



Aspendale Gardens
Community Service

ANNUAL REPORT

2024

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Aspendale Gardens Community Service acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Bunurong people of the Kulin nation, on which the Centre stands, and pay respect to their Elders past and present. We extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who use the Centre.

INTRODUCTION

1,230+

Community members used
our centre per week.

2,695

Sessions delivered of programs.

60+

Different programs delivered.

Aspendale Gardens Community Service (AGCS) is a not-for-profit organisation part of a network of over 400 Neighbourhood Houses across Victoria. As a Neighbourhood House, we remain committed to providing accessible programs that cater to the needs of the community, providing a space for gathering and social inclusion, delivering educational and skills-building activities, and promoting wellbeing. Through the dedication of our staff and volunteers we seek to make a real impact on the lives of our community members and embody the idea of Neighbourhood Houses as “the heart of the community”.

Reflecting on 2024, we are amazed at the diversity of our programs at AGCS and the efforts of our staff, volunteers and community members who make our work possible. In 2024 we delivered 2,695 sessions of over 60 different programs. Our programs range from our kindergarten, children's activities, seniors events, art and fitness classes, basketball, donation drives, recycling programs, and much more. The breadth of the programs we offer has allowed us to make a positive impact and holistic intervention across many different sections of the community, from young children all the way to seniors, from those interested in arts or sports, to people who are seeking a social group or just a place to regularly drop off their recyclables. In 2024 1,231 people used our centre every week.

This report provides a high-level overview of our programs, challenges, and achievements over the past 12 months. It includes a report from our volunteer Board of Management, who oversee the strategic direction of AGCS, and a report on our financial outcomes.

DADS' PLACE

\$80k

Grant funding over 4 years.

200+

Dads and dad-like figures engaged across 3 terms.

250+

Children engaged in Dads' Place.

60+

Different programs delivered.

"I don't get time during the week to come to weekday playgroup. I always hear about it but never get to be there.

Dads' Playgroup is my daughter's favorite time of the week."

Participant response from Dads' Playgroup

At the start of 2024 we were successful for a Dads' Group Grant from the Victorian State Government. Awarded to only 18 community organisations and councils across Victoria, the grant provides funding for 4 years to deliver peer-to-peer dads groups encouraging fathers to connect, share experiences and receive support. AGCS has always had an emphasis on life-long learning and early intervention supports for new parents and carers, and with this grant we will be leveraging off our existing programs for families with young children and our specialist knowledge in early learning. The grant enables us to increase the participation of dads and men at our centre, broadening our impact in early learning spaces and strengthening our openness to all members of the community.

DADS' PLACE

In April we launched 'Dads' Place', our hub for dads and dad-like figures. Our launch event was a Dads' and Kids Fun Day, which was met with huge community interest and support, with nearly 100 dads and 200 children attending over our 2 hours event.

As part of Dads' Place we expanded our well attended weekday playgroups to include a fortnightly Dads' Playgroup on Saturday mornings, a time which our research indicated is more accessible to working dads. While continuing our emphasis on play-based learning across all our children's activities, Dads' Playgroup is also an opportunity for Dads of young children to engage with our knowledgeable playgroup instructor, learn from each other, and establish lifelong connections and support networks. In 2024 we ran 17 sessions of Dads' Playgroup, engaging 80

Dads' Place Networks & Partnerships:

- The Fathering Project
- City of Kingston Maternal and Child Health Care
- Aspendale Gardens Primary School

dads across the program.

Our third major program for Dads' Place is a Dads' Casual Basketball, providing the opportunity to socialise and promoting wellbeing through physical activity and non-competitive sports.

EDUCATION & COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Through Dads' Place we also seek to provide dads the opportunity to better understand childhood health, explore parental challenges, and find time for self-care. To achieve this, we have leveraged our own specialist knowledge in early learning and childcare and also broadened our connections with other community groups, not-for-profits, local councils, and the local primary school.

In September we ran a joint event with The Fathering Project, a not-for-profit that supports and connects Dads' Groups across Victoria. The event provided information and discussion with dads about fathering and men's mental health, led by former AFL player and coach, Rodney Eade.

We also connected with the City of Kingston's Maternal and Child Health (MCH) team, inviting an MCH specialist in sleep and settling to one of our Dads' Playgroup sessions to provide casual consultations. By developing our relationship with the MCH team we were able to secure a \$500 food grant to provide fresh fruit during Dads' Playgroup, increasing the accessibility of the space.

KINDERGARTEN

Offering 15 hours of free kindergarten for both 3 and 4 year old kinder, we continued to thrive with full enrolments and a vibrant active kinder community.

The kindergarten team continued their work on building knowledge of Aboriginal ways of learning, through our regular walks on Country for our 4 year old groups. In sessions, the children have learnt about our 3 Australian flags, read stories by First Nations authors, studied artworks and participated in activities for NAIDOC week.

Our road safety project continued to achieve success, with children, staff and families advocating for safer car parks and roads and a commitment from VicRoads to relocate the 40km speed sign on Kearney drive. This will improve safety for families who walk to kinder and the centre. The crossing from the AGCS carpark to the shopping centre is also getting a re-vamp as a result of this advocacy work.

Our connection with Aspendale Gardens Primary School continues to strengthen, with students from the school visiting our kinder sessions regularly throughout the year. Kinder teachers work with the school to ensure a smooth transition to school, including a joint presentation to families and transition visits to the school classrooms and playground.

Child safety education continued thanks to our School Readiness Funding through DoE. Sessions were offered to children, staff and community around body safety and protective behaviours. Our commitment to reducing child abuse in our community extends from education programs, formal training for staff, strict reporting protocols and referral processes to support families in need.

Along with child protection training, our teachers and educators completed professional development on engaging dads, improving curriculum planning, emotional regulation, key word signing and continued planning for the Best Start, Best Life reforms.

BASKETBALL

242

Aspendale Gardens Giants
Basketball players across 31 teams

2,200+

Hours of basketball played

\$25,000

Additional sponsorship
funding received

300

Children engaged in our
School Holidays Basketball
Program

Established in 2018, the Aspendale Gardens Giants Basketball club has grown to include 242 players organised into 31 teams. The incredible growth of our basketball program has been possible thanks to our volunteer basketball committee, coaches and team managers, who have worked tirelessly to keep the program running. 2024 was no exception for our Giants basketballers, who have always been relentless in their efforts to develop their skills, support their teammates and embrace the thriving basketball culture at AGCS. This year our basketballers played just over 2,200 (2,226) hours of basketball, developing their social connections and promoting physical and mental health for the children and youth in our community.

We seek to continually diversify our basketball program to provide opportunities to different members of our community and provide opportunities outside of the regular basketball season. Our Junior Giants program, which allows pre-club aged children to play basketball and develop their skills, was steadily booked out throughout the year. But a major success in 2024 was the expansion of our basketball program thanks to a major sponsorship from our local Bendigo Bank branch.

BENDIGO BANK SPONSORSHIP

In July we were successful for a \$25,000 sponsorship for our basketball program, from the Community Bank Edithvale-Aspendale branch of Bendigo Bank. This enabled us to set up a school holidays basketball program for children and young people in our area, which we ran over the July and September school holidays break and will continue into 2025.

The Bendigo Bank sponsorship also includes funding for modified basketball rings that can be lowered to be more suitable for younger players and players requiring all-abilities access.



GIVING BACK & SUSTAINABILITY

3,128

Items donated to Knit One Give One

52,340

Items recycled through our centre

We are also proud to facilitate the generosity of our community members, who are keen to support each other and those in need. In 2024 we continued to host and source materials for our knitting and crocheting group who donated over 3,128 items to the charity Knit One Give One, which distributes these items to families in need. We had community donations for a non-perishable food drive for Mums Supporting Families in Need, a local charity that provides material aid to vulnerable families. Throughout the year we also collected nappies for families in stress on behalf of The Nappy Collective, and books for disadvantaged children on behalf of 123Read2Me.

SUSTAINABILITY

2024 was our first full year as a provider of the Victorian State Government Container Deposit Scheme. AGCS is keen to be part of Victoria's target of diverting 80% of all material away from landfill by 2030. In 2024, 52,340 items were recycled through our centre as part of the scheme. The Scheme also allows customers to donate their items to AGCS, raising a total of \$XX for our centre. Furthering our interests of diverting waste from landfill, we are proud to be a soft plastics collection site on behalf of the City of Kingston. This year we had 60 customers a week come to drop off soft plastics, filling our 240L bin X times.

DONATIONS

AGCS is proud to promote and support the work of other not-for-profits and charities, as well as advocate for social change that benefits our community. In December AGCS staff attended our first Respect Victoria's Walk Against Family Violence. This event was deeply meaningful to us, as we engage so many families, women and vulnerable groups, and reflects our commitment to early intervention and fostering healthy families. Since 2012 we have donated our entire venue to the Miranda Foundation for their annual Biggest Playdate, which raises funds for the Monash Children's Cancer Centre. Staff members also volunteer for this event, providing their time and expertise to support the fundraiser.

LOOKING FORWARD

3,128

Items donated to Knit One Give One

52,340

Items recycled through our centre

Looking to 2025, we have many opportunities to broaden our work, build our programs, review our strategic direction, update our infrastructure, and continue developing AGCS as a vibrant and accessible space for our community. Some of our key upcoming projects include:

- Weekly fruit and vegetable relief to participants at our programs, ensuring access to fresh and nutritious food. This is thanks to a Victorian Government Community Food Relief grant which we were successful for at the end of 2024.
- A new employment position for 2025 overseeing our Aspendale Gardens Giants Basketball program as well as Dads' Place. Our new employee, John, is a professional basketball player and dad to three young children, so is able to bring specialist knowledge to this position.
- The installation of our modified basketball rings as part of our sponsorship from Bendigo Bank.
- Major facilities upgrades including new automatic doors at the front of the centre allowing for better all-abilities access, as well as more suitable child safe toilets at the Wattle Kinder room.
- A communities of practice program involving our office and kinder staff, where we will continue to develop our AGCS values and vision and practically orient ourselves towards best practices.
- The continuation of our seniors programs with new venue hirers Equip4Life, who will brief seniors on health living, and U3A, who will be running a seniors art program.