



**Dorset  
Community House**

**Dorset Community House  
Annual Report  
2024-2025**

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**#heartofdorset**



## **Board & Staff**

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### **Dorset Community House Board of Directors**

Ross Watson, President  
Bree Philpot, Vice President  
Geoff Saville, Secretary  
Libby Richardson, Public Officer  
Pat Young  
Sue Davies  
Melissa Krushka  
Casper Staak  
Steve McGlashan

### **Dorset Community House Staff**

Naomi Buster, Manager  
Mark Hayes, Garden & Volunteer Officer  
Zoe Bennett, Programs Worker  
Catherine Bennett, Playgroup Worker  
Jack Brooks, Youth Development Officer  
Sue Davies, Youth Development Officer  
Fiona Bennett, Community Outreach Officer





### Ross Watson

President, Dorset Community Association

In preparing this report I reflected on the year that has passed. Scott Timmins in his 2024 Presidents Report used the analogy of a steam train powering along the old Scottsdale line. I am inclined to view the timeline more like a bullet train but will continue the theme. Fortunately, there have been no derailments, but a few shudders have happened during the year. The train has righted itself on each occasion and has continued to move forward.

The year started out with optimism with new board members signed on for the journey. While all have contributed, due to personal circumstances the Board ends the year with some departures. The Association continues to seek additional members for Board positions. I accepted the dual role of your President and Treasurer with the hope that it would be a temporary situation, but that has not happened.

Naomi and the team, Mark, Zoe, Fiona, and Catherine have stepped in to fill gaps as they have appeared throughout the year. They are to be congratulated for their flexible approach in the running of the House and its programs. There have been changes in the operational team with Ray and Jodie moving on from the Bright Dorset program and the House. However, the House recently welcomed Jack and Sue to the team to assist in the program.

Your Board continues to strive to set the framework and governance for the running of the Association supporting the House. There is an ever-increasing obligation being placed on not-for-profit associations and employers that on occasions wear the most resilient of us. The station is in sight so congratulations to Naomi and the team as well as my fellow Board members for another successful year in providing support and service to those in need in the Dorset Community.





## Ross Watson

Treasurer, Dorset Community Association

The financial statements audited for 2025 reflect a gain of \$8,732 compared to a gain of \$55.982 for 2024. The outcome is also close to our budgeted projections. ALA Partners have once again undertaken the 2025 Audit Review, and I hope will continue to do so for the year 2026.

Funding the House on a sustainable level is not an easy task and while the Grant Funding provided by the Tasmanian Government is acknowledged, as is that from the Tasmanian Community Fund for the Bright Dorset Program, there are limits to how far the money can be stretched to meet competing demands.

The Association is currently in a fortunate position to have some financial resilience that was tested during the recent political instability. The delay in the annual funding was able to be withheld but it was reported in the media that a Neighbourhood House in Tasmania needed to obtain an overdraft to maintain services. Wages and superannuation are the major costs for the Association, a given if programs and the House are to operate. Grant Funding from the Government is currently indexed at 3% per annum. This does not reflect the increased costs being incurred.

During the recent election campaign there was a push to provide more sustainable funding for Neighborhood Houses operating in Tasmania. While the outcome of that push will not be known until the interim Government Budget is introduced into Parliament in November, given the state of the Tasmanian economy, while hopeful, it is in my opinion unlikely.

To help provide our staff with an opportunity to gain a better after income tax position the Association applied for and was granted Public Benevolent Institutions status with Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission. While still being explored, this status will open opportunities to offer tax-incentive salary packaging to existing staff. Hopefully in the long term it will help retain existing staff and allow the Association to better compete for new staff when required to do so.

Thanks to Rachel and her crew at RBK Bookkeeping for undertaking the day-to-day bookkeeping and once again putting up with my requests as well as meddling, Naomi for her continued leadership, my fellow Board members and all the team at Dorset House working to provide outstanding service to the Dorset community.





## Naomi Buster, House Manager

Throughout the last year, Dorset Community House has provided a safe and welcoming centre to support, connect and empower the local community. The most significant thing we can offer is a friendly human face and a warm hello and cup of tea. Whatever people need, whether just somewhere to sit and someone to talk to for a little while or more targeted support and information or even just a chance to volunteer or buy some fresh, local produce, everyone is welcome!

Over the past year we have supported 48 NILS loan applications, provided community transport for 196 trips (medical and social isolation), supported people in need with food 2,717 times and sold fresh, local healthy produce over 1,484 times. Our Polliwog Playgroup and Baby Chat group have been places of nurture and fun and one mother who was new to the area said to me 'the Polliwog Playgroup is the reason I feel so at home and supported since moving to Scottsdale'. The Bright Dorset Youth Project has now entered into its third year, and we can see all the engagement, planning, relationship building and support that our Youth Development Officers have contributed over the founding two years have finally led to where the project is now. The Dorset Young Leaders are now in a place where they have a committed group of young people aged 12 -16 years representing their local community. These young people plan local events and initiatives, consult on local issues and contribute regularly to youth voice in the area through their articles in the North Eastern Advertiser Newspaper.

Through the Kitchen Krew program, we are seeing very vulnerable young people get support and feel connected, learn cooking and food safety skills, enjoy nutritious food (and take some home) and gain understanding of future employment pathways. The young women's program has also taken off, with an emphasis on young people transitioning to high school. This was identified by young people, schools and the community as a very challenging time and it is great that the Bright Dorset project has been able to respond to this issue.

'A Neighbourhood House is the heart and soul of its community. It's a hub of volunteers, a hive of activity, community programs and connection... The Beautiful thing about the community houses and the Neighborhood House network is that they're all different, but they're all the same. They're reflective of the volunteers and the community that they live and work in and spend time with. They reflect the needs of the local community.' (David O'Byrne, 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2025).





Dorset Community House has supported 219 community members with travel for health and wellbeing over the past year. We provided 149 trips to medical appointments and 47 social trips. We found that community numbers are growing but that we are able to provide more shared travel. We also lent the bus to community groups and organisations serving the Dorset area when the House was closed.

Over the year the vehicles travelled 37,752 kilometres. The new Mitsubishi ASX is going well and is proving to be a very suitable vehicle for the travel and terrain. None of this transport support would have been possible without Kevin Keating, our transport coordinator and the generous volunteers who keep this service running through their driving.

## Website, Socials and Newsletter

The Dorset Facebook page has a strong presence in the local digital landscape with regular followers. In the past year the Dorset House Facebook page had an average of 1,640 followers and reached a total of 65,198 people. Our newsletter got an upgrade to a new digital format, designed in Canva and distributed digitally by Dashboard. The newsletter had an email mailing list of 292 people. Our new Federal Member for Bass, Jess Teesdale continues to honour the precedent set by Bridget Archer previously in the role and prints the Dorset House newsletter six times per year as well as posting copies to almost 50 people. Around 150 copies of the newsletter are distributed to community hubs and post offices around Dorset.



## Mark Hayes Garden and Volunteer Officer

Dorset House is incredibly grateful for the many generous volunteers who donate their time to the community garden, providing a welcoming reception, driving people to appointments, serving on the board, supporting youth and children's programs and assisting with outreach and events. Recently we have been very appreciative of the addition of some Dorset House catering volunteers. In the past year, Dorset House had 38 volunteers throughout the house and programmes. These 38 people together donated an average of 90 hours of volunteering per week which is equivalent to the time of two and a half staff full time members. In the past year, Dorset House said goodbye to one of our long-time volunteers and great friend of the House, Marita Grant. Marita assisted in many aspects of the house over 7 years including welcoming and reception, garden, the seed library, food assistance, events and so much more. Marita's contribution was steady, thoughtful and committed, her contribution will be remembered and she leaves a lasting legacy through her work in the community garden.



## NILS Report

Over the past year, Dorset House has supported the community to access 48 NILs Loans to support households to buy essential items without interest. Items purchased by community members over the past year included fridges, washing machines, clothes dryers, reverse cycle heat pumps and building repairs to their homes. The NILs group are fantastic at securing concessions that clients might not have known about to further assist them. For example in one situation, NILs were able to direct clients to a significant discount on a Heat Pump so that they had no out of pocket expenses.



## Mark Hayes

Garden and Volunteer Officer

The community garden has continued to be a busy place over the past year, with a significant contribution to local, fresh and varied produce at the house and in building the gardening skills of local people. The varied ages and backgrounds of the different volunteers is a real strength of the gardening team as they learn from one another and friendships blossom. Dedicated volunteers assisting with maintaining the garden and grounds through planting, maintaining, weeding and pruning.

The workshop was a great asset during the cooler months, as volunteers used it to work on House projects and build garden beds from reused materials. Rotating vegetable garden beds in the past year has aided in control of pests and disease with different produce including, Corn, Tomatoes, garlic, peas, broad beans, cucumbers, zucchini, asparagus and other seasonal crops. Growing these crops allows us to provide fresh and affordable and healthy produce to our community members.



Sales of fresh and affordable produce were around 80-100 kg per week of produce from our garden and purchased from local suppliers. We were fortunate through a donation to have the Men's Shed in Scottsdale build a vegetable stand for produce such as potatoes, onions, pumpkins and apples. The stand stores produce more conveniently and also improves access to the fridge and creates a safer environment by reducing trip hazards inside. The plant nursery at the House sells a variety of garden plants, succulents and vegetable seedling that have been grown by the volunteers in the garden. These are sold at affordable prices to our community members and encourage people to grow their own food.



## Affordable Fruit and Vegetables

The House aims to support the local community with local, affordable and fresh produce – an essential element in increasing good health and reducing food insecurity. We encourage all members of the community to support healthy eating and local producers through contributing from their own gardens and purchasing locally. In the past year there were 1706 community sales of fresh produce , these included potatoes, carrots, corn, tomatoes, silverbeet and many other contributions from the Dorset House Community Garden and local gardens. There were over 1484 sales in Scottsdale and over 222 sales at Gladstone.



## Zoe Bennett Program Worker

Dorset House has enjoyed supporting community and volunteer led programs over the past year such as Ledgerwood Line Dancing, Craft Group, Ukelele Group, CWA and new faces such as Care2Serve frequent the House with their programs. We have hosted regular Volunteer Morning Teas and a wide range of events at the House. A few of these included a Legal Bootcamp with Women's Legal, a series of two Nurture Workshops for wellbeing and self-care with local Jess Cairns, a Canva Workshop on flyer making and design (with Zoe as the trainer) and our annual End of Year Christmas Party, not to mention Playgroup Parties, Eating with Friends monthly meals and Youth Events with Bright Dorset. Following the severe weather events Dorset Community House was honoured by a visit from the Governor of Tasmania and provided a community morning tea in recognition.

A highlight of the year was our Neighbourhood House Week of events with Open House tours throughout the week, a Children's Party and a Neighbourhood BBQ in the Tuesday afternoon attended by our Dorset Young Leaders, Dorset Community Association Board Members, Members of Dorset Council and NHT CEO Simone. We would especially like to thank our catering volunteers for preparing delicious cupcakes and all the Dorset councillors who attended our Neighbourhood BBQ. And of course, we want to thank the Dorset Young Leaders for their assistance with the BBQ. The theme of the 2025 Youth Week Event was 'Courage, Stepping Out of Your Comfort Zone', and that exactly what the Dorset Young Leaders have been doing!



## Craft Group

Our wonderful House volunteers Saoirse and Rosey supported a local volunteer-led craft group for the community over the past year through Spring, Summer and Autumn. The group hosted 36 craft sessions with 97 attendances across the sessions. There was a wide range of craft enjoyed, from wood burning to painting, felting, book creation, and carving decoration. This group has become a circle of friendship and support to many people who attended. Many of the craft group members are people managing ongoing health conditions and the craft group became a place where they could gather and support one another while doing something they enjoyed. The cuppas and conversation were as important to the group as the craft.

## Eating With Friends

Eating with Friends celebrated a wonderful milestone in the past year with a 18+ Years Birthday Party for the group! The group shared a Garden Party meal at the Dorset Community House and remembered the journey that has made this group so special and brought it to where it is today. EWF was started by Vicki Knight when she was Manager of Dorset House, and from a group of 12 people who shared meals at the House, they soon grew beyond being able to fit into the (pre-renovated) venue. At the start the meals cost \$10 and were often cooked by local netball and football clubs as a community fundraiser – everyone pitched in and helped!

Pretty soon, Pat Young was supporting the group with Vicki and they were determined to provide the consistency, connection and regularity that people wanted. The group outgrew Dorset House and began to look for other places to have meals. Local venues such as Kendall's Pub and Anabele's were great hosts. The group travelled around Bridport, Gladstone, Ringarooma, Branxholm and even George Town as older people who had moved away and could no longer drive wanted to connect with the places where they had lived and grown up. They even did cemetery visits over the years and also social trips such as the Tulip Farm and Serendipity.

Eating with friends remains a key group at Dorset House with 10 meals annually and 53 active members. During the year we celebrated Seniors Week, with support from Dorset Council. Also, Kit's 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration was an opportunity for many of the Eating with Friends group to get together and remember how she and her 3 sisters were founding members of the group. Pat Young continues to champion and organise the group which meets monthly for social meals and looks like it will continue for at least another 18 years!

## Emergency Food Relief

Over the past year Dorset House has provided 10,350 kilos of fresh vegetables to the community, with 2,250 kilos of fruit, 660 pre-cooked emergency meals and 2,150 pantry items. We had 131 uses of the shower and laundry by people who do not have access to housing and/or suitable shower and laundry facilities. Leading up to Christmas we provided 40 hampers to households in need and 30 hampers to households at Easter. We thank the local schools, Salvation Army, Red Dirt Café, Better Health 4 Dorset and postal services for their support in identifying people who would benefit from these hampers and in assisting with delivery.





## Catherine Bennett Playgroup Worker

For both Polliwog and Baby Chat, our goal is to provide friendship and understanding in a warm and supportive environment. Polliwog Playgroup and Baby Chat Café have once more been a hive of activity and enjoyment for all attending. We celebrated many events throughout the year. For Simultaneous Storytime, Catherine read the Storytime 2025 book, 'The Truck Cat' to Polliwog Playgroup. Andrea from Paint Dorset REaD and the 'Book Book' bird brought even more colour and excitement to the event. Dorset House supported the new book tubs and street libraries around the community as a site to collect, swap or donate some books for children to read with their families.

The partnership with Building Blocks has remained strong, especially through the delivery of the Baby Chat program and early years activities at the Ringarooma Show. The focus of the Dorset House and Building Blocks partnership has been to build capacity for families of children aged 0-5, with a particular focus on health, wellbeing and early literacy skills. This partnership formed the basis of the launch of the Paint Dorset REaD mascot event at the Scottsdale Children's Reserve, Baby and Child First Aid training in Dorset, a series of Speech Sessions for parents run by a local speech pathologist. Guests at Baby Chat sessions included Melissa from the Australian Breastfeeding Association, Maya from the Child Health and Parenting state service and Lori from Early Childhood Inclusion Service.



Both playgroup programs have had a significant number of young parents (under 25) attending, with all of these parents facing very complex and difficult personal circumstances. In working with these young people, the support of Jodie as Youth Development Officer and of DoE Family Engagement Worker Ruth Stockton was also been extremely valuable. Ruth's assistance extended to families, including young mothers, transporting them to and from the house as well as taking the families to appointments in Dorset and Launceston and offering her services during those occasions.



## Fiona Bennett Community Outreach Officer

Remote area Outreach continues to make a positive impact in Dorset and now includes monthly outreach sessions for the Pioneer Community in response to need in that area. These sessions are based in the Pioneer Town Hall on the first Wednesday of each month. At both the Gladstone and Pioneer sessions community members are supported with one-on-one support, referrals and information on a wide range of health and wellbeing topics, including gambling. Fiona is trained as a NILs Loan Officer and on gambling harm support. Fiona also attends the monthly morning teas with Futurelinks and continues to make significant connection with community members ensuring that they get the support they need.



Fiona has run many events in remote areas and older members of the Dorset community. These include sessions on in-home care, legal information workshops with Launceston Community Legal Centre and Women's Legal in Gladstone, Scams and Online Safety Sessions in Gladstone and Scottsdale and Community Hearing Checks in Gladstone and Scottsdale. At many of these events, Fiona worked to provide additional information about gambling harm and offer supports for people impacted by gambling. The morning tea event in July with Lara from Women's Legal was very successful and women showed tremendous strength and vulnerability sharing their stories and supporting one another in a safe place.

Fiona delivers emergency relief and fresh fruit and vegetables on Thursday afternoons to the Gladstone Hall and local residents come along and collect what they need. Cash donations are appreciated but not required and this money goes back into our emergency relief fund. Donations of excess produce are also encouraged and it is great to see the amount of produce shared in the community during spring, including lots of farm fresh eggs.

## Youth Development Officers



The Bright Dorset Program started well in 2023 with two youth development officers working across six different programs. Please find an outline of each program below.

### Kitchen Krew

Each week at the Kitchen Krew program in Winnaleah, young people from remote parts of Dorset are supported to prepare healthy low-cost meals. Once all the hard work is done, the group sit down to share a meal together and have some in-depth hard conversation about life and the struggles that young people today encounter. They always cook enough to take home to their families as well. This program has seen continued interest amongst young people and their knowledge of cooking, safe kitchen practices and healthy eating has continued to grow. Before finishing the annual year in December, the Kitchen Krew hosted a 'Restaurant Night' where the young people showcased their newfound skills. Families of participants were invited to enjoy a two-course meal prepared by the young 'chefs'. Feedback from families was overwhelmingly positive. This event provided a sense of accomplishment for the young people and families shared stories, connected over food, and celebrated the achievements of the young people. Kitchen Krew has also spent some time travelling to businesses in the area for field trips to learn more about hospitality and future employment pathways. Dorset House thanks the Welsborough Hotel and the Scottsdale House Paddock for their partnership. The information that the young people gained from these visits will help support them in their journey as they move toward employment.

Over the course of the Kitchen Krew program in the past year the young people have reported having greater confidence in preparing meals and making healthier food choices. Feedback from the young people at the halfway mark of the program, revealed that around 85% of the youth felt more knowledgeable about nutrition and food preparation. Many young people and their families also reported that they began to share their newfound skills at home. Some families who have never done so before are now cooking together and developing healthier eating habits. One of the young people in particular has voiced their desire to become a qualified chef after graduating school.



## Young Leaders

The Dorset Young Leaders Program has fast become a dynamic and motivated group who are focused on working within the community to provide a voice for young people in the region. The first major project for the Dorset Young Leaders was the Youth Week movie night held at the Mechanic's Hall in Scottsdale. The young people planned the event, made decisions about the movie, venue and catering and promoted the event throughout Scottsdale and in the local newspaper. They really took on the 2025 Youth Week theme 'Courage – Stepping out of your comfort zone' demonstrating leadership, teamwork and standing up to do public speaking even when it made them nervous.

The Dorset Young Leaders have reason to be proud of their achievements over the last couple of months, with regular youth-led articles in the Advertiser Newspaper and a number of successful projects. The map for the Paint Dorset REaD children's street libraries was designed by the Dorset Young Leaders. The group partnered with Libraries Tasmania to host another youth movie event that was held at the library during the holiday break. Through this event, young people were able to use what they had learned from the Youth Week movie event to design another local event for the community. The group is eager to be involved in more local events and decision making.



## Young Women's Program

International Women's Day is a big event on the calendar and the day was spent engaging with young women from the community. Dorset Community House hosted Winnaleah high school students and the members of the wider community to a self-care workshop and salsa dance lessons at Northbourne Hall. The day was full of bravery, positive role modelling, fun and laughs. Scottsdale High School also invited youth worker Jodie as a guest to their International Women's Day annual breakfast. The weekly Young Women's Program sessions moved to Scottsdale Primary School after considering feedback from community and partnering organisations. These sessions focused on supporting younger women through some of the issues that arise from transitional phases in adolescence such as puberty and changes of school environment from primary to secondary schooling.

## Youth Events & Workshops

The Bright Dorset project delivered a number of youth events and workshops over the past year including a NAIDOC Week workshop to the Tebrakunna Visitor Centre and Scavenger Hunt around Scottsdale. The team delivered a Youth Mental Health Week Event, International Women's Day Event and Youth Pool Event as well as partnering to support local NAIDOC youth celebrations and the Speak Up Stay Chatty program in Scottsdale.



The Youth Mental Health Week Event at Bridport in October was designed to raise awareness about mental health challenges, reduce stigma and provide information about services available for support. The event was a resounding success with over 140 people attending. The Bright Dorset Youth Pool Event was a great opportunity for local young people from small communities in Dorset to spend some time together in the Summer and to learn some swim and water safety skills. We are very thankful Scottsdale Aquatic Centre and Dorset Council for partnering with the Bright Dorset team to make this event possible.



## Severe Weather Emergency Response

In September 2024 the Dorset area was hit with a large-scale wind and rain weather event that had a huge impact. Many people were left without electricity, some without water and many without access to food and drinking water. There were a few people who became homeless when severe weather impacted their place of residence, including one home where the roof was entirely torn off by strong winds.

In an effort to get prompt and appropriate support to people in need, Dorset House was funded through the Tasmanian state government to provide first responder food and water relief to communities. We also assisted with general support, showers and supported community members to apply for small grants available. Dorset House delivered 185 food and water packages to people in need across Scottsdale, Winnaleah, Ringarooma, Pioneer, Branxholm, Gladstone, New river, Bridport, Tomahawk. We supported 41 people to apply for grants after power loss and housing damage.

A highlight in December was a visit from the Governor of Tasmania who spent time at Dorset Community House to connect with community members who had been impacted by the severe weather events earlier in the year. Her Excellency also encouraged local organisations and staff who had supported people through the events. The Governor talked with community members, SES volunteers, Dorset House staff, and representatives from Dorset Council. Her Excellency warmly affirmed the community's support for each other during a difficult time. Dorset House was honoured to partner with Dorset Council to host her Excellency's visit.

## Share the Dignity

Over 90 pink box packs were discreetly accessed and used by the community through a confidential vending machine in the Dorset House toilet. We also continued to supply the community with women's sanitary products, baby nappies and adult nappies through our emergency relief program.



## Visiting Service Providers

Eighty-six referrals were made to support services over the past year. Service providers who provided local services from the House in the past year included Anglicare (Financial Counselling and Kids in Focus), DECYP, Child Health and Parenting Service, Colony 47, Emerge Allied Health, Maxima Employment, National JobsLink Parents Program, Launceston Community Legal Centre, Relationships Australia, Safe Choices, Women's Legal Service, Wellways and Yemaya Women's Service. Care2Serve hosted regular gatherings for local carers to come together and support one another using Dorset House as a venue. A number of local community-based groups also used the venue regularly in the past year. These included Alcoholics Anonymous, the Northeast Chamber of Commerce and the Dorset Christian Men's Group.