



**2025-
2030**

WONTHAGGI NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE STRATEGIC PLAN



**WNC Committee
of Management
2025**

Introduction

WNC meets on the land of the Bunurong Boonwurrong people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge and pay our respects to the traditional owners of this land where we gather to learn, work and play. We thank the elder past, present and emerging for their custodianship and their continuing connections to the land, sea and community.

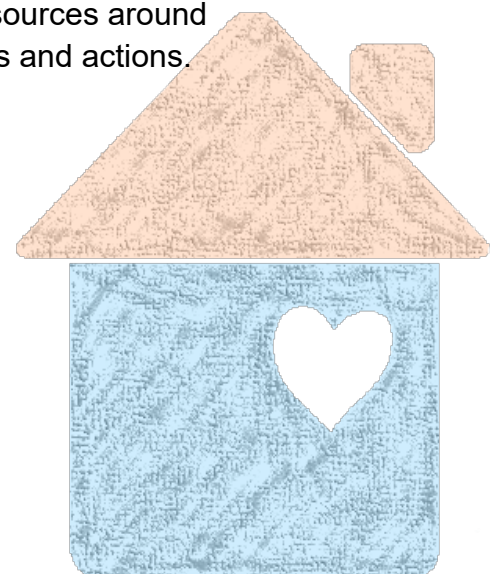
The Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre at Mitchell House Inc. (WNC) is a non-profit, incorporated association. It is an organisation managed by volunteers that is based on community development principles. The purpose of WNC is to:

- Provide a safe and welcoming environment where people can meet to learn and share ideas, skills and information, and build friendship.
- Build social capital and improve social health and wellbeing. WNC provides a diverse range of programs and activities in response to local needs, which support and connect individuals and groups in their participation in community life.

The Strategic Planning process commenced in June 2025 to bring together the important work that has been developed in the past, consult with members and key stakeholders and to consider current trends and future opportunities. This Strategic Plan 2025-2030 report is a culmination of this important work.

The Wonthaggi community and the broader Bass Coast region is experiencing significant growth, developing from a rural township to a thriving Regional Centre. This presents both challenges and opportunities for WNC, which is already operating at near peak capacity in terms of facility size and human resources.

It is hoped that the Strategic Plan framework will help the Committee of Management and staff to focus on priority areas, structure resources around these priorities and to inform the annual plan for detailed tasks and actions.



Neighbourhood Houses

Neighbourhood Houses receive funding through the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) under the Neighbourhood House Coordination Program and its guidelines – WNC is supported by the Neighbourhood Houses Gippsland Network.

The Neighbourhood House Coordination Program provides funding to support the provision of community development programs and activities that lead to community strengthening outcomes by:

- Supporting diversity and promoting community participation and inclusion.
- Facilitating community development and capacity building in support of individuals and groups within communities.
- Supporting lifelong learning opportunities for people to improve their well-being and community connections.
- Undertake community development processes to address locally identified priorities and needs through:
 - Collaboration with other community service providers
 - Development of agreed community responses to identified priorities and needs
 - Identification of additional funding sources

Refer to the appendices for additional information about Neighbourhood Houses and the Local Gippsland network.

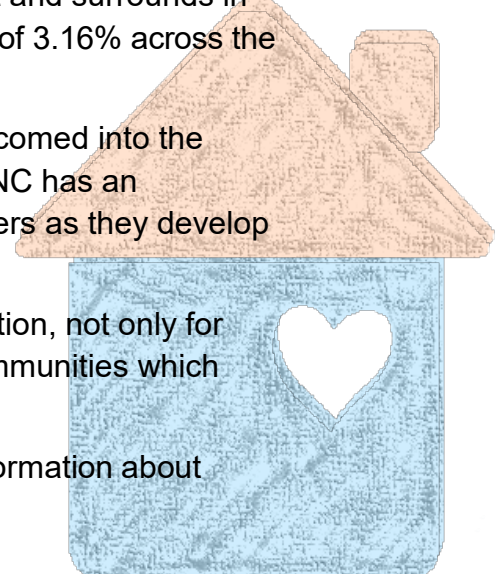
Wonthaggi Community

The Wonthaggi community lives within one of Victoria's fastest growing rural municipalities. The estimated population of Wonthaggi District and surrounds in 2024 was 19,998 . This increase reflected an annual increase of 3.16% across the whole of the Bass Coast Shire.

New individuals, couples and families are regularly being welcomed into the community as they expand the diversity of the population. WNC has an opportunity to continue its long history of supporting newcomers as they develop their support and friendships.

The Bass Coast area is also known as a major tourist destination, not only for Phillip Island and the Nature Parks, but the other seaside communities which swell during the peak summer months.

Please refer to the appendices for additional demographic information about Wonthaggi.



Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre

History

WNC has a rich and dynamic history – it was built in the 1980's by people of the community who saw the need for a place of support and welcoming, especially for young mothers who needed childcare, playgroups and social contact.

Cape Paterson couple Lorraine and Ross Mitchell were both active community members at the time and Lorraine was a founding member and driving force in the development of WNC.

A small group led by Lorraine began working with several local groups, including Apex, Cape Paterson Life Saving Club, Cape Paterson Progress Association and Wonthaggi Play Group around the idea of developing a Neighbourhood Centre for Wonthaggi.

The property, which is now Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre@Mitchell House, was owned by Vic Rail and was empty for some time and in a state of disrepair. However, the Committee, with Lorraine as its President, sought assistance from the Wonthaggi Apex Club to acquire the premises from the shire for use by the community.

Tragically though, Lorraine and Ross never saw the final results of their efforts – both died in a car accident on 28 November 1982, which was a terrible blow to all involved with the project.

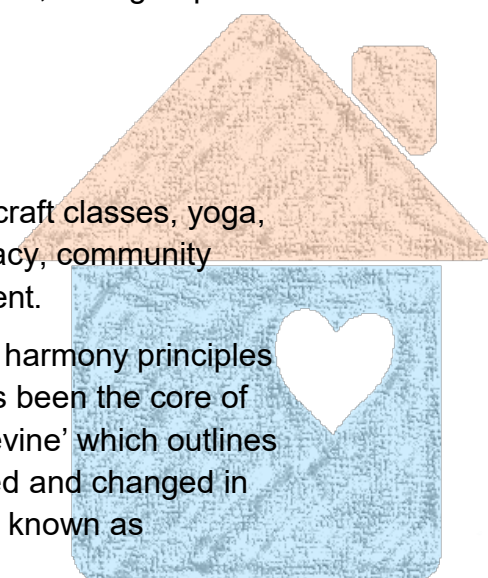
WNC opened its doors in July 1983 and as a mark of respect and in remembrance of the important contribution made by Lorraine and Ross Mitchell, it was named Mitchell House.

In the forty years since its inception, WNC has held fast to its roots and to the philosophy of the Neighbourhood House movement. WNC has been and continues to be a warm and welcoming place to a wide range of individuals, local groups and organisations.

Programs and Commitments

WNC offers a broad range of activities which include art and craft classes, yoga, health and well-being, music, play groups, community advocacy, community meals, community event management and project development.

Responding to local needs and issues, promoting community harmony principles and developing community strengthening practice has always been the core of WNC's work. WNC produces a program known as the 'Grapevine' which outlines the activities undertaken throughout the year and are reviewed and changed in line with community need and feedback. A regular newsletter known as 'Connections' is produced quarterly.



WNC supports the right of all people to access programs that are safe, supportive and affordable. It is their belief that many social and economic difficulties which people in the Wonthaggi community face are often not the fault of the individuals who experience them. Rather, they are a result of economic and social inequalities, discrimination against less powerful people and lack of varied, affordable options.

WNC are committed to maximising people's individual empowerment for information, decision- making, relationships and resources. As part of this, WNC supports Learnshare – a model of people coming together to share their knowledge and skills with each other at low or no cost.

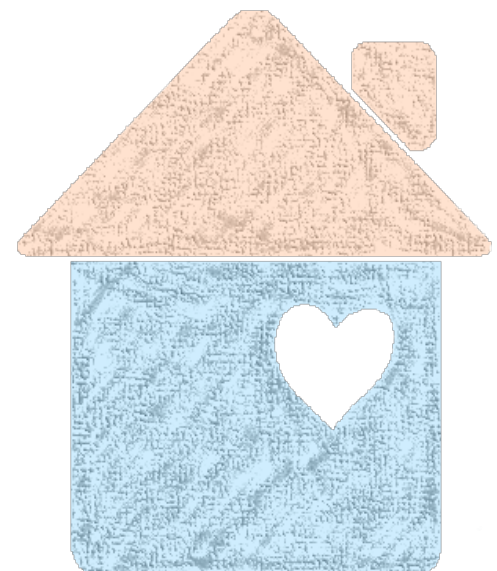
Who we are

As an Incorporated Association, the WNC is managed by a volunteer committee who employs a Coordinator in line with funding provided by the Department of Families, Fairness & Housing.

WNC offers the community the opportunity to become a member, presently there are around 160 members and there is always room for more.

The users of WNC are community members who visit for a range of reasons.

The volunteer Committee of Management is determined each year at the Annual General Meeting as set out in the Constitution and the Committee usually has five to seven members.



Staff

There are currently three part time staff employed for around 58 hours per week. 21 hours in the L2P program and 37 hours in the WNC office.

Events

WNC has conducted and participated in a range of very successful community events and special activities which are often dependent on grants and the availability of volunteer resources. Some of these events include:

- Homelessness Week
- 40th birthday celebration
- Harmony Day
- Refugee Week
- International Women's Day

Auspicing

As an incorporated entity WNC has been able to act as the auspicing body for community groups undertaking both short and longer term projects. This has enabled groups that are not incorporated to apply for grants needed to successfully complete their aims of enhancing community services or facilities.

WNC currently auspices two longer term projects –

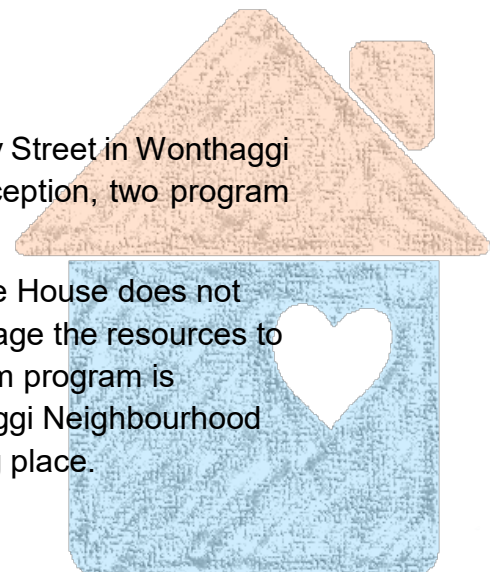
- Bass Coast Housing Matters
- Bass Coast Refugee Sponsorship Group

Auspicing provides these groups with liability insurance for events, a venue for regular meetings, financial administration and association with a trusted and respected community entity.

Facility and Utilisation

The WNC's main facility (Mitchell House) is located on Murray Street in Wonthaggi and includes the coordinator's office, small kitchen area, reception, two program rooms and two small office spaces.

These facilities are not always fit for purpose, for example the House does not have a commercial kitchen, but the volunteers and staff manage the resources to suit the needs of the programs as much as possible. The term program is reviewed and promoted through the Grapevine. The Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre, on a typical week has up to 5 activities per day taking place.



Strategic Plan

Our Vision: “Building Community Spirit”

Mission/Purpose

Provide a safe, welcoming environment where people can meet to learn and share ideas, skills and information, and build friendship.

Build social capital and improve social health and wellbeing. WNC provides a diverse range of programs and activities in response to local needs, which support and connect individuals and groups in their participation in community life.

Core Principles

The Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre sector works in a community development framework with a membership-based governance model. This builds social connections and networks that are based on trust, respect and reciprocal interaction – known as social capital. The 10 Neighbourhood House Sector principles that the WNC adopts are:

Community ownership To set, manage and control the direction, resources, decision-making and processes of the Neighbourhood House or Centre so that local volunteer members have a sense of ownership and intrinsic belonging.	Community participation To recognise that everyone has a valuable contribution to make and to facilitate community members to join in at any level. Volunteers and community members are integral to the decision making, evaluation, provision, participation and direction setting at all levels of the organisation.
Empowerment To put into practice a process which respects, values and enhances people’s ability to have control of their lives. This process encourages people to meet their needs and aspirations in a self-aware and informed way which takes advantage of their skills, experience and potential.	Access and equity To ensure fair and equitable access for all people. Striving to make meaningful opportunities, programs, activities and services accessible to individuals, groups and the community. To promote a fairer distribution of economic resources and power between people.
Lifelong learning To build and support the personal skills, knowledge, abilities and resilience of people. To develop the health, well-being and connection of people and their families, through formal and informal pathways in education, employment and self-development	Inclusion To value the diverse contributions that people make and to be sensitive to their individual needs.

Networking To link, form alliances, collaborate and work with individuals, groups, other agencies, Government and business.	Advocacy To act with and on behalf of community members to endeavor that their individual or group needs are met.
Self help To come together in a supportive group environment to share information, knowledge, skills and life experience so each participant can reach their own personal goals.	Social action To analyse internal and external factors that impact on the local community, to transform relationships between individuals, groups and organisations and within the community through collective action.

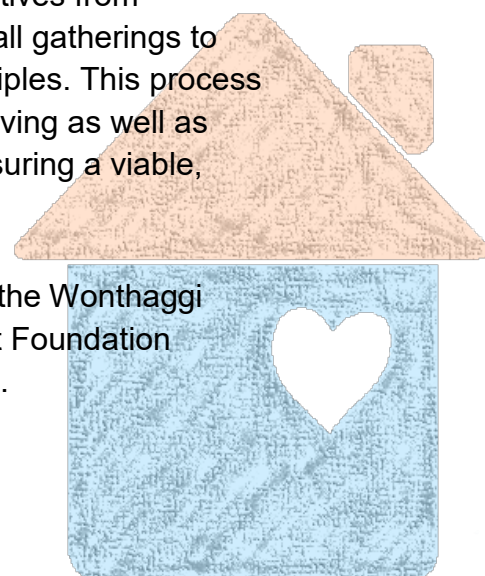
Strategic Intentions

Six core principles were initially identified by the WNC Committee of Management (CoM) as being particularly relevant to the local setting and community needs. These are:

- Advocacy and social action
- Identify and respond to local community needs and aspirations
- Build social capital for individuals, groups, staff and volunteers
- Partnership and networking
- Inclusion and access
- Financial viability

A consultation process was subsequently conducted by the WNC CoM alongside the WNC manager Leslie Adams from March until June 2025. WNC members, Bass Coast Shire Council staff and councilors and representatives from community agencies and programs were invited to attend small gatherings to discuss ideas about how to put into action the above six principles. This process provided valuable feedback about what WNC is already achieving as well as future possibilities for programs and events, alliances and ensuring a viable, relevant future for WNC.

Representatives from the Bass Coast Adult Learning Centre, the Wonthaggi library (West Gippsland Regional Library) and the Bass Coast Foundation ensured that input was received from services most like WNC.



1. Advocacy and Social Action

Act with and on behalf of the community members for changes that enable their individual or group needs to be met.

Support collective action that addresses and removes barriers to community needs being met.

Analyse and utilize demographic and other data for the purpose of improved services to the community.

Gather knowledge of issues and trends that impact the local community.

2. Identify and Respond to Community Needs and Aspirations

Understand the underlying social and political character of the local area.

Monitor local social trends and the challenges experienced by community members and consider such trends when developing the WNC program.

Provide a safe environment where community members have an opportunity to form connections and develop skills and knowledge.

Review and update WNC programs and explore community requests for programs and auspicing.

3. Build Social Capital for Individuals, Groups, Staff and Volunteers

Provide an environment in which individuals and groups are empowered with the skills and knowledge they need to effect change within their lives and the community.

Provide an environment in which volunteers and staff are supported to develop their skills and capabilities as they perform their jobs.

Provide programs and events which enhance the health and well-being of community members.

Prioritize the safety of staff, volunteers and participants.

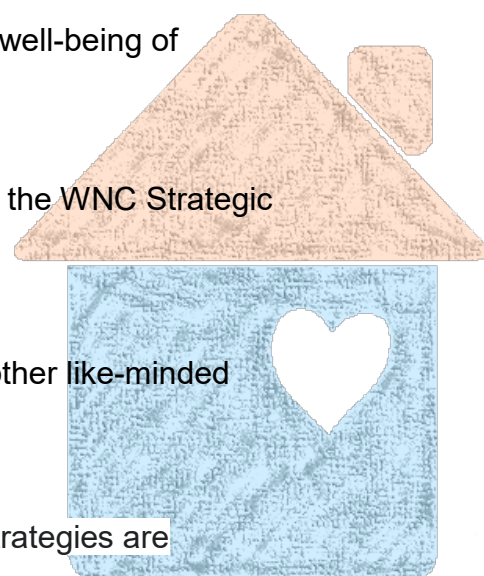
Capitalize on members' skills, knowledge and interest to fulfil the WNC Strategic Action Plan

4. Partnership and Networking

Form alliances and collaborate with individuals, groups and other like-minded agencies for the delivery of activities, events and resources.

Build a strong relationship with the Bass Coast Shire.

Understand how the relevant Bass Coast Shire community strategies are interlinked with the WNC Strategic Plan.



Promote communication between other local neighbourhood centres and the Bass Coast Shire.

Collaborate with local businesses to enhance the WNC amenities and program.

Support auspicing requests that align with WNC's capacity.

Expand social media promotion.

5. Inclusion and Access

Recognize that all community members have a valuable contribution to make and to facilitate their involvement at WNC at any level.

Encourage a diverse group of community members to engage with WNC.

Develop a marketing strategy to build the community's understanding of the purpose of WNC and to promote the programs and facilities

Look for opportunities to improve the physical amenities.

6. Financial Viability

Develop additional sources of revenue to ensure long term fiscal viability.

Diversify the approach to revenue raising.

Support improved sector funding.

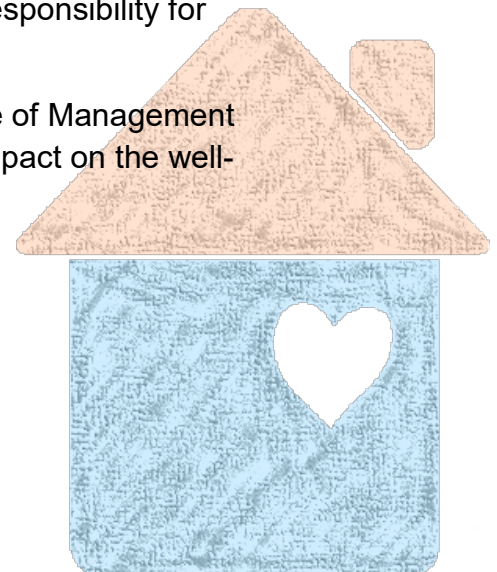
Engage interested members in the task of fundraising.

Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre

Operational Action Plan

Stage two of the Strategic Plan will involve the committee of management compiling a detailed Action Plan that focuses on achieving the above strategic intentions. It will outline objectives, tasks and who will have responsibility for each task.

This will provide both the Centre manager and the Committee of Management with a comprehensive guide to maximizing WNC's positive impact on the well-being of the local community and residents.



Appendix – Supporting Information

Methodology

The following key steps were completed during the development of this Strategic Plan:

- A strategic plan sub-committee met during March 2025 to draw up the planning process and the focus for consultations
- Consultation including numerous meetings were held with the CoM and WNC members, Bass Coast Shire Council, user groups and other key stakeholders to discuss the project and identify key issues and opportunities.
- The strategic intentions were finalized in July 2025 and adopted by the CoM in August 2025.
- The Operational Action Plan will be completed following the 2025 AGM.

Supporting Plans and Strategies

Bass Coast Shire Council plans:

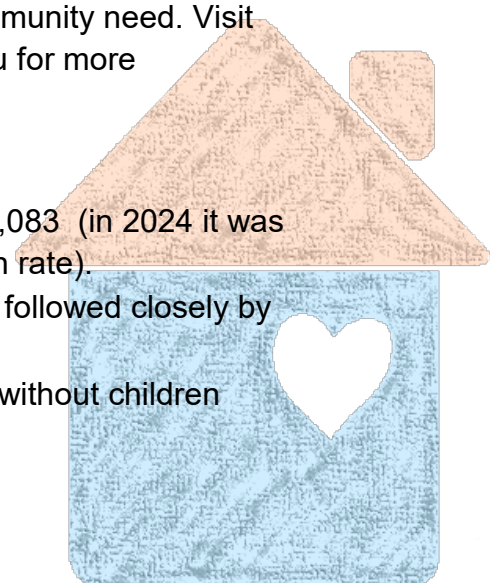
- Health Communities Plan 2021-2025
- Community Vision 2041
- Council Plan 2021-2025
- Living Young Plan 2021-2025

Demographics

The Census, which takes place every five years, provides a snapshot of Australia's people and their housing – information that Council uses to make informed decisions about what services and facilities our community need. Visit the Australian Bureau of Statistics website at www.abs.gov.au for more information.

Some facts from the 2021 census:

- The resident population in the Bass Coast Sire was 36,083 (in 2024 it was estimated as 43,557 which was a 3.16% annual growth rate).
- The age group with the most population was 70-84 yrs followed closely by 60 -69 yrs
- The predominant household type at 31% was couples without children
- 29.5% of households contained one person
- The most dominant household size was two persons
- 37.1 % earned a low income



The estimated population of Wonthaggi and its surrounds in 2024 was 19,980

The Bass Coast Shire population forecast is expected to grow to 46,429 by 2036.

More statistics are available at profile.id.com.au/bass-coast

Neighbourhood Houses Gippsland

Neighbourhood Houses Gippsland covers the Houses located in Bass Coast Shire, Baw Baw Shire, Latrobe City, South Gippsland Shire, Wellington Shire.

Within Bass Coast Shire there are five Community Houses including WNC. The other facilities are:

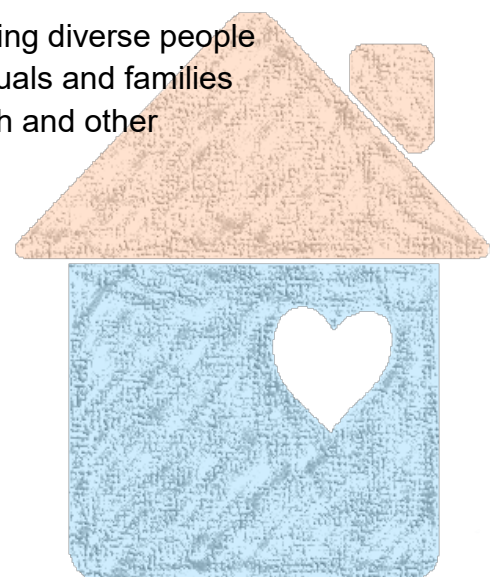
- Bass Valley Community Centre
- Corinella & District Community Centre
- Inverloch Community House Inc.
- Phillip Island Community and Learning Centre.

Connecting a Diverse Victoria

The findings of the 2017 Neighbourhood Houses Victoria Participant Survey show that Neighbourhood Houses are clearly effective at engaging communities in all their diversity, including people experiencing disadvantage and/or at risk of isolation. These results combined with data from the annual Neighbourhood Houses Surveys further show Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres are actively addressing key challenges experienced by Victorians.

The most commonly identified benefits across the sample of 46,458 participants were associated with community connections, participation and reducing isolation, spending time with others and meeting new people and making friends.

An increasing body of research shows social networks that bring diverse people together strengthen communities, as well as providing individuals and families with tangible benefits that inevitably relieve pressure on health and other intervention services.



Value Adding to the Community...

Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre at Mitchell House

2024 - Real Impact. Real Value.

INCOME \$286,039

VALUE \$957,878

This figure includes the value of:

Improved quality of life through social connection:
\$362,862

Volunteer contributions: **\$373,336**

Emergency relief provided: **\$69,460**

Services provided: **\$152,220**

Emergency relief value includes:

- Food and groceries: **\$68,620**
- Clothing: **\$360**
- Personal care & hygiene items: **\$480**

Services value includes:

- Facilities use or hire: **\$69,300**
- Résumé assistance: **\$360**
- Auspicing other organisations: **\$1,897**
- Community lunch, frozen or other meals:
\$69,600
- Fee for service activities: **\$11,063**

This community value equates to:

\$3.35 for every \$1 of income

\$9.71 for every \$1
of Neighbourhood House Coordination Program
funding

Over **\$332.60** for every hour the neighbourhood
house is in use

Employment value

2.0 FTE jobs

including 1.5 direct and 0.6 indirect
Full Time Equivalent positions

These values are produced by Neighbourhood Houses Victoria based on data provided by Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre at Mitchell House in the 2024 Neighbourhood Houses Survey. Only a limited range of activities where a determinable valuation method exists are included.

**Just some of the value to communities from selected
Neighbourhood House activities**

Stakeholders Consulted

Organisation/individuals
WNC members
WNC volunteers
WNC staff
Bass Coast Shire Council staff
Bass Coast Shire Councillors
Bass Coast Refugee Support Group
Bass Coast Housing Matters
West Gippsland Library
Bass Coast Community Foundation
Bass Coast Adult Learning Centre
Combined Community Services Housing Coalition

References

The following references have been used in the development of this report:

- Neighbourhood Houses Victoria website
- Bass Coast Shire Council website and relevant planning documents.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics – Population data.
- Other planning studies and strategies as identified in the document.

