# Travellers Voice

May – October 2024

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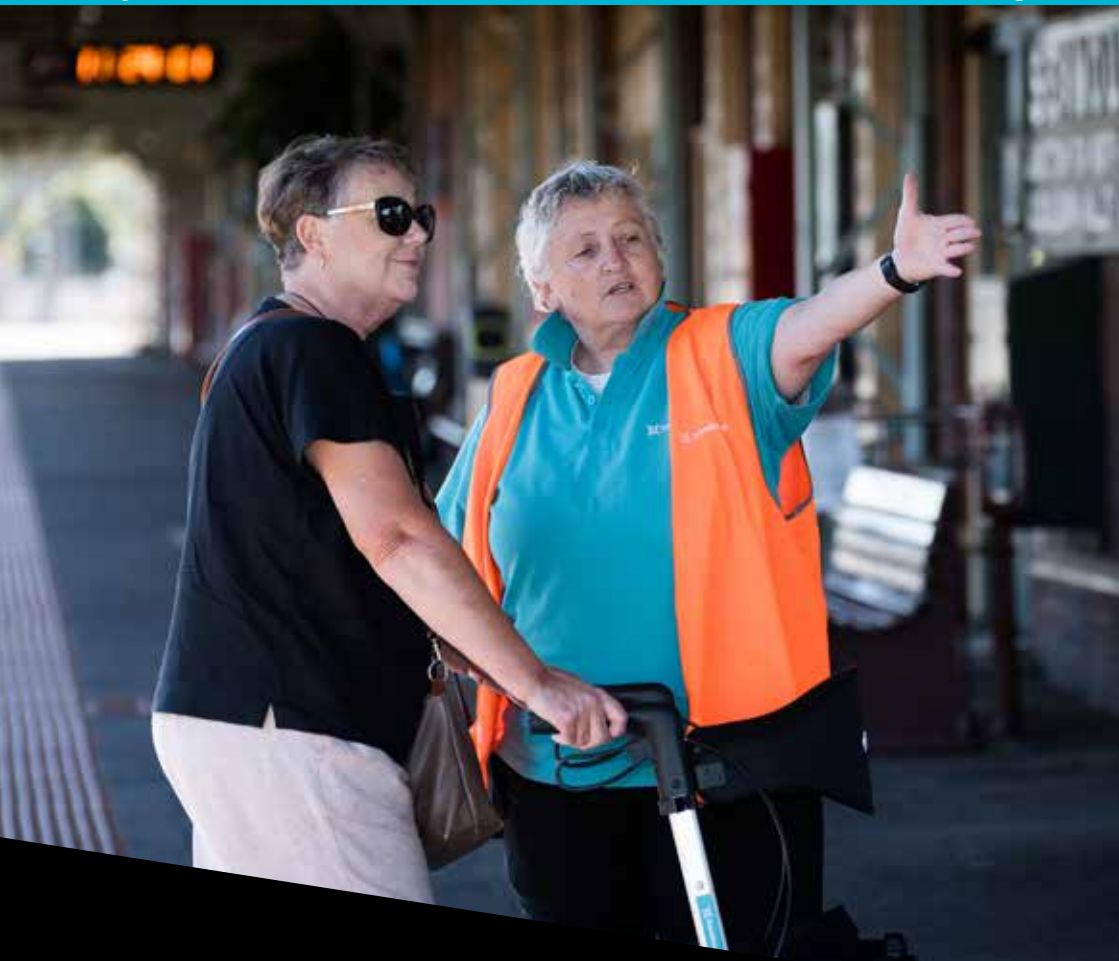

# Take access and inclusion further

This magazine is produced with the generous support of: V/Line

Travellers Aid

# CEO Welcome

It's been a joy to witness the steady growth of our access and inclusion services across Melbourne and regional Victoria over the past year.

From the record crowds at the F1 Australian Grand Prix and Taylor Swift concerts to our newest pilot program in the Latrobe Valley, we are excited to be supporting more people to access their community on their terms.

We know that people with disability experience barriers accessing transport. This is especially so in regional areas. Travellers Aid is working hard to address that issue. Our companion service pilot program in the Latrobe Valley is working to meet this need, as is our participation with MediStays supporting patients travelling from regional areas to Melbourne for medical appointments.

Research conducted for us by the Health Issues Centre reinforced the critical importance of expanding our services into regional Victoria. The HIC report highlighted barriers including a lack of reliable transport options, limited information about accessible transport and feeling overwhelmed when using public transport. This affected people's ability to attend medical, social or recreational appointments as well as their sense of independence.

Our services empower people to build their independence and confidence, knowing they have solid and trusted support when they need it. This Ballarat service user sums up how much our service is valued.

"I learnt a lot on my first travel with the walker and suitcase and I'm very indebted to you here and to the Southern Cross people."

Please support our Winter Tax Appeal so we can continue to make a difference.

I hope you'll enjoy reading about the impact we are already having and the exciting potential to take our services further.

Your donations are transformational in growing our reach and proving that inclusion is within everyone's ability.

Elias Lebbos
Chief Executive Officer

# Train chat leads to Ballarat volunteer role

Approaching retirement Jayne Mark knew she wanted to volunteer within her local Ballarat community. Thanks to a chance encounter on the train to Melbourne she discovered an opportunity to join Travellers Aid.

Chatting with a fellow traveller who turned out to be the organisation's Ballarat site supervisor, Jayne learned about Travellers Aid's new support service at Ballarat Train Station. Not long after, she became one of its first volunteers.

"I get a lot of satisfaction knowing I'm contributing to the Ballarat community," Jayne says.

"It's a real sense of being worthwhile and people appreciating your help."

In her 9am–12:30pm Wednesday shift Jayne makes herself known to travellers and watches for anyone needing assistance.

She recently assisted an older man returning home to Melbourne after an unexpected stay in hospital. She saw that he looked unwell and discovered he'd not eaten since the day before.

"I took him up to the station café for a drink, a sandwich and a cake and wheeled him back to platform two to wait for his train," she says.

"Then I rang ahead to Southern Cross and organised for a Travellers Aid buggy to meet him at his platform and take him to the taxi rank so he could get home."

Jayne encourages other locals to consider the well-supported and flexible volunteering role with Travellers Aid.

She says volunteers can also assist at major events supported by Travellers Aid, as she did at the Australian Open.

"Mainly just having the personality that you're not afraid to talk to people, to ask them questions, to find out where they're going and to assist them," Jayne says.

**Support travellers in Ballarat by becoming a Travellers Aid volunteer. Contact us on 03 9654 2600 or email volunteers@travellersaid.org.au**

# Events

It has been another busy summer events season, with record numbers of people turning out to enjoy some of Melbourne's major events. It's such a pleasure to deliver accessibility and inclusion services that enable everyone to participate on their terms.

The big events started with the Australian Open at Melbourne Park where we assisted 60% more people than in 2023. Over the two weeks of this vibrant tennis tournament we supported patrons with disability or mobility impairment to attend and enjoy the event with confidence.

Our support included buggy transport to and from tram and bus stops, and from the National Tennis Centre carpark to access the event precinct.

"My husband and I recently travelled to Melbourne to watch the Australian Open tennis. While there, I sustained a knee injury and could only just walk with the aid of crutches. We were able to access Mobility Assistance very easily and were offered wheelchairs every day. All of the people, volunteers mostly, were absolutely wonderful - kind, cheerful and willing assistants. I could see that there was respect and communication between team members as well. My husband and I were blown away by how well we were treated and what a difference it made to our experience of having poor mobility. There was no way, without such assistance, I would have been able to participate in this event. Well done to all of this amazing team, and the biggest heart felt thank you for all that you did for us."

In February we joined the Taylor Swift buzz with a buggy service transporting Swifties who required support from Flinders St Station to the MCG. This was backed up with another successful year providing buggy connection services at the St Kilda Festival. We also introduced our services at the Northcote Rise Festival.

Extreme heat during Moomba led to the cancellation of some events, but we were still on hand for patrons attending the Labour Day weekend celebrations.

**75 staff and volunteers**

**2070 people supported**

**Almost 850 buggy rides**

**1850 hours of support**

**More than 1170 wheelchair assists**

Our Moomba services included mobility equipment hire, wheelchair connections, as well as a quiet place to rest.

Numbers were booming at the F1 Australian Grand Prix and Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show, both held on the same weekend. Our services assisted patrons in getting into and around the events, whether they arrived by public transport or by car.

“Yesterday I attended the Melbourne International Flower Show. This is something my friend and I do every year. Each year it is a little more difficult to get around (at 80). Thank you so much for supplying the buggy at the entrance. That long walk from the bus to the front door is daunting. It was greatly appreciated.”

In April we supported the A Walk in the Park fundraiser for Fight Parkinson’s, the Melbourne International Comedy Festival and the Anzac Day Dawn Service and Parade at the Shrine of Remembrance. In May we provided support at the Australian Disability Network (ADN) Impact Conference, our first event at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC).

We are also thrilled to be providing our service to delegates at the Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Conference being held in Melbourne in August.

# Regional companion services

Travellers Aid has begun a regional companion service pilot program in the Latrobe Valley to support people with disability to access health services. The six-month pilot will see volunteers accompany residents to medical appointments via public transport. The service includes trips within the Latrobe Valley as well as into Melbourne.

Types of assistance include:
- journey planning
- navigating different modes of transport
- navigating unfamiliar locations
- building confidence to travel independently
- wellbeing support.

Once the pilot is complete, we will evaluate the program to see if it is a viable ongoing service for the Latrobe Valley. We will also look at the possibility of expanding the service to other regional areas in Victoria.

**Find out more or book the service. Call 1300 700 399 or email companion@travellersaid.org.au**

## Rushall outing

Residents from Rushall Retirement Village in Melbourne used Travellers Aid's services for a day trip to Ballarat in March.

Five Travellers Aid volunteers met the group of 23 residents who arrived at Southern Cross by train, then took them via buggy to meet their V/Line connection. The volunteers travelled with the group to offer companionship and extra practical support.

In Ballarat, the group visited the Old Colonists' Association building and enjoyed lunch at The George Hotel. The Rushall Park group has used Travellers Aid's services for other outings, including a day trip to Portarlington on Port Phillip Ferries.

## Support us to grow

Donor support is vital in allowing us to highlight need and to fill service gaps so that everyone can participate in their community using public transport. Your gift to our Winter Appeal means we can reach more people in more places. Please see the enclosed letter to learn about our impact and how your generosity can make it go further.

# Regional disruptions support

Our support during metropolitan transport disruptions is well known. But we have recently made an impact during regional service disruptions, too.

Over the past 8 months we have provided more than 2100 buggy assists during disruptions at Seymour and supported 721 people with wheelchair and buggy assists in Sunbury.

The value of these services is highlighted through the wonderful feedback and thanks our team receives from our service users.

“I was so worried that I wouldn’t make it to the bus from the train before the bus left because I am so slow. The conductor assured me you would be there. I am so grateful that you were, as I never would have managed those ramps.” – Seymour transport user.

## Corporate partner volunteering

It’s so lovely when our corporate partners put up their hands to volunteer alongside the Travellers Aid team. We thank NHP, Yarra Trams and City of Melbourne for joining us to deliver access and inclusion services this year. Employees from these partners helped out at the F1 Australian Grand Prix and Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show, offering mobility assistance using wheelchairs and driving the buggy.

Our partners’ involvement at these events builds their workforce’s awareness of the challenges experienced by people with disability and mobility impairment when attending events.

“Thank you for the opportunity and support over the two days volunteering at the Flower and Garden Show. I keep saying that the whole experience was good for the soul, and it is always nice to make a difference.” – NHP volunteer at the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show.

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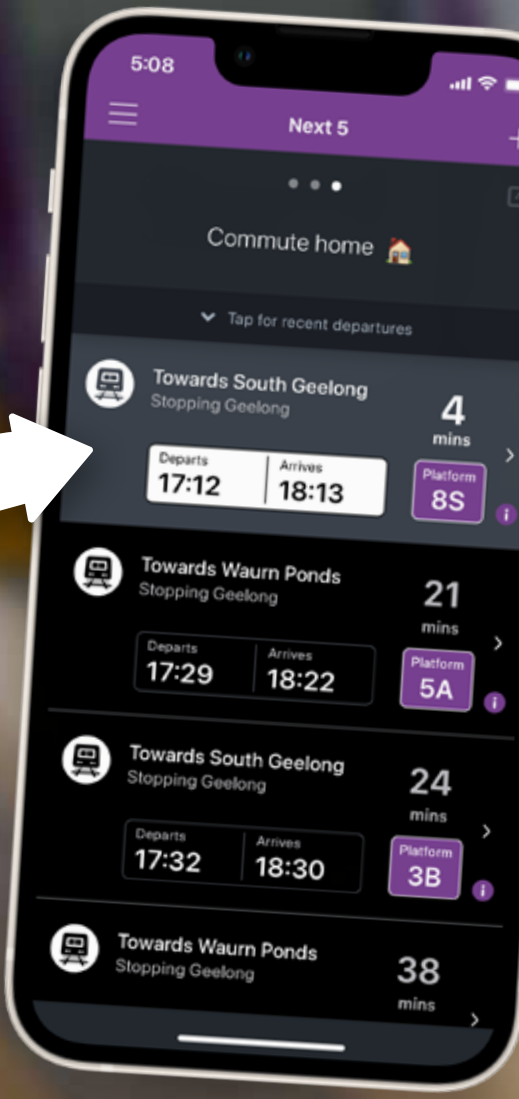


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