

SOUTH WEST COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

# Year in Review

2025



SOUTH WEST  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

South West Community Foundation acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land where we live and work – the Gunditjmara, Giraiwurung, Guilidjan, Gadubanud, Djabwurrung and all those people of the Eastern Maar Nation.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and recognise their cultural heritage and continuing connection to land, water and community, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



# Our year in numbers

6

**new projects** funded  
through the Gardiner  
Foundation partnership

10+

**workshops and events**  
hosted across South  
West Victoria

8

**new flow-through  
partners**  
established

*over*  
\$200,000

**distributed** in grants  
across the region

15

**years** of giving  
celebrated in Colac

4

**new community funds**  
launched, including the  
GROW fund

1

**data snapshot**  
completed - Vital Signs  
South West

## FROM THE CHAIR

This year has been one of focus and growth for the South West Community Foundation.

The Board strengthened its structure through new sub-committees, Governance and Compliance; Finance, Risk and Audit; and Community Engagement; providing greater clarity and accountability in our work.

With the support of the Australian Communities Foundation (ACF), we enhanced our financial management, compliance, and impact investment capacity, allowing the Foundation to concentrate on growth, sustainability, and community engagement.

A key milestone was the completion of our Strategic Plan 2026–29, developed with guidance from Community Foundations Australia and inspired by the Nebraska Community Foundation model. The plan positions SWCF to lead a regional affiliate model for South West Victoria and to launch a Community Charity Trust in 2026 — unlocking new opportunities for place-based giving.

We thank our retiring Director Robyn Alexander for ten years of outstanding service and farewell our Executive Officer, Annabel Cussen, whose leadership over the past five years has strengthened governance, partnerships, and community impact.

Together, we continue to build a foundation that empowers communities to thrive — for good, and forever.



Mary Graham,  
CHAIR, SOUTH WEST  
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

**“Together, we continue to build a foundation that empowers communities to thrive — for good, and forever.”**

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER

This year has marked a milestone for SWCF; not only in what we have delivered, but in how we have deepened relationships and expanded our reach.

We have listened; through our PLACE Listening Tour, where community voices shaped the conversation about the future of philanthropy in South West Victoria. We have partnered; through our new collaborations with the Gardiner Foundation, Beyond Bank, and Australian Communities Foundation. And we have grown; launching new funds, expanding local engagement, and increasing the number of organisations benefiting from community-driven grantmaking.

At the heart of this progress is trust. Our Foundation continues to earn the confidence of donors, partners, and community groups who see SWCF as a safe, transparent, and effective vehicle for local generosity.

As I conclude my time as Executive Officer, I want to thank the Board, our community partners, and everyone who contributes their time, treasure, and talent to this work. The Foundation is well-positioned for the future, guided by a regional strategy that honours local identity, supports collaboration, and ensures that generosity stays local.



Annabel Cussen,  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER,  
SOUTH WEST COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

“The Foundation is well-positioned for the future, guided by a regional strategy that honours local identity, supports collaboration, and ensures that generosity stays local.”

# Foundation Footprint

South West Community Foundation operates in the six municipal council areas in the south west of Victoria: Colac Otway, Corangamite, Moyne, Warrnambool, Southern Grampians and Glenelg.

The South West Community Foundation serves the diverse and vibrant communities across six local government areas — Colac Otway, Corangamite, Glenelg, Moyne, Southern Grampians and Warrnambool. Our regional footprint is strengthened by a network of community-led funds that reflect local priorities and aspirations, including the Legacy Fund, Koroit Community Fund, Colac Community Fund, IRCF Hamilton, IRCF Portland, the Hey Mate We've Got Your Back Fund, and the GROW Fund. Together, these funds enable place-based giving that supports resilience, connection and opportunity across South West Victoria.

Our Main Fund covers the entire region.



# Thank You to Our People

The Foundation thanks our volunteer Board for their leadership and service. We acknowledge the retirement of Robyn Alexander, whose generous contribution has helped shape the Foundation's legacy.



**Mary Graham**  
CHAIR (Camperdown)



**Robyn Alexander**  
DEPUTY CHAIR (Colac)



**Ray Keynes**  
(Koroit)



**David McIntyre**  
TREASURER  
(Warrnambool)



**Angie Paspaliaris**  
(Warrnambool)



**Trish McLean**  
(Heywood)



**Nicky Suter**  
(Warrnambool)

We also recognise Annabel Cussen for her dedicated leadership as Executive Officer, guiding the Foundation through growth and renewal, supported by Administration Support Officer Maggie Leutton.

# Highlights of 2025

This year has been defined by connection, collaboration, and renewed commitment. The following highlights reflect a year of listening, learning, and leading together across the South West.

## Listening, Learning and Leading

In partnership with Deakin University's Warrnambool Campus, SWCF hosted the PLACE Listening Tour, a series of conversations across Warrnambool and Hamilton that brought together local not-for-profits, service providers, and community leaders.

The tour provided a platform for communities to share their unique perspectives on local challenges and opportunities, from volunteering and youth engagement to housing, health, and the environment.

These insights are now shaping how SWCF and our partners support community-led change.

## Historic Reform for Community Giving

Recent **Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR)** reform has created a landmark opportunity for community foundations across Australia. For the first time, philanthropy led by local people can be recognised under a new **Community Charity** classification, enabling broader eligibility for tax-deductible donations and greater flexibility in how funds are structured and distributed.

For the South West Community Foundation, this reform paves the way for the launch of our **Community Charity Trust**, expanding our ability to partner with local groups, grow place-based giving, and ensure that community resources stay local.



## Welcoming four new community funds to grow local giving and impact

### **The GROW Fund**

A new regional community fund supporting nurture rooms, Hands on Learning and kitchen garden programs in the regions' schools, founded to honour the legacy of Josie Black OAM.

*"I've followed the wonderful work you do to service the SW community. It was with great pleasure and pride I read that you have dedicated a new fund, the GROW fund in Mum's name. A fund dedicated to children.*

*"Mum led a life commitment to others. Her legacy of giving lives in her children and her grandchildren. She remains equal to the most formidable person I've met in my life. Her quiet commitment to family has powerfully influenced my parenting. I'm so pleased her legacy to help other children continues 16 years after her death.*

*I wish you all every success."*

– Marcus Hunt

### **FRRR IRCF Hamilton and Portland Funds**

Through the Investing in Rural Community Futures (IRCF) program, SWCF continues to support the capacity and sustainability of local not-for-profits in Hamilton and Portland.

The funds support strengthened governance, leadership, and collaboration, helping community groups connect, plan, and deliver long-term impact across the Glenelg and Southern Grampians regions.

### **Hey Mate, We've Got Your Back Fund**

Supporting farmers and families affected by drought across South West Victoria, the fund is a grassroots initiative born from community conversations and driven by a desire to support those most affected.

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE

# Colac Community Fund

## Celebrating 15 years of local giving and lasting impact

Fifteen years ago, a group of passionate community leaders in Colac came together with a simple but powerful idea: that local people could create lasting change by pooling their resources for the good of their community.

From that vision, the Colac Community Fund was born — one of the earliest sub-funds established under the South West Community Foundation. Since its founding in 2009, the Fund has supported dozens of local projects, community groups, and initiatives that make Colac a more connected, caring, and vibrant place to live.

This year, we proudly celebrated the 15th anniversary of the Fund — marking a decade and a half of local generosity, shared purpose, and community pride.

At a special community event, we honoured the founding members whose foresight and commitment laid the groundwork for this enduring legacy. Their leadership and belief in the power of local giving continue to inspire new generations of community builders in Colac and beyond.

The celebration culminated in Pitch Up Colac, an uplifting live grant event that brought together community members, donors, and local organisations. Six local groups shared their stories and impact, collectively receiving \$15,000 in grants to continue their valuable work. The energy in the room reflected everything the Fund stands for — generosity, trust, and collaboration.

Over fifteen years, the Colac Community Fund has grown not only as a source of financial support but also as a symbol of community strength and unity. Every donation contributes to a perpetual fund that ensures Colac's needs are met now and in the future.

As we look ahead, the Fund remains a shining example of what's possible when local people lead the way. The South West Community Foundation is proud to stand alongside the Colac community as it continues to give, grow, and thrive.



Colac Maker's Space



**Robyn Alexander,**

CHAIR, COLAC COMMUNITY FUND

“Our Pitch Up Event was an inspirational experience that created a positive impact on our audience. We were provided with a ‘convincing case’ and closer understanding of each project, which underpins our endeavours to strengthen our community. For the community groups, it provided a valuable networking opportunity, and for all parties, it promoted social connections. Overall, it was the fulfilling highlight of the Colac Community Fund’s 15th Anniversary Year. Also, a rewarding finale, for my tenure as a Board Director of the SWCF”

# The Power of Partnership

True community impact is never achieved alone.

By working in partnership with local organisations, businesses, and philanthropic peers, the South West Community Foundation multiplies the reach and effectiveness of every dollar given.

Collaboration allows us to combine expertise, share resources, and strengthen the networks that help communities thrive; ensuring that generosity translates into lasting change across South West Victoria.

## Our new partners in 2025

**Gardiner Foundation Partnership:** Six projects funded through our inaugural partnership, with continued growth into 2025.

**Double Donation Day with Beyond Bank:** Matching donations dollar-for-dollar to amplify community giving to raise over \$20,000 in just 48 hours.

**FRRR IRCF Programs:** Ongoing support in Colac, Hamilton, and Portland to strengthen local not-for-profits.

**SWCF – FRRR Community Account Flow-Through Granting:** Our biggest year yet for flow-through activity, enabling flexible and effective local giving.

**Vital Signs South West:** Completed with Deakin's Freelancing HUB, providing data and insights on wellbeing across the region.

## PARTNER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We could not do the work we do without the support of others, we extend our thanks and gratitude to all of our partners and supporters both within the region and beyond.

### PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERS

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COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS AUSTRALIA

PHILANTHROPY AUSTRALIA



FRRR  
Foundation for Rural  
Regional Renewal



AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES FOUNDATION

### COMMUNITY PARTNERS

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GARDINER FOUNDATION

**Ceebeks**  
Business Solutions for GOOD

Beyond Bank

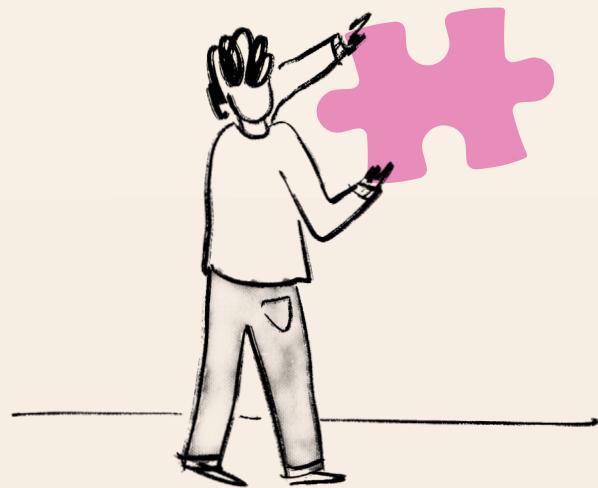


DEAKIN  
UNIVERSITY

SINCLAIR Wilson  
ACCOUNTANTS & BUSINESS ADVISORS

MH | MCLAREN HUNT  
FINANCIAL GROUP

# Community Workshops and Conversations



Throughout 2025, SWCF hosted workshops and events to strengthen governance, fundraising, and impact measurement across the region.

Our partnership with Community Foundations Australia continues to ensure regional voices are represented in national discussions, particularly through national philanthropic round tables of She Gives, the Australian Rural Leadership Program and the Productivity Commission into national philanthropy.

*"Annabel's work with the South West Community Foundation (SWCF) is a shining example of what it means to be deeply invested in the future of our communities. Her dedication, compassion, and strategic insight have helped empower countless local groups and individuals across South West Victoria to turn ideas into action and challenges into opportunities.*

*"Through her leadership and the Foundation's unwavering support, SWCF continues to be a catalyst for positive change—fostering resilience, encouraging innovation, and nurturing the grassroots efforts that make our region thrive. Whether it's through grant making, partnerships, or advocacy, Annabel and SWCF are not just supporting communities—they're helping them shape a better future.*

*"Their commitment to listening, learning, and leading alongside community members ensures that every initiative is grounded in local knowledge and driven by shared purpose. It's this approach that makes SWCF such a vital force in our region's development and a trusted partner in building stronger, more connected communities."*

**Grant Howland**  
Community Development Manager, Beyond Bank

# Transparency and Accountability

The South West Community Foundation is committed to maintaining the highest standards of transparency and good governance.

Our audited financial statements are publicly available at all times through the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) website.

To view them, visit [www.acnc.gov.au](http://www.acnc.gov.au) and search for South West Community Foundation.

## Looking Ahead

### A New Regional Strategy

As we move into 2025, SWCF launches a Regional Strategy for Community Philanthropy to expand our network of affiliated regional funds, strengthen governance, grow partnerships, and build sustainable giving structures across South West Victoria.

For Good. For Ever. For the South West.

# Contact us

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