

Yarra Valley Winter Shelter 2020

*a community that cares, connects and
empowers people experiencing homelessness*

PROJECT SUMMARY

Project Summary

For the last three winters, Stable One has partnered with local churches to open their premises to provide shelter to some of the Yarra Valley's most vulnerable community members. The COVID-19 pandemic presented not only a challenge for 2020, but also an opportunity. Instead of operating the usual program, Stable One swiftly pivoted to partner with an underutilised conference centre to realise a new vision; a **community that cares, connects and empowers people experiencing homelessness**.

An Advisory Committee met regularly from April and after much hard work, the new-look Yarra Valley Winter Shelter was opened on 1 July for three months. The program offered supported accommodation to local men and women providing a crucial component of the pathway out of homelessness.

Project Objectives

The full evaluation report gives details of how each of these objectives were met:

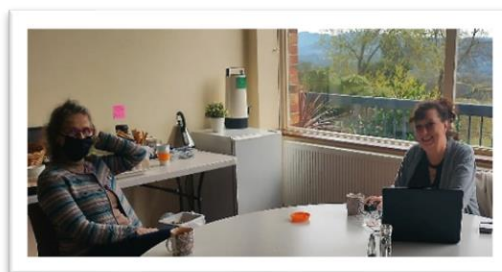
- Care – a welcoming, inclusive, safe and restoring community
- Connect – building healthy relationships and collaborating with support services
- Empower – journeying together, supporting and encouraging growth that will assist in building the skills and confidence for an integrated life in the future.

Summary of Key Recommendations

- Open year-round and operate ongoing programs that provide more than a place to stay.
- Employ full-time social worker for case management.
- Employ part-time live-in house managers.
- Appoint cook (employee or volunteer).
- Partner with local churches to provide Saturday night meals.

Findings

- Venue - Jumbunna Lodge, a conference centre in Launching Place, VIC, proved to be a venue suitably fit for purpose. It is a 'dry' site (no alcohol or drugs). Smoking was permitted away from the building.
- Church Partnerships - Volunteers, finances, donations of goods and providing cooks and food for evening meals once a week.
- Lodgers - Nine different people were assessed and approved to stay at Jumbunna Lodge over the thirteen-week period – three females, six males. Their average stay was six weeks. Five moved on to long-term accommodation, one of which also found full-time employment.
- Staffing - A team approach to wellbeing was provided by live-in managers, volunteers and Alongsiders, program managers and external professionals. 57 trained volunteers contributed approximately 2355 hours.
- Transport - Some lodgers had their own vehicles. Eastern Volunteers provided a low-cost minibus.
- Timetable - Lodgers committed to caring for their home by contributing to its upkeep. They also agreed to attend dinner each evening, as well as the weekly house meeting.
- Activities – Opportunities were created to learn new skills, be creative or exercise eg. sewing face masks, baking, carpentry, bike-riding, Tai Chi, walking, job search/computer/social skills.



A Lodger working on study skills with her 'Alongsider'

- Spiritual Care – Optional activities were offered including prayer and a weekly ‘God Spot’.
- COVID-19 – The pandemic posed many challenges with policies updated regularly and a COVID-Safe Plan written and implemented. Jumbunna Lodge remained open as intended with no positive cases of COVID amongst any staff, volunteers or lodgers during the program.
- Challenges included managing COVID, establishing an appropriate culture and building community, conflict between lodgers, lack of case-management support from referring agencies, unsuitable lodgers (eg. people with high needs) and alcohol and other drugs.
- Finance - Lodgers contributed to the cost of the program paying \$200 per week for board and lodging. Fees did not cover expenses and were heavily subsidized by donations and grants to Stable One. Excluding substantial in-kind contributions (volunteer hours, food and other donations) valued in excess of \$65,000, total costs from 1 Jan-31 Oct were approx. \$100,000.

Conclusion

This pilot program aimed to create a community that cares, connects and empowers people experiencing homelessness. These outcomes, all of which are essential on the pathways out of homelessness, were carefully set and have been achieved. A community was created. Lodgers found a place and people to belong to, demonstrated by their contributions to and ownership of the program.

Care:

All feedback from lodgers commented on the care they had been shown - from being in a safe place, to the quality of the food and warmth and respect from volunteers. For many this had a significant positive impact on their wellbeing and their reported feelings of readiness to move on into more integrated living in the wider Community. Care and generosity were also observed between lodgers as they offered each other support.

Connect:

Connections were made in a multitude of ways, formal and informal, relational and practical. Lodgers accessed allied health services, organised their Centrelink reporting, purchased a car from a volunteer and moved to live independently into housing owned by church contacts. They found friends and people to walk alongside them.

Empower:

Empowerment came through mastering new skills, commencing study, collective decision-making and resolving conflict.

The COVID-19 restrictions took away the potential for us to achieve even more with this project. Dramatically reducing the numbers of volunteers involved impacted planned programs and put extra strain on the managers. Stable One is proud, however, that despite this unprecedented challenge, nine different people were provided with **more than a place to stay** through possibly the hardest months of not only 2020, but at least the last decade.

Based on the success of this pilot program, Stable One is already working towards opening a year-round ongoing project at Jumbunna Lodge by April 2021, when government funding for motel accommodation ceases.