

**Wombat Housing
Support Services**

Annual Report 2025

Acknowledgement of Country



Wombat Housing acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first people of now-called Australia. We pay our respects to the Wurundjeri people of the Woi-Wurrung language group of the Kulin Nation where we work, advocate, and support the wider community who are experiencing barriers to access housing. We pay our deepest respects to their Elders—those who came before us and those who guide us today.

Wombat Housing acknowledges the ongoing impacts of colonisation. We recognise that housing provides a place of belonging and cultural identity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and this has been disrupted by colonisation and systemic inequalities.

Wombat Housing recognises that the current housing system does not reflect the cultural needs or practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which results in further discrimination, criminalisation, and disadvantage in accessing support.

Through this, Wombat Housing will continue to listen to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; advocating for culturally appropriate solutions and ensuring that housing policies are inclusive and equitable. Wombat Housing will continue to develop meaningful connections with the community to ensure we address systemic barriers that impact the access to safe and sustainable housing.

We will strive for justice, equity, and respect for all, ensuring that the stories and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and upheld in our collective journey forward to reconciliation and truth-telling.

Wombat Housing Support Services supports Treaty for Victoria.

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All content has been written
by Wombat staff members and
our clients.

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Chairperson Report



This year has brought significant pressure across the sector for many community organisations. Housing stress and growing demand for support have made Wombat's work more vital than ever.

Through it all, everyone across Wombat has shown great resilience and compassion, always putting clients and communities first.

Wombat's reconciliation journey also continues to progress, with meaningful steps taken toward publishing its first Reconciliation Action Plan.

As a board, we focused on strengthening Wombat's organisational sustainability to ensure it can continue delivering vital services in these challenging times. Like many smaller organisations, Wombat needed stronger back-of-house functions to better support its teams. A trial alliance with Unison Housing, whose mission to build inclusive communities closely aligns with our own, is already helping to provide this foundation. Together, we're finding practical solutions, sharing expertise, and ensuring Wombat is well-positioned to continue its mission long into the future.

I want to acknowledge my fellow board colleagues for their dedication to Wombat's purpose during another year of tough decision-making in a rapidly changing environment. We look ahead with optimism that Wombat is now well placed to strengthen its impact across communities.

Tara Durdin



Wombat's Reconciliation Action Plan

2025 has seen the working group build on last year's work readying our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), a Reflect RAP, for final endorsement by Reconciliation Australia.

The working group this year is made up of our General Manager and frontline staff and included invaluable feedback from First Nations staff members.

The group has been working hard to get the RAP draft to the publication stage.

In addition, we have:

- Learnt more about the history of our local area and the continuing significance of Royal Park to First Nations people. This was communicated to the broader staff group as part of National Reconciliation Week.
- Attended NAIDOC week events to celebrate the history and culture of First Nations people, including Brimbank Council's The Little Long Walk in Sunshine and VACCHO's Street Party in Collingwood.
- Attended First People's Assembly of Victoria: Treaty for Victoria information sessions with the view to Wombat supporting and promoting the creation of Treaty in Victoria.

We hope to have our inaugural Wombat Reflect RAP officially endorsed and published in the coming months.

8%

**of Wombat's clients
identified as Aboriginal
and/or Torres Strait
Islander**



Meet the board



Tara Durdin – Chairperson

Tara is an independent management consultant focused on designing and delivering system level change and transformation across public, private and not-for-profit (NFP) sectors. Formerly a senior official in the New Zealand government, Tara remains committed to driving innovation and improvement in social sector service delivery.

Kim Berry – Deputy Chairperson

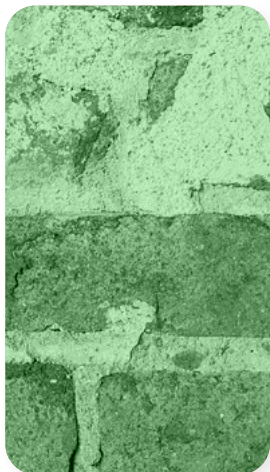
Kim has extensive experience in fundraising and marketing, having been engaged in the sector for over 20 years. She has worked across a wide variety of sectors with a focus on social justice. Kim has a track record of fostering innovation and growth. She is currently Head of fundraising and Marketing at CARE Australia.





Jo Duckworth – Treasurer

Jo is passionate about the for-purpose sector and working alongside teams to define and implement strategies to achieve organisational missions and growth. Starting out as a Chartered Accountant, Jo has years of financial, operational, and strategic planning experience within ASX100 corporates and for-purpose organisations both in Australia and overseas. She loves to bring strategies and innovations alive while ensuring a balance of service delivery and financial sustainability.



Joy Tansey – Board Member

With her background of 24 years in community housing and 15 years as a residential youth worker Joy brings an experienced perspective to the board. Now retired, Joy continues to believe in the importance of contributing to the community and chooses to do this through serving on the Wombat Board, an organisation whose values accord with her own. Having had a previous stint of 12 years as a Board Member at Wombat, many of them as Treasurer, Joy also brings a unique historical perspective to the organisation.





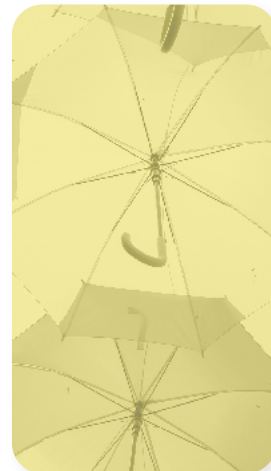
Ilana Jaffe – Board Member

Ilana is a social work leader who has over 15 years of professional experience spanning homelessness, family violence and health services. Ilana is skilled in social policy, project management, partnerships, collaboration and change management with a passion for social justice advocacy. Ilana now works for Family Safety Victoria.



Sam Sowerwine – Secretary

Sam has 15+ years' experience in the legal and community sectors. As Victoria Legal Aid's Program Manager for Economic and Social Rights, she leads on housing, NDIS, and social security. Sam is a skilled and dynamic leader in governance, strategic advocacy, human-centred design, and fundraising. Sam previously managed Justice Connect Homeless Law.



In keeping with best practice, we introduced maximum board terms this year. As a result, Briana, Ilana, and Kim concluded their service after reaching the new limit. We sincerely thank them for their contributions and dedication to Wombat's mission.

We also acknowledge Joy, a long-serving board member who stepped down due to health reasons, and Zoey, who resigned due to professional commitments. Each has made a meaningful impact, and we extend our appreciation for their support of Wombat's work.



Brianna Davidson – Board Member

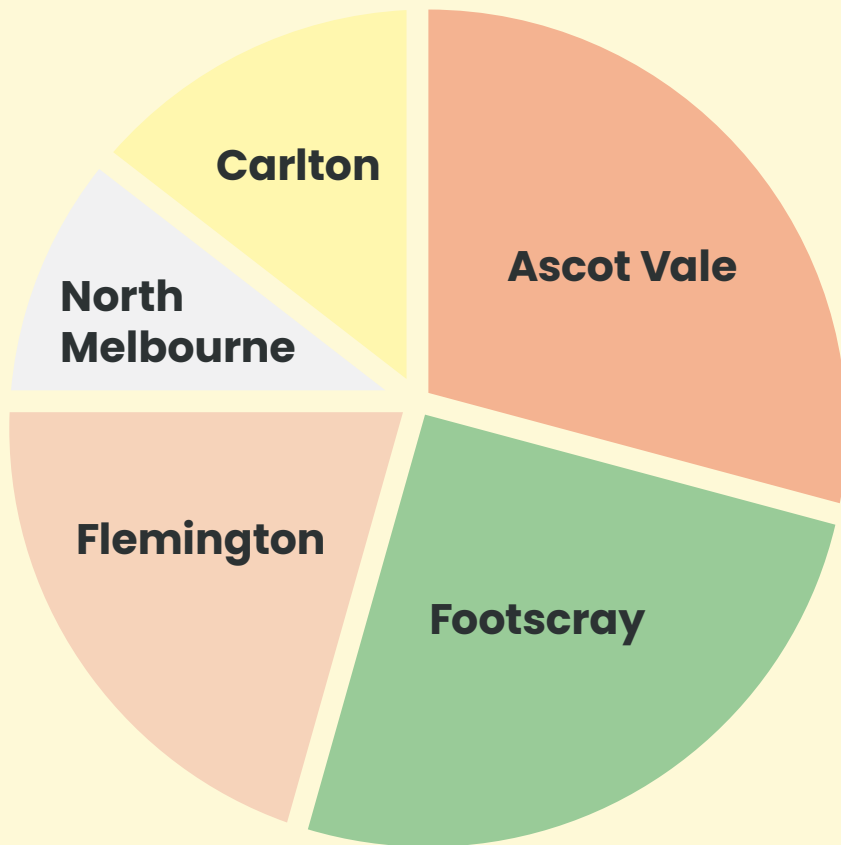
Brianna is a policy, strategy and communications manager and is currently leading the Social Policy team at the Office for Women (Vic Gov). She has more than 10 years' experience developing strategies for domestic and international for-purpose organisations including: International Women's Development Agency, Foundation for Young Australians and Anglicare Victoria.

Zoey Dlomo – Board Member

Zoey is an experienced Finance Leader with over 15 years' experience working in the not-for-profit space, particularly in healthcare and research. She has provided key financial insights for strategic decision making and has served on StreetSmart Australia's Board as Treasurer. She believes in diversity and inclusion and is an advocate for equitable opportunity in housing, healthcare and education.



Where do we work?



Locality of Wombat's clients

General Manager's Report

It has been an eventful 12 months for Wombat marked by considerable change. Our focus this year was on building and embedding systems to demonstrate the impact of the work we do. The decision to become more data-led has been transformative; engaging all parts of the organisation from board members to case managers, as we grapple with the challenges of quantifying what can often feel intangible. It's been incredibly valuable, leading us to interrogate how and why we do things, what we're hoping to achieve, and challenging ourselves to consider if there is a better way.

Nothing highlights this desire for innovation better than our foray into virtual case management. WomBot captured the imagination of The Technology for Social Justice Conference, winning its creator, Lenka Brazda, the award for Best Accidental IT Person, and receiving praise from the Assistant Federal Minister for Productivity, Competition, Charities and Treasury, the Hon Dr Andrew Leigh. It's clear to us that we're currently experiencing a period of change and disruption in society, where AI enhanced technologies like WomBot have the capacity to become a key component of a broader systemic solution to our overburdened system.



In March, we entered into a Strategic Alliance with Unison. Whilst we already worked closely, formalising the relationship has afforded us the opportunity to learn from each other and find ways to not only improve collaboration but increase positive outcomes for our shared clients. As this relationship progresses, so too will the opportunities. We're excited to consider how we can support each other to enhance and elevate our positive impact moving forward.

Sadly, we bid farewell to our CEO Rebecca Cleaver after 7 years in the role and an incredible 26 years at Wombat and Steve Maher, our former CEO who retired (again) after we coaxed him back as our Planning and Partnerships Manager. Both have contributed so much to Wombat, and we wish them well moving forward.

WomBot: A New Approach to Homelessness Support

This year, Wombat continued to lead the sector with WomBot, an AI-powered virtual chatbot co-designed with frontline case managers and people with lived experience of homelessness. Now an integral part of our work, WomBot helps us reach more people, streamline our services, and measure our impact in meaningful ways. Available 24/7, WomBot makes it easier for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to access essential information and support, whenever and wherever they need it.

From the beginning, we saw WomBot as a digital extension of our outreach ethos: meeting clients where they are, which today often means online. WomBot is the first tool of its kind in Australia, and possibly the world, offering not just information, but real-time, personalised support.

"I was surprised to get an immediate reply from wombot Thank you" - A WomBot user

WomBot's capabilities quickly surpassed our expectations. Beyond delivering up-to-date housing information, emergency accommodation options, and material aid assistance, WomBot has evolved to answer complex questions such as supporting trans and neurodivergent clients, assisting in writing complaint notices for landlords, and so much more. By providing immediate, early intervention support, WomBot helped prevent people from falling into crisis.

The results speak for themselves:

- **84%** of people preferred to use WomBot as their first point of contact,
- **94%** of interactions led to successful query resolution,
- For others, WomBot was a gateway to further support from case managers.



By reducing the burden of navigating a complex system, WomBot acts as a digital triage tool, empowering those who can self-advocate to resolve their needs independently, while ensuring individuals needing more intensive support are quickly referred to case managers. This smarter allocation of resources ensures that those in greatest need receive focused, timely assistance. WomBot seamlessly integrates with our case management practice, connecting users directly to services such as Ask Izzy, Dear Landlord, and local access points.

Our trial of a 'virtual case manager' demonstrated WomBot's potential to address longstanding sector challenges: overwhelming demand, fragmented systems, limited business hours, and the need for effective triage. WomBot bridges these gaps, offering scalable, client-centered support around the clock.

We believe that scaling and integrating WomBot, or similar AI-driven tools, across the homelessness sector could revolutionise service delivery, connect fragmented systems, and be a decisive step toward ending homelessness in Melbourne.

WomBot demonstrates what's possible when technology and compassion work hand-in-hand. We invite partners and supporters to join us in expanding this innovation, so that together, we can build a more connected, responsive, and hopeful service system for all.



Staff member Lenka accepts award for
“Accidental IT person”

Farewell to Rebecca Cleaver

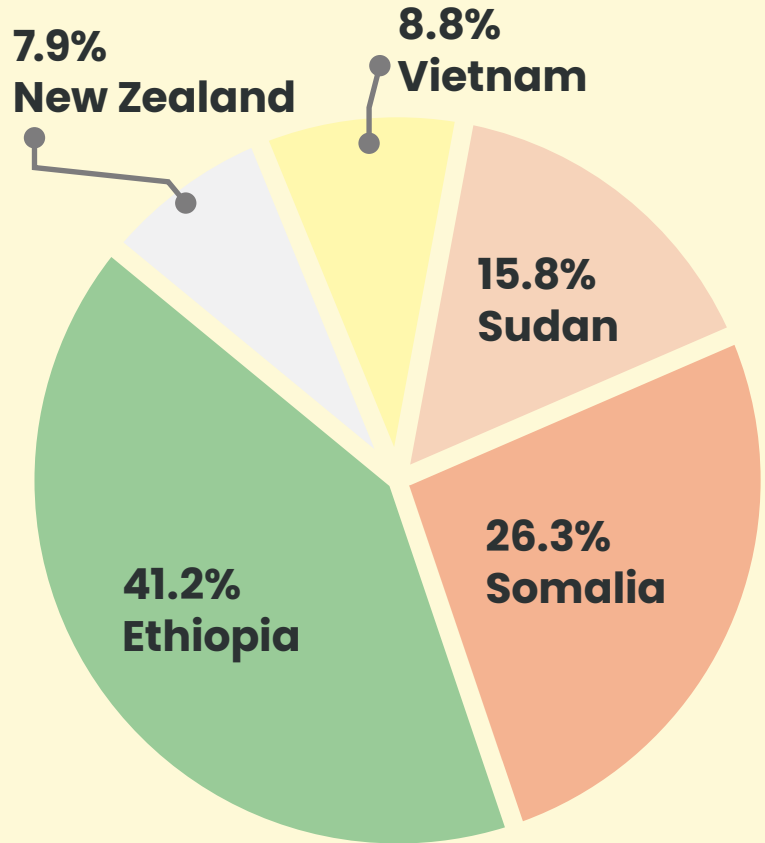


In March we bid farewell to our CEO Rebecca Cleaver after 7 years in the role. Over 26 years ago she began as a case manager in Wombat's youth program and has since filled numerous roles, including as our first quality worker successfully guiding us through accreditation, and as General Manager, overseeing the first iteration of what would become our Everyday Life Skills tool. We would like to acknowledge Rebecca's long-standing contribution to Wombat and offer her best wishes for the future.

Who do we work with?

40%

of the people we worked with were not born in Australia, coming from 64 different countries



Top 5 Countries of Birth (Excluding Australia)

Client Stories

Tina and her three children faced multiple episodes of homelessness after their arrival in Australia as refugees in 2019. In 2020, they were referred to Wombat Housing for support in maintaining their transitional housing unit. During this time, Wombat connected them with legal services, helped them secure permanent residency in Australia, and gain access to Centrelink and Medicare benefits. Additionally, Wombat helped them apply for long-term housing through the Victorian Housing Register. After a four-year wait, Tina and her children finally moved into their dream home. While they continue to work with Wombat, Tina is deeply grateful for their new home and for the support she received.

*Identifying details have been changed

Of all closed clients in 24/25

30% exited into
**Community
Housing**

16% into Public
Housing

7% into Private
Rental





When Alex first connected with Wombat in 2016, she was 17 and experiencing homelessness. She had spent over a year moving between youth refuges and temporary accommodation, feeling exhausted and longing for some stability.

Through Wombat's support, Alex was placed in transitional housing with Unison. Over time, she built a strong and trusting relationship with her Wombat worker, who supported her through challenges with her mental health and alcohol and drug use. Together, they navigated periods where her tenancy was at risk, coordinated care with services like Orygen Youth Health and YSAS, and worked step by step to rebuild her confidence and motivation.

In recent years, Alex has shown remarkable progress. After engaging in counselling and completing a detox program, she began attending regular AA meetings and building new support networks. Motivated to make a difference, Alex sought out opportunities for community involvement, eventually volunteering with local emergency response and disaster relief initiatives. She has completed extensive training, responded to real emergencies, and continues to give back to her community.

Alex is now focused on securing meaningful employment and long-term housing. Her journey demonstrates the power of sustained, person-centred support and how with the right foundation, people can move from surviving to thriving.

*Identifying details have been changed

The Networker's Report

The Western Homelessness Networker, auspiced by Wombat, represents over 100 homelessness and family violence programs. They have driven significant advocacy and innovation across Melbourne's west.

A highlight of the year was the powerful 'Houses at Parliament' campaign during Homelessness Week, where 6,000 origami houses were displayed on Parliament's steps—symbolising the 60,000 homes required to meet Victoria's public and community housing need. This advocacy continued throughout 2024–25, amplifying public awareness and political engagement.

The Networker made strategic contributions to national and state policy through submissions to the Homelessness Guidelines consultation, the National Housing and Homelessness Plan, and the Ministerial Reform Advisory Group, ensuring western Melbourne voices were heard.

Capacity-building efforts included webinars on mental health, housing cooperatives, plus tailored orientation for 100 new sector workers. Cross sector forums strengthened



Photo: Minister for Housing, Harriet Shing MP, at the Houses at Parliament event



Photo: Chair of the Western Homelessness Network at the Houses at Parliament event



collaboration between homelessness services and both settlement and family violence sectors. Emma Dawson, the executive director of Per Capita, headlined a World Homelessness Day Webinar.

Operationally, the Networker coordinated nine active working groups, including the Consumer Participation Working Group who are trialing a year-long survey, and an Innovation Technology Working Group that is producing consumer facing videos to improve transparency and access to information. Additionally, the youth working group designed a model for a youth access point.

Throughout the year, the Network tackled numerous complex issues including support for single adults, young people transitioning out of youth services, and people with pets. In addition, the Networker participated in the implementation of the Aboriginal Homelessness Blueprint and developed ongoing partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.



Tenancy Plus Flexible Funding

In the 2024/2025 financial year, Tenancy Plus received a one-off allocation of flexible funding which furthered our impact in establishing successful tenancies and sustaining tenancies at risk. This funding enhanced the flexibility of our service delivery and tailored support, enabling rapid responses to complex situations.

These clients received basic household items such as white goods, furniture, kitchenware, bedding, or help with relocation and removalist costs. This was crucial for vulnerable renters moving into or between public and social housing, improving their stability and wellbeing and preventing tenancy breakdowns. The funds were for empowering our clients and facilitating community integration.

A total of 143 households were supported via this funding, 127 of these were establishing new tenancies, while 16 were directed towards sustaining existing tenancies.

Support and funding were paired effectively - some households received assistance within just two days, particularly in urgent cases involving family violence, unsafe living conditions or fire damage. The program responded swiftly to renters affected by crisis, including floods, fires, bed bug infestations, and severe environmental hazards like hoarding and mould. For those forced to relocate due to health risks, essential furniture replacements ensured a safe and dignified transition.

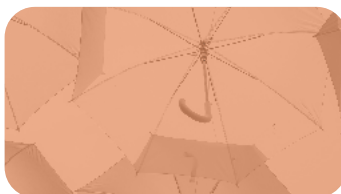
Staff noted that the funds made a difference for their clients during an incredibly stressful time, laying the foundation to address their issues to ensure a safe and stable tenancy.



Photo: Chloe and Caitlin attend Monash Sustainable Buildings' Design Challenge 2025 Showcase Night



Photo: We are Mobilise representatives Rishi and Zoe visit Wombat



Wombat Housing Support Services Statement of Profit or Loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 30 June 2025

	2025 \$	2024 \$ (restated)
Revenue and other income		
Interest income	31,175	25,396
Government Grants	3,700,748	3,858,279
Other revenue	411,074	245,864
Other income	15,526	-
	<u>4,158,523</u>	<u>4,129,539</u>
Less: expenses		
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(5,219)	(35,971)
Employee benefit expense	(3,286,782)	(3,187,499)
Occupancy expense	(8,415)	(7,938)
Advertising expense	(11,884)	(11,128)
Client expenditure	(466,325)	(252,340)
Other expenses	(392,662)	(553,586)
	<u>(4,171,287)</u>	<u>(4,048,462)</u>
(Deficit) / Surplus for the year	<u>(12,764)</u>	<u>81,077</u>
Other comprehensive income		
Devaluation of property	(395,150)	-
Other comprehensive income for the year	(395,150)	-
Total comprehensive (deficit) / surplus	<u>(407,914)</u>	<u>81,077</u>

Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2025

This is an extract and full audited statements are available on request.

	2025 \$	2024 \$ (restated)
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	583,085	983,480
Receivables	181,881	141,605
Other financial assets	535,000	517,763
Other assets	14,802	24,417
Total current assets	<u>1,314,768</u>	<u>1,667,265</u>
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	2,688,725	3,080,369
Total non-current assets	<u>2,688,725</u>	<u>3,080,369</u>
Total assets	<u>4,003,493</u>	<u>4,747,634</u>
Current liabilities		
Payables	401,226	389,132
Provisions	487,381	709,467
Other liabilities	134,470	261,330
Total current liabilities	<u>1,023,077</u>	<u>1,359,929</u>
Non-current liabilities		
Provisions	35,395	34,770
Total non-current liabilities	<u>35,395</u>	<u>34,770</u>
Total liabilities	<u>1,058,472</u>	<u>1,394,699</u>
Net assets	<u>2,945,021</u>	<u>3,352,935</u>
Members funds		
Reserves	1,550,394	1,945,544
Accumulated surplus	1,394,627	1,407,391
Total members funds	<u>2,945,021</u>	<u>3,352,935</u>

Thank You!

Wombat has been fortunate to receive assistance from a broad range of supporters, including individual community members, organisations, grants, and trusts. These partnerships help us to develop creative new ways to support more people.



We are Mobilise: Raises funds which are used to keep people housed- including payments for rent arrears, rent in advance and even a car!

Life Church: Gifted a wonderful range of toys and food hampers for Christmas.

Queens Fund: Provides grants for individual client's needs.

Kids in Philanthropy: Wombat participated in this program which involved attending schools and talking with students about homelessness. Students from these schools donated material aid as well as financial donations.

Streetsmart: Provided grant for families and singles to purchase essential items when moving into a home. Regular donations of sheets and towels kindly provided by Sheridan.

Lord Mayors Charitable Fund: Donated funds that enabled us to continue our work with the WomBot.

Hotham Mission: Regular donations of food parcels for hundreds of households.

The Sixth Child: Gifted a wonderful range of toys and bikes for Christmas.



John Herbert from NAB: Provided invaluable assistance and expertise with spreadsheets and IT.

Lewis Real Estate: Contributed regular donations, which provide clients food, cleaning products and other household items.

Big Group Hug & Our Village: Provided goods for infants and young children.

HoMie: Donated clothing for clients.

Thread Together: Regularly provided clothing for clients.

Share the Dignity: Provided dignity bags, containing toiletries and sanitary items for clients.

The Hall Foundation: Provided grants for individual client needs.

Magistrates Court: Ongoing financial contributions from the court are used toward a range of essential supports, particularly in circumstances where no other funding sources are available.



If you are interested in supporting our work, please contact us. We're always exploring new ways to assist our clients.

Our Partners

Wombat is lucky to work with several like-minded agencies who help us to provide holistic and innovative support to our clients. We would like to thank our partners for allowing us to continue to do what we do best.

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

Homes Victoria

Our local Homes Vic offices: North Melbourne, Carlton, Ascot Vale and Footscray

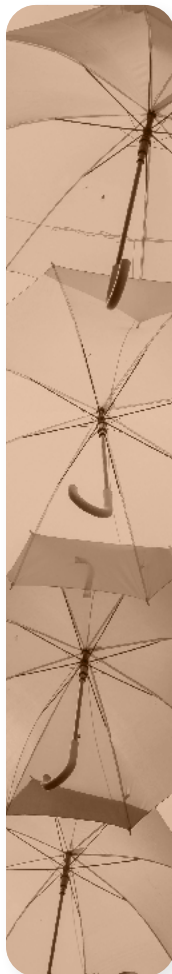
The Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria

Council to Homeless Persons (CHP)

Salvation Army Metro Homelessness Service

Unison Housing

Housing First



We Are Mobilise

Jesuit Social Services

VincentCare

Haven Home Safe

Phoenix Youth Hub

Orygen Youth Health

Bridge It

For Change Co

Yakkazoo

Digital Native

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

Inner Melbourne Legal Service

Moonee Valley Legal Service

Outcomes, Practice and Evidence Network (OPEN)

Pride in Health and Wellbeing



Families,
Fairness
and Housing



Justice
and Community
Safety



Council
to Homeless
Persons



unison



HousingFirst



MOBILISE

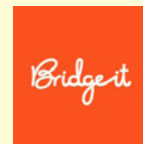


Jesuit
Social Services
Building a Just Society

haven
HOME, SAFE

PHOENIX
YOUTH
HUB

or y
gen



For
Change
Co.

Yakkazoo



DIGITAL NATIVE



Centre for Excellence in
Child and Family Welfare



INNER MELBOURNE
COMMUNITY LEGAL



MOONEE VALLEY
LEGAL SERVICE



Outcomes Practice
Evidence Network
Child and Family
Services

prideinhealth
+wellbeing



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