overseas. Staying safe online remains a key focus with learners as does keeping equipment, software and applications up to date.

The English for Living and Working in Australia group had a new tutor, with the group going from strength to strength in numbers, learning new topics and visiting locations such as the National Gallery of Victoria, Cloudehill garden and nursery, Tea Leaves in Sassafras and culminating in a wonderful Christmas lunch at the Olinda Tea House & Restaurant.

Through the ACFE Family Learning and Partnership (FLP) funding we commenced a Kitchen Garden and Conversation and Crochet group with the Community Housing Limited (CHL) residents in Ferntree Gully. These groups were well attended each week and we finished the year with a Christmas barbecue and a visit from the Lizard Wizard.

Barbara Behan Buxton
Adult Learning Manager



Reconnect

In 2023, Reconnect continued its focus on supporting parents in the local community, particularly after the closure of several other external services resulted in a larger gap in accessible support options for that specific cohort.

In collaboration with Ruccis Circus, Reconnect was able to continue to provide a welcoming space for participants to meet with their children. This facilitated a supportive community of adult learners who were returning to education or employment whilst managing caring duties, who could meet with their case manager and enjoy the facilities catered to the young and young at heart. Our thanks goes to Ruccis Circus, in particular Emily who shared her knowledge and heart with us all.

Our program delivered case management services to a wide variety of the community in 2023. Over 59% of the total caseload had completed up to year 10 at school, with 68% of which had not gone on to complete any further training or education since leaving school, before connecting to MDLC's Reconnect program. Within these statistics are people aged from 17-64, as we supported right through the age range in 2023. We also experienced a higher prevalence of providing services to people with a disability this year, with 49% of the total caseload identified as having a disability.

It has been a year of hard work and growth at MDLC's Reconnect program, and we look forward to what 2024 will bring.

Racheal Edwards
Reconnect Manager



Community Services

2023 was a jam packed year for the Community Services Office which oversees the Volunteer Program, Social Support Program, Hi-Rise Community Garden, MDLC Artisan Market, Mountain Treasures Craft Group, Philosophy for Thinkers, Community Development and other Leisure Workshops and courses!

From Community bus trips, learning opportunities, incursions and excursions there was something for everyone every week.

SOCIAL SUPPORT – The Social Support Program enjoyed strong client attendance with a wait list for nearly every group. Unfortunately though, we did say goodbye to several of our Women On The Move ladies who passed away during Term 3. We will really miss their smiling faces and years of friendship. Other groups enjoyed crafting and many social opportunities.

VOLUNTEERS - Our volunteer and student placement program is still so vibrant and diverse with a number of new volunteers signing up to help out in the areas of community gardening, Social Support group assistance, Cottage Program, and The Gully News. MDLC is truly blessed to enjoy a volunteer program that is worth its weight in gold.

COMMUNITY GARDEN – Well its fairly safe to say that Luise and her team of Community Gardeners continued to work on and create a garden that is beautiful, inviting and well cared for. The garden program ran each week from Tuesday to Thursday and welcomed volunteers from a broad range – including those who need to complete 15hrs for Centrelink and those from our local community who simply enjoy a gardening environment.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT – MDLC was lucky enough to obtain a grant from the North Eastern Public Health Unit (Austin Health) to promote healthy eating and cooking within Social Housing Complex's in the City of Knox Region. Every Thursday staff worked with the residents to create healthy menus and then cook a budget friendly meal together that included using produce from their community gardens.

MDLC ARTISAN MARKET – The MDLC Artisan Market once again enjoyed a full stall line up of local makers and musicians. We also had a sausage sizzle that was run by volunteers, and amazing coffee and treats from Station St Grocers. It was wonderful to meet and support our local community, and to show everyone around the beautiful MDLC Community Gardens. As usual, the Mountain Treasures Craft stall looked super stocked up with hand made gifts and plants. There really was something for everyone!

Rachel Bast

Community Services Manager



Home and Community Care (HACC) and Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP)



Social Support Groups

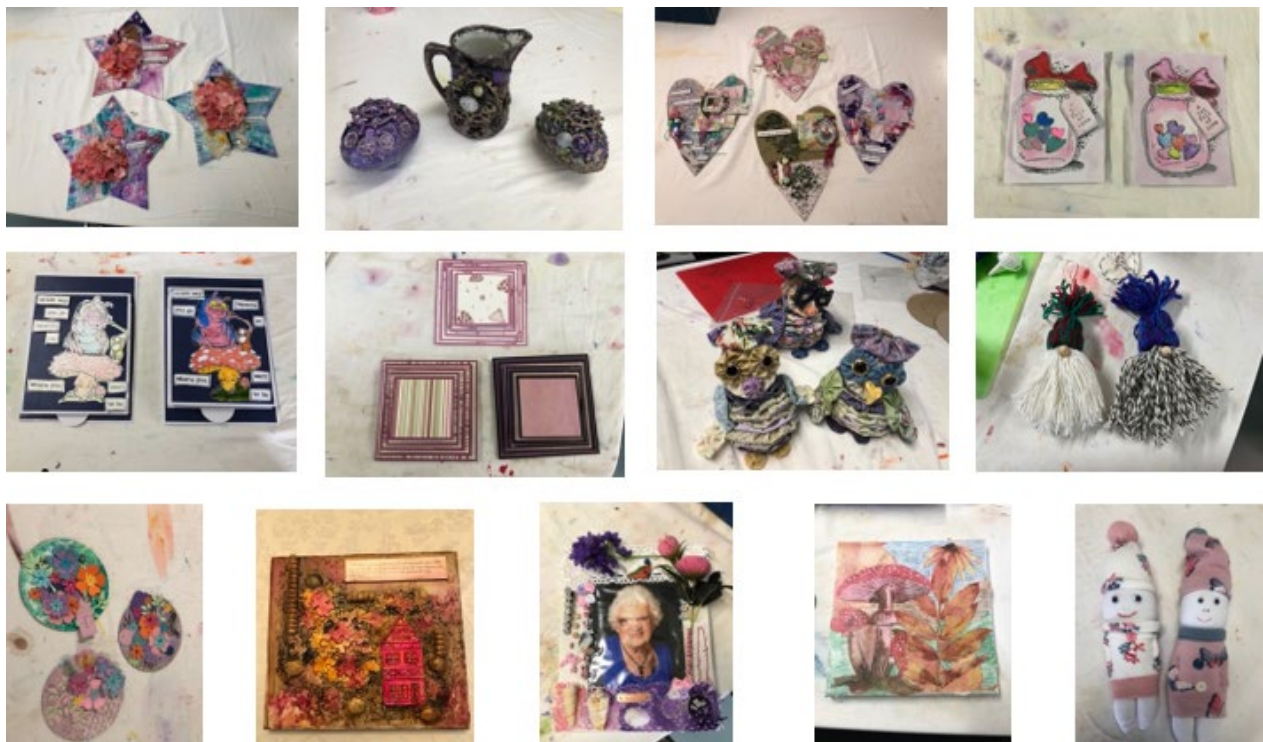
Monday morning Advanced Craft

This group have formed a strong bond of friendship and are always there to support one another. There is lots of conversation happening during class while they create.

The ladies have enjoyed learning new techniques and some have really come out of the comfort zone with colour choices. They all produce beautiful pieces of work and are encouraged to add their own spin to the demo model provided. They enjoy challenging themselves.

During the year they completed multiple mixed media projects using different substrates including styles of shabby chic and steampunk. They have done some sewing, macrame and various interactive cards.

Lynn Foster
Group Leader



Nature Craft

We had a great year as usual and a very busy one with lots of chatting while crafting. We did a Collage using magazines to make a picture in nature they all looked great. The ladies made a decorative hanger with a pocket and dried flowers in it they looked very pretty. They also did some printing with the autumn leaves using paint which they glued into their scrap books. For Christmas we got creative with some clay decorations for gifts they looked beautiful. Overall it was a great year the ladies all love getting together and crafting.

Sharon Saliba
Group Leader

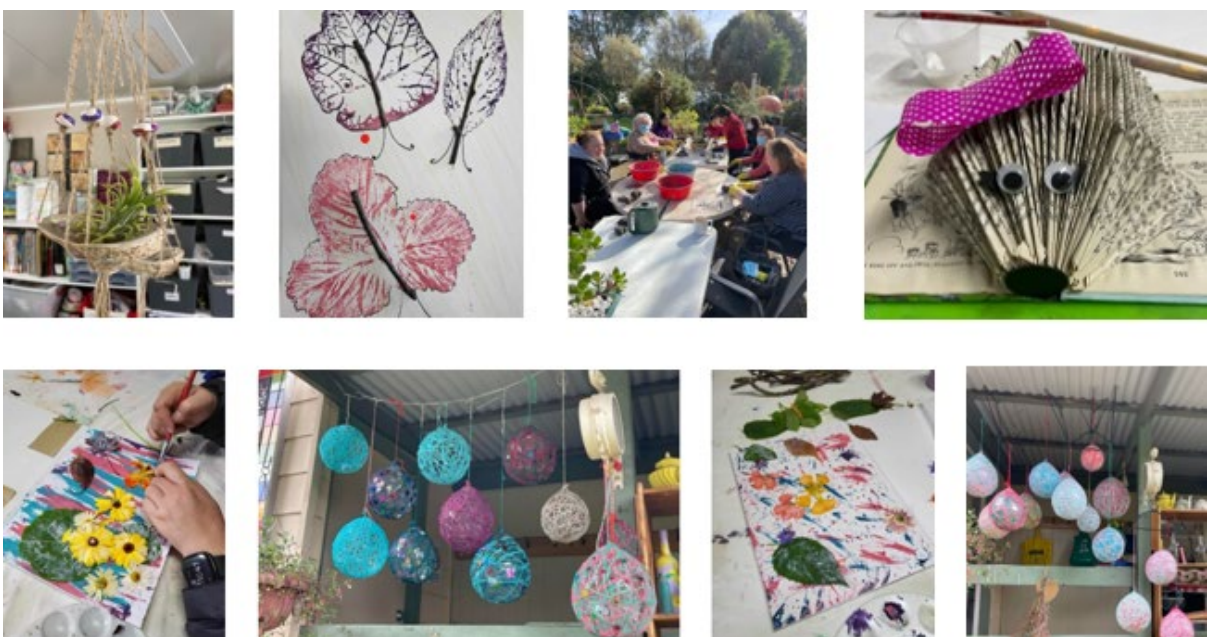


Craft and Grow

2023 was a very creative year for Craft and Grow. leaves were used to create beautiful butterfly art to painting with unusual items to produce bright colourful paintings.

Balloons, glue, and wool produced the most incredible balloon displays. Everyone had fun getting messy with the glue, but the result is incredible. Children's books were turned into cute book hedgehogs, polymer clay beads were made then used in macramé hangers. And mornings spent outside making hypertufa hearts for the garden.

Luise Topma
Community Garden Coordinator & Social Support Group Facilitator

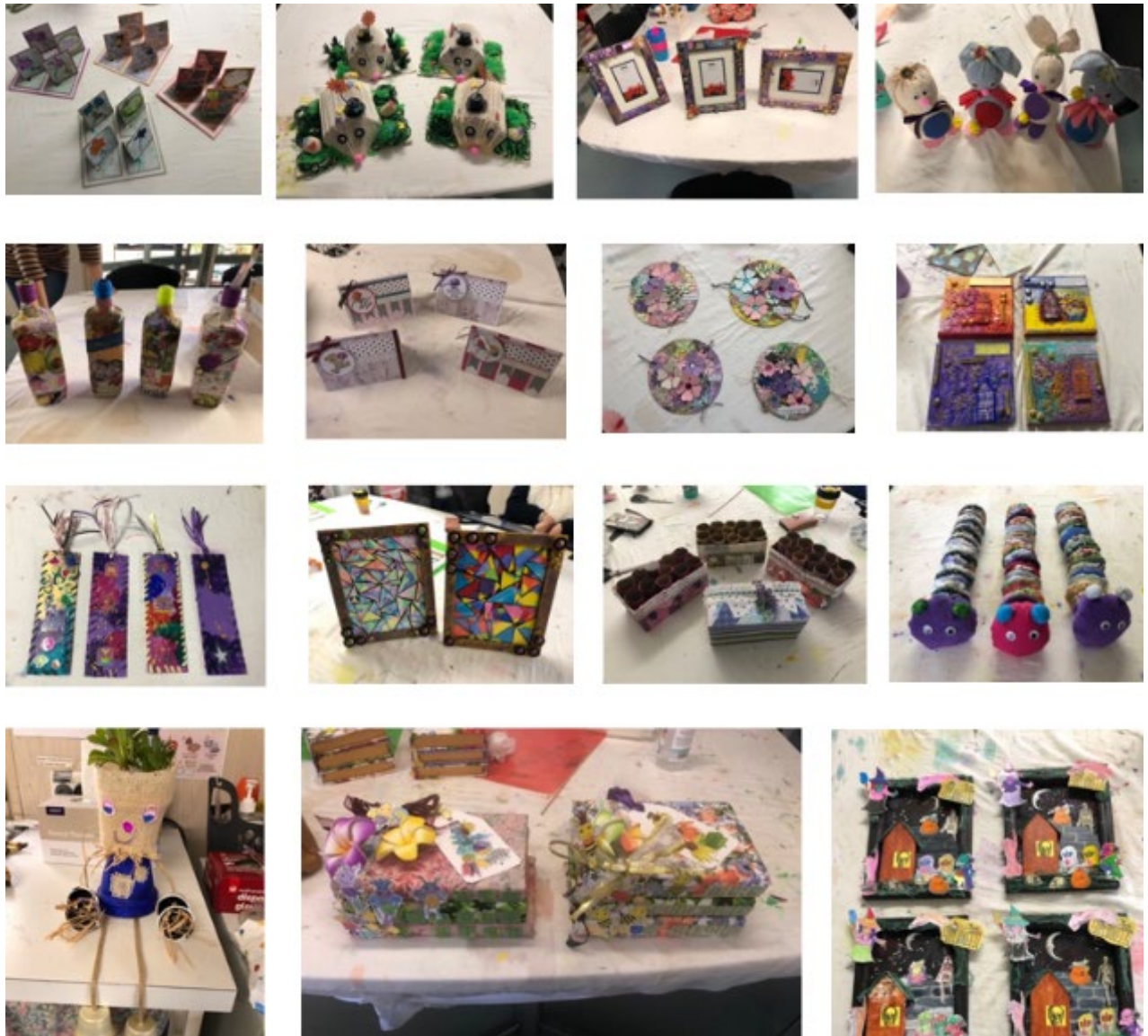


Wednesday Paper Craft

This group thoroughly enjoyed coming up to MDLC each week to have some quiet time away from base and to enjoy our beautiful garden view from our room. They all enjoyed making lots of different projects with the assistance of their carers, Sandy (our volunteer) and myself.

They made a huge variety of projects including cards, mixed media pieces and a pot man. They worked with bottles, socks, frames, material, pots, books and lots of mediums to create their projects.

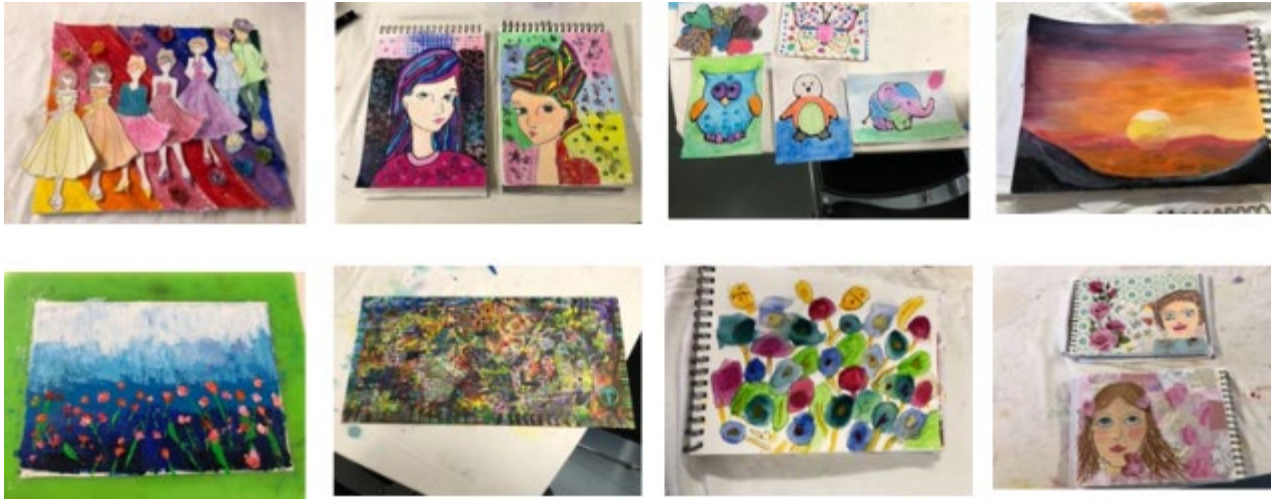
Lynn Foster
Group Leader



Wednesday Mixed Media Art

This group had a busy year with lots of different styles of art being made. They did a mixed media rainbow lady piece, worked with face stencils to create ladies with colourful hair and backgrounds, dabbled in watercolour, palette knife work, some portraiture, blending, some collage, process art and lots of acrylic painting.

Lynn Foster
Group Leader



Thursday Beginner Craft

This group had so much fun each week. We had two more participants join the group, each with carers so the group was full. All the participants arrived each week full of enthusiasm. I could always hear them marching up the ramp chatting and coming into the room with big smiles on their faces. They have formed a great friendship bond and happily chatted throughout class. They loved their catch up each week and were all super social. They made some great projects. Often they changed the demo model to their own design which was fantastic.

They had a busy year creating a variety of projects as shown below.

Lynn Foster
Group Leader



Thursday Crafteria

These ladies have formed great friendships and love their crafting time each week. Lots of great conversation while they complete their projects. They are happy to share ideas of things they see on Pinterest.

The ladies made various projects using a multitude of different substrates. They did lots of wall hanging pieces, cards, lots of work with jars and paper. They just loved crafting.

Lynn and Sharon

Group Leaders



MDLC Social Friendship Group

Throughout the year, MDLC Friendship Group organized engaging sessions and hosted vibrant cultural exchange events showcasing diverse traditions and cuisines.

To celebrate Footy Day, our group immersed themselves in the festive spirit at the MDLC Community Gardens. Engaging in outdoor games, singing along to beloved team anthems, and relishing the classic Aussie combo of pies with sauce made for a delightful afternoon. Another highlight of the year was our visit to the enchanting Cranbourne Botanical Gardens. The excitement was palpable as we boarded the coach from MDLC, resonating through the bus with chatter and laughter. Some strolled through the garden's captivating living collections while others enjoyed a guided tour on the shuttle bus.

Friendship Group has become more than just a gathering; it's a sanctuary where bonds are forged and nurtured forever.

Debbie & Meredith

Group Leaders



Men's Chat Group

Having only just begun in 2022, the "Men's Chat Group" at the *Hills Op-shop* (in Ferntree Gully), saw a healthy consolidation of its core group of men attending in 2023 – with a smattering of extras dropping in from time-to-time. Sadly, we lost one of our members at the start of the year – which reminded each of us just how fragile life can be – so don't take anything for granted, make the most of opportunity, and keep an eye out for one another. Our regulars are taking an active interest in one another's lives and health, building friendships, and even arranging to catch up with each other for other activities during the week.

After one of our elder statesmen was seriously injured during a bad fall, MDLC was able to advocate on his behalf - which resulted in a speedy *My Aged Care* assessment, and support services being quickly put into place! This became quite a talking point amongst the group - adding yet another layer of awareness as to the value of our weekly get-togethers.

The unexpected success of this group has provided a welcome boost to *Community Services*, reinforcing our belief in our ability to serve the needs within in our local community.

Henk

Group Leader



Bit by Bit Computers

When writing my report for last year's Annual Report I was very much hoping that numbers would grow and we would return to the numbers we experienced prior to the COVID lockdown.

Unfortunately that has not been the experience. COVID has certainly changed how people view coming together. I am certain that, with time, this will change and people will again feel confident about social gatherings.

As always at the start of each term, students were given the opportunity to decide on the topics that would make up the Session Plan. This meant that everyone could ensure that their learning goals were included in our learning plan .

Students who attended were very satisfied with the numbers being smaller, as this meant that the lessons were much more personalized and they felt they could ask more questions.

We covered the following topics:

- Working with File Explorer – a lesson which requires much attention – but gives great rewards
- Working with photos –
 - downloading from a device and saving photos in a folder on their computer
 - sending the folder containing the photos to a USB
 - Attaching a photo from the downloaded photos to an email and sending it to a recipient.
- Understanding Computer Jargon – an explanation of what the jargon means
- How to book airline tickets on line
- How to navigate 'My Gov'
- How to Use and Move Around Wordpad
- Lesson on CyberSecurity and How to stay safe Online
- Understanding Storage and File Pathways
- How to locate podcasts
- How to 'unfreeze' a Computer
- How to work with emails and attachments
- How to complete online forms

The class no longer stops for a coffee break – which was the choice of the class – but I do wonder if the lack of socialization is a loss. Time passes very quickly in class and, although we start promptly, it seems the clock races and suddenly is time to go home.

Lillian Brown

Tutor

Women on the Move

Our friendly group of ladies commenced the year on 30th January looking forward to a very different year with our first time ever of being guided by a male instructor. Harry Miller.

Harry came in not knowing how the ladies were going to accept the change, but he was not to know most of us have sons his age so we were all quite comfortable from the get go, and his instruction was so clear as he described all the movements and the benefits, our bodies gained on each instruction. Very soon a vote was taken and it was unanimous we keep him.

2023 was not a happy year in a lot of ways for us as we lost quite a few of our lovely ladies. Astrid, Alice and Jean and then our dear Coral who had gone off on holiday for a month in June and was just back with us hail and hearty when she passed also. Coral had looked after the finances for the group we think for at least 15 years so we are still missing her input immensely as well as her smile.

We enjoyed having Luise as our go to while Rachel was on long service leave for a term. She kept a keen eye on us and was willing to lend a hand at any time.

Harry let it slip that he was celebrating a big birthday, 60, in August so the ladies all contributed to knitting him a cosy woollen scarf for the cold days on his motor bike and gave him a surprise cake and nibbles after class. Luise took photos of the celebration.

As well as losing our lovely ladies some of our girls also had major health issues to deal with during the year which kept them away from class but we got through.

The year ended with an enjoyable luncheon at Crave in Boronia inviting our chauffer Peter and wife Pam, Harry and wife Janine, and Coral's husband John as he had been looking after our monies until he handed them on to us when he was sorted.

Gwen White

Women on the Move



Community Hi-Rise Garden

Volunteer Garden Program

2023 was an incredibly busy year for the Garden volunteer team with multiple projects being finished.

Over two years our amazing garden volunteer team with the help from Ron Bast our resident Centre handy man, have transformed our front driveway into an incredible space not only for our many human visitors but for our increased local fauna.

From the original plans to final completion, we have planted over 50 Australian Native plants of all shapes, sizes and colour, dug over 50 holes, built 3 new round garden beds, added two handmade garden seats thanks to the skills of the Knox and District Woodworkers club and moved over 10 cubic meters of soil and mulch.

As the plants start to grow, we have marveled at their beauty, been amazed at how well they have adapted to their new homes and smiled at all the birds, lizards and bugs that now regularly visit. With local magpies happily raising their families among the gum trees.



A visit from Gardens for Wildlife, Knox City Council and Knox Environment Society and Community, we have been told we are well on our way to creating a biodiverse haven and playing an important role in linking the wildlife that move between the Dandenong Ranges National Park and Ferntree Gully Ridge.

Over time the MDLC Community Garden Volunteer Program will continue to increase our local indigenous and native plantings that mirror the remnant vegetation found in these areas, providing additional stepping stones for fauna to visit.

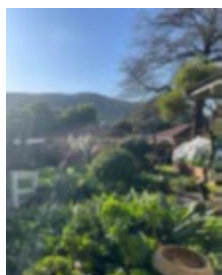
Unfortunately, we had a large limb from one of our beautiful gum trees fall across the driveway and into our Queens Garden project. Luckily there was minimal damage to our newly planted trees, however the bench seat made for us by the Knox & District Woodworkers was damaged, luckily, they were able to fix this for us.



Also completed in 2023 were the tree stump seats for the Ferntree Gully Uniting Church Chatting Circle. 13 raw tree stumps have been, stripped, sanded, painted, varnished, and finally turned into beautiful works of art for everyone to enjoy.

Luise Topma

Community Garden Coordinator & Social Support Group Facilitator



Ferntree Gully News Report

Six issues of Gully News were issued in 2023, and we issued the first edition in 2024 at the end of January. Circulation is estimated to be 10,500 copies, with 11,000 copies printed to provide surplus for Knox Festival and top-up any pick-up points.

One of the key challenges in 2023 was the retirement or pulling back of a number of volunteers, including John McMillan, who had been managing distribution, a number of walkers, and Beth Duffy and Beverley Mills as Assistant Editors. We are very grateful for all the time these individuals committed to Gully News over the years.

Gavin Green and I increased our involvement in distribution, and Liliane Azar took on Assistant Editor duties. We were also fortunate to have the services of Mariati for editing images for news items and advertisements. As she moves on, we need to work out how to continue with this capability.

We continue to be active in community engagement, including (but not limited to) an exhibition of Barbara Oehring photos at Millers Homestead, MDLC Artisan Market, Yarning Circle at the Uniting Church, ANZAC Dawn Watch, the Village Traders and Foothills Food Care. Many of these activities will be repeated in 2024.

Profit/loss for 2023 shows a profit of \$3,604.63. Formatting and printing costs of \$27,130.59 offset advertising income of \$31,608.35. An attribution of \$1455.96 towards salaries and \$730.75 overheads are key drivers of the additional expenses. \$320 of advertising income was written off in 2023.

We received a grant from the Bendigo Bank of \$2,950 to fund a new edition of the Ferntree Gully Village Guide, and are grateful for their ongoing support.

Martin Whiteley

Ferntree Gully News



Partnerships and Affiliations

MDLC highly values collaboration with organisations through partnerships and affiliations including:

- Community Houses Association of the Outer Eastern Suburbs (CHAOS)
- Neighbourhood Houses Victoria (NHV)
- ACEVic
- Adult Learning Australia
- Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC)
- OELLEN
- Ferntree Gully Uniting Church
- Knox Infolink
- Knox Emergency Relief Network (KERN)
- Eastern VET network
- Knox Learning Alliance and Volunteer 4 Knox
- Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges Youth Services
- headspace Knox
- Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS)
- EACH
- Foothills Community Care
- Uniting Care
- SwinLocal
- Your Library (Eastern Regional Libraries)
- Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges Councils
- Ferntree Gully Rotary
- Community Housing Limited
- Ferntree Gully Village Traders Association
- Hills Op Shop
- Other local schools, charities and community groups

Acknowledgement of Funding Bodies

MDLC is grateful to our major funding bodies including:

Victorian Government

- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Region - Skills First
- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Region - Adult and Further Community Education (ACFE),
- Department of Education and Training - Reconnect
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – Neighbourhood House Coordination Program
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – Home & Community Care (HACC) Planned Activity Groups

Commonwealth Government

- Department of Health – Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) Social Support Groups

Local Government

- Knox City Council – Neighbourhood House Operational Funding Program
- Knox City Council – Community Development Grants and Empowering Communities Grant
- Maroondah City Council – Community Development Grants