

COMMUNITY WORK CONNECTIONS

Issue 9 May 2016

Buddy Bear Program

Latrobe Community Health Services (LCHS) and the Gippsland Region Community Work Program formed a partnership in September 2015 to create the Buddy Bear program, which makes a valuable contribution to the community by providing comfort and friendship for children who have suffered a traumatic experience.



The Buddy Bears is a female-specific program that facilitates the community work obligations for up to 20 offenders per week.

The Buddy Bears are distributed free of charge to the community from GP clinics, dentists, and carer and counselling programs. Each bear comes with a birth certificate and non-toxic washable markers, allowing the bear to be named, decorated, washed and reused.

The LCHS Program Facilitator Adriana Pezzutto said children enjoy being given something so unique and special. "We receive amazing reactions from children who are excited and intrigued to receive a bear as it is given in a colourful bag and looks like a gift," she said. "The Buddy Bears have grown from being a tool used for trauma to a great tool for our reception and staff to use to create

a positive distraction for children who have to wait periods of time for an appointment, a helpful distraction to the distress the child or parent may be experiencing."

The program has provided offenders with terrific opportunities for learning new skills and giving back to the community. For example, one offender who completed her required hours has now returned as a volunteer.

Offenders have learned new skills such as sewing and knitting, and have made things for themselves (in their own time) such as clothes. Not only have some gained a new life skill, but they have also gained self-confidence and a sense of self-worth while being a part of this program. This alternative craft has also been a great way for them to express themselves and try new things.

A LCHS counsellor said, "I utilise the Buddy Bear as a therapy tool. The children take them home each week and write about the things they want to discuss. As issues or anxieties build during the week, they then bring the bear back in for discussion in the next session as a tool to prompt and recall things they wished to discuss. They then take the bears home, wash them and start again"

The Gippsland Community Work Program is strongly committed to this program and its future development, with recent investments in materials and new sewing machines.

From the Commissioner

Corrections Victoria is committed to supporting the community by organising for offenders on court orders to assist with important local projects. The stories in this edition illustrate our diverse response capability.



Our partners are at the centre of our projects and our staff are always eager to respond to approaches for assistance. If you are reading this newsletter for the first time, please do not hesitate to contact your local Community Correctional Services office. The Community Work staff will be only too happy to discuss your ideas for us to work with your community group.

The Department of Justice and Regulation (DJR) and Corrections Victoria are also at the forefront of responses to family violence. Our feature article in this newsletter illustrates an important contribution in the Gippsland region, where offenders are creating toys for children who are often traumatised by their experience in a violent home.

Projects such as these can be extremely meaningful to offenders, who express pride in assisting the community. Through their participation, they can also acquire life and work-related skills to support their rehabilitation into the community, increasing their employability and reducing their risk of re-offending.

Jan Shuard PSM
Commissioner, Corrections Victoria

Swags for Homeless

Swags for Homeless is a non-profit community organisation that supports people who are homeless and living on the street. It provides homeless people with a light backpack bed, which can be carried around and turned into a swag bed when required, providing a more dignified and safe place in which to sleep.

As the West Metro Community Work team co-ordinates community work placements in the region for people sentenced to Community Correction Orders by the courts, Swags for Homeless contacted the team for assistance.

Swags for Homeless both donate the backpack beds and sell them in a retail store. Consequently, they needed help repackaging these beds, as they had decided to donate the beds they would normally sell. This work required offenders to help change over paperwork in the bags, as well as remove poles and repack the bags. A total of 216 units were completed by the team in March 2016 alone.

In addition to the bed itself, the Community Work team was able to source useful items for homeless people in need. Articles

such as toothbrushes, deodorant, sleeping masks and socks were included in pouches that were provided with each bed. Boxes of extra pouches and socks were also given to some of the charities for them to hand out as required. The backpack beds were shipped off to a variety of organisations across Australia to be distributed in time for winter.

Swags for Homeless was judged the Best Community Organisation in 2011 by the Australian Human Rights Commission.



St Albans Place Making Event

The West Metro Community Correctional Services team recently provided furniture to Brimbank City Council for a place making pop-up-park event. Pop-up-parks are an initiative designed to encourage community members to be more active in their outdoor environment.

The Recycle Reuse Donate Woodwork Program, currently in operation through the West Metro Community Work Team, involves offenders completing their community work hours by creating items of furniture out of reused, donated wooden pallets. These are then donated to disadvantaged members of the community. The donation to Brimbank City Council comprised two framed wooden chairs and two reclining wooden chairs.

The two-day event in March was a street market, with a



Youth Movement, a local youth dance group, relax on furniture made by offenders for the 'pop-up' park in St Albans.

talent quest, community-based music performances, martial arts demonstrations, dancing and singing events in Alfreda Street, St Albans.

This partnership has been in place for a number of years and it is hoped it will be extended further to provide more items for similar events.

Creating Cards – Community Work Opportunities for Women

Healthy Pears is an innovative community work program for women offenders, involving a partnership between the Jesuit Community College and the South East Metropolitan Region (SEMR) Community Work Team. The program is based at the Frankston North Community House and provides the women with an accreditation opportunity.

Female offenders are designing an A to Z library of picture cards on healthy eating. They are also supported by an experienced artist throughout the program to help design the cards. The cards will be donated to local primary schools in the region, to be used as an educational resource to promote healthy eating by children.



Additionally, participants learn about healthy eating and take this knowledge back to their families.

This program has been achieving excellent attendance rates and offenders are also linking into other services and programs provided by the community house. This creates pathway opportunities for the women to engage in further training, which can lead to employment. Their families can also utilise the services provided by the centre.

Creative Cards involves card-making for women offenders

in partnership with The Basin Community House, through the Lilydale Justice Service Centre. This program commenced towards the end of 2015 and has become a very successful program in only a very short period of time. Female offenders are provided with pre-accreditation opportunities, where they learn new skills while making and designing beautiful cards. The cards are then sold at The Cancer in Kids Auxiliary (CIKA) at the Royal Children's Hospital to raise money for children's cancer research.

Bendigo Offenders collecting rubbish in local parks

Over the last 12 months the partnership between Bendigo Community Correctional Services and Parks Victoria has continued to develop. A work team meets with Parks Victoria rangers on a fortnightly basis and assists with rubbish collection throughout the national parks around Bendigo. They also work on the Wheel Cactus Pest Weed Eradication project in Kamarooka (Greater Bendigo National Park).

On 11 March 2016, the work team collected more than 1000 kilograms of general waste from two major hot spots that have been causing considerable community concern. Over the course of the partnership, the offenders have come across a number of dumped items, including car bodies, syringes, animal

carcasses, white goods and a safe, which was handed in to the police for finger printing.

All offenders completing work with the Parks Victoria work team undergo a safety briefing at the commencement of the day. Offenders are assisting the local rangers in work that was

Sam Falkingham, a Parks Victoria Ranger, supervises offenders about to set off for the day on their litter pick-up community work in a national park.

previously left solely to them and are learning about the impact rubbish dumping can have on the community and wildlife.



Animal Aid in Coldstream

Animal Aid in Coldstream is a terrific site for offenders to complete their community work hours. While South East Metropolitan Region (SEMR) Community Correctional Services has work teams that attend regularly to complete gardening

and maintenance work, there is also the opportunity for offenders to attend on an individual placement basis. Offenders who have significant hours of community work to complete can be trained to work with the dogs and cats on site, along with other duties.

An ex-offender recently discussed her successful community work placement at the 2015 annual SEMR community work site forum. She explained how she was able to turn her life around during her time performing community work at this site. The staff on site accepted her without judgement and this made her feel welcome. She attended each week and assisted in a variety of ways with the animals, eventually asking to work with the difficult-to-place dogs.

These were dogs that no one wanted to adopt but the offender was adamant that she wanted to help give them a second chance, since she felt she had been given a second chance by Animal Aid. Her work with the dogs was so valued that the manager of Animal Aid offered her an ongoing job at the end of her community work hours. Overall, a very positive outcome for all involved!



Mount Bolton Fire Recovery

The Mount Bolton area of the Grampians was struck by bushfire in February 2016, which burnt through 1,300 hectares of land. At one point, 46 fire trucks and 14 aircraft were fighting the fire, which ultimately destroyed three houses.



Together with BlazeAid, the Grampians Community Work Team has contributed to the recovery effort, helping those affected by the fire. Grampians Community Work Teams were on the ground days after the area was declared safe, removing damaged fencing and debris.

The efforts were organised by BlazeAid, which has coordinated

recovery efforts for recent bushfires in the Mount Bolton and Scotsburn areas. Ballarat City Council has also assisted, providing much-needed litter deposit points for Community Work Teams to place fire-affected debris for collection.

The recovery works have been well received, and over a kilometre of fire-damaged fencing and ten trailer loads of debris have

been removed from fire-affected properties since the teams commenced work at the beginning of March.

This project has provided uninsured property owners with relief and has provided valuable assistance after such a devastating event.

River Rescue

The Yarrowee River flows through Ballarat, collecting rainwater. Towards the south of Ballarat, the river flows out of the concreted area into a natural running stream surrounded by bushland and walking tracks. Unfortunately, after periods of rain, flowing water collects litter in Ballarat and this flows through the concrete system,

ending up in the natural running stream and bushland area.

In partnership with Ballarat City Council, the Grampians Community Work Team has begun to clean the natural stream area. A team of offenders attend the river weekly, starting at the cement run off and working their way along

the five-kilometre natural river.

This work requires some long walks for offenders and they have reported that, despite this, the area itself is great to work in and cleaning the litter is very satisfying.

Over two trailer loads of litter have been removed from the first few sections of the river.



If you have a job for your regional Community Work Program, contact the office nearest you and ask for the Regional Community Work Program Manager.

Authorised by the Department of Justice and Regulation, 121 Exhibition St, Melbourne

May 2016

www.justice.vic.gov.au

Published by Department of Justice and Regulation, Victoria, Australia

© Copyright State of Victoria 2016, Department of Justice and Regulation



Justice and Regulation

Hume Region Celebrates Successful Partnerships

On 18 January 2016, the Hume Region Community Work Awards were held to celebrate partnerships between Corrections Victoria and local community organisations. The awards ceremony was held in Benalla and was attended by more than 120 partner agencies, stakeholders and Department of Justice and Regulation (DJR) staff.

In total, 154 community work partner agencies were thanked for their on-going support and commitment to the Hume Region Community Work Program, each receiving a Certificate of Appreciation.

Ms Jaclyn Symes MP, member of the Victorian Legislative Council representing Northern Victoria, presented 25 organisations with Outstanding Contribution Awards, in acknowledgement of their dedication and contribution to the Community Work Program.

The awards trophies (pictured) were made out of recycled materials by the offenders. Also on display throughout the day was recycled artwork, made by offenders completing their unpaid community work. This created a lot of attention and provided some enjoyment for the participants, with a lucky door prize being a pick from the display.

In 2014–15, the Hume Region community work program contributed more than \$1.6 million and 54,000 hours of unpaid work to not-for-profit organisations across Northern Victoria.

For further information, contact Renae Johns, Regional Community Work Program Manager, Hume Region on (03) 5858 7600.



Cultivating Place, Cultivating People

“Cultivating Place, Cultivating People” is a unique community work program which provides men and women serving Community Correction Orders with an opportunity to complete a certified training course and prepare meals in an industrial kitchen for those most in need in the community.

The program is a joint venture between the North Metro Community Correctional Services, Jesuit Social Services, and FareShare. Offenders are able to attend and work in the kitchen at FareShare in Abbotsford to prepare meals to be distributed in the community to those in need. In 2015, FareShare prepared and distributed over 1.1 million meals!

Offenders are also able to complete a foundation training course, while at the same time giving back to the community in a worthwhile way.

The program has been running for 10 weeks now, and has seen an unprecedented level of engagement and ongoing attendance. Participants have

commented on the satisfaction they gain from being able to give back to the community and complete useful, tangible work that also offers them the opportunity to enhance their skills.

In April 2016, a second team commenced at FareShare, expanding on the success of the initial work team.



Leading Community Corrections Officer Liam Brockhus helps chop up carrots at Cultivating Place, Cultivating People.