



The Homestead
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Dear Mayor Vernon

I am writing to request that Council give urgent consideration to extending the operating subsidy of the Connect Victoria Park Village Hub, at the current rate, for a further six months. It would be greatly appreciated if consideration of this request could be progressed in early May so as to provide certainty before the impending cessation of our current operating subsidy on 30 June 2020.

The Town's contribution of \$50,000 per annum for the last three financial years has been critical in the establishment of our successful Village Hub and has resulted in many positive outcomes for the older people living in the Town of Victoria Park. With the cessation of the operating subsidy in approximately eight weeks' time, and uncertainty about the timeframes for a new operating subsidy application process, a timely commitment to extend this support would allow Connect Victoria Park Inc to continue to invest its financial and human resources in growing the Village Hub for the benefit of all older members of our community.

The requested six month extension (valued at \$25,000) will ensure that the Village Hub is able to continue our current level of support to our community during the next several months of the COVID-19 pandemic, implement our new Connect60+ Wellness Program, and ensure we are able to participate in the new operating subsidy application process. It also provides sufficient time to manage a reconfiguration of the Village Hub should we be unsuccessful in securing an operating subsidy for the next period.

To support this request I have provided a brief report, including:

1. a summary of the Village Hub background and operations to date;
2. performance data against the Town's Strategic Community Plan Objectives for the 28 months of Village Hub operations;
3. details of partnerships established and successes in building our profile;
4. membership data and other progress towards financial sustainability for the Village Hub; and
5. plans for the future.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request. I am available to address any meeting or provide additional information should this be required.

Yours sincerely

Luke Garswood

Brief Report to the Town of Victoria Park

1. A summary of the Village Hub background and operations to date;

Connect Victoria Park Inc (Connect) is a well-established not-for-profit organisation in the local government area of the Town of Victoria Park (the Town). It operates rental units for low income people aged 60 years and over, and a community centre to facilitate social connection for people aged 55 years and over. The community centre has been revitalised in the last two years with the purpose of improving the quality of life of older people living in Victoria Park and support them to age well in the community they love.

The revitalisation of the centre has been achieved by establishing The Connect Victoria Park Village Hub (the Village Hub), an approach based on the Beacon Hill Village in the US, a member led Hub that aims to enable people aged 55+ to age well in place, assisting each other socially and practically.

The Village Hub has sought to develop a **'Member led, staff supported'** culture by recognizing the significant skills and abilities of the membership and encouraging member leadership and co-design. A Members' Working Group was established from the beginning to allow for co-design of the Village Hub program and other initiatives.

Members have co-designed a program of events and classes with professional facilitators that meet member interests and support healthy ageing, social connection and lifelong learning. Where necessary Village Hub staff have worked alongside some members to support them to explore their ideas and to develop the confidence to pursue them.

The Members' Working Group has since evolved into two groups that meet regularly: The Events Group (organizes social events, guest speakers, day and overnight trips) and The Hosts and Leaders Group (organizes and maintains classes and groups to meet members' interests and needs).

Classes now operating include Tai Chi, Ballroom Fit, Line Dancing, Chair Yoga, Gentle Pilates, Watercolour and Drawing, and Fitness Classes.

Member and Volunteer Led Groups now operating include Creative Writing, Photography, Book Club, Craft, Social Cycling, Walking Group, Cooking, Bridge, and French Conversation.

Members are now contributing regularly to the sustainability of the Village Hub through member led activities and other volunteering activities with more than 7214 hours of volunteering being recorded to date, including assisting each other with small household tasks, lifts to appointments, and other support, through our Neighbour-to-Neighbour volunteering programme. More than 44 people have been assisted through Neighbour-to-Neighbour since September 2018.

An additional 100 occasions of support have been provided to people to assist with issues impacting on their independent living e.g. referrals to community care or assistance in dealing with Centrelink, via our Member Help Centre.

An independent evaluation was conducted in the first 18 months of the Village Hub operations. Quality of Life surveys were administered in April 2018 and April 2019. A comparison of two surveys shows a substantial improvement in members' quality of life. Across almost all factors, social, economic, financial and health and well-being, the results show improved metrics. Whilst it is not possible to solely attribute individual results to the benefit of hub membership from this comparison, results of both surveys and interviews strongly indicate that access to the activities, and the friendships and support that is available at the Village Hub is demonstrably improving the quality of life of the general membership.

Individual comparison of those members who completed both surveys resulted in a 28% improvement in self-perceived quality of life. A copy of the full independent evaluation report is available [here](#).

2. Performance data against the Town's Strategic Community Plan Objectives for the 28 months of Village Hub operations;

Our program of classes and groups provides access to affordable opportunities for physical activity, cognitive stimulation and lifelong learning, and opportunities for social connection and friendships. They are strongly linked to the Town's Strategic Community Plan Objectives and have been an essential part of building community within the Village Hub. Pleasingly participation rates have been steadily increasing from approximately 5,800 attendances per annum before the establishment of the Village Hub to approximately 10,000 attendances per annum. Since commencement we have facilitated a total of 20,065 attendances.

2.1 Physical and health related activities at the Village Hub align with the Town's Strategic Community Plan Objective S1 – A Health Community.

Activity	Participation January 2018 to March 2020
Social Cycling	192
Ballroom Fit	930
Carpet Bowls	28
Line Dancing	1156
Walking Group	297
Chair Yoga	699
Tai Chi	1281
Gardening Club	112
Active for Life	878
Gentle Pilates	469
Middle Eastern Dancing	22
Podiatry	597
Stay Sharp	316
Meditation	43
Total	7,020

2.2 Life-long learning activities at the Village Hub align with the Town's Strategic Community Plan Objectives S2 – An informed and knowledgeable Community and S4 – A place where all people have and appreciation and awareness of arts.

Activity	Participation January 2018 to March 2020
Ukulele	180
Book Club	72
Community Choir	758
Drawing and Watercolour	289
Tech Savvy	47
Chapters	795
Sustainable Solutions	130
Information Sessions	535
Learn, Cook and Share	31

Photography	60
Bridge	130
Committee Meetings	61
JP Service	113
French conversation	29
Brain Games	16
Total	3,246

2.3 Social and community events at the Village Hub and our volunteering programme align with the Town’s Strategic Community Plan Objective S3– An empowered community with a sense of pride.

Activity	Participation January 2018 to March 2020
Community lunch	2464
Craft groups	700
Members’ Drop In Day	273
Out and About Group	109
Coach Tours	494
Luncheon	528
Saturday Bingo	3999
Members Sundowners	283
Chat Room	256
‘Lives Well Lived’ Outdoor Movie	70
Intergenerational events	30
Other social events	179
Volunteering at the Village Hub	7214
Total	16,599

2.4 Activity during COVID-19 pandemic.

The Village Hub closed our Centre in Mid-March and as most of our Hub activities involved face to face classes and groups and this has required some reinvention. Three working days after we closed our centre we launched a range of outdoor classes for groups up to 10 people covering Ballroom Dancing, Line Dancing, and Fitness and Tai Chi. After one week it was necessary to cancel these as group limits had to be changed for community safety and reconfigure our approach.

We launched our first online classes the following week and now offer a large range of groups and classes via Zoom and are utilising other approaches to keep in touch with our members who are not keen/able to engage online. Pleasingly we have successfully supported more than 118 individuals to take up Zoom through our innovative Zoom With Friends Tutorial Sessions and one on one assistance as people join in to our free Zoom sessions of Gentle Pilates, Chair Yoga, Fitness, Meditation, Ballroom Dancing, Line Dancing and Tai Chi or join our daily ChatZoom, Weekly Movie Club or Zoom Sessions with a Dietician. This has occurred in less than four weeks. 87 older people have taken up the opportunity to regularly join our zoom sessions.

For people who are less tech savvy we have encouraged them to join our daily chat session via phone, or be part of our Phone Tree – either as a volunteer who makes contact with up to 10

people per week for a welfare check and chat – or as a person who receives a regular phone call. Any concerns that are identified are relayed back to our Village Hub staff for resolution, which may include requesting one of our screened volunteers to assist with a food delivery or similar task, or arranging a referral to other services.

Activity - Classes in the Park and on Zoom	Participation from 23 March to 28 April 2020
ChatZoom	51
Ballroom Fit	54
Line Dancing	32
Chair Yoga	65
Tai Chi	38
Active for Life	78
Pilates	65
Movie Club	11
Nutrition Interactive	17
Meditation	3
Total	414

3. Details of partnerships established and successes in building our profile;

The most significant partnership that has developed since the establishment of the Village Hub is that with the Town of Victoria Park. The Town has been represented on the Village Hub Steering Committee from the inception and a number of exciting projects have been progressed collaboratively, including:

- Town of Victoria Park, Harold Hawthorne Community Centre and Swan Care in the development of the 55+ In The Park Community Directory;
- Town of Victoria Park Library for Buzz Week events including Wills and Estate Planning event;
- Town of Victoria Park Swing Concerts in 2019 and 2020, Neighbour Day Event in Read Park, and Jazzin' Up the West End Event;
- Town of Victoria Park Arts Season 2018 events: Curry & Culture, Fabulous Bingo, Egyptian Mummies Art, Art in the Park;
- Town of Victoria Park Have A Go Day stall in 2018 and 2019;
- Town of Victoria Park Community Grant for Culture Connect Intergenerational Noongar Singing with Wanjoo Pty Ltd (Gina Williams and Guy Ghouse), Ursula Frayne Catholic College and Kent Street High School;
- Town of Victoria Park Digital Hub: Be Connected – Get online presentation and collaboration on Zoom with Friends during COVID-19.

Other partnerships include:

- The Vic Park Collective Film Series and Collective Conversation on Ageing;
- GRAI Inc (GLBTI+ Rights in Ageing Inc) for Arts Season event Fabulous Bingo;
- Advocare - Your Money, Your Life presentation – Wills, Enduring Power of Attorney, Advance Health Directive, Elder Abuse prevention;

- St Andrews Greek School and Victoria Park Primary School – performances at Village Hub Luncheons;
- Volunteering WA – Step into Volunteering Presentation;
- Alzheimer’s WA -Understanding Dementia (Part of Dementia Awareness Week 2019);
- Commonwealth Bank – Helping you stay safe online and Financial Independence for Women presentations;
- Act, Belong, Commit – Become an Act Belong Commit Partner in 2019 and information session on Act Belong Commit campaign to inform and build capacity of Village Hub members on mental health issues;
- Bank of I.D.E.A.S. - Changing Ageing in WA seminar in December 2019 to share learnings of first 18 months of Village Hub and Peter Kenyon’s learnings from attending US Village to Village Network Conference;
- Informal partnership with 6 local families to plan, organise and run 2 intergenerational sessions in January 2020;
- U3A – informal partnership in January and February 2020 to build capacity of Village Hub members to run activities such as Brain Games, Topic and Talk and French Conversation;
- Victoria Park Community Centre, Befriend Inc, Active Mental Health and Town of Victoria Park Digital Hub production of step-by-step guide on how to use Zoom for online video-conferencing after physical distance restrictions were put in place due to Covid-19 and conducting Zoom with Friends sessions:
- Carson St School - use of their wheel-chair accessible bus during school holidays for Village Hub members outings
- Seed funding from Rotary Victoria Park and Park Property to Connect Community Choir, now operating as Mackie Street Singers
- COTA-WA – Aged Care Navigator program to provide information and support to older people trying to navigate the aged care system
- Hawaiian Park Centre - regular stall at the shopping centre to talk to locals about ageing in community and the Village Hub
- Local Justice of the Peace - free, weekly service to Village Hub members and Vic Park community members from The Homestead
- Department of Human Services - free information session on financial services available to older people and on how to use MyGov portal
- Department of Consumer Protection - free Scam Information Workshop to Village Hub and community members

The Village Hub has also provided an opportunity to raise our profile and that of the Victoria Park community. Most notable among these are:

- National coverage of the Village Hub on ABC TV News and ABC News Online;
- Attendance of Ken Wyatt MP, Federal Minister for Senior Australians, at the Village Hub’s 1st Birthday High Tea;
- ABC Radio 720 and Curtin FM Interviews with Connect Victoria Park Inc CEO and Village Hub Manager;
- Press coverage in The Southern Gazette and Have A Go News;

- Joint paper presented by Town of Victoria Park Manager of Communities Kaitlyn Griggs and Connect Victoria Park Inc CEO at the National Local Government Professionals Conference on Age Friendly Communities in Fremantle in 2019;
- Invitation for Luke Garswood to present to a Department of Social Services meeting in Canberra and participate in the design of the roll out of the \$10M election commitment to establish Village Hubs across Australia.

4. Membership data and other progress towards financial sustainability for the Village Hub

The Village Hub was successful in gaining a significant grant of \$189,000 (with approximately \$100,000 for day-to-day operations) at our commencement and the Town of Victoria Park contribution, cumulatively over three years, of \$150,000. Connect Victoria Park Inc has supplemented the Village Hub from our own resources at approximately \$180,000, not including in-kind support and the contribution of the CEO's time for planning, supervision and reporting.

The Village Hub is based on a Membership model that encourages participation and skills sharing as well as requiring a small financial contribution that represents an affordable approach to 'user-pays'. Membership currently stands at approximately 300 individuals, a significant increase from the 127 people we commenced with in January 2018, including 75 Connect Victoria Park tenants and 52 members of the previous Homestead Social Club. There are three tiers of membership that provide increasing benefits, in particular discounts and/or free classes. While the majority of people are Bronze Members (\$50 per year) an increasing number of people are taking up the Silver Membership (\$150 per year) and Gold Membership (\$250 per year). There are currently 51 Silver Members and 29 Gold Members. Membership income is currently worth approximately \$25,000 per annum and supplements our major costs of wages for the 1.8 FTE required to staff the Village Hub. Other significant income comes from those Bronze Members and non-members who pay to attend our classes. This income of approximately \$60,000 per annum fully covers the cost of providing the classes but does not, at this stage, provide any capacity to address staffing costs. A number of approaches have been made to philanthropic bodies to supplement our funding but this has proven to be unsuccessful at this stage.

The Board of Connect Victoria Park Inc is committed to continuing its support of the Village Hub and are keenly aware of its benefits to our tenants, members and the broader community. While we continue to explore opportunities to raise income through our membership and sponsorship the Board is prepared to continue its financial support of the Village Hub and hopes that the support from the Town can also continue at this time.

5. Plans for the future

2020 has started with the challenge of COVID-19 but the Village Hub has responded positively and reconfigured our approach to ensure that we can continue to provide affordable opportunities for social connection, lifelong learning and physical fitness. We have also ensured that our members and the broader community know that they have access to assistance if they require it, including through the use of our Neighbour-to-Neighbour volunteers and our active Phone Tree.

In the coming months the Village Hub will launch a new Wellness programme that we have called Connect60+. We are delighted that this project is being developed in conjunction with Independent Living Assessment (formerly The Independent Living Centre of WA) and Curtin

University and will involve the assessment of participants' physical, cognitive and emotional wellbeing at commencement and conclusion of the programme.

This exciting project will supplement our very full program of classes, groups and events. Our focus on supporting the community during COVID-19 remains and we look forward to continuing to work closely with the Town of Victoria Park as we help to make Victoria Park the best place to age in WA.

28 April 2020.