

LIVING
OUR
BEST LIFE



LIVING OUR BEST LIFE PROJECT

An update on social prescribing
in the City of Knox

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The CHAOS Network acknowledges funding support for this project from The Wicking Trust (via Equity Trustees) and The Jack Brockhoff Foundation. The project aims to reduce the incidence of loneliness amongst older residents in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne through the use of social prescribing and intentional connecting.



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TRUST
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THE
JACK BROCKHOFF
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This project aims to address the issues of loneliness and social isolation for older people in our community.

The model consists of three core components:

1

**Community connecting
(including social
prescribing as a pathway)**

2

**Weekly Talking
Café groups**

3

Signposting

People enter the program in a variety of ways:

- Via formal referral or social prescription* (from GPs, allied health professionals, social workers, aged care staff in Council, Community health services)
- Self-referral (after being signposted or seeing/hearing marketing activities)
- By noticing our Talking Café and approaching us

Regardless of how people enter the program they have three pathways:

- A direct referral to an appropriate club or activity if the participant feels confident to follow up themselves
- Allocation of a community connector (usually a volunteer) to assist them to identify suitable community activities and, if necessary, to assist them to engage
- Attendance at the weekly Talking Café to make new friends and hear about activities from volunteer hosts and other participants and plan their pathway from there.



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The Living our Best Life (social prescribing) Project, first started in 2020, has continued to grow and evolve since the report on the initial trial was produced in 2021. For a copy of that initial report [follow this link](#) or scan the QR code.



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2022-23 Successes

Establishment of a total of ten Talking Cafes meeting weekly across the LGAs of Knox, Manningham, Whitehorse, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges.

110

Café sessions held

552

attendances by 82 individuals

5

Average attendees per café

29 + 30

referrals from 2023

still active referrals from 2022

mostly attending Talking Cafés but some still dipping in and out of connecting to other activities.

18 individual professionals in 10 practices/organisations referring

4

GP practices

2

physio-therapists

1

Community Health Service

1

Local govt. short term support service

1

Community House

1

Library

Model replicated in two rural/regional trials

5 Community Centres in the Upper Murray region trialled the model for six months. Talking Café was the most successful feature of the model for them. Four of them are continuing the Talking Café in their community and have developed a practice of “consciously connecting” people.

1 Community House in the Goldfields LGA working in partnership with their local GP. The trial was successful and has been funded to continue for another 12 months.

Building a signposter base in the communities surrounding the Talking Cafes has been progressing. We have been combining general information and volunteer recruitment sessions with signposter activation. We are currently investigating the activation of veterinarians and pharmacists as signposters for the project.

Networking and showcasing the model

- Every opportunity to embed the model across the Community House sector has been explored. The project was showcased at the 2023 Neighbourhood Houses Victoria Conference and has been short-listed as a finalist for the NHVic awards in the Good Health and Wellbeing category.
- The project team hosts a quarterly Community of Practice online for organisations across the state using the LOBL model.
- Referrals have also been received from Health practices trialling Social Prescribing for different cohorts to ours.

Measurement and evaluation

- UCLA four question survey to measure loneliness
- Collection of participant journey stories is ongoing
- Will commence using evaluation tools from the Wales School for Social Prescribing Research in early 2024.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS
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Jenny's story

"Jenny" says that before joining LOBL she was "feeling isolated. I was living on my own." Her son visited a couple of nights per week but she "wanted to meet more people." She was "not connected enough to community, not activating looking, but wanting more." A choir group was her only social activity outside the home.

Her health was "pretty much OK. A little bit of mild anxiety and mild depression."

She first heard about the project through a friend who was a carer like her. The friend recommended she attend a carers group offered by the CHAOS Network. Once she did that she found that the LOBL project would be a better fit for her and started attending two of the Talking Cafes.

"The Talking Café has gone above and beyond what's called for." "It was a big step to go but I tried not to think about it too much and just go."

"I found the group to be friendly. The café was nice and easy to get to."

I'm now "meeting new people. Feeling less isolated and more connected to community. It's given me more purpose and another thing to fill the time."

Jenny has started to travel to some of the other Talking Cafes if she can find someone who'd like to travel with her.

"My life has definitely improved. I'm feeling more connected and part of the community. It's amazing the amount of knowledge you gain and what you learn at a Talking Café. I've received personal referrals for local tradies etc which is very useful."



"The Talking Café gets you out of the house. It's a reward for me. If I didn't have it I'd keep on cleaning."

"People at the Talking Café are very supportive."

"The Talking Café gets you out of the house. It's a reward for me. If I didn't have it I'd keep on cleaning."

Jenny has noticed changes in her health and wellbeing. "I definitely have less anxiety. My psychologist has told me I can lower my meds since I've started attending. I've started doing more outside the house."

Jenny's response to the question of how important her volunteer is to her... "He's quite special. I have a feeling of being supported. It gives you peace of mind."

Mavis's story



“Mavis” is 85 years old next month. She has lived in the Knox area for 60 years after moving from interstate as a young woman. Her parents and siblings remained interstate and she tells us that she had to draw on her inner strength and “push” herself to reach out and connect with her new community.

Mavis's life has had its challenges. Her husband became an alcoholic while she was a mother to four young children. She sought refuge with understanding neighbours and through taking on additional employment but eventually knew when she needed to leave him.

Mavis is a strong and resilient woman who believes that her childhood stood her in good stead for some of the challenges she has endured.

Before joining the Boronia Talking Café through an introduction from a friend who was already attending she describes herself as feeling generally “OK, but a bit sad because I lost my son tragically in 2020.” She lives alone but still drives herself around the community, having attained her licence at the age of forty-one. Her health was fairly good with controlled type 2 diabetes. About 20 years ago she suffered a mini stroke that had no ill effects.

Mavis has now been attending the Talking Café for over a year and comes most weeks. She enjoys the experience and likes the fact that it's something that she doesn't have to “sign-up for”. She says “It's always easy and ... always a pleasure to see smiling faces. The smiling faces are more important than the coffee.” She enjoys watching “new people go from being quiet to joining in and moving on.”

Whilst Mavis is “not afraid to be on my own” she sees the weekly Talking Café as a bit of a treat for herself, a chance to put on some nice clothes and opportunity “to take myself out.”

She says Living our best life “reinforces your belief in yourself... I will, I can, I did do that.” She sees it in the other participants as well. She finds the support and information sharing not only from the volunteer host but the other participants as valuable for her. She appreciates “having other people to relate to.”

Mavis has family quite close by “but they are busy, have busy lives. They say... just ring up but I don't see them a lot.”

Mavis believes that her feelings of wellbeing have improved since she joined the Talking Café. “Every week it's in my diary and my thoughts to go.” She has continued her participation in a singing group that has been important to her all her life and has also started attending another social group as a result of connecting through Living our best life.

Mavis has recommended the project to a few of her friends and believes that it is a valuable service for the community.

“It's always easy and ... always a pleasure to see smiling faces. The smiling faces are more important than the coffee.”

Con's story

He genuinely described the project as “a life saver”.

When he was first referred to us in 2020 by a community health agency, Con (not his real name) was lonely and socially isolated after years of chronic pain and caring full time for his terminally ill wife. In his own words, prior to connecting with Living our Best Life he was “Feeling lost, worthless, had no drive, I had no purpose. “That’s all happened not due to Covid, it was pre Covid, Covid added to it. It was due to wife passing away. I’d see a friend once every couple of months and I just sat at home.” He had poor sleep habits and mental health issues.

It was a bit of a slow start with his community connector as Con wasn’t sure why someone who wasn’t being paid would care about his wellbeing. However, three months after being referred to the Living our best life project, Con was involved in three different community activities and said that he now has a reason for getting out of the bed in the morning.

“I feel life is a lot better, so much so that I have been able to stop some of the anti-depression meds. It’s actually changed my life. I feel like there is a purpose to my day where before I wouldn’t bother hardly getting out of bed before 2-3 o’clock.”

“My health has changed greatly, its chalk and cheese, everybody needs some kind of purpose and I had nothing, and now I have found one or a few! Making some good friends out of this, meeting some nice people.”

Con slowly started rebuilding his life, fixing things that needed fixing, repairing house and gardening – stuff he hadn’t done in 15-17 years.

He genuinely described the project as “a life saver”.

After a year or so of attending a Talking Café group, and gradually becoming more engaged and taking on responsible roles in his other interest groups, Con decided he’d like to join the project as a volunteer and commenced assisting with two of the Talking Cafes. He then trained as a Community Connector with the support of his former Community Connector.

Con is now a confident, connected member of the community who is dedicated to assisting others to find their place in their community.

