

CONNECT

March 2023



INSIDE:

New regional social housing
Support for asylum seekers
Your support last Christmas ... and more!



CatholicCare
VICTORIA

Strengthening families & communities

Welcome from the CEO



Agnes Sheehan, CEO of CatholicCare Victoria.

CatholicCare Victoria is starting this year with a number of new exciting community programs being launched, including the opening of our first Children's Contact Centre in Wangaratta, and Open Doors programs. The CatholicCare Victoria team is focused on delivering our strategic goal of building thriving communities through disrupting the cycle of disadvantage.

We are on a journey to build over 270 homes across Victoria and it is imperative that these are not just homes, but thriving communities.

CatholicCare Victoria and our subsidiary CatholicCare Victoria Housing will be supporting our communities and our clients to have access to safe, secure, and quality housing which is a necessary step in achieving social justice for our communities. We will be able to provide those communities with our outstanding support services. When we provide both housing and support, even people with the most complex needs can sustain a home and avoid re-entering homelessness.

In December 2022, Open Doors counselling was integrated into CatholicCare Victoria's suite of services. We are so grateful for this opportunity to continue Open Doors' compassionate work and mission.

Bringing all social services of the Victorian Catholic dioceses under one entity has helped us deliver enormous benefits to the vulnerable and marginalised by improving coordination and greater choice for clients. Coming together has also enabled programs to scale-up and respond to new and emerging communities. Critically, it has given CatholicCare Victoria additional resources to address the root causes of poverty and injustice across Victoria.

This year more people in Victoria will see our three-petal logo. It is a powerful visual reminder of how our staff and our supporters are compassionately delivering more services to vulnerable people: by strengthening their relationships, increasing their resilience, and assisting and encouraging our most marginalised to be part of the community.

Thank you for choosing to support the work of CatholicCare Victoria. Together we can disrupt disadvantage and build thriving communities.



CatholicCare Victoria Housing

CatholicCare Victoria Housing (CCVH) provides long-term accommodation for people on a low income.

We've spoken with Fiona Williams, CEO of CatholicCare Victoria Housing, to share more about the program and its impact for Victorians.

Q: Fiona, what services does CatholicCare Victoria Housing provide?

Housing is fundamental to people's wellbeing. It's extremely hard to thrive without having somewhere safe and secure to live.

We offer safe, comfortable and affordable homes. Through CatholicCare Victoria's programs, we arrange additional support when needed such as counselling, or financial and material aid, so that thriving communities can be built.

Q: Can you share more about the impact CCVH has in supporting Victorians?

Without the support of CCVH, some tenants would become homeless, if they weren't already, and their health issues would worsen. In some cases, they would also have had to leave the community where they lived to find affordable housing somewhere else.

Housing just affects so many things. In terms of your ability to work, to hold down a job. Particularly people with mental health issues, it's much harder to look after themselves when they haven't got a stable housing environment.

"Once when I went to check in on how a tenant had settled in, he said 'I was able to sit down and have a little cry to myself, because now I have place to myself, my own space'" - Kathy, Team Leader, CatholicCare Victoria Housing

Q: Who can access housing through CCVH?

Our tenants come from different cohorts, such as singles, couples, families, single parent families, those who are on age pension, disability pension, jobs seeker payments, and parenting payments. We don't discriminate.

Tenants have to be registered on the Victorian Housing Register. Our tenants face all sorts of challenges. They are generally low income tenants, but they could be escaping family violence, living with disabilities, have mental health or drug and alcohol challenges, identify as LGBTQI, or aged.

Q: How will CCVH support more people in need of affordable housing?

We are expanding through a development program to build over 270 properties across regional Victoria in the next couple of years.

Our partners in development include Homes Victoria, Catholic Development Fund and the Victorian State Government Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. We're also partnering with councils, developers, local builders and Affordable Housing Solutions.

The locations of our new and upcoming properties include Darley, Delacombe, Bacchus Marsh, Bannockburn, Melton South, Mildura, Officer, Shepparton, Swan Hill, Warrnambool, and Wendouree - all areas of need.

In some of these locations there is not any social housing, or only very little available now. These properties will be providing opportunities for people to live and stay in the community where they belong.

Support for Asylum Seekers

CatholicCare Victoria's Asylum Seeker Support Program provides assistance for those who have been displaced from their home country, and are seeking a safe and brighter future in Victoria.

Without supported housing and a sense of security, asylum seekers can feel incredibly vulnerable. They can be prone to poor mental health, language barriers and social isolation.

"The immediate goal of our program is to support asylum seeker families to keep their housing, and to make sure they have enough food for the household," says Sally-Anne Petrie, Pastoral Coordinator, Asylum Seeker Support Program - CatholicCare Victoria.

"Without CatholicCare Victoria's support, a lot of these families would be homeless and would not be able to feed their family. Our longer-term goal with these families is to empower them so that they can make a brighter future for themselves."

"There are often very diverse challenges for each family we assist. But one of the key challenges is the uncertainty around their residency, as they don't have a permanent visa. This uncertainty has implications for their mental health and wellbeing. It also means they don't have government financial support like Centrelink, so they don't have a financial safety net if they were to lose their job. They'd become homeless," says Sally-Anne.

CatholicCare Victoria has held a close partnership with the parishes of Camberwell, Balwyn, Deepdene, Surrey Hills and Wattle Park for many years, with the goal of supporting local asylum seeker families in need through our Asylum Seeker Support Program.

To support asylum seeker families, the parish community provides funding which is used for

housing and rental support, food vouchers, and education and employment support. They also donate essential items like toiletries, baby nappies, and household items and appliances.

"For us as a parish community, it's been really important to partner with an organisation who can assist with providing support in a way that's beyond what the parish can do on its own - an organisation that has the capacity and expertise to work in the area of asylum seekers," says Fr Brendan Reed, Parish Priest.

"For our parishioners, there's a strong sense that those seeking asylum, and refugees, are close to their hearts. And they're really conscious of the fact that there are so many displaced people across the globe. If we can do some small thing to support them, then that's what we want to do," says Fr Brendan.

"From a very local point of view, through this funding project that we have with CatholicCare Victoria, some of the benefits we've seen is the empowerment," says Kate Baines, Stewardship Coordinator.

"Some of these families have been given, after a transitional period, the opportunity to take on the leases of houses on their own."

"They have become part of their community and are looking after themselves, which gives not only dignity but also pride for these families. So that's been heart-warming in many ways, that the parish has been able to facilitate that," says Kate.

CatholicCare Victoria would also like to acknowledge the generous support from St John of God Health Care for their funding towards the Asylum Seeker Support program. We also acknowledge the assistance of other parishes and partnerships who have assisted with supported housing opportunities and material aid as needs in the community are arising.

Nadia and Hamid's story

Nadia* and her husband, Hamid* are an asylum seeker family with five children, who came into CatholicCare Victoria's Asylum Seeker Support Program 12 months ago.

They have a bridging visa, with work rights. Our Asylum Seeker Support Program assisted the family significantly with financial aid through our Emergency Relief service, until Hamid found work in a local factory.

Hamid's income covers only the rent for their house, and so CatholicCare Victoria has continued to support the family with monthly food vouchers, as well as items to make their house a home - including a large rug for the bare floor in their lounge room, so the children can sit and play in the winter.

The parish community donated a reconditioned lawn mower, which Hamid was delighted to receive, as he had previously been cutting the grass with scissors, by hand.

CatholicCare Victoria has enrolled Nadia in driving lessons, which she has nearly completed. She is soon hoping to get her licence so that she can look for some work in the evenings (while Hamid is home) to supplement their income.

Nadia has also been linked into local English classes, which she is loving.

**At CatholicCare Victoria, we respect everyone who comes to us for help. Many are working towards a fresh start in life. So, while the stories are true, client names have been changed to protect their privacy. Thank you for your understanding.*



Kate Baines (left) and Sally-Anne Petrie with Christmas presents donated from the parish community for asylum seeker and refugee families.

Nourish and Flourish

As part of our strategic commitment to building a thriving community and disrupting disadvantage, CatholicCare Victoria works closely with teachers and families of St Anthony's Primary School in Melton South to find opportunities to support all young people in their education, and in Melton more broadly.

In December 2019, nine St Anthony's Primary School families participated in a co-design workshop with CatholicCare Victoria to discover opportunities to support children and families at their school.

One of the ideas resulting from this workshop was a breakfast club for students. We know that breakfast is often described as the most important meal of the day, especially for younger children with developing brains!

The regularity of wholesome, daily meal patterns comprised of healthy foods is important for the physical and mental development of children and adolescents.

School breakfast programs are becoming increasingly popular (particularly in communities where there are families doing it tough) to support children and families facing food insecurity, and to enable opportunities for social connection and other support.

"We believe that providing breakfast will also help improve children's readiness to learn, engagement with their school, and concentration and memory in the classroom," says Ruth Knight, Manager Strategic Projects at CatholicCare Victoria.

It has been estimated that one in five Victorian children arrive at school hungry, affecting their ability to learn and do their best (MacDonald, 2019).

St Anthony's Primary School's wellbeing team had observed that there were children regularly starting their school day without breakfast, and so this idea evolved into the Nourish and Flourish program. Nourish and Flourish covers three related wellbeing programs - one being the breakfast club.

"The breakfast club is open to all St Anthony's students two days per week, and is attracting between 190-240 students each morning," says Ruth.

"A key principle of any school breakfast program is that it is free and available to all students at the school, to reduce stigma."

The Nourish and Flourish program is supported by a paid coordinator, as well as teaching staff and volunteers.

CatholicCare Victoria provided seed funding for the coordinator role, and leveraged professional expertise and connections for the program design and implementation phase. This included help to source community funding partners.

"We now have a number of local businesses funding the Nourish and Flourish breakfast club," says Ruth.

St Anthony's Primary School in Melton South has not been eligible for a Government-funded breakfast program, but by leveraging CatholicCare Victoria funding and other supports, St Anthony's Primary School is helping to meet this unmet need for their families.



Victims Assistance Program

The Victims Assistance Program provides information, practical supports and service referrals for victims and witnesses of violent crime, and for family members of affected victims.

"We work with victims of violent crime to reduce or mitigate the harm that a violent crime has caused. Assisting them with anything from reporting to police, emotional support, court preparation, and just being with them through that process," says Jacinta Wainwright, Senior Manager of Justice Programs, CatholicCare Victoria.

"Helping people understand and supporting them through any criminal justice processes can make a huge difference to the overwhelming stress that somebody might be experiencing during that process. There's a lot of processes that don't necessarily make sense to those who don't work in a court environment, and it can be pretty intimidating."

"We also look at what has been the impact of the crime more broadly on an individual or family, and what they might need to get back on their feet, so to speak. That might mean counselling, to address any psychological trauma. Or even assisting with the costs of some medical bills; connecting them with TAC or WorkCover; or helping them apply to the victims register."

The Victims Assistance Program can also provide advocacy support for victims and others in need.

"One woman, who was a witness to a crime, identified that due to her mental health she wasn't going to manage or cope with having to give evidence in court. We successfully advocated on her behalf with the prosecutors, engaging with her psychologist and GP. This was an enormous relief, because she genuinely believed that she would have a breakdown if she had to go through that particular process," says Jacinta.

"Our criminal justice system can be retraumatizing for victims. We can make the difference between mitigating how the court process contributes to that trauma."

"With our support, victims of violent crime are often able to get back on their feet more quickly. Without this additional help it can be a more difficult experience for many."

CatholicCare Victoria is funded by the Victorian State Government Department of Justice and Community Safety to deliver the Victims Assistance Program in the Grampians and Barwon South West regions.

Our amazing donors, thank you!

Your compassion helped us to spread hope, joy and love during Christmas.



Left: Agnes Sheehan, CEO of CatholicCare Victoria with Matthew Cassin, CEO of Catholic Development Fund (CDF).
Right: CDF staff who volunteered and helped with packing food hampers.

The amazing support from many wonderful donors who gave to the 2022 Giving Tree Appeal have enabled CatholicCare Victoria to distribute food hampers to those in need across Victoria.

Because of the generosity and compassion of our donors, 610 food hampers were distributed to families and individuals struggling to put food on the table last Christmas. On behalf of these families, we say a huge thank you to all who donated to the CatholicCare Victoria Giving Tree Appeal.

CatholicCare Victoria would also like to thank Catholic Development Fund (CDF) Melbourne, for their generous support towards the 2022 Giving Tree Appeal. Also, a group of 14 amazing staff from CDF helped us with packing food hampers.

Thanks also to Rinoldi Pasta for donating Vetta Spaghetti, and to Food Factory Sales for providing discounted food items for the food hampers.

“One of the best feelings I had when giving out the food hampers to people was the smiles on their faces, and the kind words they said to me when I handed it over to them.

It made me feel proud of myself and the organisation I work for, because the happiness and smiles we put on people’s faces is why CatholicCare Victoria exists.

Things like food hampers are significant for an organisation like us because many people out there need our support.”
- Haroun Kafi, CatholicCare Victoria

