



a fairer victoria achievements so far

**Strategy Twelve** Building stronger communities

# strategy twelve

## Building stronger communities

### Aim

Communities thrive and have a sense of purpose when they are actively engaged in local issues, setting their own direction and driving progress. The individuals in them have a sense of belonging, have people to turn to for support and have better health, education, employment and general wellbeing. Active communities need good quality community facilities, ways to come together to discuss issues and make decisions, and access to funding and support from Government and other sectors.

A Fairer Victoria is helping to build stronger communities through community events and activities, broadly inclusive planning and priority setting, supporting strong local decision-making processes and building links to Government, business and other resources.

### Assisting communities with high needs

As the State's economy has grown many Victorians have benefited from higher incomes, better jobs and improved housing. However, not all communities have benefited equally. There are still significant concentrations of need in some communities. Local place-based initiatives have been a key feature of A Fairer Victoria, bringing together the energy, commitment and resources of residents, governments, the community sector and business to tackle local issues.

*Neighbourhood Renewal* is addressing the gap between disadvantaged communities and the rest of the State by creating stronger, vibrant communities in areas with high proportions of public housing. Its key action areas include housing and environment, employment, learning and economic activity, crime and safety, health and wellbeing, and community pride and participation. Since 2001, the program has made major gains, and was expanded through A Fairer Victoria to cover 19 sites.

*Neighbourhood Renewal* has had a number of achievements across its 19 sites, including:

- delivering jobs to over 370 residents across Victoria through the *Workforce Participation Partnerships Program*, *Employment Support Initiative*, and *Public Tenant Employment Program* in 2006/07. To date, over 4,600 jobs have been generated in *Neighbourhood Renewal* areas through these programs
- generating a further 130 jobs each year through 33 social enterprises
- creating 23 community hubs
- supporting 80 community infrastructure and urban design projects
- driving 42 housing redevelopments and acquisitions, and 1,000 housing upgrades and immediate improvements in 2006/07. As a result, 6,000 houses have been improved since 2001, and
- establishing a range of health programs in different communities, including community gardens, community kitchens, food cooperatives, breakfast clubs, the *Walking School Bus* program, and a *Go For Your Life* demonstration project – *Be Active Eat Well*.

*Neighbourhood Renewal* has also reduced energy consumption, and with it costs. In 2006/07 1,193 energy improvements were undertaken, which translated into a combined annual reduction of 897 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, and 58 megalitres of water saved. On average, households saw a reduction in annual electricity bills of nine per cent and gas bills of 16 per cent, equating to an annual saving of over \$100.

*Neighbourhood Renewal* has also improved the liveability of the areas in which it's based:

- property crime and crimes against persons are down 70 and 50 per cent respectively
- recorded offences are down in 60 per cent of all areas
- 18 per cent of residents felt crime had reduced and safety had improved (rising to 55 per cent of people in Fitzroy), and

- turn-over, vacancies and rental arrears in Neighbourhood Renewal areas are down in 80 per cent of sites.

Building on knowledge gained through *Neighbourhood Renewal*, the recent *Community Renewal* program takes a similar approach in urban neighbourhoods, transforming them into places of opportunity and activity. Since 2006 eight sites have been established. While these projects are in their early stages we are already seeing some results, including:

- increased employment for residents through *Workforce Participation Partnerships* and community enterprises in Laverton and Whittington
- upgraded community facilities such as the new Laverton Children's Centre
- community festivals have brought residents together to celebrate and be proud of where they live, for example the 'I Love Frankston' parade, and
- improvements to streets, parks and outdoor play areas to improve the visual amenity of communities and increase physical activity.

Nearly 4,000 community members have attended community opportunity workshops to develop community plans through the *Community Building Initiative (CBI)*, which focuses on 102 small rural towns affected by drought and bushfire. Some highly successful community projects and initiatives have resulted from these community workshops, for example:

- the *Warracknabeal Men's Shed* opened in July 2007, with the initial meeting attracting over 50 men

*"They feel they're doing something useful for themselves and their community. Some have really come out of their shell. They obviously enjoy the company, but also talk about health issues and treatments."* *David Mollison, Warracknabeal Men's Shed Chairman.*

- local residents in the Upper Yarra CBI have secured \$600,000 to set up an after hours medical service
- the first farmers market was held in Pearcedale, with over \$20,000 of local produce sold
- a nursing course commenced in Cobram in 2008, reducing the pressures of travelling long distances to get nursing training, and
- the Kinglake Ranges Small Business Forum has been established with over 50 small businesses participating in workshops.

### **Better community facilities**

Good quality community facilities – both general purpose and specialised – provide the space for people to meet, learn, gain skills, volunteer, play sport or socialise. Victorians are active users of local facilities. Each year we make more than 32 million visits to libraries, and neighbourhood houses provide classes and activities for over three million participants.

A Fairer Victoria has invested in a wide range of new and refurbished community facilities including:

- funding more than 1,700 aquatic and sporting facility projects across Victorian communities
- establishing 12 new neighbourhood houses and redeveloping or co-locating a further 51
- undertaking 64 information technology projects across the State's neighbourhood houses, including upgrading computer facilities and internet access, and
- contributing over \$12 million to 46 community facilities in 2005/06.

We have also increased the total coordination funding to neighbourhood houses by 62 per cent, to \$18.5 million in 2007/08. This increase allowed the hourly rate to be lifted to \$38.95, effective from 1 July 2007.

In addition, the *Neighbourhood House Foundation Grants Program* is assisting community-based organisations that have not previously been able to get funding under the Neighbourhood House

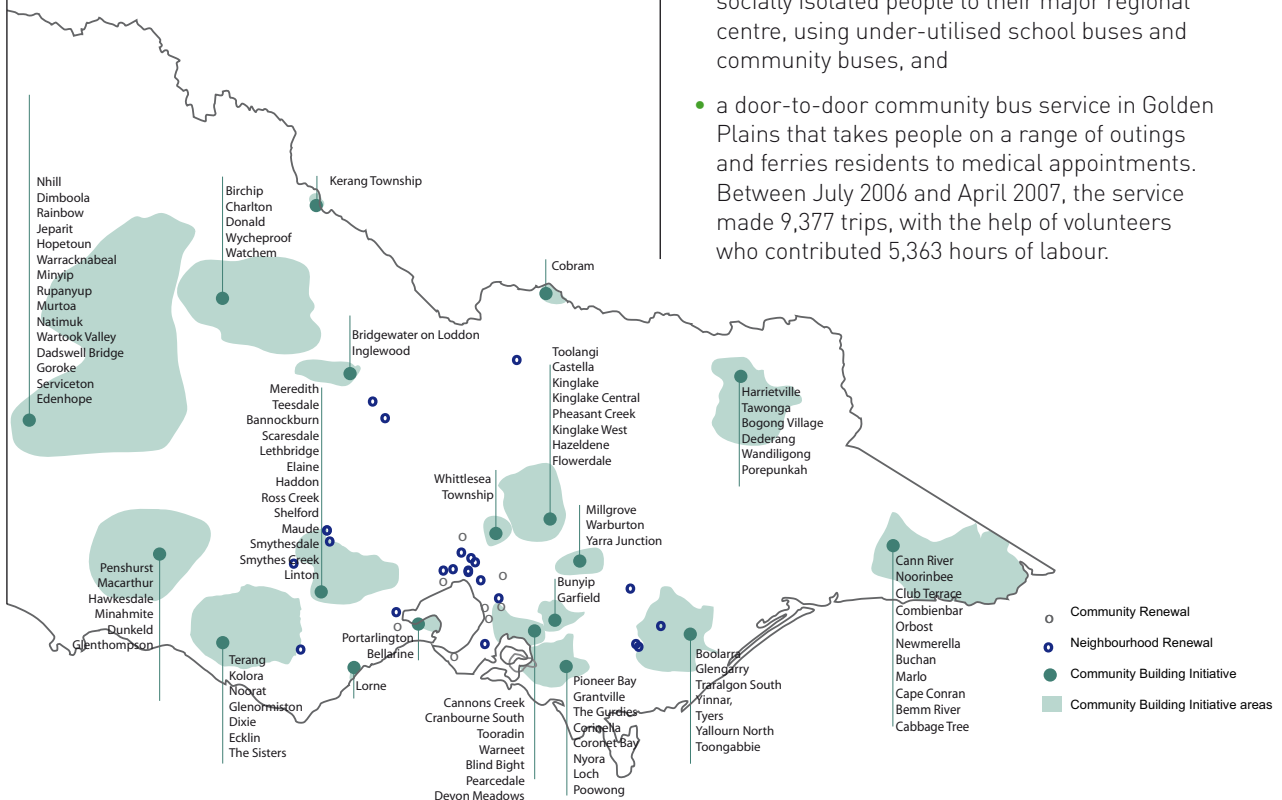
program. The grants allow organisations to provide a range of activities including skills development and social programs. To date, 29 organisations have received one-off capacity building grants, and a further 11 have been added to the *Neighbourhood House Coordination Program*. This brings the total number of neighbourhood houses across the State to 359.

### Improving transport

Providing access to transport is one of the best ways of ensuring people can get involved in the economic, civic and social life of their communities. We have improved access to bus services in Melbourne and regional Victoria by:

- introducing 19 new services in Melbourne and 17 in regional Victoria
- extending 4 existing routes in Melbourne and 13 in regional Victoria, and
- extending the service hours (evenings and weekends) of 61 services in Melbourne and 30 in regional Victoria.

### Neighbourhood Renewal, Community Renewal and Community Building Initiatives



Of these services, 13 have been provided in growth areas – Yarra Ranges, Point Cook, Wyndham, Sydenham, Melton, Sunbury, Craigieburn, Roxburgh Park, Pakenham, Epping, Berwick, Frankston and Mornington.

We have also established 30 *Transport Connections* projects across rural, regional, and outer metropolitan Victoria. Through partnerships between state and local government, community organisations, the health and education sectors and local residents, these projects work to create practical local transport solutions. Early outcomes include:

- the *Mt Beauty Flexi Bus* - a route bus service in Victoria's High Country that collects residents directly from their home, taking them to shops, leisure centres and medical appointments
- *Buchan Bus 'n' Freight*, which has combined a bus and freight service, taking people and goods from Buchan to Bairnsdale
- the *Gippsland Melbourne Medical Transport Initiative*, which uses volunteer transport and the V/Line network to assist people to attend medical appointments in Melbourne
- a bus network in the Mallee that is reconnecting socially isolated people to their major regional centre, using under-utilised school buses and community buses, and
- a door-to-door community bus service in Golden Plains that takes people on a range of outings and ferries residents to medical appointments. Between July 2006 and April 2007, the service made 9,377 trips, with the help of volunteers who contributed 5,363 hours of labour.

## Buchan Bus 'n' Freight

With no public transport available and petrol costs rising, residents in the Buchan area were finding it harder and harder to travel around.

Although a bus and freight service had started in December 2003, it needed a bit of tweaking. Rhonda James, East Gippsland Shire Council's transport project coordinator, said the Let's GET Connected Transport Connections project, in partnership with the bus operator and community groups, brought people together to review the service.

Acting as a broker, Rhonda worked with the bus operator, the community and the Department of Infrastructure to survey local people about their transport needs.

Working together, the community identified some service needs – such as what days people wanted to travel, why they were travelling and what route would suit them best.

With this information, Rhonda was able to involve the Department of Infrastructure and the bus operator in discussions and to change the service.

Rhonda said the bus took people to Bairnsdale and return, allowing them to shop, visit friends and family and make use of services not available in Buchan.

"It also brings services to the people in Bairnsdale and Buchan by way of freight," she said.

"Local people can now ring Bairnsdale supermarkets, place an order and pay a small fee to Buchan Bus 'n' Freight to collect their groceries and deliver them to their door."

The local bus service is now also being used by community organisations like the Bush Nursing Centre to deliver pathology samples to the Bairnsdale Hospital.

And it also provides a much better link between Buchan and the V/Line services in Bairnsdale for people taking longer trips across Gippsland, or to Melbourne or Canberra.



"We're proud of what we've already achieved – and we understand that the Department of Infrastructure is looking at our project to see if a similar idea could be used in other rural Victorian communities," Rhonda said.

Funded by the State Government's *Transport Connections* program, Let's GET Connected is a partnership between the East Gippsland Shire Council, Wellington Shire Council, local communities and transport operators. It is one of 32 projects funded through the *Transport Connections* program.

*This is an achievement under strategy 12.5, Building stronger communities, A Fairer Victoria 2006.*

Published by the State Government of Victoria,  
1 Treasury Place, Melbourne VIC 3002.

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Authorised by Peter Batchelor,  
1 Spring Street, Melbourne VIC 3000.

Printed by On Demand,  
152 Sturt Street, South Bank

ISBN 978-1-921331-21-3