

Quarterly Newsletter

DECEMBER 2020 EDITION



CEO CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

*Dear Participants,
Families and Friends,*

As 2020 draws to a close, it seems fair to say that it has been a year like no other. With the bushfires and then the COVID-19 pandemic, the year has offered challenges that few of us saw coming.

Right up front, I would like to thank you for your support during 2020, which has helped us continue to provide support to participants despite the challenges faced.

The OC Connections' team have valued your words of encouragement, your compliments, and your suggestions. Your encouragement has meant so much to us during this year. We have done our best to continue to support participants and families, albeit at a reduced level throughout each stage of lockdown.

As Victorians, we have all faced and overcome challenges this year. We have experienced loss and grief, hardship, loneliness, and frustration with reduced mechanisms for support from our family and friends. We have managed lockdown, home-schooling, masks, and sanitisers. We have also survived the disconnection from family and friends and of course, the COVID tests which are an unpleasant experience!

I will remember the overwhelming resilience and adaptability of participants, families, and staff. Our community has been fantastic this year, and the human spirit has been courageous, determined, and strong.

Our staff have remained committed during this challenging time, often going above and beyond what is expected of them. Several times this year, I have been humbled by staff commitment. Their willingness to work together to maintain high-quality support for participants during the lockdown, including creating new routines and tasks related to COVID, as well as working in PPE and maintaining a positive spirit.

As an organisation, we have learned many lessons, reconnected with community, and shown goodwill to fellow Victorians. We have also increased our IT skills, learned to communicate with face masks, and importantly, learned to enjoy the simpler things in life.

Thank you to all members of the OCC community for taking this journey with us in 2020. It has not been easy, but we have done very well.

No matter if you celebrate Christmas, Chanukkah or other cultural or religious events, I know we can all join together to celebrate what we have achieved in Victoria during 2020.

Here's to a wonderful 2021!

Therese Desmond



Right: OCC CEO Therese Desmond (left) thanks Lesley Swallow for her donation of beautiful homemade face masks for participants to use at home. September 2020.



AN UPDATE ON THIS YEAR'S CHRISTMAS TREE FUNDRAISER

2020 has been an extraordinary year and as Victorians, we've all made sacrifices to keep each other safe. We've worked hard to ensure the safety of our OCC community and will continue to do so. While Melbourne's COVID-19 restrictions are easing, we are going to extend our people-first approach, and unfortunately, our annual Christmas Tree fundraiser will not be held this year.

Buying a tree from our Christmas Tree Fundraiser is an annual tradition for many families, and we know that this is disappointing.

As a disability services organisation, keeping our staff, participants, volunteers and customers safe is always our top priority, and it's the right decision to make.

Social distancing with our Christmas Tree sales will be difficult, and we'd much rather see your smiling faces back in the new year rather than risk you or your loved ones getting ill.

You can still purchase your fresh Christmas Trees from our supplier, Dandenong Christmas Tree Farm, and we encourage you to do this to support a business who has supported us over many years.

www.dandenongchristmastreefarm.com.au

Here's another way to help us:

The Christmas Tree fundraiser is an important part of our fundraising efforts, and the proceeds go towards helping us support people for things that the NDIS does not cover. If you'd still like to help us raise funds, please head to our website

www.occonnections.org/get-involved/donate

Our plan is to be back bigger and stronger next year, continuing to spread Christmas cheer and we hope we get to see you then.

In the meantime, we wish you and your loved ones a safe and healthy Christmas and New Year.

The team at OC Connections

For more information contact 9569 0603 or email fhaberfield@occonnections.org



MY BRILLIANT CAREER

In February 2020 Rishi was excited to be appointed to the open employment, Supervisor role at the OC Connections Enterprises (OCCE) Car Wash.

Rishi decided to apply for the senior role of Supervisor because he wanted a new challenge and to learn new skills.

He put in an application and was later invited to attend an interview where he had to answer lots of questions. He was excited when he was offered the role shortly after. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 restrictions imposed not long after this, the car wash team had to stop operating temporarily.

When we aren't in lockdown, his job as Supervisor ensures that the car wash service is of high quality. He also supervises and trains employees on best practice car washing techniques.

There are challenges in any role but Rishi says he is able to manage them. His key focus is to motivate people to work as a team and remind everyone about the important steps needed to wash a vehicle.

Rishi's daily highlights far outweigh the challenges. He especially loves meeting new people, attending new venues and washing a variety of vehicles like buses and vans.

Rishi is excited about the future and is determined to keep learning and growing as a person. His next goal is to undertake computer training so he can learn how to record customer information and do the invoicing.

GAIL'S STORY

Meet Gail. She is a member of the dedicated and hard-working team from OC Connections Enterprises (OCCE).

Gail's role as Senior Supervisor at OCCE involves receiving stock, getting work out, dealing with customers, setting up jobs, supporting the supervisors and supported employees to assist in the completion of packing jobs.

Gail has been in her role for approximately two years. Her favourite parts of the job are supporting people to achieve their goals, the variety of tasks, and the interaction with customers. She especially enjoys how well her team works together.

She said that the COVID-19 period has made the year a challenging one. Having to manage the commercial customer requirements and work closely with the supported employees while being short-staffed was a real challenge for the team.

For Gail, she gets the most joy from achieving the personal goals she has set for herself and working with the supported employees to help them achieve their goals.

Gail aspires to develop her computer skills and apply these new skills in her role.

After a tough 2020, our OCCE team member wants to return to the things she loves, like being outdoors. She can't wait to spend time with family, especially her gorgeous grandson Leo. In 2021, she might even get back to her other passion, snow skiing!



THANK YOU WOODARDS!

OC Connections would like to thank The Woodards Charitable Foundation for their generous donation in 2020.

With their support, we will be able to buy every Community Living participant a gift card for Christmas.

A special thank you to Richard Williams from Woodards Real Estate in Oakleigh for his valued and continued support of OCC.

OC Connections support The Woodards Charitable Foundation and their commitment to programs that assist the homeless.



RESILIENCE AND FLEXIBILITY DURING COVID

David, a participant attending Day Support at OC Connections, has shown remarkable flexibility and resilience during the pandemic. He is non-verbal and usually follows a very strict routine.

David continued to attend sessions at OCC where possible during recent months and adapted well to the program that was a little different to what he was used to. He has engaged in new activities and even worked with some different staff and has enjoyed doing this.

David has even tried his hand at cooking. Supported by Nicole, Support Worker from OCC, he had some great success with these impressive cupcakes pictured above!



LIFE ACCORDING TO SAM

Sam is a young man with a great sense of humour, a cheeky smile and loves quoting from Monty Python. Sam also has very complex needs. Before COVID, Sam didn't overly engage in activities at OCC. However, he has thrived during these unsettled times.

Because he has been able to receive 2:1 funding, Sam has participated in meaningful activities in the community. One of Sam's goals is to widen the variety of locations that he visits to build on his flexible thinking and resilience to change. He recently visited Karkarook Park where he walked around the entire lake. With the support of staff, he later headed to Mordialloc Beach where he had an incredible swim which was a mammoth achievement for Sam. Overall, staff felt that Sam's day out was a day of tremendous personal growth.



SUCCESS STORIES DURING COVID

James is one of the many OC Connections positive stories to come out of the long Melbourne lockdown.

James attends our Day Support Program and has undertaken a range of new activities over the last couple of months. He has enjoyed spending time in the garden and has renewed his interest in riding a bike with the support of staff member Stanley (we haven't seen him ride a bike in years!).

Despite it being a challenging period for everyone, James is happy, relaxed and willing to explore different activities.



VALE DAVID HAWKES

Long-serving OC Connections volunteer, Mr David Hawkes, passed away on 29 October 2020.

David played an important role in the success of OC Connections from when we were known as the Oakleigh Centre through to our current rebranding.

David started volunteering at OC Connections (then the Oakleigh Centre) in September 1964, one week after arriving in Melbourne from London. David's daughter, Valerie, was a participant at the Centre.

David always assisted when available at OC Connections' fundraising events, including setting up large fetes, family and working bee picnics and 'trash and treasure markets' in the earlier days. David was actively involved in the Christmas Tree Fundraiser for over 35 years as well as our Golf Day event where he was famous for judging the 'Nearest the Pin' competition.

David epitomised the ethos of volunteering, cultivating values such as solidarity, reciprocity, mutual trust, belonging and empowerment. Therese Desmond, CEO of OC Connections, says "David's outstanding contribution over many years was highly valued, but he was also a beautiful man who will be sadly missed."

David's funeral was held on Friday 6 November at Renowden Chapel at Springvale Cemetery. OC Connections through CEO Therese Desmond was invited to pay tribute to Dave. She acknowledged his significant contribution and long term, meaningful connection to the organisation.