

ANNUAL REPORT

20
24



Park Orchards
Community House & Learning Centre

Our Vision

***Strengthened Community Participation,
Capability Enhancement and Wellbeing***

Our Mission

***To Provide Opportunities for Equitable
Community Engagement Through
Social, Recreational and Learning
Activities***

Contents

Chairperson's Report	Page 4
Treasurers's Report	Page 6
Board of Management	Page 7
About us	Page 9
Manager's Report	Page 10
Staff	Page 12
Manningham Civic Awards	Page 13
Vocational Education & Training	Page 14
Early Learning Centre	Page 16
Pre-accredited Training- ACFE	Page 18
Community	Page 19
Scones Together	Page 20
Biggest Morning Tea	Page 21
Nature in Art	Page 22
Community Outings	Page 23
Community Garden	Page 24
Acknowledgements	Page 25

Chairperson's Report

It is with great pleasure that I present this year's report. Over the past 12 months, our organisation has continued to grow, adapt, and deliver despite a rapidly changing environment. This report provides an overview of our key activities, milestones, and the collective efforts of our dedicated team, volunteers, and partners. I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on our progress, acknowledge the challenges, and outline the strategic priorities that will guide us in the coming year.

One of our organisation's key focuses over the past 10 years has been to build a new Community House to replace our current 60-year-old building, which is showing signs of age and has limited space to accommodate our growing programs and community reach. We are currently maximising every available space to deliver our existing programs. We are excited to announce that Manningham City Council has purchased the adjacent land at 568 Park Road to establish a new Community Centre. Once the new building is completed, the existing structure will be demolished to create additional and accessible parking to meet the increasing demand in the precinct. While the construction of the new facility will take time, securing funding in today's economic climate remains a challenge, we look forward to continuing our partnership with Manningham City Council to bring this important project to fruition for the Park Orchards community.

This year has seen significant achievements in multiple areas, including the expansion of our classes into other communities. We established programs in partnership with Applewood Retirement Village in Doncaster and Coonara Community House in Ferntree Gully, while continuing our collaboration with long-standing partners. These outreach programs allow us to broaden our reach and deliver our services to a wider audience.

Our Community Centre remains a vital hub for social connection and engagement within our region. It offers a welcoming environment where individuals can acquire new skills, further their education, improve their health and wellbeing, access childcare and take part in a variety of recreational activities. Through a diverse range of accredited and pre-accredited training courses, community programs, clubs, and social events, we provide numerous opportunities for personal growth and community involvement. The enthusiastic response and rapid enrolment in our programs reflect the community's eagerness to be involved and learn.

Significant changes within ACFE (Adult, Community, and Further Education), which supports our pre-accredited training, have led to a restructuring that has increased our administrative workload. I would like to acknowledge and thank our staff for embracing this challenge with professionalism and resilience. Your efforts have been crucial in implementing these changes while also supporting the increase in our funded hours, providing vital opportunities for pre-accredited training in our community.

Socially connecting our community is a core value of Park Orchards Community House. Our Scones Together program continues to be one of our most beloved events, alongside our participation in Australia's Biggest Morning Tea. This year marked our first time supporting the Cancer Council, and we are committed to making this an annual tradition. We are deeply grateful for the generous donation of botanical artist Terry Napier, who contributed his original artwork as the grand prize in our major raffle. Thanks to the support of our community, we are proud to have donated \$2,160 directly to the Cancer Council through this initiative.

Another highlight of the year has been our day trips, which have become increasingly popular and attracted many new faces to the Community House. Memorable outings included visits to the Paris Exhibition in Bendigo, the Tesselaar Tulip Festival, and Broughton Hall in Jindivick. These trips not only provided cultural enrichment but also helped foster new friendships and strengthen our sense of community.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our staff for their exceptional dedication, professionalism, and consistent hard work over the past 12 months. Your commitment is evident in the way you handle daily operations and your willingness to contribute when needed. A special thank you goes to our Executive Manager, Kelly, for her outstanding leadership and contributions to the team.

I want to thank my fellow board members for their unwavering commitment, enthusiasm, and professionalism. To Meg, Deputy Chair; Mike, Treasurer; Sherry, Secretary; and members John and Wendy – thank you. It's clear that each of you is passionate about our mission and plays a crucial role in guiding and supporting the organisation's work.

We continue to welcome applications from individuals interested in joining our Board and encourage you to consider expressing your interest. If you are passionate about making a difference in our community, there is always room for one more dedicated voice.

We owe much of our efficiency and success to the invaluable support of our dedicated team of volunteers. I extend my sincere gratitude to each and every one of you for your ongoing commitment and contributions to our organisation.

As we look ahead, I am confident that we will continue to build on our achievements and embrace new opportunities with resilience and purpose. Together, we remain committed to advancing our mission and making a positive impact in the year to come.

Heather Edmonds
Chairperson



Treasurers Report

Our auditors, LDAssurance Chartered Accountants, have given the Community House a clean bill of health regarding our financial responsibilities as an organisation, as set out in the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission Act.

2024 was another great year for the Community House, with income showing an increase of over 12% for the trading year and a growth of 49% since 2022.

While client participation in community activities and fitness classes increased slightly over the previous year, there was considerable growth in participation in our Accredited and Pre-Accredited courses, leading to a \$115,000 increase in income compared to the previous year. Childcare fees also reflected increased attendance and corresponding income.

Let’s not forget the large number of free classes and group sessions that the Community House offers to our community members—providing opportunities for learning, social connection, and engagement—core pillars of our organisational Strategic Plan and Charter.

	2022	2023	2024
Fees Income	\$498,562	\$633,372	\$678,443
Grants Income	\$510,820	\$694,918	\$816,327
Donations and Fundraising	\$460	\$2,416	\$7,263
Interest Income	\$334	\$6,877	\$9,753
Other Income	\$6,622	\$10,300	\$3,731
Total Revenue	\$1,016,798	\$1,347,883	\$1,515,517

As with all Not-for-Profit organisations, the challenge is to maximise activity while minimising expenses. The biggest increase in expenditure during the year was in our staffing costs. Maintaining compliance with our funding bodies, planning curriculum, and running all the courses and activities offered at the Community House requires significant time and expertise. As our staff continue to deliver outstanding service, they also become more experienced and thus receive more senior-level salaries. Wages and WorkCover insurance premiums alone increased by \$193,000 compared to the previous year.

The staff have continued to implement more proactive advertising to reach a broader community, explored strategies to optimise the number of RTO courses delivered in-house throughout the year, extended our outreach programs, and reviewed operational expenditures and practices to reduce costs.

For this financial year, the Community House has ended with an operational profit of \$10,015—an excellent result and a credit to our dedicated team.

A copy of our audited financial accounts is attached.

This will be my final report as Treasurer, having been a member of the Board since 2016. It has been a great privilege to work with such incredible people—our Board members, staff, and Managers Pauline Fyffe and now Kelly Cooper.

Thank you to the Park Orchards community and my fellow Board members for the opportunity to serve on the Board, to act as Chairperson , and most recently as Treasurer for the past five.

During this time, the Board has overseen a tremendous expansion in the programs and activities offered to the community. We are now also seeing the concrete steps being taken toward future development, with plans for a larger facility and the purchase of suitable land by Manningham City Council—something successive Boards have worked toward for many years.

Mike Green
Treasurer

Board of Management



Heather Edmonds

Chairperson

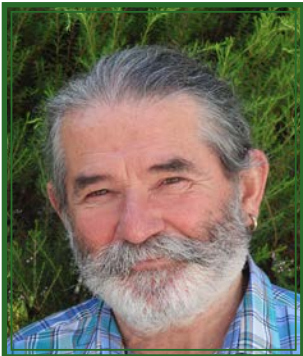
Heather's experience spans both the public and private sectors, bringing a diverse range of skills and knowledge to the table. She has a strong background in business management, human resources, and workplace health and safety, and has applied this expertise across a variety of organisational settings.



Meg Downie

Vice Chairperson

Meg joined the Board in 2022. She has worked as a primary school teacher as well as a sales representative. In addition, she served as a Manningham Councillor from 2008 to 2016. Meg continues to be a passionate advocate for lifelong learning and community engagement.



Michael Green

Treasurer

Mike's membership on the Board since 2016 has been invaluable, drawing on his extensive expertise and experience as the Principal of Ringwood North Primary School for over four decades. His deep understanding of education, leadership, and community engagement has provided invaluable insights and guidance.



Sherry Hutton

Secretary

Sherry joined our Board in 2019, bringing with her a wealth of experience in the education sector. She has worked with a diverse range of learners, from primary school children to those in special education, as well as preschoolers. Sherry has worked as a trainer in Early Childhood Education and Support, as well as a VET Coordinator.



John Balshaw

General Board Member

John has been a valuable member of the Board since 2014. With extensive experience as a First Aid trainer, he brings a deep understanding of vocational education and training (VET). His practical expertise has significantly contributed to the Board's overall effectiveness.



Wendy Taylor

General Board Member

After immigrating to Australia from Scotland in 1975, Wendy was a primary school teacher for 40 years. Since retiring from teaching, Wendy has volunteered at Lifeline to run suicide intervention workshops known as ASIST and is the president of a Probus club. Welfare has always been important to her.

***Belonging - Promoting a Sense of Community
Spirit and Acceptance***

Integrity - Honest, Ethical and Committed

***Diversity - Recognise the Value of the Unique
Contribution of Each and Every Individual***

***Sustainability - Striving for Excellence,
Environmental Awareness and Resilience***

***Respect - Having Respect for Ourselves, Our
Participants and the Service We Offer***

About us

Park Orchards Community House & Learning Centre Incorporated is a vibrant, community-based organisation committed to delivering quality opportunities for engagement through social, recreational, and educational activities.

In 1978, the Park Orchards School Council's community relations sub-committee launched a leisure time program, initially utilising the school art room. The program offered four courses in Term 1, 1979, taught by local tutors—marking the beginning of Park Orchards Leisure Time Activities (POLTA).

POLTA's mission was to create an environment that fosters lifelong learning for all members of the community. Park Orchards, often described as a village within the city, has a unique character, and we recognised the importance of supporting initiatives like POLTA to preserve and nurture this identity. The program's early success paved the way for the establishment of the Park Orchards Community House in 1983—a hub for learning and community development at 572 Park Road.

In 1986, the organisation became incorporated, and since then, we have undergone three building extensions to support our expanding range of programs. Today, we proudly offer a wide variety of activities and courses that reflect the evolving needs and interests of our community, including further education, arts and crafts, after-school programs, health and fitness, personal development, and early childhood education and care. We now operate across several locations, allowing us to broaden our reach and increase access to lifelong learning opportunities for more members of the community.

Our Early Learning Centre, also known as "Hilary's House," is well-regarded in the community as a safe, nurturing place where families can confidently leave their children while they work or study. Opened in 2019, this purpose-built facility—named after our long-time ELC Coordinator—is the result of years of dedicated work by our staff and Board. It offers a rich educational program and serves as a welcoming hub for community connection.

As a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), Park Orchards Community House & Learning Centre delivers nationally recognised Vocational Education and Training (VET), equipping learners with valuable skills for employment or further study. We offer a supportive learning environment with experienced trainers who are passionate about education and committed to student success. Whether individuals are entering the workforce for the first time, changing careers, or upskilling, our accredited training provides a solid foundation for achieving their goals.

In addition, we provide a range of pre-accredited courses, offering accessible pathways to future opportunities and lifelong learning.

These entry-level programs help build the confidence, knowledge, and skills needed to transition into further education or employment. Pre-accredited

courses are especially valuable for those returning to study, seeking to improve their language, literacy, numeracy, or digital skills, or wanting to re-engage with learning in a friendly and inclusive setting.

Our organisation is guided by a volunteer Board of Management, elected from within our membership. The Board provides strategic oversight and governance, ensuring our operations remain aligned with community needs and sector standards.

Our team is made up of a diverse group of dedicated professionals, including our Executive Manager, Assistant Manager, Finance Administrator, VET Co-ordinator, Community and ACFE Co-ordinator, Marketing and Administration, Early Learning Administrator, Early Learning Co-ordinator, and Early Childhood Educators.

We are also supported by a talented team of trainers, who bring a wealth of experience and enthusiasm to their work, ensuring the delivery of quality programs across all areas of learning. We remain grateful for the continued support of Manningham City Council, who own the buildings in which we operate and provide us with access to additional venues such as Domeney Recreation Centre for our accredited training and Warrandyte South Hall for health and wellbeing classes.

“Strengthened Community Participation, Capability Enhancement and Wellbeing”

Manager's Report

Reflecting on 2024 at Park Orchards Community House and Learning Centre

As we close out another successful year at Park Orchards Community House and Learning Centre, I reflect with pride on the journey we've taken throughout 2024. Our focus has remained clear: to expand our programs and ensure they meet the evolving needs of our community. While outcomes can be measured through enrolments, learner results, and participation data, the true success of our programs is seen—and felt—in the laughter, the conversations, the new friendships formed, and the heartfelt gratitude expressed by those who walk through our doors.

Neighbourhood Houses like ours offer far more than education—they create vital spaces for people to connect, reduce isolation, and build lasting social networks. Social participation forms the bedrock of strong communities, and we are proud to support individual growth, well-being, and lifelong health through our programs and courses.

We are deeply grateful for the continued support from our key stakeholders:

- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)
- Manningham City Council
- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR)

Thanks to the funding and guidance provided through these partnerships, we have delivered a broad range of programs throughout the year. Notably, 79% of our enrolments in 2024 were for programs delivered directly through our centre, a strong indication that our offerings are truly resonating with community needs and interests.

Of course, funding alone does not deliver these outcomes. The passion, commitment, and shared vision of our incredible team make it all possible, as their dedication is the heart of our success. I would like to thank:

- Our core team: Lydia, Robyn, Cathryn, Stephanie, Jessica, Melody and Hilary.
- Our Early Learning Centre educators, who make learning joyful every day for our youngest participants: Sarah, Kumin, Sarisse, Wenyeue, Micaelia, Harpinder, Anna, Nadine, Karen and Debbie.
- Our dedicated educators, supporting learners on their journey to qualifications and employment: Anne, Ann-Maree, Karina, Karen, Bushra, Jacinta, and Sarah

- Our Board of Management, for generously contributing their time, skills, and wisdom
- Our incredible volunteers, who are at the heart of our operations and community spirit.

Throughout 2024, myself and the Park Orchards Community House and Learning Centre team have achieved so much, and every day I am proud of what we do.

During the year we have:

- Averaged 407 staff hours per week
- Engaged 51 volunteers who support our organisation, contributing an average of 52 hours per week
- On average, 403 people attended face-to-face activities per week
- Delivered 3,080 program sessions throughout the year
- Supported 7 students with work placements
- Celebrated 5 graduation ceremonies, issuing 72 certificates and 108 statements of attainment.
- Supported high-quality early childhood care for 66 children and their families.
- Hosted our biggest morning tea with 96 people attending
- Organised 3 community outings, visiting the Bendigo Art Gallery Paris exhibition, the Tesselaar Tulip Festival, and Broughton Hall at Jindivick

Looking ahead, we are excited about the future of Park Orchards Community House and Learning Centre. With the strong backing of Manningham City Council, we are progressing toward securing funding for our new Community House. Located at the newly acquired site next door at 568 Park Road, this space represents the next chapter for our organisation—a place built by many hands, and one we hope to celebrate together at its ribbon-cutting in the near future.

I remain committed to achieving our long-term goals, not just for our organisation, but for the people we serve. Thank you to everyone who has been a part of our journey this year. Here's to continued growth, connection, and as we look ahead to 2025, I'm excited for the opportunities to continue making a difference together. Thank you for being a part of our journey.

Kelly Cooper
Executive Manager



Staff



Kelly Cooper
Executive Manager



Lydia Denman
Assistant Manager



Stephanie Hurley
Finance Officer



Cathryn Harris
VET Co-ordinator



Jess Ali
Administration and
Program Support



Melody Solomons
Community Program
Coordinator



Robyn Sheridan
Childcare Administrator &
Early Childhood Educator



Hilary Ramadge
Early Childhood
Co-ordinator



Sarah Wild
Assistant Coordinator/
Early Childhood Educator



Kumin Davis
Assistant Coordinator/
Early Childhood Educator



Sarisse Van Gorp
Early Childhood Educator



Micaelia Doolan
Early Childhood Educator



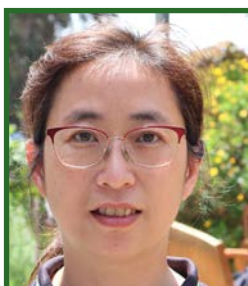
Harpinder Chand
Early Childhood Educator



Hui Karen Ye
Early Childhood Educator



Debbie Bambridge
Early Childhood Educator



Wenyue Liu
Early Childhood Educator



Anna Lugt
Early Childhood Educator



Nadine Kinniff
Early Childhood Educator

Manningham Civic Awards



The Manningham Civic Awards are an annual initiative by Manningham City Council to recognise and celebrate the outstanding contributions of individuals and community organisations within the Manningham municipality. These awards honour those who have made a significant impact through volunteer, paid, or unpaid work, fostering a stronger, more connected community.

In 2024, we were honoured to be nominated for the Manningham Civic Awards, in the Community Organisation of the Year category for outstanding contributions through diverse programs and services that foster community engagement and support.

Scones Together, a program run in partnership with Park Orchards Community House & Learning Centre, was also nominated in the same category. This recognition highlighted the program's positive influence on social connection, particularly among seniors, and its role in promoting community wellbeing.

These nominations reflect the invaluable dedication of our volunteers and the strong support from our local community. They underscore our ongoing commitment to strengthening community ties and enhancing inclusivity and wellbeing.



Vocational Education & Training

2024 has been a fantastic year for the RTO. We've seen strong student growth, launched as Victoria's only community provider of the new TAE40122 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, and received a 2024 Workforce Development Grant from the VET Development Centre (VDC). We were proud to be invited by the Victorian Skills Authority to help shape a statewide Vocational Education Workforce Framework, recognising our contribution to the sector.

A major milestone this year was expanding to Upper Ferntree Gully, delivering the CHC30221 Certificate III in School Based Education Support at Coonara Community House, directly supporting local schools with trained staff. A second intake began in November 2024 and will continue into 2025.

To extend our reach, we introduced blended delivery in select programs, allowing students to attend real-time classes via Zoom. While not available for all courses, this option was well-received and helps us address classroom space limitations.

We celebrated five joyful graduations across our sites, including our first at Upper Ferntree Gully.

Our programs were supported by both the Reconnect initiative (providing student fee and resource assistance) and ACFE-funded Study Skills sessions.

Programs Delivered in 2024:

- TAE40122 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment
 - 1 daytime course (August)
 - 11 upgrade completions
- CHC30221 Certificate III in School Based Education Support
 - 5 daytime courses (Feb, Mar, Apr, Jul, Nov)
- CHC30121 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care
 - 2 daytime courses (Feb, Jul)
 - 4 upgrade completions
- CHC50121 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care
 - 1 daytime course (Feb)

Through the VDC workforce development grant, we delivered targeted professional development for Skills First Learn Local RTOs in Melbourne's south-east. The three key focus areas were supporting learners with complex mental health needs, adult learning strategies and building and applying industry currency. We trained 22 trainers and assessors across 11 organisations, including 3 TAFEs and a private provider. The aim was to offer customised training to target smaller community organisations and their challenges with size, staffing and budgeting. Our three sessions were very successful and we enjoyed working with both the Vet Development centre and Victorian Skills Authority in the delivery of our grant

In 2024, we ran two key upgrade programs:

- TAE40122 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment: Enabled existing trainers to update their qualifications to the current standard. This upgrade was highly valued, with 11 completions.
- CHC30121 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care: Designed to help educators with older qualifications meet the new entry requirements for the CHC50121 Diploma. This program ensures educators remain eligible to continue their professional pathway and has strong industry support. It will continue into 2025.

We retained all trainers from 2023, with Ann-Maree Thompson, Karina Griffiths, Anne Butler, Sarah Kinder, Karen McGown, Jacinta Buhagiar, and Bushra Essop Mohamed continuing to deliver high-quality training. Their dedication is central to our success. In 2024, they completed PD through the VDC Workforce Development Grant, focusing on mental health, diverse learner needs, and trainer currency, as well as additional PD at Pines Learning and Cire Learning Hub.

Cathryn Harris
VET Co-ordinator



*Just want to let you know that I am really enjoying the course!! Karina is such a professional and friendly teacher who delivers the most important information to each class
- Certificate III in School Based Education Support*

*There was plenty of opportunities to have discussions with the assessor and other students about various topics we were studying. I also liked that the assessor was extremely approachable
- Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care*



*The flexibility of the course, and Trainer Bushra going above and beyond to assist us with our learning. The trainers were Amazing!!! Have made the course great
- Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care*

*Anne is kind, helpful and a great trainer
- Certificate IV in Training and Assessment*

Early Learning Centre

Children naturally live in the moment, and they allow that moment to be what it is; magical and beautiful in every way!' - April Peerless.

Hilary's House continues to offer a safe, inclusive, and nurturing environment for up to 23 children aged six weeks to six years. Our mixed-age setting supports child-to-child learning and each child's development through a play-based, individualised approach.

We remain committed to accessibility and affordability, with Child Care Subsidy (CCS) available to help families access quality early learning. Our program aligns with the Early Years Learning Framework, blending indoor and outdoor experiences to build confidence, curiosity, and creativity.

Our dedicated team of educators—including Sarah (2IC), Kumin (2IC), Micaelia, Harpinder, Wen Yue, Debbie, Nadine, Karen, Anna, and Sarisse work collaboratively to create an enriching environment where children feel safe to explore and grow.

In 2024, our ELC delivered a rich program celebrating culture, community, nature, and wellbeing—nurturing curiosity and a lifelong love of learning.

2024 Highlights:

- Term 1 – Chinese New Year (Year of the Dragon), Pancake Day, Red Nose Day, Sea Week, Ramadan, Nature Play Week, ANZAC Day
- Term 2 – Mother's Day, Families Week, World Bee Day, Reconciliation Week, World Oceans Week, Yoga Day
- Term 3 – NAIDOC Week, Pyjama Day, Bunnings Workshop, Dental Health Week, Music Program, Book Week
- Term 4 – Educators Day, Police Visit, Father's Day, Space Week, Nutrition Program, Library Storytime, Grandparents' Day, Diwali, Recycling Week (Manningham Council), Cultural Awareness, Christmas Cooking & Craft

These experiences supported children's development while nurturing cultural awareness, strengthening community connections, and promoting a sense of belonging.

Key community partnerships in 2024 included Park Orchards Primary School, The Pines Library, Bunnings, Manningham Council, and Victoria Police.

Our Early Learning Centre remains strongly connected to the local community, with regular excursions and partnerships enriching children's learning through real-world experiences. These outings are guided by children's interests and developmental goals, helping them explore their environment and build confidence.

We also sincerely thank the Patchwork Group for their beautiful handmade contributions, including placemats, bags, doll's blankets, and bunting, which have brought warmth and colour to our centre.

We continue to support student learning in early childhood education through practical placements and offer a School Holiday Program during term breaks on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, welcoming children of all ages, including school-aged siblings.

A heartfelt thank you to Robyn, our childcare administrator and educator, for your professionalism and ongoing support of our children, families, and staff.

We're grateful for the dedication of our ELC team, the support of management, and the guidance of our Board. It's a privilege to help lay the foundation for each child's lifelong love of learning.

Hilary Ramadge
Early Childhood Co-ordinator



Pre-accredited Training - ACFE (Learn Local)

2024 was our most successful year to date for ACFE programs, marked by strong growth in enrolments, the introduction of new courses, and strengthened community partnerships. We proudly increased our hours delivered by 23% compared to 2023.

We delivered a diverse and responsive range of courses to meet the evolving needs of our learners. New offerings included Mental Health Peer Support, Journaling for Wellbeing, Write Your Memoirs, English Language, and Life Skills for People with Disabilities. Our existing programs in Xero, Creative Arts, and Digital Literacy also continued to attract strong participation. Our Floristry courses remained a standout, offered at two levels and consistently drawing high enrolments.

We welcomed new trainers in 2024, expanding our delivery capacity and supporting the growing interest in our programs. This helped us reach a broader and more diverse student cohort, including those with varying levels of ability and English literacy.

Partnerships played a key role in our success. We established new partnerships and strengthened existing ones. Through these collaborations, we offered Digital Essentials and Let's Learn English, continuing to support culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Thanks to these efforts, we saw notable enrolment increases in programs supporting learners of all abilities and those seeking to improve their English literacy.

Through the combined efforts of our dedicated team, new and ongoing partnerships, and a deep understanding of community needs, ACFE programs have become a vital and inclusive learning pathway for adults in our community.

We look forward to continuing this momentum in 2025—expanding opportunities, deepening partnerships, and empowering more learners to gain skills for work, further study, or personal development through accessible, community-based education.

Melody Solomons
Community Program Co-ordinator



Community

2024 has been an exciting and rewarding year for our community programs, with a diverse range of offerings that engaged and supported people of all ages. From established favourites to new initiatives, term-based activities, workshops, and free clubs, there truly was something for everyone.

A standout moment was hosting our first Australia's Biggest Morning Tea, part of a national fundraiser for cancer research and support services. The event brought the community together for a meaningful cause, raising funds for individuals and families affected by cancer.

We were proud to introduce Dance it Up!, a free monthly event celebrating movement, music, and connection. It quickly became a community favourite, offering light refreshments, social fun, and a welcoming space to get active.

In support of community wellbeing, Park Orchards Community House continued to run a wide range of health and fitness programs. From energising workouts to calming sessions, we catered to all fitness levels while fostering inclusivity and wellbeing.

This year's community outings were a highlight, with trips to Bendigo Art Gallery, the Tulip Festival, and Broughton Hall. These well-attended excursions created shared experiences and lasting memories—we're excited to build on their success in 2025.

Enrolments grew to over 1,500—a 10% increase from 2023—reflecting strong community interest. Creative workshops were especially popular, with participants enjoying hands-on sessions in candle making, bookbinding, and watercolour painting. These sessions not only taught new skills but also encouraged connection and creativity.

We also expanded our after-school programs, adding new craft and sports sessions, as well as school holiday workshops for preschool and school-aged children—supporting creative, curious, and active young minds.

Our FREE Clubs remained a core part of our programming. Groups like the Social Walking Group, Weekly Walkers, Photography, Genealogy, Book, and Garden Clubs continued to grow, with Dance it Up! now proudly among them.

As we reflect on 2024, it's clear our programs made a lasting impact—building connection, promoting wellbeing, and offering space for learning and growth. We're grateful to all participants, volunteers, and supporters for making this year such a success. We look forward to continuing this momentum into 2025!

Melody Solomons
Community Program Co-ordinator





Scones Together

Scones Together is a program developed in early 2023 in response to the growing need for social connection within our community. Inspired by the vision of local community members Tristen Haigh and Vickie Redfern, the program was created to provide a welcoming, inclusive space where individuals—particularly those who are ageing or socially isolated—could come together in a supportive and uplifting environment. Partnering with Park Orchards Community House & Learning Centre provided the program with vital funding security through local council support.

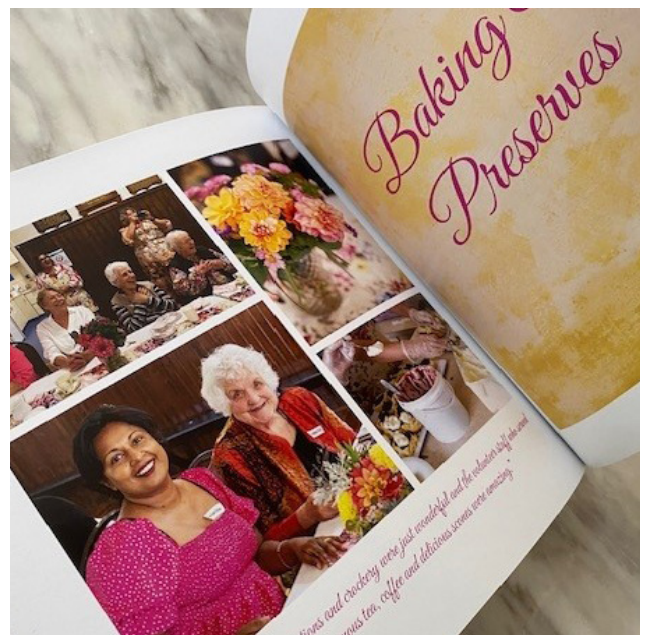
Held monthly, each session invites participants to enjoy freshly baked scones with jam and cream, accompanied by a warm cup of tea or coffee. Beyond the refreshments, guests are treated to performances by local musicians or engaging talks from guest speakers on topics relevant to their lives and interests. What began as a program aimed at addressing social isolation among older adults has naturally evolved into a richly diverse gathering.

In 2024, Scones Together had expanded significantly, with over 110 individuals registered and up to 80 participants attending each monthly session. The program's ongoing success has not only strengthened social connections but has also created a deeply meaningful volunteer experience. Volunteers consistently report a strong sense of purpose, knowing that their contributions are making a real difference to the lives of participants. The program continues to meet important health and wellbeing needs, while fostering a strong sense of belonging and community engagement.

To celebrate the shared spirit and stories of the program, the Scones Together Cookbook was compiled, featuring favourite and treasured family recipes contributed by participants. This heartfelt collection captures the essence of the program—bringing people together through food, memory, and tradition. The cookbook stands as a testament to the warmth and generosity of the community, with each recipe reflecting the rich tapestry of backgrounds and experiences represented in the group.

In early 2024, Scones Together celebrated its first birthday—a significant milestone that highlighted the strong community bonds formed over the past year and the positive impact the program has had on so many lives.

The program's impact has been widely recognised, and in 2024 Scones Together was honoured with a nomination for a Manningham Civic Award. This recognition reflects its powerful role in building community connection, reducing isolation, and promoting inclusion across generations. Scones Together has become more than just a monthly event—it is a place where participants feel respected, valued, and genuinely connected. Many of the friendships formed through the program have grown beyond the monthly sessions, creating a lasting ripple effect of care, kindness, and community spirit.



Biggest Morning Tea

In 2024, we were proud to host our very first Biggest Morning Tea and were deeply moved by the incredible support from our community. Thanks to the generosity of all who participated, we raised \$2,160 for Cancer Council Australia—reflecting a strong sense of unity and commitment to the cause.

The event was more than just a fundraiser; it became a true celebration of community spirit and shared purpose. Attendees enjoyed live entertainment, inspiring guest speakers, a delicious morning tea, and an exciting raffle, making it a day filled with connection and support for a great cause.

We were honoured to welcome Lorraine Dunbar, a representative of the Craft a Cure for Cancer group, as our guest speaker. Her words highlighted the important work being done and the impact of community-driven initiatives in the fight against cancer. We were also pleased to acknowledge the contributions of the Craft a Cure for Cancer group, who held a stall of handmade gifts to help raise funds. Their ongoing efforts and presence added meaning and support to the occasion.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to Terry Napier, who generously donated an original watercolour painting as the main prize in our event raffle. This beautiful piece of art was not only a highlight of the day but also played a significant role in encouraging raffle ticket sales and boosting our overall fundraising total. Terry's thoughtful contribution reflected the spirit of generosity that underpinned the event and was deeply appreciated by all involved.

Every dollar raised supported the Cancer Council's essential work in cancer research, prevention, awareness, and patient support services.

We extend our sincere thanks to everyone involved in making the day such a tremendous success. Your participation, generosity, and support were key to making this event truly unforgettable.

Building on the enthusiasm from 2024, we are already planning for the 2025 Biggest Morning Tea, aiming to continue this momentum and create an even greater impact.

Together, we truly made a difference.



Nature in Art



Zebra Finches
Peta McDonald

Our Centre has a wonderful reputation for the study of Natural History Art. Each week over 80 students participate in our many classes specific to this beautiful form of art.

Established in 1996 at Park Orchards Community House & Learning Centre, by Terry Napier, the Nature in Art group is dedicated to the study of natural history illustration and painting. Working on a diverse range of subjects, its members' principle aim is to gain knowledge and understanding of a subject's physical characteristics through close observation and to capture the detail in a pleasing, graphic way. This combines scientific accuracy with artistic vision and allows different students to paint with varying levels of detail.

Nature in Art covers an extensive range of subjects: flowers, insects and animals. Under the guidance and encouragement of the teachers, students learn to see things in a new, more complex way and their paintings emerge into beautiful works of art.

Some of our 80 students have been involved in our Nature in Art program for over two decades and our community of artists includes the renowned botanical and natural history artists and tutors Terry Napier, David Reynolds, Peta Harrington and Peta McDonald.

Terry Napier was awarded the Celia Rosser Medal in 2010. He has paintings in the State Collection and the Cranbourne Collection at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Melbourne and also The Gardens of Government House Florilegium held in the State Library Melbourne.

He is represented in the Australian collection in the Inaugural International Botanical Exhibition 2018.

David is an experienced botanical and natural history artist. His background is in commercial art, graphic design, photography and multimedia. He describes his style as 'Accurate Realism' and is always looking to portray his botanical and wildlife subjects with the most accurate detail possible yet doing it in a 'painterly' way honouring the watercolour medium.

Peta Harrington has always enjoyed different forms of art since a young age. Peta has been a student of Terry Napier's for over twenty years and since commencing the Nature in Art classes has developed a love of painting, particularly the level of detail presented in nature. Peta has been teaching Nature in Art since 2019.

In 2024, Peta McDonald joined us, bringing a strong background in Biological Science and over 20 years of experience as a science teacher. She is an Honorary Research Associate at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne and recently completed a Botanical Illustration Studentship at the Melbourne Herbarium. Peta enjoys sharing this intersection of science and art, inspiring others with the beauty and mystery of the natural world.

Community Outings



In 2024, we organised a variety of community outings designed to foster connection, engagement, and wellbeing among our members. Supported by funding from the Victorian Government's Pathways to Connect initiative. Outings included visits to the, Bendigo Art Gallery Paris Exhibition, the Tessealar Tulip Festival, and Broughton Hall each providing a unique experience that contributed to a vibrant and memorable calendar of events.

We trialled the outing to the Cranbourne Botanical Gardens in 2023 and received such a great response that we decided to plan three more events for 2024. During the 2023 visit, members explored the remarkable Australian Garden, which showcased a stunning array of native plants arranged in creative, sustainable designs. Guided walks and interpretive signage provided insight into the diversity of Australian flora, while the open, natural setting encouraged relaxed conversations and a shared appreciation of the environment. This outing was a refreshing start to our activities and set a welcoming tone for future outings.

In March, we visited the Bendigo Art Gallery for the Paris Exhibition, a cultural highlight of the year. The exhibition showcased Parisian art and history, offering members a chance to immerse themselves in the city's rich cultural heritage. After exploring the displays and discussing the artwork, the group enjoyed a lovely lunch together, making it a memorable and enriching outing.

Our next event was a lively visit to the Tulip Festival, where the group was welcomed by a sea of colourful blooms and a festive atmosphere. Set against the backdrop of expansive flower fields, the festival provided an uplifting day filled with music, food, and entertainment. It was a particularly popular outing, offering plenty of opportunities for social interaction and vibrant photo moments.

Finally, the year's program concluded with a trip to Broughton Hall in Jindivick, West Gippsland, where members enjoyed the beauty of formal gardens in a more tranquil setting. The outing featured leisurely walks, garden discussions, and a relaxed afternoon tea.

We received enthusiastic feedback across all outings, with many participants expressing appreciation for the variety and quality of experiences. Notably, several new participants, who hadn't been involved with the house before, joined us and made new friends along the way. These shared moments brought joy and helped strengthen the sense of community and forge new friendships among our members. Building on this success, we look forward to offering similar trips in 2025—while also exploring new destinations and fresh opportunities to connect and engage.



Community Garden

***"If you really want to
grow a plant you love
in your garden, you
should try three times.
Plants make up their
own mind if they know
they are loved!"***

– Michael Morrison

Michael Morrison was the longtime gardener and close friend of Dame Elisabeth Murdoch. He began working for her in 1971 and continued tending her garden even after her passing in December 2012, at the remarkable age of 103.

This year's weather couldn't have been more different from last year. We had a cooler, slightly wetter summer than usual, followed by a warm autumn, despite the occasional cold winds and dry days. Just last night we enjoyed a beautiful downpour, with more rain on the way today.

A big thank you to Alby for keeping the plants watered between our gardening days—your help has truly kept the garden thriving.

The roses and salvias loved the warmth and dry conditions, though most of the veggies weren't as keen—except for the ever-reliable chilli plant. The passionfruit vine had another successful fruiting season, much to the delight of both humans and birds—until we managed to get it netted! On one of our bus trips, Kelly brought back a beautiful plant for the garden, with grey foliage and bright orange, poppy-like flowers. It's drought-tolerant and already bringing plenty of joy.

The new stools, tables, and benches now set up across the two garden levels have been popular spots for classes and lunches. We continue to enjoy the warm interactions with class participants, staff, and visitors—it's these moments that make all our efforts so rewarding.

Thank you to our wonderful volunteers: Alby Boccalatte, Rhona Diviney, Geoff Hipwell, and Janice Clarke. Your dedication and care are what keep this garden growing in every way.

We gratefully acknowledge funding and support from:

Manningham City Council

Manningham City Council, not only for the fiscal support but also for the continuing support from council officers.

We also value and appreciate the support given to us by our Councillors.



Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

We are grateful for the financial support offered by the Victorian Government through the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing who value the work we do as a Neighbourhood House.



Department of Job Skills and Training

The Department of Education and Training offers support through the Adult Community & Further Education program, and 'Skills First'.



Neighbourhood Houses Victoria

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria offers support through Professional Development, Human Resource advice and with regional collaboration on projects.



Warrandyte Community Bank Branch of Bendigo Bank

The Warrandyte Community Bank Branch of Bendigo Bank offers support through their Community Investment Program.



Park Orchards Community House & Learning Centre
572 Park Road, Park Orchards, 3114
www.parkorchards.org.au 9876 4381

