

## Volunteers at the Heart of Mallee Track

### National Volunteer Week shines a spotlight on the people who help keep communities connected.

National Volunteer Week provided an opportunity for Mallee Track Health and Community Service (MTHCS) to celebrate and recognise the extraordinary contribution of its volunteers, whose generosity and commitment help support services across the Mallee Track region every day.

With 104 registered volunteers contributing more than 350 hours of service each month, volunteers play a vital role in helping MTHCS deliver care, connection and support to communities across the region.

From assisting with community transport and social support programs to supporting aged care residents and community activities, volunteers help ensure people can remain connected, independent and engaged in their local communities.

MTHCS Community Care Team Leader Pennie Wisneske said volunteers are the foundation of many services delivered throughout the organisation.

"With 104 registered volunteers, we are incredibly lucky to have such a strong, generous and dedicated community behind us," Pennie said.

"Each volunteer brings something unique — a smile, a skill, a steady pair of hands, a listening ear — and together they create an environment filled with kindness, connection and genuine care."

"Volunteers are the heartbeat of our organisation. They show up not because they have to, but because they want to make someone's day a little brighter. They give their time, energy and compassion, and it makes a real difference."

Celia Reidy is our Ouyen PAG gem and has been volunteering for many years. The group are very special to her.

Celia says "I just love getting out and about helping others. The joy, the smiles, and the gratitude from the ladies brighten my whole day. I've volunteered at Mallee Track for years, and joining Ouyen PAG has been a wonderful new chapter. I'm so grateful to be part of it."

One of the most visible examples of volunteer impact is MTHCS's Community Transport Program, which helps residents access medical appointments, shopping, social activities and other essential services.

The service currently relies on 28 regular volunteer transport drivers who help deliver an average of 119 transport journeys each month across the Mallee Track. Volunteer drivers assist clients travelling to appointments in locations including Mildura, Swan Hill, Bendigo and the Riverland, ensuring people can access the care they need when it is not available locally.



Image: Rhonda Roberts



Image: Celia Reidy at Ouyen PAG



Image: Robyn Langworthy



Image: Ian John



Image: Sue Gilchrist

## Volunteers at the Heart of Mallee Track

MTHCS Chief Executive Officer Dr Frances Peart said National Volunteer Week was an important reminder of the enormous value volunteers bring to regional communities.

"Across the Mallee Track, volunteers help make services possible that would otherwise be difficult to deliver across such a large geographic area," Dr Peart said.

"They are often the friendly face that people see first, the person who helps someone get to a specialist appointment, attend a social group, or simply stay connected to their community. Their contribution extends far beyond the hours they give – they create stronger, healthier and more connected communities."

Dr Peart said volunteers embodied the spirit of community that has always been a defining feature of life in the Mallee.

"Our volunteers give their time because they care about their neighbours and their community. Their kindness, dedication and willingness to help others is something we are incredibly grateful for and proud to celebrate."

MTHCS extends its sincere thanks to every volunteer who contributes their time, skills and compassion to support local people and strengthen communities across the Mallee Track.

As National Volunteer Week highlights the power of volunteering, MTHCS encourages community members interested in making a difference to consider joining its volunteer team and becoming part of a network that helps bring care, connection and support closer to home. For more information go to their website <https://www.mthcs.com.au/about/volunteer>

## Mallee Communities Come Together to Celebrate Connection and Wellbeing

Mallee Track Health and Community Service (MTHCS) Neighbourhood Houses in Murrayville, Ouyen and Sea Lake have been buzzing with activity throughout May, bringing local communities together to celebrate connection, wellbeing and community spirit.

The celebrations coincided with both Neighbourhood House Week and Mallee Community Wellbeing Week, delivering a diverse range of activities designed to strengthen social connections, support mental wellbeing and create opportunities for people to come together.

Across the Mallee Track, residents participated in community lunches, educational workshops, wellbeing activities and fundraising events, highlighting the important role Neighbourhood Houses play in rural communities.

MTHCS Rural Connection Team Leader Kim Darley said the events provided valuable opportunities for people to connect while also helping shape future community programs.

*"It was a wonderful opportunity for MTHCS to partner with Mildura Rural City Council and other organisations to deliver local events for Mallee Community Wellbeing Week, creating new opportunities for people to learn, connect and enhance their wellbeing," Ms Darley said.*

*"It was also a valuable opportunity for MTHCS to hear directly from community members about the types of ongoing programs and supports they would like to see in the future."*



Image (L to R): Melissa Kennelly (Social Inclusion Facilitator MRCC), Laura (Friends For Good Facilitator), community members participating Gaylene and Juanita.

## Mallee Communities Come Together to Celebrate Connection and Wellbeing

As part of Mallee Community Wellbeing Week, Ouyen hosted an Introduction to Mental Health First Aid session, giving community members the chance to learn about recognising and responding to mental health challenges, while Murrayville residents enjoyed a Come and Try Tai Chi session focused on gentle movement, relaxation and social connection. Ouyen also welcomed participants to The Art of Connection workshop, which combined creativity and conversation to explore the importance of belonging and community.

Neighbourhood House Week was marked by community lunches in Ouyen, Murrayville and Sea Lake, with residents and volunteers gathering to share meals, conversation and companionship. These events reinforced the important role local Neighbourhood Houses play as welcoming spaces where people can connect and support one another.

Fundraising events also brought communities together for a worthy cause. The Biggest Morning Tea events held across Murrayville, Ouyen and Sea Lake raised vital funds for cancer research, prevention and support services. Murrayville residents gathered for a traditional morning tea featuring homemade cakes and local hospitality, while community members across the Mallee demonstrated their generosity and commitment to supporting those impacted by cancer.



Ouyen's event raised an impressive \$2,009, while Sea Lake raised \$1,065, with additional fundraising continuing through local business support.

Ms Darley said the success of the events reflected the strength of Mallee communities and the importance of creating opportunities for people to come together.

“Cancer affects so many people in our small communities. Events like these not only raise valuable funds and awareness but also provide an opportunity for people to connect, share stories and support one another,” she said.

Looking ahead, MTHCS will continue to build on the momentum generated during the month, with the Ouyen Neighbourhood House moving a number of regular programs to Mondays throughout winter. Community favourites including Chatty Café and Community Soup Day will alternate weekly, providing ongoing opportunities for local residents to connect and stay engaged.

The month-long celebrations in May demonstrated that whether through learning new skills, sharing a meal, supporting a charity fundraiser or simply spending time together, strong community connections remain at the heart of wellbeing across the Mallee Track.

