

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

**SOCIAL  
IMPACT  
REPORT**

**2024**

**MADE POSSIBLE BY**



**KINDRED  
SPIRITS**  
enterprises

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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

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



**Ben Tunks**  
Founder and  
Project Lead

The Little Village Project is a community-led initiative auspiced by Kindred Spirited Enterprises (KSE) that supports vulnerable children in the Latrobe Valley. Founded by youth worker and counsellor Ben Tunks in 2019, the project supports primary schools by raising funds to provide timely, evidenced-based interventions to help their disadvantaged students flourish.

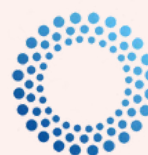
In partnership with KSE, the project funded its first intervention at Stockdale Road in 2020 and expanded to Grey Street and Tanjil South primary schools in 2023. Kosciuszko Street Primary School became the fourth expansion school in 2024. In four years, the project has supported more than 100 students by offering a range of services, including mental health care, speech and occupational therapy, and sensory support.

These interventions help eliminate barriers that are holding students back from engaging with their education. The community-funded interventions enable the students to actively participate in classes and other activities, ultimately fostering a brighter and more promising future for each child.

Kindred Spirits Enterprises (KSE) turns ideas into impact. It provides backbone support to individuals and organisations to develop place-based social impact projects that create positive change in their communities.

The not-for-profit took its first steps in 2016 thanks to the founder of Kindred Spirits Foundation, Rhonda Renwick. Rhonda created KSE to work hand-in-hand with regional and remote communities and entrepreneurs to develop sustainable livelihoods and address social challenges.

KSE, along with other key partners, supported First Nations communities in northern Australia to develop social enterprises before helping to develop projects in Gippsland. KSE collaborated with communities to develop education, health and environment focused projects, such as Regen Gippsland, the Kurnai Young Parents Program Mentor Initiative and The Little Village Project.



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**Shaun Mallia**  
Executive Officer

# Building The Little Village Project

## The challenge

Before launching The Little Village Project (LVP) at Stockdale Road Primary School, it was clear to the 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.

## The vision


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 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 and happy students.

## The support

Ben's vision garnered support from the Gippsland Regional Executive Forum (GREF), leading to a partnership with Kindred Spirits Enterprises (KSE) in 2019. KSE auspiced the project, offered valuable administrative resources and helped initiate fundraising efforts. Members of GREF helped fund initial student interventions, with KSE actively advocating for the project and establishing lasting partnerships. An advisory group featuring representatives from Gippsland's business community and local allied health professionals was formed in 2019 to guide Ben and review student support requests.

## The partnerships

In early 2023, the project secured long-term partnerships with the Latrobe Health Assembly and AGL Loy Yang, facilitating its expansion to Grey Street and Tanjil South primary schools in 2023, before partnering with Kosciuszko Street Primary School in 2024.

 TLVP founder  
Ben Tunks



## The project in action

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 others who might help the student and their family overcome the challenges impacting on their ability to engage at school.

**The Little Village Project (LVP) is purposefully broad so that it can cover the 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.



### Little Village Project Advisory Group

**David Hackford (Chair)**  
**John Mitchell**  
**Dr Renee Carr**  
**Rhonda Renwick OAM**  
**Dr 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 working closely with primary schools and partner organisations to explore innovative solutions to many of the challenges encountered in our Latrobe Valley primary schools.



“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.

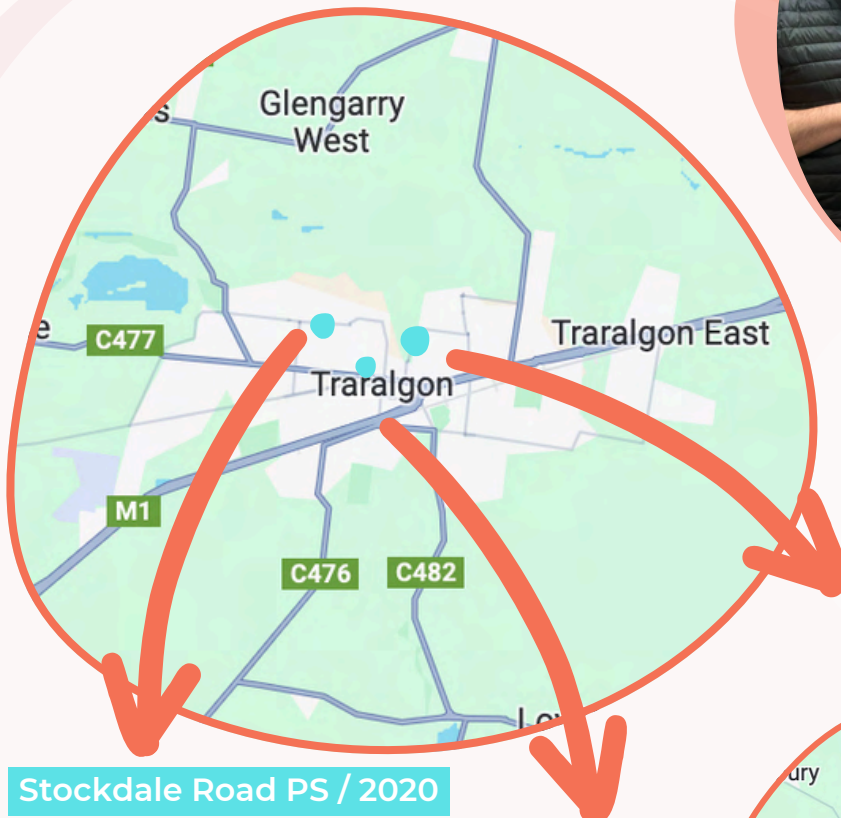


Ms Feldt said the school was not fortunate enough to have the funding to hire an on-ground speech pathologist, and said the supply for specialists was not here in the Latrobe Valley.





## A growing village

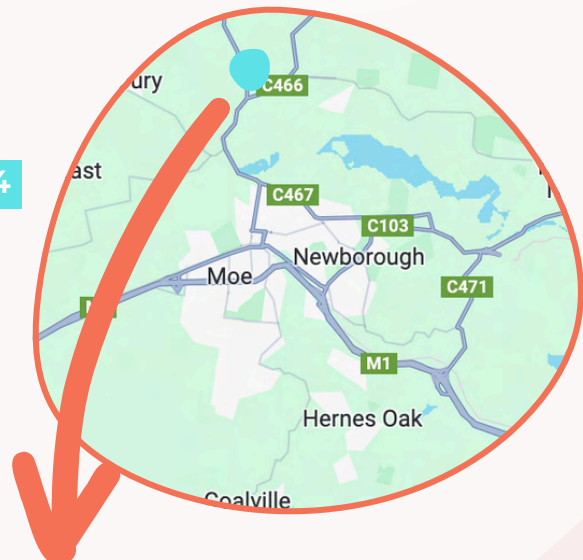


Stockdale Road PS / 2020

Kosciuszko Steet PS / 2024



Grey Street PS / 2023

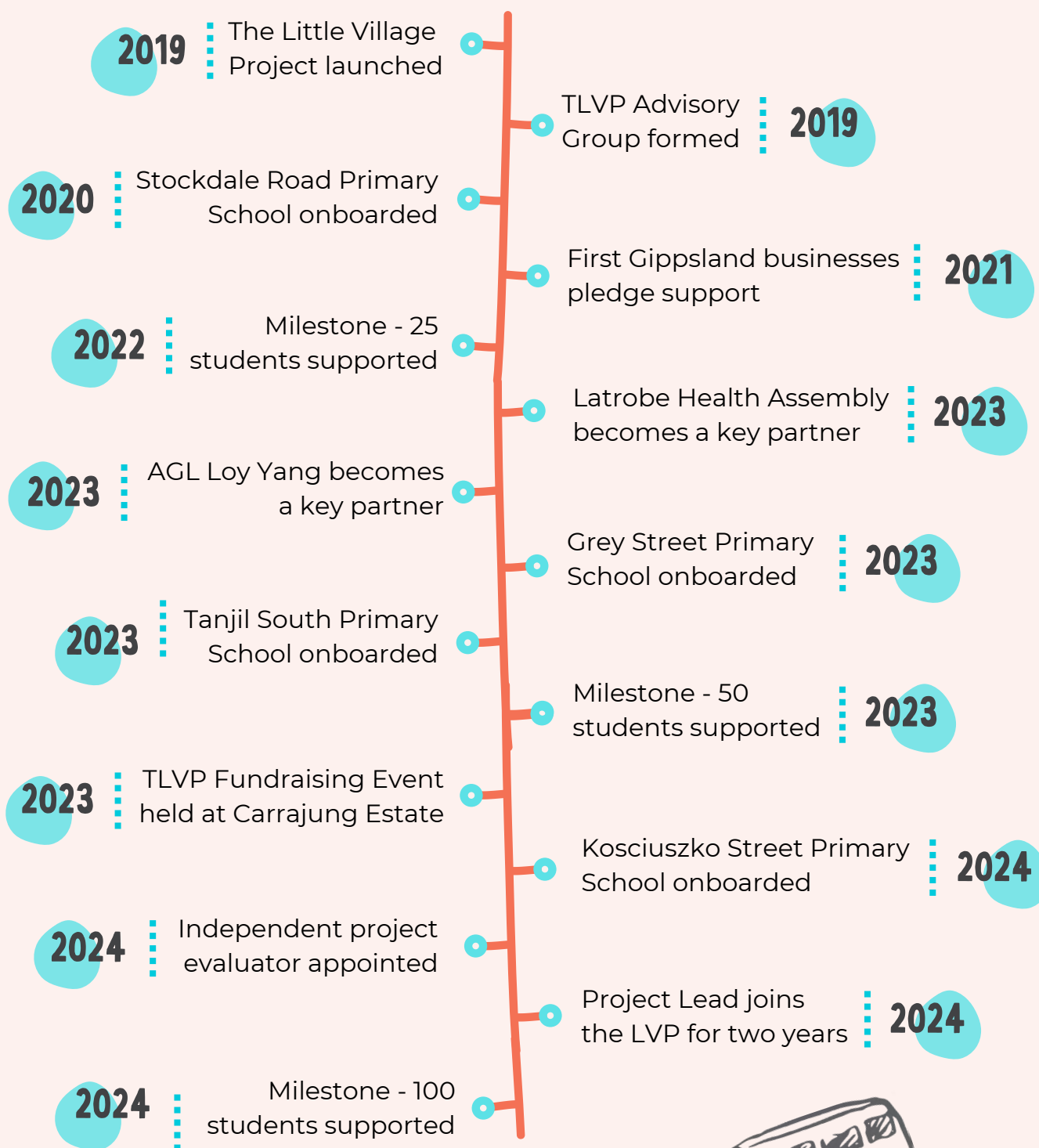


Tanjil South PS / 2023





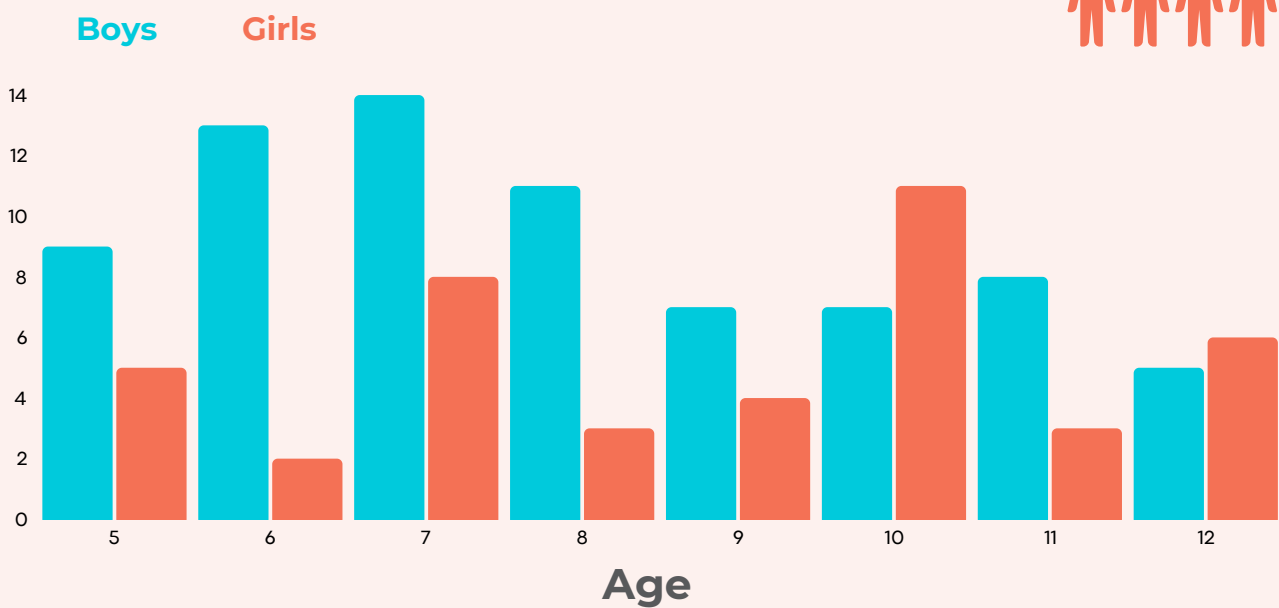
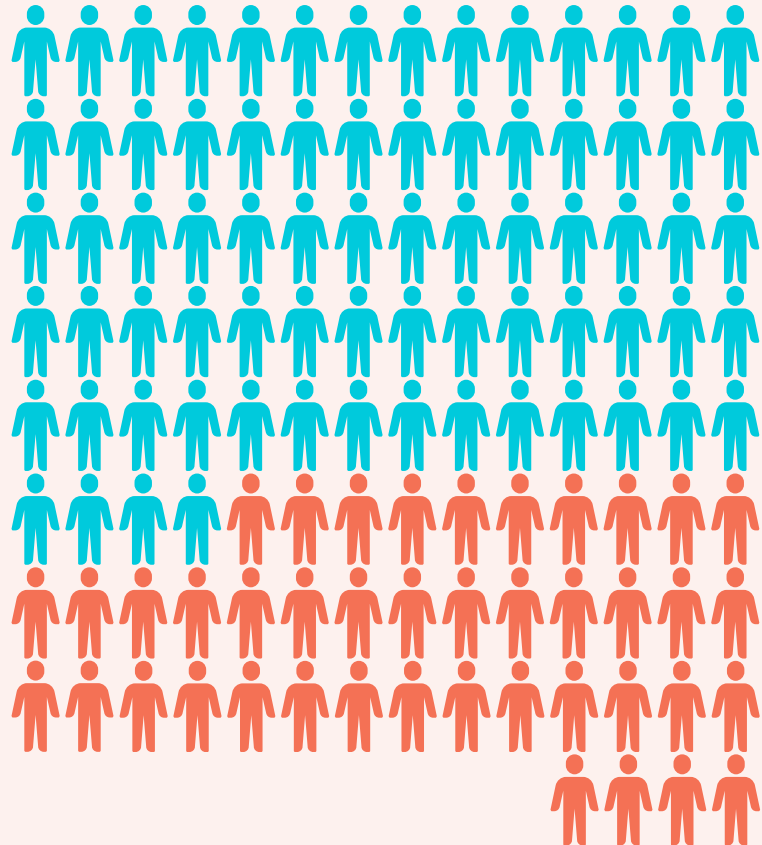
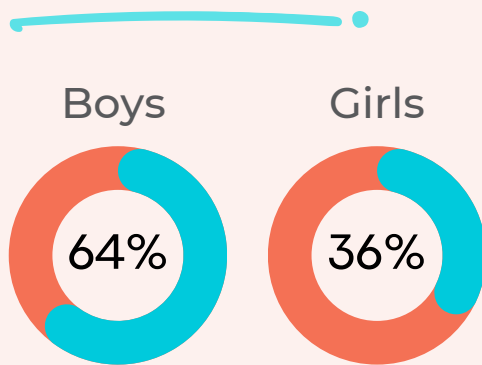
## The journey so far





## Since 2019...

The Little Village Project has helped **116** children thrive across **four** primary schools in the Latrobe Valley.

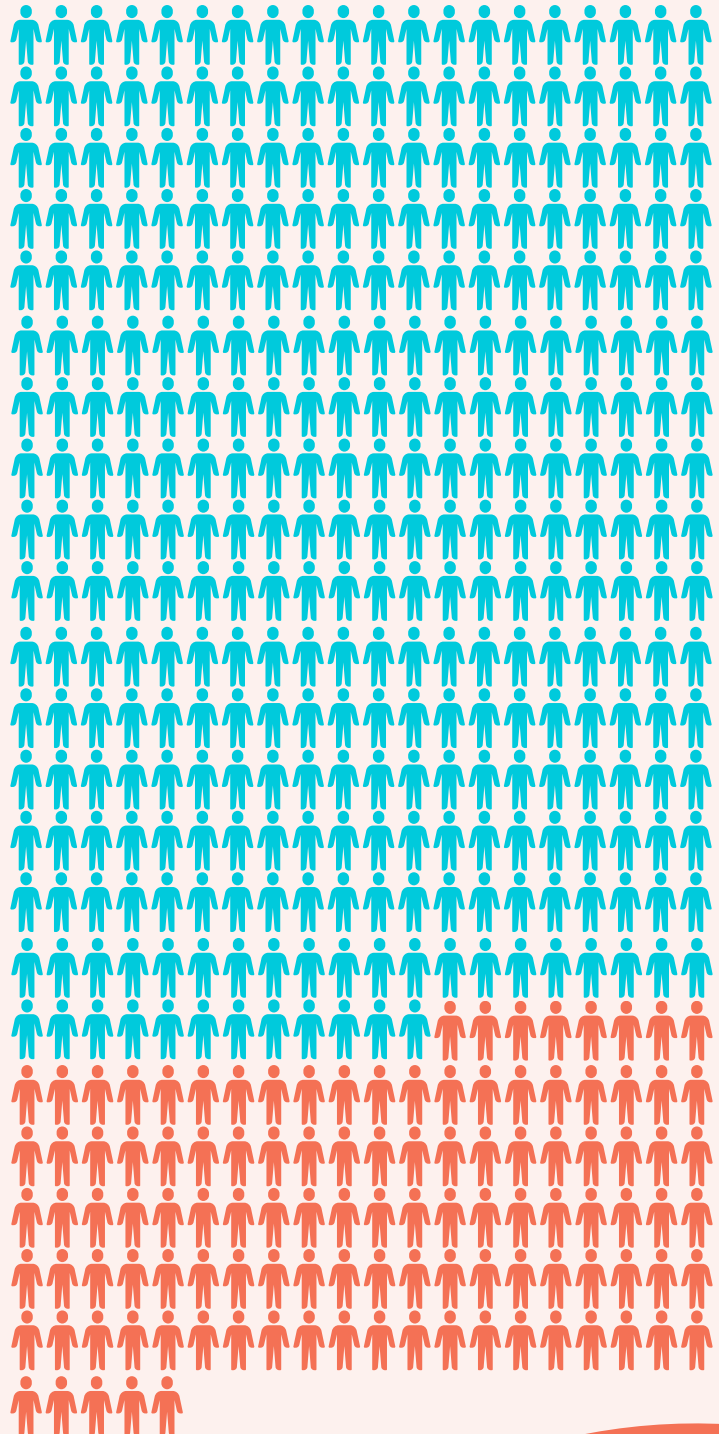
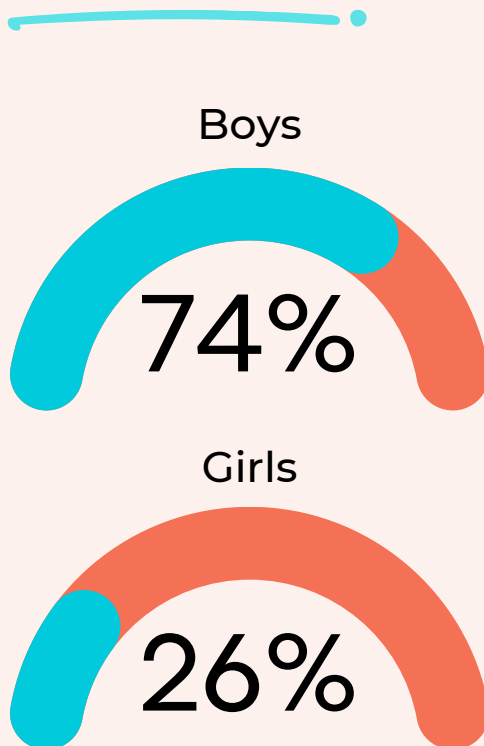






## Since 2019...

The Little Village Project has supported primary schools in the Latrobe Valley to provide **446** direct interventions in partnership with local health providers.



## Since 2019...

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 flourish.



Cognitive Assessment



Therapy Sessions



Speech Pathology



Social Work Sessions



Neuropsychologist Report



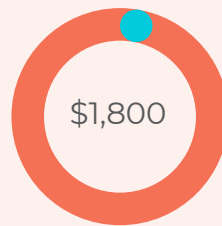
Academic Assessment



Occupational Therapy



Optical



Autism Assessment



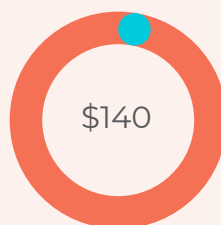
Swimming Lessons



Fuel Cards



Clothing



Hearing Assessment







## Changing lives

### School camp - An alternative choice



Kate is a nine-year-old student at one of our partner schools. She lives in foster care and has experienced a traumatic start to life. School is challenging for her because her body has become accustomed to being in fight or flight mode given the adversity she has survived.

She has managed to find safety and security at home and at school, where she is surrounded by nurturing and attuned caregiving, but the symptoms of her trauma are evident in her lingering unpredictable and distressing behaviour.

Kate's foster carer and her school desperately want her to undertake all the quintessential experiences that go hand-in-hand with attending primary school; however, it has become evident that taking Kate on school camp would present too much of a risk to her safety.

With the funding available via The Little Village Project, the school and Kate's foster carer were able to find an alternative camp that caters specifically to children with backgrounds similar to Kate's. The hope is that as Kate's trauma continues to heal and her behaviour becomes safer and more predictable, she will gain transferrable skills from the alternative camp that will allow her to join her friends on school camp next year.





## Changing lives

### The Education Support Worker with a heart of gold




Renee is an Education Support Worker at one of our partner schools. She has an absolute heart of gold and the kids at her school adore her for her ability to nurture them, guide them, pick them up when they fall and advocate for their best interests.

Likewise, the parents at the school are happy to know that their children have someone at the school who they can trust to provide such genuine care for their kids.

It's through this amazing work that Renee was having a conversation with a parent who was lamenting that they could not afford the occupational therapy that their child needed and would therefore have to go without. Renee quickly recalled The Little Village Project and suggested that the school could make an application to have this cost completely covered.

The Little Village Project wishes to thank the likes of Renee for being the conduit to which the money we raise is directed to where it is needed most.

Four red stars of varying sizes arranged in a cluster.



# Changing lives

## Speech therapy - A cost effective solution



Mark is the Disability Inclusion Leader at one of our partner schools. He noticed that many children within his school were having difficulty with their speech and language, to the point whereby it was impacting on their ability to engage in learning. Learning to read, write and spell can be incredibly difficult for a five-year-old when you can't yet articulate /th/, /sh/ and other sounds!

He reached out to a local speech therapist and despite her books being closed, convinced her to attend his school once per week for several hours to work with his students and staff using funding from The Little Village Project.

Mark has told us that the 20 students directly involved in the project have shown amazing growth, but perhaps the most remarkable secondary outcome has been the upskilling of Mark's colleagues and the knowledge they have gained from working so closely with a qualified speech therapist.



# The little village making it happen

## Project Delivery



## Key Partners



## Partners Schools



## Donors and Supporters in 2024

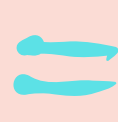




## The key partners



Latrobe Health  
Assembly



The Latrobe Health Assembly, AGL Loy Yang and Kindred Spirits Foundation have so far collectively contributed **\$189,000** and committed an additional **\$202,478** to the Little Village Project.

### THEIR COMMITMENT HAS HELPED...

Provide ongoing  
support for our  
current partners

Give us the  
confidence to  
expand to other  
schools

Recruit a project  
lead to care for  
and expand the  
project

Support more  
than 100 young  
students

Secure the services  
of an independent  
evaluator

# THANK YOU!

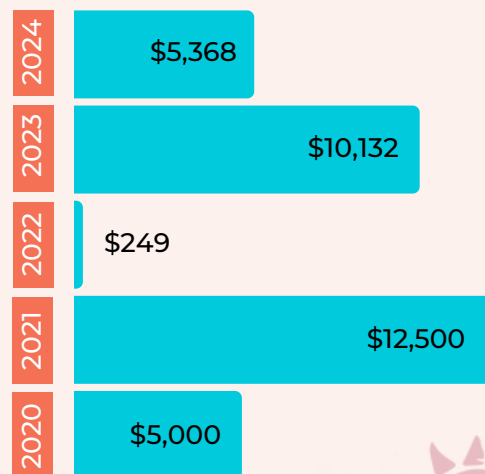


# A simple gesture goes a long way

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 and succeed.

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.

## Thank you for your generosity



## Our wonderful donors

Kindred Spirits Foundation  
Megan Stewart-North  
Joh Lyons  
Latrobe Spirit and Community  
Littleton Hackford Lawyers  
Carrajung Estate  
Raymond Tunks  
Latrobe Regional Hospital  
Peter Minster  
Kimberley Howard  
Tracey Piening  
Shaun Mallia  
Greg Allen-Pretty

John Mitchell  
Christine Stewart  
Mantra Traralgon  
The Butter Factory  
Stony Creek Earth Home  
Wattle Bank Farm  
Tennis Australia  
Ada Cottage Accommodation  
Goodmove Conveyancing  
Leah Metherr  
M & T Connolly  
Betta Electrical Traralgon  
Collins Booksellers Sale  
Latrobe Blinds





## Spread the word

The Little Village Project team was invited to speak about the project at a number of community events and schools, including the Latrobe Regional Health (LRH) annual general meeting and Kosciuszko Street Primary School whole-of-staff meeting. This has helped create awareness of the project and an understanding of its purpose and how it can be implemented to change lives for the better.





## Get involved

Donate today



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

Their support goes a long way to ensuring 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.



Speak to **TLVP Project Lead Ben Tunks** to discover how you can support the project.

email: [btunks@thelittlevillageproject.org.au](mailto:btunks@thelittlevillageproject.org.au)

### 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.

**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 and AGL Loy Yang.**

The project is made possible thanks to Kindred Spirits Enterprises



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