

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Let's meet Emma

The heart of our Wednesday Community Lunch



At Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre at Mitchell House, our chef Emma is seen in the kitchen preparing a generous spread of vibrant vegetarian meals for the Community Lunch. She leads a dedicated team of volunteers, working together to carefully plate and finish each dish, as colourful, freshly prepared meals fill the table around her. Every lunch she creates is more than just food—it's a warm, welcoming experience that nourishes both body and community spirit.

You may have already heard of Emma, or have even met her, or if you're really lucky, you may have had the immense pleasure of experiencing the food she creates, cooks and provides to those who come to Mitchell House for the weekly Wednesday Community Lunches and the frozen meals programme. Oh, and those of you who are hard core fans will have probably attended at least one of the (now) famous WNC Christmas lunches. If so, then you have truly had the Emma experience ♥

Emma Bowditch and her two young boys moved to Wonthaggi around the end of 2020. Being new to town, Emma visited Mitchell House to find out what went on here. Iain, the manager at the time, started chatting with Emma and invited her to have a look at the lovely new kitchen. Emma explains that she fell in love with the space and knew straight away that this was where she wanted to spend her time, being of service to her new community.

"Iain, would you like me to come in and help?" she asked.

And so an amazing partnership began. Emma's connection with Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre has continued and her impact has grown and deepened over time — not just in the food provided, but in the dining experience itself. Our Wednesday dining room is styled to symbolise abundance and to provide a cosy, friendly environment.

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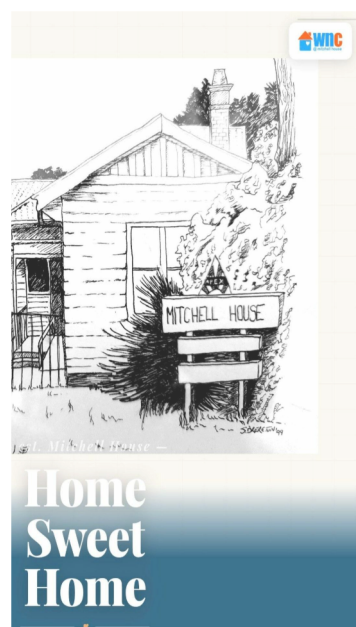
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From the kitchen



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Let's Meet Emma continued

Emma has been working in kitchens since she was 20 years old; her passion is grounded in her certainty that showing love through food brings connection, joy and wellbeing to both the givers and receivers. Implicit in her practice is a profound respect for ingredients. Whilst she names lemon and salt as two favourites, she also seeks out new ideas and combinations to push flavour boundaries and challenge expectations.

Emma emphasises that she works alongside a crew of committed and skilled volunteers — people whose friendship she values greatly. Producing delicious and nutritious lunches and frozen meals week after week is definitely a team effort. And we, the patrons of the Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre, are the very lucky recipients of these meals made and served with such love and care.



Standing up for neighbourhood houses the “Keep Our Doors Open” rally

MANAGER'S MESSAGE

Keep Our Doors Open

When I walk through the doors at Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre each morning, I am struck by something simple and profoundly important: this space matters. As a local artist, musician and environmentalist, I understand the value of spaces that bring people together — where ideas flourish and community is something you feel the moment you arrive. With my two children loving this place as much as I do, it's not just a hub. It's home.

Celebrating Our Heart: The Volunteers

If I had to capture what made autumn 2026 special, it's simple: our volunteers. Emma Bowditch and the Community Lunch team remind us every Wednesday that feeding people goes far beyond nutrition — it's about dignity, connection and the quiet power of care. Peter and Liam have transformed our outdoor space, and Vicki brought our Community Library back to life. To every volunteer reading this: thank you. You are the reason our doors stay open.

New Energy & Looking Ahead

This year we've welcomed exciting new energy — Wonthaggi Karate, Hobbie Nights, the reopened Community Library, and we have our Trivia Night to look forward to in July. Our partners, including the Women's Multicultural Group, Bass Coast Refugee Support Group, Housing Matters, Combined Services Homelessness Coalition, Bayside Health Supported Playgroup, Salvation Army IMS and many others, have chosen to call the centre home. Growing our **membership** is our biggest focus, because membership keeps neighbourhood houses democratic, locally driven and sustainable. Oh and did we mention the Koori Supported Playgroup, delivered by VACCA and Ramahyuck, will soon open new doors for families.

The Bigger Picture

Neighbourhood houses across Victoria are experiencing unprecedented pressure — rising costs, growing demand and eroded funding have pushed almost half of them into deficit. But here's what gives me hope: for every \$1 of funding, communities benefit to the tune of \$21.94. Neighbourhood houses are an investment that pays dividends in wellbeing, connection and resilience.

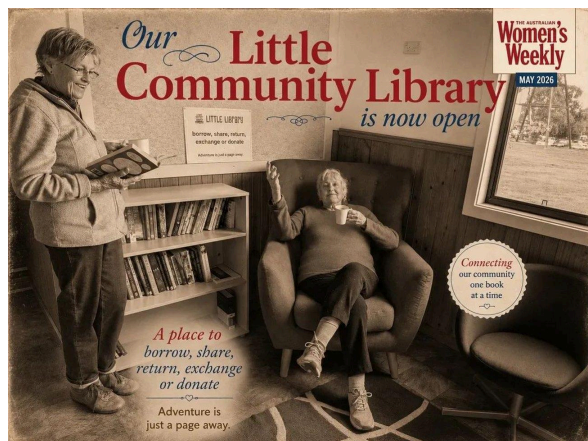
That's why we need your MEMBERSHIP! That's why we need you.

If you're not yet a member, please consider joining (\$20 per person, \$30 per family, or concession rates are also available). Becoming a member isn't just about joining a neighbourhood house—it's about being part of something that belongs to all of us. Membership gives you a voice in shaping the future of your community space; helping guide the programs, values, and direction of your neighbourhood house so it continues to reflect the people it serves. This is your place as much as anyone's, and your ideas, presence, and perspective genuinely matter here.

Stay cosy, Ben ❤️

COMMUNITY NEWS

Our Little Community Library is Open



Drop in to Mitchell House and make yourself at home. Browse the shelves, borrow a book, swap one you've finished, or donate a few you're ready to pass on. All you need is to be a member of WNC – then it's just good reads and good company. Pull up a chair, put the kettle on, and stay a while. Our little library is a warm, welcoming space for everyone – a quiet cuppa, a friendly chat, or a new story to take home. We'd love to see you here.

HOUSE HIGHLIGHT

Craft & Cuppa Group

Friday mornings at Mitchell House

Another wonderful year has been enjoyed by the ladies of the Craft & Cuppa Group at Mitchell House. We catch up on Friday mornings and participate in all sorts of craftwork.



Diane is a very capable knitter, working on jumpers for children and babies, ladies' cardigans and items for dogs, and brings a lovely sense of humour to the group. Ellen enjoys putting crocheted squares together to form rugs – a gentle and happy presence at the table. Pam, who has recently joined, likes to knit and crochet

in wool or alpaca, and has found the group warm, friendly and helpful.

Josephine enjoys embroidery, long stitch tapestry and painting, with much of her work proudly displayed at home. When Lynda is able to join us she makes crocheted granny squares, and Tori crafts beautiful crocheted animals including unicorns and character toys. Thelma's main focus has been crocheting and knitting items for charity; skilled across painting, long stitch, tapestry and quilting, she readily offers assistance and takes great pleasure in teaching crochet techniques.

Diane, Ellen and Thelma have each been involved at Mitchell House for over 10 years. As foundation members of the group they warmly welcome newcomers. Over the years they have appreciated the consistent support of Centre Managers including Ian Ritchie, Leslie Adams and currently Ben Cavender.

As a group they find it very friendly and comforting to sit down and chat over a cuppa. Their chats are often humorous and always supportive if someone shares a concern. Following their gathering, the ladies often continue on to an optional shared lunch at a local restaurant, a regular and treasured feature of their Fridays together.

PROGRAMS & EVENTS

You're Invited: Winter Warmer Trivia Night

Our exciting new Winter Trivia Night is a fundraiser

Whether you're a seasoned Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre member or new to our community, this is the perfect opportunity to come together, have fun, and support a cause we're passionate about.

Join us at Mitchell House for an evening of laughter, friendly competition and great company. With our wonderful MC Ben leading the festivities, you can expect loads of laughs and plenty of surprises! All proceeds support our LearnShare program at WNC.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Trivia challenges for all knowledge levels
- Delicious food and refreshments
- Raffle tickets and exciting prizes
- BYO drinks (tea, coffee and alcoholic welcome)
- Make new friends and connect with community

THE DETAILS

WHEN

Saturday 25th July
6:30 – 9:00 pm

WHERE

Mitchell House, Wonthaggi
Neighbourhood Centre

COST

\$5 per person
(tables of 6)

TO BOOK

Call (03) 5672 3731
Bookings are essential!

Bookings close Wednesday 23rd July

VEGJOYTABLE

Introducing VEGJOYTABLE

A brand new addition to the Mitchell House quarterly newsletter



Tandoori cauliflower



Miso/hoisin glazed tofu



A celebration of Spring

My name is Em and I have been creating deliciously nourishing meals for our weekly Community Lunch since 2021, and I want to share with you what drives me to keep returning to the kitchen with enthusiasm and drive!

Food is important! Good nutrition keeps us strong; it nourishes our mind, body and soul. Food gives us energy, brings us together, is our identity and culture, and gives us pleasure!

In this section there will be ongoing updates on our fabulous Community Lunches via a QR code. We'll explore the inspiration behind the meals prepared in the Mitchell House kitchen, plus links to interesting food articles and conversations with passionate cooks and chefs

JOIN US AT THE TABLE

Come along to our Weekly Wednesday Community Lunches at 12:30.

Meals are always plant-based — sometimes vegan, sometimes with dairy — made with locally sourced seasonal veg. Always nourishing!

Limited seating for 20 — please book on 5672 3731. Gold coin donation appreciated.

Much love and light, **Em** ✨🌱💜😊 xx