Winter 2025

Junction Support Services Community Connect

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Windbreak and Youth Training Programs Coordinator, Rikki Whittaker, and Social Enterprise and Youth Pathways Manager, David Kapay.

From the Source: Transforming young lives through food

A fresh new hands-on initiative is stirring up excitement at Junction Support Services, blending local ingredients and knowledge, real-world learning, and community spirit into a powerful recipe for youth empowerment.

Based at Windbreak3690 and Close Collective Café, From the Source is an engaging 18-week food literacy program designed to support young people aged 15–21.

The program is crafted especially for at-risk youth, emphasising education and skill-building.

It provides engaging, hands-on food experiences that explore the origins of local produce, how to access it, and the journey of sourcing and supplying it - all while enhancing food selection and cooking skills.

This program guides young people from the source of food to showing them how to prepare healthy, affordable, and nutritious meals they can be proud of.

“From the Source offers a warm and welcoming environment where participants can develop essential life skills while exploring local food systems,” says Rikki Whittaker, Junction’s Windbreak and Youth Training Programs Coordinator.

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From nourishing initiatives to bold new beginnings, this issue is packed with stories that celebrate growth, generosity, and grassroots impact.

- Wodonga rallies for a heartfelt fundraiser.
- Discover how our trail-blazing Diverge program is transforming the future for disengaged youth.
- Explore a W.I.S.E. new initiative helping young people shape their futures.
- Learn why Borinya and Junction have united for Homelessness Week.
- Our Pay-It-Forward initiative is filling plates and hearts.
- Pioneering Homes First program re-shapes homelessness support.
- Junction shares insights to strengthen family reunification.
- Opening the doors at Wodonga's Education First Youth Foyer.

Fundraiser unites the community and honours unsung hero

Scones and community spirit made Junction Support Services' inaugural Biggest Morning Tea one to remember, raising an impressive $1,887.95 for the Cancer Council — nearly doubling our original $1000 goal.

Held on Friday, June 27, at Windbreak3690 Youth Space in Wodonga, the event brought together supporters, locals and Junction staff for a heartfelt morning of connection and cause.

Led by Junction's OHS and Wellbeing Coordinator James Howley and the incredible Close Collective Café team, guests were treated to freshly baked scones, sandwiches, fruit platters, and hot drinks, all in support of cancer research, prevention, and support programs.

The fundraiser holds special meaning for the Junction community.

Close Collective Café was named in honour of Kate Close, former Team Manager of the Intensive Case Management Service, whose dedication to vulnerable young people continues to inspire Junction's work.

CEO Megan Hanley shared, "Hosting a community morning tea and raising funds through our Close Collective Café is a perfect way to continue Kate's impact."

Beyond the event itself, Close Collective Café donated 50 per cent of all scone sales throughout June to the Cancer Council, helping bump the total to nearly $2,000.

"It's a collective effort to stamp out cancer," says Social Enterprise and Youth Pathways Manager David Kapay. "We're incredibly grateful for the generosity of our community."

Relaunched Diverge re-writes the future

Junction Support Services has been awarded the tender for the Youth Empowerment Program, enabling us to relaunch our Diverge program throughout Wodonga and Wangaratta.

Previously, Diverge was provided through the Safer Communities program to support young people aged 13 to 21 who were known to the police but had not yet engaged with the Youth Justice system.

Our relaunched Diverge is supported by the Australian government's Youth Empowerment Program. Diverge is a 24-month project that empowers young people aged 10 to 17 and their families to overcome challenging circumstances and promote positive changes in their lives.

"We are excited to relaunch Diverge and significantly impact the lives of young people in our community," says Annie Shirley, Junction's Regional Manager – Client Services.

"Our goal is to provide alternative pathways for those who engage in or are at risk of engaging in criminal and/or anti-social behaviour.

"We're grateful for our overwhelming support; it shows a strong community commitment to supporting our youth.

"Junction Support Services greatly appreciates this support and is dedicated to making a positive impact."

The new model will emphasise practical and engaging learning experiences, including career exploration opportunities.

This approach re-engages participants with education and prepares them for future vocational pathways in a supportive environment.

Diverge aims to change young people's paths by fostering a commitment to education, building positive connections with family and the community, and promoting inclusion.

In 2023, Wodonga TAFE supported 12 students from the initial Diverge program and will continue to play an essential role in the updated model.

Transforming young lives through food

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The program takes a 'paddock to plate' approach, guiding participants through every step of the food journey — from sourcing fresh local produce to planning and preparing delicious, healthy, and affordable meals.

From the Source will be delivered across four main Food domains:

- Planning and management of food
- Selection of food
- Preparation of food
- Eating of food

Lessons will focus on outreach, relationship building and engagement with diverse communities to reshape food literacy through exposure to local produce.

Students will see where their food comes from and learn to prepare and plate up local produce in an affordable and nutritional way in as safe and supported community-based environment. Rikki and Junction's Social Enterprise and Youth Pathways Manager, David Kapay, collaborated closely with food producers to create a course centred on self-efficacy and connection. "Food is a universal language," says David. "When young people learn to cook, they're not just feeding themselves — they're discovering their potential."

Drawing on his experience working at Jamie Oliver's Fifteen London, David applies the same passion and purpose to From the Source, delivering live demonstrations and sharing his culinary expertise through customised sessions.

Topics include food handling, budgeting, meal planning, and building confidence in the kitchen — all with takeaway recipes to encourage independent learning.

Junction CEO Megan Hanley says the program represents a bold and meaningful step forward.

"This initiative is about more than teaching cooking skills," Megan says. "It's about giving young people the confidence and capability to shape their futures."

From The Source is the first program of its kind in the region, and Junction is currently seeking enthusiastic participants who are ready to explore the world of food in a welcoming and supportive environment.

If you or someone you know is interested, we'd love to hear from you.

Pay-It-Forward puts food on the table

Junction Support Services is strengthening its commitment to community connection through an innovative meal voucher initiative, Pay It Forward. It's designed to promote kindness and foster a sense of community spirit.

In partnership with Close Collective Café and Windbreak3690 youth space, the initiative gives young people aged 12 to 25 access to nutritious, ready-to-eat meals.

For just $10, community members can buy a voucher that provides a meal to someone in need.

"Pay It Forward is all about harnessing the incredible generosity of our community," says Social Enterprise and Youth Pathways Manager, David Kapay.

"For only $10, you can fill a hungry belly and make a real difference."

David and the Close Collective Café team work alongside young people at Windbreak3690 to prepare the fresh, nutritious meals.

Windbreak3690 youth space then distributes Pay It Forward meals to young people.

The initiative not only provides essential support to those in need but also creates learning opportunities for young people, teaching them valuable cooking skills and promoting healthy eating practices.

The program was born from a brilliant idea by Junction's Youth Advisory Group, YO3690, who wanted to create a way to support vulnerable community members. Since launching in March, almost 300 meal vouchers have been purchased by cafe patrons.

"This initiative is a testament to the power of community," says Junction CEO Megan Hanley.

"It shows how small acts of kindness can build a strong, thriving community for all."

Junction Support Services is excited to announce the launch of the W.I.S.E. Program.

For young people aged up to 20 years who have received a Victorian Early School Leaver Exemption, W.I.S.E. stands for Work Readiness, Inclusion, Skills Development, and Education Reengagement.

W.I.S.E. is part of the Victorian Early School Leavers Connection Initiative (VELCI).

To learn more or refer a young person, call (02) 6043 7400, email wise@junction.org.au or visit junction.org.au.

Congratulations to Ann Guns, our Education Support for Children in Care Service Manager, on her well-deserved award!

Ann has been recognised for her Excellent and Sustained Contribution to the Teaching and Learning of History and her dedication to the History Teachers' Association of Victoria.

Her passion and commitment to education continue to inspire those around her, and we are so proud to have her on our team!

Borinya and Junction cook up a project to support Homelessness Week

During Homelessness Week, students from Wangaratta's Borinya School rolled up their sleeves to prepare and donate hot meals for community members accessing the Wangaratta Night Shelter.

Supported by Junction Support Services' Homelessness Services team, this initiative helped highlight the importance of community partnerships in making a real difference in the lives of individuals experiencing homelessness in our region.

"Junction is committed to strengthening local solutions and fostering connections like this that help build strong, thriving communities," said Megan Waters, Junction's Homelessness Services Manager.

Borinya Principal Eamonn Buckley said the partnership truly reflected the school's values of compassion and taking action.

"We're proud to join with Junction Support Services and Wangaratta Night Shelter, whose commitment to supporting vulnerable people inspires us, and grateful for the opportunity to contribute," Mr Buckley said.

Spotlight on... HOMES FIRST

Exciting progress in innovative pilot program

Homelessness Services Manager, Megan Waters had the privilege of speaking at the Benalla Homelessness Response Group's very first AGM.

These passionate volunteers support those doing it tough in the region, and we were honoured to share how our Homes First program is creating real, lasting change.

Homes First helps people not only find a safe place to live, but the support they need to stay there.

Junction Support Services' dedicated homelessness team is making remarkable strides with the Homes First program, a pioneering Victorian pilot initiative to deliver three-year support packages to 448 clients over five years.

The Homes First program offers comprehensive support to individuals and families experiencing homelessness through intensive case management, culturally responsible care, peer support and counselling.

Junction provides Homes First services in the Ovens Murray and Goulburn areas and has been building strong relationships with other providers to ensure clients can access the necessary services and support.

"Unlike most homelessness programs that stop support once individuals are housed, Homes First is long-term, allowing us to provide continued support for as long as needed, which is fantastic," says Megan Waters, Junction's Homelessness Services manager.

Our team comprises case managers, Aboriginal case managers, peer workers, and dual diagnosis clinicians, each providing personalised, wraparound support to help clients sustain their housing and improve their lives.

This innovative program adopts a "housing first" approach, ensuring equitable access in high-demand areas.The program's first intake in December 2024 has already shown outstanding outcomes, highlighting the effectiveness of the Homes First program.

A client with a history of a transient lifestyle was the first person housed in the Goulburn region. Homes First funding was used to set up electricity and gas, and St. Vincent de Paul provided a bed and pillows.

The client is now excited about their new living situation and is considering buying a motorised scooter for shopping.

In another example, a client living in a caravan with their partner and dog has been accepted into long-term housing.

The Homes First team provided transport to and from town to help them access food and other necessities.

Happy about having a stable house, they are now working towards reconnecting with family, and getting back to work.

Further intake rounds are planned for mid-2025 and mid-2026, promising continued growth and impact for the Homes First program.

By supporting clients with complex needs and extended homelessness, the program ensures that those most in need receive the vital support they deserve.

Additional funding also supports access to health services and flexible funding to meet clients' goals, including access to NDIS and detox services.

"The Homes First program is setting a benchmark for future homelessness programs, demonstrating the power of a housing-first approach combined with intensive, personalised support," Megan says.

Care forum hears about our dedication to reunite families

Junction Support Services recently joined a gathering of sector leaders at the South Care Service Forum in Dandenong, working together to help more children and young people safely return to their families.

Held on June 23rd, the forum brought together professionals from across the South division to share insights and spark new ideas for increasing family reunification — a key goal in supporting vulnerable

young people. Junction's leadership team, including CEO Megan Hanley and COO Rhianna Coleiro, was proud to take part, alongside leaders from across the care sector.

Megan participated in a panel discussion, sharing Junction's innovative approach to working with complex families.

She also paid special tribute to Junction's incredible carers, whose passion and dedication help create safe, nurturing environments that support reunification success stories.

"This event was a powerful reminder of what we can achieve when we collaborate across sectors," Megan said. "Every safe return home is a testament to the care, commitment and teamwork behind the scenes."

Junction looks forward to continuing to work hand-in-hand with its partners to keep families connected and children safe.

Students settling into new home at Youth Foyer

The Wodonga Education First Youth Foyer is already providing life-changing opportunities for young students in the Border region.

The $15.7 million project gives 40 people aged 16 to 24 a safe and stable place to call home, with 20 young people already living at the Foyer.

The remaining 20 units are expected to be occupied by spring.

We're so proud to see the message of the Foyer spreading across our region.

Local media recently had a look inside the Foyer and were given an insight into how it is changing lives from one of our Youth Development Coaches, Abigail Connell.

"The students and potential students, are coming from situations where their housing has been unstable or unsafe," Abigail told ABC Radio.

"At the Education First Youth Foyer we're all on the same wavelength of creating that really homely, safe environment that's really secure for them."

Junction Support Services staff are on-site and available 24/7 to support students with everything from goal setting to day-to-day life skills like budgeting, cooking and navigating the rental market.

The Wodonga Education First Youth Foyer is a partnership between Homes Victoria, Wodonga TAFE, Beyond Housing, Brotherhood of St. Laurence, and Junction Support Services.