Volunteers that campaigned and won for their cause

Golden Square Pool is a vibrant, inclusive, empowering and powerful community hub for residents of Golden Square and Bendigo, which provides low-cost and accessible health, wellbeing and fitness opportunities, a space for live music events, and a community meeting space for all ages, all year round. The group of 70 volunteers launched a campaign to save the pool from closure in 2012, following City of Greater Bendigo council's plans to permanently close and decommission the pool. Upon successfully retaining the then dilapidated and unmaintained pool, the team learnt the skills to transform the 101 year-old facility, reinvigorating it into a place that is now the heart of the suburb. In the six-years the volunteers have managed the pool, while balancing their own families and lives, 90,000 locals have come through the gates - with last summer seeing 18,793 in four-months, the highest entry-figure in its history. The organisation is entirely voluntary run by 70 locals – with the youngest volunteer being 5 and the eldest 80.

Golden Square Pool was honoured to be a recipient of a state Innovation Award at the Volunteering Victoria 2019 State Awards, for the Junior Volunteer Team program. This program was launched last summer to help foster and grow the ideas, enthusiasm and drive of young people within the Golden Square and Bendigo communities around helping at their local pool, but also getting involved in volunteering opportunities. This program revolves around creating a culture of youth involvement, and at the pool offers mentoring opportunities by other volunteers, teaching of money handling skills, learning how to be part of a team, serving customers, undertaking maintenance – and the most important thing, youth learning the value, importance and power of being part of a community who are working to provide health and wellbeing opportunities for all people. This program has transformed the facility, encouraged parents to bring their young people with them to the pool to also volunteer – therefore increasing volunteer numbers, and helped to create the next leaders in the community.

Golden Square Pool volunteers have made a significant impact in the Bendigo and Victorian community, through saving the pool from closure and now providing a safe place for the community to connect to – that doesn't exist anywhere else in the suburb. To the 90,000 patrons in just six years, there have been significant benefits to mental, social, physical and emotional health and wellbeing, with the pool redefining the fabric of the suburb of Golden Square.

Winning this award has given valuable recognition to the young people for their work, has empowered them to continue going forward and encourage them to bring their friends to be part of the program, and shown that their work at the pool is appreciated by the sector. Moreover, it solidifies the belief that volunteers are doing a remarkable job in operating the swimming pool – and will help to secure the long-term future as a powerful community organisation that is changing lives.

Congratulations to Golden Square Pool on their well-deserved Innovation Award at the 2019 Volunteering Victoria State Awards.