

Media Release

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Local social enterprise making a positive impact

Regional businesses are stepping up to support local people with a disability who want to find paid work, and Wangaratta resident Brittney Hall couldn't be happier.

Thursday 21 November is World Social Enterprise Day – a global movement raising awareness of purpose-driven businesses, and the positive impact they make on people's lives.

Brittney, aged 23, has been completing on-the-job hospitality training at Wangaratta social enterprise cafe Where Is My Coffee? for the past two years.

Run by for-purpose aged and disability organisation VMCH, the cafe has supported 46 people since it opened in late 2021.

Where Is My Coffee? provides a safe and supportive environment for people to learn hospitality and general job skills at their own pace, guided by experienced hospitality and disability support workers. When participants feel ready to move on, VMCH supports them on the path to award-wage employment within its own social enterprises, or roles with 20 Employment Partners across the region.

One of those partners is McDonald's in Wangaratta, where Brittney recently secured her first paid job!

"I was pretty nervous when I went for the interview ... but when I got the job, I was proud and excited," the mother-of-one says.

Practical training at the cafe is just one part of the journey, with the VMCH Employment Pathways team helping clients with job seeking, resume writing, interview preparation, then ongoing support as they navigate the paid workforce.

Brittney says this ongoing support, plus earning a wage to support her daughter, has built her confidence and independence. Eventually, she'd love to complete her studies to work in disability support.

"When I first started here (at the cafe) I was shy and quiet. Now, I talk to everyone. The customer service part has been my favourite."

As part of Social Enterprise Day, VMCH has released its first Social Enterprise Report. Over the past 12 months, it has delivered 27,000 hours of job skills training to 139 clients and award wages to 11 staff with a disability across its own suite of social enterprises across Melbourne and regional Victoria. These include cafes, a coffee van, maintenance and gardening crews, and an online store selling bespoke goods created by participants at its Cre8 Sheds in Wangaratta and Shepparton.

Harley Dalgleish, VMCH Senior Manager Group Programs and Employment, says the organisation is proud to support people who have the drive to work, but not always the opportunity.

He said the ongoing investment and development in VMCH's own social enterprises, as well as growing its number of Employment Partners, is critical in helping VMCH achieve its first milestone to support 100 people with a disability to find and sustain meaningful award-wage employment by 2025.

"We're committed to not only supporting people with disabilities find employment but breaking down barriers for businesses to employ them," Harley says.

"We work closely with our clients and their employers to ensure the relationship is working for both of them. Often businesses may feel it's too daunting or there's too much red tape to employ a person with disability, but it's just not the case. By normalising the employment of people with disability in a range of roles and industries, we reduce the anxiety of businesses to embrace this fantastic opportunity. We also walk the talk at VMCH, employing people with disability after they have completed their job skills program across our own large organisation in a variety of roles, including our social enterprises."

Where Is My Coffee? Cafe Coordinator Marguerite Ferguson says the cafe team pride themselves on creating a supportive and safe space for trainees.

"Brittney, for example, has been through a big transition, moving to a new town with her daughter and starting fresh. Now, she's made friends and is more social. She'll even go up to new participants at the cafe and greet them, it's really lovely to see."

Marguerite says she's proud to work for VMCH and witness amazing outcomes like Brittney's.

"Working here is lots of fun – it's the best place. Just to watch everyone grow. You see them walk in, shy, scared, and then flourish and become their own person. It's miraculous."

Where Is My Coffee? is located at 1/103 Murphy St, Wangaratta. To learn more about VMCH job skills programs, call us on 1300 698 624.

Media enquiries

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About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic, for-purpose organisation, love, joy, hospitality and courage aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and compassionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.