

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

Improving liveability for older people in small towns



Foreword

During 2011-2014, the Victorian Government through the Municipal Association of Victoria provided funds to selected councils to create more age-friendly communities. This 'bottom up' approach was the basis for the Improving Liveability for Older People (ILOP) in small towns project.

Over this period, funded organisations were able to plan and deliver a wide range of projects that have made a positive difference to the quality of life, social participation, health, wellbeing and connectedness of older people in their respective communities.

To help develop age-friendly communities across regional and rural Victoria, \$1.7 million was distributed across 17 councils. In total, more than 10,000 older people participated in ILOP, which included a consultation/project development phase and a diverse range of community activities.

This valuable work underscored the efforts of local councils and agencies in connecting with older people in their communities, listening to and understanding their needs and aspirations, and establishing partnerships to create better environments for ageing well.

ILOP created many positive and sustainable age-friendly projects across regional and rural Victoria. Councils and local agencies have increased capacity and understanding of the needs of older people, and are therefore better placed to respond to their ageing populations. Importantly, older people report feeling a stronger sense of worth and belonging in the place they live. There is no doubt that ILOP has transformed lives and communities for the better.

The legacy of ILOP is summarised in this Good Practice Guide and in the ILOP promotional video. You can read the case studies and information inside this guide and watch the stories captured on video to find suggestions on how to enrich the lives of older residents in your community. By using this material and listening to older people, local councils can continue to improve the age-friendliness of local communities all over Victoria.

The ILOP initiative provided funding to the following shires: Alpine, Buloke, Central Goldfields, Colac Otway, Gannawarra, Glenelg, Hindmarsh, Loddon, Moira, Pyrenees, South Gippsland, Southern Grampians, Strathbogie, Surf Coast, Towong, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack.

Snapshot of ILOP outcomes:

- Delivered over 190 separate projects with more than 10,000 older people involved in project planning or as participants in programs, events and activities.
- Strengthened councils' and local communities' capacity to develop more age-friendly communities.
- Cultivated more opportunities for older people to participate in community, social, arts and lifelong learning activities, and to take on leaderships roles in their communities.
- Elevated council, agencies' and the general community's awareness of older people and the issues and needs concerning ageing in small rural communities.

The Aims of this Good Practice Guide

Based on the learnings from the ILOP project, this good practice guide provides viable ideas and new possibilities for any local council or community group that aspires to plan and deliver similar age-friendly initiatives - to enhance the liveability of communities and make them better places in which to grow old.

The guide provides ideas on how councils can create their own projects by outlining some of the key processes and outcomes from ILOP projects.

The information is accessible and encourages processes used in the ILOP project to be sustainable and replicable in other communities. By highlighting case studies, we want to share some of the major learnings gained within the ILOP project with all Victorian local government authorities.

The document illustrates good practice that can be applied to the development of other local initiatives. The case studies describe how through the funded projects, communities were encouraged to collaborate, consult, create and problem-solve their way through to successful and effective outcomes.

"The ILOP project has identified that although there are many issues that will require intervention at a higher level, often the projects that local government can deliver can make a significant difference to improving the health and wellbeing of older people in our communities." (Project Manager)



PROJECT



AIM



PROCESS



ACHIEVEMENT



BENEFITS



What can we learn from the ILOP Project?

The ILOP project demonstrates how local communities and rural towns can become better places to age when council, community agencies and the community have a better understanding of the issues, expectations and aspirations of older people. Evidence from ILOP indicates that its projects have had an impact on the long-term planning, and decision-making processes in the funded councils.

The ILOP projects have contributed to more positive community attitudes towards older people through local media coverage and feedback from the communities involved.

Establishing partnerships with community agencies and organisations was a key ingredient to project success. Partnerships formed and enhanced through ILOP involved local clubs and organisations, community agencies, health services and regional organisations. These partnerships led to older people being better considered in the design, planning and delivery of services provided for older people. In addition, project partners now feel more confident in responding to local issues that affect the lives of older people in their communities.

The importance of consultation and engagement

The success of ILOP projects is due to the emphasis on engagement and conversations with older people conducted at the start of each project. This compulsory phase allowed older people to guide project directions and outcomes. Through this process, older people felt valued by having their voices heard.

More than 3,200 older people were engaged and consulted at the commencement of the 17 ILOP projects.

The ILOP projects provided an opportunity for 10 of the 16 funded councils to develop or update their positive ageing strategies. Through this planning, older people have been able to shape the future direction of their own communities. A range of consultative processes were used and some councils engaged consultants to assist with the process.

Generating opportunities for older people to participate in community leadership and volunteering roles created opportunities to develop leadership skills through involvement in project reference groups, seniors' advisory groups and as

managers of local projects. By training and supporting older people to play prominent roles in local communities, and acting as a link between the community and council, older people felt more engaged, connected and empowered.

It is vital that older people are involved in conversations about decisions that affect their lives. They are their own best advocates and have a voice to be heard.

The Importance of flexibility

A major contributor to the success of the ILOP project was the flexible funding model. Local ideas and issues could be addressed in different ways that result in a wide diversity of projects responding to different issues in different communities. Some projects were shire-wide in focus, while others were very township focused. Some projects were decided and acted on quickly, others took longer to develop.

Funding flexibility enabled projects to develop at a pace that reflected the capacity of the community to embrace new opportunities.

"Establishment of an older persons' advisory group has commenced. This recognition of the need to engage with older people in decisions that affect them has been received very positively. This group will hold an advisory capacity to Council."
(Project Manager)

"The strong desire and ability of older people to be represented in decision making has been evident" (Project Manager)

Ten of the 16 ILOP councils used their funds to develop or update their positive ageing strategies. Consensus is that, as a result, these councils and their local and regional partners are now better placed to understand and respond to the range of issues affecting their older residents.

Alpine Shire's Positive Ageing Strategy



Creating the Alpine Shire's Positive Ageing Strategy (2013-2017) focused on optimising the quality of life of older people living in the Shire. Although targeted at an ageing cohort, it has subsequently enjoyed a positive impact on the community as a whole.



As the Alpine Shire population ages, community services and infrastructure must change to adapt to the needs of older people. To achieve this, there needs to be a consensus of the key issues and the opportunities for older people within the Shire. An agreed way forward that involves key stakeholders has been documented to ensure the best possible outcomes for older people and the broader community of Alpine Shire.



A project reference group consisting of 15 older people provided valuable initial support and guidance to the project. This group provided oversight of the project's consultation phase which engaged with 200 older people around the content and direction of the strategy.

The project used the World Health Organization's Age-Friendly Community Toolkit to assist the development of the strategy.



The project has been influential in changing council attitudes to older residents in the shire. New initiatives for older people will flow from the project, and the process influenced council's long-term strategic directions for older people. Importantly, the project enabled older people to directly influence council on decisions affecting them.

The development of the strategy created a high level of interest in the project across council departments. Several councillors and senior council staff became champions of the strategy. As well, high profile community leaders and community organisations became advocates for the development of the strategy.



The project brought together many different people through consultation across the community.

As a result of developing the strategy, Alpine Shire can feel more confident in developing tailored initiatives that respond to older residents. The strategy will inform and influence future policies, activities and programs.

The project used elements of the internationally recognised World Health Organisation's Age-Friendly Cities Guide and Checklist, demonstrating best practice in strategy development.

Tip:

The opportunity for interagency and interdepartmental collaboration increased awareness of how much more can be achieved together, rather than working in isolation.

"The ILOP directly involved many residents in the decision-making of plans and strategies which have changed our lives. This has meant people's opinions and thoughts were listened to and accepted by the local council. This was a totally new experience that left us feeling empowered, confident and valued. It gave us the strength to believe in ourselves and to prove that we mattered to our community." (Local Resident)

"By developing a Positive Ageing Strategy, we could build on the community's capacity to achieve its aspirations. The community building-approach will continue to have positive outcomes for all of our residents. The implementation of the strategy will continue over the coming years." (Project Manager)

Glenelg Shire's Energy Efficiency Masters (GEEM)



PROJECT

The Glenelg Energy Efficiency Masters (GEEM) program enabled older residents to become volunteer household energy-efficiency champions/advisors to younger and older people in the community by teaching them about ways to save energy.



AIM

To provide an opportunity for older people to engage in active learning in the important areas of household energy saving and sustainability, and to play a leadership role in their community.



PROCESS

Senior council staff, community organisations and older people in the community first took ownership and became champions of the project during early consultations, involving people from all age groups. A local practitioner was then found to work as the community development officer on the project. About 30 people remained with the project from start to finish. They attended training on improving the energy efficiency of their homes and how to communicate energy efficiency messages to older people in the community.



ACHIEVEMENT

As a result of this project, Glenelg Shire and the Glenelg Southern Grampians Primary Care Partnership (PCP) developed the Glenelg Saves project. This project has been funded through the Commonwealth's Low Income Energy Efficiency Program (LIEEP) and will work with 35 homecare staff and approximately 300 homecare clients to look at ways of improving energy efficiency in client and worker homes.



BENEFITS

The GEEM project highlights how older people can improve their own lives and the lives of others in their communities through delivery of long-term sustainable benefits to everyone. Community feedback at the completion of the project indicated residents were keen to change their energy use habits.

Tip:

Linking projects to existing work being undertaken by other agencies and organisations in the local area or region can help build project momentum and contribute to project sustainability.

"Older people are not a homogenous group, they represent a diverse range of interests, abilities, insights, life stories and wisdom and have the solutions to what will most benefit them."
(Project Manager)



Central Goldfields Shire Men's Shed



PROJECT

The Maryborough Men's Shed was established as a place for men to enjoy social interaction and activities that help to build and maintain their health and wellbeing.



AIM

As well as being a focus for men to socialise, build and create, the Maryborough Men's Shed fostered an environment where men can discuss personal, health and community issues. A Men's Shed can also ease the transition from full-time employment to other activities in retirement.



PROCESS

The project started with a consultation session attended by 25 men, focusing on the possibility and need for a Men's Shed in Maryborough. As a result, a Men's Shed was established. A list of men keen to be involved in the project was created and a bus tour of other Men's Shed venues in the region followed. A location in Maryborough was selected and the council's ILOP project coordinator worked with the group to establish governance procedures and a working committee. The critical element of the process was the project worker's close involvement with the group of men as they progressed through the establishment phases of the project, providing encouragement and support, and assisting with information and skills to develop the capacity of the group.



ACHIEVEMENT

The men developed an understanding of governance principles and how to effectively run a community group. The Men's Shed has subsequently undertaken a range of community projects, including a roving house-maintenance service for pensioners, constructing book boxes for a community literacy project, organising fund-raising raffles for community groups and constructing items to sell at markets where proceeds are returned to the Men's Shed. The men involved in the Men's Shed are working to develop a strategic five-year plan to secure the future of this successful group.

The group is also mentoring groups in other shires on how to establish Men's Sheds by sharing their knowledge and the processes they implemented to get their group up and running.



BENEFITS

The Maryborough Men's Shed promotes good health by allowing men to be productive and feel valued by the community. The shed connects people and helps in maintaining active bodies and minds. The Men's Shed provides local men with a safe and friendly environment in an atmosphere of old-fashioned mateship.

Tip:

Support and guidance from a skilled council worker can give people new ideas and initiatives the support they need to come to fruition. The value of staff to manage a project and support older people in the process from ideas to programs on-the-ground has been a significant contributor to success.



"It's the best thing I've ever done" ... "I used to work in construction and I really missed the blokes when I retired. Now I've got the shed here." ... "Meeting days mean a lot to my missus – it's the one day she gets a bit of peace and quiet without me hanging around."
(Central Goldfields Resident)

"It's been an inspiring project to work on and I have been in continual awe of the skills, patience and contribution that so many older people make within our community. There is a sense of having being a part of creating ongoing positive change and I am so grateful for this opportunity."
(Council Staff Member)

Colac Otway Shire's Positive Ageing Ambassadors



The Colac Otway Shire recruited 12 older people from local townships to become Positive Ageing Ambassadors. Trained by council at a two-day residential workshop, the Ambassadors were skilled up to talk with their neighbours and the wider community on how best to develop a range of projects to benefit older people. Ambassadors were each allocated a budget of \$3,000 to develop local projects in partnership with their communities.



To develop older people as local leaders in their towns and to maximise the involvement of older people in generating local projects. Ambassadors, each in partnership with a community organisation, worked within their communities to develop projects that would improve the liveability of their town for older people.



With the support of a skilled project worker, the Ambassadors facilitated a series of local discussions, had conversations and conducted interviews in their towns aimed to generate community-based ideas to improve life for older people. They became the conduit between their communities and council. The process built confidence that the voice of older people was being heard and responded to, and built the confidence of the Ambassadors as community leaders. The Ambassadors provided a catalyst for communities to activate their own projects which were all peer reviewed prior to approval.



Older people were trained and skilled to become community leaders and provide advice to council on issues around ageing. The project saw priority local projects including: development of the Women's Art Studio Proposal and SHARPS (Social Healthy Active Resilient Productive Seniors) Program; progress on the Multi Use Recreation Facility concept at Wye River; support for local historical events and an intergenerational schools program; installation of new public seating in Colac and Apollo Bay; initiation of first aid training; and development of information and social inclusion programs.



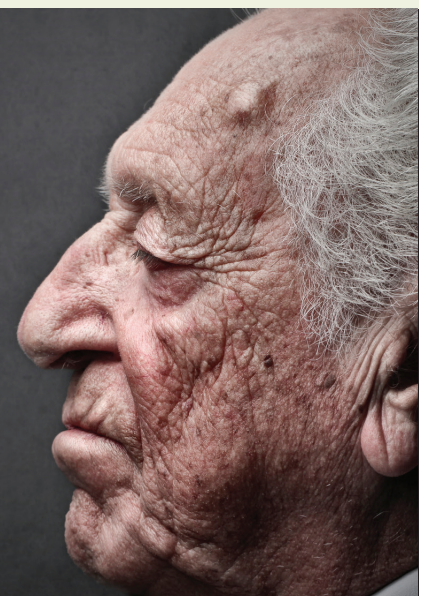
The project encouraged a new approach for older people to have a fulfilling community life. Ambassadors developed confidence and respect as they were supported and encouraged in their leadership roles. They became a focus for older people in their communities and developed skills in consultation and communication. Council benefited by integrating this program with its Positive Ageing Strategy, Transport Connections Strategy, Active Transport Strategy, its Health and Wellbeing Plan and various other initiatives. Social capital can be hard to measure, but there was substantial gain made through the relationships created in the engagement process. The projects also increased council awareness of how to improve the liveability of small rural communities for older people.

Tip:

In developing an Ambassador Program, success can be achieved where there is strong leadership and support provided to the group. Using a community development approach, a skilled person leading the process and accepting the need for flexibility can achieve optimal results for the program, the individuals involved and their community.

"The ILOP provided Ambassadors with the opportunity to have a key role in community, develop skills and confidence - the personal journey for some individuals has been the gold of the project."
(Project Manager)

"People are the experts in their own lives. By involving older people actively in projects you can multiply the outcomes – achieving much more than a project worker trying to achieve the same outcomes. Greater outcomes can be achieved by council, project partners and community partners developing coordinated responses to positive ageing." (Council Staff Member)



Surf Coast Shire's Wise And Wild Ideas



PROJECT

Set up a series of community engagement events aimed at creating local opportunities to improve the liveability of small towns for older people.



AIM

To identify what makes a community a great place to live and age by inspiring and sharing ideas for local projects that would make life better for older people in the Shire's small towns.



PROCESS

Initially, discussions focused on mainstream issues associated with ageing, and there was a lack of willingness to think more creatively about local projects that had the potential to overcome long standing issues – the attitude expressed was 'been there, done that'.

Council then realigned the project using the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach and re-branded it as 'Wise & Wild Ideas'. Council developed a distinctive design to market the project, creating a new and different approach to engaging with older people. The new ABCD approach identified a high level of actively-engaged seniors groups, environmental and other groups who used the Wise & Wild Ideas theme to encourage new and fresh ideas.

Consultations saw 137 participants across four Surf Coast towns engaged in Wise & Wild Ideas local lunches and community morning teas. The project linked people with suggestions on how to improve and enrich their local communities under the Wise & Wild Ideas funding. Following the consultations, 39 applications were received for Wise & Wild Ideas funding with 29 projects across the Shire successfully sharing a total of \$55,954.

"The project brought older residents together to share a meal at the local hotel once a week. This project will continue with the residents continuing this weekly tradition and the publican continuing to provide the space and low cost meals so this group of older people can still meet regularly." (Project Manager)



ACHIEVEMENT

Some of the projects included:

- TimeHelp Surf Coast – is a volunteer program connecting retirees to local schools. Up to 20 retirees were recruited as volunteers to help with reading, gardening and library activities.
- Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Marsh encouraged the least likely performers to participate in weekly choir, orchestra and percussion workshops. The project encouraged those with no musical experience or confidence, those with socially isolating disabilities (such as hearing or mental health issues) and those who, through shyness or fear, rarely joined in group activities to participate.
- New Tricks for 50's Plus Chicks is a women's development program to improve physical and emotional health and wellbeing. Wise & Wild Ideas funding supported a second round of a very successful program.
- Twisting the Tides Tall Tales of Lorne in the 60's formed part of the Lorne Festival of Performing Arts. This project engaged and celebrated the older Lorne community and created intergenerational opportunities.

One of the keys to the success of this approach was the marketing. The Wise & Wild Ideas concept and associated graphic of a 'wise' owl in a tree appealed to the target audience (and beyond). The 'wise' aspect highlighted the value of older people's knowledge and experience while the 'wild' part helped to encourage ideas that people might otherwise not have contributed for fear of them being seen as silly. It is estimated that up to 1,641 older people across the Surf Coast participated in the funded projects.



BENEFITS

Many older people associated with the project proudly identified themselves as being 'wise and wild'. The concept helped people to feel valued in their communities which, in turn, inspired greater enthusiasm to lead projects. Project reports from the grant recipients helped capture important feedback for the review of the Surf Coast's Positive Ageing Strategy. Council has included a focus on projects for older people within its community grants funding.

Tip:

Marketing ideas. Think creatively about new ways to engage with older people. The wise and wild graphics and branding provided a creative and respectful ideas-generating process where other established processes had failed.



Towong Shire's Community Shop at Walwa



PROJECT

Build a community enterprise shop at Walwa providing access to healthy food, continued access to books and, provide a way for people to become more socially connected.



AIM

Using the community shop to encourage healthy ageing by providing access to fresh fruit and vegetables, proactively providing a welcoming environment at the 'kitchen table', providing books for exchange or sale at a minimum cost, and providing clothes and other goods for sale.



PROCESS

Two workshops resulted in the establishment of a shop coordinated by volunteers. Locals identified the need for a shop in Walwa, a small town of 300 people located in northeast Victoria. A mission statement, vision and operational strategy were developed to guide the operation of the shop.



ACHIEVEMENT

The shop remains open, drawing in regular customers and provides a place for locals to 'connect over a cuppa'. Fresh fruit and vegetables are both supplied and taken by residents. People continue to donate goods including books and clothing to be sold or exchanged at the shop.



BENEFITS

The shop is an ideal place to generate social connections in the community by creating an environment where older people can relax and chat. It is a place where older people can overcome their social isolation, build relationships and feel valued and valuable members of the community. Older people manage the shop independently with minimal input from council.

Tip:

Sometimes it is a very small initiative that can create a difference in a small community. Taking on small projects can often lead to bigger changes over time.



Ideas for your community

The ILOP project successfully demonstrated that ideas for community programs and initiatives were limited only by people's imaginations. Ideas can be big or small depending on local needs and can make a big impact on small communities.

Projects ideally should reflect local needs, interests and aspirations, and can include the development of social programs, learning and education courses, health and wellbeing education information, meal-sharing and arts groups, improving facilities used by older people, and extending existing programs or activities.

Here are some outcomes from the ILOP that can be replicated in other small rural communities:

- Introducing scooter recharge points to increase mobility and encourage participation in community life.
- Providing town maps to enhance mobility and safety for older people.
- Creating a local arts program to reduce isolation, encouraging new social interactions and providing new creative experiences for older people.
- Establishing a Men's Shed to provide a venue for older men to socialise, make new friendships, and build self-esteem and self-worth.
- Creating and supporting positive ageing ambassadors in the community who can generate new leadership qualities in older people and generate cross-community involvement.
- Setting up a healthy food program encouraging older people to eat healthier food.
- Installing new seating to increase accessibility for older people to attend events and activities or just make the local streets and shops easier to use.
- Developing a fitness program at the local senior citizens club to promote good health, physical exercise and general wellbeing.
- Creating a photo library or exhibition, or recording of oral histories to create connections across age groups, encourage learning and improve social connectedness.
- Establishing courses and opportunities for study to maintain an active mind and encourage lifelong learning.
- Encouraging young people to teach older people skills in using technology to create intergenerational connections and friendships.

Stories and experiences from a number of ILOP programs have been captured on video (the Art of Ageing in Pyrenees Shire and Positive Ageing Ambassadors in Colac Otway Shire), which are included on Seniors Online, the Department of Health Human Services website for older Victorians. See the stories at www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au.

Creating successful project outcomes in a community depends on a number of factors working together effectively: sound project management, maintaining timelines, delivering project outcomes, fulfilling the requirements of funding arrangements and embedding sustainability.

Older people are the key to project success

Most importantly, the overriding contribution to project success is older people acting as the drivers. Without their involvement as the project architects, the results of the ILOP would not have been as positive.

Collaborating with community partners

Working with project partners greatly assists project outcomes and learnings. All projects in the ILOP initiative had community partners involved in some form of project management and/or implementation. Partners included local clubs and organisations, health services, arts organisations, older person's groups, regional agencies and more. The projects all revolved around collaborative processes, with most of these relationships proving to be successful and, hopefully long-lasting. The vast distances in rural Victoria can make regular meetings and face-to-face discussions around the issues more problematic but solutions were often found for this problem.

The bottom line is: identify your partners early, collaborate thoughtfully and engage constantly.

Create local responses to local issues

Ensure your project ideas reflect local responses to local issues. Many issues facing older people in small rural communities can be practically addressed with the right project.

This can include the purchase of mobility equipment, chairs or specialist sports equipment; design of exploratory projects to establish organisations or make new links; holding communal lunches and cooking lessons; organising community transport initiatives; conducting town mobility mapping; planning intergenerational activities and many, many more.

Creating opportunities for older people to participate in their local communities and community activities creates better, more accessible and equipped local communities in which to age.

Project Sustainability

Sustainability can be achieved where a project, its processes or learnings have provided older people with an ongoing voice and a role in guiding community and council directions on issues affecting them. Project reference groups have the potential to become ongoing advisory structures; seniors advisory groups can be established for the long-term; and partnerships can endure long after the initial project has been completed.

Evidence of sustainable outcomes from the ILOP was reflected in different ways including: creation of new staff positions to work with older people and coordinate project outcomes; creation of a small permanent funding stream targeted at projects of benefit to older people; creation of a local transport service; creation of meal share programs; creation of health, wellbeing and connectedness programs; and continuation of programs and activities well beyond the objectives of the ILOP project.



A final word

The ILOP initiatives have all reported positive impacts on the lives of older people in the rural towns and areas where the projects were undertaken. Notwithstanding the significant benefits of making older people simply happier with their lives, the initiatives and activities provided an opportunity for older people to be involved in all aspects of planning, implementation and decision-making. Older people say they felt engaged, empowered and motivated, which proved to be the most effective model for sustainability and delivery of positive long-term community-wide outcomes.

The ILOP program provided a fresh opportunity for councils and project partners to engage with older people in their communities - to meet and discuss new ideas and activities and then to implement them.

From the outset, older people in the ILOP initiatives were at the heart of change, becoming involved or more involved in their community's activities, setting the agenda, working hard for their communities, devoting time to working groups and committees, and volunteering to make their towns better places in which to age. Their stories serve as the basis for this Good Practice Guide.

Engaging with older people through community projects can improve community connectedness and help to reduce social isolation.

Older people can achieve positions of influence in local decision-making. As a result of the ILOP projects, councillors, council staff, community agencies and the community generally are more aware of older people and the issues around ageing in small rural communities.

The positive effect can continue in every community across Victoria as residents, councils, community agencies and organisations continue to work in partnership to create more inclusive and supportive communities for older people.

Opportunities for older people to participate socially have increased. There are more opportunities to participate in community life and community programs which help to improve the physical and mental health of older people.

Projects like those mentioned in this Good Practice Guide have the potential to:

- Increase your community's and council's capacity to develop more age-friendly communities.
- Engage older people in decisions that affect their communities and their lives.
- Create more opportunities for older people to engage with their communities, participate in programs and activities that improve physical and mental health and help to relieve social isolation of older people.
- Foster community development by increasing the social and economic participation and lifelong learning opportunities for older people in local communities.
- Build community capacity to generate opportunities for older people to participate in community leadership and volunteering.

We hope this Good Practice Guide encourages older people in the community and all local Victorian councils to create, consult, engage and deliver!

