



Communities
of Wellbeing

ANNUAL REPORT – 2024



Chairs' Report

Communities of Wellbeing Inc. continues to flourish even as some of our key personnel have coped with health, family and career issues. However, we in our mission statement recognize that struggle is part of life and true to our beliefs we have come through this with greater resilience.

We completed last year with our

December 2023 – Celebration of Community

Our December meeting was held in the offices of Nick McGowan MLC, pictured here with our catering team. It was a lovely sunny evening on his balcony as we enjoyed fantastic food, great conversation and the beautiful music of Jazz Notes. It was a perfect occasion for us all to reflect on the past year and savour our successes.

We also collected donations for Urban Life's Christmas Hamper Program.

We would like to thank Nick McGowan for providing us with a free venue and Ann and Kevin of Jazz Notes for playing for us free of charge.



February 2024 – Play Your Part Have Your Say



In February we met to consider whether we needed to update or refocus our objectives and to consider our plans for 2024. We developed a number of new ideas which we planned to implement in 2024. We also confirmed our commitment to our strategic plan.

-
1. *“A goal without a plan is just a wish.” – Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*
-

March – Connection with Nature



In March, the Communities of Wellbeing meeting was a celebration of nature’s profound impact on our wellbeing. Held at the lovely Warriën Reserve in North Croydon, members were treated to a ‘sense and savour’ walk, expertly guided by self-compassion specialist Kathryn Lovewell. The event kicked off with a friendly sausage sizzle under the canopy of twilight, setting the stage for an evening of connection and reflection. As the weather was perfect, providing the perfect backdrop, participants shared stories of their cherished natural havens and the significance these places hold in their lives. Kathryn Lovewell’s insights further enriched our understanding, highlighting how our bond with nature not only nurtures our physical selves but also serves as a wellspring for mental and emotional strength. This gathering wasn’t just a meeting; it was a collective journey back to the heart of what it means to truly connect with the world around us and within us.

“When you bring your attention to a stone, a tree or an animal, something of its essence transmits itself to you. You can sense how still it is and in doing so the same stillness rises within you. You can sense how deeply it rests in being, completely one with what it is and where it is, in realizing this, you too come to a place or rest deep within yourself.”

— Eckhart Tolle

April – Dying Well



In April, our Communities of Wellbeing meeting hosted a profound and enlightening session led by Natalia Sopelario, a spiritual guide working at the Alfred Hospital, who specialises in supporting those facing terminal illnesses. The evening focused on the themes of living well and embracing the inevitabilities of life's final stages, blending spiritual guidance with practical wisdom.

The session began with a calming meditation led by Natalia, aimed at centring and preparing us for a deep exploration into the often-challenging topics of life and death. This reflective practice set the tone for a thoughtful discussion and ensured that participants were emotionally and mentally ready to engage with the sensitive subject matter.

Natalia introduced the concept of the “Five Remembrances,” which are fundamental truths about life that she shares with her patients to help them navigate their final days with acceptance and peace. These remembrances are:

- Impermanence of Life: Recognising that life is not permanent and accepting this truth can profoundly change our perspective on how we live and value each day.
- Importance of Relationships: Emphasising the value of relationships and the impact our interactions have on our wellbeing and that of others.
- Reality of Life's Limitations: Acknowledging that life has its limitations and challenges, and understanding these can lead to a deeper appreciation of our experiences.
- Significance of Actions: Highlighting how our actions have consequences and the importance of living with intention and mindfulness.
- Acceptance of Life's End: Accepting that death is a natural part of life, which can lead to more meaningful living and less fear towards dying.

Natalia's talk provided not only comfort but also a framework for living a life filled with purpose, mindfulness, and acceptance. Her expertise in spiritual care brought a unique perspective to the universal experiences of life and death, making the session especially impactful.

May – Wellbeing Throughout Life



In our May meeting we offered a captivating exploration of Erik Erikson's stages of development, uniquely framed through the lens of wellbeing across life's various stages. The evening was structured around insightful discussions led by experts who delved into how wellbeing manifests at different ages and the critical roles community and support networks play in fostering a healthy, happy life.

In our new space at Eastland, Peter Gaze launched the evening with an overview of Erickson's stages and set the stage for a walk through these various stages by some Maroondah community members.

The talk began with a focus on early years (ages 1-7) by Lisa Waters (Maroondah City Council Early Childhood Manager), highlighting the importance of nurturing and secure environments in the foundational stages of life. The discussion transitioned to the challenges and triumphs of young people by Ella Watts (Youth and Children's worker at Urban Life Church (ages 8-25)), emphasising the crucial phase of identity formation and the impact of peer, family and community support.

Attention then shifted to adult life, examining two pivotal aspects: personal relationships, including marriage, divorce, bringing up a family and career development. Suzy Stojanovic (McAlpin Ward Councillor for Maroondah City Council) and Peter Maguire, (COWB Executive Committee and Director of Ridgeline HR) illustrated how adult challenges are navigated successfully through community support and individual resilience. They spoke about their learnings along their individual journeys that enrich our lives and provide the wisdom that can be shared and used in future endeavours.

Lastly, the conversation covered healthy ageing for those in aged care and active seniors post-career. COWB executive members Peter Feeney, Janni Haskin and Edwina Ricci shared their experiences with personal stories and those of ageing parents. The emphasis was on the importance of community engagement and the joy of daily achievements and social interactions in promoting mental and emotional health in later years.

The overarching conclusion from the evening was profound yet simple: “It takes a village to raise a person to be healthy and happy.” This timeless wisdom resonated deeply, affirming the essential role of community at every stage of human development.

Communities of Wellbeing would like to thank our experts for the evening who gave their time and words of wisdom, and to COWB executive committee member Peter Gaze whose vision and effort to bring the concept of exploring wellbeing alongside Erikson’s life stages was appreciated by all who attended. Thanks also to the Maroondah City Council for providing the refreshments and to Eastland for our new amazing space to share our wellbeing messages with community.

“If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”
– African Proverb

June – Health, Happiness and ‘Hygge’ – Exploring ways to avoid the Winter Blues



We had a full house in the specially decorated and “hygged” Friendship Ninja Zone. Janni explained the increasingly popular concept of Hygge and how to achieve it and Marijke did a great job of tying the principles of Hygge to our PERMAH model. The ‘Menu’ that Marijke had put together was so ideal – because it gave us all practical takeaways, but also facilitated discussion and information sharing amongst the group which was very popular. The Family Feud game was also a big hit, enabling people to connect, share ideas, and collaborate. This was such a great example of the hygge concept.

*“To stand at our window, wrapped in the half-dark
and watch the day disappear... is a moment of
hygge.”*

– Louisa Thomsen Brits

July – Mindsets for Optimal Wellbeing



Ronnie Oliech told us his life story and how it had influenced the growth of his mindsets and his approach to wellbeing. He explained how his business develops people’s total wellbeing and helps them develop mindsets that facilitate healthy relationships, stress reduction and emotional wellbeing.

Ronnie runs his own personal training studio in Lilydale where he provides 1:1 personal training for physical fitness and general wellbeing. His long term approach rather than quick fixes enables people to tailor their journey to their lifestyle and context.

We are grateful to Ronnie for sharing his expertise and for inspiring us to prioritise our health as a means to living a more satisfying life.

“Physical fitness is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body; it is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity.” – John F. Kennedy

August – Empowerment



In August a convergence of holidays, illness and a variety of other circumstances converged to leave us with our lowest attendance ever, but a small but very passionate group intensely discussed empowerment, the times we did and did not feel empowered and what it means to us. Everyone there voted it one of our most successful discussions ever.

“To be the person who we long to be—we must be vulnerable. We must take off the armour, put down the weapons, show up, and let ourselves be seen.”
— Brené Brown

September – My Manifesto



What a great night we had at Communities of Wellbeing hosting Justin Robinson, a dear friend and partner of COWB for ten years, for the Maroondah launch of he and Sue Wong's new book, "My Manifesto." The feedback on Justin's presentation was overwhelmingly positive and highlighted its impact on personal growth, inspiration, and clarity. Participants appreciated the authenticity, kindness, and passion Justin brought to the session. They found the 7-step process practical and accessible, providing clarity on personal values, character strengths, and purpose. Many attendees felt inspired to begin their own manifesto journey, with several expressing their desire to purchase the book and the 'inspiration cards.'

The presentation was motivational, helping individuals confront themselves while giving hope and direction for the future. The message of perseverance, courage, and being true to oneself resonated deeply, with many feeling encouraged to pursue their dreams and contribute to community wellbeing. The idea that a manifesto is fluid and evolves with life was highlighted, and there was strong enthusiasm for a future book tailored for teens.

Overall, the presentation was clear, inspiring, and transformative, leaving us energised and eager to apply the lessons to our own lives.

If you haven't had a chance to check out Sue and Justin's work please visit their website – <https://mymanifesto.me/>

Thanks Justin and Sue for your inspiration.

October – Grow Your Wellbeing Event



The Communities of Wellbeing team had a brilliant day at the Grow Your Wellbeing family event at Eastland. With the sun shining, families eagerly explored our Character Strengths Wheel, highlighting their strengths superpowers. Attendees were excited to receive their Strengths Kits, which provided access to the VIA Character Strengths Survey, enabling them to discover and reflect on their unique strengths at home.

Our Family Wellbeing Survey sparked thoughtful responses, with many sharing how they foster wellbeing within their families and what resources they'd like to see created for families in the future. A common theme for children, young people and adults was the importance of meaningful connection as the foundation for building wellbeing. These insights will guide us as we continue developing supportive tools for families in our community.

It was a day filled with positive energy and collaboration, shared between the Communities of Wellbeing Executive Committee—Maria, Janni, Peter F, and Edwina—along with our wonderful partners from the council and Eastland. We were thrilled to meet so many people who visited our space and engaged with our activities. A huge thank you to everyone who joined us, making the event a huge success. We look forward to continuing this journey, helping families thrive.

October – Leading for Wellbeing Breakfast



How fantastic it was to see so many of our business, education and sporting leaders up early for our breakfast with ex Richmond Football Club captain Trent Cotchin to celebrate World Mental Health Day on October 10th. Trent's presentation on 'leading for wellbeing' was inspiring and provided some practical tools for everyone to take and apply within their own context. Trent's defining moment as a captain was his decision to put his own interests aside and make the team success his number 1 priority, creating the environment for his players to be the best version of themselves on and off the field - the rest is history.

We were also fortunate to have the school captains from Rolling Hills PS Lachie and Cody who spoke of the impact on the school community from their 'We Are Posi' experience as Trent and program creator Justin Robinson from The Wellbeing Distillery sat proudly listening to their accounts.

Communities of Wellbeing are grateful again to have collaborated with such wonderful partners in QIC and Maroonah City Council. It was 9 months in the planning, and we could not have been happier with the support and outcomes.

Our food was provided by Eastland's newest cafe run by Glen Park Community Centre Inc's 'Hungry for Success'. A big thank you to Naomi, Heidi and the team.

Thanks also to Jodie Murphy from QIC, Fiona Burrige from Maroondah City Council and our wonderful Communities of Wellbeing team. Your commitment to serving our community and ensuring that those attending the event had the best possible experience is amazing.



Acknowledgements:

None of the achievements of this year would be possible without the support of our many grant providers, partners, members, and friends especially Maroondah City Council and Eastland, but a special mention must be made of our executive committee. This team of volunteers give their own time to plan and manage the activities of Communities of Wellbeing Inc. Our committee for 2024 was made up of Maria Allison, Peter Feeney, Peter Gaze, Marijke Graham, Janni Haskin, Peter Maguire, Edwina Ricci, and Gail Woods.

Edwina Ricci
Vice-Chairperson

Peter Feeney
Chairperson

*“Hurting people, hurt people
Healing people, heal people
Growing People, grow people.”
- My Manifesto*
