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Reynard Street Neighbourhood House would like to thank Philippa Sweikert for designing this year's Annual Report!

Dear Members and Stakeholders

We are pleased to present the Chair and Manager's Report for Reynard Street Neighbourhood House's 2024 Annual Report. Throughout this report, we hope to showcase the soul and heart of the House. Its staff, volunteers and participants, who continue to exhibit the welcoming and inclusive nature of the house.

Over the last year, we have been both excited and proud to see investments made in the upgrades to Robinson Reserve and our Community Garden over 2022-2023, continue. It has been amazing to see so much work this year with numerous new assets and infrastructure being installed and utilised within our Community Garden space. This has been facilitated by our successes with key funding opportunities through the Multicultural Festivals Grant, Merribek Council and the Living Local Grant. Over the last year, we have installed an outdoor shelter, a new fence, compost bays, sensory gardens, an arbour near the entrance to the Community Garden, and a new greenhouse.

This has opened up opportunities to really activate how the community engages with the House. The Community Garden has been the cornerstone for building programs which have had the highest participation rates, from our inclusive art and gardening programs, a number

of our ACFE-funded classes and user pay programs have also had a focus on gardening and horticulture. Some of the wonderful things we have seen in our Inclusive Art and Gardening group created mosaics stepping stones and decorated the wicking beds in the garden, and most recently painted the Toadstool seats in the sensory garden.

We cannot thank our volunteer urban gardening group enough. They maintain our Community Garden as well as bring their energy and have created a vibrant community around this space. They, along with numerous other volunteers within the House and across our community as well as our delivery partner, NECCHI were part of our flagship events for the year. The Placemaking Festival, which supported the launch of the newly upgraded Robinson Reserve, and the Twilight Festival which is part of the Coburg Open Gardens Festival funded by My Smart Gardens. One of the key outcomes of the Placemaking Festival was the creation of an Indigenous Plant & Wildlife Corridor with the support of Gardens for Wildlife from Merri-Bek. It was a joyous day out for the community, to come together and learn about bush foods, creating indigenous corridors and connect with the community over food, plants and music.

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Chair and Manager's Report

We have continued to invest and see strong community participation in our food programs at the House. With continued cost of living pressures, our Food Swap program, Community Pantry, Pop-Up market and our One Pot Wednesday and Friday Community Lunches continue to be services that our community values. We extend our sincere appreciation to Foodbank, Open Table and Second Bite for their invaluable support in providing rescued foods to those in need and allowing us to continue running these critical community services. We thank our community members who are contributing to the Community Pantry by adding things to the cupboard, whether it be a one-off or regularly. These services are not just transactional, like the best kind of community services, events like One Pot Wednesday and Friday Community Lunches also allow community members to just come in for a chat and to connect. We thank our partnership with Corrections Victoria in running our Friday Lunches.

Our baking and cooking volunteers are our unsung heroes, coming in and making amazing goods to sell at our cafe and recently hosting the International Lunch for our community, dedicated to the Loneliness Awareness Week. These baked goods are always welcome by program participants and communities when dropping in to get their coffee hit for the day at

the House.

We've been quietly ploughing away at developing a catering service to best showcase our amazing commercial kitchen, a real unique treasure within our community. The food program volunteers have had their first catering job this year, with hope to continue building on this service in the next few years.

We have had a real focus on building our partnerships this year with the aim of being able to utilise additional resources to deliver our programs to our community with likeminded and values-aligned organisations.

Some partnerships have been well established and we continue to grow them, this has included our collaboration with other Merri-bek neighbourhood houses like NECCHI, Sussex and Glenroy as well as Merri-bek Council. Other partnerships are new and we look forward to ongoing work with them in order to reach more people and encourage them to participate in our programs and services.

Our volunteers are indeed the heart of the house. All of our critical volunteer roles were filled this year and we were able to demonstrate our appreciation for their hard work by holding a thank you afternoon tea. Next year we hope to go further, with our success with the DSS Volunteer Grant, we will be able to host a



welcome BBQ, fund for volunteer resources, training and reimburse them for fuel costs.

We also want to give our deep heartfelt appreciation to our staff, both current and past. A huge thank you to Ruby Walker-Smith, Meri Carnovale, Nathacha Subero, Minori Satake, Aya Pigdon, Craig Burgess and Bronwen McLoney. This year we also had the pleasure of having Polina Potekhina as acting Manager for 10 weeks whilst I (Lucy Eames) took long-service leave this year. We thank you all for your commitment to the House and the work you do.

In addition to operational delivery, we have also seen some changes to our governance. We have sadly said farewell to our departing Chair, Phil Day and a number of long-time Committee of Management members. At the same time, we have welcomed a new cohort of Committee of Management members including our new Chair, Dung Nguyen, Deputy Chair, Frances Martin, Treasurer Matt Gourley and members Ilona Nichola and Derya Siva. Along with welcoming these new members, the Committee and staff collaborated on our new three-year strategy which is very much focused on the pillars of creating services our community wants and values, enabling this by supporting our staff and volunteers to thrive, focusing on partnerships to expand our reach and ability to deliver and ensure we operate the House in a financially responsible and sustainable manner. We thank all the members for your commitment to governing the organisation, especially during a time of so much change.

Thank you to everyone who has had such a critical role to play over the last year in driving the success of this house. I (Dung Nguyen) as the new Chair, have had a steep learning curve, but I have always felt supported and welcomed by the staff and volunteers at the House. I have

loved meeting you and the regular participants in our programs. The most common thread I kept hearing from many of you is why you keep coming back. You may have started as a placement student or a program participant. But you loved the welcoming environment and the feeling of belonging that you came back, either as a volunteer or as a staff member. This feeling is what brings us all back again and again and I hope this is something we truly keep fostering.

As we present this report, we must also bid farewell to Lucy Eames, who will be stepping down as Manager after a decade of dedicated service. Over the past ten years, Lucy's leadership, passion, and commitment have shaped Reynard Street Neighbourhood House into the vibrant community hub it is today. Her vision has been integral to the growth and success of many key programs, from the flourishing Community Garden to our impactful food relief initiatives. Lucy's tireless work has left a lasting legacy, and her warm, welcoming spirit will be deeply missed by all who had the privilege of working alongside her. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Lucy for her exceptional contributions and wish her all the very best in her future endeavours.

Sincerely,

Dung Nguyen Chairperson

Lucy Eames House Manager

About Reynard Street Neighbourhood House

Who We Are:



We are an incorporated, not-forprofit organisation in Coburg. We aim to promote community wellbeing, reduce social isolation, and support and encourage an inclusive, empowered and resilient local neighbourhood.



Founded in 1988, Reynard Street Neighbourhood House (formerly Robinson Reserve Neighbourhood House) is managed by a Committee of Management made up of local residents who have an interest in the community.



We receive funding from various sources including Merri-bek City Council and the Victorian Government. This funding assists us in the running of programs and activities.

What We Do:



We create a welcoming space to enrich personal, family and community development.



We engage with our community and represent and respond to local needs.



We deliver accessible, high-quality programs and services.



We build community wellbeing and resilience.



Our Vision

To be a vital hub for a happy, healthy, vibrant and inclusive Merri-bek community.



Our Mission

To improve the wellbeing of our community and build a strong neighbourhood by being a welcoming place where everyone can learn, connect and play



Our Values

Our values underpin everything we do. In our work we aim for:

Authenticity: we bring our whole selves to work to connect with our community and colleagues and build trust.

Sustainability: financial sustainability and a minimal ecological footprint, with an emphasis on innovation and continuous improvement.

Inclusion: we value diversity and recognise, respect and welcome all people equally.

Integrity: on an organisational and personal level we maintain high standards and our operations are honest, ethical and transparent.

Respect: for ourselves, each other and the natural environment. We act with care.

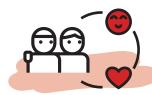
Community connectedness: engagement with

Our Impact

Real impact, real value.

Income: \$389,078 Community Value: \$2,444,238

This figure includes the value of:



Improved quality of life through social connection: \$626,492



Volunteer contributions: \$497,011



Emergency relief provided: \$198,225



Services provided: \$116,348



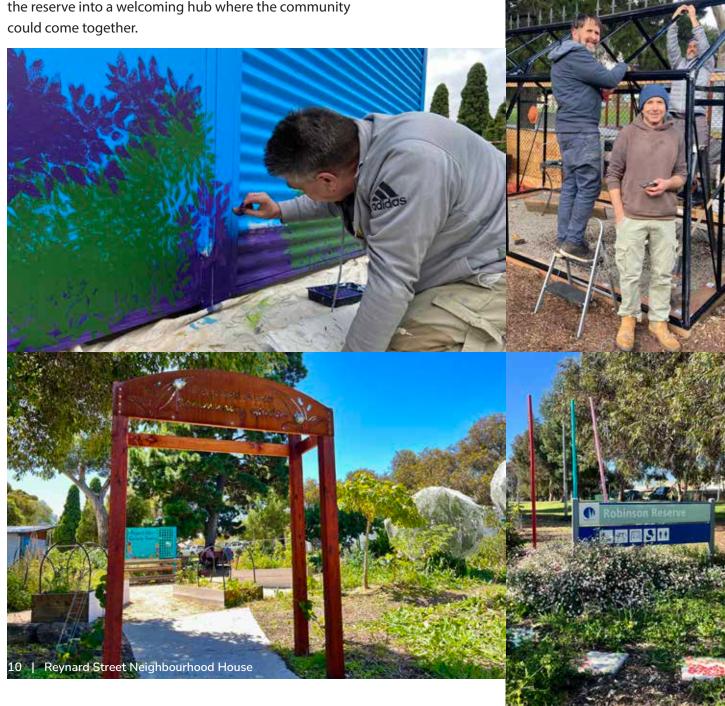
Adult community education: \$1,003,561



Social enterprise goods & services: \$2,600

Activation Events at Robinson Reserve

The activation events at Robinson Reserve marked a significant year of celebration and community connection, showcasing the revitalised park and its new features. The upgrades, funded through the Living Local Grant, included a new shelter, accessible pathways, park benches, picnic tables, BBQs, and a striking mural, enhancing the space's accessibility and appeal. These improvements transformed the reserve into a welcoming hub where the community could come together.





Placemaking Festival

The Placemaking Festival was a major highlight, funded by both the Multicultural Grant and part of the Living Local Grant. This event celebrated Indigenous culture and marked the official opening of the newly upgraded Robinson Reserve on Wurundjeri Land. In partnership with the Merri-bek Council, the festival honoured First Nations history through cultural performances, traditional practices, food, and information booths. It offered an opportunity for participants to immerse themselves in the rich cultural heritage of the land and fostered meaningful dialogue across different communities. The event was instrumental in promoting cultural awareness and a deeper appreciation of the diverse history shared by all.









Twilight Festival

The Twilight Festival was another successful activation, held as part of the Coburg Community Garden Festival, a My Smart Garden event presented by Merri-bek City Council, NECCHi Newlands & East Coburg Neighbourhood Houses, and Reynard Street Neighbourhood House. The festival celebrated Coburg's community gardens, showcasing efforts to strengthen local food systems, build community resilience, and engage residents with gardening. Attendees enjoyed a range of free workshops and activities spread across multiple garden sites, with the Twilight Festival adding a lively evening experience to the program.





Coburg Community Garden Festival

The Coburg Community Garden Festival's recognition as "Event of the Year" at the Merri-bek Community Awards highlighted its impact on the community. Together, these events underscored the importance of shared spaces like Robinson Reserve in fostering cultural connection, community engagement, and celebration.







The Community Garden

A Place for Connection

Reynard Street Community Garden serves as not only a place for people to get some hands-on gardening experience but also to connect with other community members. The Inclusive Gardening Class every Friday is one of the most popular programs and the Urban Food Gardening Class on Thursdays has been growing. Volunteers and class participants as well as placement students come together to learn about gardening from Nathacha Subero, our Garden Coordinator.

Our Community Garden is a food forest with a wide variety of plants including over 20 fruit trees, wild and cultivated herbs, leafy greens, seasonal veggies and some more ornamental flowering plants. We have a great variety of Indigenous plants and other natives.

This year we have put a lot of effort into creating the Indigenous Plant and Wildlife Corridor: dreaming, planning and planting. There is an abundance of learning along the way. Over the last few years, we welcomed Marg Allan from Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative (VINC) and Jo Russell, a proud Wiradyuri woman, for the workshops and they helped us enrich our knowledge of native plants and how to create a healthy and sustainable environment for wildlife. Several collaborations have emerged such as Gardens for Wildlife Merri-bek. We have also focused a lot on developing a small income stream for the garden by selling plants, all propagated by garden volunteers.



"It is a place where inclusion is well enacted and diversity is well represented. Working alongside passionate staff and volunteers, facilitating learning experiences for anyone that brings them closer to life's cycles, building community and enhancing our sense of belonging and ownership to this place."

Nathacha, Garden Coordinator









Poonam

Since Poonam joined our gardening volunteer group in May 2024, she has played a vital role in the growth of RSCG She assists Nathacha in leading gardening classes and managing daily operations, including watering plants and caring for the greenhouse.

Motivated by a desire to enhance her skills in agriculture and horticulture, which she has studied over the years, Poonam finds particular joy in pruning, an activity that is new to her. Her passion and dedication to the community garden inspire fellow volunteers and class participants, encouraging them to engage more actively.

Poonam's Message: "It's a great place to meet new people and learn new skills. Whether doing things on your own or with a group, you can train leadership skills, and the people at RSCG are very nice. "

Access and Inclusion at **RSNH**

Reynard Street Neighbourhood House (RSNH) is committed to fostering a safe, inclusive, and accessible environment for all community members. We aim to provide opportunities for individuals to learn new skills, acquire knowledge, and connect with others through various programs. Recently, RSNH was recognised as a finalist in the Merri-bek Community Awards under the Access and Inclusion category, acknowledging our ongoing dedication to these values.

Our inclusive approach is embedded in all our activities, from cooking and ardening classes to art and community programs. We prioritise making these experiences welcoming and accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities and their support workers. Our strong partnerships with local disability support services have enabled more individuals to fully participate, particularly in our cooking and art classes, which are popular among those with disabilities. Their involvement enriches the overall program experience, fostering a sense of joy and community.

Accessibility remains central to our operations. With a significant number of visitors each week, RSNH is dedicated to maintaining and enhancing our accessible features. The community garden now includes wheelchair-accessible pathways, and the house itself is equipped with an accessible toilet, a Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant ramp, and steps with handrails to ensure ease of access.

Inclusivity also extends to our staff, who prioritise understanding and addressing the needs of people with disabilities. Recent participation in the Inclusion Training for Neighbourhood Houses, provided by the Merri-bek City Council, has equipped our team with the skills and insights necessary to support program attendees effectively. This training offered valuable opportunities to share experiences with other neighbourhood houses and individuals with lived expertise.

RSNH remains dedicated to continually improving our practices and expanding our engagement with diverse community members. Our commitment to inclusion, integrity, respect, and community connectedness guides us in creating accessible opportunities for everyone.



397 participants in programs per week





In 2023-2024, we offered programs across Technology, Languages, Creativity, Horticulture, Hospitality, Health and Wellbeing, Children's Programs, Workshops and Events.

Technology

Beginners Computers Intermediate Computers Connect Club with Work Readiness

Languages

English Conversation English Basics English Intermediate

Creativity

Visual Art Sewing Projects **Beginners Sewing**

Horticulture/Garden

Urban Food Gardening Introduction to Permaculture

Hospitality

Creative Cooking Introduction to Cafe Skills

Social

Singing by Day Inclusive Garden Art Group **Inclusive Gardening Inclusive Cooking** Community Lunch Chatty Cafe

Health and Well-being

Circuit Classes **Pilates** Heart Foundation Walking group Deep Ecology - Falling in love with the world

Children's Programs

Community Playgroups **New Parent Groups**





Helen

Helen has been actively contributing her time and talents for the past 18 months. Following retirement, she sought a meaningful way to give back to the community, ultimately finding her purpose in RSNH.

Volunteering three days a week, she engages in a variety of tasks, including serving as a barista, baking for the café, and assisting Ruby in running the pop-up markets. Among these activities, baking has become a particular highlight, allowing her to express creativity while collaborating with a supportive team. She views her role as a mutually beneficial experience, stating that it enables her to bring joy to others while finding personal fulfilment.

Helen's message: "We are fortunate to have the community centre at Reynard Street to support those in need. I'm grateful to be a part of this amazing community."

Learning and connecting in community

This year, Reynard Street Neighbourhood House (RSNH) has made significant strides across our creative, playgroup, social, and health and wellbeing programs, fostering a thriving and connected community.

COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS

Our community playgroups remain a cherished resource for local families, with up to 100 families attending each year. Led by Meri Carnovale, the playgroups take place in a welcoming, light-filled room that opens onto a sensory garden, creating an inclusive and nurturing environment for children to explore and for parents to connect.

CREATIVE PROGRAMS

The creative programs have flourished, with the Introduction to Visual Art course attracting participants eager to develop their artistic skills. Students have learned various techniques across multiple mediums, including acrylic, graphite, watercolour, coloured pencil, and gouache, enriching their creative experiences. The sewing programs have also been popular, catering to all levels with classes that support ongoing sewing projects and a beginners' course where participants learn essential skills and create a garment of their choice.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Social engagement has been a key aspect of RSNH's health and well-being offerings. The weekly walking group, affiliated with the Heart Foundation, promotes physical activity and social connection through enjoyable walks around Coburg. Following the walk, participants are encouraged to join the Chatty Cafe and

Community Lunch, which provide opportunities to socialise and foster community bonds. These activities ensure that health programs not only benefit physical well-being but also support mental and social health.

The Cardio Circuit classes offer a dynamic workout targeting cardio, strength, and endurance, while Pilates sessions focus on core strength, posture, flexibility, and balance through guided exercises.

RSNH's achievements this year reflect our dedication to providing programs that enrich lives, strengthen social connections, and promote holistic well-being in our community.



"I enjoy working with families and their children. The energy of the children is uplifting to the environment in the playgroup. Playgroup is a wonderful place to work in seeing the children grow and families becoming friends with each other. They start their own little community up with each other and form friendships outside of playgroups. This really makes my work enjoyable and feels great to be involved in."

Meri, **Playgroup Coordinator**







Community Spotlight

Phillip

Phillip has been a dedicated volunteer at RSNH for an impressive 7 to 8 years, making him a cherished member of our community. His unwavering commitment and warm spirit truly embody the values we uphold.

As a key player in our food relief programs, Phillip helps run our Wednesday pop-up market, coordinating food pickups from Second Bite. His efforts ensure that essential resources reach those in need.

Drawn to RSNH to foster connections, Phillip finds immense joy in the relationships he builds while helping others. His positive attitude transforms every interaction, making a lasting impact on everyone he meets.

Phillip's message: "It makes me happy when I'm doing something meaningful and people appreciate it. Being part of this community feels rewarding. Let's be thoughtful, pleasant, and welcoming, and enjoy each other's company; it's what makes this place so special!"

Supporting community and environmental well-being

The Food Relief Program at Reynard Street Neighbourhood House (RSNH) has continued to play a vital role in supporting the local community, addressing food insecurity, and fostering social connections. Throughout the year, the program has provided essential food assistance through a range of initiatives aimed at meeting diverse community needs.

Our weekly pop-up market remains a cornerstone of the program, offering fresh produce and pantry staples in a welcoming environment. This market ensures that individuals and families experiencing food insecurity can access nutritious food with dignity. Additionally, our Community Pantry has been enhanced to offer a more diverse selection of essential items, including culturally appropriate foods, allowing people to take what they need.

RSNH also host a Community Lunch, promoting both nourishment and social well-being, while our free pre-cooked takeaway meals offer a convenient option for those unable to attend in person. By collaborating with local food donors and partners, we effectively reduce food waste by redistributing surplus food within the community, aligning with our commitment to sustainability.

The dedication of our volunteers is crucial to the program's success, as they support various roles from cooking to market setup. Ultimately, RSNH's Food Relief Program aims to create a supportive network that reduces social isolation and empowers individuals to improve their quality of life.



7,500 kgs of food relief provided by the program in 2023



"I love engaging with new people and learning their stories. It is great to be a part of so many interesting and creative programs that are delivered in a warm and encouraging space. The kitchen is the centre and the heart of most homes, as it is also at RSNH. Here is a place where people eat together, relax, share stories, and create some magical meals that are shared amongst the community."

Ruby Kitchen Coordinator



Froso

Froso Siatos has been volunteering as a kitchen assistant for the last 10 years, twice a week on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Her role in our community kitchen extends beyond the preparation and serving of meals; she embodies humility, generosity, and dedication. Froso's impact is felt across generations, and her warmth and approachability resonate with people of all ages.

Froso was drawn to RSNH because of the supportive environment and the respect she felt from our community. She loves every aspect of her role, from cooking delicious meals to keeping our space clean.

Froso's Message: "I feel like I'm doing something good whenever I'm here. It's not just about the work; it's about being part of a community that feels like a second home to me."

Froso was nominated for Merri-bek Volunteer of the Year Award 2024.



Thank you to staff and volunteers

Admin

Andelys Jolley Anne Ruby Carol Steele

Cafe

Ayaka Kimura Denise McLachlan Dianne Liquorish Diego Acevedo **Eloise Easton** Francisco Andres Haruna Oguchi Jacqueline Hannigan Lily Evans Nando Campana Pheobe Xiuming Li **Robert Seamons** Runa Kobayashi Teeb Lake Vincent Cirilo

Committee

Yuka Akizumi

Cheryl McLachlan Derya Siva Dung Nguyen Frances Martin Ilona Nicola Matthew Gourley Shannon Wiseman

Computers / IT

Alan Hooman

Design

Philippa Sweikert

Driving

Duncan Cole

Phillip Ridi

Events

Nina (Xiaomin) He Sara Gillard

Garden

Ben Ferlazzo Carmen Noguera Christine Romeyn Edwina Crawford Elham Shirani Emiko Pelaggi Gianni Grigoletto Hillary Jane McLeish Jonathan Eastman Jonathan Richards Julie Schilin Kath Dolan Liz Morrigan Luke Hall Maggie Cowling Margherita De Pietro Osegueda Pauline Galvin Poonam Dewangan **Sharief Ouaida** Simon Eastman

General

Adua Merola Leslie Toth Mary-Grace Giovankis Michael Riley

Handy person

Ian Williams

Kitchen

Anne Erna Cathy Volpe Carol Gray Froso Siatos Helen Oliverio Mandy Dubrich **Rosemary Southgate** Teigan McLean Duygu Arslan

Playgroup

Laura Carman Minnie Zimmerman Xylia Detering

Social Media

Arun Amatya

Walking Group

Ian Gibson

Intern

Minori Satake

Students on placement

Natalie (Tho Thi Quynh Nguyen) Binaya Lamichhane Olivia (Hong Van Pham) Thuy Tran Tran Jaime (Chao i Sung) Jenisha Karki Asmita Shrestha Hayley Appleby Martha Emereuwa Jemma Huxley **Bashir Ahmed** Kelly McGivern Patricia Penafiel Neha Unadkat Maryam Anwar Indira Dhamala



STAFF

Lucy Eames House Manager

Alfina Astuto Bookkeeper

Bronwen McLoney Aya Pidgon Administration Officer

Craig Burgess

Volunteer Coordinator, English Tutor and Visual Art Tutor

Minori Satake

Marketing, Program Administration and Volunteer Coordinator

Meri Carnovale

Playgroup Coordinator and Work Readiness Tutor

Nathacha Subero

Garden Coordinator, Gardening Tutor and Event Coordinator (Placemaking Festival)

Ruby Walker-Smith

Kitchen Program Coordinator and Sewing and Cooking Tutor

TUTORS/INSTRUCTORS

Barbara Guignard-Drieberg Luke Maselli English Tutors

Bec James

Inclusive Garden Art Tutor

Daniel Makowski

Computer Tutor

Sue Broumos

Exercise Instructor

Sue Taylor-Pearce

Visual Art Tutor



Funders

We acknowledge the funding and support from the following Government bodies:

Department of Health and Human Services

Department of Education and Training: Adult Community & Further Education

Merri-bek City Council

Key Partners / Relationships

We would like to acknowledge and thank our partners and supporters:

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria

North West Neighbourhood House Network (NWNHN)

Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres

Association (ANHCA)

Sussex Neighbourhood House

Corrections Victoria

Open Table

NECCHI

Food Bank

Second Bite

Merri Food Hub

CIS Merri-bek

Bunnings Coburg

Merri-bek Community Gardening Inc.

Coburg West Primary School

Veolia

VINC

Neighbours United for Climate Action

Bendigo Community Bank, Strathmore Branch

Peter Khalil, Federal Labor Member for Wills

Anthony Cianflone, State Member for Pascoe Vale

Grow, Eat, Together (GET)

The Seed Collection

Merri-bek City Council Maternal and Child Services

Stott's College

Sourthern Cross University

The University of Melbourne

Victoria University

Onemda

Campbell Page

Jobfind

APM Employment Services

Inclusion Melbourne

Life Without Barriers

Liberty Disability Services

Milparinka

AMS Consulting Group

BodeWell Community Care

Breakthru

IPAR

Nabenet

Melbourne City Mission

Sacred Heart Mission



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