

# Strengthening Seniors Inclusion and Participation in local communities

Project booklet



Community of Practice with the  
Commissioner for Senior Victorians

## Foreword from the Commissioner for Senior Victorians

I have been pleased to lead the Strengthening Seniors Inclusion and Participation in Local Communities initiative, which brings together organisations to focus on addressing social isolation and loneliness of older people.

Older people want to play a meaningful role with value and purpose as they age. We know they want to participate where they live, and that what is available does not always meet their needs. We also know that we need to provide welcoming and inclusive group dynamics, and to reach out to people who do not come to us.

I strongly encourage local government and community organisations and groups to consider the ideas demonstrated by these seven projects.

Some ways to get started include:

- asking the older participants in your groups and clubs how well you do what you do
- developing activities and events to re-engage and re-connect with past members
- using the newly tested interventions, tools and resources available on Seniors Online at [www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/get-involved](http://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/get-involved)

By working together there is a significant amount we can achieve.

Gerard Mansour  
Commissioner for Senior Victorians  
April 2018



Maribyrnong strengthening seniors event held at Pipemakers Park

## Introduction

The Strengthening Seniors Inclusion and Participation in Local Communities initiative is a key component of the Victorian Government's response to the Commissioner for Senior Victorians' report *Ageing is everyone's business*, which found that seniors need more opportunities to join, attend and participate in clubs, groups, organisations and activities in the community.

Seven local government areas were selected to participate, based on an analysis of socioeconomic status, proportion of single-person households, existing networks of interest and potential support for the project. There was coverage across metropolitan, outer metropolitan and rural locations. The locations were the City of Greater Dandenong (led by enliven, Primary Care Partnership) and local government leads in the:

- City of Latrobe
- City of Whittlesea
- Shire of Mornington Peninsula
- City of Greater Bendigo and Shire of Loddon
- City of Maribyrnong
- City of Frankston.

The initiative aimed to support local community-based organisations in these local government areas to address social isolation and loneliness of older people. It encouraged partnerships between organisations, as well as capacity-building activities that could be transferred and used across the state.

Each area had a lead agency that established a project leadership group with their partners.

The project focused on four priority areas:

- service and program offerings
- organisational culture
- local connections and referral pathways
- governance and organisational life cycle.

Each area had a lead agency that established a project leadership group with their partners.

The Commissioner for Senior Victorians chaired a state-wide project reference group, which provided strategic advice on the project. Membership was drawn from statewide organisations such as peak bodies, state and local government agencies, and academia.

A community of practice brought together project leadership groups from all seven areas to encourage peer learning, and to share tools and resources.

A social planning and evaluation consultant supported all project sites, facilitated the community of practice, and conducted the project evaluation.

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Maribyrnong Strengthening Seniors event at Pipemakers Park.

## Using co-design methodology to strengthen seniors participation at City of Maribyrnong

This project surveyed older people to understand their needs and aspirations for lifestyle and community wellbeing. Socially isolated older people, particularly those who might not use regular programs and services, were consulted to find out what activities they would like to see in their local area.

Working with local community leaders, the project examined gaps in opportunities and barriers to access. The project leadership group then identified five short-term prototypes for delivery during the Victorian Seniors Festival.

This project:

- developed a model for engaging with older people to co-design service activities
- provided opportunities for older people to tell agencies what they would like to see



Maribyrnong Strengthening Seniors event at Pipemakers Park.

- increased the civic participation of older people within the City of Maribyrnong
- provided vibrant intergenerational and intercultural activities that older people want to be a part of
- created clear, measurable and sustainable outcomes for older people.

During the consultation and prototype stages of the project lessons included:

- 78 per cent of participants wanted to feel more connected to people and activities in their community. While more than 80 per cent had lived in the area for 10 or more years, only a small proportion felt strongly or very strongly attached to their community
- transport was a common concern, leading to consideration of providing a community bus, volunteer driver service, improved access to public transport, or information on parking options
- affordability was a key factor. Therefore undertaking cheaper activities that involve less infrastructure, equipment or paid staff time would be beneficial
- that older people desire contemporary, future-oriented services, opportunities and support programs
- it is important to provide engagement and participation for seniors and involve older people in project design and decision making.

## Project Leadership Group

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Enliven robotics course.

## enliven at City of Greater Dandenong

**enliven** is a health promoting charity and primary care partnership. As lead agency, *enliven* brought together an alliance of local area health and human services to improve care of older people in the community.

The project created meaningful partnerships across the agencies, and engaged with older people who were not currently accessing services.

In March 2017, local agencies participated in a workshop to identify ways of trialling engagement and re-engagement activities for seniors.

This led to the following initiatives:

- a survey of South Eastern Legacy clients in Greater Dandenong to inform future offerings by that organisation
- a partnership between the Dandenong Neighbourhood House and the City of Greater Dandenong Library (Dandenong branch) to establish a homework club where seniors mentored year 6–12 students and facilitated peer to peer support

- a robotics class for older adults who had little or no computer skills using EV3 LEGO robotics kits to build confidence in using computers (held at the Library as a partnership between Dandenong Library and Dandenong Neighbourhood house)
- a review of technology needs, and the development of a digital literacy class, which pioneered an innovative teaching format (run through Dandenong Neighbourhood House).

Key lessons included:

- primary care partnerships are well connected facilitators to tackle isolation and loneliness in older people
- **enliven** acted as a conduit between organisations to expand opportunities to engage seniors in activities and initiatives
- bringing different community groups together resulted in meaningful and sustainable partnerships and unexpected outcomes
- engaging seniors to support and mentor youth and their learning (ie. the homework club) invigorated and energised older people
- trialling different approaches to engage and support seniors in technology is crucial. Further research on this approach would be valuable
- the robotics class improved participants' confidence to explore other digital technologies, such as mobile phone and computers.
- common interests bring people together regardless of where they live, even if beyond municipal boundaries.

*“Join a club to have social contacts”*

*“Join in activities you enjoy, keep busy and do one exercise class.”*

*“Get out of the house and enjoy yourself.”*

*“Some avenue to have contact with young people in our community.”*

## Project Leadership Group

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*“Volunteer to help charities.”*

*“Make sure you go out every day and talk to different people.”*

Responses from South East Legacy survey question: 'What other advice and ideas do you have for older Victorians to remain connected with their community?'



Latrobe City Council Welcoming & Age Friendly accreditation presentation.

## Developing a network of 'Welcoming & Age Friendly' community groups in the City of Latrobe

Latrobe City Council sought to reduce isolation and loneliness of older members of the community by developing a network of 'Welcoming & Age Friendly' community groups with a recognisable brand, and through individual referral pathways.

This project:

- held a workshop to define what being welcoming and age friendly meant to individuals and then created resources to support groups to develop and maintain an inclusive environment
- established a network of groups and clubs to support people to re-engage with their community
- provided a broader understanding of the health impacts of social isolation and loneliness
- developed an identifiable brand with localised recognition

## Strengthening Seniors Inclusion and Participation in local communities

- developed promotional tools with older people, including a library campaign in an accessible, comfortable environment
- raised awareness of available community involvement opportunities.

Key lessons included that:

- face-to-face contact motivates groups, increases understanding of the benefits of the project and ensures future interaction
- no two groups are the same – each group offers something more than just their scheduled activities
- each individual referral is effective because it is based on the person's interests and capabilities
- most community groups could relate to the benefits of the project, and had engaged with socially isolated seniors
- the majority of community members, even if they are currently disconnected, believe that community involvement is important
- clubs and groups respond very well to peer evaluation
- developing a network of welcoming and age-friendly groups can establish promotional avenues.

### Project Leadership Group

John Forsyth, Treasurer, Keenagers Table Tennis Moe

Annie McDuffie, Committee member, U3A Latrobe Valley

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Fun and friendship in Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula

## Social inclusion in Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula region

This project raised awareness of social isolation and loneliness, and increased opportunities for socially isolated people to access established social activities in Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula region.

The project developed a Community Connector Project, which trained volunteers to deliver one-on-one support to alleviate barriers to accessing social activities. Via a relaxed phone conversation or face to face, Community Connector volunteers would identify the activities community members would like to be involved in and provide them with information on how to access those activities. Volunteers could also accompany community members to an activity or group to help them settle in.

A focus on building capacity in existing clubs and groups to provide a welcoming and friendly environment for new members helped to retain and increase membership. It also meant that Community Connectors could refer people to activities, and be confident that they would be warmly welcomed.



Frankston Positive Ageing Together.

Through this project the group:

- developed a high-quality social inclusion volunteer Community Connector training package
- recruited a project leadership group from 12 key community agencies across Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula
- held two large community consultations to determine the project scope, attended by 90 people
- delivered the Community Connector training package to 55 community members
- recruited 17 Community Connector volunteers across the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula region, and provided ongoing support and training for volunteers
- raised awareness of the importance of social inclusion for health. This occurred at community and agency levels
- increased partnerships within communities
- developed a resource kit to enable seniors clubs and groups to implement welcoming policies and procedures
- committed to providing ongoing support and training for volunteer committees of management to help them develop their club or group
- strengthened relationships between the clubs and groups and council, and also strengthened the relationship between the two partnering councils

- brought together representatives of 58 clubs from across the region to attend a Seniors Clubs and Group Forum in November 2017 to network and discuss what it means to be a welcoming club
- developed a publication for clubs and groups about how to develop and maintain a welcoming culture
- increased relationships between local government and local seniors clubs and groups resulting in ongoing support and training programs being offered to committees of management.

### Project Leadership Group:

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Whittlesea community members and Volunteer Community Connectors.

## Whittlesea Seniors Linkup

This project established a network of volunteer Community Connectors who support socially isolated and lonely seniors to participate in activities that meet their needs and interests.

The project also promoted and encouraged age-friendly approaches for community groups.

Commencing with a mapping exercise of activities for seniors in the municipality, the project built a searchable online database of activities and information.

This project involved:

- an information workshop and two training sessions for Community Connectors
- conducting an information workshop and two training sessions for Community Connectors
- regular networking opportunities for connectors and a facility and activity tour to familiarise volunteers with available activities

## Strengthening Seniors Inclusion and Participation in local communities

- developing a volunteer Community Connectors training package, including a contact report and referral pathway information
- supporting, via the work of the Community Connectors, more than 18 people to link to a range of activities including golf, Tai Chi, a walking group, a seniors club and walking football.

A major outcome of this project was bringing to light the many areas that can be improved.

An important lesson was that simple actions like creating brochures, checking in with people who have stopped attending, and improving communication can make a big difference.

### Project Leadership Group:

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Greater Bendigo and Loddon Shire reminiscing event.

## Strengthening seniors inclusion and participation in Bendigo and Loddon

The City of Greater Bendigo and Shire of Loddon project worked with local community groups and organisations to create awareness of the needs of older community members so that these needs could be included in program planning and delivery.

It also strengthened local connections and referral pathways by building community capacity and interagency partnerships.

Wellbeing Teams were established to work with vulnerable community members.

The first was in the Bendigo U3A, which developed a movie morning to bring together people who had trouble accessing the commercial cinema.

The Wellbeing Team also tackled nutrition by hosting lunch after the movie morning.

The project also included library site activation and engagement, and digital literacy programs in Axedale, Inglewood, Elmore and Bort.

Museums Victoria helped to develop reminiscing kits, which the project used to connect seniors with younger members of the community. Author tours and book clubs will be developed in the future.

Training was also developed for clubs, libraries and volunteers to improve understanding of the service system, referral pathways, and accessing My Aged Care.

Two sporting clubs also participated: the Woodbury Bowls Club and Eaglehawk Croquet Club.

Key achievements of this project were:

- training sessions to help groups and volunteers identify the needs of seniors, and refer people to other supports
- Wellbeing Teams formed at U3A Bendigo and at the Rotary Club of Kangaroo Flat
- use of the reminiscing kit training from Museums Victoria leading to establishment of a working group to plan programs for seniors, including a 'memory café' and outreach reminiscing sessions
- a group of socially isolated seniors were provided transport to enjoy a 'memories of childhood' session, followed by afternoon tea. They loved the reminiscing, sharing of stories and connection with others.

## **Project Leadership Group**

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