

THE REAL DIFFERENCES THAT PEOPLE  
AND NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES CAN MAKE

# IT'S A STARTING POINT



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT... IT WORKS BEAUTIFULLY



Neighbourhood  
Houses Tasmania

[www.nht.org.au](http://www.nht.org.au)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are so very grateful to all of the people who participated in this project, who talked to us about their journeys and the journeys of their communities, it has been a privilege and a humbling experience for the Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania team and we sincerely thank you all: Cheryl Lowery, Leanne O'Brien, Leanne Jackson, Melissa Mason, Larissa Dobson, Danyelle Jackson, Liz Brown, Stephanie Rigby, Chelsea Barnes, Cheynee Pullen, Gabe Gartrell, Claire Boost, Nat Siggins, Jill Vaughan, Molly, Elaine Baldwin, Christine Badcock, Diane Bowerman, Anthony Edler, Peter Richards, Lexia Brown, Lucy Whitehead, Michael Higgins, Nettie Burr, Jenny Gee, Simon Douglas, Kate Beer, Elena Olah, Ann Harrison, Lyn O'Grady, Sarina Laidler, Vicki Knight, and Christine Gimblett.

## DISCLAIMER

All stories are as told and no changes to the story tellers wording have been made.

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## INTRODUCTION

**It is really hard to eloquently introduce this book and properly do justice to the people and House stories that follow. However it is very exciting that within you will find a few examples of the hundreds of stories that could be told of the impact Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania (NHT) are having in their communities.**

You won't see these stories in a Neighbourhood House brochure, a strategic plan or framework or a flyer advertising an event (nor possibly should you) but they capture the impact that Houses have for everyday Tasmanians, every day!

The frustration for Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania and our Members is that we hear from community members all the time about the difference that the House has made to them but this isn't easily seen or shared. We really hope this book is the start of showcasing what Houses truly achieve.

Our team at Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania has been privileged to hear many inspiring stories from many different people about the significance of their involvement with a Neighbourhood House.

This collection barely touches the surface of the work that occurs in communities by local people for local people, but we can see that there are themes that run strong and constant, including that:

- Connection within a community is a critical factor in people's lives and Neighbourhood Houses enable connections in so many ways.
- Connection and confidence are two related strengths – one builds on the other and brings people to a place where they can be happier and healthier – and often leads to contributions back to their communities. It benefits the person but just as importantly we are building stronger communities.

"It's a double whammy of awesomeness!\*"

Behind the ordinary bricks and mortar facades of Neighbourhood Houses really extraordinary things are happening. And what is amazing is that these stories show that Houses have great impact, but also that what happens is not "tricky" or expensive or may not even seem remarkable in and of itself – it is acceptance, welcome, inclusion, a smiling face, someone to talk to (or not), getting involved at the persons own pace, NOT having to

answer a lot of questions or fill out a referral form, being able to contribute in simple ways or big ways. What results over time is confidence, a sense of belonging, a safe place that is just there, friendships, hope, pathways and ultimately the community benefits and grows from all of these very subtle, perhaps very ordinary occurrences that allow people, as Peter puts it, the "chance to become who they were before".

The reason this book is important is that often we at NHT and Houses feel our place based community development model (or as we like to say being Run by the community for the community) is disregarded and overlooked as unsophisticated and unprofessional... Well read these stories and tell us the difference isn't profound.

A service delivery model will never achieve what Houses can and do!

*\*quote from storyteller Christine about Gagebrook Community Centre*



### The Stories Project background

These stories were gathered enthusiastically by Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania in May – July of 2015. The stories come from across Tasmania; from Burnie to Dodges Ferry, from Kingston to Rocherlea.

The interviews were conducted loosely around a set of questions, but story tellers were often so excited to be able to tell about the “small miracles” that they had witnessed in themselves and in others, that the questions went out the window and the stories unfolded naturally and spontaneously.

The questions for individuals OR for community projects/activities or events were:

1. How did you become involved with the Neighbourhood House OR what was the starting point for the Project, activity or event?

2. What was the difference or change you wanted to see or experience?
3. What happened next?
4. For you, what was the change you have seen or experienced?
5. What do you feel is the most important thing you will take away from this experience?
6. Where do you think it will take you in future, OR Looking back – what might you have done differently?

The “double whammy of awesomeness” continues, as through these stories we are able to demonstrate the value of the broader Neighbourhood House Program, by celebrating the successes at individual and community levels that can be achieved through Houses community-driven activities.

The stories show how people are welcomed into a Neighbourhood House or an activity of the House, find their feet, forge connections and friendships, and then give back and in that discover/re-discover their own potential. Houses are “a starting point” that lead to so much.

Thanks to all who contributed a story and to everyone involved in the Neighbourhood House network in Tasmania. The staff, many hundreds of volunteers, partner organisations and community members who come to the Houses will see something of themselves in these stories. Congratulations! It’s an awesome privilege to be a small part of what you all do for your community.

**John Hooper**  
Executive Officer,  
Neighbourhood Houses  
Tasmania

*Consent to publish was obtained from all participants*

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How we develop and grow is up to our members. Everyone has a right to a say.

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## WATERBRIDGE FOOD CO-OP, KITCHEN, GARDEN, PANTRY (COMMUNITY PROJECT)

The idea for this project began in February 2014. At the first Tas Medicare Local introduction, we heard about the Social Determinants of Health. We went to that meeting at Glenorchy LINC and I think it was from there that Dr. Bridgette Watts approached us to be a part of a project to try to address the social determinants of health in our area.

We almost thought we were biting off more than we could chew really after that meeting, and we sort of sat there and went wow this is huge, is this really for us but Second Bite said, we want to partner with you, Heart Foundation said, we want to partner with you, Colony 47 said, they want to partner with us and we figured we have got all that support we might as well have a crack at it, if they believe that we can do it and we've got that support, we have to go for it really.

We were ticking boxes as they were talking about wellbeing and

inclusiveness and all that sort of stuff and I was sitting there going we do that, we do that, we do that and they are actually going to give us a heap of money to enable us to do that better and do it for a longer amount of time. I'm not a hundred percent sure where the idea did come from and Chelsea was already doing a garden and called it Waterbridge; well the community named it Waterbridge.

Part of the requirements of TML was that you had to develop at least three partnerships to work together to develop the project plan and deliver the project over the two year funding period and hopefully, beyond. The strength and commitment of this partnership is evident in their continued involvement and willingness to improve the health outcomes for our communities.

For me it's always finding the expert in the community. That's when you can step back and say okay you do it, you're the expert.



I think the people who are involved in the project now are feeling quite lucky that they have been able to join with Waterbridge and have this chance to have this awesome job and really do some good work to put back into the community. We've got a really massive purpose, we always have, but Waterbridge is now employing five people; Christine to do Fast Foodies, Jody and Tash in the pantry, Jodie in the gardens and Gwen as the Manager.

We'll take food from anywhere really – commercial places, Second Bite, farmers, and it's about giving home growers the opportunity to get rid of the glut. Like there were so many tomatoes grown in Tasmania this year and if the food Co-op had been up earlier we would have been able to tap into those growers; taking some of the pressure off by putting that food into the Co-op and work out some sort of barter system as well. So if they drop off a couple of kilos of tomatoes then they can get a couple of kilos of potatoes or however you want to work it. We realise there is a hell of a lot of food that goes to waste in Tasmania and while we've still got people who are going hungry and the apples are falling on the ground (and no one picks them up) we need to start making those connections and getting the fruit to the people before it starts to rot.

So it's almost getting back to the old neighbourhood barter system. So we are trying to skill up the community so when they finally do get their gardens from Community Blitz they know what to do with it. If they have a massive amount of food and they don't know what to do with it they know they can bring it to the food co-op and swap it for some apples or whatever we've got going as well. It's just trying to pull the web all back together. And people want to share

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A year and a bit on we can look back at this big scary project and now we are in in it there is this wonderfulness, people are happy. People want to share stuff. It's a warm fuzzy feeling.

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their produce, people are really proud that they have managed to grow a certain amount of veggies, you know they've fed their family they have fed their neighbours, now all the neighbours and all the family are sick of whatever they've grown.

And that's the thing we want to tap into, these home gardeners because they want to share their stuff and they want to show it off and quite often it's just connecting those dots. If its transport we can help out with that, there's no reason why we can't go and pick up bits and pieces, we've got different drivers and learner cars and stuff that are buzzing around all the time that can help out with that sort of stuff. So we are really starting to look at the logistics of it now and work out okay we've got all these awesome people who want to help us out how do we connect the dots.

How do we find all those awesome farmers who want to support us, we know they are out there because they are starting to gently trickle in and I think that once word gets out it will improve.

The ABC publicity thing has been our god-send really in that regard. And the beauty of it is, it is something quite new, well it is not really something new, but how we have approached it, we're not just about food we're actually wanting to help people twenty years down the track, so if we can get them to eat better now that's going to save us in twenty years down the track, so it's a new way of looking at a food co-op. I mean you can look at a food co-op and go, oh you're just handing

food out but no we're handing out really good nutritious food, at a low, decent cost which just makes it accessible for everybody. That's what it comes down to, good, decent food, at a decent price. Our whole purpose, the whole reason we started the co-op was to provide healthy, affordable food for our community. And open up the access to it, you know a lot of people don't have cars, how are you going to walk to Bridgewater today it's pouring with rain. If you need to go shopping, let alone lugging all your stuff back, let alone waiting for the bus, let alone waiting for the taxi, the taxi then may never turn up and try and do that with a couple of kids. How long should your trip to Woolworths take? If you want to go and do a nice little shopping trip four kilometres away. So we have brought the fresh goods to here.

I'm hoping as well that in the near future that we can actually load up a car and take it around to the people who can't access the centre at all. So if there's people stuck in a wheelchair that can't get out, maybe the worker only comes once a week to take them out the food Co-ops not open that day, come around drop your money off and we'll deliver it that day.

Like, we just want to make it as easy for everyone to have a crack at some decent food. Some of the other things we are going to be doing through Waterbridge, we've got the Chefs at Home Project which is part of Waterbridge which is a cooking class, we're going to be doing some Fresh Food Mate training in the second half of this year with Second Bite. There's



barista training because we've got a barista machine, so Workskills are going to run barista training. We were thinking also about job readiness, so there is Barista training and Workskills is also doing a job ready, well it's called Ready, Set, Go which is all about pathway planning, interview skills and all of that. Also part of Waterbridge, we've got pop up markets. I don't know when we are going to run the pop up kitchen but that's about taking the produce that we've got in the pantry to a street for feeding people, so we've got veggie boxes up there, so taking a veggie box and showing them what you can cook out of a veggie box for a street of people. Then if they want to buy that, then we will have a couple of pre-made ones in the van for people to buy, and also have all the ingredients vegetable-wise for them to be able to make their own.

And we're hoping in the future that this food co-op just becomes really normal and everybody just goes to the co-op and gets your food. People want to know where their money is going and I think we need to be really, really open and so we've got a big sign up in there... "All the money made from

here goes back in to the food co-op to get you guys more fresh fruit and vegetables right at your doorstep". It's not about making money it was never about making money. It just needs to be able to keep churning over.

So it is a great project to be involved in because just watching, you know, how the new employed staff have just grabbed it with both hands and just gone for it. You know Jodie in the garden how she's managed to encourage and engage with all the participants that we may never have got if it wasn't for Jodie. She's just got a special knack with people she really has, she's awesome. She was saying the other day they don't even need me now. Yeah, so the garden worker has done her job so well in seven weeks, she has done so well she has done herself out of a job. She supports them and you know whatever they need and now she said to me last

week, she said to me she goes, they don't even need me anymore. Like she can go to meetings and stuff and come back and know that the gardens fine, the guys get on and do what they have to do.

I think the Project Manager role, because it was such a massive project as well; I probably would have gone whoa, that's a big job, a really, big, big job. But the thing is what we found is because we spent so much time on the plan and it was drilled into our heads that if somebody falls away at some time or needs to leave for whatever reason, we should have enough planned that we can just keep going. There were enough people on the Team that knew what we were doing that nothing was really going to stop us. The project didn't suffer, it kept moving, which can happen quite often you've got a project that's run by a volunteer, whatever, they get sick,

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there goes the whole project. So we were really fortunate that we had that planning time that we had it all nitted out. It's good.

People are excited about the Project, they are. They are excited about the opportunity that something has actually been brought to them, we have cut down as many barriers as possible and as we go along with this project if we come across a barrier, like the weather is going to be a barrier today for a lot of people, what can we do we've got the flexibility to be able to work around that. It's giving people the opportunity I suppose to be able to get those veggies and be able to go home and cook a decent meal for their families. And to know that they can get it at an affordable price that is not going to break the budget. It's important to me that I can now go to Gagebrook to buy my quince paste to have with my cheese and know that I bought it from a place that values its customers and values its community that's what I get out of it. It's also the opportunity to let people try some new stuff, tomato chutney, tomato relish, zucchini pickles – it's not your supermarket staple fare, you know you can get your bottled relish and that evokes food memories. I have seen giving someone a bottle of relish going "oh I haven't had relish since Nan used to make it and my Aunty used to make it" and it brings back food memories for a lot of people and that's really important, for a lot of people.

And it is almost like you have another



layer of knowledge you've got in the community that you might not have had access to before. Yes because we have opened the door and said we need your help, we need your skill, are you a gardener, oh you're not a gardener but you're a cook, please come in and help us if you'd like to.

That's when you can step back and say okay you do it, you're the expert. For me it's always finding the expert in the community, and it's about a safe place to try new stuff as well. Take it home, try it for free, see if you like it... So if we can try and encourage people to taste things here and then take it home we're winning.

Seeing the community grow, it has only been a short time but you know with the community skills and everyone wanting to do or be a part of, I don't know, it's like we're enabling that, it's new and we are still unsure

ourselves, or we were unsure how it was all going to work, was this just us projecting what our community want or do they actually need it?

It's just seeing the difference in some of the community members, a couple of parents in the cooking class have never cooked with some of the things they have cooked with and seeing Christine in her Fast Foodies teach people how to do different things, I suppose we can never assume what peoples skill levels are until they tell us.

It's really good for the community and the people looking from the outside looking in, even though it feels like there is so much going on, but when the community turns around and goes wow you guys have done a great job. The main thing is the Community want to see it succeed. So you know you are doing something right when someone chooses the Co-op and not to go to Salamanca or go to New Norfolk or Kempton to a guy on the side of the road. That feedback is great, it's awesome.

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We are walking the walk by setting an example, changing people's perceptions of food.  
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... and we sort of sat there and went wow this is huge, is this really for us?... but we figured we have got all that support we might as well have a crack at it, if they believe that we can do it and we've got that support we have to go for it really.

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I don't think there is anything we might have done differently. I think the whole process has been a good process. It has been time consuming on Neighbourhood House time, getting the big plan in but being able to step back now and look at the project running, there is some serious satisfaction there. A year and a bit on we can look back at this big scary project and now we are in it there is this wonderfulness, people are happy. People want to share stuff. It's a warm fuzzy feeling. We are walking the walk by setting an example, changing people's perceptions of food. Stories of little girls in the garden eating broccoli flowers and finding strawberries... the wheels are turning. Watch this space, it is only going to grow!  
(Pun intended.) 🏡



STEPHANIE RIGBY AT NORTHERN SUBURBS COMMUNITY CENTRE - ROCHERLEA

STEPHANIE'S STORY

Story Collector: Jonathan from NHT, June 2015

I was put in touch with the Northern Suburbs Community Centre (NSCC) at Rocherlea and initially started getting involved with the Goldie's Group. I was a little younger than most people in the group, but found the support I needed. At first I was unsure, but I talked to the group and shared my story. I was really welcomed into the group with open arms. The time of the illness was challenging with related financial issues and the impact of the illness on my family as a whole, so the support of the group and staff and volunteers at the House more generally was really important.

I wanted to get out and help others in the community. I wanted to get out and talk to people in the community to let them know that a diagnosis like mine is not all doom and gloom like everyone thinks. I wanted to support other women going through the same things as me. I was also keen on the social side of things.

Three years ago I was supported through the House to go to a breast cancer summit in Sydney, with fundraising efforts and sponsorship. And now I've been asked again to go to Melbourne for another summit in July. We recently had another fundraiser at the local hall where \$360 dollars was raised to help with the

accommodation and other financial cost of going.

The NSCC Rocherlea opened my world up, especially through the trip to Sydney, so I'm keen to give back to the community in return for all the support and assistance I get.

A major part of the summit is the opportunity for me to learn about cultural awareness and how to work with people from different cultural backgrounds when they have a cancer diagnosis. It will be good to be able to work with people from different cultural backgrounds and to find ways to extend our support to them. The NSCC at Rocherlea has also helped me with training, and I have completed a Certificate 3 in Community Services, and also the Certificate 2 in Business, again sponsored and supported by the House. I've even attended first aid training as well.

Following my treatment, I felt quite alone. I got lots of support soon after the diagnosis and early days of the treatment, but then it did go a bit quiet and people got busy again and that was where people at NSCC really stepped back in and helped. I made new friends and this was quite an

important part of what I have gained from the Centre.

I've also been volunteering in the Op Shop. My daughter has an intellectual disability, so I did get a bit too busy there for a while between all the things I have been doing. I have had to pull back a bit from doing too much.

Before I lived here, we lived out of town in an isolated area, where I was alone a lot of the time. It was a pretty stressful time. When I got sick I moved up here and started on treatment. I went into a bit of a hollow for a while not really knowing where things were heading, but then that little bit of a push, some encouragement from that nurse to get involved in a Neighbourhood House or Community Centre. She said 'Just go along, see what they are doing, and see what they are like at the Centre', and since then, I've just thrived.

My confidence has increased, and I get out in the community a lot more now than I ever did, helping people, volunteering for the Red Cross and other things.

Before all this, I wouldn't have been able to talk to you. I am now confident enough to be able to get up and speak

The NSCC Rocherlea opened my world up... so I'm keen to give back to the community in return for all the support and assistance I get.

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Before all this, I wouldn't have been able to talk to you. I am now confident enough to be able to get up and speak in front of 200 people.

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in front of 200 people. Before, there was no way I could have done that. I've spoken at a funeral and different functions. So yes it has built my confidence up. Now I help run the Gynaecology and Breast group at the Cancer Centre. I'd like to one day get into the community service sector and work.

The most important thing I will take away from this experience is probably the friendship, the encouragement that I have received, and the increased confidence.

I convinced the women in the Goldies to go and have mammograms, and one of the ladies in the group is 86. She was so happy to have done that, for the first time in years and years and for her to have been supported by her friends in that group was special. It has been good to see other people make change, make decisions and to gain their confidence as well.

I never thought I would go back to school and study again, so that was another big thing to be doing all that, and everything I do in the community.

Yeah I feel that I have come a really long way.

In the future, I'd like to help people more in the community, and I'd like to get a job somewhere working in the community, in aged care, or disability services, or get Denise's job (the Coordinator of the NSCC Rocherlea) – no – I'm just joking. But you know, I'd like to get a job somewhere in the community services sector. 🏠

## DERWENT VALLEY

Eating with Friends has such a wonderful atmosphere. I love the constant chatter and the happy vibe that fills the room. I love the way people arrive early so that they can save their favourite seats for their friends. One of the best things is how people arrange their calendar around EWF - they would not miss it for the world. The pick-up trips are just wonderful – to have a car full of excited, chatting, laughing 80+ year olds is something to be experienced.

Lexia

CHERYL, LEANNE, MELISSA, LEANNE J, LARISSA, DANYELLE,  
AND LIZ AT BURNIE COMMUNITY HOUSE

## HILLTOP PRODUCE - A COMMUNITY STORY

Story Collector: Jonathan from NHT, June 2015

**Melissa has not worked before starting to volunteer with the House about 5 years ago. She has volunteered in a variety of projects and programs over the years, including art and craft groups, cooking groups and projects with migrant community groups.**

The Neighbourhood House has generally provided good opportunities to meet with others in the local community, and has always been a positive and supportive place.

Once Melissa had been involved with the House for a while, she did some training to increase her skills and job readiness. Melissa trained in Food Handling and Hygiene.

When the ideas of the Hilltop Produce project came together Tracey, the House coordinator, approached Melissa to take on a part-time role helping with the project. While it felt like a big thing, Melissa was excited by the opportunity to put some of what she had learnt in her training into practice. Melissa now does part time work helping to coordinate the Hilltop Produce project. Melissa has enjoyed how the project started small and has slowly grown as the demand grows and the project gets more established. Melissa has enjoyed learning to cook things, and working out what people want.

...helping other people was one of the best and most important aspects of the volunteer and paid work that they do.

The project has many aspects to it with the farm being another part that others are working on. Leanne mentioned that a recent highlight was cooking soup and then taking it to the people working on the farm growing vegetables.

When asked what has changed, they all laughed and said “we have sore backs and sore feet from the amount of work we are doing in the kitchen and carrying supplies around”. Melissa, Chantal and Leanne also mentioned how rewarding it is to be contributing to the project, and to be getting really good feedback from other people buying the produce and visiting the store.

When asked what they have learnt the group said they have learnt about communication with other people, especially new customers. Melissa said that she used to be very shy, but now she felt much more able to talk with others and to say what she thinks. When asked what they love the most about the activities they are doing, Melissa, Chantal and Leanne consistently said helping other people was one of the best and most important aspects of the volunteer and paid work that they do.

Some other recent highlights of their involvement with the House have led to:

- › Participation in Financial literacy training and following on from this, they created a Flash Mob for an Anti-Gambling project, with their group performing at the TACH (now Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania) Neighbourhood House Week Awards in 2014.
- › Engaging in Reconciliation activities where they are learning about their own cultural heritage. Melissa mentioned how she had recently learnt that she had been adopted as a child and had recently met her father.
- › She had a very proud moment where she introduced him to her daughter and grandchild. 🏠

## COMMUNITY INTERVIEW AT OKINES FOOD CO-OP

Story collector: Jonathan from NHT, May 2015

In 2011 the seeds for the Food Co-op were sown by a group of volunteers through the Community garden. \$50 was collected in trust from 25 volunteers as a start-up fund to get the Food Co-op off the ground. Jill Vaughan, as a new key volunteer, took on a big load of the establishment of the Food Co-op.

The main principle of the co-op is to provide community members with access to bulk, organic, ethical, regional wholefoods (where possible) at affordable prices within the local area. We also aim to provide food and nutritional information and advice to our community.

The Food Co-op and Community garden is dependent on community engagement. It is a 2 way relationship. It has arisen from the needs of the

develop. I'd like to see more space available for the Co-op and the Community garden use.

The most important things to me about being involved with the Food Co-op are the personal growth and learning of social/community skills and the importance of positive communication, of IT skills and how much more there is to learn; getting to know so many members of our community I would probably never have come in contact with otherwise; that small projects can grow and persist with perseverance and considerable assistance from both individuals and larger organisations; and that community endeavours, no matter how well-meaning their wider membership, require an enormous input from a few dedicated and persistent volunteers.

Small projects can grow and persist with perseverance and considerable assistance from both individuals and larger organisations... but community endeavours, no matter how well-meaning their wider membership, require an enormous input from a few dedicated and persistent volunteers.

Later, the Community garden and House wrote a joint application to the Food for all Tasmanians Grant for a 2 year position to pay for a coordinator of the Co-op. In 2012, this application was successful and we received money, a portion of which was used to employ Jill as coordinator. The Food Co-op began in 2013 and within a year was successful enough to operate independently from the Community garden. This was in no small part due to the support, input and leadership of Nat Siggins, and the financial support from Karen Shaw in the Community House. Consequently, since the end of the grant in Nov 2014, the co-op can continue to pay Jill 5 hours per week. (This is not sufficient and many additional voluntary hours are needed).

community – which are constantly changing and evolving, so we are constantly readjusting and changing to meet those needs. For me, bringing up young children, the Food Co-op (and the community garden and Community House surrounds) provides a safe, communal, happy, beautiful, interactive space where we share, play and learn.

In the future, I would like to see the Food Co-op offering fresh Food Boxes, where the local community support local growers and agriculture by redistributing fresh local fruit and veg, and eliminating the “middle man”.

I think it is great for the community... more members and volunteers are needed to continue to grow and

Looking back there are things we would have done differently, such as seeking help earlier with IT learning and development, seeking more advice from existing co-ops, establishing a Committee for support far earlier; and communicating more regularly with the Garden and House coordinators. 🏠



JILL VAUGHAN AT OKINES COMMUNITY HOUSE

## OKINES FOOD CO-OP

Story collector: Jonathan from NHT, May 2015

**As a keen gardener, I started volunteering in the Okines community garden as an opportunity to get to know others in the local area.**

When the garden girls (Gabe and Claire) decided to set up a Food Co-op, they asked me if I would act as coordinator. I eagerly said yes, as I had recently left a job in town and had also given up regular volunteering for Hobart Meals on Wheels. I was happy to offer my time to something that I felt personally and ethically, the area really needed.

We subsequently received a portion of a grant to the Community House that help start the co-op and paid a few hrs/week for a coordinator (lucky me). We also relied on the commitment of 20-30 locals, who contributed funds for our first food purchase in return for membership and credits when we finally opened. Setting up and coordinating a co-op structure was a large learning curve for me. I had limited experience with using computers or working with larger numbers of volunteers. There was a lot of research involved in finding suppliers that suited our needs and abilities.

We wanted to make healthy and/or bulk food products easily available in our immediate area without needing to go to town to get these products. By buying bulk we thought we would be able to offer this to like-minded community members, and reduce prices and packaging. In turn it might help others by providing a local source

of healthy foods. Education in food and nutrition is also important to the philosophy of the co-op.

It has been a lot of work but I think we are doing reasonably well. It is still a struggle to get enough consistently committed volunteers, but now that we have a committee in place, I feel I will have more support for ongoing decision making and the ability to address the varying concerns and needs of our membership. Coordinating our volunteers can be challenging, as their availability and commitment can change.

Just working out rosters and who does what task was daunting and very time-consuming at first, but this gradually gets easier with experience. We do have a core group of very dedicated active members who help to hold the ongoing structure together – as they did last year when I was away for some time.

It is not easy to please everyone, as each member joins with their own interpretation and expectation of what the co-op is or should be. Catering to this is a continual work in progress. We are still at the stage of ongoing modification and refinement of how we function. Coordinating and communicating with members involves as much time as research and supply of the goods we handle. Obviously this is an essential part of a community group and the benefits of sharing

knowledge and experience help both me and the co-op to grow and mature.

My role as coordinator has involved learning to communicate with a lot of different people with different views, and also to soften my 'bull-at-a-gate' approach to getting tasks done, and tendency to try to please everyone straight away. I also need to take on board some views, attitudes and opinions that I wouldn't normally hold myself, and accept them as valid. Patience and thinking before acting are vital attributes I am still working on.

I knew very little about IT and financial skills to start with, but have gained more understanding over time. This was not something I thought I'd enjoy, but it has been stimulating to learn about all these aspects of running a co-op and to be able to gradually apply what I have learnt in such a useful community activity.



The co-op (and I) still needs lots more expert assistance as we continue to refine and streamline our computer-based processes such as our Point-of-Sale system and data bases and files. I know where I would like to be with these tasks, but don't know how to get there yet.

In the future we could develop in all sorts of different directions. The co-op could grow more like a small business, or remain a totally membership based local community organisation. It may be possible to expand our membership to the wider community.

There are pros and cons for either direction. Balancing and reviewing our aims and goals is another ongoing aspect.

How we develop and grow is up to our members. Everyone has a right to a say. We are also totally dependent on the support of the Okines Community House, so any significant developments will be with their cooperation and contribution. I look forward to strengthening our link with the Garden and eventually being able to jointly offer regular supplies of fruit, vegetables and preserves using the community garden produce.

One of the co-op's main principles is that it is member driven. It started with members giving money on the understanding that we would set up a system offering different, cheaper and healthier products than is locally available. It is based on trust and confidence as core principles, and again means that we can and should remain member driven. As coordinator, that is just what I should be – a coordinator and facilitator to try and bring people together for the long term success of the co-op, and not to just set up things based purely on what I think should happen. 🏠

#### ROSEBERY NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE

As part of Mental Health Week, Eating with Friends held a trivia game with lots of info about mental health – there were lots of give-aways, heaps of cheating and loads of fun... and an enormous amount of food. If laughter keeps one mentally healthy we are all quite sane and well.

Lyn

## MOLLY AT EASTERN SHORE NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE

## MOLLY'S STORY

Story Collector: Jo from NHT, June 2015

**I became involved in the Community House when my oldest son was about a year old. I started coming in just to see the Health Nurse and started being involved in other things like craft activities and kiddie things here. After a couple of years I became a member of the steering committee for the construction of the East Devonport Child and Family Centre.**

So I was on that, it was huge. I then went away until my oldest was four, I went back to work. And then became more involved when I fell pregnant with my youngest son. When starting up the C4C (Communities for Communities) my main aim was to help where I could. To get people to feel more comfortable to ask for help when needed, because in this community, in the East Devonport community, there is a lot of bad stigma. When I started with C4C I didn't understand what kind of changes we could make. I'm one person, didn't know many people, kept to myself, didn't socialise much. I didn't really see what I could do. But then we had a few things go on.

First, we had a movie night down at the East Devonport School. We put out flyers and all that kind of stuff. I know there are people in our community who hardly ever leave their homes. It was great to see people like that at our movie night. Even when people came for a short time it was really nice to see them there, to be able to come out and enjoy it with all the kids. It was great to see.

The second was I do a lot with other groups. So, someone from Housing Choices came to me to tell me of someone who could really use a hand. The person had fallen on hard times, as a victim of crime, so I went around there. Then I came here (to ESCH) to seek out what I could do to help. I thought of food supplies and all that kind of stuff. When I help people they are so thankful. Even when they are at their lowest and don't think they can get through, to be able to go around to give a hand, some food, whatever it is, shows them that someone cares. I try to keep in contact with people, making sure they are ok, giving food, and stuff. I have been hugged and hugged because people are just so thankful. I feel like I am doing something important, like I'm changing lives. And that's what I want to do, that's the main aim. You don't understand until you see that kind of

thing and you get to do that yourself, you don't understand. So, yeah. It just shows that by having people in the community that care, I think that's the biggest step, for them to be able to know that there is someone that they can turn to when they are down. Everyone needs a hand up sometime in their life. I think that is the most important experience that I will take away from being on this Committee, is just knowing that I am someone there that can help if someone needs it.

My main aim is to be a good role model for my kids, for my kids to see that I am not just sitting at home doing nothing. I am out there being someone. You know, people work for a living and at the moment I'm raising kids but this is how I do my work at the moment. 🏠

I feel like I am doing something important, like I'm changing lives. And that's what I want to do, that's the main aim.

I think that is the most important experience that I will take away from being in this Committee, is just knowing that I am someone there that can help if someone needs it.

### DORSET HOUSE

Travelling around different venues in Dorset has been a great way for the people who attend Eating with Friends to reminisce and talk about where they grew up, started work and met their first love.

One of the venues, a pub, was where one woman got her first job 60 years ago.

Vicki



CHRISTINE GIMBLETT AT GAGEBROOK COMMUNITY CENTRE

CHRISTINE'S STORY PLUS "FAST FOODIES"

Story Collector: Leah from NHT, June 2015

I first started at the Gagebrook House in around 2007. I was a stay at home mum, very isolated, not getting out of the house. I was scared to get out of the house to the point that I would walk to the bus stop, and freak out that something was going on at the house, worry that I didn't turn things off, think are we going to be safe on the bus, really high anxiety, then I would walk back home and not go out again.

My sister became very concerned; she was actively involved at the Centre here, doing courses and stuff and she convinced me to come along and meet everybody and start a course here. Which means my life has changed, once I started to not get scared to get out of the house. I did a certificate 2, then a certificate 3, then a certificate 4 in Community Services. Amongst other courses that were available here I did some mental health stuff, some first aid and I helped run some beading and card making classes because I found my inner confidence.

But it was not so much about teaching them how to bead or make cards; it was the social networks they were building within the classes. They end up talking to more and more people and you see their growth, their self-worth and their confidence. Then you can say "why don't you two go do this course together, do this that's on tomorrow?"

...they feel like they are doing a good thing for themselves and doing a good thing for somebody else. It is giving back a double whammy of awesomeness.

Then eventually they do and you see them go where you went and that's really awesome. I was in a very dark, sad place and didn't know what happiness was until I came here and did stuff and it unlocked that, the judgement that I was fearful of... is just gone. You don't have that here, they don't judge you, they just see you as a person.

I got offered a job in disability. I did that for a couple of years but I was still volunteering here every spare moment because I just love volunteering, it is so rewarding. I get really passionate and it's really hard to tame that. I got a job with Headway for several years and with that work I didn't have the chance to come back and I missed it, I constantly missed it. If I had a spare day I would come in to catch up and help out with whatever they were doing here and put my fifty cents worth in.

Then that work was burning me out so I left and the job for Fast Foodies came up. Helen knew I already had skills in that area through seeing me volunteer, so she offered the position to me and I was like, oh that sounds like me all over. I can be creative and adapt really well so if someone from Second Bite comes in and says here's twenty kilos of apples, I have learnt so many different things to do with apples.

That is what I like about the program, whatever we get you've got to turn it into something and it is not being wasted. The participants that come in have all got different skills so they are teaching me stuff and I am teaching them stuff and the conversations and silliness in the kitchen is awesome. I have already seen the confidence grow in some of the ladies. That's what it is about, not making jam or chutney but making their life better.

I didn't think the changes would happen so quickly. I didn't think I would see people coming in and saying I cooked this at home Christine and I tried this and this, my sister, brother, Uncle really liked it and I've shared it on Facebook. I didn't think the excitement and the passion would happen so quickly. I thought it would take a while because some of the participant's confidence is not one hundred percent; they have the skills but not the confidence in their skills. I think it works because they are giving back to the community. The stuff is going into the shop (the pantry) and going out to the community and they

But it was not so much about teaching them how to bead or how to make cards it was the social networks they were building within the classes...



That's what it is about,  
not making jam or  
chutney but making  
their life better.



feel like they are doing a good thing for themselves and for somebody else. So that is empowering them in a different way. It is giving back, giving back, a double whammy of awesomeness.

The most important and best thing I would take away is the knowledge I am getting from everybody within the group. I am learning just as much as they are from the stuff that they know. It is knowledge that I am gathering. I get really excited when I learn something new.

The plan for the future of Fast Foodies is to link in with some young men that have been working in schools and the Community Garden and are harvesting stuff. Half of them don't know what the stuff is that they are pulling out of the ground and what to do with it. So the House is trying to seek funding so I can teach them what these things are and what to do with them. That would be really awesome, something I would be really passionate about. I'd like to go to other Community Houses, other places and teach people how to cook. I think it's where my passion is – food, cooking and teaching.

It is like a full circle for me here. I left for a bit, now I am back again. It is a safe place to come back to... even if it is to come here for a coffee, sit down collect yourself and you're off again. I have seen a lot of lives change coming through the door, I have also seen a lot of misses that could have been caught, that first contact here with someone is really important. 🏠



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I was in a very dark, sad place and didn't know what happiness was until I came here and did stuff and it unlocked that, the judgement that I was fearful of... is just gone. You don't have that here, they don't judge you, they just see you as a person.  
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## ELAINE BALDWIN AT DELORAINE HOUSE

## ELAINE' STORY

Story Collector: Karen at NHT, May 2015

**My name is Elaine Baldwin and I first became involved when they were trying to get Deloraine House off the ground and it was an uphill battle 25 years ago. I was a member of the Wacky Walkers group and Julie Roach was trying to get Deloraine House started and she was a member of the walking group as well.**

Deloraine wasn't an easy place to try and start off something like this and in the early days people would say to me "oh Hippy House, going to Hippy

House are you?" Anyway we got Hippy House up and running and I think now it's the most important thing in our town. All the services it offers, they are endless, any support or help people need, Deloraine House is the place to come.

My husband Brian and I still come to Eating With Friends and its very enjoyable chatting with people we don't see very often. We look forward to that and Deloraine House is very special. Just looking around at all the things on the walls here, the friendship that it offers and all the support groups, I can't name them all.

We are still the Wacky Walkers, I am a life member of the Deloraine walking club, not climbing any mountains, but we still meet, and do more talking than walking now. I come down here with my grandchildren when they were having a function, just generally interested and associated with what goes on.

I am not a committee person so I like to just pass on words to people who are looking for information. I have my friend Christine here next to me who I never get the chance to see or talk to other than here. 🏠

## RISDON VALE NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE

Our Eating with Friends group, in partnership with our local Food – works Supermarket held a fundraising lunch to raise funds for a local young boy with cancer. We raised over \$1,500 for the family. The young boy has since passed but will always be remembered by our community. 106 people turned up for lunch.

Ann

## CHRISTINE'S STORY

Story Collector: Karen at NHT, May 2015

I live at Westbury and about 2 years ago I was getting sick of waiting for photos from my family up in Queensland so I went and bought a computer - a neighbour couldn't help me with setting up the computer so she suggested that I come up to Deloraine House, which I did - and I am very grateful for that fact.

I have been coming here since. I bring things to help people out - if I have spare eggs or anything like that I bring them up for the community to take. I do find it interesting here speaking with friends and if I need help I know where to come if I need it. Everybody has been very friendly to me and I feel comfortable here.

Coming up here for the computer is good - I am not up to date with everything but I am getting there. I have Bell's palsy so I tell Carolyn if I slur or something, sometimes I get a

bit slow, just take a few deep breathes and then get on with things, and I suffer from diabetes, but other than that I am ok. Elaine and Brian made me very welcome here and just having those sorts of friends around me has helped me a lot. I didn't know Elaine before I came here. I hope Deloraine House keeps on going. Coming up here for computer help or Eating With Friends, I get in the car and off I go... it is enjoyable and somewhere I can make friends and they are there if I need them. It has helped me a lot. 🏠



DIANE BOWERMAN AT MARANOA HEIGHTS COMMUNITY CENTRE

## DIANE'S STORY

Story Collector: Leah from NHT, June, 2015

**I didn't know the Neighbourhood House existed for a few years, I lived in the next street and didn't know, someone said hey did you know there is a Community Centre there and you can get bread and various things happen there, because I have a mental illness and was a bit isolated at home.**

Initially it was very scary to come in the door but once I did it was very welcoming and friendly and that was my starting point. I came in and met the coordinator at the time, got some bread and slowly, slowly just came back a few times. That's where it all started from, basically and moved to where I am today.

I had a need you know, to do something and to get out of my house and I guess I was encouraged by my case worker to come back, so I tried to and I am really glad I did, because it has had a huge impact on my life ever since.

The coordinator, Wendy, at the time kept me coming, made me feel very welcome because I was very nervous and at times not feeling very well, so it was hard being around people I didn't know. I think just the atmosphere and the friendly people, started slowly to make me feel more comfortable and I got to know the regular people and the staff and members that were here. That sort of drew me back, I guess if I had come in the door and didn't feel

The Community Centre is like a family, you have your ups and downs, like any family, we support each other and anyone who comes through the door. The most important thing is relationships and not being judgemental and being welcoming and accepting of people of all walks of life.

that I probably wouldn't have come back but knowing I was welcome regardless of who I felt I was, what my issues or down fallings were or regardless of my bad days, I felt I was welcome. It became a less scary place from when I initially came in the door – I don't mean the place was scary but for me where I was with my mental health and those sorts of things. I felt accepted and the people I met made me feel like I could come back and be a part of the Community Centre.

I have been a full time volunteer now for a number of years and I have also, previously, been on the Management Committee. I am slowly starting to cut back my hours now because I am wanting to do some other things for myself.

Coming to the House just gave me a reason to get out of bed, basically because before I couldn't or wouldn't. So now I am involved in numerous things – I do NILS loans for people and manage the food program here so I have come a long way. It has been a great place to help me and for me to help others which has been a great thing for me because it's something that I love to do and it keeps me well mentally, helps me get out of bed and face some fears and to be part of a Community. It has been wonderful.

It has been a journey, sometimes I can't come because I still have bad days... and it is not just a place to get things out of, you get so much by giving back to people, helping people, it is wonderful.

It has had a dramatic effect on my mental health, just the day to day reason to get up and push past the depression and other things. When I first came here I was being hospitalised in the psychiatric unit many, many times a year. Over the last few years that has decreased dramatically, my amount of hospitalisations and episodes that I have where I am not well at all. I really contribute that to Maranoa giving me a reason to push past and something to do every day, a reason to keep going.

Wood working has been great. I have started wood working with the mental health guys but the first wood working I ever did was here. They had a grant and ran a short course and if I hadn't done that I wouldn't have known how much I enjoyed it, it is another knock on effect of doing a project here. So I have started and it will be an ongoing thing that I do.

What I have found most rewarding is seeing other people on their journeys, to have a part in their lives, it is great



to see. As far as I am concerned the Community Centre is like a family, you have your ups and downs, like any family, we support each other and anyone who comes through the door. The most important thing is relationships and not being judgemental and being welcoming and accepting of people of all walks of life. It might be okay to walk through the door the first time but you have to feel like you can come back. There is some much on offer here for all ages and all walks of life.

One of the great things about being here is the lack of pressure. I can come and go if I am having a bad day, but just with my increased confidence and cutting back my hours here I am starting to do some new things again. Like I am starting a wood working project and different things that I am doing away from here and I wouldn't have had the confidence to do any of

that if I hadn't had the base here. A couple of years ago I went to the NILS Conference in Brisbane, the Centre sent me, which was like wow, I would not have dreamed of doing something like that before. It has just changed my life really. The things that I have done here, maybe the abilities I didn't know I had way back is really helping me in everyday life. There is no great scheme or plan I suppose of where I will go or what I will do. I don't think I am going to do any great things but I will continue here and that for me is life changing. To be coming here, not shut up at home with bad things happening.

I think it is a great advertisement for Neighbourhood Houses to come in maybe how I was, you know, so scared and alone and isolated to get that loaf of bread and then travel along the journey as a volunteer, the

Management Committee, the NILS stuff – it shows the effect a Community Centre can have on people, everyday people. You don't have to be some wonderful, fabulous achiever. I think that is the thing I have noticed the most about the Community Centre, is the everyday people that come through the door, their stories, the changes and the little bits we can do here to help people, not just the physical things but the talking, sitting down and having a chat with someone, it might be the only chat they get for the week, you know what I mean? We might forget that sometimes, everyone has a story and they need someone to listen to it.

It's great to have a place to come to, to have a cuppa, for some people that's all they need, have a nice warm drink in their hand. 🏠

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We might forget that sometimes, everyone has a story and they need someone to listen to it. It's great to have a place to come to, to have a cuppa, for some people that's all they need.

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ANTHONY EDLER AT RISDON VALE NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE

## BIKES PROGRAM AT RISDON VALE

Story Collector: Leah from NHT, May, 2015

**The starting point of the Bikes Program was in 2006. I had been doing some work at the local High School (Geilston Bay) with some youth from Risdon Vale and the opportunity came up at this Neighbourhood House (RVNC) to do a similar kind of thing. It had been running for a few years and they were looking for someone to take it over.**

It was all about using bikes as a medium to teach kids other skills. We started doing weekly sessions with some kids who were disengaged from school, as well as with a group of primary school students as part of their options program. What we were doing at this point was restoring bikes to give away locally.

At the beginning, along with the skills we wanted to teach, the aim of the project was that they would actually see something happen beyond themselves and be able to give a bike away to someone in need in Hobart. The groups were small, 4 to 6 in each session, because working with kids with high needs in small groups is a really effective way of keeping them on task, getting alongside in that mentoring role to actually have time and space to work alongside a young person to informally chat and ask them how it's going, what's been happening?

We then sought other volunteers who could come along and act as mentors, so other community members have come in to work with the young people on the bikes as well. Each year we would have an event called the Big Bike Giveaway Fiesta that was all about having a fun community event and a bunch of people would be given a bike and a helmet. We partnered with non-profit organisations such as Anglicare, Neighbourhood Houses, Migrant Resource Centre and others. Those organisations would then find the people to receive a bike. We were giving away 150 bikes a year by the time that was happening. The kids who restored the bikes came along and were part of giving those bikes away.

After a couple of years it became a bit difficult to find the people and get them there. Looking at the attitude of a bike in the western world, it is for recreation, it is a bit of a throw away item so we wanted to look at another avenue for giving the bikes away. I started researching and found a model that had been used elsewhere around the world that involved setting up a shipping container, filling it with bikes and sending it off to a partner organisation in a third world country. The container would be set up as a local bike shop, they would give the bikes away, train the guys there to work on the bikes and it would be a grass roots community project.



Some of the most important things we can take away from the Bikes Program are that long term relationships are really important for these guys... and confidence, that was the big thing...

Another big thing to get the young guys engaged is to give them something to work toward, something that benefits both them and the community... they were working in a space of contributing to something bigger and broader than themselves...



It fitted with what we were doing here; it would benefit people in a third world country, and open up a conversation about poverty and how people live in another country with our young people who have a fairly localised view, who might not engage a lot with world issues.

In 2012 we started working towards sending a container to Namibia in South West Africa. We thought it would take two years as we could fit around 400 bikes in a large shipping container. The reaction of the young people involved was mixed, some really got it, were really engaged and wanted to help other people in another country who were a lot poorer than themselves whilst others struggled with the idea that people in Africa would get the bikes that they were working so hard on. Over the two years we showed some video of what a bike means for someone in Africa compared to what it means here, and engaged in some community education around that. By the time we sent the container the majority were really excited and I felt, quite proud of their efforts. It was hard at times because they were working hard on some good bikes that they then had to put aside to send somewhere else. So they were working in a space of contributing to something bigger and broader than themselves.

After the container arrived in Namibia we got the photos back, posted them on face book and showed the guys. They were stoked that the bikes were being distributed. It ended up that our bikes were re-supply for existing little bike shops and so it worked pretty well as the bikes ended up going all over Namibia. We got photos from different spots in Namibia. The young guys were really responsive and enjoyed seeing those photos.

At the send-off of the bikes, the guys all signed the container. The young guys were applauded by politicians, representatives from organisations, the community, local Councils, Neighbourhood Houses and the Principal of the school. The Premier of the day spoke and said what a fabulous job they had done. They were brought up the front and given certificates. For these guys to be part of this was really encouraging, to see the change that happened – they were really proud of their achievements. It was a big celebration, really pushing the fact that these guys had done a fantastic thing.

Often what we saw, what happened with the bikes was confidence; that was the big thing. We were able to get them in to do something they enjoyed and could achieve with, to see that they were reaching goals, and completing the task that they were set. It was a space where they were excelling in, unlike school, which for them was

often a place of constant failure. This was a space where they could do it. We often found that self-confidence, and things like working in a group, enabled us to really encourage these guys to think about what that means to work with people you may or may not get along with, and how you work together in an environment respecting each other, staying safe and how does that translate into a job. I could see after a while that shift in their attitudes to others and when they came into that space they were quite respectful of the volunteers, mentors and other students.

The other thing we saw was the learning of new skills which then led to them working on their own bikes, maintaining them, which meant they had more stuff to do. In their down time they would be riding their bikes around and have avenues for fixing them. To see the guys who were involved in a lot of the issues in the community be so engaged in this was really a big thing.

It is hard to measure and gauge if we had an impact in the broader culture of the community but for the young people who were involved I felt there was a change, especially as they were getting older. Often I found that by the time they were hitting grade 9, so 14 or 15, it was almost like a switch triggered in their head where they suddenly go “ooh I’ve got to do something or I am going to end up failing school or leaving school and have no job prospects”, so I found that at that stage they would really re-engage. More recently I think I have seen more of a whole culture shift. In the last 12 months there has been a shift in the young guys in the community since we sent the container to Africa.

We sat down and said well what were our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as a project. One of the things we looked at was how do we change a culture, not just one person but the social dynamic





of a group of young people in a community. These were some of the lessons and reflections we took into the next phase and now I think we are seeing some changes because of that.

We have shifted to completely being a community project instead of partly in school and partly in the community, and so from what we've learnt, we are focussing a lot more on the skill development side of things. We have actually put together a big matrix of all the skills we feel we want kids to learn, the bike skills but more importantly the work skills, the problem solving, the interpersonal relationship skills. We have written it all down and we are going through it with the kids every few weeks and going, okay what are we learning and they have got to tick these off. We start them off on Beginner skills through to Pro and Grand Master, make it a bit of fun. The other big thing was having places in the community for social connection for these young guys that would have positive influences, spaces to hang out, connect socially and to have positive voices.

To exercise and be healthy, we've built some trails in the bush, and we are upgrading the BMX park, as well as the workshop, so they can drop into the workshop space.

Through providing those spaces, giving them more stuff to do I feel like we are seeing a slight culture shift there in a move away from anti-social behaviour to the point where we are seeing a whole group of young people pull together to re-engage. So rather than just one person they are getting on each other's back about going to school and that is a big shift.

They are encouraging each other to go to school instead of encouraging each other to wag school.

Some of the most important things we can take away from the Bikes Program are that long term relationships are really important for these guys. A positive role model who can help them transition from school to a work environment is really important and we felt that was really lacking. We want to allow that relationship to exist beyond school or a two year project, for a positive voice to exist for a longer period. In their worlds there are a lot of negative voices, sometimes it is just no voice. So we feel like encouraging them on a positive path and building them up has to happen over an extended period of time, to gain respect and have a young person listen to you, it all takes time.

Another is to give them something to work toward, something that benefits both them and the community.

For example, they came and built the bike tracks with us, and they had to work quite hard. It is physical work and it will benefit the whole community as well as themselves. And they are earning their way to a bike – they are ticking off sessions and are now able to earn themselves a bike. We felt there needed to be a quite significant sense of achievement, it is about understanding that you've got to work hard but there is a reward and goals that can be reached.

Another thing we took away was the importance of really tangible goals to help them to stay on task and to engage with what they are doing. It is a high bar, 25 sessions (a session is around 1.5 hours) earns them a good bike, that is around half a year of commitment and if they help on trails and things they can earn extra sessions. Some kids are working on their second bike. We are getting kids coming back and more and more kids getting involved. It's great.

Looking back, one thing we felt we might have done better was to have more volunteers and mentors. Having myself and another mentor in every session would be the best case scenario. Increasing the number of mentors but also allocating a mentor to a group and having that mentor commit to that group over an extended period of time we felt was really important. We felt strongly about something that could be owned by the community, centred in one community, Risdon Vale. It has been really good. 🏠

## PETER'S STORY

Story Collector, John at NHT, June 2015

**Peter really actively wants his story to have his name attached; as if others are depressed it's good to actually know someone.**

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To tell you the truth I didn't know it (the Neighbourhood House) was here and being a gardener for a long, long time, I had a lot of vegetables left over from my garden. I've only got a very small back yard... but it's always growing. It was the next door neighbour; I was talking about all the spares, mostly tomatoes, pumpkins and such... cos I got them into gardening as well. And she told me about the House and she got the number for the House and I rang them up and asked them if they'd like all the spare vegetables... well they jumped at it... Two ladies came up and they picked them and invited me to come down to the House. Having had depression pretty bad for quite some time I didn't want to mingle but after several trips up there to get vegetables, I sort of thought yeah I'd come down there and then shoot home sort of thing, safety you know, and it all started from there. I was scared shitless, I was, I was scared shitless. I was worried I'd come in, somebody would say something and I'd jump in the car and leave. That's how bad it was. When I got paid, I'd just slip down here (...points to nearby shopping centre)... pay my bills; get food and bang I'd be home. I mean I knew my neighbour and my neighbour over the back fence and that's it. I mean I did my gardening. That's when I really got stuck into the alcohol badly. But that was the

extent of my outings, talking to my neighbours, I was quite comfortable with them although I didn't explain my situation to them. To actually go out was a big thing, and to come down here and spend a day... wow ...unreal. That would be about three years ago, it would have been about February, March that they first came and got the vegetables and I'd come down and go home again and whatever. The two women they said "just come down and meet some people" as I'd already told them what was sort of going on after a while...well not straight up but I'd told them after a while of visits. They said just come down and mingle for a while, even if just for half an hour and then go home. Just come down every now and then. That was the start of it.

I was just coming down for half an hour and as soon as I was uncomfortable I'd disappear. And gradually it got longer and longer till I was 2 or 3 hours here. Till it was a couple of days a week and now it's every day. Now I don't like being inside, it's the exact opposite.

Gradually I'd get to meet people, find out who they were, what they did. Then I'd started doing little bits and pieces around the House. Like Mr Meet and Greet, that's one of the ones I've taken on myself, going down to get Second Bite, bringing down my own vegetables of a Monday. Generally tidy up and put things away and whatever. Then I was invited to join the Board.

By this time I'd sort of got myself going reasonable, anyway I went on the Board, was pretty quiet for a while and anyway next elections they wanted me to go on again and I said yes and I took on the role of Vice President and Public Officer.

And actually we've just finished re-doing the constitution. Which is handy for them I'd had a lot of experience before with fishing clubs, associations, state bodies and whatever.

And I used what knowledge I did have with another lady from here and we tidied up the constitution and it's now waiting with the Board to be passed.

Whereas some places you go there and they say "look if you go and do this you'll come right in six months" None of that here. They just ask "how are you going"? There's no questions it's just a friendly place. It's just like walking inside to your family at the end of the day. And now this is like my family.

Now I know I can come down here and I know there will be people who I can talk to and my involvement with the garden has opened up a whole new field for me with people and now I'm the head gardener for Pioneer Parade.

Pioneer Parade is a community garden. If you want to you can come in and do some weeding. If you want to you can come in and take some of the produce. It's a community garden. I do a fair bit of the work up there, other people come in and get bits and pieces, and what's left comes down here.

I did all the planning for it because of my back ground with the gardening business, I worked for two other fellas for ten years, and I took over my own business in 2000 and I ran that for over ten years then when I stopped that because of my leg I still had customers that I used to go and look over. So I was able to put a plan together for them and from there we got all the stuff in, we had working bees, we got it all up and running. Now it's got to the stage where I go up there one day a week and teach.

Showing people the differences between the weeds and the plants and how long it will take to grow. Which I enjoy, I love the garden so now I'm gardening with other people and I get on pretty well. There's four or five blocks of land and Housing Tas. are trying to get an MOU up so I can take over the lot. It's where the units used to be that got burnt down. I've got it so that one block will be for native plants, our garden will be beside it, a play area for the kids and an orchard. The Neighbourhood House will be signing the MOUs I'm just doing the planning.

I've regained my confidence; I had no confidence in myself or anyone else really. I couldn't mingle. Four years ago there is no way I could have sat here and talked to you like this. A stranger for one, I just couldn't have done it. But now, because of my work here and the understanding I've received from the girls in the office I've been able to join the Board, I've been able to fix their constitution and I do jobs here. I teach up at the garden without anyone from here, and there are other blocks that we're looking at. There's Waverly school

who are asking for my expert opinion, I hate that word expert, but you know what I mean on their garden, how to manage it, so that they can get theirs going, so they can get some tutorage. And they've asked that I might take six or seven students at a time to show the gardening and what it's worth. What the vegetables can do for your body. Which is more or less what I do at Pioneer Parade, I teach people the value of fresh fruit and vegetables.

I'll be doing a yearly planner, when to plant when to stop. I'll do it as a wagon wheel and I'll put in the vegetables month by month.

They'll have a wagon wheel of knowledge for the garden or for their own back yards. I want people trained up so that it's not dependent on me. There's no guarantee I'll be around. I mean it didn't stop when I was in hospital for four weeks. They still went up there and did the weeding and general maintenance and later on down the track they can come on and be the teacher.



That's the pathway I want so that there are others ready to take it on when I'm no longer there.

The thing for me is that with the gardens, I always say its fresh nutritious food and you cut it, you take it home and you cook it, they'll be healthier they'll be getting less sick, because if you're fit and well you avoid some of the mental problems that can happen if you're not fit and well as you're not up to it. That's a big thing for me, the mental side, I mean I've been there and done it pretty hard for a long time and it's a big thing for me to be able to offer help.

At the House, all you've got to do is come through that door and help will be offered. There were no questions, you just come in and people talk to you. But you come in and if you want to pour your guts out, they'll lock the door so it's one on one, and they don't ask you questions they listen. And then if they've got something they think might help you they'll offer it, but they don't push. That's what I found. Whereas some places you go there and they say "look if you go and do this you'll come right in six months". None of that here they just ask "how are you going?". There's no questions it's just a friendly place. It's just like walking inside to your family at the end of the day. And now this is like my family. That's exactly what they are, and that's what I say to them when I come in here now... well, I'm home. Even when I'm on the door or I go and get Second Bite, or packing the books. Sometimes there might be two or three meetings going I ask them what they're after and then I take them where they need to go. Give them the guided tour... it takes a lot of the... it's not angst but... it makes them feel welcome... it's not like they're walking into somebody's house. People come here they don't know what to expect and they're nervous...

I want people trained up so that it's not dependent on me. There's no guarantee I'll be around. I mean it didn't stop when I was in hospital for four weeks. They still went up there and did the weeding and general maintenance and later on down the track they can come on and be the teacher. That's the pathway I want so that there are others ready to take it on when I'm no longer there.

and all of a sudden you get a big smile, a bearded head and asked "can I help you?", "what are you after?"... then I take them where they want to go. I take them to Cynthia for a NILS loan... and say I've got a couple of guests. I always call people guests. But it's making sure people don't feel anxious when they come through the door.

If they come here and I've got a sour look on my face, they're going to think well if that's what the rest of it's going to be like I don't want this and leave.

What's important is being able to help people. The ability to help people, cause now that I'm right I've got a lot of life experiences and now if somebody says they're a bit down, I don't have the certificates or anything but I've got the ability to talk to people without really asking them questions. And a lot of this came out of Avidity. I did the Cert 2 for community services and that taught me a lot, a hell of a lot about being able to talk to people without asking the questions. Being able to look at them and listen, take it in and understand, and don't offer advice unless they want it. Some people just want to get it off their chest and then they're right they can go home. But if they say "I don't know what to do..." you can offer advice. You just keep talking to them till they get out of you what they want.

There was one person who'd suffered depression, who heard that I'd been through depression and they came and

talked to me one day. And I said if you ever want to sit down and talk to me and have a chat, you go for your life. I said I'll listen, if you want me to say something I will, but if you don't I'll just listen. They were really pleased with that. We had two or three chats. It gave them the chance to unload. And it never got deep, or about what caused it, they just wanted to talk to somebody and that helped them. And again I was pretty happy about that, because that's just one more person who's got the chance to become who they were before. Most people will be happy with that, if they can get close to what they used to be before they got depression or anxiety or whatever... if they can get close to what they were they'll be happy. And it's not about going to a shrink and lying on a couch and counting from one to ten. It's talking to someone, a kind person, who's been through the mill. I can learn something from them. The doctor hasn't been through it.

Anything they've got going I'll put my hand up for and if I don't like it I'll just pull out as they know I've got a lot on. In fact Nettie keeps telling me I've got too much on and I've got to cut back.

I love me gardening and being outside, but eventually I'd like to take a group to Lake Waverly and show them casting and fishing. Take them up there and they can fish to their hearts content. Show them how to kill a trout properly and all that sort of thing. 🏡

## SHORT STORIES

Stories provided by Lexia, (DVCH), May 2015

**Each Wednesday and Thursday, the DVCH holds a community lunch. There is no charge and anyone is welcome.**

Wednesday lunches are prepared by our trusty band of volunteers, and they rustle up such good old favourites as Shepherd's Pie, curried sausages, rissoles in onion gravy, all served with mashed potato and vegies. There is always something hot and delicious on the table.

The starting point for this activity was one wild and wet Wednesday; we received a larger than usual delivery from Second Bite and in the delivery was some mince. We rarely get meat from them and this was a very big, but welcome surprise. We also received hamburger rolls and lettuce and tomatoes. Our freezer was full and the mince would not fit in, so I said, let's drag the BBQ out and have a BBQ. The ladies in the kitchen turned the mince into hamburger patties, we set the tables up with sauce and some tinned beetroot, sliced the tomatoes, shredded the lettuce and had an impromptu BBQ which everyone loved. We all were sitting around after eating and decided that it would be nice to do this every week, so that is how the Wednesday lunches were born. DVCH pays for the ingredients if we do not have enough on hand, and we now have up to 30 people attending. It is Pot Luck though, we serve lunch at Midday and when the food is gone, the food is gone.

Thursday lunches are supported by the Dirt-to-Plate-to-Job project. The lunches reflect budget conscious, seasonal produce and nutritional meals. We feed all the participants from the Horticulture Certificate 1 and 2 classes which are held on Thursdays. Our aim is to use as much produce as possible from the Garden. We have a Nutritional Officer who plans and cooks the meals on a Thursday with the help of a volunteer. A volunteer from the Garden project helps in the kitchen and gets to learn new kitchen skills and how to cook. The recipe from each meal is printed out and discussed during the lunch so that people can see how easy it is to make healthy nutritious food.

We have lots of requests for recipes and we are very happy with this as it shows that the word is getting out there. The lunches are a terrific way of bringing the community together and there is always lively chatter around the tables with diverse topics of conversation.

We have seen friendships formed and all those sorts of things that show you eating together is a powerful experience for everyone.

**Drive Time is a program run by DVCH to help people obtain their P's. We help with every step - we provide the mentor, the car and the fuel, so there is no cost to participants.**

We identified a need in our Strategic Plan for people who live in isolated areas and have difficulty in obtaining

their drivers licence due to many factors: no car, no money, no supervisory driver. A submission for DVCH to have their own car and money for fuel was successful, and we were soon the proud owners of a Subaru Impreza, and there was the birth of the Drive Time program.

Our program was so successful that we had a wait of up to 2 years for a mentor. We now have 14 mentors on our books and are responsible for many people passing their P's and being able to drive independently. Being a part of this life changing program has been wonderful and we are supported by State Growth and Driver Mentoring Tasmania.

We have many wonderful stories that have come out of this program and I would love to share one with you today.

A very tiny lady came in to see me one day. She was very excited and asked me 1 million questions about the program and if she was eligible to be a participant. She was over the moon when I told her that she could be a participant. I explained she was close to the top of the list and I would let her know a start date.

Now I have to tell you, this lady rang me every week for 9 months to see if she was at the top of the list. Finally I was able to tell her we were ready to get her into the hot seat! Now this in itself was no mean feat, as she is so tiny. Her mentor was not to be deterred by this and he made her a booster seat out of foam. She was so excited to get on the road and

soon they were clocking up hours on a regular basis. Her L2 test was approaching and she was so nervous, but she passed with flying colours. Now, as I have mentioned, this lady is very tiny, but boy, did she grow. Her confidence, her self-esteem and just everything about her seemed to grow by the minute.

Soon she had reached her 50 hours and was ready to go for the dreaded P test. Finally, the big day was here. We all were waiting and waiting for them to return and after so long we all

assumed that she did not pass her test. Then, in through the door she burst with an armful of presents. She was floating on thin air; I have never seen anyone so visibly elated. She kept thanking everyone and then handed out her gifts and then just stood stock still and said "I passed my P test. I have my licence."

We were all a bit teary not to mention her mentor by this time. She then took me by the hand and led me to the couch. She told me that she had always wanted to do a course at TAFE

and had no way of getting there each day. For 9 years she had been trying to find a way to enrol in this course. And then she told me that she was driving to TAFE that afternoon to enrol in her lifelong dream course.

Now if you ever needed proof that this program is worthwhile, then here it is. She has had her licence for over 1 year now and I am pleased to tell you, is in her second year at TAFE. How very honoured we are to play such a part in a person's journey. 🏠

## OKINES COMMUNITY HOUSE

A gentleman visited the house on the encouragement of his daughter who suggested it would be a good way for him to meet new people and to move forward after the death of his wife. When Jim (not his real name) first visited the house he was clearly extremely upset over the death of his wife, he looked very lost, tearful, he was nervous about getting involved and reluctant to meet new people. Over the following months however, the transformation in Jim was overwhelming. Jim came out of his shell as a result of that first visit to Okines. He started to regularly attending EWF and meeting new people. When you saw Jim now, there was a smile on his face, animated chatter, much laughter and his name was guaranteed to be first on the list for any new activities we were undertaking. Jim met many new people from the monthly lunches and he began to socialise with these new friends in activities outside of the house. Jim even ventured across to Maria Island on a seniors trip despite being notoriously sea sick in the past and had a marvellous time. Yes Jim still often reminisced about his wife but he had made friends at the house with which he could share these wonderful memories with as well as share his grief.

Now it's our turn to reminisce about Jim as sadly he passed away after a short illness. During the week before he died, he requested that friends he had made from EWF visit him in hospital and which are memories that they cherish knowing that they made a positive difference to each other's lives. The one regret is that our time knowing Jim was so relatively short however he enriched our lives immensely and we believe that he felt the same. At Okines we have photos of Jim smiling and enjoying himself, engaging with others, and it is a pleasure to be able to remember him this way, so vastly different from the man we first met.

## THE PHOENIX COMMUNITY HOUSE STORY

Story Collector: Leah from NHT, June, 2015

**Phoenix Community House started in 2001 when a group of Community members and health professionals got together because there was a gap in supporting disability clients.**

We started off as King Island Supporting Disability and we were lucky enough to get access to a Housing Tas house and started the project. We then realised there was so much more happening within the community and so many more needs, while the House certainly met the needs of our disability group there where many more opportunities that could be met. So we then formed a Committee of key stakeholders and interested community members and that is how Phoenix Community House was formed.

In the early days we were lucky we came under the auspice of King Island Council. The project just grew and has blossomed over the years. It provides support in a large number of areas, currently we have a Community garden on King Island, that started as one of the small projects, now we lease a plot of DHHS land and we have fourteen Members and plots as well as community plots and a hot house and we have just built a shelter so that has expanded significantly. In 2006, we had a group of men who identified that they would like their own space as well and they had heard about the men's shed projects so we supported

the initiation of the King Island Men's Shed as well. Those are our two main projects that happen under the Phoenix House umbrella, those two projects each have their own working group.

The House became incorporated in 2013, that was a marvellous move for the House and showed how the House had grown and it runs such a wide variety of projects. I (Sarina) am the Health Promotions Officer on King Island and I couldn't provide to the community or meet the needs of the community without Phoenix House.

Its staff actually look after a wide range of health and wellbeing projects, and it is great when we can start and run a program and then it can be taken over by another community organisation. One of the things we strive to do is to provide support to get programs up and running and then release them to the community to run and in doing that we are supporting community members to run programs according to good governance and staff and community development.

We do lots of small projects so there is always lots of activity happening.



...working with people who are so committed and passionate about the community and that contribute so much of their time and energy is the most important thing...

The population of King Island is about fifteen hundred at the moment, so it is quite small and it is an ageing population. We also have a lot of young families here as it is a safe environment for children and then we have the older people, so we try to meet everyone's needs. One of our mottos is, "we are here for all".

We have certainly achieved the goals that we set out to achieve, which was to interact with all members of the community and particularly provide a place for disadvantaged community members with encouraging social interaction. A lot of community development and capacity building within community is just being able to provide opportunities for people to extend themselves and reach their goals and aims and to encourage and support that.

King Island is well known for its volunteers about thirty three percent of King Islanders volunteer their time so it does run on volunteers so it is

hard work then to recruit and retain volunteers because of the competition with all the other organisations. So we have done a lot of work around supporting volunteers on the Island, we recently facilitated a volunteer day and event where we invited all the volunteers on King Island to come along to that and celebrate volunteering. Over all we have been very lucky in that we take advantage of those in the community who have got the skills to share and we encourage and support that. Then everyone benefits from that.

I think that the House filled a lot of gaps in the community. So just seeing your community health and wellbeing improve is just a wonderful bonus through filling all of those gaps. I think, working with people who are so committed and passionate about the community and that contribute so much of their time and energy is the most important thing I will take away from this. I enjoy working with people and seeing what the community has been able to achieve

within the community. The self-fulfilment of being part of something that is providing something to the community.

I think one of the things we have learnt is the importance of promoting Neighbourhood Houses and what they are about within the community because sometimes people are so busy they don't really always know what is happening in their community.

Funding is an ongoing issue for Phoenix House; the next financial year will be a real challenge for us. It is hard, particularly when we know we have done so well and contributed so well to the community. We have always had a sustainability plan and always worked toward sustainability but in a small community that is always going to be a challenge, we do charge for some of our programs in trying to be sustainable and the community are getting used to that, the user pays principle, but unfortunately their dollars (incomes) will only go so far. 🏠

.....  
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.....

## THE PHOTOBOOK COURSE AND LITERACY

Story collected by: Steve, June 2015

**We were engaging with part of the community here through adult literacy. There were a lot of people engaging through one-on-one programs, computer stuff, and things like that, but we wanted to engage with more parents, parents with smaller children.**

Participants have been interested in doing a story book. It's quite a big process. It'd be a great thing, although it would take quite a lot of time.

It would be more like a 10 week or 12 week process, needing a lot of support. Two hour sessions for 10 weeks or something like that.

So instead we went for a photobook where they could collect images, start exploring using text and images together. And it went from there, and that worked really well.



I have found that people act as mentors for each other...  
They're quite open about sharing with others needing support that they also get support.



Recently – 12 months, maybe 2 years ago – we got the Child and Family Centre in Geeveston. They have adjunct care so they have an environment that is conducive for parents to be able to do some study, knowing their kids are in a safe environment.

We wanted to partner with them and attract some other people who probably weren't coming into our community centre. So we did the outreach through Child and Family Centre. It's almost a bit of a reinvention of how we connect and re-engage with certain sectors of the community.

And it has brought the community back into here for other activities. Youth programs, they're doing other literacy stuff through here. There's people who have never been into the Centre that started out through the Child and Family Centre and who are now coming to the Community Centre so that's been really successful.

And they also get to know about other services that happen here: emergency relief, woodwork, and all sorts of things.

Next we came up with a plan, a five week idea. Advertised it, got participants and ran the course. We advertised through our newsletter, through the Child and Family Centre newsletter, the LINC, and through a paid advertisement in the Huon News.

Some participants hadn't had a lot of contact with other people in the community. So they've made new relationships. Some also accessed other literacy programs as well. Getting Learners licenses – they can do their written tests here now. We've had people coming up to do that, and getting access to the driver mentor program we have up here. This helps improve their ability to move around transport wise in a rural town. And they bring some of their older kids into our school holiday program as well. Some have come back and done computer courses.

Another big thing is the request for one-on-one literacy support which I've been able to offer, like the grant writing person. Knowing that I was a first port of contact in a fairly informal group setting meant that then they could go "Oh, I'll get Lucy to come and help me with this form".

Or they maybe are building an identity. It's like "Oh Lucy Literacy will help you with that!" So I think that's worked quite well. And me having access to lots of different people in the community, and being able to jump on Facebook and coordinate literacy events and the National Simultaneous Storytelling

and being able to actually talk to people, so, when other things do come up, I can just ring them up and they know who I am and know they can get support for things.

Another literacy program we ran here is the Salvos 'Filling in Forms' program. Six people took part. One was an older man who has done a little bit of computer literacy stuff. Originally he said "Oh, I'm computer illiterate. I've got this new tablet – dunno how it works", so we talked about that.

Firstly he was part of the garden, then he came in asking about his computer stuff, and then I said "well, there's this course..." he said "For me the big thing is that I can't spell". So I said "why don't you come to this Filling in Forms course". The second session was of most interest to him. He's coming in next week to do another computer refresher, and we'll talk about his spelling a bit more and work on that.

Another couple of clients were already doing one-on-one stuff with me, so that was a good chance for them to join the Filling In Forms group as well. Another guy who has come in and out of literacy support was also happy to join the group. And then a couple of parents who I did the Photobook thing with down at Wayraparattee – they joined as well. So there were 6 of us down there.

I have found that people act as mentors for each other during the courses. When one of them said "Oh, my spelling's not... I can't really spell", one of the other ones said "Oh, you should go and talk to Lucy. I do spelling with Lucy". You know, it's like "Oh you know, I do it as well". Man to man thing. And that worked. That worked really well.

It's amazing how honest people are, you know. If they're already in a group, they're there to learn stuff. They're quite open about sharing with others needing support that they also get support.

What I take away from the Photobook course is probably seeing those relationships being made and just promoting the identity of the Centre. And another big thing is being able to build on those relationships, which means having the capacity to deliver, which is massive.

I mean, to give you an idea, we had a youth worker here, funded for two years through Tas Community Fund. And the funding stopped. We were just starting to make inroads with the youth into the community. So now we actually don't have a three day a week dedicated youth worker. And you can tell – our youth participation dropped right off. We're starting to build it up again now, but it's... we lost a lot of traction because there was no funding.

Looking back at the Photobook course, it felt a bit rushed. I always feel like things could be a little bit less rushed. If I applied for a grant to run the Photobook course again I'd put another session in.

Almost all of the participants had an extra hour's session with me at some stage, because they either didn't make it to the course or for some other reason they needed a little bit of extra support on their own. It's almost like you need to book in 9 hours of one-on-one support as well, to go with the project.

I found participant numbers to be good. I only had a few for the first one, and then I had a full group for the next one. And that's got a lot to do with the groups that are actually in place. So, the second photobook

course that we did, we piggy backed on a family group that was already happening down at Wayraparattee.

I think that was really effective. And it's also about being aware of the course, you know. So the people that did the first one, or the people who heard about it the first time, might not have got interested until the second one came around, and so by the time the second one was happening it's like "Ooh, I'd better do this cos this is the only other chance". People take a while to think about it.

I'd love to run the Photobook course again. 🏠

## LITERACY LINKS PROJECT

Story Collector: Steve from NHT, May 2015

**The starting point for the project was community consultation. This was done in partnership with Northern Suburbs Community Centre this one. We both knew that members of our community did have reading and writing issues, and it was a barrier for them.**

There were lots of other literacy tutors out there, and training in literacy, and things like that, but it wasn't hitting the mark. People weren't accessing it. So, in consultation with the community, we asked people: "What would get you there? What would make it work?"

With some of them we had a good rapport and came up with this idea of the Literacy Links program. So that was a fun and creative way of pulling people in, getting people to be involved in a literacy program that didn't actually feel like a literacy program. So that was the idea really.

There'd been an outstanding need in Neighbourhood Houses for quite a while. At Tresca we had trained a whole group of our community to become literacy workers in the hope that would be a comfortable way for people to improve their literacy, which totally failed.

I think that there is a huge barrier. People have become very skilled at hiding their lack of literacy. And the actual act of coming up and saying "I want to learn to read and write"

is just a step too far. Whereas doing something where you're drawing people in under the guise of other activities is a great idea. You know, playing games, cooking – people were going there for a Wheel of Fortune, not for a literacy session. Paper plane making was a numeracy thing. They had to do measurements, so that was their numeracy. But they were making paper planes! The literacy wasn't explicit.

Even now I see like Launceston Community Legal Centre name themselves up as literacy support for filling out forms, and things like that but as soon as you start naming it up, people tend to run a mile. You can't use the 'L' word. You just can't.

See, this one here [looking at the Salvos Filling In Forms brochure], as soon as we saw it we thought "Filling out forms – I need help with that!". Because it doesn't tell us that we need help with it. It doesn't infer that we've got a lack. There's no deficit. It's filling out forms, you know? "Do you want to be involved?" It's just different. The wording's different.

We wanted to empower people to be more literate and get their needs met. That's exactly what we want. And I think that consists of a long list of things through from the gaining of confidence through to very practical things. You know, like, it is that judge... the "maybe... I can... I can do this. I can, I can do this stuff in a group.

One of my favourite stories is the fact that someone had a sister coming that they hadn't seen for years, and they wanted to have morning tea here, and invite their friends, people of the Neighbourhood House, to meet their sister because this was their family.



Maybe I could go and do a course. Maybe I could think about that job down the road. Maybe I could join a group and have a bit of fun because I liked this group there's other groups at this Neighbourhood House or next door or somewhere. Maybe I can do that'.

It's not just about learning about numbers and words. It's about expanding your world view in very small but incremental ways. So, anything that gets you in the door of something like a Neighbourhood House is going to probably have a very good chance of changing a whole lot of aspects of your life, because you're likely to get involved in other things. Most of the people that are here right now would do more than one thing here a week. And some people come in because they've got a dire need or they might be the three-monthly visitor.

So, you know, literacy is, is much more than being able to fill in a form, or learning to read and write, or add up. Much more.

I think there were some subtle changes, but I don't think there were any huge changes in the first year. I think the second year is when the changes became more obvious.

I left when the second year was starting, and I actually thought that people... their attitude was starting to change. I started to see those changes, and then, unfortunately, I moved on, and Jen took over. But when I came back again 18 months later I was astounded that those changes had happened. I could actually see where they were when they first came in, which Jen didn't see. And, you know, the fact is that a number of them still talk about that program – "I liked doing that program, it gave me these... I can do this". We had a number of them continue on post the program at the Neighbourhood House

because they wanted to they wanted to learn different things. Nearly all of them have.

So what I saw in the second year was that program was in full swing when I arrived. The thing that bothered me immediately, and always does, was scarce dollars. Funding's hard to come by, and it should have maximum impact. The impact was only about 5 people here and quite often they'd do two days a week. They did it at Rocherlea and here. Quite often it was the same people at both places. I didn't feel that we were getting enough bang for our buck.

But the people that we were helping were being helped indeed. One of our participants went on to start writing stories – and she's a great story writer. She still has problems, but they aren't about her literacy. We actually published them, in-house, those little

stories of hers, because they were very, very good, about her cat.

But by that time, one of the workers, who was the lead worker in this program, had left. We'd replaced her with another worker who went on to be our study buddy worker and finally, we felt, and this is a progression, that the program participants got as much as they wanted. Some people were leaving the group. They wanted to go on and do different things, because they were at a point where they could.

And that's when we started doing Study Buddy. And Study Buddy leaped out of this, really, at the end, and became an unexpectedly fabulous success. The Study Buddy would be in your class with you while you were doing class. And on another day of the week they'd be here if you had any problems, or you'd missed a class, or anything. That group was almost



.....  
...I mean, what a privilege, what a great job we have hey?  
We have this great job where people are in this little closed bud, and they're tight. And then you watch them bloom, you know. And it's in so many directions – it's not just the bloody reading and writing; it's their whole life. And I mean I know that's a big, big statement, but it actually is really important.  
.....

as big as the class, because people just enjoyed getting together.

And the people that were doing well in the class would come and help the people who weren't doing so well in the class. So they used it, not just the Buddy. But the Buddy set up the table, the round table, and everyone went. And there was no shame in that. There was a lot of pleasure and it was a little bit private. And that just worked amazingly. And so, out of Literacy Links, absolutely directly came that Study Buddy process.

It was good learning for us too. Perfect community development. This thing's come to its end – time to morph it.

I was quite happy with the five people initially for that first year because it's about building that relationship and trust in the community. So it's a new project, and did have literacy in its name, which hindsight tells me I wouldn't do again, although literacy wasn't the focus but just that we named it up.

I'm a fussy, difficult coot, so I want more people there if any. How can we get our proper bang for limited buck? And get more people involved? So it was kind of really well done. Sometimes there would be quite a few people.

Once we took them to the art gallery. We've got a local art gallery, just down the hill, 10 minutes away. None of them had been before. And they had that wonderfully broad set of views about whether it was good, bad, or indifferent, or that the lunch at the café at the art gallery was the best thing of the day, or the paintings were the best thing or the whatever. So it was interesting what they'd taken from it. But just the experience... and it's free, you can take you kids there. And a number of them come back and said "I'm going to take the kids". Plus, there's a museum there too which is quite a good little interactive museum. So, you know, just making that world view just that little bit bigger is just fabulous.

Some of them did a radio show for the local community radio. They had to write up what they were going to talk about, and they did a whole radio show. And they wrote that up as a little booklet. Some did scrapbooking and journaling, which was nice.

And they did lots of cooking. They became quite good at cooking some meals. There was actual life skills learned. And that was very much a part of that process, whereas the study was more about "you can do formal study, and you're actually not dumb. School might not have been that great, but you're actually really good at this stuff".

People well in their 60s, have still gone onto study and still wanted to start social enterprises and are really keen to do more. It's done quite a lot for a lot of our community members, who have then gone on to do much more responsible work here. The Op Shop is run by those participants; bingo is run by them, Knit and Natter. A lot of the groups here are run by the people who participated.



And that is because these people have the confidence to do that. And because we talk the language of “Everyone can do this”. There’s no magic involved in this. You can do this. And we push them a bit harder. You know – “Oh, you can do that! There you go! There you go”.

Things wouldn’t happen in the Neighbourhood House if it wasn’t for the volunteers, and that’s 100% true. It was Volunteers Day last week, and during my speech I mentioned three examples of work the volunteers do. And then, the audience were saying “Well what about this. You didn’t mention that and that and that...”

I was telling the story of each volunteer as I was handing out the awards and we had a mob of volunteers that weren’t there, about 15 or 20. The audience said “Can you tell their story too?” So I had to tell everybody’s story because they wanted each other’s stories. So they were really valuing each other’s contribution.

There’s about 55 active volunteers. We got a volunteer coordinator the other day, out of that \$50,000, and she actually challenged me. And I said “There’s about 54 volunteers”. And she challenged me and said “oh, there wouldn’t be that many active volunteers here”. And I said “I’m pretty sure there is, but check the paperwork”.

I think the most important thing I’ll take away from the project is allowing it to morph into Study Buddies.

That’s great community work. But for me, and I’m just a dog about all this, it’s the joy of those people. Watching them unfurl. I mean what a privilege, what a great job we have hey? We have this great job where people are in this little closed bud, and they’re tight. And then you watch them

bloom, you know. And it’s in so many directions – it’s not just the bloody reading and writing; it’s their whole life. And I mean I know that’s a big, big statement, but it actually is really important.

I think people coming here, people who are new coming here to join something, have always got people who have been here before and have just become part of that, and they’ve heard about it, so they know about it. You’ve got people coming in. And what’s lovely to watch is those people being looked after by the people who are already here. And you’ll always find someone who sort of suits you, or a group of people who sort of suits you, because there’s enough of the people coming in all of the time. Whilst we have a lot of volunteers, there’s also just a lot of regulars, and they do stuff too. They’ll do the dishes, or help out somewhere, or do something, because they’re part of here. One of my favourite stories is the

fact that someone had a sister coming that they hadn’t seen for years, and they wanted to have morning tea here, and invite their friends, people of the Neighbourhood House, to meet their sister because this was their family. And that’s happened more than once. And we’ve had a few funerals. We had a funeral here recently, because he was on our board of management. He didn’t have anyone. We were his family.

Being able to do that for people. To be the backstop when there’s no backstops and no family.

It’s such a privilege to be the coordinator, because you’re just on the edge of this tide. Watching people being together and you’re supporting it. You know, you’ll see people sitting in the corner, and then down the track, and not necessarily in a month or two months, it might be a couple of years, you see them going from sitting in the corner to being on paid staff.



So, you know, literacy is, is much more than being able to fill in a form, or learning to read and write, or add up. Much more.

I'm thinking of one particular lady who came in through a perennial project and she's now on paid staff. And that's why being able to do literacy here, is: you're just part of the joint; you're just part of the whole thing. This place is very special, and I don't exactly know why. It's very special.

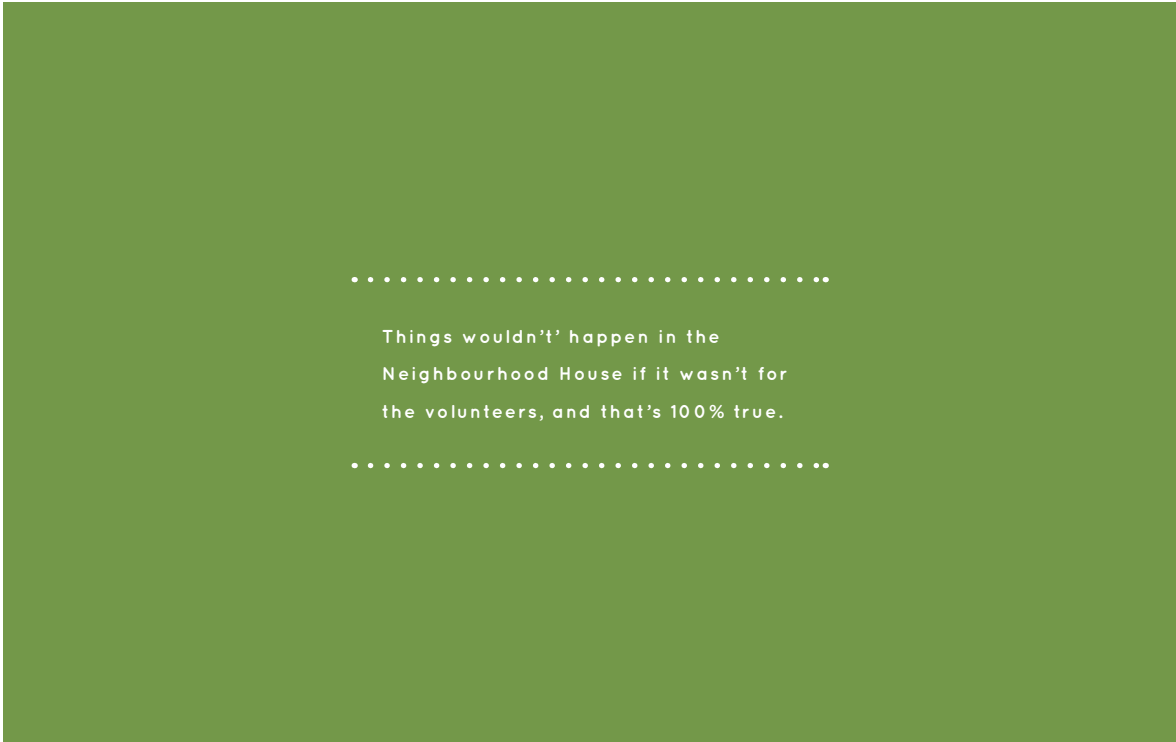
People who don't even come here are very pleased that it's here, aren't they? They're sort of proud of it. We're a little bit pushy when we have to be. Dragging people in to sit down particularly when they're upset or going off, and we have to get them out of circulation, a young person, on the phone the other day, and every second word was "f..." but I didn't actually even identify that until someone

mentioned it. I did notice that her voice was raised. But I went in and I said to her, you know, "I think you probably just need a private room to have that conversation". Not anything about her swearing or anything. She said "Oh sorry, about the swearing". I said "well, I hadn't even actually noticed you swearing. I just noticed you were upset and you might need a private room".

So, it's about not judging

In hindsight for me, it was great working on Literacy Links in partnership with Northern Suburbs, but I think our needs were a little bit different. We were going in a little bit of a different direction.

The outcomes that I feel we achieved, with participants being on our board of management, running groups, working as a volunteer. And I noticed at the partner organisation that they've had positive outcomes as well. So I feel that we succeeded. But we need to have the same vision of what that success would look like... some of the people that came in were so disengaged from society. But, you know, they continued on doing computer courses, and learning new skills, and building their capacity to increase their social networks. 🏠



SIMON DOUGLAS AT ULVERSTONE NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE  
AND KATE BEER AT DEVONPORT COMMUNITY HOUSE

## RE-ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY AND RE-STARTING THE GOVERNANCE AT UNH

Story Collector: John from NHT, July 2015

### Part One: Re-Engaging the Community

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**SIMON DOUGLAS** I was working at Devonport Community House when an agreement was reached around Devonport Community House taking on the re-opening and running of the Ulverstone House for a short period.

We took the keys the day before Christmas 2012, the House had been closed for a few months, and we took a month or so preparing, getting organised and opened the doors to the public 4th February 2013.

**KATE BEER** *“Ulverstone Community House was closed and Devonport Community House committee and staff really took it on wanting Ulverstone House to be a place that people wanted to come to – that community members, staff and committee wanted to be there and loved coming to the House – that’s what we wanted people to experience. We wanted it to have a good name and be seen as an important resource to the community. So we agreed to take on the auspice even though we knew it would impact our House here at Devonport while we auspiced it. We all agreed that it was too important so we couldn’t not take it on. And important to the Neighbourhood House network that the House re-open and continue the good name of Neighbourhood Houses.”*

**SD** We went into this with the thought that it was always going to be about community and be massively community driven and that was

what the Department (of Health and Human Services) wanted us to do too. Basically from the start to now it’s been the slow and constant growth. Contact with local community started out reasonably slow, but it’s continually grown, as far as community participation goes. Then in May 2013 we held our first event in the neighbourhood as ourselves, Ulverstone Neighbourhood House, which was in Neighbourhood House Week. We always do a similar thing – we had jumping castles, face painting, a dozen or so service providers ran their own activities, sausage sizzle... you know things that people like to come along to. I would say that was the real starting point as far as community involvement goes, the event was free, we invited everyone along. It was just a really good day with all those really initial relationships forming with community and us; this was just the start of it.

So that side of the story, in terms of bringing in the physical community around the House that was the real start for it. And then we found that that first 12 months after then, people would come in but only sporadically and occasionally, and then as those relationships built they came in more and more and some started

volunteering and some started coming along to things more regularly.

It was just a matter of giving it that time for all those relationships to build up and between then and now, we’ve just exploded. It’s created its own momentum, to the point where the House, for instance, one of the community members came in yesterday, they feel so much ownership of the place and they know where everything is, they came in and started cleaning, they just feel so much at home that they could just come in and help out. They love coming down here, they live close by, they literally just came down, said “g’day, I’m bored can I do some stuff” and we just said “yep”, and without prompting they cleaned the house. They mopped the floors, emptied the bins, refilled the paper towel and soap dispensers.

It’s a really great story that one and a good example of relationships slowly building up... He has been coming along with his kids, his youngest is in Kinder so he’s got two days off a week. So he’s at that point in his life where he’s got some days to himself and wanted to come to the Neighbourhood House and get involved. He likes helping out and he’s good at organising things and we certainly took that on board and asked

The community development model... book wise study wise I’ve never been into that much. But I always knew that if you empower community they’ll take it on, but to see it happen has been a real eye opener. I’d seen it in small ways in smaller groups but to see it in a community is just amazing.



him to come down and help out and at that point he used to come down a couple of days a week. Initially the partner was annoyed about it. Didn't so much want him to come down... but then after a couple of weeks they saw the change in him and so started encouraging him to come down. He started to get excited about his own life, more enthusiastic. Really early on I remember he came to that very first event. Was just one of those slow relationships, got comfortable with the staff, made friends, and formed that relationship where they're comfortable with the House, and the rest is history.

That whole soft entry goes a very long way. That story is basically the story of the House.

We went from a slow start, we were new staff members in this community, didn't know anyone, but once those relationships started forming, time went on and everyone started getting comfortable with each other, forming that trust. Since then, the 12 – 18 month mark it's created a momentum of itself. Steam rolled and continues to.

Something I think that was very, very important – we asked community what they wanted and we started DOING that. We did three community consultations, round table forums; first one we got a really good cross section of community including some really local people. We invited everyone in and said we're here, we're open, we need to know what

you think are the biggest issues in the community we can potentially try and address and what you want to see the House doing. When I say good cross section, we have councillors, teachers, service providers and community members, and most importantly very local community members. So that started really well. Quite coincidentally all three we did, all found the same results in what they wanted from the House. We did that in a two month time frame. We also did many, many, one-on-one conversations. If there was someone playing in the park, we went and talked to the families, if they came to our events we talked to them, it was a fairly cross the board consensus of what they wanted to see the house doing. They wanted us to work with their youth, life skills type programs and food programs. But top of the list early on was communication, they wanted to know what was going on at the House, so we did letter box drops, face book, newsletters... They just wanted to know what was going on. Secondly was youth, they wanted activities for the youth to do. They feel that they have nothing to do, and lots of issues regarding youth. Thirdly, life skills, food programs and everything involved in food programs.

In terms of change or outcomes I was hoping for, I didn't have a specific thing in what I wanted to see. I more wanted to be as effective in doing what I could in what the community wanted and to follow through. I didn't go in with specific things I wanted to start, what I wanted to do was exactly what community wanted/needed.

I didn't want to start anything I couldn't do, I didn't want to over commit. I wanted to start slow and not start a heap of things just to fill a void. I wanted the community to really drive what they wanted. So I deliberately started out slow and it's served me well so far. As far as personal opportunity,

My driver was to try and do whatever came in front of me the best that I can... my best quality is that I know I don't know everything, but I have no doubt in that I will sort anything out that comes in front of me.



to open a House from basically scratch I don't think you could have a better opportunity, I'm so grateful, although it came from unfortunate circumstances.

Another key thing is, in the vast majority of things we've done – program wise, event wise, classes whatever you want to call it, I rarely started something without involving community members or another service. It was very rare that it was driven by staff here alone. Even to the point when it was extremely clear they wanted us to work with youth, I still didn't start it then, because I wanted to form relationships with other service providers that worked with youth so that it was a number of services working towards that exact same thing. Rather than “righty they want us to work with youth let's start a program next week”.

When I first started it was 400 coming through a month and 20 from local community. Now it's 800 a month with half from our local community. This shows people come to our House from our intended area and from

outside it. Probably... in terms of the biggest change, is to see the continuing growth when you give community ownership... almost like you give them the keys to the car... give them that initial drive... they've just taken it on. The ownership they've taken to it lock, stock and barrel and ran with it. It's taken on a life of its own.

They seem to be thirsting for it. It is one thing to say you have to apply for x amount of jobs a week, attend x amount of appointments and attend a work for the dole program, this isn't appealing. But if you show them all the various ways the can participate at the House, be it as a participant or volunteer which is non-invasive and not an initial massive commitment, this seems to be quite appealing and attendance is stable and regular.

I'm both surprised and not surprised if that makes sense by the fact that once you empower the community there's nothing stopping them. It goes by a bit of a process in a way: It starts by forming those relationships, finding out what might interest them, then encouraging them in that

interest, trying to empower them in that interest, from then on basically step back and guide if need be, and support. People will bring people along with them, so if you just worked with one person... not that you work with just one person but when you're working with someone, that effect is going out wider than just that one person, and you see that. They bring their friends in, and then they start coming to groups themselves and over time you develop relationships with them... it just forms momentum and before long you never get to sit at your desk and do those reports you're meant to do 😊.

That's exactly what's gone on, we've had continuous growth but it starts with one person, then two, then four... so the growth is growing as well.

Community development... It works beautifully. It's about treating people equally, not expecting they can't be involved.

### Part Two: Re-Starting the Governance at Ulverstone Neighbourhood House

**SD** The starting point was Devonport Community House taking this on, in particular Kate (Beer – Manager Devonport Community House) and Devonport Community House committee.

**KB** “For the Devonport Committee and I it was that we didn't want the Ulverstone House lost to the community and so wanted to step up and take it on for the community of Ulverstone and the network of Neighbourhood Houses. The starting point importantly was the Devonport committee wanted to step up and we had staff at Devonport that were able to step up and take it on. Simon Douglas from here was willing and able to step up and take on the acting Coordinator role. The Devonport Committee itself were willing to be the mentor and liaison point for the House and we ran it for

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.....

*three to four months before we began seeking expressions of interest from community members to be on the Ulverstone Committee.”*

**SD** It was explained to the Devonport Committee that they were going to be responsible for Ulverstone for the next 12 – 18 months. The expectation was that they had to form a committee at the Ulverstone House, write a constitution and do everything that had to be legally done. So it cannot be understated how important DCH's role has been, the amount of time involved. Invaluable doesn't say it enough. In particular Kate Beer, her commitment was just, I don't even know how to put it into words, the amount of work and commitment was huge, she put in many, many, extra hours... as she does with everything she does.

**KB** *“We knew we'd pay a cost with Simon leaving and the effort we'd have to put in, but invariably when you have good staff and you know that they can step up with the knowledge they have and the knowledge they've been growing with in the role, you've got to provide that opportunity for them. So it's been really exciting to see that development, as Simon stepped up and worked with that community. He came from that area originally and he had that affinity with it, and so it was a natural progression”*

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Probably... in terms of the biggest change, is to see the continuing growth when you give community ownership... almost like you give them the keys to the car... give them that initial drive... they've just taken it on. The ownership they've taken to it lock, stock and barrel and ran with it. It's taken on a life of its own.

.....

**SD** The starting point as far as forming the committee was the same time as we were consulting the community. While we were asking the community what they needed, we were also asking... “At the moment we're re-opening this House and we'd love to hear from anyone that would be interested in putting their hand up for the committee and having a chat about that”. I can't remember exact figures or even time frames but within about six weeks we had ten people! It really was quite a short period of time, there was no shortage of people that wanted to see this place take off... and had a commitment to it. Once committee meetings started, or more to the point, a steering committee, over the following 12 – 18 months we virtually had no one miss a meeting, generally we had full numbers for every meeting.

By the six month mark, meetings started and quickly became fortnightly. During the following 12 months we were writing a constitution, three sessions of governance training.. we were basically meeting fortnightly for 12 months. So their commitment was phenomenal. Committee members included a lock smith, we met when he redid all the locks, I had a chat to him and asked him if he was interested in being part of it and he joined. We had a social work student, men's shed supervisor, a fairly prominent community member (not service provider wise), she's been in the community a long time. Basically four non service providers and the rest were service providers, all but split down the

middle. They just wanted big success for the local community.

Initially they were called a steering committee, and worked alongside DCH, and Kate and myself were part of the process. So ultimate governance came down to DCH and Kate at that stage, their names were on the dotted line so to speak. I guess I was in a supervisory role and I might have been on the ground at Ulverstone but was still an employee of Devonport and trying to guide this place to where people wanted it to be.

**KB** *“It's been great to see the developing skills of the committee, in fact both committees through the process, and our staff. That's been one of the biggest changes through the governance and auspicing. But of course importantly the service to the community that Ulverstone Neighbourhood House now provides.*

*Another benefit of the process... it's been good to see how the relationship with DHHS Community Partnership Team in the North West has strengthened through this. And that they worked with us about communicating to the community in a way that cut through the government jargon about why the house was re-opening initially under our auspice, they worked with us around that and were there to help through the process”*

**SD** All the stuff behind the scenes was nuts. Getting an ABN, getting the Constitution passed through, doing it in the right steps... you have to do this first to get that. You have to be able to do this to get that. All that crap was nuts. On the outside looking in you probably thought we were doing absolutely nothing but there was so much to do and we changed our name again after starting.. Didn't that cause lots of hassles! We started out as Central Coast Community house but then changed to Ulverstone Neighbourhood House. Just the Central Coast name caused so

much confusion with five other local services having very similar names.

The Neighbourhood House had been in Ulverstone for close to 30 years, but for us, in all senses though it was a brand new House with a brand new committee. One challenge was everyone finding their feet both individually and as a group. Whether it be a brand new chairperson or Manager of a brand new organisation, that initial finding our feet took a little while. All of us took some time to fit into our roles comfortably and confidently. This is one of the major benefits of the DCH auspice.

One example was the training provided for committee members in various roles, strategic planning and budgeting, this help in a big way. Further to this the further training UNH and DCH undertook with Ron from NHT continues to take everyone from strength to strength.

We are all more confident. It was interesting to see everyone developing and understanding all the aspects and roles, including myself. It's almost like everyone growing at the same rate. The community getting comfortable with the House, the committee getting comfortable with me, getting

comfortable with their role for the community, everyone that was here was basically new.

The support that people want to give is just amazing... in terms of the governance... Devonport Committee, Kate especially, the effort that everyone's given to make this happen is second to none... exceptional.

**KB** *"It was an enormous workload, it was constant but it was exciting and we had the appropriate people here in committee and staff that we could do it. It was probably 12 months of extra work, probably 20 hours a week of extra work, but it's got us to where it is today. I so take away that people working together can achieve so much. You've got to have someone to drive it, you've got to have someone to back you and then people will come along and participate if they feel welcome and then they drive it. Working together it can be done!"*

**SD** And it still continues... the want from the community and the effort to make all this happen and for the House to work. And I think the way it was done, the process, meant it was driven from the ground up. Yes it was driven from Devonport initially and needed to be... but that idea of going to the community asking their opinion

and getting their support, then encouraging them, come along and join us so to speak.

**KB** *"It's very satisfying to see it up and running and running so well, and that the community want to be a part of it"*

**SD** To me it was very much opening a brand new house... Day one was opening the doors to a House, it was virtually an empty House... it was closed... I wasn't following in anyone's shoes. I couldn't have picked a better spot to be in in my first coordinator role. Looking back... I had no experience with this process and so I had a blank canvas so to speak. My driver was to try and do whatever came in front of me the best that I can... my best quality is that I know I don't know everything, but I have no doubt in that I will sort anything out that comes in front of me.

The community development model... book wise study wise I've never been into that much. But I always knew that if you empower community they'll take it on, but to see it happen has been a real eye opener. I'd seen it in small ways in smaller groups but to see it in a community is just amazing. 🏠

## DELORAINÉ HOUSE

As we all know "food brings people together". During one of our meetings a person who does not cook much anymore, had beautiful memories of some dishes and wondered if they can be available anywhere? With the participation of those around the table we got hold of the recipe and cooked the marvellous dish. Let me tell you, we made her day!

E l e n a

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September, 2015

ISBN 978-1-943844-25-8

