

Down's Estate Community Project

Annual Report

2021-2022

The Down's Estate Community Project and our members acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Down's Estate land, the Boon Wurrung and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin nation, and pay respect to their Elders past and present and emerging. We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



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Committee elected February 2022:

Robyn Erwin	President	Samantha Liston	Ordinary member
Karan Kent	Vice President	Fran Prem	Ordinary member
Maureen Griffin	Secretary	Brendan McMahon	Ordinary member
Angus Barnes	Treasurer	Henri Muniz	Ordinary member
Kathleen van der Weerden	Ordinary member		

NB. The 2020-21 Annual General Meeting was postponed until February 2022 due to COVID19 restrictions. The 2020-21 committee continued operating until this time.



President's Report

The challenges presented by the COVID 19 pandemic continued to impact Downs Estate Community project throughout the financial year of July 1 2021 to June 30 2022 (the period covered by this report) but at the same time proved the importance of places that bring people together, that address, in big and small ways, global challenges including food security, environmental degradation and loneliness. Although we all felt our frustrations at various times during this period, DECP continued to progress towards the bigger goals and deliver in many areas of its mission.

Downs Estate Community Project Program Areas

Kick starting the Program Teams

In February 2021, DECP launched a structure in which Teams of people involved in Downs would take responsibility for 5 different program areas: Urban Agriculture, Farm House Restoration, Ecosystem Regeneration, Community Gathering and Healthy Eating and Food Sharing. After plans to run a joint 'Planning Day' for all teams were postponed a number of times due to COVID, Kathleen van der Weerden and Kathrine Renwick facilitated online sessions with each of the teams in August 2021. These sessions enabled the teams to review and discuss the goals of these areas as defined in the business case, and begin to plan for implementing components of these. All were keen for the second phase of planning involving bringing all the teams together, to be held face to face, and this eventually occurred in the following financial year.

Teams have continued to meet and work on their respective program areas, in partnership with each other and the Committee to achieve outcomes outlined below.

Urban Agriculture

COVID lockdowns between July and October 2021 resulted in Frankston Council only allowing access to community gardens for the purpose of growing and harvesting food for charitable purposes. It was felt this was a worthy activity and use of the DECP garden and so an area of the garden was allocated for this purpose. Volunteer members were issued with permits to carry out this work. Boxes of fresh vegetables were supplied to support Theodora's Cheerful Givers in Seaford. This continued into 2022.

The combination of lockdowns and flooding of large areas of the garden, meant that considerable work was needed to clear and reclaim garden areas but step-by-step much of the garden beds were re-established and successful crops grown in 2022.

Over recent years, the garden has faced a growing problem with rabbits and other vermin eating crops. In early 2022, using funds provided by Sustainable Table, a rabbit proof fence was installed around the garden and an extended area, to allow for future expansion of the garden. The funds also supported the purchase of water pipes to allow experimentation of effective watering systems.

In partnership with Belvedere Community Centre, DECP hosted a very well received course titled 'Household Resilience Through Permaculture' between May and June 2022. Led by Permaculturalists Fleur Baker and Leanda Care, the program introduced participants to the concepts of permaculture and how to apply them to their food growing and other aspects of their lives.



'..today was FABULOUS', Household Resilience course participant

Throughout 2021 DECP again hosted the Farmer Incubator Pop-Up garlic farm with 3 trainees growing their garlic crops at Downs.

Sustainable Indigenous Agriculture

In continuing DECP's Indigenous Agriculture partnership with the University of Melbourne, funded through a grant to the University from the Helen McPherson Trust, Nairm Marr Djambana joined with us to present two online workshops during lockdown related to Indigenous agriculture and indigenous plant foods. The first workshop featured an online cooking session with Narm Marr Djambana chef Tim Hollands teaching us all how to cook Warragal greens and ricotta gnocchi tossed with cherry tomatoes, saltbush, mountain pepper-berry and sauteed Karkalla. Yum! In the second workshop, Chris Andrew from Black Duck Foods discussed the history, nutrition and future potential of indigenous grains and we were honoured to have Bruce Pascoe joining the session to respond to questions. Dr Dorin Gupta also spoke to research and activities at the Dookie campus of Melbourne University. A short video was also produced discussing the role of each organisation in this space.

Ecosystem Regeneration

In July 2021, Environment and Horticultural students from Holmesglen TAFE's gave online presentations of the outcomes of their investigations (carried out in the previous financial year) into various aspects of weed management at DECP. These have been incorporated into our website Eco Regen community resources.

In November 2021 about 150 indigenous grasses, small shrubs and some scattered trees were planted by staff and students from Holmesglen TAFE and DECP members, to create a low to medium strip of indigenous ecosystem along the community garden's western border. Species were selected based on advice of Council Officers. This 200 metre strip was flourishing in June 2022. This was funded by the Federal Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources through a Community Environment Program grant 2020.

Site maintenance continued to be carried out by willing DECP volunteers. This included non-chemical weed management using practices such as frequent mowing of blackberries, pruning or brushcutting. Monitoring of these trials are showing real signs of success.

In June 2022 we were awarded a Queen's Platinum Jubilee Tree Planting Grant which will be used to plant another indigenous corridor, replacing lost vegetation inside the Old Wells Road fence, creating wildlife habitat, and attracting beneficial insects to the garden.



Farm House Restoration

In consultation with DECP members, a Concept Plan was designed by a Council appointed Architect to restore the original farmhouse to a multipurpose community space, retaining as much of the existing character and structures as viable, both inside and outside. The design included accessibility features and a back deck with additional toilets. The Farm House facility is planned to be home to Seaford's first community Museum as well as supporting a number of activities and workshops. The design, accompanied by, an Indicative Cost Plan developed by a Quantity Surveyor, (including significant allowances for contingencies and consultancies) were endorsed by Council in March 2022 allowing DECP to proceed with seeking funds to carry out this restoration.

It is a very substantial challenge to seek the over \$600,000 project cost, higher than original estimates. A thorough investigation into suitable grants was carried out and a number of advocacy documents created. In June 2022 a grant from Creative Arts Victoria was applied for to form part of a co-funding package. We are still hopeful that we may find collaborative partners to achieve this restoration goal, so that we can save this remaining piece of Seaford's farming history at Down's Estate.

Healthy Eating and Food Sharing

Sharing of food is something that regularly happens at Downs whether it be gardeners harvesting and sharing produce amongst themselves and people who drop in, donating to charities or sharing a cuppa and snacks / lunch at a working bee.

Our larger plans to run regular hands-on healthy cooking workshops took a step forward with detailed planning of a portable outdoor kitchen and the items to be purchased to create this. As an off-grid site relying on sustainable solar energy, we are aiming to be all electric and match our appliances to the size of our solar system and battery capacity. The HEAFS team also looked at various community cooking class options and food safety requirements for implementation in 2022/23.

Community Gathering

The Community Gathering started with a group of enthusiastic members who wanted to explore different ways of gathering community together at DECP and created a Team statement of purpose: *To facilitate and promote community gatherings and encourage community connections at Down's Estate Community Project. The Community Gathering Team (CGT) will strengthen relationships with local organisations and collaborate with them to host programs and events on site. We will contribute to building a healthy and resilient community network.*

The Community Gathering team published 3 seasonal newsletters with a new fresh look. These gave a good overview of what had been happening and what was coming up at the farm. The team also did planning work for public resources for DECP, and created public awareness and education signs about snake safety to be used around the community garden area. It continued to add resources to the Down's Community Farm website, maintained a social media presence on facebook and Instagram and promoted events and workshops via subscription email.

Wayapa Wuurk

Funded through a VicHealth Reimagining Health grant, DECP was very excited to be able to host a series of Wayapa Wuurk workshops led by the incredible Karan Kent and Kalie Kent . Wayapa Wurrk is a meditation and movement modality based on 12 elements that were found to be consistent across First Nations people across Australia. The big open space and sky at Downs, surrounded by nature proved to be a wonderful setting to become grounded and connected, whilst moving like the wind or a kangaroo ... and all the elements in the practice.

As the program delivery had been impacted by lockdowns, and as the weather turned colder, DECP was pleased to share this experience with other local organisations supporting programs at Djambana (Frankston), Derrimut Weelum (Mordialloc), Belvedere Community Centres and at a Women's Spirit Project in Frankston.



‘We have 24 participants (who have experienced some sort of disadvantage - covid19, mental health, domestic violence etc) and 10 mentors in the program who have just completed their 13-week journey of transformation.

‘All the women loved Karan (they thought she was amazing) and they loved learning about and doing a Wayapa session, this gave them all a sense of calm.’
Melissa Flores, Women's Spirit Project

Networks and Collaborators

DECP believes that working with and alongside others is crucial to achieving our common goals and we are grateful and honoured to be able to collaborate with those below.

Federal, State and Local Government

DECP has continued to work and consult with Frankston City Council throughout the financial year and are always grateful for their support and partnership in managing the area. The substantial infrastructure work funded and managed by FCC was officially launched by Mayor Kris Bolam in November 2021 and has been a fantastic benefit to the project.

We are also grateful for the ongoing support of Federal Member for Dunkley, Peta Murphy and State Member for Carrum, Sonya Kilkenny both of whom appreciate the value and potential of this community space.

Southern Beekeepers Club

In July 2021 DECP was asked by Council if we could assist the Southern Beekeepers Club by agreeing to have some of their hives relocated into our licenced area. Many months of discussion ensued about a potential location for these with a permanent enclosure around them, which would be safe and appropriate for both parties. DECP seeks to connect and network with the wider local community and we saw this request as an opportunity to assist another community group and potentially gain some benefit from this relationship, through sharing knowledge and resources. Frankston Council decided it would be best that SBC have their own separate licence with them and so will excise the agreed site on the Southern border from our licence. We are continuing to work with SBC on this implementation project and hope that we will establish a good working relationship with them like we have with many other groups, including our neighbours, FESWI.

Frankston Social Enterprise Hub

DECP members have enjoyed participating in the opportunities for training and connection with local social enterprises offered by the new Frankston Hub, launched in February 2022. This has provided a framework for DECP to explore its potential to create a social enterprise at Down's Estate and has enabled us to learn many important skills needed for a successful and sustainable venture from the experts at the Hub. These workshops and networking events were free to community which gave us a great entry point into this sector. As an aspiring social enterprise creator, we were very fortunate in June 2022 to be selected to participate in the 100 hours in 100 days program and will have 15 hours free mentoring with an experienced Social Enterprise entrepreneur.

Regular community and network engagements

- Frankston Environment Friends Network
- University of Melbourne liaison committee
- Frankston Community Garden Network
- The Community Plate
- The Frankston Social Enterprise Hub
- The Frankston Business Collective



DECP People

I would like to thank my fellow Committee of Management members for all their dedicated work over the last year in developing policies and plans (including a Strategic Plan endorsed by FCC), seeking grant funding and overseeing all of our activities. I also thank everyone else who has joined us onsite or in conversation to help Down's take further steps in building a community that is strong, sustainable and connected to each other and the beautiful environment we live in and have responsibility to care for.

Robyn Erwin

President DECP

