

STONNINGTON COMMUNITY ASSIST

ANNUAL REPORT 2024





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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Stonnington Community Assist acknowledges that its office operates on the traditional lands of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bununrung people of the East Kulin nations. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge their living connection to the Country, their relationship with the land and all living things extending back tens of thousands of years.





THANK YOU

Stonnington Community Assist has a dedicated committee, a team of volunteers and supporting organisations that have allowed it to serve effectively for over 50 years.

We proudly acknowledge the continued support of City of Stonnington, The Department of Social Services (DSS), Community Information and Support Victoria (CISVic), Community Bank Windsor and the Magistrates' Court of Victoria.

In 2023-2024 we were pleased to have committee representatives as follows - Clare Duggan (President), Anthony Hyden (Treasurer), David Hilton (Secretary), Julie Woolhouse, Jenny Cox, Caroline Gray, Nicole Armstrong and Heidi Sanford (Committee Members).

Stonnington Community Assist recognises and thank all contributions from its volunteers and team. We appreciate the value of your efforts.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT



It is with pleasure that I present my fifth report as President.

Another year passes when we have again relied upon the goodwill and commitment of our volunteers who have stepped up constantly to do extra shifts, attend meetings, collect bread and engage with community activities.

While other volunteers report on Tax Help, Free Legal Service, No Interest Loan Scheme, Food Security, and the Food Pantry services, I will be focussing on our efforts to create more awareness within the local community about our services. We have also spent time in providing new education and training for our volunteers as well as targeted efforts towards increasing our volunteer pool. Lastly, I am delighted to share three stories of support our volunteers have provided.

KEY ACTIVITIES:

Student Placements

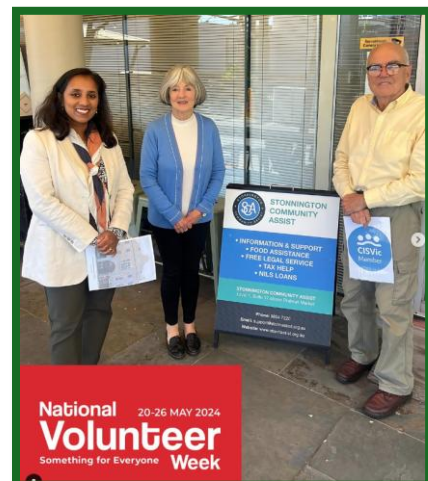
We have been fortunate again to host two students from Swinburne University. This gives us the opportunity to gain help in the day-to-day administration tasks that all volunteers need to complete. We now have a Volunteer Handbook, a Resource poster and an Evaluation Survey completed by, and with thanks, to the Swinburne students.

Volunteer Recruitment

In the past year we have had numerous enquiries from people expressing interest in working in our agency. Often there is much time spent in initial contact, a face-to-face interview and supervision. We then provide role shadowing as the potential volunteer observes interviews and is provided with training on our services. Of approximately ten applicants, we have had three who completed the requirements and became volunteers. We liaise with Council staff to request publicity in local information publications to support our endeavours to increase our volunteer pool.

Advocacy

One of our most important actions is to provide advocacy on behalf of clients and also to assist them to self-advocate. This can be with utility companies or body corporations and landlords. This last year we received visits from state MP Sam Hibbins who has been a constant advocate for a paid worker for Stonnington Community Assist. On a federal level, Michelle Ananda-Rajah visited us and pledged to support increased funding through DSS. We continue to lobby all current politicians on both sides of government through CISVic campaigning.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT CONT.

Publicity

We are constantly looking to increase our profile and engage with a larger cohort of clients, with a focus on single parents of young children. This year we implemented an Instagram account and participated in the newly formed Stonnington Connect and Discover Network. We also advertise for volunteers on the Stonnington Council website.



Accessibility and Inclusion

In a recent Evaluation Survey of over 40 service users, feedback indicated that all clients feel they are treated with dignity and respect. We continue to provide support to all clients who attend the office, even if they are not within the local community.

Capacity Building

Volunteers attended four training sessions over the past year, some of which involved guest speakers. Topics included Community Policing, funding for Team Sports (teamsports4us.org.au), and increasing our knowledge of the services provided by Uniting Care and Prahran Place.

Lastly, my thanks go to the ever-willing committee and volunteers who maintain a constant enthusiasm and dedication for the important work they do. We look forward to another successful year.

Clare Duggan

President



PRESIDENT REPORT CONT.

SUPPORT SERVICE STORIES



A significant number of clients visit the agency to ask for assistance with form filling, e.g. passport and Visa applications. Primarily, clients ask to be assisted with electronic applications or to access our email system as many still do not have an email address or have problems with literacy.

Case Study 1: Peter*

We recently had a client who is legally blind. Every few months, Peter requests support with his emails for opening, sorting and reading to be aware of anything of relevance. Although Peter has an NDIS package, he periodically has a lot of problems with his gas company and comes into the office for support. Throughout the past year, he had no gas connected to his Housing Victoria home yet received bills that were increasing in cost.

Peter owns a mobile phone but has no landline and no email address. The gas company refused to attend his home to cancel the account. We have spoken with the gas company to discuss the matter on Peter's behalf, but they required to speak with him directly. After a few attempts, we had success when we called together and managed to resolve the matter to Peter's satisfaction.

Case Study 2: Stavros*

Stavros presented to the office needing domestic assistance for his home. He is eighty-five years old and suffers from a physical disability. We assisted Stavros by calling My Aged Care on his behalf to obtain his customer number. Stavros was able to speak for himself over speaker phone. Due to Stonnington City Council outsourcing home care services, many providers could not offer services until June or July. We continued to contact various home care providers (a list of twenty-eight) and eventually reached Calvary Home Care – Melbourne South. They arranged for a Greek-speaking assessment officer to contact Stavros directly. Whilst we provided this level of support, unfortunately, he is still waiting for their services to commence. We will continue to advocate on his behalf to support him.

Case Study 3: Amber*

Amber has been a client with us for several years on a single parenting payment. A few months ago, she allowed her previous partner to return home. He subsequently destroyed all her belongings, including all electronic devices, while in a psychotic rage. She and her two daughters were absent at the time and chose not to return to their home for safety concerns. Amber came to us to obtain validation from a community agency so that she could receive the Escaping Family Violence Payment. We were able to complete the online agency application and then support her with the validation details.



"Thank you for your help. As a recent survivor of family violence, I have been to a few other agencies but had no luck with them validating my application for the Escaping Violence Payment (EVP). Thank you for providing your details to the Uniting Care Network." Amber

*All names have been changed to protect the identity of our clients.

FREE LEGAL SERVICES REPORT

Over the past 12 months the Free Legal Service continued to consult with clients by telephone on Thursday evenings from 6.30pm. Further to this, I was able to provide some advice to clients face-to-face in the office during my rostered shifts.

We had a total of 112 appointments with 71 clients. This was around the same number of appointments as the previous year (115) but a significant drop in the number of clients from 98 to 71. This is well down on the pre-pandemic numbers, which were as high as 150 appointments in 2017, but nevertheless we are still helping a large number of people.

Unfortunately, there has been a significant drop in the availability of free legal services in the area. Most of the Community Legal Centres are staffed by paid lawyers and as there is far less funding available, they have had to reduce the range of services that they offer.

I appreciate the SCA volunteers making appointments and emailing the details to me each week. On those days when they are frantically busy with their own clients, it is just one more call on their time. Thank you for your continued support with this important activity.

We operated with three volunteer lawyers and myself as the Supervising Legal Practitioner. One of our solicitors, Phoebe Smillie, resigned during the year as she left Private Practice and took up a job with Legal Aid and I would like to thank her for volunteering with us. I am still desperately trying to recruit new volunteer lawyers but with no success to date.

I would like to thank our remaining lawyers, Rodrigo Haddad and Shaun Miller for their time and ongoing support of the Stonnington Free Legal Service. They have both been volunteering with us for many years and without them, we would not be able to operate.

Jenny Cox

Supervising Legal Practitioner



TAX HELP REPORT



The Australian Tax Office provides free Tax Help to people on low to moderate incomes whose tax affairs are reasonably simple. Volunteers are police checked and undertake training in straightforward tax situations. Ideally, they guide the client through submitting their personal return; in some cases, submitting on behalf of the client. The content of the tax return submission is provided and authorised by the client.

Stonnington Community Assist has offered Tax Help for many years, and this continued for the 2022-2023 tax year. Many clients have been coming to Stonnington Community Assist for support for several years. We had three Tax Help volunteers; Wendy, who has volunteered for several years Stuart and myself for a couple of years now. Wendy no longer comes into the office of an evening; instead providing remote support via email and MS Teams to help people submit their returns online.

Some clients required repeat visits and there were a couple of no-shows, yet we provided support to over 44 clients. It is also important to note that the number of clients were assisted outside the official Tax Help period. They do not appear on this report as that data is factored into general support as 'helping clients fill in forms'.

Lesley McCrann

Tax Help Specialist

Action	Number
Check	1
Lodged	25
NL	4
Enquiry	14
Total	44



FOOD SECURITY REPORT



During the past financial year, our records show that the demand for vouchers and food parcels has risen dramatically. Increased numbers of clients have been visiting more often to receive a food parcel inbetween receiving the three-monthly voucher. We have exceeded the allocation for emergency relief and begun using our financial reserve to continue supply. This is unprecedented in the history of our agency. The combined budget total allocated to food relief was \$86,000 including DSS funding of \$36,000. The actual spend was \$121,000 which meant that we had an overspend of \$33,000. Food vouchers counted for \$106,000 and food parcels at \$12,000.

The Food Pantry report describes the wide range of food and other items we can offer. We are also able to offer material assistance and in doing so, we are able to reallocate the money for the clients to spend on food. There was \$3,000 spent on Big W vouchers primarily to supply clothing and bedding for clients relocating or needing warm clothing for winter. We also gave out vouchers for the Uniting Op Shop.

Occasionally, Woolworths donates items that are past their selling use such as ceramic dolls for Anzac Day, umbrellas that have been wrongly labelled, toys and lunch boxes. Volunteers that travel often bring back the small sample hotel toiletries which adds to the parcels.

A highlight of the last financial year was a phone call from Sam Hibbins, local state member for Prahran on the day of the announcement of the State Budget on 7 May 2024. He told our President that we were to receive substantial funding from the Victorian Strengthening Food Security Program. This funding is specifically targeted for public housing tenants who are finding it difficult to manage the increased cost of living. This payment, expected in September 2024, is to be spent over the next twelve months. We thank Sam for his advocacy in this regard and for his continued work to secure funding for a paid worker.

In a recent survey of our clients which investigated food insecurity, it has highlighted the effect of the current cost of living. Typical of the answer to “Have you always been able to put food on the table?” was these responses:



- *“No. The pension stretches me and there is no food a week before pension day. I am not even able to offer milk in tea to visitors.”*
- *“No, I put aside \$50 for food and at end of the fortnight, this service (SCA) assists to make up any gaps”*
- *“No, I haven't eaten for two days, I have thought about coming into visit you (SCA) for the past week.”*

David Hilton
Committee Member



NO INTEREST LOANS SCHEME REPORT

Stuart and I have submitted 11 No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS) applications in the past 12 months. We had three additional clients request support but were unable to finalise their applications due to lack of information from the clients.

Much to our regret we have had to stop doing the NILS loans in February 2024 as the office has been short staffed due to the low number of volunteers available weekly. We found the loans required quite a lot of time to complete with our clients and it involved too many interviews to gather the amount of information required to process the loan.

We would like to recommence offering this service to our clients once we determine there is great capacity in the office.

Lynn Ghougassian
NILS Specialist



FOOD PANTRY REPORT

Over the past 12 months we were delighted to have the opportunity to expand our Food Pantry expenditure. We decided that this was a critical need due to higher costs of groceries and living, especially as we saw an increased need for food relief.

We were able to broaden the range of items in the pantry to include more choices in breakfast food, canned vegetables, canned fruit and ready meals. We also have increased options to provide vegetarian and gluten free products. Additionally, we were able to refer clients to obtain fresh fruit and vegetable boxes from Pinos who is located in Prahran Market. Pinos generously subsidises the boxes with additional items than we provide vouchers for and this has been appreciated by many clients who were unable to otherwise buy fresh produce.

We receive two donations a week of bread and other bakery items from Woolworths. Sweet Greek at Prahran Market also supply soup, meals, cakes and salads. All of these items are a welcome addition to our pantry supplies, and we thank them for their kind donations.

A newly sourced donation was personal care packs, which includes items like shampoo, conditioner and toothpaste. This is in addition to the period care and incontinence products we have available. Another new source over the past years was pet food donated by Animal Rescue Cooperative Melbourne (ARC), Narre Warren Hub. These new items were a welcome increase to the food relief we can offer to our clients who are in much need.

Julie Woolhouse
Pantry Coordinator



EMERGENCY RELIEF STATISTICS

The Emergency Relief Statistics during 2023-2024 (FY2024) are detailed in the table below. There has been an increase in the number of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander clients assisted from 34 in FY2023 to 41 in FY2024, meaning a 20% increase. Overall, the number of individual clients assisted increased by 5%, while the number of new clients decreased by 17%.

Types of Clients	July 2023 to June 2024	July 2022 to June 2023
Total Emergency Relief visits	2352	2376
Individual Clients Assisted	823	784
New Clients	243	293
Homeless Clients	98	96
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Clients	41	34
Asylum Seekers	17	19
International Students	7	4
Clients aged less than 20 years	1%	1%
Clients aged 20 to 39 years	22%	24%
Clients aged 40 to 64 years	53%	52%
Clients aged 65 years or older	23%	23%

In the below table, the main language spoken at home highlights a total of 30 different languages across our clients. Besides English, we found the most spoken languages were Russian, Arabic, Turkish, Amharic, Cantonese, Spanish and Greek.

Main Language Spoken At Home		
English	84%	84%
Russian/Ukrainian	8%	8%
Language Other Than English (LOTE)	16%	1%

In addition to supporting 2,352 Emergency Relief (ER) visits, we responded to an extra 365 enquiries over the phone. The main topics on which we provided information were legal services, emergency relief, tax help and NILS loans. Of the number of enquiries logged into the CISVic portal, 365 enquiries is considered to be underestimated when considering the number of telephone enquiries that are not required to be logged into the database. Therefore, we estimate there may have been a total of 1,470 enquiries based on being open 5 days per week, two volunteers taking three calls per day per office. As detailed below, we were able to provide a total of \$120,496 of ER support.

Total aid provided, as reported on the CISVIC portal	\$120,496	\$122,337
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Anthony Hyden
Treasurer

TREASURER'S REPORT



STONNINGTON COMMUNITY ASSIST INC
STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE 2024 (FY2024)

		FY 2024	FY 2023
RECEIPTS			\$
	City of Stonnington		
	Community Grant	50,000.00	50,000.00
	Operating Expenses	35,000.00	34,485.00
	CIS Vic		
	DSS	36,156.99	37,855.00
	CIS Vic		
	PSB & Energy Support	-	6,884.00
	Court Fund	8,650.00	9,500.00
	Bendigo Bank Grant (Note 1)	5,000.00	5,000.00
	Bank Interest	786.18	329.00
	Donations	-	20.00
	TOTAL RECEIPTS	135,593.17	144,073.00
PAYMENTS			
	AID		
	Food vouchers & ER EFT	109,060.00	82,235.00
	Food parcels	12,066.66	12,251.63
	Education support	2,150.00	2,242.99
	Xmas 'hampers'	8,442.00	7,783.97
	Material goods	3,000.00	6,000.00
	SUBTOTAL AID	134,718.66	110,513.59
	OPERATING EXPENSES		
	Telephone & Internet	1,463.43	1,961.11
	Office expenses & Petty Cash (Note 2)	1,791.61	8,786.35
	Electricity	778.16	1,103.14
	Bank fees	-	-
	Rent	28,860.00	29,040.00
	CIS Vic membership	385.00	330.00
	Training	724.04	714.76
	PO Box & postage (PO Box not renewed)	-	3.79
	SUBTOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	34,002.24	41,939.15
	TOTAL PAYMENTS	168,720.90	152,452.74
	Excess of payments over receipts	33,127.73	8,379.74
	Opening Cash at Bank & Term Deposits	100,505.21	108,885.08
	Cash at Bank & Term Deposits at 30th June 2024	67,377.48	100,505.21
	Cash at Bank	47,377.48	80,505.21
	Term Deposits Bendigo Bank	20,000.00	20,000.00
	Cash Resources at 30th June 2024	67,377.48	100,505.21

Note 1: Grant for 2024 Christmas vouchers

Note 2: FY 2023 Office Expenses includes \$5,057 for office equipment including laptop computer and mounting, portable partitions

TREASURERS REPORT



STONNINGTON COMMUNITY ASSIST INC
STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE 2024 (FY2024)

	FY2024	FY2023
OPENING ASSETS		\$
Coles food vouchers	6,356	15,950
Aldi vouchers	30	770
Market vouchers	240	370
Big W vouchers	750	750
Pantry food (Note 1)	1,985	1,000
St Vincent's vouchers	-	50
Travel cards	90	105
Petty cash	76	65
Opening cash at bank and term deposits	100,505	108,884
TOTAL OPENING ASSETS	110,032	127,944
RECEIPTS		
TOTAL RECEIPTS (Note 3)	135,593	144,073
OPERATIONS		
AID GIVEN (Note 2)		
Food vouchers	102,330	101,814
Food parcels	15,362	14,080
Education support	265	1,517
Material goods	2,165	4,326
Other	374	600
SUBTOTAL AID	120,496	122,337
OPERATING EXPENSES		
SUBTOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES (Note 3)	34,002	41,939
EXPECTED CLOSING ASSETS		
Opening assets	110,032	127,944
Plus receipts	135,593	144,073
Less aid given (Note 2)	- 120,496	- 122,337
Less operating expenses	- 34,002	- 41,939
NET EXPECTED CLOSING ASSETS	91,127	107,741
MEASURED CLOSING ASSETS		
Coles food vouchers	25,990	6,356
Aldi vouchers	-	30
Market vouchers	60	240
BigW vouchers	750	750
Pantry food (Note 1)	1,147	1,985
St Vincent's vouchers	-	-
Travel cards	21	90
Petty cash	57	76
Closing cash at bank and term deposits	67,377	100,505
TOTAL CLOSING ASSETS	95,402	110,032

Note 1: Pantry food inventoried on 30/06/2023. Previously estimated by the volunteer who purchases food, based on last order.

Note 2: From CISVic database. Amounts are entered by volunteers following client interview.

Note 3: See Statement of Receipts and Payments for details

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS CERTIFICATE

YEAR ENDING 30 JUNE 2024

STONNINGTON COMMUNITY ASSIST INCORPORATED

This is to certify that we have reviewed the financial statements, namely:

- Statement of Receipts and Payments, and
- Statement of Operations

and find that they provide a true and fair view of the financial position and performance of Stonnington Community Assist Incorporated during and at the end of the financial year ended 30 June 2024.

Name: Clare Duggan

Name: Julie Woolhouse

Position: President

Position: Committee Member

Signed:



Signed:



Date: 28.10.24

Date: 28.10.24





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