

Quarterly Newsletter

SUMMER 2022 EDITION



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

To our valued community,

This year has not started as we had hoped. The rapid spread of the COVID Omicron variant has been dramatic and has impacted the community significantly.

Over these past few weeks we have experienced a number of positive cases from staff and participants, resulting in staff shortages and other challenges.

Our staff, as always, have risen to these challenges - assisting in areas where we are experiencing shortages and continually responding to new infection control requirements. We are continually grateful and appreciative of this support.

As the infection rate of COVID decreases within the community, we are now opening up some community day service activities, after implementing steps to ensure all COVIDSafe measures are in place.

We will continue to adhere to Government directions and requirements.

Currently, the following measures are being undertaken to help curb the spread

- Visits to houses will be limited to outdoor visits only; and visitors must wear a mask.
- Staff are wearing N95 masks and eye protection to maximise the safeguarding for participants and staff.
- We have implemented more “operation bubbles” across all services to help us contain the virus should one area be impacted by a positive case and keep other areas as safe as we can.
- We have a secure supply of rapid antigen tests (RATs) which we are using to test residents and staff who are on site.

The ongoing patience and understanding of our community has underpinned our efforts and success to date in keeping our community safe. Unfortunately, COVID will continue to challenge us for some time. We will continue to keep you updated as to any changes to services or COVID requirements and do everything we can to keep people safe.

Should you have any queries regarding our operations, please contact **9569 0603** or email **administration@occonnections.org**. Otherwise, announcements are posted on our website: **www.occonnections.org/covid-19**

May you and your family be safe and well
Therese Desmond

RECOGNISING OUR SUPPORTERS

OC Connections is proud of its strong community connections and partnerships.

Together, with our specialised services, progressive partnerships and processes, they help us support OCC participants to live and contribute with confidence, fulfilment and self-determination, every day and for their futures. In this issue, we'd like to recognise The Metropolitan Golf Club and Clayton Church of Christ, Dandenong Christmas Tree Farm, Bunnings and Interconnect Healthcare.

THE METROPOLITAN GOLF CLUB

We are continually grateful for the support of The Metropolitan Golf Club and its members.

As the last two years have been extremely challenging for all organisations, it was a welcoming surprise to receive another significant donation from The Metropolitan Golf Club members at the end of January.

Women's President, Caroline Nicholson, and Sonya Evans presented the gift to CEO, Therese Desmond on 31 January, 2022, who was blown away by the contribution.

"It has been a challenging few years for us all and so the generosity of members to gift us this amount is amazing and so appreciated, especially as Victoria was in lockdown for a large portion of the year and members did not get to see each other for much of this period," she said.

"For the club and its members to continually place us at the forefront of their activities and plans, despite the challenges they are facing in times such as this, is humbling. It is a testament to the members and shows the great things that can be achieved when you connect with your community."

Members raised money at the Women Members' Charity Day luncheon, where members donated gifts for sale, including jams, flowers, plants, cakes and biscuits, along with some OC Connections participant cards and a raffle of one OC Connections' participant's stunning artwork.

This financial support from The Metropolitan Golf Club will contribute towards our new Housing Project, where we will build four new houses and refurbish four existing homes to provide improved amenities and access to housing for people with disability.



CLAYTON CHURCH OF CHRIST SPREADS THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS

The Clayton Church of Christ has been a supporter of OC Connections since 2017 through the Church's Love Loud Initiative. Each year the Church coordinates volunteers from their congregation to support OC Connections through activities such as the Christmas Tree Festival and working bees.

Through their Love They Neighbour Christmas campaign, the Church's congregation came together to make Christmas hampers for OCC families and participants in need. Over 18 hampers filled with both necessities and treats were delivered, bringing joy and cheer at a time that can feel isolating for some.

"The Clayton Church has been a consistent supporter of OC Connections, continuing to bring its community together to help the people we support, either directly through home improvements, or indirectly through fundraising. This new initiative will have a direct positive impact on some of our most vulnerable and in-need individuals and families and is a great example of what can be achieved when a community comes together to support others." Therese Desmond, CEO.

The Church have also organised volunteers to help cut down some trees in our Community Living homes, saving us both time and money, allowing us to focus on issues of importance.



A MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM DANDENONG CHRISTMAS TREE FARM

OC Connections received a generous Christmas gift in December from our long-term supporter and tree supplier, Dandenong Christmas Tree Farm.

Owners Neil, Neale and Robyn deposited a significant donation after another bumper year of Christmas Tree sales, which we were humbled to receive and which helped ease the disappointment of not being able to hold our Christmas Tree Festival for the second year running.

The Farm usually supports us through discounted wholesale prices for us to sell at our shop. In turn, with the last two years cancelled, we have encouraged our community to purchase their trees from the farm. They also generously donated trees for our houses to enjoy the Christmas Spirit.

Their donation will go towards our housing project, helping to upgrade existing and build new houses for people with disability. Thank you to Neil, Neale and Robin for your continued support of our cause.



OC CONNECTIONS

BUNNINGS CHADSTONE LENDS THEIR SUPPORT

Paul and Bruce from Bunnings Chadstone visited 773 Warrigal Road to see how we have been using the materials the store has generously donated to us over the last few months and to receive a token of our appreciation for this community support.



Participants and residents have enjoyed donations in the form of seedlings and craft supplies, organised by Bruce, which has helped them remain active and engaged during some of the tough restrictions during the pandemic.

As a token of thanks, resident OC Connections' artist, Peter, presented Paul and Bruce with a Bunnings mosaic plaque he made, with help from his dad, Alex who is the OC Connections' Facilities Manager.

Paul and Bruce has promised the plaque will take pride of place at the Bunnings Chadstone store – a great reminder of the relationship between the two organisations.

INTERCONNECT HEALTHCARE

There have been many challenges throughout this pandemic and access to vaccines within the disability sector has been a major one.

It is important that our staff are vaccinated, to help stop the spread and impact of COVID-19 within our organisation and protect participants and colleagues. We welcome Government mandates to ensure all staff are vaccinated, including a booster dose. We have supported our staff to get vaccinated within the mandatory deadlines through providing information to vaccination sites, regular communications and discussions. However, it hasn't always been easy to access the COVID vaccine since its introduction last year.

We have been relieved and grateful for the support of Interconnect Healthcare for allowing us to make accessing the vaccine much easier for staff. In the second half of last year, the medical practice came onsite to our offices at 773 Warrigal Road to vaccinate staff; and, on Friday 4 February, they visited again to administer booster doses to staff who were due to receive it.

We are grateful for connections such as the one we have with Interconnect Healthcare. The support they have provided help ensure the safety of both staff and participants during these uncertain times.

RETURN TO ON SITE SUPPORT

As the COVIDSafe environment is continually changing, with lockdowns last year and spiking infection rates at the beginning of this year, participants, residents and staff have been resilient in the face of change.



During lockdowns and onsite capacity restrictions due to increased COVID infections, day support staff have attended our community living houses and onsite support has been limited.

We're looking forward to getting back out into the community! As the latest wave of COVID infections starts to ease, we're planning to bring back more participants on site and to support participants to get back into the community. Staff are currently working with participants and families about the return to our day support activities.

Masks, PPE, and current infection control procedures will all remain in place. Participants will be able to go into the community to areas where there is a low density of people and on off peak public transport, which we are confident will be less risk with reduced COVID infections in the community. Wherever possible we will be assisting participants to wear a mask to keep them safe.

BECOMING PART OF THE LAWN BOWLS COMMUNITY

Participants Greg, Colin and Richard are long time lawn bowls enthusiasts. On return to their onsite support in November, the three of them were practising their skills at the South Oakleigh Bowling Club.

The bowling club is the site of one of our Day Support hubs, which assists OC Connections continue to provide on site supports to smaller groups of participants – helping to prevent the spread of infection should a participant or staff member become COVID positive.

Greg, Colin and Richard attended the club almost every weekday in December as part of their daily activities. While their fellow participants took part in other activities on site, the three gentleman played the game to refine their skills.

They had the opportunity to showcase their skills at the club's social competition in December and were thrilled when they were awarded a medal each for their efforts, and gifted a club member uniform.

"This recognition made their day, if not year. When they walked back into the hall, it was great to see that their friend Deb shared their joy and came to congratulate them," said support worker, Jen Lau.



A PARTNERSHIP TO GROW OUR REACH

We're excited to be teaming with Jobbank to test and scale our blended workforce Eco Car Wash pilot program. By working together with Jobbank, we can open up opportunities for vulnerable people and support them in reaching their goals through engaging in work. Now, with the support of Jobbank, OC Connections Enterprises (OCCE) are getting ready to test an innovative pilot in Melbourne's west.



In 2016, OCCE developed a unique carwash service – a waterless system that uses environmentally friendly and biodegradable products. The system gave the OCCE team flexibility to work on site at their customer's premises, providing a fully mobile fleet cleaning system.

Jobbank's involvement is centred on testing and scaling the operation for expansion statewide, with an aim to create an estimated 200 jobs in the next two years, with a focus on regional areas where employment can be particularly challenging.

We're always open to collaborating and designing innovative ways to better support people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. Our partnerships are focussed on creating shared value to both parties, while still focussing on best outcomes for the people we support. You can connect with us to talk about how we can work together by calling us on 9569 0603 or emailing enquiries@occonnections.org.

SHOWCASING THE OPPORTUNITIES AT OCC ENTERPRISES

Providing employment opportunities for people with disability plays an integral role in creating an inclusive culture and OCC Enterprises continues to develop new opportunities for meaningful employment both onsite and in the community.

It was therefore exciting to have Major Roads Project Victoria (MRPV) visit OCC Enterprises to get footage of the new Eco-Bollards Project to showcase as part of IDPwD.

This recently approved project will see old and damaged traffic bollards diverted from landfill and recycled to make new ones. It will create ongoing and meaningful work for OCCE employees, as well as environmental, social and local economic outcomes. More information will be made available in the coming weeks and months. In the meantime, we thank OCCE employees, Daniel and Belinda, for helping with the promotion and advocacy of this project.

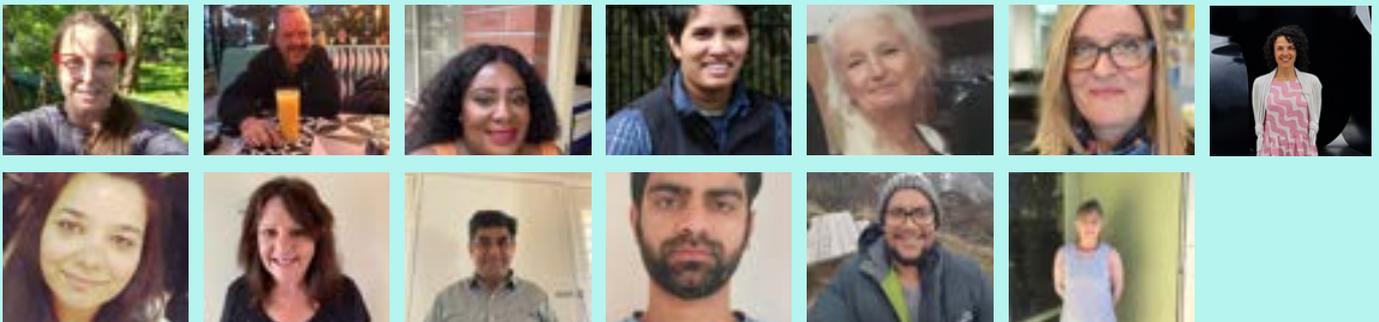
More information will be shared as the project progresses throughout the year.

STAFF ACHIEVEMENTS

We are grateful to our staff for their resilience, innovation, teamwork and a strong commitment to providing a continuity of support to participants through the pandemic. At our Annual General Meeting in October, we celebrated the commitment and service of a range of staff from the various areas of OC Connections.

Serving from 5 years to 20 years, these staff have been recognised for their commitment to OC Connections, their colleagues, participants and the community.

Every team and team members' contribution has an impact felt throughout the whole organisation, but more importantly it has a direct impact on our participant experiences with us – because everything we do at OC Connections comes back to supporting people with disabilities.



CELEBRATING 20 YEARS AT OCC: KAREN PALMER

"I enjoy coming to work and seeing the participants arrive in the morning. It makes me happy witnessing their reactions when they see their friends, access the community and be involved in activities of their choice."



Disability Support Worker, Karen Palmer, has supported participants at OC Connections for over 20 years. During this time, she has formed meaningful relationships with many of the people she supports and the staff she works with.

Karen is experienced in working with challenging behaviours and coaches many of her peers in this process, along with Makaton (Keyword and Sign) which assist staff in their communication with non-verbal participants.

Karen's commitment and love of her work is evident in all she does and we thank her for her remarkable 20 years of service.

OC CONNECTIONS

VALE MARGARET MARSDEN

Margaret Marsden is a family member of a long term OC Connections' resident, Beverley. Together with her husband, Margaret's contribution to the family reference group for the Allen Street redevelopment project, was instrumental in its success. She was also very active in the care and support of her sister.

Margaret passed away on 23 December. She will be missed by the OC Connections community and our thoughts are with her family at this time.



Teamwork Works is a campaign driven by National Disability Services (NDS), to keep the NDIS strong. But now the scheme is at a crossroads, with pressures to cut access and support levels.

Join the campaign to support more than 450,000 Australians with disability and the 270,000 workers on their team.

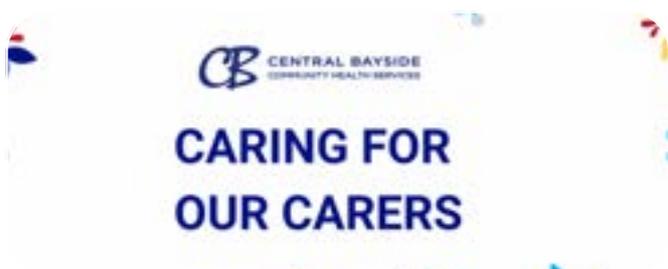
You can find out more at www.teamwork.org.au



The NDIA have updated the Supported Independent Living (SIL) and Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) operational guidelines.

The updates are intended to provide greater clarity about home and living supports, clarification of current policy and processes, and what the NDIS can and can't fund.

Find out more at www.ndis.gov.au/news/



Until June 2022, Central Bayside Community Health will provide eligible carers with respite support, allowing them to participate in up to 20 hours of FREE respite events and activities.

For more information and the full events calendar, visit www.cbchs.org.au/services/carers-respite-support/