



KINDRED  
SPIRITS  
enterprises

the **LITTLE**  
**VILLAGE**  
**PROJECT**

Social Impact Report

2023



**Kindred Spirits Enterprises  
acknowledges the Traditional  
Owners of the land on which we  
live, work and play. We pay our  
respects to their Elders past and  
present – for they hold the  
memories, traditions, culture, and  
hopes of their community.**



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# Leading the way...

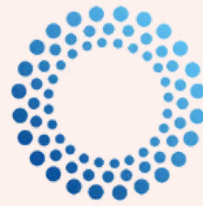
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## the **LITTLE** **VILLAGE** **PROJECT**

The Little Village Project is a community-led initiative to support vulnerable children in the Latrobe Valley. Founded by Ben Tunks, the Wellbeing Support Officer of a Latrobe Valley school, in 2020, the project strives to collaborate with primary schools to provide for their vulnerable students to help them thrive.

In partnership with Kindred Spirits Enterprises, the project began at Stockdale Road and expanded to Grey Street Primary School in 2023. The project has supported about 78 students by offering a range of services, including mental health care, speech therapy, and sensory support.

These interventions eliminate barriers to the students' engagement at school, enabling them to actively participate in classes and other activities, ultimately fostering a brighter and more promising future for each child.



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Kindred Spirits Enterprises (KSE) continues to evolve but its ethos remains the same: simply put, to help create social change so that people in the Gippsland may enjoy better lives.

The public charity was born in 2016 out of the Kindred Spirits Foundation run by Rhonda Renwick who, at the time, owned a major Latrobe Valley business. As well as having a local focus, support was also provided in KSE's earlier years to developing a native botanicals industry, working with Aboriginal enterprises in northern Australia.

Back home in Gippsland, education, environment and community-led projects emerged with the involvement of KSE. Today, we support projects such as Regen Gippsland and the Kurnai Young Parents Mentoring Initiative, and we are the proud auspicing body for The Little Village Project.



Ben Tunks  
TLVP  
Founder




Shaun Mallia  
KSE  
Executive Officer




# An idea is born...

Before the inception of The Little Village Project (LVP) in 2020 at Stockdale Road Primary School, it became apparent to school's Wellbeing Support Officer and LVP founder, Ben Tunks, that essential interventions for vulnerable students, such as assessments, therapeutic and clinical support, and allied health services, were financially out of reach for many families. Long waiting lists and complicated healthcare systems further hindered timely access to vital support. Existing programs often imposed rigid guidelines, leaving little room for innovation or tailored solutions.



In response to these challenges, **Ben envisioned the LVP as a safety net, designed to catch students who might otherwise slip through the cracks of existing services.** This community-led and funded initiative aimed to empower Stockdale Road Primary School staff to better address the complex issues impacting their students and families. Ultimately LVP **focuses on removing barriers hindering students' full participation in education, with a long-term goal of improving academic attainment and fostering healthy, happy, and fulfilled students.**



Ben's vision garnered support from the Gippsland Regional Executive Forum (GREF), leading to a partnership with Kindred Spirits Enterprises (KSE). KSE auspiced the project, offered valuable administrative resources, and helped initiate fundraising efforts. Members of GREF generously donated to fund initial student interventions, with KSE actively advocating for the project and establishing lasting partnerships. A dedicated advisory group comprising representatives from Gippsland's business community and local allied health professionals was formed to guide Ben, review student support requests, and ensure the project's success.

In 2022, the project secured a three-year partnership with the Latrobe Health Assembly, facilitating its expansion to additional schools in the Latrobe City Local Government Area. AGL Loy Yang also committed to a three-year funding partnership, further enabling the project's growth. Thanks to the sustained support of these organisations, the LVP expanded to Grey Street Primary School in mid-2023, with plans for further expansion in 2024.





# The Little Village Project in action...

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Students are identified for support when their functioning is impacted at school, which shows up in behavioural, attendance and academic data. Students might also be identified as needing assistance through engagement with parents/carers, via the school nurse, the Department of Education and Training Student Support Services team, community-based service providers or observations from their teacher and education support staff.

Interventions are sourced and discussed with the student, their family and other stakeholders that might help the student and their family overcome the challenges that are impacting on their ability to engage at school. The Little Village Project (LVP) is purposefully broad so that it can cover the very specific needs of the children it supports. Low and no-cost alternatives are always investigated and the LVP is usually only ever accessed when no other options are available, or if these alternative options cannot be delivered in a timely manner. The LVP leverages from the close relationships that the school and school staff have with their families and builds upon one of the greatest strengths that this community has, which is getting their children to primary school.

The participating school, via its Wellbeing Support Officer or equivalent, submits expenditure requests to the LVP Advisory Group, who then provide the go-ahead for the interventions, or follow up with further questions.



## TLVP Advisory Group

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David Hackford  
John Mitchell  
Dr Renee Carr  
Rhonda Renwick  
Michael Abbott



# Why the project is needed...

While all across Australia, schools and communities are in the midst of an education crisis, Latrobe Valley also has region specific issues to address.

The Little Village Project is exploring innovative solutions to many of the challenges encountered in our Latrobe Valley primary schools.

“Ms Feldt said the school was not fortunate enough to have the funding to hire an on-ground speech pathologist, and said the supply for specialists was not here in the Latrobe Valley.”

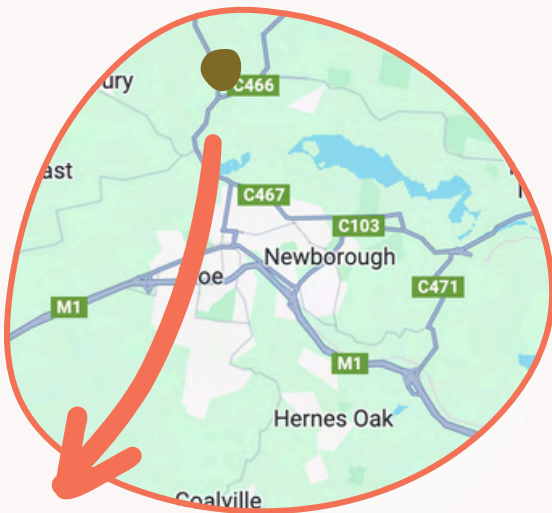
“Many students with disabilities in the Latrobe Valley schools lack access to crucial support,” Ms Feldt said.

Estimates show that chronic absenteeism levels in schools reached 49.9 per cent in 2022, with between one per cent to five per cent of all students classed as severely absent.

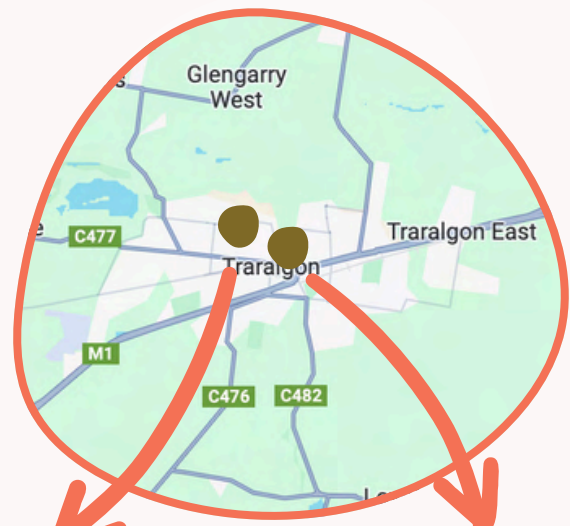




# The Little Village in the Latrobe Valley...



Tanjil South PS / 2023



Stockdale Road PS / 2020

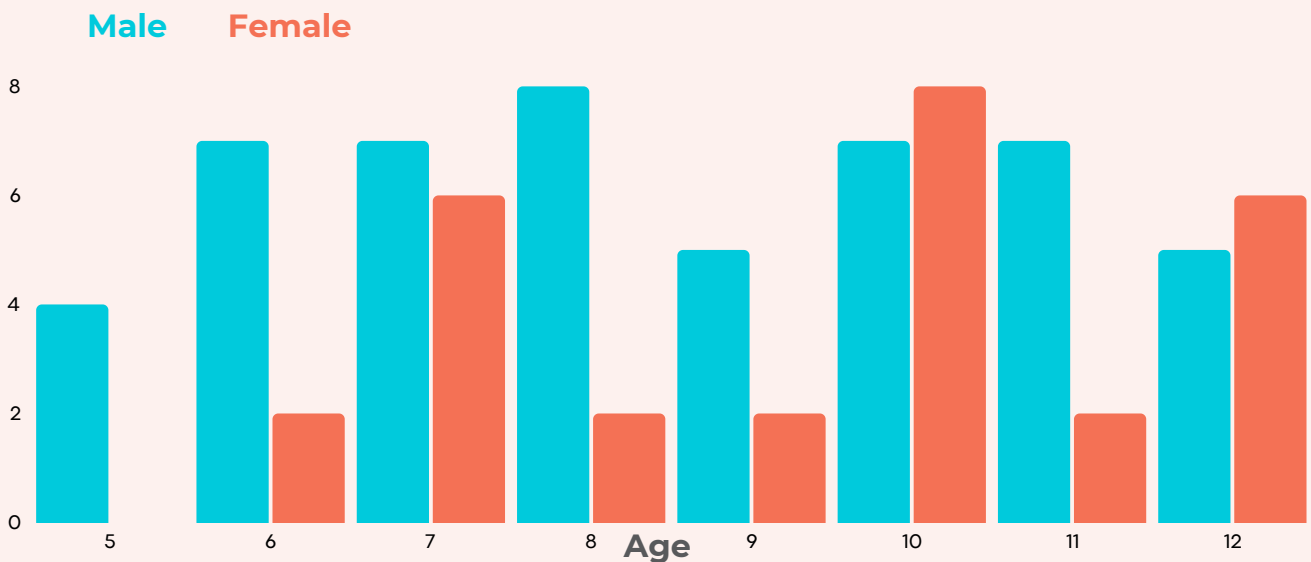
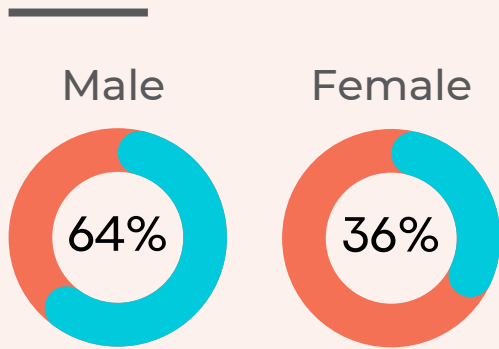
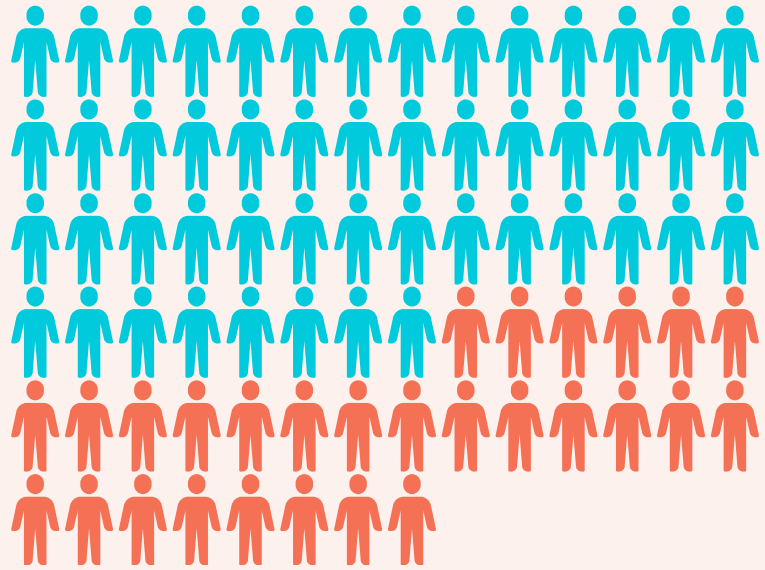
Grey Street PS / 2023





# Since 2020...

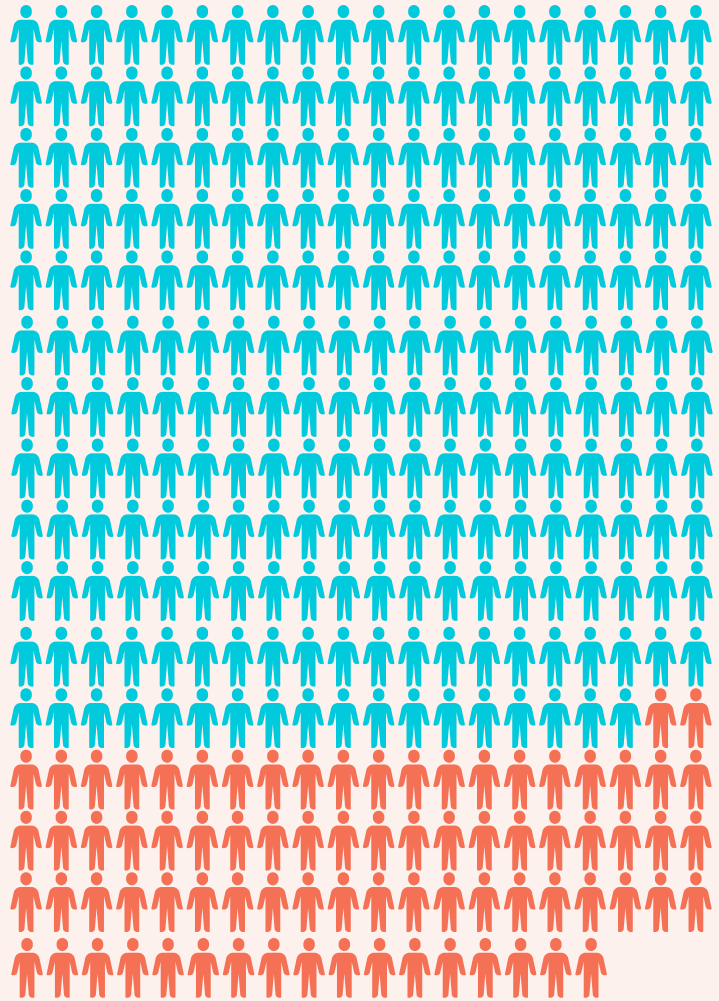
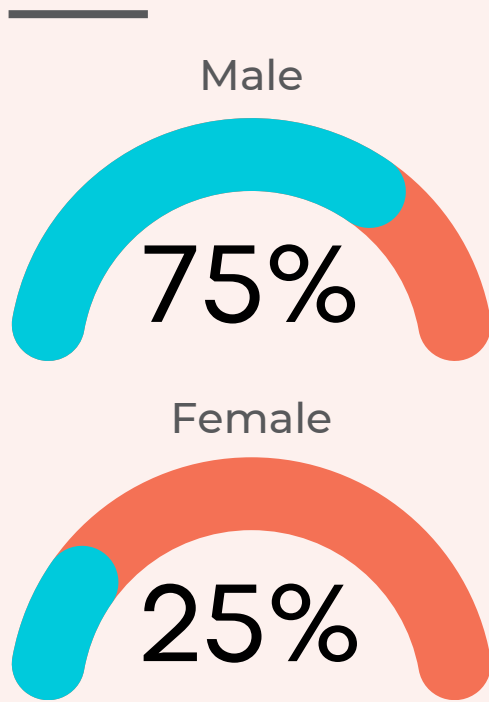
The Little Village Project has helped **78** children thrive across two primary schools in the Latrobe Valley.





# Since 2020...

The Little Village Project has supported primary schools in the Latrobe Valley to provide **317** direct interventions in partnership with local health providers.

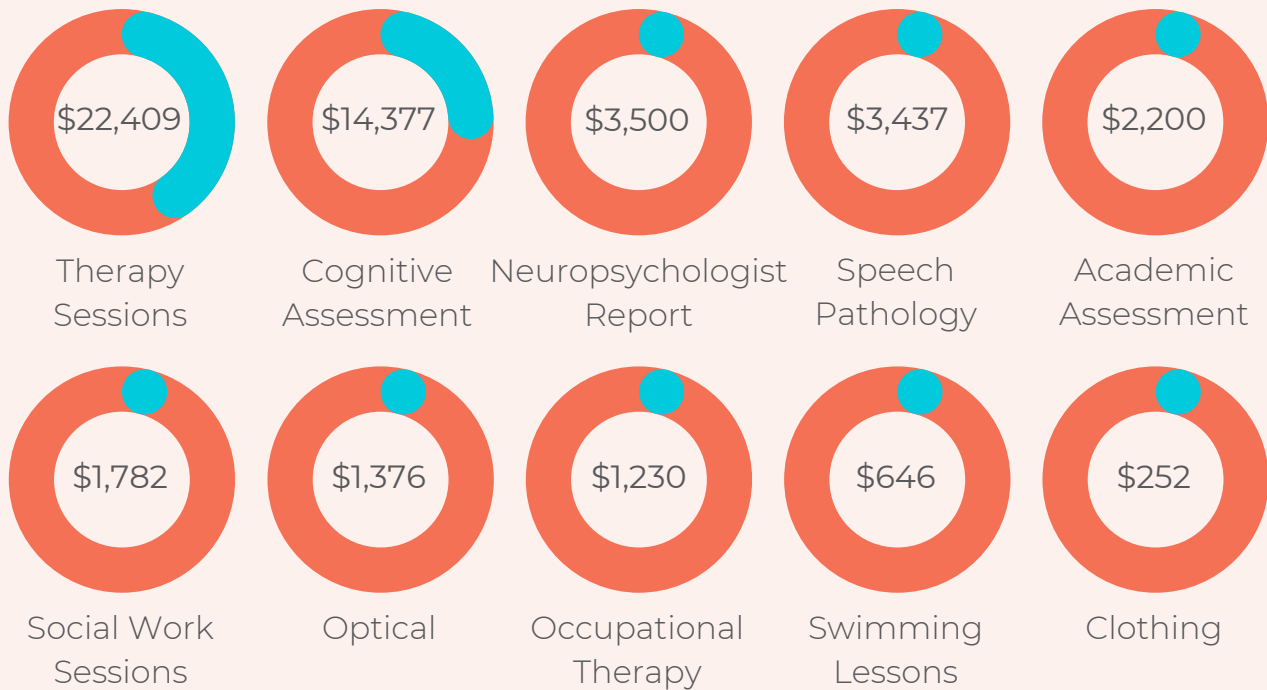




# Since 2020...

The Little Village Project provides a diverse range of interventions that remove barriers that hold students back from accessing educational opportunities.

Every dollar donated has helped break down numerous obstacles and ensured that our students not only meet outcomes, but excel.





# A life changed...

It's the impact that matters,  
and for John his life changed  
for the better once The Little  
Village Project entered his life.

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The Little Village Project (LVP) has been working with John and his family following a traumatic, life-changing event that happened in 2021 when he was in prep.

The LVP was quick to respond to support this student and his mother with therapeutic intervention via a family therapist specialising in early childhood trauma, who then helped him to transition towards seeing a psychologist. The LVP has funded all of the therapeutic interventions for John since the adverse event occurred.

In 2021/22, when the bulk of this therapeutic work was occurring our data recorded 92 incidents throughout the year of adverse/unexpected behaviour within the classroom from John. His inability to function within the classroom setting and to interact with his peers in an age-appropriate way was severely impacting John's learning and the learning of his peers.

In 2023, our data shows that there have been 0 incidents recorded in our data regarding adverse behaviour for the first 7.5 weeks of school. John's teacher reports that he is engaged in his learning and is having more luck in making friends. John proudly stated to me that he has been invited to a birthday party. The observable difference in John's ability to function at school and engage with his friends has in no doubt been contributed to by the timely support of the LVP in engaging these therapeutic services.

**Ben Tunks - Founder of The Little Village Project**







# A life changed...

The Little Village Project made a profound impact when it entered Jane's life.

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In the very early days of The Little Village Project, we met a student, Jane, who had transferred from another school to Stockdale Road Primary School. She was in Grade Six and incredibly shy – in fact, we barely heard Jane speak for the first few months she was with us. Jane was a diligent and hard-working student who gave her all to her learning. Over time, we discovered that the reason Jane was so quiet was that she felt ashamed of a speech and language issue that made it difficult for her to say “r” and “l” sounds.

The Little Village Project funded Speech Therapy sessions for Jane, which the school supported with its Speech Therapy Assistant Program. The student enthusiastically engaged in these sessions as though she had been holding out for an opportunity like this.

With a lot of hard work and persistence, Jane's speech and language improved and we watched as she grew in confidence. She began making eye contact instead of looking at the ground and she would contribute her wonderful ideas to class discussions. Most importantly, we began to see Jane smile.

She is in secondary school now. However, I was lucky enough to run into her at the shops recently. Jane bounded up to me and said hello, brimming with confidence. The money spent on Speech Therapy was worth every cent.

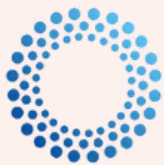
**Ben Tunks - Founder of The Little Village Project**





# Our community...

## Key Partners



KINDRED SPIRITS enterprises



Latrobe Health Assembly



## Partner Schools



Grey Street Primary School Traralgon



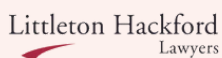
## Donors and Supporters



ARTS COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA



GIPPSLAND REGIONAL EXECUTIVE FORUM





# A giving community...

It takes a village to raise a child and the Gippsland community has embraced this mantra, joining together to donate funds and support disadvantaged primary school children to thrive.

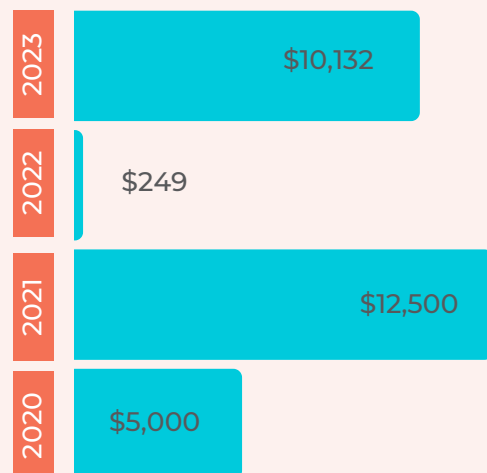
The Latrobe Valley and Gippsland community have demonstrated extraordinary generosity through their one off and on-going support for Latrobe Valley students, shaping a narrative of empowerment.

Their contributions have transcended financial aid, symbolising a collective commitment to fostering an environment where every student can flourish. **These acts of kindness are not merely monetary gestures but potent investments in their future**, showcasing the community's dedication to breaking down barriers to education.

As a united force, we are providing students in need with opportunities to unlock their full potential, equipping them with the tools required to excel academically and personally. The social impact of this generosity reverberates throughout our community, creating a ripple effect of positive change. **By investing in education, the Latrobe Valley and Gippsland community are nurturing the growth of future leaders** who will, in turn, contribute significantly to the well-being and progress of our society.



## Thanks for your generous donations





# A key contributor...



**AGL Loy Yang**  
proudly joined  
The Little Village  
Project as a key  
partner in 2023.

This partnership played a crucial role in enabling Stockdale Road Primary School to meet the escalating demand for the project due to the rising cost of living and helped us to expand to a second primary school in Traralgon.

The dedication of AGL and the Loy Yang workforce is deeply appreciated by Kindred Spirits Enterprises and The Little Village Project.

Above all, we commend their continued commitment to ensuring that our students have access to vital health services, fostering an environment where they can thrive in their educational journey.



**Year 1 - 2023**

**\$30,000** contribution

**Year 2 - 2024**

**\$30,000** contribution

**Year 3 - 2025**

**\$30,000** contribution







# A key contributor...



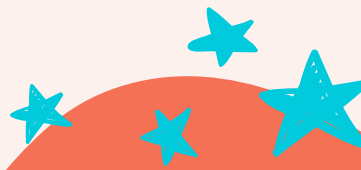
**Latrobe Health  
Assembly**

The **Latrobe Health Assembly** proudly joined The Little Village Project as a key partner in 2022.

The Latrobe Health Assembly's multi-year commitment serves as a powerful endorsement, validating the effectiveness of The Little Village Project in addressing the needs of disadvantaged students across the Latrobe Valley.

Going beyond symbolic support, the Assembly contributes valuable resources, expertise and access to a vast network of health professionals. This partnership provides a platform for the project to expand its reach and embark on even more impactful journey.

Through their collective efforts, The Little Village Project and the Latrobe Health Assembly are working towards a community where all individuals have the opportunity to reach their full potential.



**Year 1 - 2023**

**\$50,400** contribution

**Year 2 - 2024**

**\$30,400** contribution

**Year 3 - 2025**

**\$20,400** contribution

**Year 4 - 2026**

**\$10,000** contribution





# The Little Village that's growing...

The Gippsland community has embraced the project, offering their support at every opportunity.

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Thanks to the financial and in-kind support from Latrobe Health Assembly, AGL Loy Yang and many other organisations and individuals, community interest in The Little Village Project has grown exponentially.

The formation of key partnerships has helped to expand the project's reach, with requests for interviews, presentations and guest speaker spots.

Every bit of publicity leads to an outpouring of interest from our community and more direct support for students, opening new pathways for them to reconnect with their education.

## Media

[Get Off The Bench \(Podcast\)](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQZ03S27Blw>

[Latrobe Valley Express \(Print and Online\)](#)

<https://latrobevalleyexpress.com.au/community/2023/09/27/little-village-project-ongoing-supporters/>

[TRFM \(Radio and Online\)](#)

<https://trfm.com.au/articles/traralgon-students-thrive>

## Speaking opportunities

Latrobe Regional Health AGM (guest speaker)







# Celebrating the success so far...

The first **Little Village Project fundraiser** was launched in 2023 with great success, raising \$12,000 for Latrobe Valley school children.

This article featured on the Kindred Spirits Enterprises website highlights the impact of the event.

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Carrajung Estate Winery was aglow with the spirit of unity and compassion as businesses from across Gippsland rallied to raise \$12,000 for The Little Village Project.

This heart-warming event, organised by Kindred Spirits Enterprises in collaboration with project partners Latrobe Health Assembly, AGL Loy Yang, local businesses and community members, sent a resounding message of hope and support. Their collective efforts are set to make a profound impact on the lives of disadvantaged students in the Latrobe Valley, ensuring they can engage with their education and thrive.

At the heart of this gathering was the unwavering commitment to the Little Village Project, a community-driven initiative launched at Stockdale Road Primary School by Wellbeing Support Officer Ben Tunks in 2020. Thanks to the dedication and generosity of the local community, this project is now a beacon of hope for students, helping them overcome obstacles that can impede their educational journey.

The funds raised during this event will play a pivotal role in providing timely interventions and health solutions to these students, effectively transforming obstacles into stepping stones on their path to success.



**Our community, together with our esteemed partners, is making a tangible difference in the lives of these young learners. Through The Little Village Project, we are paving the way for a brighter future, one where every student can reach their full potential.**

Kindred Spirits Enterprises  
Executive Officer Shaun Mallia





# The path ahead...

Great strides have been taken since The Little Village Project launched in 2020, and more than 70 lives have been changed and are now flourishing thanks to a generous community.

Looking ahead, the project will expand to additional schools and build a network of supporters to help the project become a sustainable and integral part of the Latrobe Valley community... and beyond.





# Just imagine...

Is there an opportunity to turn The Little Village Project into a **social enterprise**?

Let's find out!

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In 2024, we will assess the feasibility of this venture, marking a crucial stride towards ensuring the long-term sustainability of the project.

Proceeds have the potential to finance vital interventions, removing obstacles that impede students' full engagement in education.

Additionally, these funds will empower Kindred Spirits Enterprises to persist in the delivery of this initiative.

The opportunities presented by this venture are boundless.

Ultimately, the enterprise is dedicated to serving our students, enhancing academic achievement and nurturing a community of healthy, happy, and fulfilled children

As we embrace this endeavour, we anticipate a positive transformation that extends beyond the classroom.





# Get involved...

Donate today



The Little Village Project owes its success to the Gippsland and Latrobe Valley community willing to dig deep and support its vulnerable primary school students.

Your support, either financially or volunteering your time or services, goes a long way to ensuring our students have the tools to succeed at school. Your involvement paves the way for them to have a bright, fulfilling future.

## Financial Support

One way to make an impact to The Little Village Project is through financial support. One-time or recurring donations can be made via the Kindred Spirits Enterprises website.

Businesses seeking a more lasting impact can explore the opportunity of entering into a long-term partnership or launching a workplace giving program.

## Volunteer Engagement

Organisations and individuals passionate about making a difference can actively support the project by donating their time. This can involve organising fundraisers within their own communities or workplaces, fostering a sense of community engagement.

## Services Contribution

We welcome the support of services that can directly enhance the educational experience for students.

Service providers, ranging from allied health to other professionals, can make a lasting impact by donating their time and services.



Speak to **Kindred Spirits Enterprises** to discover how you can support disadvantaged primary school students to thrive.

email: [info@kindredspirits.org.au](mailto:info@kindredspirits.org.au)



**The Little Village Project is an initiative of the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone and funding has been provided by the Latrobe Health Assembly in partnership with the Victorian Government.**



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proudly auspicing The  
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