

# Case study: Sharing stories of inclusion

## Karen Community Working Bee at Long Gully Community Garden

**The Karen Community Working Bee took place at the Long Gully Community Garden, bringing together members of the local Karen community to foster community integration and connections.**

### Background

The Karen Community Working Bee was a collaborative initiative between:

- The Victorian Government **Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action** (DEECA), supporting volunteer managers in environmental activities;
- **Long Gully Community Garden**, part of the Long Gully Community Hub and the neighbourhood house network;
- **Regional Victorians of Colour**, a collective of people of colour living in regional Victoria, that supports belonging, connection, and community contribution in regional communities.
- **Volunteering Loddon Mallee**, as an evaluator and partners for the next steps in the initiative.

Each organiser had unique goals for the event:

- **Jonathan**, Long Gully Garden facilitator, aimed to build new garden beds, engage current garden participants, and provide a positive experience for those involved.
- **Ethal**, a Karen community organiser, hoped to involve the community in a mainstream activity and foster a sense of belonging in shared spaces.
- **Amy**, from DEECA, focused on learning how to support informal volunteering efforts and integrate a cultural perspective into environmental volunteering.
- **Linto**, a coordinator with Regional Victorians of Colour, hoped to encourage communal engagement and community involvement.

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*“It won’t happen organically; it needs systems and structures, people, resources and investment.”* – Linto, Regional Victorians of Colour coordinator

### The Working Bee

Participants built two raised garden beds, providing space for new gardeners at Long Gully. Jonathan acknowledged the Dja Dja Wurrung country and explained that the local soil has been contaminated by mining and requires the use of raised beds for safe food production.

The group included 13 Karen volunteers, ranging from new arrivals to long-term residents, supported by three community workers. Some didn’t speak English very well, but amongst the group there were people who could translate.

Most lived nearby and were connected to the childcare and educational programs at the Old Church on the Hill; a local community space in Bendigo. Activities at the Old Church on the Hill are largely examples of inter-community informal volunteering where community members support each other in event and spontaneous volunteering, whereas the Community Garden is a formal volunteering activity.



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### Opportunities and challenges

- **Organiser model:** The event's success was driven by a paid community organiser who mobilised participants, which was instrumental in fostering community involvement.
- **Integration:** The Working Bee helped integrate newly arrived migrants into broader community activities while making the shared community space feel like "theirs."
- **Cultural lens:** Ensuring the environment was welcoming and accessible, with activities suitable for all abilities, was crucial to success.
- **Family focus:** Many participants attended with family members, highlighting the importance of addressing the needs of migrant communities holistically.



It was important to recognise that the basic unit of new migrant communities is the family, rather than the individual. Almost all participants were connected by familial ties with at least one other person.

### Benefits and impact

- The Working Bee encouraged participation in broader community activities beyond internal Karen gatherings and activities.
- Volunteers gained new skills, including gardening techniques and health insights related to local soil conditions.

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- The space is now seen as a shared community asset, with participants feeling a strong sense of belonging.
- The Working Bee activity was all about doing something for the greater good and beyond family and existing connections.

### Participant reflections

- **Bu Gay** has had a garden bed for 1.5 years. She liked that she was attending the Working Bee with her community and that she could bring her kids.
- **Ku Ku** helped organise the event and translated for newer arrivals, making the activity more accessible.
- **Tee Kaw** and **Lovely** came to help out at their mother's suggestion, learnt some new skills, and experienced the garden for the first time.
- **May** found the activity relaxing and enjoyed meeting new people.
- **Lah Su** liked that the garden was a place where the Anglo community and the Karen community came together and collaborated.
- **Bure** attended with her daughter, May, and felt very welcomed. Providing transport was valuable to enable her to participate.



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*“[The community garden] have beds like the ones that we were building at home, but good to learn about them and how to set them up and care for them.”* – Bure, Karen community participant.

*“Karen like to garden, but also gardening helps to respond to the current cost of living.”* – Bu Gay, Karen community participant.



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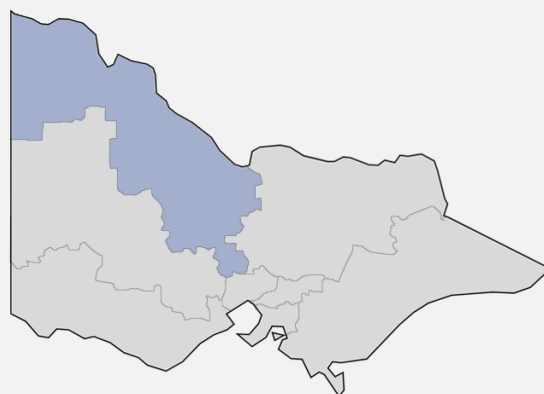
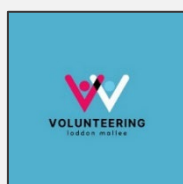
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<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/vma-2022-2026/>



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*Volunteering Victoria acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.*