

STAYING CONNECTED

EDITION FOUR, DECEMBER 2023



Dear Friends and Supporters,

It's been an exciting year at OC Connections! With 2024 just around the corner, I'm delighted to share some recent updates and stories as we prepare for the holidays.

In September, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability released its final report.

OC Connections welcomes the 222 recommendations made by the report to meet the visions of inclusion, pride and safety of people living with disabilities. Recommendations included strengthening accessibility and autonomy, inclusive education, housing and employment, and ensuring the human rights of people with disability are at the forefront.

Over the last month, we have conducted several meetings and information sessions with our community on the potential merger with trusted not-for-profit organisation, The Disability Trust. This exciting development will allow us to expand our services for participants, while maintaining all current staff and ensuring we can thrive in the disability sector for many years to come. Communication is a vital part of this process and we are available to discuss any queries or concerns from our community on the merger.

The OC Connections Art Space has been encouraging our creative participants to engage in the wider community by exhibiting their artworks at several shows. Most recently, participants had the opportunity to showcase and sell their art at the SASI Art Show. It was great to attend the opening night with families and staff members and I am so proud of the passion we've seen coming out of our art classes.

In the lead-up to Christmas, we decided not to run our annual Christmas Tree Fundraiser again this year. OC Connections continues to put the safety of our participants, families, and staff first, and with COVID-19 transmissions increasing, we hope to play our part in reducing the spread of the virus. If you are purchasing a tree this year, we recommend the Dandenong Christmas Tree Farm, who are long-term supporters of OC Connections.

Thank you for your ongoing engagement and connection throughout 2023. Your support is vital and enables us to continue the important work we do – to optimise opportunities and choice for people living with disabilities through co-creation, innovation and leadership.

CEO MESSAGE THERESE DESMOND



Therese Desmond

POTENTIAL MERGER WITH THE DISABILITY TRUST



Over the last 5 years, OC Connections has been looking into growing our organisation and the impact it has for people living with disability and their families. To continue to thrive into the future, we have carefully selected another respected not-for-profit disability service to potentially join forces.

Since announcing our potential merger with The Disability Trust, we have conducted a number of meetings and information sessions with our community. Families, staff and stakeholders across OC Connections have taken this opportunity to discuss all queries or concerns with our CEO, Therese.

The potential merger will bring positive change to our organisation by strengthening our services and stabilising our financial capacity for many years to come. Safeguards will ensure a seamless process for participants, ongoing employment for our passionate workforce, and no immediate name change.

Our Co-Achieve model, the foundation of our organisation, will ensure we stay grounded throughout all future developments.

Communication is our top priority throughout this process, and while no final decision has been made, we will continue to update our community as the merger develops.

VALE PETER DENNIS

Peter has been an integral part of OC Connections since he joined at just 16 years old. He enjoyed many holidays around Australia with his devoted parents and was supported by his sister Dierdre and nephew Michael until the end.

Peter lived in our Specialist Disability Accommodation with close friends and worked at OCC Enterprises since its beginning. He valued any opportunity to engage in the community and learn new things. He loved Elvis, tattoos, Carlton football club, motorbikes and KISS, and took pride in his styled clothing and accessories.

Peter will be dearly missed by his housemates, carers, and the whole OC Connections community.



BASIL'S JOURNEY TO RECONNECT WITH FAMILY AND IDENTITY

Basil has been working for OC Connections Enterprises for 26 years. Just before COVID-19, he was made Team Leader in the Skin Packing department – a role he's proud of. His life-partner, Christine, has been an OCCE employee for 36 years, and recently they celebrated their wedding anniversary at the Sovereign Hill Hotel in Ballarat.

With their strong leadership skills, contagious personalities, and knack for storytelling, Basil and his wife Christine are irreplaceable parts of the OC Connections community.

Christine's family has been welcoming of Basil since they met as teenagers at an OC Connections disco night. For the last six years, they have been living with her father, supporting him as he gets older. Christine's brothers, Greg and David, live nearby in OC Connections' Specialist Disability Accommodation homes. But Basil always felt that something was missing.

When he was young, he and his siblings were made wards of the state.

His father, a decorated veteran, passed away before he was born, and his mother couldn't support the family alone. He lived in many different homes over the years and, gradually, he lost contact with his siblings.

With the support of Donna, Veronica and Athena from OCCE, his partner Christine, and a well-connected regional network, Basil has been reconnecting with members of his family across Australia.

One brother, who resides in New South Wales, maintained their relationship over the years and made Basil godfather to his child. Basil located and visited his mother's grave earlier this year, and now, he is rebuilding a relationship with one of his sisters.

Recently, Basil learned that his sister, who he lost contact with at 17, was a regular attendee of Ballarat's Country Music Festival.

Coincidentally, the following Country Music Festival was on the weekend of Basil's birthday. He went up to Ballarat with Christine and, as if by fate, reconnected with his long-lost sister. Since then, they have spent time together at their homes in Glen Valley and Melbourne respectively, and their relationship has blossomed.

"There's been a lot of water going under the bridge... a lot of catch-up. But if you looked at her, and looked at me, you would see that we're brother and sister."

BASIL'S JOURNEY CONTINUED...

Basil has been reliving memories of his childhood that he'd forgotten, and learning more about how he grew up, through his sister. Currently, he's going through the process of claiming his files from the Department of Family, Fairness and Housing. Hopefully, Basil says, there will be photos and reports from his childhood that will provide insight into his upbringing and siblings.

Reconnecting with his siblings has made a huge impact on Basil's sense of belonging and identity. His sister has a strong memory and has been filling in some of the blanks for Basil, and receiving further information from the government will add more context to his childhood.

His family and friends in Melbourne have been incredibly supportive in his search for answers, driving him to his previous care homes in Bacchus March and helping with DFFH paperwork.

OCCE Manager Athena has played a vital role in Basil and Christine's lives – she has encouraged Basil to learn more about himself and step outside of his comfort zone, and she even walked Christine down the aisle on their wedding day.

Basil's next step, alongside his sister and life partner, is to visit his father's grave. Currently the grave is unmarked, but the local RSL is organising a commemorative plaque for his father's dedication in the war. A special service will be hosted for family and friends when the plaque is placed.

Hopefully, this will be a final stage of closure for Basil and his siblings, and will help to build a strong foundation for their growing family.

Thank you to Basil and Christine for sitting down with us and sharing this inspiring story of identity, family and connection. Congratulations on your fourth wedding anniversary, and here's to many more.



CLAYTON HOUSING PROJECT: BUILDING TO START SOON!

Design plans for OC Connections' housing project in Clayton have been completed and approved. The purpose-built Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) will begin construction by the end of 2023 and will take roughly 10-11 months to complete.

Residents of OC Connections' nearby SDA houses are excited to temporarily relocate to the new property while their homes are renovated in 2024-2025. Further updates will be provided as the project develops.





OUR ARTISTS SELL THEIR WORK AT SASI ART EXHIBITION

Pictured left: Peter at the SASI Art Exhibition in front of his artwork.

The opening night of the SASI Art Show was a heartwarming, resounding success. Staff from across OC Connections came to support our participants in exhibiting their beautiful works of art to the community, including OC's CEO Therese Desmond.

Several participants' pieces sold early on in the night, including Peter's stunning artwork. Peter has a strong eye for colour and utilises black marker with confidence.

Along with many participants in the OC Art Space, Peter has been encouraged to submit his art to several exhibitions – recently, his creativity was showcased at Cardinia Cultural Centre in an exhibition for people living with disabilities.

Participants who have their works on display are:

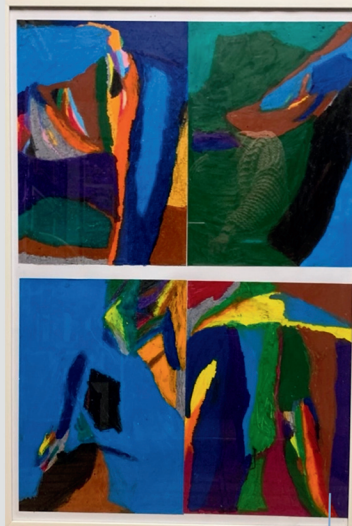
- Ben
- Anna
- Craig
- Mitchell
- Nicolas
- Peter
- Joey
- Kathleen

The OC Arts Team are always on the lookout for opportunities to connect with the broader community and share our participants' stories.

OC's Art Space provides an encouraging environment for participants to learn creative self-expression, build their confidence, and communicate with others. Support staff Renate, Rose, Michelle, Marie, Idit and Val have built a strong foundation at OC Connections, guiding participants to maximise their abilities and engage in a diverse range of artistic mediums.



Pictured: Art by Nicholas (above), Craig, Ben, and Anna (Left to right).



ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

We pride ourselves on ensuring OC Connections is a safe and encouraging environment for all people with disability and their support staff. We foster a Zero Tolerance policy against any kind of emotional, mental or physical harm and we employ safeguards to protect participants using our services.

Our lines of communication are always open. If you have any concerns about the service we provide, we will listen and act.

We will treat all concerns, complaints and incidents with the utmost priority, and we hope that our community is confident in discussing these matters with us directly.

To learn more about our policy, visit occonnections.org/resources/our-policies.

OCC Enterprises

Closing on 22 December 2023 and returning on 8 January 2024

OC Connections (Warrigal Rd)

Closing on 22 December at 4pm.

Open on Wednesday 27 December to 29 December, 2023.

Reopen Tuesday 2nd January, 2024.

(Note: most corporate services will be operating in a reduced capacity after 22 December until 8 January)

OC Connections (Casey Hub)

Closing on public holidays only.

CHRISTMAS CLOSURE DATES



Wishing you a safe and happy festive season and thank you for your support in 2023.

Though it was another challenging year, we saw plenty of what makes our work worthwhile; participants getting out in the community, learning new skills, making friends and achieving their goals!

We look forward to what 2024 brings!



BECOME A SUPPORTED EMPLOYEE

**DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT,
ADMINISTRATION,
PACKING,
ASSEMBLY,
MANUFACTURING,
CAR WASHING
ROLES AVAILABLE!**



OC Connections Enterprises is currently looking for people to join the team! We have roles available in Document Management, Administration, Packing, Assembly, Manufacturing, and Car Washing.

If you have an interest in exploring your employment options, learning new skills, making friends, earning some money, and gaining work experience, please get in touch with:

Veronica Galdames

Employee Support Officer

vgaldames@ocenterprises.org

Work gives me a reason to get up in the morning, builds my skills and confidence while financially, I can enjoy my interests outside of my work activities.

**Jo-anne, Supported Employee
Document Management**

Having a stable job means I can look for my own rental property to live independently.

**Elias, Supported Employee
and Team Leader**

DISABILITY-FRIENDLY holidays

ACCESSIBLE HOLIDAY ACCOMMODATION, MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Welcome to Tootgarook!

Located in the stunning beachside town of Tootgarook on the Mornington Peninsula, our fully accessible holiday home is available year round for private or group bookings.

Enjoy a beach getaway with family or friends in a house that features accessible bathrooms, a shower-bed and portable hoists.

BOOK NOW!

VISIT:
OCCONNECTIONS.ORG/HOLIDAYS
OR CALL (03) 9569 0603



6 bedrooms, sleeps max 14 guests.
Includes 2 hospital beds.



3 fully accessible bathrooms. 2 shower chairs and shower bed with portable hoist.



2 lounge rooms with TVs and DVD players.



Large, fully-fenced and landscaped rear garden with BBQ.



Central air-conditioning and heating



Free wi-fi