

BRINGING CARE TO THE HALLS OF POWER

Victorian MP Georgie Purcell
is centering care in her
approach to politics

2061: THE AGE OF CARE

The world's first piece of "Care-
fi" - "care fiction" - takes us into
the future of care

TAKING PRIDE IN OFFERING CARE

Wangaratta's Pride Hub offers
inclusion and love in unique
ways, writes Allison Winters

...and other stories by north-east Victorian
and Goulburn Valley locals

SIGHTS OF CARE

A revolution of care in
regional Victoria



**WOMEN'S
HEALTH**
Goulburn North East

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are intersectional in our approach and are proud to stand beside generations of great women whose work has brought us closer to equality for all.

We acknowledge the wisdom, living culture and connection of the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands on which we work, and acknowledge the profound disruption of colonisation and the Stolen Generations on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We respect Aboriginal rights to self-determination, and take seriously our responsibility to ensure our work, policies and collaborations all enable and strengthen these rights.

We believe in shared and just cultural transformation that embraces diversity, and these acknowledgements are part of the ethical principles that guide our work and conduct.

We're listening to your feedback on our work – please let us know how we're doing.



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AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

By Lauren Salathiel,
Women's Health Goulburn North East

I read recently, in the introductory pages of an anthology of LGBTI love poems, the statement that “love is the quality of attention we pay to things.”* I would be so bold as to suggest that this definition applies as readily to “care” as it does to “love.”

In an age of swiping and doom-scrolling, of digital quick-fixes, of light-speed news cycles, and a seemingly endless flurry of global crises aired breathlessly on the radio as we drive the kids between their extracurricular activities, this thing - "attention" - can seem as though it can be hard to muster, let alone direct with thought and tenderness to any particular object or situation.

And yet, when we slow down and turn our gaze towards the things that are closest to us - the people, animals, natural places, phenomenon that are right in front of us - or lift our gaze up from the blur of daily life to take in the "big picture" that might inspire and guide us, it seems easier to nurture and harness this attention, this care.

This year's edition of our World Localisation Day magazine explores exactly this idea. In the pages that follow, we celebrate the various ways people in our own community have chosen to dedicate their attention and their hearts to the things around them.

The localised nature of those acts of care doesn't make them insignificant or parochial. In fact, as shown by this edition's piece of "Care-fi" writing (a genre of future-focused care-centred fiction we've invented for this edition), these localised acts of care ripple out through time and space, right into the future.

With that, we invite you to stop, pay attention and read. And to then go into your community and its future with care and love.

We're deeply indebted to the team of wonderful writers, storytellers and all-round good community folk who were willing to share their tales of localised care with us for this publication. We urge you to throw your support behind them however you can - seek out their organisations or projects, 'like' them on social media, volunteer with them or be inspired to follow in their footsteps.

*J.D. McClatchy, 2021 *Love Speaks Its Name: Gay and Lesbian Love Poems*



**Introducing
RAFFI, THE
THERAPY DOG**

COMFORT AND CARE COME NATURALLY



By Samm Menzies, therapy dog trainer

In a world that often seems rushed and detached, and where so many feel overwhelmed, the simple act of caring has the power to create profound positive change. Companion dog Raffi and his human partner-in-care Samm, are finding joyfully simple ways of bringing this care to their community.

For more than two decades, I have worked within the community arts, disability and health sector, seeking ways to bring joy and support to those in need. And now, I have found a remarkable partner in this endeavour - Raffi, my poodle cross doggo. Together, we hope to enhance lives and spread the spirit of care and compassion.

Raffi, my four-legged companion, is not your average dog. In his short life, he has undergone extensive training as a service dog, acquiring skills that go beyond the usual realm of companionship. His empathetic nature and remarkable ability to connect with people make him an invaluable asset in our pursuit of improving wellbeing.

Raffi previously supported a person with psychosocial support needs and,

with me, in his new life, he continues to display a beautiful calm and comforting presence. I regularly observe him helping to alleviate stress and anxiety by sitting quietly or lying down beside total strangers and friends alike. He just seems to know where and when he is needed. His gentle, friendly nature help to make him a welcomed part of the lives he touches.

Raffi and I have begun a meaningful partnership with our local nursing home where we visit regularly. The joy that lights up the residents (and staff) faces when Raffi enters the room is immeasurable. We share stories, we sit quietly and listen or we wander from room to room to simply say hello to those who may be feeling lonely or isolated.

For those folk who are unable to communicate verbally, Raffi's presence offers the magic of physical touch. Through our visits, we aim to create an atmosphere of care and support, fostering a sense of connectedness and improving the overall wellbeing of the residents.



Raffi and I are working towards engaging more deeply with our wider community where we will seek opportunities to promote wellbeing. Whether it's visiting schools, community centres, or hospitals, Raffi's presence would bring a sense of calm and happiness. We would love to engage in interactive sessions, where individuals of all ages get the chance to bond with Raffi and experience the therapeutic benefits of his presence. The unconditional love and acceptance that Raffi embodies become a catalyst for fostering connections and nurturing a culture of care within the community.

Recognising the transformative impact Raffi has on the lives of those he encounters, we aspire to have him formally trained as a therapy dog. This step will enhance his abilities and allow us to reach even more people in need. However, such training

requires funding, and we are actively seeking support to make this dream a reality. With the necessary training, Raffi can continue to provide comfort, companionship, and therapeutic support to individuals facing physical and emotional challenges.

In a world where acts of care and compassion are increasingly rare, the presence of Raffi and me brings a renewed sense of hope and connection. We strive to make a difference in people's lives, one interaction at a time. Raffi's innate ability to provide comfort and support, combined with my experience in the community arts, disability and health sector, form a powerful partnership centred around the theme of care. Together, we hope to inspire others to embrace the power of care and make a positive impact on the wellbeing of those around them.

Samm has launch a Go Fund Me campaign to support the training of Raffi, the therapy dog. Donate [here](#).



BRINGING CARE TO THE HALLS OF POWER

By Georgie Purcell, Animal Justice MP for Northern Victoria

Politics has come to be seen as a system with no space for care or compassion. But care is exactly what policy and decision-making should be about, says Victorian Animal Justice Party MP Georgie Purcell.

For a long time, I thought that I had no place in our political systems. There are a few reasons for this – my colourful past and different story than most politicians were factors. But another large part of it was because politics is seen as a brutal game, with no space for kindness, caring or compassion.

But at its core, this is what policy and decision making should be all about.

With politicians being consistently ranked as one of the least trusted professions, many Victorians look at our parliaments and think they are devoid of compassion and integrity.

Now that I am elected, this is something I am determined to change.

As the youngest woman in the Victorian Parliament, my way of showing ‘care’ is by bringing the true and unpolished version of myself everywhere I go. It’s important for me to show my constituents the true version of who I am.

I speak to all members of my community, I am an active listener and importantly, I do my best to show that I'm just a bit of a bogan who cares about creating a kinder, more decent Victoria – and found myself as a politician because of it.

The Animal Justice Party has four core values of kindness, equality, rationality and non-violence.

“*As a member of parliament representing some of the most vulnerable in society, I now realise that care is embodied in every decision that I make – and that is a strength that I bring to the halls of power, not a weakness.*”

Maybe part of this lack of care in politics comes down to the long-standing absence of women in such positions. Traditionally a woman is given the role of a caretaker, someone who keeps the house in check.

I was certainly fed this narrative as a young girl and only now in my 20s and early 30s have I come to understand ways in which I can break these gender roles society has molded for us.

My first interaction with a male-dominated field was choosing to pursue a law degree fresh out of high school, with legal roles, only until recently, historically made





up of men. It then went on to be something I experienced in politics, initially as a staffer, and now as a member of parliament.

It is well documented that having women in political leadership roles can mean more care in our communities. For the first time ever, Victoria's Legislative Council or the 'Upper House', currently has a majority of women - with 55 percent of elected members in the House. I am one of them.

Being known as the House of Review, this will result in there being more women in our current

political landscape making decisions on policy and law than we've ever seen in Victoria.

The animal protection movement is also represented by a vast majority of women, with the Animal Justice Party membership being 80 per cent women. I represent a core group of people who exemplify care within our communities.

As the face of politics slowly but surely begins to change, I am excited about a future where care is a key value held by all politicians.



**Introducing
GREATER
SHEPPARTON
LIGHTHOUSE
PROJECT**



MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHTHOUSE WORK

By Amy Robinson, chief executive officer of Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project

Flooding brings out the best of a community's sense of care and responsibility for collective wellbeing.

Reflecting on the recent floods crisis that had devastating impacts throughout the state and in my home of Shepparton and neighbouring communities in the municipality feels surreal as the crisis was eight months ago. Yet, the impacts and recovery are ongoing.

We saw how mother nature and climate change can affect our communities and how this intersects with social injustice and exacerbates social challenges already prevalent in the community.

But on the other hand, it highlighted the best of our region, demonstrating the strength, resilience and care our community has for each other.

Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project (Lighthouse) staff, our board, our community volunteers, and myself chose to proactively and strategically respond. This response was mirrored by the collective efforts of many individuals and community groups, reflecting an ethos that, as a community, this is just what you do for each other when times are tough.

For Lighthouse, our collective impact approach ensures we are well-positioned to channel the goodwill of our community and be the vehicle that allows people to engage on a larger scale, enabling swift actions and solutions. When the October floods hit, that's exactly what we did.

Supported by Greater Shepparton City Council, Lighthouse created a sophisticated yet grassroots system to provide food and other necessities like nappies, formula, medication, and pet food to 2800 families in the week following the floods. This food was delivered by a dedicated team of 150 volunteers.

“ *Their care for our community shone through, indicated by the fact that they put up their hands overnight to assist their fellow community members.* ”

With a core group that possessed a vast knowledge of the Greater Shepparton region, Lighthouse established six additional satellite food hubs to neighbouring areas in Mooroopna and beyond. Our communication channels on the ground during the crisis enabled us to anticipate and commence with targeted support to areas of greater need or higher flood threat or impact.

From volunteers packing and delivering boxes to the business community who provided unique skills in logistics or forklift driving and access to food supplies from larger supermarket chains to local orchardists providing fresh fruit, there are many available assets in our community that provide enormous opportunities.

By harnessing these assets in a coordinated effort, we can ensure that strength and resilience shine through despite the devastation.

Additionally, Lighthouse raised and directly distributed \$145k from philanthropy and donations to provide



immediate financial aid to those needing rapid support.

As a community leader and leader of Lighthouse, I thank our staff, volunteers and our community, whose care was instrumental in providing timely and tangible support to our people when they needed a hand the most.



A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH CARE

By Sarah Hill, a practical philosopher who happens to work at WHGNE

For Sarah Hill, a simple interaction in a cafe was a lesson in the empathy, authenticity and honesty that sit at the centre of "care."

I walked into a cafe the other day, consumed by thoughts of what I was going to order. It was somewhere I had not been before, so I was overwhelmed by the new surroundings, trying to anticipate expectations and fall into line.

Then I noticed a man in front of me - because we do notice when we see someone who looks this way. Homeless. We notice, even though most of us pretend we don't as we walk by.

He noticed himself too, and I knew this by the way he said to the café attendant, "I've got some money," announcing his right to tread inside.

The barista asked him politely, "What would you like?" He placed his order - a coffee. And then she asked him, "Would you like to pay?" He said yes.

He didn't have to; she had offered the option for him not to, as the café offers a pay it forward scheme.

She gave him an option, and he made a choice. He paid on that day because he had the means to do so. He contributed because he could, and if he could not that was okay, he would still have received what he needed. She didn't question him and say he should save the money for something else, something she thought he "needed" more. She did not tell him what to do.

“ *This is what care is to me. It's about how we interact with others, and with ourselves. It's understanding that autonomy and self-determination do not desert us because of circumstance, perceptions or because of systemic failure. It is authenticity and honesty in our dialogue, and in our actions.* ”

And it is asking ourselves, "What do I need in this moment?" and honouring those needs. It is ensuring we have the wisdom to reflect on our beliefs, values, and assumptions and to challenge our own mental models. It is creating space for diverse opinions and perspectives, so that we may challenge our own, and open ourselves up to grow in ways we didn't know we could.

Why does this matter? Because only when we care for ourselves, can we care for others.





FLIPPING THE SCRIPT ON PARENTING

By Nik Hazeleger, a stay-at-home dad in rural Victoria

Parenting offers an unexpected and life-changing lesson in love and care for globetrotter, barista and now new dad, Nik Hazeleger.

I can't believe I'm a dad. It blows my tiny mind every day. I know some people have this idea from an early age that, one day, they'll have children. Never really seemed like my jam, kids are crazy, noisy, grabby little cyclones of mess and mayhem, leaving

paths of destruction and broken parents in their wake wherever they go. Who would honestly want one, or more, or many?!

It turns out, most people actually; because as hard as parenting is, it also brings a depth of love and level of care into your life that is quite indescribable, and otherwise unattainable. Some people know that going in, I'm learning as I go.

It cannot be overstated how much becoming a parent changes your life. My partner and I had been together for a few years before the world shut down in 2020.

A firefighter and a barista who both loved to travel and seek out exciting new experiences in interesting places.

Fast forward a few years and the world's turned upside down. Goodbye travel, sleep, sex life, date nights, friends, autonomy, careers, financial stability and any aspirations towards sustainability...at least for the foreseeable future. HELLO raising a happy, healthy, slightly hectic little boy, in the home we built during the pandemic, in the tiny town of Yackandandah.

Our particular path down parenthood lane started with a 36-hour home water-birth labour, that ended with an emergency transfer to the hospital for the last 30 minute push. I caught my son with no mask, no gloves and no gown during the tail end of COVID, so we were already off to an unconventional start.

Initially we both took some time off work, but there really is no substitute for a mother's nourishing,



comforting connection with her new baby, so thankfully mum was able to take a little longer.

“ We were also lucky enough to have paid parental leave, which should really be a universal right for all families with new arrivals.



Those first few months are both precious and difficult, and it was hugely valuable for us to have supportive workplaces during that period of unimaginable change and growth.

However, after that first year things continued to change, as they do, and a few things became apparent; my job was no longer serving me or my family particularly well, the relentlessness of parenting a busy toddler full-time was taking its toll on mum, and daycare was not an option.

So, flip the script. My partner took an opportunity in her Forest Fire Management career, making her not only a wonderful mum but also a great provider for our family, and I became our son's primary carer. Hardest job I've ever had!

Thankfully, I've spent many years coming to grips with my own mental health issues, so I've actually built a great set of tools (mainly patience, let's face it) for dealing with a tiny mischief-maker who shares my restless, cheeky and stubbornly contrary nature. So far it's been a positive change, giving us all a little more space to grow and expand.

I feel so lucky to get this special time with him, as much as it often drives me mad. Experiencing and exploring a whole bright new world together is absolutely priceless.

Ultimately, this time is a gift we give to ourselves and our son, for through it flows both life and love, and though it may be challenging it must always be cherished.

2061: THE AGE OF CARE

A work for care-fiction (care-fi)
by Dani Kline, a futurist who
happens to work for WHGNE



*What do we want? Care!
When do we want it? Forever!
Why do we want it? So everything is better!*

It's 2061, 28 years into the Careaceous period and the next generation of Care-beings are being born; the first Care-being was born in 2033.

Care-beings are born with a fabulous trait, the CAREb trait, which has evolved significantly and effortlessly since 2033. CAREb cannot be tracked by an app on a phone; it is not a chip implanted in the brain that allows Care-beings to care; nor is it a superfood that supports them with the ability to care.


CAREb is a trait that supports Care-beings to care for fellow Care-beings,

humans, animals, plants, and Earth in its entirety, with ease.

The CAREb trait strengthens over time as Care-beings experience and witness different life and world events. Care-beings also have a wonderful network of fellow Care-beings, and they regularly have care chats with one another to enhance their skills and allow them to continue being wonderful Care-beings.

To teach humans (the beings born prior to the Careaceous period) about care, Care-beings impart their wisdom and knowledge through storytelling, the Care Podcast and a regular Care articles written in each independent newspaper and magazine, every day.

Care-beings naturally and attentively care for everything and everyone



they come into contact with. They undertake Care Quests each day, not because they have to, but because they want to.

“ *Care Quests are not onerous. In fact, the simple act of smiling, saying hello, helping a fellow Care-being, helping a human, or simply showing up and listening when someone or something needs some care is considered a Care Quest.*

Care Quests are not measured, tallied or ticked off a list. Care-beings simply complete them each and every day as they go about their normal lives working, supporting their families, socialising with friends and family, playing sport and so on.

Care-beings have made a huge difference to the lives of generations of humans and to Earth. You see, when care is given freely, without the expectation of getting something in return, everything within that Care Cycle is given a big warm hug and goes about the day with a heart full of care.

For Care-beings to be able to continue with their daily lives and care quests, they need the support of humans. Humans are encouraged to smile and say hello each time they see a Care-being, as this is what fills up the Care-being's heart and allows them to continue their Care Quests for the day.

The future prosperity of the Careaceous period starts now, with us. Please show some care to fellow humans, to Earth and to the Care-beings who already walk among us, because you never know how much they might need that care!



A LETTER TO A FRIEND

By Lou Barrow, friend, carer and
Benalla-based Team Kymbo Animal
Rescue volunteer

*Supporting her friend through her
end-of-life journey taught Benalla
woman Lou Barrow that often care is
the best thing to give and the only
thing we need to receive.*

Kym,

When you told me you had cancer, I was angry at the world. For you were the epitome of good.

Your heart was as big as your farm that had all of your rescue animals on. Dolittle Ridge; what a perfect name, for the perfect place, for the perfect human.

You asked me if I could come and care for you. What an honour and privilege of a request.

At the time I didn't know what care would look like... I had in my mind that if I just cared enough I could heal you.

I spent so much time doing things for you around the farm-things that I believed care looked like. During your last hard month I finally began to realise what care was, and what you actually needed.

And that was simply to sit with you.

Care can be expressed in so many ways, but the biggest thing we can do for anybody in need is to just sit with them. Just sit.

Through the pain and sickness, in moments of nothing,

moments of everything, through laughter and crying.

To sit and share as many sunsets as you can with them. I hope that I cared enough; that I sat long enough to help you.

Sadly, my care could not fix you. So now, without you, I try to find solace in caring for rescues. To carry on the legacy of your beautiful spirit and try and help where I can.

I started Team Kymbo Animal Rescue in the hope it will grow and save others in their moment of need, to care for the lives many neglect.

“ *Until my last breath, my friend, I will care for them as you did. I will stop everyday and just sit. I will sit with the animals in need; those who are scared and those who have never experienced human kindness.*

Care is free. We all have it in us, and we can all be a little sparkle when the world tells others there is none.

Kymbo, I can no longer sit with you. But everyday I will enjoy the sunset, hopefully with a little soul next to me, letting them know they are safe.



CARE IN TIMES OF DISASTER

Whether it's climate impacts like fire and flood or a global pandemic, disaster is no longer unprecedented. So what do we need to care for each other well – before, during and after a disaster?

This is the question Women's Health Goulburn North East is asking, in partnership with our friends at Australia reMADE, for a research project about what's needed to keep our communities safe and thriving in a disaster-prone world.

In recent times Australians have experienced the severe weather impacts of climate change, as well as a global pandemic – made more intense by the ongoing and less visible crises of increasing costs of living, unaffordable housing and more.

Around the country people have

stepped up to care for each other, whether it's doing the shopping for the vulnerable, offering up a spare room, fighting fires, filling sandbags, or minding children.

But we've also heard about how our most vulnerable have been left behind; and how unsustainable it is for communities to be left to pick up the pieces of broken policies and bad decisions, which not only create and compound these crises, but leave more people feeling isolated, vulnerable, stressed and at risk.

This project is exploring how we can better set ourselves up to and be cared for well, especially during times of deep disruption. When business as usual falls away, what works and what doesn't? What needs to already be in place so people can continue to get by, recover and thrive?

GET INVOLVED

To help us advocate for the practical ways to centre care before, during and after disaster we need your help.

We want to hear your experiences: how have you cared, and been cared for, in your community – especially during times of collective disruption, challenge and extreme stress? What's worked, and what hasn't? What kinds of support, resources, programs or infrastructure should we be preparing for now, so we're more equipped to survive and thrive next time disaster strikes?

There are two ways for you, or your organisation, to get involved between now and the middle of July 2023 (choose as many as you like):

- Host a Kitchen Table Conversation with family, friends or colleagues (we'll provide the resources and support you need);
- Complete a [brief online survey](#).

While anyone is welcome to participate and share lessons from their community, we're particularly keen to hear from those living in the Goulburn Valley and north-east Victoria, as our report and advocacy will be focused there.

To register your interest in facilitating or participating in a community conversation, or for more information, please contact rachel@australiaremade.org, or register your interest below.

WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE CONTENT OF CONVERSATIONS?

We know that politicians, unions, local councils and others with the power to support and change how we care for each other are keen to hear your stories.

We'll bring your experiences and ideas together into a resource that envisions how we – communities, organisations, businesses and governments – can embed care into disaster preparation, response and recovery.

We hope these conversations will be an opportunity to share your experiences and ideas, meet like-minded friends and allies, and contribute to building community capacity to thrive before, during and after disaster.



**Introducing
ALLISON WINTERS
from
LINE WANGARATTA**



TAKING PRIDE IN OFFERING CARE

By Allison Winters,
LINE Wangaratta President

Wangaratta's Pride Hub is all about making local LGBTQIA+ feel welcomed, supported, connected, safe and cared for.

In February 2023, local LGBTQIA+ charity LINE Wangaratta opened a Pride Hub: a space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) people to gather in regional Victoria.

The Pride Hub project came about through community conversations

and engagement with LGBTQIA+ people from across the Hume region.

Community members were looking for an LGBTQIA+ owned and run venue for events and programs, and LINE Wangaratta was looking for a space to host peer support programs, education sessions and art classes in a safe space.

After seeking funding and securing a small amount, a shed in an industrial area was selected and the LINE Wangaratta team worked hard to create a venue that could host programs, as well a support LGBTQIA+ people.

Opening in February 2023, the Pride Hub has:

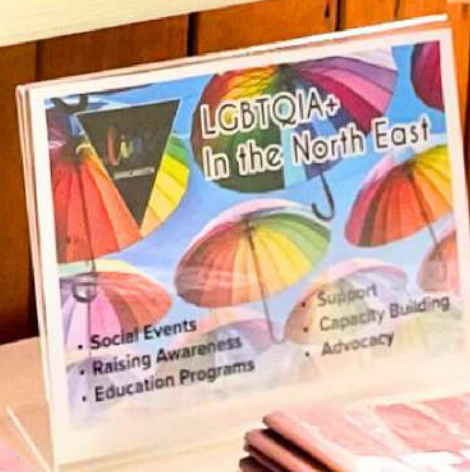
- Free clothing, shoes, and accessories,
- Free toiletries,
- Free Pride Library,
- Pride Shop, with LGBTQIA+ books, clothing, accessories, and homewares,
- Program space, where Peer Support groups, LGBTQIA+ education sessions, meetings and workshops are held, as well as regular art classes, school holiday programs for young people and more.


The aim of the Pride Hub is to provide a place for people to connect, and gives our organisation the opportunity to provide a service for a marginalised community, that is currently not available anywhere in our region.

People are welcomed in to access free items, as well as financial support and referral to counselling and support services.

We're committed to improving the wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ people in our region, and we do that through connection, care, advocacy, and support at the Pride Hub.

The Pride Hub is located at the Wangaratta Woollen Mills, in Textile Ave, Wangaratta and is open on Friday afternoons from 2-6pm and Saturday mornings from 9am-1pm.





What does the Pride Hub mean to you?

People visiting the space have been positive, spoken of how much having a Pride Hub means to them.

One visitor said, “there’s nothing like this in regional Australia.”

One of the new Board Members reflected on her experience of the Pride Hub, saying, “I discovered the Pride Hub just before it opened in December 2022, and the amazing volunteers and people that I met helped me figure out who I am in the early stages of my gender transition.

“I’ve since become involved in the organisation and the community, and now I’m planning projects and peer support programs. It’s wonderful to receive care at a service, and then go one to give that care to others.”

Another volunteer reflected, “I volunteer at the Pride Hub, and love connecting with people like me. We recently had a young LGBTQIA+ person come into the hub and they were able to pick up free clothing and toiletries to take home.

“Others have contacted us online, and we’ve been able to help them get a new fridge after moving out of home and experiencing financial stress. I love giving back to the community.

“Having the Pride Hub in Wangaratta is a valuable asset in our community. This space and the people in it, make our LGBTQIA+ community safe, supported and cared for.”



FOR THE LOVE OF A MOUNTAIN GOAT

By Lauren Salathiel, a cycling commuter who happens to work at WHGNE

Sometimes it's hard to follow through on acts of care, particularly when they feel as though they are directed at something obtuse, or beyond one's immediate reality. But lifting one's gaze towards a "big picture" - no matter how far away it is - can focus the heart like nothing else.

I decided to sell my car and take to riding my bike everywhere four years ago, out of care for the natural world and a commitment to reducing my emissions.

When it's warm and fine and the birds are singing, it's easy to follow this through. In fact, I feel sorry that the people zipping along in cars beside me can't feel the breeze on their cheeks and the sun on their shoulders!

When the wind is whipping at me, my socks are wet, my hands are freezing, my bum is sore, the hills are steep and the traffic obnoxious, my commitment to the natural world wavers.

And it's then that I think of the Arabian Ibex. The Ibex is an amazing creature, but definitely not the sort of beast I will ever encounter while riding between Yackandandah and Wangaratta. It's a type of mountain goat, endemic to the Arabian peninsula, most commonly seen teetering on its tiny, delicate hoofs, on the most precarious of rocky outcrops in the harsh desert.

I've only ever seen it on wildlife documentaries, and whenever I have, I've been overcome with emotion (in a perhaps slightly unhealthy way) with how uniquely it has evolved to live in its unforgiving and treacherous

environment. How it has thrived up there, balancing so perfectly on rocky spurs that look as though they could hardly hold the weight of a sparrow.

The thing that both enthralls and horrifies me when it comes to the Arabian Ibex, is the thought that what I do here in my tiny, insignificant corner of the world could very well be the thing that tips this obscure and largely unknown creature, in its equally tiny, insignificant part of the world, over the edge.

It has occurred to me that the Ibex is a symbol, a metaphor, that "fuels" me when it feels like this bizarre bicycle-mounted act of care is pointless and too hard.

As much as I love and care about and am dazzled by the Ibex as a singular creature, perhaps it also has a broader value as a tangible stand-in for all the miraculous things in our world that we are putting at risk unknowingly, unthinkingly, as we pursue convenience and efficiency.

Picturing the Ibex at all the times that I want to throw my bike into the bushes and buy a car helps to illuminate a link (to my mind and heart, at least) between what can look and feel like a feeble effort (or sometimes, quite literally a pain in the butt) , and the existence of a world of creatures whose lives depend on all of us continuing to see value in seemingly feeble efforts to care.

“ *Having a bigger picture to care about focuses the heart and the mind on acting with purpose and conviction, even if this action feels tiny and insignificant.*



So many people have their own "Ibex" that nudges them forwards (perhaps with its horns, perhaps not!) and motivates them to keep caring even when they have committed themselves to caring about something as amorphous as "the natural world" or "the future" or "social justice."

They're hard things to pin down, in many ways, but people orient themselves towards these types of care by thinking about their children, their grandchildren, their community, the bravery and wisdom of their constituents, the strength of spiritual, cultural and ancestral ties. They draw their courage to care from reading in the newspaper about the lived experience of someone they'll never meet or a place they'll never go. These things all give us an ability to look beyond the limits of our own existence and care about something bigger.

Whether our reason for caring tugs at our heart from right in front of us, or half a world away, it's important to recognise it when it pulls. And it's good to know that none of us are alone in feeling that pull, wherever its origins may be.

That is where our collective strength to keep moving - and keep caring - will really come from.



MENTORS FOSTER TRUE CONNECTION

By Caz Sammon, Big Brothers Big Sisters
Wangaratta Mentoring Coordinator

A supportive, caring and understanding adult can make the world of difference to a young person who is grappling with life's challenges, writes Caz Sammon.

Wangaratta is a community in which I feel deeply connected and for that I am enormously grateful.

Being truly connected radically increases the likelihood we feel happy and satisfied with our life, and improves our ability to cope in tough times.

Unfortunately, even in our wonderful community of Wangaratta, there are people who are isolated, people who are missing the support structures required to thrive.

For lots of reasons, a significant number of our young people are not connected with a stable supportive adult, stealing their opportunity to build life skills, and often leading to high-risk behaviour and mental health issues.

The Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) Youth Mentoring Program connects vulnerable and disadvantaged young people aged seven to 17 with volunteer adult mentors. They spend an hour or two together every week for at least a

year, developing a strong friendship and building trust. The connection creates a safe space in which to increase resilience and open their mind to new possibilities.

The BBBS Program, which was relaunched in Wangaratta last year, has been run around the world for over a century with demonstrated results. Already we are seeing big changes in the young people involved locally, such as improved confidence, stronger peer relationships, increased school attendance, and new skills such as cooking and the ability to gain part-time employment. The ripple effect of the program has a positive impact across our community.

We have an incredible group of volunteers who contribute in a variety of ways, not only mentoring, but running events, fundraising and supporting the local mentoring coordinator.

We invite you to get on board! Mentors receive basic training and are supported throughout their time in the program. It's a rewarding role and meaningful way to contribute, and our volunteers are often surprised how much they gain from their involvement.

Find out more at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/bbswangaratta/>



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