

CONNECTIONS



WNC MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER
No. 14 February 2026

"Communities are found in gathering places where people connect, build relationships, and support each other."
- Anonymous

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Welcome Ben Cavender - New WNC Manager

The new year at Mitchell House commences with a new Manager in place. The Committee of Management is pleased to welcome Ben Cavender to the Manager's chair and are looking forward to working with Ben into 2026 and beyond!

Ben has worked locally for many years most recently as the Community Engagement Officer with Headspace in Wonthaggi and prior to that as the Senior Co-ordinator of the YES Youth Hub. He has demonstrated a sincere desire to enhance community connections and a passionate commitment to help others to feel welcome, connected, supported and proud of who they are.

Ben brings to our Neighbourhood House an enthusiasm for community development and a broad range of skills including people and project management, experience in fund raising, partnership building and a deep understanding of diverse needs.

In addition he is an accomplished musician, sound artist, storyteller, photographer and field recordist. He has successfully produced a number of projects using these skills, incorporating recorded environmental sounds, images and story into works that have clearly demonstrated his creative talents and his ability to plan, prepare and produce a project.



In Ben's own words...

"I am strongly aligned with the Neighbourhood House philosophy and feel deeply connected to the values of inclusion, empowerment, lifelong learning, social justice and community-led action. Neighbourhood Houses are uniquely positioned to bring people together, reduce isolation, nurture creativity and support individuals to develop new skills. My own work has always centred on creating welcoming spaces where people can learn, express themselves, share stories, and feel part of something bigger. Whether through youth engagement, creative art projects, environmental listening, or community wellbeing programs, I am driven by a desire to strengthen connection and help people thrive."

"I am particularly inspired by the idea of a Neighbourhood House as both a creative hub and a social anchor point—a place where people can grow confidence, explore identity, contribute ideas and build friendships. I will bring enormous passion, creativity and community spirit to supporting Mitchell House and the Wonthaggi community."

We welcome Ben to WNC@Mitchell House and look forward to working with him into the future. Please introduce yourself and say hello next time you are at Mitchell House!

THANK YOU!

The 2025 year at Mitchell House concluded with a special afternoon tea to acknowledge the wonderful contribution Leslie Adams and Josie Charles have made during their tenure with the Neighbourhood Centre. Leslie served as the Manager for over three years and Josie as the Administration Officer for almost as long. Together they formed an efficient team that ensured that the House continued to function smoothly and provide the local community with a valuable service. Leslie and Josie were formerly thanked by President Helen Searle and presented with artworks completed by local artist Dell Nolan. Mitchell House will miss both Leslie and Josie as will the many people who appreciated their welcoming smiles and helpful advice. We wish them well in the future!



CHRISTMAS CHEER!

The friendly Friday craft group finished the 2025 year with their traditional Christmas themed morning tea. The ladies have enjoyed another year filled with friendly banter while working on a range of creative projects. These clever ladies love coming together each Friday morning to catch up over a

cuppa and share in lively conversation. During the year they have produced many works demonstrating their creative talents.

One such piece, a delightfully colourful patchwork rug was presented to retiring Manager Leslie in appreciation for her support and friendship.

The group gathers each Friday morning at Mitchell House. Newcomers can be assured of a warm and friendly welcome. If you enjoy company and have a love of craft activity of any kind, please consider coming along. The group members often share lunch at a local café following their time together at the House.



Fourth refugee family welcomed!

The Bass Coast Refugee Sponsorship Group (BCRSG) has enthusiastically welcomed another family to the local community. The family, comprising parents and four young children arrived in early January from Lebanon where they were living in a tent in a refugee compound. The Group secured a rental property in Wonthaggi and furnished the house with all the necessary items most of which had been generously donated, to make it as homely as possible. The family was met at Melbourne airport by group members and transported to their new home which we can be sure, was a huge improvement upon their tent accommodation! The family were deeply appreciative and it wasn't long before they met other refugee families who had been successfully settled and supported by the Group in previous years. It was a delight to see the families quickly make connections. The Group is hard at work now arranging for Centrelink support and preparing the children for the new school year.

The BCRSG comprises truly dedicated members who demonstrate incredible commitment and energy. Together they coordinate the support that each family requires as they transition to their strange new environment, efficiently manage the regular donations of goods and a range of fund raising activities that provide the significant financial support required. The Group can feel justifiably proud of their ability to successfully resettle now four families into the local Wonthaggi community.

The refugee families and members of the Group recently enjoyed a celebratory picnic together at Guide Park. This was an opportunity to again welcome the recently arrived family and to celebrate the fact that previous families had made such encouraging progress in their new community. The BCRSG welcomes enquiries from the those within the community who wish to make donations in support of their work or who would like to explore the possibility of becoming directly involved as members of the Group. Visit their dedicated website for more information: <https://bcrsg.com.au/>



Welcoming party at airport



Family on way to their new home!



UP AND RUNNING IN 2026!

The doors of Mitchell House are now open for the start of the New Year. All the activities that were appreciated throughout the previous year will again be on offer. Groups offering opportunities to engage in craft, art, yoga (seated and traditional), weight management, activity for multi-cultural women, ukulele playing and others will have commenced by the time you receive this newsletter. Also recommencing will be the popular community lunches each Wednesday and the supported playgroups for pre-schoolers. Check out the full program illustrated in the Grapevine publication available on our website or in hard copy format at Mitchell House. All groups welcome newcomers with genuine warmth, if you are seeking connection with friendly locals who have a shared interest, come along and discover the inclusive welcome on offer at Mitchell House - 6 Murray Street, Wonthaggi.



From the Manager...

Hello Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre Community!

I'm Ben Cavender, and I'm absolutely thrilled to join Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre at Mitchell House as your new Centre Manager. From the moment I stepped into Mitchell House, I was struck by how welcoming and generous this community already feels — from our dedicated volunteers and supportive Committee of Management to the people who come through our doors each day. It truly feels like a place where connections are made, skills are shared, and everyone belongs.

This Centre has a long history of bringing people together in a positive, inclusive environment where everyone can meet new friends, learn or share skills, ideas and information. The heart of this work reflects the deep Neighbourhood House principles of community empowerment, lifelong learning, connection, and wellbeing — values that I deeply share and look forward to championing with you.

My experience in community engagement, program leadership, and partnership building has shown me how powerful inclusive, accessible community spaces can be. I'm passionate about nurturing community activities, supporting creative and wellbeing projects, and strengthening the many relationships that make this place vibrant and welcoming.

I'm so excited to work alongside you — listening, learning, collaborating, and building on the great work already happening here. Please stop by, say hi, or share your ideas for the future. Together, we can continue to make Mitchell House an even stronger hub of connection and support for all.

Lastly I would like to thank Josie Charles for all the support she has given me during this period. She is a wealth of knowledge and such a beautiful human.

Enjoy the sun!

Ben

"WNC is on the land of the Bunurong Boonwurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge and pay our respects to the traditional owners of this land where we gather to learn, work and play. We thank the elders past, present and emerging for their custodianship and their continuing connections to the land, sea and community."