



Mountain District

Women's Co-op Ltd.

trading as

**Mountain District
Learning Centre**



52nd ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Contents

Chairperson's Report	1
CEO's Report	2
Board of Directors Committee Reports	3
Marketing & Growth	3
Finance and Facilities Report	4
Policy and Compliance	5
Asset Management	6
Premier's Visit	7
Registered Training Organisation (RTO)	8
The Cottage Program	9
ACFE Learn Local Pre-Accredited Training	12
1. Family Learning Partnership Program	12
2. Just-in-Time Industry Partnership Project	13
3. Workforce Development Grant	13
Reconnect	14
Community Services	15
Home and Community Care (HACC) NDIS and Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP)	17
Social Support Groups	17
Community Hi-Rise Garden	20
Ferntree Gully News Report	21
Partnerships and Affiliations	22
Acknowledgement of Funding Bodies	22
Annual Financial Report	

Chairperson's Report

As I look over the past year, it is fair to say it's been one of those years that has given MDLC a bit of everything.

We have welcomed 2 new staff members Nyssa and Ronan. Aimee produced a beautiful son and our programs are going very well.

Plans were put in place and acted on to transfer our staff to 12 Victoria Street, now known as Admin House. This was a gigantic change, and staff are still settling in. Our reception is still at the Centre as Lyndee and Nyssa do a great job looking after both MDLC and The Avenue School enquiries and needs.

Our Cottage Program has been able to expand their footprint in the cottage. Alison and Cathryn have refurbished rooms to accommodate a more comfortable and friendly atmosphere. From the relaxed appearance of the students, they have appreciated the changes made.

I must touch on the work our wonderful volunteers do in the garden. Vegetables and flowers are plentiful, even supplying vendors in Ferntree Gully for free. As I have said on many occasions before, the garden is a beautiful place to just sit and enjoy the surrounds with a cup of coffee, a friend or just by yourself.

Our older members are catered for too. Rachel organises and runs projects for crafts, exercise classes, the men's group and bus trips that are filled quickly on being advertised.

I can't not mention The Avenue School. Jarrod and staff are doing a wonderful job in the education and well being of the students. It's such a joy to visit the school where a welcome from both staff and students is by a huge grin and "hello".

I want to pay tribute to a longtime member of MDWC/MDLC, Judy Boumeester who quietly put up her house with two other ladies to make this wonderful Centre a permanent feature some 52 years ago.

Judy has been connected to MDLC all that time in varying roles and I have had the pleasure of working with Judy on the Members/Volunteers and Fundraising Committee where her input has been valuable. Due to family commitments Judy has not been able to participate this year. Thank you for your time and contribution Judy, it has been most appreciated.

Now it's time to say a big thank you to our CEO, Janet Claringbold. Janet is the power house of MDLC and we all appreciate the work she does. To the Board, thank you for your commitment to the governance of MDLC, your friendship and always being there. To the staff and volunteers, without you all, where would we be? A massive thank you.

Robyn Burke

Chairperson, Board of Directors



CEO's Report

2025 is widely considered a pivotal year, marking a point in history where significant transitions are rapidly developing in technology, geopolitics, and society.

To some degree, 2025 has been a pivotal year for MDLC.

The Avenue School commenced in February and is operating in every way that we had hoped for. Our partnership is positive, respectful and harmonious. The School Board led by John Enright, share our values of educational equity and share our ambition to support young people marginalised from mainstream education in the best way possible.

Principal, Jarrid Bartle is respectful of our legacy and of the powerful work we have done stepping in to educate young people who have significant barriers to attending traditional schooling. Jarrid has recruited a skilled staff team who are dedicated in their approach and generous in their nature.

The grounding of our intent to assure our people are our focus is what brings us our success. We remain committed to our vision and are positioned well for a bright future.

As 2025 progressed, it became apparent that the School would need more space to accommodate additional students and staff. The time had come to begin to utilise the building purchased at the rear of MDLC at 12 Victoria Street.

The transition of administration staff commenced in late September and by January 2026 we were set up in our new offices with one room in the new location set aside for meetings and as a new home for the Ferntree Gully News volunteer team. This new arrangement is working well so far. We have retained reception and administration services at the main building to ensure ease of communication and to maintain a public interface.

Setting up in a House, brings thoughts of the origins of many Neighbourhood Houses. I am mindful of the part MDLC has played in the history of our sector. The women involved in establishing education programs through "The Co-op" had an ambition to provide education in a way that allowed people to participate, when other forms of education did not.

The Victorian Adult Community Education sector is an example of a community driven solution, responding to a recognised need, with an intent to build equity in society. The sector became a movement, ultimately supported by Governments who recognised the benefit of our work and the positive outcomes it brings to many people.

It is unfortunate that we appear to be entering an era where Government Departments seem to believe Adult Community Education belongs to them. It doesn't. Adult Community Education belongs to communities. The need to connect people with education in a form that is relevant and meaningful to them remains. Providers need to be able to respond flexibly to community education needs as they emerge and we need sufficient resources to do it successfully.

I continue to be very grateful to work alongside extraordinary people. The members of the Board are always enthusiastic champions of MDLC. I appreciate the continual support I receive from Robyn Burke, our Chair. Each and every member of staff have my admiration for the work they do and for their loyalty, dedication and commitment. Thank you also to our volunteers and supporters for their contribution in making MDLC a wonderful community organisation.

Janet Claringbold
CEO

Board of Directors Committee Reports

Marketing & Growth

The Marketing & Growth Committee has identified a number of philanthropic organisations that support organisations such as MDLC, and as opportunities to submit grant applications present, the Committee has lodged its expression of interest.

Prior to 2025 the focus of applications was on The Avenue School (TAS). In 2025, with TAS now occupying a significant amount of existing accommodation, it was agreed that the focus for the future would need to be on increasing accommodation to meet potential growth.

Through 2025 Oak Tree Den was established and made operational, as was Admin House at 12 Victoria St, and grants were received to assist with works to these buildings and Daniela De Martino MP officially opened the Men's Shed (Oak Tree Den).

In August Daniela visited MDLC with the Premier, Jacinta Allen.

MDLC enjoyed a good number of positive newspaper articles throughout the year, and by the end of the year Tim Rivett had recorded a very professional promotional announcement that is currently being aired on 3 MDR community radio on Saturdays.

Robyn Burke has a regular column in the FTG News titled "Snippets" that features current activities at MDLC.

MDLC is a small organisation and does not have the profile of some of the larger organisations, but it is through the hard work of the staff and members of the committees such as Marketing & Growth that ensures its ongoing success.

Thanks go to the members of the Marketing & Growth Committee for their work throughout 2025, and they are Robyn Burke, Janet Claringbold, Ross Corben, John Gerrard and Pat Rivett.

John Gerrard
Convenor



Finance and Facilities Report

Centre Risk Profile

Financially speaking, 2025 was a little easier; due, in part to the settlement payment from the (former) MDCC being received and to cash stabilisation from regular funds received from The Avenue School.

In September we were informed that ReConnect will continue until 2029. This was extremely good news as we are heavily dependent on this source of income.

It is with pleasure that we advise MDLC is able to report a surplus of \$189,609 for the year ending 2025.

The Avenue School:

Despite various obstacles and difficulties, registration of the school was completed. However, funding from State and Commonwealth Governments was not received until the middle of the year, necessitating an increase to the amount of MDLC's operating loan to TAS. It is pleasing to report however that TAS have been meticulous in repaying funds as and when they become due.

Donations:

MDLC is very appreciative of the many supporters, both local and in the wider community, groups and individuals who generously give donations to help with the education programs. In 2025 your support was invaluable and we offer our sincere thanks to:

- Ranges Organic Growers
- Ferntree Gully Uniting Church
- P Rivett
- FTG Village Traders Association Inc
- F R Van Groen
- Bendigo Bank Appreciation Board Donations

Grants:

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance from the Councils and businesses below, along with our ongoing Commonwealth and State Government operational funding.

- VET Development Centre – Workforce Development Grant
- DFFH – Men's Shed Project Stage 2 Funding
- DFFH – Victorian Youth Fest Grant
- Knox City Council – Minor Grant for Community Chicken Coop Upgrade
- Knox City Council – Minor Grant for Seniors Week
- Knox City Council – Grant for 2025 Makers Market
- Bendigo Bank – FTG News Volunteers Grant
- Bendigo Bank – Makers Market Donation
- Maroondah City Council – Small Equipment Grant

Fundraising:

The members and Volunteers and Fundraising groups invariably make a generous contribution to our organisation. Fundraising events included the Maker's Market, organising the Red & Green Luncheon, and a number of other events. We also owe thanks to groups such as the Crafty Treasures and the Sit n Sew Group. Fundraising ended the year with \$8,212 in their bank account.

Venue and Facilities:

12 Victoria Street:

With the anticipated future expansion of The Avenue School plans were implemented for MDLC's staff and tutors to take over the property at 12 Victoria Street. The tenant was given notice and duly vacated. The residence was then turned into an Administration Centre and the staff and tutors were successfully transferred. The building is now known as Admin House.

Reception for both MDLC and TAS remains at The Avenue property with TAS staff occupying the space left vacant by the MDLC staff move to Admin House. In view of all these changes it has been necessary to draw up a revised Lease incorporating the outgoings, Service Agreement and Hire Agreement for the School.

Men's Shed:

Having been successful in our application for a grant from the State Government, partial renovation of the garage was completed (now known as Oak Tree Den), and the Men's Shed was launched by our local Member of Parliament, Daniela De Martino on 30th May. To date they have been struggling a little with membership but it is hoped that this will improve with time.

Enid Hughes

Treasurer



Policy and Compliance

The committee met each month to review policies that were due, among them:

- Governance such as Organisational Code of Practice, Role of the Board of Directors, Media Policy.
- Strategy such as Strategic Plan and the Risk Register (both reviewed annually).
- OHS suite: Infection Control and Managing Blood Spills and Bleeding.
- Welfare: Anaphylaxis Management.
- Operational such as Student Academic Honesty and Recognition of Prior Learning.

Thank you to the team of Janet, Robyn, Ross, John and Pat who laboured diligently over several policies each month.

Sue Roberts

Convenor

Asset Management

I am pleased to report to members of the MDWC that the campus buildings and associated equipment of the MDLC have been maintained in excellent condition throughout the year largely as a result frequent and diligent inspection and review of the entire suite of facilities and the grounds they occupy.

This year has seen some major improvements within the campus environment which have all contributed to the effectiveness of our operations but will inevitably demand a greater degree of maintenance attention and activity. Without doubt, the most significant development has been the relocation of the Centre's administration hub to our premises at 12 Victoria St at the rear of our property in The Avenue. Now known as "Admin House", the premises has been rejigged to suit our office requirements necessitating some changes in room layout, doorway repositioning, repainting (the entire interior), recarpeting and the installation of a new telephone system. The whole relocation project was meticulously planned and executed by Janet and her superb team while Ron Bast, our "in house" maintenance and construction guru was responsible for the structural alterations. The fitter members of the Board and other volunteers assisted in the physical aspects of the relocation and sincere thanks are offered to all concerned.

Other matters arising from diligent maintenance surveillance include the reroofing of the Oaktree Den and work on the access ramp at the Studio. New carpet squares have been laid in the Annexe and a new fence and gate between that building and the main campus building have been erected. Additionally, a major termite inspection was carried out on the Studio and I am pleased to report the no evidence of these destructive pests was found.

I believe it is self-evident to all visitors to MDLC that the grounds in which the Centre/The Avenue School is located are rather special. This is due entirely to the members of the Garden Group whose work in maintaining the gardens in such an outstanding fashion adds substantially to the prevailing ambience of the site and I wish to convey the Board's deep appreciation of their efforts.

On a sad note, I want to conclude by mentioning the late Ray Hollis. In common with everyone who knew him, I was shocked and deeply saddened by Ray's sudden passing. We at the Centre will remember Ray for his generous, good-humoured, out-going and deeply caring approach and his willingness to always help out whenever he saw the need. That he would attend every working bee was a given and he frequently returned later in the week to finish off any job not completed on the day. Ray is sadly missed by his community and especially around MDLC and extending belated condolences to Enid, I believe I do so for the entire MDLC family.

Ross Corben
Convenor



Premier's Visit

The Member for Monbulk, Daniela De Martino surprised us all with a 'surprise' visit from Premier Jacinta Allen. The visit was arranged to showcase both The Avenue School and MDLC. I had an opportunity to speak directly to the Premier about some of the challenges faced by Adult Community Education providers and remind her of the important work we do as a Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre in supporting our community.

The Avenue School Principal, Jarrid Bartle spoke of the School's ambition to provide a curriculum that meets the students learning needs in a supportive, flexible environment and the secondary education pathway it will provide to the students in MDLC's Cottage Program. Our guests looked cosy and comfortable in their gifted TAS hoodies!

Thank you to Daniela for organising the Premier's visit and to Premier Jacinta Allen for her interest and encouragement.



Registered Training Organisation (RTO)

As a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), Mountain District Learning Centre (MDLC) is committed to delivering accessible, high-quality vocational education and training that supports learner participation, workforce development, and positive community outcomes. This commitment is underpinned by strong governance and full compliance with the Victorian Government's Skills First Funding and associated regulatory requirements.

Throughout the 2024–2025 reporting period, MDLC prioritised compliance with the Skills First Funding contract and the legislative and regulatory frameworks governing publicly funded Vocational Education & Training (VET) delivery in Victoria. Contractual updates, policy changes, and reporting requirements were closely monitored to ensure program delivery, student eligibility, data reporting, and financial processes remained fully aligned with Victorian Government expectations.

Internal reviews and compliance activities, including the 2025 Skills First Internal Audit, assessed adherence to funding rules, evidence requirements, internal controls, and regulatory standards. Audit outcomes informed continuous improvement actions to strengthen governance, funding integrity, and accountability.

MDLC maintained comprehensive and accurate compliance documentation, including Program Delivery Plans (PDPs), Training and Assessment Schedules, and validated student enrolment and reporting records. These systems support transparent Skills First reporting and the consistent delivery of quality training outcomes for learners.

In alignment with Victorian Government priorities to strengthen capability within the VET sector, MDLC supported Franci, Adult Learning Manager, to plan and deliver initiatives under the VET Workforce Development Grant 2025. Awarded by the VET Development Centre (VDC), this grant supported the enhancement of digital capability across the Learn Local workforce. We successfully delivered a series of three interactive workshops to build the digital literacy skills of trainers, tutors, and assessors delivering both accredited and pre-accredited training.

To further strengthen vocational education and training pathways for students at The Avenue School, MDLC developed the Certificate II in Active Volunteering as a new VET course for delivery in 2026. This program has been designed to support student engagement through practical, community-based learning while building transferable employability skills. The course will provide structured opportunities for students to gain nationally recognised qualifications, develop confidence and workplace readiness, and establish clear pathways into further education, volunteering, and employment.

I acknowledge and thank Sue Dunn, RTO Compliance Manager, for her continued diligence in maintaining compliance with Skills First and regulatory requirements. While much of this work occurs behind the scenes, it is critical to protecting public funding, ensuring audit readiness, and supporting the delivery of high-quality, compliant training outcomes.

Alison Percy
Education & Training Manager



The Cottage Program

22689VIC Certificate I in General Education for Adults (Introductory)

22490VIC Certificate I in General Education for Adults (CGEA)

22491VIC Certificate II in General Education for Adults (CGEA)

22492VIC Certificate III in General Education for Adults (CGEA)

The 2025 year has been a period of reflection, growth, and resilience for The Cottage Program at Mountain District Learning Centre. Throughout the year, we welcomed back familiar faces and introduced new students and staff into our learning community. It has been a privilege to witness new friendships develop as students connected with one another, our teachers, youth workers, and broader MDLC staff. Despite a year marked by change, the program remained focused on re-engaging young people in education and supporting them to build confidence, independence, and positive future pathways.

During 2025, the Cottage Program was delivered across four groups, with three operating from the Ferntree Gully site and one group initially based at Croydon. In response to enrolment patterns and increasing demand in the Early Years Program, the program was streamlined. Groups 1 and 2 were combined from Term 3, with minimal disruption to students. While Group 2 students experienced a change to their days of attendance, teaching continuity was maintained. Magda continued in her role as lead teacher, supported by Jess and Dan, ensuring stability and strong relationships for students.

A significant milestone for MDLC in 2025 was the establishment of The Avenue School, an Independent Specialist School located onsite. We were pleased to welcome Principal Jarrid Bartle and his team and look forward to continuing to work collaboratively to create strong and meaningful pathways for students. The shared philosophy between The Avenue School and the Cottage Program has already strengthened transition opportunities for young people.

The year also brought notable change to the Croydon group. Since 2019, MDLC has partnered with Maroondah Council to deliver the Cottage Program at EV's Youth Centre. During 2025, the program was required to vacate this site due to council redevelopment and the demolition of the existing building. With limited notice and no alternative site immediately available, the decision was made to relocate Group 3 to the Ferntree Gully campus at the end of Term 2. While this transition was unexpected, families and students responded with understanding and support. The team worked closely with young people to ensure continuity of care and a smooth transition to the new setting.

Student engagement throughout the year remained strong, with attendance consistently positive, even during the colder months. Several students successfully completed certificates and prepared to transition into further education or training. Individual Education Plans were developed and reviewed regularly, and Student Support Group meetings continued to bring together students, families, partner schools, and MDLC staff to ensure learning goals, wellbeing needs, and pathways remained at the centre of planning.

The program continued to benefit greatly from the dedication and expertise of its staff. Teachers created inclusive and flexible learning environments, while youth workers played a vital role in supporting student wellbeing, informed decision-making, healthy relationships, and resilience. Youth workers also assisted students to navigate mental health challenges through support and referrals, and encouraged engagement in positive opportunities that built skills, independence, and community connection. We were fortunate to have Catherine, Education Administration Officer, supporting the program three days per week. Her work across enrolments, tours, enquiries, departmental liaison,

and daily operations ensured the smooth running of the program and consistent support for students and staff alike.

It was with sadness that we farewelled Michael, who concluded three years as a youth worker with the Cottage Program. Michael's kindness and enthusiasm brought energy and into the program, and his contribution has left a lasting impact on our young people. We thank him sincerely and wish him every success in his next chapter.

We were also pleased to welcome Danny to the Cottage Program team as a Youth Worker. Danny brings a wealth of experience as a youth advocate and a strong commitment to supporting young people to achieve positive outcomes. We are excited to have Danny as part of our team and look forward to the support, expertise, and passion he brings to working with our student cohort.

Throughout the year, students participated in a wide range of enrichment activities that extended learning beyond the classroom. MDLC was fortunate to receive funding through the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Victorian Government Youth Fest Grant, enabling engaging opportunities during the September school holidays. Activities included a cultural cooking workshop celebrating diversity and teamwork, and an Art and Science Fair where students explored creativity, innovation, and experimentation.

Career education and pathway development remained a strong focus. Students participated in Swinburne University's Health Sector Industry Taster Day, resume-building workshops, and individualised career sessions. These experiences provided valuable insight into further study, vocational training, and employment options, empowering students to plan their next steps with confidence. Student Pathway Meetings further supported this work by identifying goals and aligning supports for future transitions.

Collaboration with external partners continued throughout the year. The Cottage team participated in secondary consultations with CYMHS clinicians to strengthen capacity in supporting young people experiencing mental health difficulties. Re-engagement contracts with local government schools ensured coordinated support for students who have found mainstream education challenging

Students enjoyed a range of excursions designed to build connection, curiosity, and wellbeing. Visits to the Melbourne Museum, the Olinda Walk, and Burnham Beeches allowed students to explore history, culture, sustainability, and nature, while strengthening relationships and confidence. The Immersion Day at The Avenue School provided students with insight into alternative learning environments that align strongly with the values of the Cottage Program.



The year concluded with several celebrations that highlighted student creativity, growth, and achievement. The MDLC Annual Makers Market showcased student enterprise through the sale of handmade items including bird seed feeders, dog biscuits, jams, relishes, and sauces. The Daylight Disco provided a joyful celebration of friendship and progress, while the end-of-year BBQ at the 1000 Steps brought all groups together to reflect on the year and celebrate achievements. The determination shown by students and staff during the walk was symbolic of the resilience demonstrated throughout the year.

We also acknowledge the support received through the Maroondah Small Equipment Grant, which enabled improvements to resources that enhanced learning and program delivery.

As we reflect on 2025, we recognise the perseverance, adaptability, and commitment shown by our students. Their willingness to embrace challenges and support one another has been truly inspiring. Every achievement, whether academic, social, or personal, reflects their strength and determination.

“Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after the other.”

Heartfelt thanks are extended to Danny and Jess, our dedicated youth workers, and to Magda and Stephen, our teachers, for their passion, commitment, and care throughout the year. Thank you also to Catherine for her steady leadership and unwavering support, to Janet our CEO, the Board of Management, and to Sue, our Compliance Manager, for their ongoing guidance and support. Their collective efforts have ensured strong educational outcomes, high standards of compliance, and a program that genuinely makes a difference.

We are incredibly proud of what has been achieved in 2025 and look forward with optimism and enthusiasm to the year ahead.

Alison Percy

Education and Training Manager



ACFE Learn Local Pre-Accredited Training

Building Pathways, Skills and Confidence

Mountain District Learning Centre (MDLC) is proudly funded through the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board to deliver accessible, inclusive learning opportunities for adults facing barriers to education, employment and community participation. Through ACFE Learn Local funding, MDLC provides pre-accredited training—practical, flexible programs designed to build confidence, develop foundational skills, and support learners to take their next steps into further study, employment, or greater independence.

Our programs primarily support vulnerable adult learners, including migrants, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, early school leavers, and adults experiencing social or economic disadvantage. Delivered across the local government areas of Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges, MDLC's pre-accredited programs create safe and supportive learning environments where learners feel respected, heard and encouraged to succeed.

Celebrating Learner Achievement

At the end of the year, MDLC celebrated learner success through certificate presentation events recognising the effort and resilience of adult learners. These events brought together learners, educators, and Board members to acknowledge achievements across a range of programs, including English for Living and Working in Australia, Read Write Now, Digital Literacy, Health and Financial Wellbeing, Brainworks, and English Conversation.

For many learners, these certificates represent more than course completion—they mark renewed confidence, personal growth and a re-connection with learning.



Innovation and Impact

2025 was marked by targeted innovation and strong partnerships. Three completed key initiatives demonstrate how MDLC continues to respond strategically to community, workforce and family learning needs.

1. Family Learning Partnership Program

Strengthening literacy through families and community

Through the Family Learning Partnership (FLP) initiative, MDLC strengthened its collaboration with Eastern Regional Libraries, delivering co-designed, low-stigma family literacy programs in accessible library settings.

Across Boronia and Rowville Libraries:

- 12 family storytime sessions were delivered
- Over 250 families participated
- Sessions combined storytelling, themed literacy activities and creative hands-on learning
- Guest experiences, including live animals, increased engagement and attendance

The program successfully reduced barriers to participation by embedding adult literacy support within family-friendly environments. Resources developed during the program will continue to be reused within libraries and MDLC programs, supporting sustainability beyond the grant period.

2. Just-in-Time Industry Partnership Project

Foundations for Success: Practical Skills for Care Workers

Through the Just-in-Time Industry Partnerships grant, MDLC designed and delivered a bespoke pre-accredited employability program for workers in the aged care, disability and community services sectors, in partnership with a reputable industry provider.

Key achievements:

- Development of a full PQF+ aligned curriculum
- Creation of transfer-ready resources
- 13 learners enrolled and all completed the course

All learners retained or gained employment, with several expressing interest in further study. The program has generated sector interest and is positioned for future delivery with other care providers, demonstrating the strong value of industry co-design.

3. Workforce Development Grant

Building Digital Literacy Capacity for Adult Learning Educators

MDLC also successfully delivered the Workforce Development Grant project focused on strengthening educators' digital capability and confidence in blended learning environments.

Project outcomes included:

- Delivery of three interactive professional development workshops
- Development of a digital resource toolkit
- Establishment of peer coaching sessions to embed practice

The project strengthened teaching quality, improved learner engagement, and directly benefited approximately 450 adult learners through more inclusive and digitally supported learning experiences.



Looking Ahead

The Adult Learning team at MDLC continues to lead with purpose, innovation and collaboration. By placing learners at the centre of program design, building strong partnerships, and responding directly to community and workforce needs, MDLC remains committed to creating pathways that change lives.

Through targeted family learning, industry-responsive training and workforce capability building, MDLC is helping learners develop not just skills - but confidence, connection and opportunity.

Franci Buljat

Adult Learning Manager

Reconnect

Our Reconnect team in 2025 supported local members of our community to reengage back into education and employment. This year we noted a higher cohort of participants who identified as having a disability and those who were of mature age.

In response to the emerging needs of our community, our case managers worked closely with our internal teams at MDLC to design and implement programs to best address the skills and confidence-based barriers for those seeking support.

The Reconnect team responded to referrals at over 120% of the program's capacity in 2025. We ensured a warm referral to alternative services was provided to those who were seeking support and not eligible for the Reconnect program.

This year was also a time for reflection, as the program underwent a statewide evaluation. We are proud to advise that Mountain District Learning Centre will be a continued provider of the Reconnect Program in 2026 and beyond.

Racheal Edwards

Reconnect Manager



Community Services

2025 was a jam-packed year for the Community Services Office which oversees the Volunteer Program, Social Support Program, Hi-Rise Community Garden, MDLC Makers Market, Crafty Treasures Craft Group, Philosophy for Thinkers, Community Development projects and other various Leisure Program workshops and outreach groups.

From Community bus trips, learning opportunities, incursions and excursions there was something for everyone every week!!

SOCIAL SUPPORT

The Social Support Program enjoyed strong client attendance with a wait list for most groups. We were glad to welcome back our Wednesday afternoon Art for Wellbeing Group, and the Friendship Group continues to go from strength to strength, with participants genuinely enjoying the sense of connection, inclusion, and shared experience it provides. It's been very encouraging to see the group grow not just in numbers, but in enthusiasm and engagement, with members forming meaningful friendships and looking forward to each gathering. The Mountain Treasures group and Crafty ladies made the decision (based on declining numbers) to form one group and re-name themselves the "Crafty Treasures". By combining groups, numbers are now at a lovely sociable amount. All other groups enjoyed crafting, gardening, learning new skills, making new friends and many other social opportunities. Big thanks to Lynn, Sharon, Deb, Luise, Monique and Henk for their endless creativity and kind enthusiasm.



VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteer, work experience and student placement program is still so vibrant and diverse with a few new volunteers signing up to help in the areas of Social Support group assistance, Cottage Program, and The Gully News. MDLC is truly blessed to enjoy a volunteer program that is worth its weight in gold. MDLC is proud to partner with Box Hill Institute, Swinburne TAFE, Chisholm, and RMIT to place students looking to commence and complete various amounts of work placement hours throughout the year, as well as local Secondary Schools to assist younger students to complete work experience days in a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

MDLC is lucky to partner with Knox City Council to offer a coach bus trip (or two or three) to various and interesting places of interest that are around 1 hour out of Melbourne. In 2025 we enjoyed trips to Crystal World in Devon Meadows, the Flinders Golf Club out in the beautiful Mornington Peninsula, as well as the stunning Lotus Flower Garden in the Yarra Valley.



In 2025 we also welcomed the brand-new Mountain District Men's Group to our newly appointed Oak Tree Den. This group has been slow to build, but word is slowly getting around, and we feel confident that numbers will increase steadily.

Our Crochet and Chat group that runs every Monday evening at the Boronia Library continues to attract good numbers and a large group of regulars has now formed, which is great news!

MDLC MAKERS MARKET

The 2025 MDLC Makers Market once again enjoyed a full stall line up of local makers and musicians with a waitlist for the very first time! We also had a sausage sizzle that was run by our fantastic board members and other volunteers. It was wonderful to meet and support our local community, and to show everyone around the beautiful MDLC Community Gardens. It was a bit of a rainy morning, but the day steadily grew warmer, and the sunshine eventually arrived, but as usual, the Mountain Treasures Craft stall and the Cottage Program Student stalls and all others were fully stocked with handmade gifts, cards, relishes, skin care, art and plants. There really was something for everyone!

Rachel Bast

Community Services Manager



Home and Community Care (HACC) NDIS and Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP)

Social Support Groups

Monday Makers

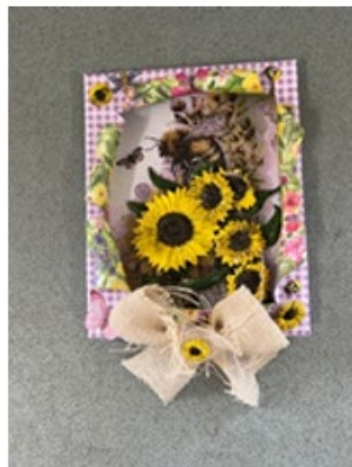
This group of lovely ladies have all become firm friends, always looking out for one another.

The ladies have thrived this year, each becoming more confident in their class projects and their skills. We have revisited a few favourites such as macrame and card making. We have also explored some new topics such as paper tole and mini album making from start to finish. Their real passion is the mixed media pieces they create which provides them with lots of decision making in coming up with their own take on the project. They talk through their processes, discuss colour options and provide input into each other's projects.

This group are a joy to create with each week and they have produced some beautiful craft.

Lynn Foster

Group Leader



Craft and Grow

What an incredible year it's been for Craft n Grow. Many mornings were spent creating crafts, sharing stories, and laughing together beneath the beautiful pin oak tree in the main garden.

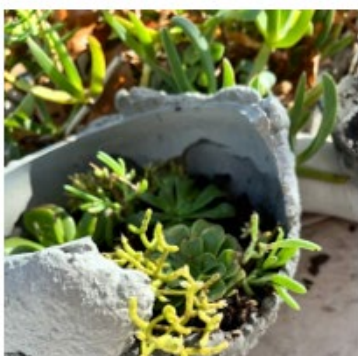
Clients transformed old children's books into lovely paper dahlia flowers, crafted drink coasters from air-dried clay and freshly picked leaves and enjoyed a visit to the breathtaking Blue Lotus Water Gardens to admire its dazzling blooms.

Hand-sewn elephant and whale families proved to be a crowd favourite, while vibrant handmade fabric flowers were pinned to bags and jumpers. Experimenting with concrete and balloons led to distinctive planters, and painted plaster moulds resulted in charming street scenes.

As Christmas approached, everyone made festive native gum leaf wreaths using a mix of gum leaves, bright red bottle brush, and wattle branches, and upcycled books into creative Christmas trees. We wrapped up the year with a joyful Christmas party - eating, laughing, and sharing excitement about all the new skills we'll discover in 2026.

Luise Topma

Community Garden Coordinator & Social Support Group Facilitator



Thursday Morning All Abilities Mixed Media

This group loves attending class each week. They are already talking to me as they head up the ramp, excited to share their stories and find out what they are doing in class. They just love all kinds of craft, so we cover a wide variety of projects from painting to mixed media canvases, paper craft, a bit of sewing, beading, collage, 3D projects and sock craft. Everyone who attends is always happy and chatty in the class. They truly have the best time, and they are a pleasure to work with each week. Parties are a big favourite amongst this group, so every special occasion is celebrated.

Lynn Foster
Group Leader



Thursday Crafteria

A lovely bunch of ladies attend this group. Some of them have been together for a long time and they enjoy catching up socially and crafting together each week. We have covered many different types of craft over the year involving all sorts of materials from decorating bottles, using denim jean material in various projects, lots of cards and other paper creations, mono printing, collage, mixed media canvases, stamping, zentangle, using lots of lace and some painting. The ladies all enjoy the variety of projects offered and we have seen some beautiful creations walk out the door of our craft room with some very proud creators.

Lynn and Sharon
Group Leaders



Community Hi-Rise Garden

This year was truly monumental for our garden. Our dedicated volunteers kicked things off by removing the old chicken coop to make way for a new one a huge task made possible with the help of site manager Billie Dog, Ron Bast, and our Community Service Manager Rachel. Thanks to their hard work, we now have an incredible new coop, so be sure to look out for our soon-to-arrive residents.

The next challenge was upgrading the Hi Rise garden beds in the main area. With a generous contribution from Rangers Organic Growers Association, we reinforced the beds, added new lining, fresh soil, compost, and mulch. We also replaced our outdated drip system with a modern drip line connected to our rainwater tank. As the soil settles, we'll need to keep topping up the beds. David from D&L Landscaping installed new concrete paths to ease movement between the front and back gardens. Many thanks to the MDLC Board members who helped relocate the large amounts of soil displaced during path construction—this made it much simpler for our volunteers to level and reseed the lawn.

We removed more fences between Victoria garden, the rear house, and the main garden, further enhancing our shared space. The Maker's Market once again proved to be a great success, providing us with a wonderful opportunity to showcase the garden.

Throughout 2025, we welcomed a variety of animal visitors, including bees, dragonflies, damselflies, butterflies, ladybugs, lizards, frogs, Rosellas, Crimson Red parrots, Kookaburras, Currawongs, and Morri the raven. Of course, we can't forget our favourite four-legged friends: Monty, Apollo, Ryder, and site manager Billie Girl.

As 2025 ends, the Garden Volunteer team and I extend heartfelt thanks to everyone who has helped in some way - whether by moving dirt, donating plants, enjoying lunch, or simply appreciating the space. Special thanks go to Bunnings Scoresby, Eastern Recycling, Plant Growers Australia, Rangers Organic Growers Association, and Mr. F Van Groen for their generous donations throughout the year.

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Ferntree Gully News Report

2025 was a busy and varied year for Gully News. We continued our coverage of local community groups, history, sports, arts, education, environment and more.

March saw the commencement of Under The Fern Trees Market which Gully News attended for the duration of the market run (ending with September market). It was a great opportunity to be a part of a lively community event, speak with locals and promote the paper.

Our annual Volunteers Thank You Party was held at Ferntree Gully Library on Friday 9th May 2025. It was well attended by Gully News volunteers, Daniela De Martino (state member for Monbulk), as well as members from local groups. Gully News launched the second edition of the Village Guide at this event. The updated Guide was made possible thanks to a grant from FTG Community Bank and aims to promote the Village as a thriving and varied Shopping Centre, a focus for community activities and a starting point for exploring the beautiful surroundings.

Gully News attended Knox Volunteers Expo at Knox Civic Centre on Friday 16 May.

With over 450 people in attendance it was a good opportunity to promote the paper and potentially recruit new volunteers.

In June, thanks to the Bendigo Bank, Gully News secured a grant to go towards increasing the paper's visibility at events via marketing paraphernalia; tablecloth, teardrop banners etc. The Reception dinner was attended by Liliane Azar and Susan Laukens.

Gully News also secured a grant through KCC Community Development Fund- thanks to Susan Laukens. These funds are going towards a new Scenes & Stories book, which covers stories from editions 51 - 100.

The CNAV Conference was held in Ballarat on Saturday 11 October. We had 4 team members attend the event, and we received three awards - placing as finalists in three categories (best feature story, best community content, best editorial comment).

Ferntree Gully News Team



Partnerships and Affiliations

MDLC highly values collaboration with organisations through partnerships and affiliations including:

- Community Houses Association of the Outer Eastern Suburbs (CHAOS)
- Neighbourhood Houses Victoria (NHV)
- ACEVic
- Adult Learning Australia
- Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC)
- OELLEN
- Ferntree Gully Uniting Church
- Knox Infolink
- Knox Emergency Relief Network (KERN)
- Eastern VET network
- Knox Learning Alliance and Volunteer 4 Knox
- Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges Youth Services
- headspace Knox
- Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS)
- EACH
- Foothills Community Care
- Uniting Care
- SwinLocal
- Your Library (Eastern Regional Libraries)
- Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges Councils
- Ferntree Gully Rotary
- Community Housing Limited
- Ferntree Gully Village Traders Association
- Hills Op Shop
- Other local schools, charities and community groups

Acknowledgement of Funding Bodies

MDLC is grateful to our major funding bodies including:

Victorian Government

- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Region - Skills First
- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Region - Adult and Further Community Education (ACFE),
- Department of Education and Training - Reconnect
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – Neighbourhood House Coordination Program
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – Home & Community Care (HACC) Planned Activity Groups

Commonwealth Government

- Department of Health – Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) Social Support Groups

Local Government

- Knox City Council – Neighbourhood House Operational Funding Program
- Knox City Council – Community Development Grants and Empowering Communities Grant
- Maroondah City Council – Community Development Grants