



2022-23 Annual report

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ABN 93 394 556 254 / Incorporation number A0009183G / TOID 3811

Fitzroy Learning Network acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we live, learn and work. We pay our respects to elders past and present of the Wurundjeri Wilam Clan of the Kulin Nation and we recognise their continuing living culture and the contribution they make to our city. We express our hope for reconciliation, justice, and the recognition of the ongoing living culture of all aboriginal people.



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Demographics of FLN and suburb

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CEO Report

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Neighbourhood House Program

Castaways

B2H

Block Party

Yarra NH Collaboration

Sector & Community Investment

Auspicing

Partnerships

Networks

Education Program

Accredited Training Program

Adult Community & Further Education

Community Support

Food Bank

Youth Engagement Program

Kitchen Catering Project

ABOUT US

*Connecting community,
developing potential,
investing in people*

*Fitzroy Learning network is an essential and trusted part of Fitzroy.
A local community hub where people feel safe to connect,
be heard, and to learn and grow.*

VISION

An egalitarian society where everyone feels safe,
included, and empowered.

PURPOSE

To foster community connection and active
participation in society.

OUR VALUES

Community-centred | Inclusive | Authentic
Welcoming | Collaborative

2022-2023 SNAPSHOT

1,510 food relief packs
10,000 onsite meals
1,040 classes
12 special events
760 community support interactions
480 social support engagement
60 volunteers
1,740 volunteer hours
>400 hours of citizenship preparation

WHAT FILLS OUR DAY?

Listening to and talking with people

Housing Assistance

Creative Writing

Art in the Courtyard

Bridges to Harmony

Strategic Planning

Castaways Craft Group

Youth Engagement

Community Lunches

Partnerships & Collaborations

Gardening Programs

Excursions to parks & museums

Computer Classes

Barista Training

Fitzroy Community Dinners

Sewing & Art Classes

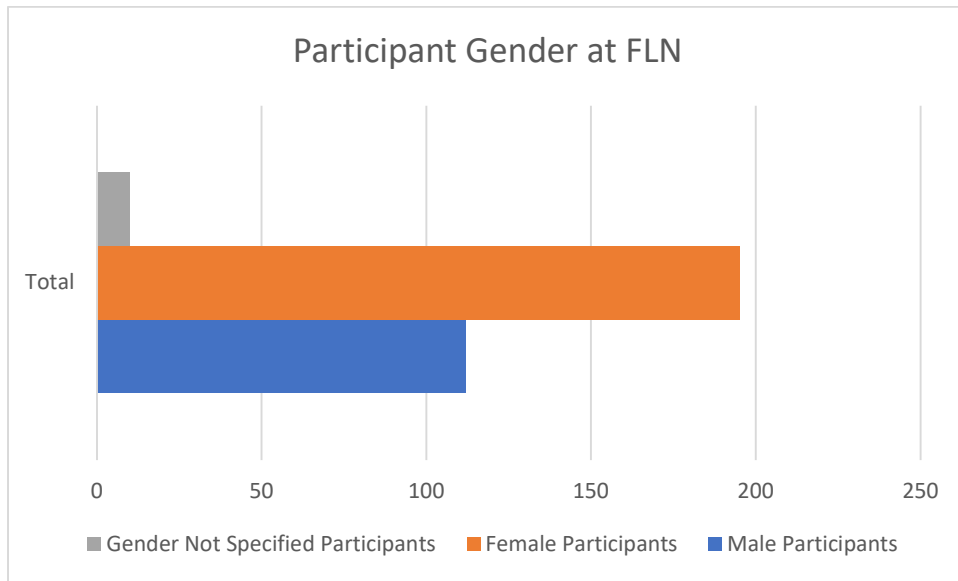
Train the Trainer

English Language Courses

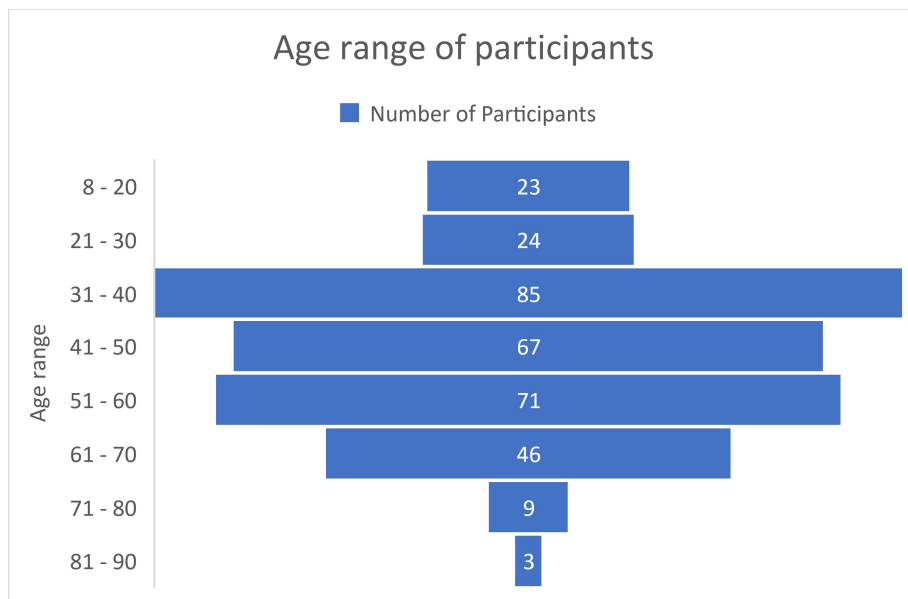
The Kitchen Catering Project

Reducing people's loneliness and providing connection

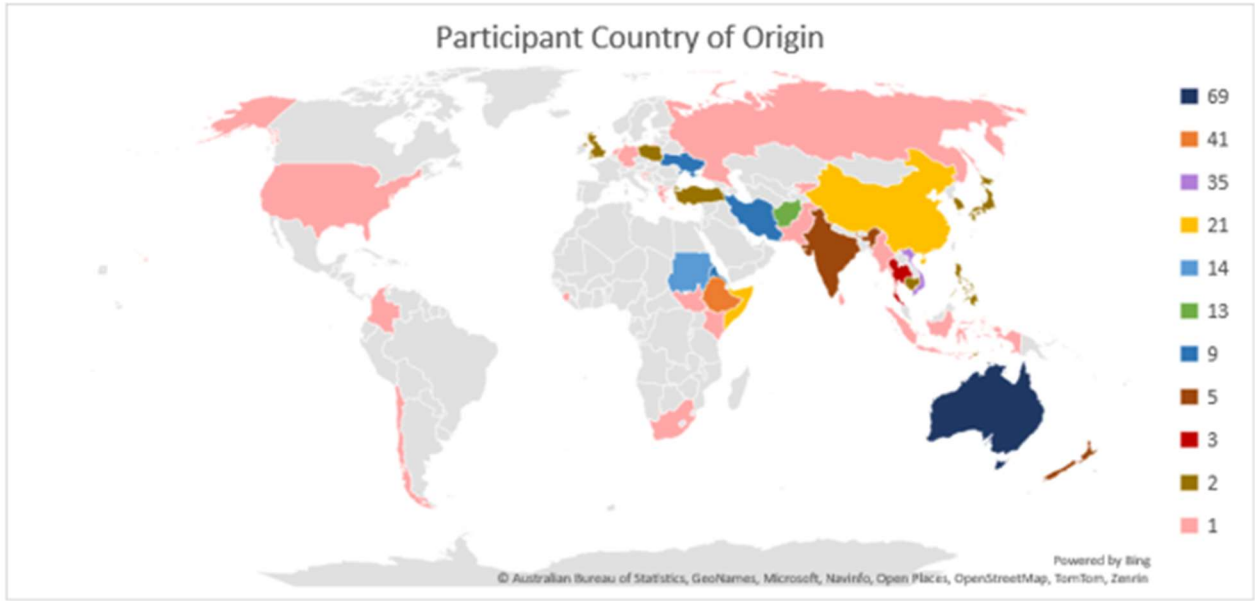
DEMOGRAPHICS



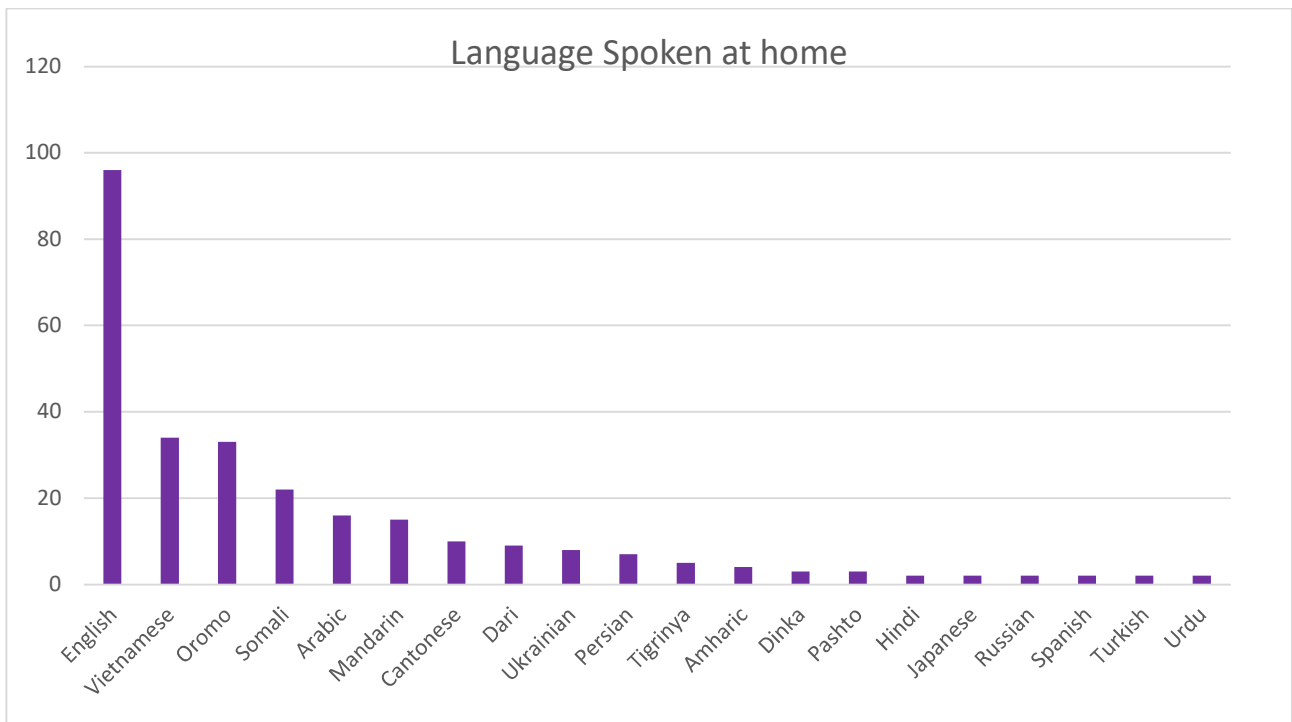
Fitzroy Learning Network sees more women than men come through the door, although the gap is reducing with our fantastic ACFE programs reaching a more diverse cohort.



The majority of our participants are between the ages of 30 and 60, which doesn't change a lot year on year. However, we have over 50 people aged 60 and older and it is great to see so many people continue to prioritise learning in their lives. When we add in the Youth Engagement Program, our age range is eight to eighty-plus and this is to be celebrated.



Although the highest number of participants identify as Australian, Fitzroy Learning continues to have a fantastic breadth of participants, with people coming from Vietnam, Ethiopia, Somalia, China, Sudan, Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea, and many other countries.



Unsurprisingly, our Neighbourhood House has speakers of more than 44 different languages.

PEOPLE

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Chair | Jeannine Jacobson |
| Deputy Chair | Jon Staley |
| Secretary | Annie Chapman |
| Treasurer | Kalpesh Kothari |
| Ordinary Board Members | Chloe Pearse Gerson Hernandez Jen Freshwater Julia Gregg Laura Bird Martin Foo |
| Finance Risk & Compliance Committee | Shawn Tan |
| Relocation Working Group | Danielle Meyer |

THE CORE TEAM

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Chief Executive Officer | Jane Tonkin |
| Accredited Training Program Manager | Nicole Adornetto |
| Learn Local & Community Program Manager | Christine Sammut |
| Community Support Coordinator | Edith Benkoe |
| Administrator | Thuy Ngo |
| Project Support | Carlota Baticon |

Programs & Project Staff**EAL Teachers**

Cathy Sailah
 Floyd Kermodé
 Jarie Jarungchit
 Judith Fleurisson
 Kath Janka
 Matt Noonan
 Ronnie Elazary

Learn Local Facilitators

Alanna Clarkson
 Christina Hornby-Waring
 Francis Thompson
 Fred Van't Sand
 Judith Fleurisson
 Kamalpreet Singh
 Lucy Derum
 Mandy Sinclair
 Merryn Steel
 Michelle Twyford
 Sasha Hodge
 Simone Broekman
 Sue Coffey

Castaways Craft Group

Christine Sammut

Youth Engagement Program*** Youth Sewing Group**

Christobel Elliott
 Sasha Hodge
*** Our Space**
 Carlota Baticon
 Christobel Elliott
 Iftine Omar

Isra Mohamed
 Katherine Hesline
 Lucy Van't Sand
 Luigi Chisenga

Food Bank

Brigid Russell
 Denise Weybury
 John
 Helen
 Maria

Hospitality Training

Mandy Sinclair
 Ximena Abarca

Kitchen Catering Team

Akram Fallah
 Amina Ayubi
 Carlota Baticon
 Fatema Hossanzadeh
 Laila Maqsoodi
 Nassim Gholami
 Shukri Hassam

Documentation

Sayed Maqsoodi

External Programs

Gabby Kanini-Parsons
 Mandy Sinclair

Project Support

Eugenia Mezquida
 Holly Van't Sand
 Isabelle Khor
 Ivany Sabatini
 Koko Lawton
 Mia Bowen

VOLUNTEERS

Adrian Leatherland | Alma Gill | Amanda Rasmussen | Andoni Laguna-Alberdi |
 Anne Michelson | Annemarie Levin | Annie Chapman | Beth Kermond | Betsy Bradshaw |
 Brigid Russell | Carolyn Turner | Christina Hornby-Waring | Denise Weybury |
 Florence Little | Fred Van't Sand | Grace Richardson | Isabelle Khor | Jeannine Jacobson
 | Jen Freshwater | Jenny Norvick | John Richardson | John Telfer |
 Lou Yous | Lynda Clifford | Marcia Burchell-Quirk | Maria Zerella | Marianne Lee |
 Marie Buckland | Mark Rumler | Meredith Young | Miriam Sherwood |
 Nanette Hunter | Nicole Brown | Patrick O'Brien | Paula Moore | Rob Freshwater |
 Rosemary Ballard | Sadif Mehiish | Sakira Nathaniel | Sharon Hernandez |
 Shumon Khan | Steve Bone | Steve Wilkins | Sue Coffey

STUDENT PLACEMENTS

Gabby Kanani-Parsons | Razia Qasim | Christina Panayidis |
 Priscilla Di Mello | Liz Stoyanova | Jia Hui

FROM THE CHAIR

Fitzroy Learning Network is in full swing as a vibrant and active community-based organisation providing a fantastic focus for a range of activities and training programs including some initiated by community members and facilitated by Fitzroy Learning. There is an ongoing conversation between staff and community members about what they want from their Neighbourhood House and the program adjusts, where it can, to respond to what people in the Fitzroy community are seeking.

A good example of this is the demand for Hospitality Training which has now been added to Fitzroy Learning Network's delivery scope in its role as a Registered Training Organisation.

The Kitchen Catering Project was kickstarted with support from The Funding Network and has had pop up stalls with their fabulous food at several Neighbourhood House events as well as the Vic Pride Festival and Fairfield in Feb Music Concerts.

Once again, Bridges to Harmony was a magnificent community event in Condell Park. From mid-afternoon to sunset, great performances on stage led to lots of dancing, drumming and singing. Many families picnicked in the park with their friends and neighbours with the Kitchen Catering Team turning out fantastic food. This Harmony Day event was supported by funding from Multicultural Festivals & Events and City of Yarra. It is a hugely collaborative celebration with our partners Cultivating Community, Yarra Libraries, Monique Di Mattina and Super Mande Percussion.

Fitzroy Learning Network partnered with Monique DiMattina and Bandwagon in a series of late afternoon Block Parties in Condell Park featuring live music and dance from young and emerging creatives in the City of Yarra. The Kitchen Catering Team provided food, and craft stalls enabled Fitzroy Learning and Connie Ben makers to sell their wares. The Fitzroy Block Parties

proved to be popular events attracting people from across the spectrum of the Fitzroy community.

It's great to see Condell Park being used as the site for events for the Fitzroy community.

Fund Raising

Fitzroy Learning has begun to host fundraising events again after Covid restrictions suspended them for several years. 2022-23 included a successful Quiz Night and a glamorous dinner which raised much needed funds.

Fundraising is an important focus for Fitzroy Learning into the future. Like many community-based organisations, Fitzroy Learning is struggling with a sharp increase in costs and our revenue sources are not increasing at the same rate. We are exploring all options to expand our funding sources and to increase donations.

Changes to the Board

We welcomed several new board members this year - Chloe Pearse, Martin Foo, Laura Bird and Gerson Hernandez. Shawn Tan has joined the Finance Risk and Compliance Committee of the Board. It is a pleasure to work with all of them.

We are sorry to say farewell to two board members who are retiring because of pressure from other commitments. Our Treasurer for the last three years, Kalpesh Kothari and Deputy Chair Jon Staley, are both retiring.

We thank them for their contribution to Fitzroy Learning's continuing stability. We have all enjoyed working with them and wish them well.

Fitzroy Learning Network's new location

We are confident that the Neighbourhood House will be moving within the next year into space at the base of the tower at 140 Brunswick St on the Atherton Gardens Estate. We are working closely with the Victorian Department of Families Fairness and Housing and Homes Victoria to finalise arrangements to enable this to happen. We are looking forward to being able to move into the new site and to be in closer proximity to many of the people we engage with and support. The move will open an exciting new chapter for the Neighbourhood House and will allow us to make the most of many new opportunities to expand our range of activities.

Acknowledgments

Jane Tonkin, Fitzroy Learning's CEO and her team, Nicole Adornetto, Christine Sammut, Edith Benkoe, Thuy Ngo and Carlota Baticon have worked tirelessly to deliver the broad range of community focused events and services. I acknowledge the work of Fitzroy Learning's dedicated teachers, facilitators, and volunteers.

Thanks also go to our partners who collaborate with us to deliver programs and services and the organisations who have generously awarded Fitzroy Learning Network with grants for community projects and activities.

Finally thank you to my fellow Board members for fantastic commitment and work over the year.

Jeannine Jacobson
Chair



Soft Sculpture created by Youth Sewing Group
Collaboration with Social Studio

FROM THE TREASURER

The financial year 2022-23 marked the first full cycle following the disruptive aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the direct impact of the pandemic has subsided, residual challenges persisted, necessitating our steadfast organisational recovery. This period was defined by resilient restoration.

In contrast to the preceding financial year, the Fitzroy Learning Network (FLN) experienced a reduction of \$86k in COVID-19 Government Support during FY 22-23. This loss of revenue, however, was not only recuperated but surpassed through the following means:

- A. An augmented Government Funding of \$90k for our Core program delivery compared to the preceding year.
- B. An additional \$22k in other income, surpassing the previous financial year.
- C. An increment of \$4k in student revenue compared to the previous year.

On the expenditure front, FLN demonstrated a commendable reduction of \$20k in Depreciation and Amortisation expenses in FY 22-23 compared to FY 21-22. Nevertheless, due to a pronounced surge in inflationary pressures, there was a noteworthy increase of \$63k in Salaries and Wages, and \$51k in Program Expenses, as compared to the previous year. Consequently, FLN concluded the FY 22-23 with a reported deficit of little under \$34k.

In reflection, while FLN has exhibited resilience in restoring and elevating activity levels, the ongoing challenges of cost management persist, urging a return to modest surpluses. It is imperative to acknowledge that while FLN operates as a "Not-for-Profit" organisation, it is unequivocally "Not-for-losses" either.

In response, the Board has intensified its focus on diversifying revenue streams and enhancing fundraising endeavours while concurrently exercising prudent cost controls. A dedicated subcommittee has been instituted with the primary objective of fortifying fundraising efforts. Simultaneously, the Finance, Risk And Compliance Committee (FRACC) has initiated several measures to curtail significant cost components such as IT Support costs, Bookkeeping costs, and equipment expenses.

I wish to inform FLN members that, having completed three fulfilling years as the Treasurer, and with a strategic alignment with my personal priorities, I have elected to resign from the Board. These years have been profoundly enriching, collaborating with the esteemed members of the Board. It has been an honour to work alongside experienced, committed, and benevolent individuals.

I am heartened by the infusion of young, dynamic, and enthusiastic members onto the FLN Board over the last year. Furthermore, I am pleased to note that FLN has secured an outstanding candidate to assume the role of Treasurer, moving forward.

I extend my best wishes to FLN, its Board, and its dedicated staff for continued success in the future.

Financial Result Summary

| | 2023 \$ | 2022 \$ | YoY change \$ |
|-----------------------|------------|------------|------------------|
| TOTAL REVENUE | 941,287 | 909,585 | 31,702 |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURE | 974,917 | 883,694 | 91,223 |
| NET Surplus/(Deficit) | (33,630) | 26,163 | (59,521) |

Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2023

| | 2023 \$ | 2022 \$ | YoY change \$ |
|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| ASSETS | | | |
| TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS | 548,480 | 575,482 | (27,002) |
| TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS | 11,909 | 34,800 | (22,891) |
| TOTAL ASSETS | 560,389 | 610,282 | (49,893) |
| LIABILITIES | | | |
| TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES | 272,697 | 269,371 | 3,326 |
| TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES | - | 19,580 | (19,580) |
| TOTAL LIABILITIES | 272,697 | 288,951 | (16,254) |
| NET ASSETS | 287,702 | 321,332 | (33,630) |
| EQUITY | | | |
| ACCUMULATED FUNDS | 287,702 | 321,332 | (33,630) |
| TOTAL EQUITY | 287,702 | 321,332 | (33,630) |

FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Fitzroy Learning Network is a place full of laughter and joy ... mostly.

So many of the people we work with have travelled hard roads to reach our Neighbourhood House, and many are still on those roads. They are trying to reconnect with family on the other side of the world. They are trying to establish new lives here and build social connections and friendships. They are hoping for wellbeing and having enough food on the table.

Working in the community sector has never been more important. And I take this opportunity to acknowledge the extraordinary group of people who participate in delivering our annual program - whether core team, casual and project staff, volunteers, occasional helpers, board members, people who come here everyday or people we meet only briefly. Everyone here has an impact on our Neighbourhood House and the people participating in our programs and activities.

I thank everyone of them. It makes coming to work enjoyable and rewarding.

Back to the laughter and joy ... we see it when:

- An English class is dancing to YMCA and Nutbush City Limits,
- Two people find a connection over lunch in the courtyard,
- There is any kind of cooking happening in the kitchen,
- Someone races here from their Citizenship Test to tell us they passed,
- People share their culture,
- Someone has a grandchild,
- Someone has a baby,
- Someone gets a job,
- People graduate,
- People sing in the choir.



CEO CONT.

The last twelve months have seen some cyclical shifts in requests and services from the community and you can find these outlined in this report. Food relief remains a growing area and we anticipate this to continue. Citizenship and immigration support requests are on the rise and this makes us reflect on the time it takes to make the applications for family reunification as well the time it takes to process the application.

At the same time we are seeing a rise in the number of people spending time at the Neighbourhood House because we are their social network. It is a fantastic social environment because we have children through to eighty year olds, we are multi-generational, multi-lingual and we always have tea and coffee on the go.

Jane Tonkin
CEO

2022-2023 PROGRAM

Neighbourhood House Program

- Bridges to Harmony
- Fitzroy Block Party
- Fitzroy Community Dinners
- Castaways Crafters
- Youth Engagement Program

Education Program

- Adult Community & Further Education [Learn Local]
- English Language Classes [accredited]
- Hospitality Training [accredited]

Community Engagement & Development

- Community Lunches
- Art in the Courtyard
- Volunteer Program
- Student Placements
- The Kitchen Catering Program

Community Support

- Food Relief
- Direct Support
- Clothing Bank

Sector Investment

- Partnerships & Collaborations
- Project Auspicing

Neighbourhood House Program

The Neighbourhood House is a natural space for the community to gather whether for social activities, a meal, to learn a new skill, celebrate in a festival, volunteer to help out or to sit and have a cup of tea. It is a comfortable, warm and welcoming space which enables people to feel at ease from their first visit.

The House is always busy and filled with mothers and toddlers, eight to eighty year old participants, young people...

Our program responds to our community. As well as practical support and developing skills, our community focus connects people, reduces isolation and provides a place for people to be.

We facilitate **community engagement** through a broad program which provides **skills** and **learning opportunities, social connections** and both wrap around and material **support**. These things combine to grow and provoke peoples' **confidence, resilience, dignity** and **sense of belonging**.

COMMUNITY DINNERS have become a feature of our annual events program. People bring all sorts of wonderful food, our team will prepare some additions and there is always at least sixty people arriving to share the meal, and often around 100. There are regular attendees and always new faces - people we have not met before.



BRIDGES TO HARMONY is the wonderful annual festival celebrating Harmony Day. We take over Condell Reserve with live music, dance and African drumming workshops, come'n'try circus, face painters, book tent, activities space and food. The Harmony Day theme in 2023 was everyone belongs - of this resonates strongly with our Neighbourhood House. Bridges to Harmony is a wonderful coming together of the broad community that is Fitzroy.

Collaboration with:
Yarra Libraries, Cultivating Community, Monique DiMattina, Super Mande Percussion

Supported by:
Multicultural Festivals and Events and City of Yarra



THE CASTAWAYS is an ever-evolving group of people who love yarn and love to spin a yarn. Whether knitting or crocheting, an experienced creator or a novice, this group reflects what the Neighbourhood House is all about.

Members of the group are connected to Fitzroy Learning in multiple ways including volunteers, the art class, long-term participants, staff, English Language students...

The group began online and they are prolific makers. So much so that they need projects! In the last twelve months they have created dog blankets and dog coats for the lost dogs home, and tiny hats and booties and blankets for prem babies that need to be snuggly.



FITZROY BLOCK PARTY A wonderful series of events in Condell Reserve produced in partnership with Monique Di Martina and Bandwagon.

Monique and Bandwagon took on the production side of things and curated a rich program of live performance - music and dance - that celebrated young creatives from primary school age to young adults.

The Kitchen Catering Team produced food that we sold and we had craft stalls on site as well. Fantastic vibe in Condell Reserve!

Collaboration with:
Yarra Libraries, Cultivating Community, Monique DiMattina, Super Mande Percussion

Supported by:
City of Yarra provided funding to Monique Di Mattina

Youth Engagement Program



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM includes the Youth Sewing Group [for teenagers] and Our Space [for eight to 14 year olds].

A space for young people to gather, share a meal, learn things, and develop confidence and camaraderie.

Highlights - sewing soft sculptures with Social Studio, young people initiating projects and seeking funding to extend activity.

Collaboration with:
Yarra Libraries & Yarra Youth Services

Supported by:
Community Bank Clifton Hill

Education Program

Adult Community & Further Education [Learn Local]

Supported by ACFE

Courses:

Creative industries - Art for Beginners and Sewing

Living & Working in Australia

Urban Farming

Train the Trainer

Journaling for recovery - in partnership with Quin House

Cooking from the pantry - two classes, one partnership with Quin House

Small business startup - in partnership with Connie Benn

Choir - in partnership with St Marys House of Welcome

Attendance for the classes in the last 12 months has been very consistent. There are a variety of educators involved and all are passionate about their area of expertise. It is great to see this flow onto to the participants and makes for a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment. It is also wonderful to see the confidence and skills of the participants develop. A good number of people continue with the courses over successive terms which I think speaks to the sense of community and positive learning environment that is provided at Fitzroy Learning.

2022 saw the return of conferences. I was fortunate enough to get to the ACFE conference at the Park Hyatt in August 2022 and the Neighbour Houses conference at Philipp Island in May 2023. These both presented great networking opportunities which included conversations around program delivery and development. Both conferences included a wide variety of workshops including digital skills, learners teaching practice and working with partners to name just a few. There were also some very informative and challenging keynote speakers.

Fitzroy Learning staff have been able to promote the programs we deliver with the continued relaxing of restrictions across the housing estates. This commenced in March 2023 with staff being able to be present in the foyers at the base of the towers as well as attend the monthly community markets to talk about the different programs on offer.

It has been another action-packed year full of wonderful conversations with students staff and volunteers. Our community relationships and partnerships continue to go from strength to strength. It is wonderful to see the students return year after year, and to hear and see the improvements in skills and confidence.

Christine Sammut

Learn Local & Community Programs Manager



Education Program cont.

Accredited Program including:-

Supported by AMEP and Skills First

Classes:

Hospitality Training

English Language Classes

It's been a fabulous year for FLN's Accredited Training Programs. After finally shaking off the shackles of pandemic restrictions, classes returned to full-time face-to-face and the centre is bright and busy again. Students are active and engaged, with a full program of guest speakers, activities and other fun stuff to complement our learning programs. We were very excited to begin our hospitality training program, delivered in partnership with Sibling Café and supported by Aspire Foundation.

Hospitality Training

This year kicked off our Barista Coffee and Food Handling Training Program in partnership with Sibling Café/Kinfolk Enterprise and supported by Aspire Foundation. People signed up via Fitzroy Learning and the volunteer program at Sibling to engage in training and complete two accredited units from the Certificate II in Hospitality. Led by our amazing trainers Ximena Abarca and Mandy Sinclair, students were introduced to the content, first Kitchen Safety and then Barista Training. Once they completed the content, they were given the opportunity to put their knowledge into practice onsite at Sibling Café in one training shift a week. We have had two iterations this year, with all students successfully completing the course. It is wonderful to see the participants grow from zero barista experience to them confidently utilising their skills making coffees, and to bump into them in café employment where they are putting the training into practice.

We thank Jesi, Bel, Nick, Joe and Jared from Sibling/Kinfolk Enterprise for their dedication and commitment to this partnership. We were dismayed when Sibling closed in May drawing this collaboration to a close; the partnership with Sibling was crucial to kickstart this training and get it onto scope.



Thanks to the brilliant Nick and Lachlan at Nomad Coffee (Veneziano), who stepped in and offered access to their fantastic training facility in Richmond. The last round of training and assessments in Barista training happened there and we are thrilled about continuing to use their fantastic training facilities in Richmond as the training progresses. We cannot wait to see the next group tackling the coffee challenge!

English Language classes

After last year's student number high, Fitzroy Learning is pleased to report that this year has seen even more students through our door to improve their English. We continue to teach migrants and refugees from vastly diverse places and, as always, we enjoy working with them as they establish themselves in Australia. We welcomed several guest speakers into the Neighbourhood House this year to provide our students with a greater understanding of the systems, culture and obligations of an Australian resident. Speakers included:-

- Lifesaving Victoria
- Victorian Electoral Commission
- Services Australia
- The Waterwell Project (Health information and education)

Other highlights of the year included -

- watching our students progress through the different levels of curriculum and increase their English fluency,
- student participation in community events such as Community Dinners and Bridges to Harmony,
- Our students cooking and learning about food and nutrition through the Meet and Eat program facilitated by the wonderful Peta from Cultivating Community, with Jane from CoHealth,
- the wonderful atmosphere of morning tea, seeing people from many different cultures sharing food and conversation together in our lovely courtyard, and
- seeing students achieve their goals by obtaining work or participating in further or additional study.

As always the delivery of such a high quality program would not be possible without our fantastic teaching staff, which we saw expand yet again with the addition of Jarie Jarungchit, who came to Fitzroy Learning first as a volunteer, then a student teacher, and finally as a welcome addition to our teaching staff. I am constantly amazed by the dedication and creativity of our teachers and look forward to watching them work their magic in the future.

Nicole Adornetto
Accredited Programs Manager

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

Community Programs, which are designed to elevate social isolation, develop skills as well as providing support.

Loneliness and isolation



Community Lunches

We feed people everyday, and have celebratory lunches to mark end of term, Eid, Easter... Often students will initiate the celebration and organise food to bring. This becomes a lovely cultural sharing, with stories surrounding the food.



Art in the Courtyard

An art therapist in residence provoked a wonderful organic project with art materials and gentle encouragement bringing English Language students to the table along with other participants at morning tea and lunch to create artwork. It was a marvellous way to uncover some hidden talent and to let people explore creativity.



Student Placements

We love providing opportunities for students in the final stages of study to be part of the Neighbourhood House. Some are preparing to be ESL teachers and so diving in to English Language classes makes perfect sense. Others are studying community development or social work and Fitzroy Learning provides scope to explore variety of areas from youth engagement to direct support to community events.

More than half our recent placements have translated into employment with us which we love!

Volunteer Program

Our Volunteers are amazing!

They invest time, energy and expertise to extend the capacity of our Neighbourhood House.

They help in the classroom, support people with applications for immigration and housing, they sort our OzHarvest delivery each week and make sure people's grocery bags are ready for collection, they are generous and have an amazing array of talents.

The Volunteer Lunch during Volunteer Week was a highlight, celebrating the contributions made by volunteers from across the nine Yarra Neighbourhood Houses. Hosted by Fitzroy Learning, the event was a collaboration between the nine houses, choirs performed, and food came from across Yarra. It was a very special day!

Volunteers provide more than 1,740 hours of time over the year. This is equivalent to about \$65,240 in economic terms and about a million dollars in well being and happiness measures.



THE KITCHEN CATERING PROJECT

Kickstarted by support from The Funding Network, this project was designed to provide employment for women connected to the Neighbourhood House.

Many women who connect with us whilst building a life in Australia come from a setting where they were not highly educated, do not have an established work history or particular qualifications. Nevertheless they have valuable skills and experience and importantly confidence when it comes to food.

We harnessed this energy and have created a dynamic team of women who come together to create food. They share skills and established strong camaraderie. They are now initiating projects, bringing ideas and identifying more women who can be part of this project.

We have employed eight women since October on a casual basis, have connected three of them with our sector partner Free to Feed for their leadership program and cooking classes.

The Kitchen Project has been part of a number of events:-

- Fairfield in Feb
- Vic Pride Festival
- Yarra Neighbourhood House Network Volunteer Celebration
- High Street Bells Choir Workshop Day
- Private events
- Fitzroy Block Parties
- Bridges to Harmony

Links to: [Train the trainer](#), [hospitality training](#), [community dinners](#), [sector partnerships](#), [Yarra Neighbourhood House Network](#)



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Our Community Support Program includes direct and wrap around support, food relief, a clothing bank and a responsive approach to ensuring people's safety and well being.

Context

The last few years have been tumultuous and seen a huge shift in government services moving to non-client facing delivery. This has led to a significant increase in demand for support - the continued assistance with traversing government processes but now with the additional need for support in navigating online systems that are often not mobile phone friendly.

When the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing reopened its doors on the housing estate we saw an immediate dip in this area of support.

The move to online has created more work for individuals with less support available from these services. People struggle to navigate Centrelink, Home Affairs, Birth, Death and Marriages, and Vic Roads.

With the post-pandemic opening of borders, immigration work has skyrocketed including both family reunification applications and citizenship applications.

We are also seeing an increase in requests for support from further afield with people being referred here by friends, family or agencies.

Submitting paperwork online creates its own array of problems as we spend hours trying to upload the passport pictures or pdf docs which are not 100% satisfactory to the websites requesting them, which then creates the issue of not being able to submit the application, creating distress to the client, and delaying processes. We need further funding to have onsite IT support to respond to like this.

The suggestion often provided to people who come to us for support is to 'just' submit online or get an immigration lawyer or get their support worker (which they don't have) to do the work. These are not options for our cohort due to financial cost, limited access to wifi and computers, not speaking English well enough to communicate via phone or understand what is being asked in the forms or how to make online payments on immi.gov.au for their visa/citizenship payments.

Settlement work

There has been an increased demand in family sponsorship and immigration from our clients since August 2022. Australian citizens who came here as refugees and are now citizens want to bring over family members left behind - parents, siblings, adult children, cousins, orphaned nieces. Mostly from areas like Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, or South Sudan.

The application process is intense and arduous taking many hours to complete. Complex forms and documentation requirement mean around 10-15 appointments to complete the applications. We rely on a specialist volunteer for both navigating the online system and being able to support people through this process. The approximate wait time is seven years for this type of visa and so there is a long wait to see any result from this investment.

Our volunteer was asked about the amount of time it takes to lodge the application:

"It depends on how many people are in the application. About 10-15 hours for a family of four, going up to about 50 hours for three families in another client's application".

Level of work

Changes: Since February 2023, we have seen a significant increase in citizenship applications going from five to about ten per month. This is only possible with the extensive help of another volunteer who focuses solely on citizenship applications. It is his commitment that enables us to support this number. It takes five hours per person per application and includes applying for a police clearance but only if all the documentation is available. If a form of identity or documentation is missing this can double the time, as can adding children to the application.

We have started to receive increased requests for support people who live outside Yarra and have been referred by Ava Raku, MiCare, or Migrant Services. The wait time for an appointment with us can be five weeks. Clients have to attend at least 2-3 appointments by the time everything is ready to be submitted. Additional issues such as no birth certificate (not unusual for people who flee a war-torn country), add another layer of what can or needs to be submitted. Clients' circumstances are individual and there are not always answers on the Home Affairs website to find the right way of submitting the application. Following up with the department via phone, the only option of contact possible can add up to 40mins wait time on the phone.

Housing sessions have dropped a little as people can now visit the Department of Families, Fairness & Housing office, this change came in middle of last year. Whereas immigration issues have been increasing as this Department is non-client facing and requires a high level of computer literacy to be even utilised. This service often needs to be addressed with the interpreter services.

There are often multiple needs that need to be addressed in a client's session, often leading to several appointments to solve them. Applying for birth certificate of a child to then apply for evidence of citizenship, to apply then for a child passport. This alone can take 5 appointments while also having the client's child/children in attendance which hinders easy communication and a quick approach.

A neighbour concerned with clothing going to landfill has struck a relationship with a clothing distributor and us. She brings a regular run of clothing - new, sometimes missing a button or a belt - and we have been able to provide this clothing for our neighbourhood. We have saved about \$15,000 worth of clothing from landfill through this process. And it has evolved into a second hand clothing swap with people donating clothes in good shape.

Between appointments, drop ins and phone support we have seen around 1,000 support contacts in the last year, approximately 20 each week.

We have provided about 1,500 food relief packs over the year and we provide lunches everyday.

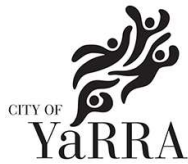
The increase in citizenship application and the increased speed with people are being encouraged to pursue this has meant an increase in people attending our Living and Working in Australia classes.

There is pure joy, and shrieks of excitement when people arrive with their certificate. People have come straight from the citizenship test to Fitzroy Learning to share the news with us first and we love this! Everyone gets a buzz when somebody becomes a citizen.

PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATIONS and SUPPORTERS

Fitzroy Learning Network loves collaborating and relies on its extraordinary support base to maximise our impact and reach. Our support base includes government funders, philanthropic and project partners, private donors, sponsors and volunteers.

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