

ANNUAL REPORT

2019-2020



Celebrating 30 years

belong
community • people • opportunity



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF INDIGENOUS OWNERS

belong holds the deepest respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first people of this country, and we acknowledge that the prosperity of modern day Australia is built on lands stolen, never ceded.

We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have survived and continue to endure the traumas of historical and systemic injustices on their lands and people.

Yet we celebrate the world's longest surviving cultures - testament to systems of belief and technological sophistication that supported the survival of more than 250 clans or 'nations' across the enormous range of environments that comprise this continent.

This year, we won't forget about in a hurry. Our offspring will study it for generations to come, write essays about it, try to make sense of it all on their own journey to adulthood and their place in the world.

We had the unbelievable fires; we had the unprecedented COVID-19; and we had George Floyd: a North American man of colour, life snuffed out violently for no good reason.

So Australian First Nations stood up. Other Australians stood up as others said, "What on earth does this have to do with Australia?"

The answer: Everything. Systemic racism needs to stop. This is not the first time Indigenous Australian's have heard those harrowing words, "I can't breathe". And far too many have said those same words in the context of policing or incarceration.

George Floyd's death sparked the biggest rally in Brisbane City's recent living memory, and arguably the biggest rally of all Australian cities on that day. United we said, NO MORE. This is an Australian issue. This is a FIRST NATIONS AUSTRALIAN ISSUE. THIS IS ALL OUR BUSINESS!

Some stirring episodes have since followed, including several celebrated television events.

Meyne Wyatt delivered a spine tingling monologue at the end of ABC's Q&A program on 13 June 2020 only two nights after the Brisbane rally. One of our beloved Acacia Ride aunties said:

"I cried at the march listening to the speeches. Then Monday night (Meyne's monologue), I'm punching the air and crying. I think it was because growing up, we never dreamt that we would hear that sort of power coming from one of our own. But then again, you don't become the oldest, continuing culture in the world by being clueless. We are all hoping for a better future for all of us."

We pay our deepest respect to the Jagera people on whose land we are privileged to work, and pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

Image: Meyne Wyatt, Courtesy ABC Q&A

Our Pillars

Leadership and Community Engagement

We listen actively to our stakeholders, creating work that delivers on the genuine needs and aspirations of our community.

Financial Inclusion

We provide lifelines to the most disadvantaged people in our community. We support people to build skills, find work, and establish social enterprises.

Health and Wellbeing

We support people's understanding of health systems and good self-care. We provide spaces and opportunities for people of all abilities to unwind, connect, and participate.

Lifelong Learning

We support people's right to learn and grow at all stages of the lifespan through training, community education, and meaningful activities.

Active Citizenship

We work with community members to build their understanding of Australian citizenship, and provide opportunities to participate.



Who We Are

First established in 1989 as Acacia Ridge Community Support Inc., **belong** is a not-for-profit community-based organisation that provides services and support to people and communities across the Southside of Brisbane. Our Financial Assistance Service and various training projects extend more broadly, reaching into nearby local government areas including Logan, Ipswich and the Scenic Rim.

In our 30-year history, we have grown from a modest neighbourhood house offering a meeting space for members of the community to a vibrant agency servicing some of the highest-need suburbs on Brisbane's Southside. Our team of staff and volunteers share a belief that communities are strengthened when their most vulnerable members are supported and included in all aspects of life. We welcome and offer support for families, individuals and communities in a safe and respectful environment, delivering a range of programs and services in response to identified local needs and aspirations.

At **belong**, we work in partnership with communities, other service providers and local businesses to ensure we remain responsive and relevant to local community needs, and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

belong operates two community venues:

The **Acacia Ridge Community Centre** is located at 21 Hanify St, Acacia Ridge, adjacent to beautiful Grenier Park. The Community Centre is a place of welcome for members of the community and home to the majority of our programs and services.

The **Social Space** is located at the corner of Clifton and Fleurs Streets in Moorooka, the site of the former Annerley-Moorooka Senior Citizens' Hall. Since taking over the lease for this building in 2016, we have steadily transformed it into a dynamic community and social enterprise hub that is helping build connections and skills across the community.

Table of Contents

DELIVERY HIGHLIGHTS

4

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

5

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

6

LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

8

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

13

HEALTH & WELLBEING

17

LIFELONG LEARNING

21

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

24

30 YEARS IN REVIEW

26

Delivery Highlights

92

**JOBS CREATED
FOR
DISADVANTAGED
JOB SEEKERS**

300

**STRANDED
INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS
SUPPORTED**

X4

**INCREASE IN
VEGGIES AND
PROTEINS FOR
PEOPLE IN OUR
COMMUNITY**

10

**AT-RISK PEOPLE
SUPPORTED EACH
WEEK WITH
MEDICATION
NEEDS**

3000

**SAPLINGS
PLANTED BY
BELONG TRAINEES
AT BINNA BURRA**

184

**EMPLOYMENT
TRAINING PLACES
CREATED**

212

**PARCELS
DELIVERED TO
HOMES EACH WEEK
DURING
LOCKDOWN**

15

**DEDICATED
VOLUNTEERS
SOURCED
THROUGH THE
CARE ARMY**

\$1.65M

**IN WAGES PAID TO
BELONG TRAINEES**



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

For those of you who don't know me, I would like to introduce myself as the President of **belong**. We farewelled long-serving and committed President, Jo Justo, at last year's AGM and I took up the mantle. I have spent 13 years in community services, much of it working in the multicultural sector and more recently in mental health. I had the pleasure of serving on the ARCSI Management Committee for three years from 2011 before heading to Nauru to work with refugees on the island in 2014. I came back to the management committee in 2019 as I have such admiration for the work done by the staff and volunteers at **belong**.

It is fitting that I start with an enormous thank you to all **belong** staff and volunteers who have remained committed and responsive throughout this challenging year. **belong** has been flexible in its ability to meet local community needs whilst responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. In an effort to ensure the Acacia Ridge Community Centre and The Social Space do not become transition hot spots, Trish and the committee have actioned prompt centre closures and clear communication through **belong's** social media platform and community connections. Services and support have been creatively maintained by staff and volunteers to ensure people have been able to access much needed emergency relief during this time. Trish has lobbied local and State Government who have stepped up to increase emergency relief and support organisational decisions regarding centre closures.

Whilst **belong** has handled these challenges with dignity, the year has also brought some exiting news for the organisation. It is with great pleasure that I mention the implementation of a new EBA. Highlights of the agreement include provisions for domestic violence leave and access to long service leave after five years. These arrangements sit well above industry averages and Fairwork recommendations and showcase **belong's** commitment to staff well-being.

The committee have also supported **belong's** transition into NDIS services this year. While face to face groups have been interrupted by COVID-19 physical distancing restrictions, Support Coordination and Core Support services have commenced. Luis has excelled in setting up rigorous processes to ensure the appropriate accountability measures are in place to run the service. **belong** has also engaged an experienced sub-contractor to manage the increasing workload.

Due to the hard work of staff and volunteers, and strong management of the organisation, **belong** is well-placed to embrace the next year's challenges and opportunities, and to ensure the communities we serve continue to feel supported and connected to the centres and to each other.

Nikki Wynne (President)

DIRECTOR'S REPORT



It almost goes without saying that this has been a year like no other.

We take some solace that Queensland seems to have avoided the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic as social distancing requirements are slowly relaxed and the cycles of daily life assume a more familiar rhyme and rhythm. At the same time, we know that the longer term social and economic repercussions of the virus hang over our heads as a great unknown.

The first jobs to evaporate in times like this are those characterised by casual or short-term/contract employment agreements. These are the exact same jobs our community so precariously depend upon to feed their families. For now, many in our community are insulated from the worst of it by initiatives like *JobKeeper* and an enhanced income safety net. But what happens when such supports are inevitably pared back?

There's a new storm brewing on the near horizon that will define our year ahead, and I'm proud to say:

WE ARE READY FOR IT!

We have built on our capacity to relieve hunger in the community this year through a range of new partnerships and the amazing dedication of our local volunteers including people sourced from the Queensland Government's *Care Army* initiative. Our team responded at lightening speed, adapting the existing food cooperative in Acacia Ridge to an outreach delivery service that, during lockdown, provided 212 boxes of food and groceries a week to people in need. Other partnerships have allowed us to provide food and material relief to stranded international students and to young people connected to the Acacia Ridge YMCA. Of greatest note, we're proud to have been contracted by Q Shelter this year to establish and coordinate three food hubs on the Southside of Brisbane that now provide much needed relief to families as we enter COVID-19's second storm of widespread financial stress.

These developments have been supplemented by the launch of a new frontline role at **belong**. Our **Community Link Worker** now provides us with the much-needed resource to go beyond Band-Aid solutions and address the often-complex underlying needs and circumstances of people in our catchment. We expect this role will come to the fore over the difficult months ahead.

Effective data capture is crucial to sharing this unfolding reality with those resourced and influential enough to make the decisions needed to support our community. We've implemented a new CRM system this year that now allows the capture of real-time data across a wide range of parameters. We trust this tool will offer our political and business leaders a fresh new portal into a world we know subjectively all too well, providing the impetus to commit

additional resources.

This hasn't been an easy year for anyone, and I take my hat off to the whole **belong** community for simply hanging in there. Everything about how and where we work has changed, and our crew have rolled with the punches.

Our front-line staff moved quickly to provide services via phone, online, and through no-contact delivery of food to the most vulnerable in our community. The Employment & Training team implemented flexible program delivery allowing the completion of all funded projects and some inspiring participant outcomes. Our staff who work behind the scenes (e.g., finance and IT) did an outstanding job to keep the wheels turning without missing a beat. My special thanks to all our training participants this year for your dedication through such tricky times.

Another highlight has been the launch of our NDIS program. We commenced early this year with the goal to start small and establish firm foundations from which the program can grow and flourish in the year ahead. I'm pleased to say this mission has been accomplished.

As much as times of crisis are taxing, they also have a way of encouraging us to pause, take stock and reflect more deeply on the kind of world we'd like to live in. People from all walks of life are now asking big questions about what constitutes 'the good life'. What makes a good community? How can work be made more secure, fair and life-affirming? How come I don't know my own neighbours? What really matters? We've been delighted this year to welcome Dr Liz Woods and Kevin Leong to The Social Space. Both exceptional community artists, the duo have commenced a new project to bring community together in pursuit of building some inspiring shared visions and action for the future. We're excited to see what unfolds.

Finally, the events of this year have overshadowed a special milestone for **belong**. 2020 marks 30 years since incorporation as Acacia Ridge Community Support Inc. (ARCSI). I've been honoured to lead this wonderful organisation for ten years now. Not long into my new role, large parts of our core catchment were devastated by the 2011 Brisbane floods. We worked tirelessly with community to identify what affected people needed and to respond accordingly. In the months that followed, we were brought to the brink by a new state government that slashed our operating budget to oblivion. We now stand stronger than ever before. There will be other crises to deal with ahead. What has kept us going all this time is our commitment to listen to and work in partnership with community at all levels. I extend my congratulations and gratitude to all past and present board members, staff and volunteers for your contributions to this story of longevity and success. We look forward to announcing a big celebration of this milestone once social distancing requirements are sufficiently lifted.

In the meantime, I trust that you enjoy the brief retrospective featured in the closing pages of this year's report.

Trish Cattermole (Director)

Leadership & Community Engagement

***belong* works in partnership with community to generate community development and service-based responses with real impact. In a year of significant crises, our commitment to engage and listen to community has been the defining feature of our work.**

COVID-19 Relief

belong's core catchment (defined by the Rocklea-Acacia Ridge SA2) is Greater Brisbane's second-most 'at risk' in terms of residents who possess two or more specific vulnerabilities to COVID-19 (e.g., diabetes, suppressed immunity, recent migration status, etc.). From the outset of COVID-19, we worked to identify and support particularly vulnerable individuals and 'hard to reach' groups. Our responses have included:

- Providing home delivery of food parcels that address the specific dietary and cultural requirements of community members;
- Supporting approximately 300 stranded international students, all whom had lost casual employment and were at risk of homelessness;
- Collecting and delivering prescription medication to 10 people per week with health conditions that placed them at high risk of contracting COVID-19 outside their homes.

2020 Vision

Growing demand for our frontline services in recent years has made it increasingly difficult to record the presenting needs of community members; a vital missing ingredient to developing effective service responses.

In the early months of 2020, ***belong*** commenced development of a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which allows the capture of real-time data across a wide range of parameters.

The information now allows us clearer insight to the lived experiences of our community, and a stronger foundation from which to approach time-poor leaders to attract greater financial and social investment into our Southside community.

Homelessness Crisis in Acacia

In October 2019, **belong** formalised a program logic for *Sustainable Futures*; an innovative, hub & spokes approach to homelessness support that addresses homelessness at its root causes through a range of partnerships while leveraging **belong's** existing services and community networks.

In the past financial year, frontline staff at the Acacia Ridge Community Centre staff have responded to approximately 50 people per week who are experiencing homelessness or who are at immediate risk of becoming homeless (e.g., in significant rental arrears).

The experiences of **belong** and other partners have raised our understanding of how low-cost food hubs provide a soft entry point to engage people around the underlying causes of homelessness, including things like: mental health; domestic and sexual violence; self-advocacy; housing systems literacy; financial literacy; and, employability skills.

At present, there are no specialist homelessness support services based in Acacia Ridge or neighbouring suburbs. An upshot of this is the migration of affected people towards the inner city, eroding their connection to suburban-based networks (a vital protective factor against becoming homelessness).

belong is currently exploring opportunities to launch *Sustainable Futures* in the 2020-21 financial year.

Social Distancing

As per organisations everywhere, we experienced through sheer necessity a revolution in the way we do business this year. Our commitment to best practice and evolving COVID-19 legislation has guaranteed continuity of business and, importantly, the safety of **belong's** staff, volunteers and community.

The continuity of our group-based training programs funded through the *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* initiative has presented our biggest challenges, but in hindsight, our biggest achievements. All programs were able to continue thanks to the flexibility and diligence of **belong** staff, our various training partners and site hosts, and most significantly, our training participants who showed tremendous perseverance to see their respective programs through to completion. This often necessitated splitting groups up to undertake work and training at separate sites under minimal supervision in order to maintain social distancing requirements.

Community Link Worker

Our frontline work at **belong** received a significant boost this year with the creation of a new, funded **Community Link Worker (CLW)** role.

The role provides new scope to address the often multiple and interconnected presenting needs of people in our community. Unearthing and understanding the complexity of people's needs is achieved from a foundation of relationship building and trust. Trust requires a commitment of one-on-one time that our busy frontline reception staff simply do not have.

Through an active process of *appreciative inquiry*, the CLW supports people to better understand and harness their own inner strengths and qualities that can be brought to bear on addressing and resolving their challenges in life. The role now receives approximately **100 contacts per month**, the bulk being face-to-face walk-ins at the Acacia Ridge Community Centre. **288 people have accessed this service to date** which also now oversees the dispersal of Emergency Relief support at **belong**.

CLW - Top Areas of Need

The top five areas of need engaged since the launch of the CLW role include:

- 1) Access to low cost or no cost food
- 2) Loss of work due to COVID-19 - especially for people ineligible for income support due to visa status
- 3) Mental health/trauma - particularly for people with a history of forced migration

4) Limited supported housing options for people with complex needs (women fleeing domestic violence and single men are particularly pronounced cohorts)

5) Credit debts

CLW - Case Study #1

The CLW was recently approached by a man in the community seeking material assistance. As trust was developed, it became apparent that he and his partner had been living in their broken down car on the roadside for several weeks. They were experiencing an array of surrounding issues, including outstanding fines, a pending court date, extreme financial vulnerability, and their children in child protection. They also faced mounting pressure from the police and local community to move on.

The CLW engaged local police to verify the situation of this couple, and negotiated Emergency Relief and COVID-19 funds to support towing of the car. The couple were supported to mobilise their own strengths to address their challenges, including seeking quotes for the repairs, and nominating their own choice of mechanic.

After boarding a few nights at a local motel, they were able to save and budget for an additional night from their own pockets. After negotiations with the couple and a local mechanic, a final repair quote was agreed to, with payment supported by **belong**. They were on their way again.

Case Study #1 (continued)

Although still searching for stable housing, the couple have been gradually empowered through exercising their own choices - they have bought a tent and are currently camping out. They have built a cordial relationship with the local police and are self-advocating with a housing organisation. They know they can continue to come to **belong** for support if they need it, but so far are self-managing their situation and taking responsibility for some of the circumstances they find themselves in. Both recognise the need for stable housing as their children are in care. How they use and manage their resources has become a newfound source of responsibility which they continue to work on.

Case Study #2

The CLW worked with a single CALD woman expecting the birth of twins, and already mother to two school aged children. The near arrival of twins posed considerable financial stress, particularly given the need to purchase two of many of the same items. The mother had decided she could afford to take out a NILS loan through another provider. As a person from a non-English speaking background, the associated NILS paperwork presented a considerable challenge. The CLW worked with her to raise awareness of her strong management skills which she had used to solve many problems in her past. The documents were worked on together, with the woman seeking and coming to understand all financial requirements of the other service. The application turnaround was quite slow, but the

woman had arranged quotes and laybys on all the required baby equipment. Every step of the forms were explained, shared calls were made to the NILS provider and finally, approval was achieved and the new purchases made.

Throughout this time, the woman was anxious that the twins might arrive before the application was approved. However through continuous dialogue, she was reminded of her innate resilience, and how she has overcome much more significant challenges in the course of her life.

Trainees Support Binna Burra Recovery

Binna Burra Lodge was among the most recognizable casualties of bushfires that devastated the Gold Coast hinterland in early September last year. Meanwhile, an existing **belong** Conservation and Land Management traineeship project in the Scenic Rim region was nearing completion. It was then that we received the surprise call to support the Queensland icon on its first steps to recovery.

Our strong relationship with the Scenic Rim Regional Council (SRRRC) and established track record delivering projects in the region placed us centre stage in the Council's strategy to mobilise resources and commence the enormous tasks of clean up and bush regeneration. The Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) provided a special extension to **belong**'s existing local traineeship project to help undertake this vital work.

Twelve people from the region participated in the project in partnership with the Binna Burra Lodge Recovery Team, and the SRRRC.

Three of the twelve trainees were directly impacted by the fires, including local Canungra man, Stephane Roy who tirelessly supported farmers relocate their herds from harm's way to safer grounds. Others included a young local who worked with the volunteer fire service during the height of the blaze, and an employee of the Binna Burra Lodge who counts among the many who lost their treasured livelihood in the wake of this tragedy.

The traineeship project saw participants tend to a range of tasks including lopping tree branches, the clean-up and removal of debris surrounding the campsite, and the planting of 3000 trees, all indigenous to the region's globally unique ecology.

We view this as a proud addition to our legacy of implementing localized, community-centred responses in events of disaster. In 2011, **belong** became the key coordinating agency in Rocklea in the wake of the Brisbane floods, sharing information and giving residents a choice about whether they wanted to connect to agencies or services. Our philosophy is always to build on our community's strengths and capacity, connecting residents with other residents to drive and direct their shared recovery. **belong** is immensely grateful to all trainees on this project who delivered exceptional work under highly onerous circumstances.

Financial Inclusion

***belong* expects the economic fallout from COVID-19 to exacerbate the existing vulnerabilities of our community in the year ahead. We have sought this year to position ourselves in readiness for further surges in demand for the bare basics: food, and financial & material relief.**

Emergency Relief

belong's Emergency Relief service was accessed 2,725 times in the 2019-2020 financial year, marking a 37% increase from the previous financial year.

Part of this increase can be attributed to the release of additional funding to the program as part of the Australian Government's COVID-19 response. However, the biggest driver has been the escalating financial distress in our community as people struggle with job insecurity in the context of a global pandemic. We anticipate a further surge in demand with the removal of *JobSeeker* and *JobKeeper* payments in the months ahead.

The top three reasons people accessed Emergency Relief in 2019-2020 were:

- Electricity bills
- Rent arrears
- Fuel and food relief

Food Security - Timeline

Strengthening the food security of our communities has increased in priority for *belong* this year with the onset of COVID-19. Highlights have included the following:

JULY—DECEMBER 2019

- *belong* retail trainees improve efficiencies of existing Food Co-op at the Acacia Ridge Community Centre. New sources of supply negotiated and additional refrigeration units sourced at cost in a partnership with Coolphase Pty Ltd.

JANUARY 2020 - PRESENT

- Onset of COVID-19: *belong* moves rapidly to contactless home delivery-based service, providing more than 200 boxes of food to the community each week through the first COVID-19 lockdown
- Specific dietary and cultural needs of community members supported through additional 'special deliveries', including Halal, gluten free, low carb, etc.



Food Security (continued)

- **belong** approached by El Salvador Community Association to provide support to large numbers of international students who had lost their casual employment due to COVID-19. Approximately 300 students supported through a combination of food parcels and food vouchers accessed from **belong**'s Emergency Relief program
- COVID-19 food relief activities greatly enhanced by an additional 15 volunteers sourced through the Queensland Government's *Care Army* initiative
- Q-Shelter contracts **belong** to establish and operate additional food hubs on the Southside of Brisbane. **belong**'s food footprint expanded to encompass Ellen Grove and Logan
- Expansion of refrigeration partnership with Coolphase Pty Ltd delivers fourfold increase in **belong**'s capacity to store perishable foods, in particular meat and vegetables. The capacity is augmented by new supply partnerships with food rescue agencies, greatly increasing quality and quantity of offerings at both the Acacia Ridge Community Centre and Elorac Place Community Centre (Ellen Grove)
- **belong** develops COVID-safe plan for its hubs at Acacia Ridge and Ellen Grove. Spaces reopened to the community with support from a new COVID-19 safety officer
- Acacia Ridge cooperative moves from former location to the Activity Room: cleaner, brighter, enhanced stock, a more dignified experience for our community.

Dear **belong** team,

This is a letter of appreciation for the BIG HELP I receive weekly from you.

COVID-19 has greatly affected our total wellbeing - healthwise, financially, socially, psychologically, emotionally, and mentally.

The prices of a lot of basic commodities have also gone sky high because of the current crisis. That's why the goodies you deliver every week is such a BIG HELP.

Thanks to all the volunteers who pack and deliver them, and to all those working hard behind the scene.

Thank you very much for your generosity and thoughtfulness. All your hard work and dedication is greatly appreciated. Keep up your great work. All of you are some of the unsung heroes in our community!

I salute you all!

Respectfully yours,

Jacinta

Share Shed Inc. Partnership



belong was proud to team up with **Share Shed Inc.** this year, creating a unique way to provide access to much needed goods for families doing it tough due to COVID-19.

Based in Salisbury and three years in the making, Share Shed is Queensland's first Library of Things where people can borrow and return from their catalogue of those things we all need but only tend to use once in a while.

The idea of the partnership is to encourage people to pay-it-forward and donate an annual Share Shed membership to those in need, with **belong** then distributing the donated memberships to families who could benefit from access to hundreds of useful items for free.

The initiative is proving a double win for the community - providing free access to Share Shed's items for those who really need a hand while financially supporting Share Shed to stay open and continue to support the

community during tough times.

With six memberships distributed by **belong** to date, we're delighted to be part of the widening of lifestyle opportunities this partnership is providing and look forward to building on this in the year ahead.

Connect with Share Shed through their website: www.shareshed.org.au

Lifeline for Students

An estimated 500,000 international students were based in Australia when the Coronavirus first struck - lives since upended with the widespread loss of casual employment leaving many struggle to afford the bare basics let only save for return flights to their home countries. In the worst cases, stranded students have faced serious exploitation by unscrupulous landlords or employers. **belong** was proud to partner with the El Salvador Community Association during the height of the COVID-19 lockdown, providing support to approximately 300 stranded students through the provision of food parcels and food vouchers.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

2019-2020 HIGHLIGHTS



300

**INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS
SUPPORTED**



37%

**INCREASE IN
DEMAND FOR
EMERGENCY
RELIEF**



2725

**INSTANCES OF
EMERGENCY
RELIEF SUPPORT**

Health & Wellbeing

The launch of a new NDIS program marked the largest development in *belong*'s commitment to the health and wellbeing of our community this year. We have also supported the psychological health and wellbeing of our communities through the COVID-19 crisis.

NDIS

belong was proud to become an accredited provider of supports under the **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** in late 2019.

The onset of COVID-19 shortly after the launch of our NDIS program has resulted in a slow uptake during the first half of 2020 and beyond, with four participants supported to date. However, our objective from the start was to build a solid foundation of knowledge and experience from which to build in 2020-21. Key to this vision is the development of a program that provides real choice to participants in line with their unique preferences, interests and personalities, including:

- Recruiting and training a diverse range of support workers from which participants can choose;
- Developing a responsive, person-centred, strengths-based approach to working with people towards their aspirations;

- Building robust referral networks that can offer appropriate supports in cases where we are not ideally positioned to address a person's needs;
- Understanding the gaps and limitations to what the NDIS is able to offer.

Another issue to surface is how we can support people with limited finances at the very beginnings of their NDIS journey. A person's eligibility for NDIS support is determined by way of a Functional Assessment undertaken by an Occupational Therapist, Social Worker or Psychologist. These entail a comprehensive evaluation of a person's capacities in a range of domains (e.g., in their own houses, at school, going to the shops, etc.), and come at a considerable cost to the applicant. For many people in Acacia Ridge and surrounds, the expense is simply prohibitive. It remains a priority for the year ahead to address this important barrier to participation within our community.

Healthy Options

New logistical and supply partnerships have increased our capacity to provide perishable foods to people on low incomes in our community this year - by a factor of four.

Our refrigeration and freezer capacity, in particular, has received a big boost thanks to the generosity of Coolphase Pty Ltd., who have supplied a wide range of near-new display cases at or near cost. The upshot has been better eating options for our community members who struggle to afford nutritious fresh food.

A Call A Day

The way we as people respond to ongoing crises such as COVID-19 follows a predictable three-step pattern, says the research. We are first shocked and working hard to make sense of it all. We then start to adapt, and in this phase quite frequently find a few silver linings. But as the days turn into weeks turn into months, the crisis takes an increasing psychological toll. This is a crisis that has caused much loss, separation and isolation, with no clear end point in site.

Through our social media reach and frontline reception team, we introduced the support of *A Call a Day*. Call us any time to debrief, unwind, and explore the range of ways we may be able to support. Phone (07) 3277 4893



belong supported the mental wellbeing of kids during school lockdown by providing free packs of chalk, and sharing their colourful creations on our Facebook page!



belong support worker, Carly, and NDIS participant, Georgia letting their hair down at the 2020 belong Short Film Festival in March.

Tailored Support

Our COVID-19 no-contact outreach services responded to the particular health needs of community members in several ways this year.

In addition to regular food parcels, special parcels were packed and delivered to individuals with particular dietary needs relating to health issues or cultural needs.

We also supported around ten of our most vulnerable community members each week through the delivery of medications collected from local pharmacies. Big thanks to our local Acacia Ridge pharmacies who were very responsive to our community's needs.

Hearing Assessments

Hearing loss is often an issue that creeps up so slowly through the lifespan that it goes unnoticed until significant loss has already occurred. We were delighted to welcome **Hearing Australia** to the Acacia Ridge Community Centre twice this year where they provided free hearing assessments to members of our local community. As with all things health, early detection and intervention offers the best prospects to minimizing further deterioration and offers the opportunity to embrace options that improve quality of life.



Lifelong Learning

***belong* continued to deliver learning opportunities to people of all ages this year. Our training programs in particular engaged many younger and mature-aged learners, cohorts which face significant discrimination and other barriers to participation in the workforce.**

Skilling Queenslanders for Work

belong was proud to deliver the following community-based training programs this year, funded through the Queensland Government's Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative:

Work Skills Traineeships:

- Community Green Skills (MT3744)
- Greening Jimboomba (SE3745)
- Scenic Rim Conservation (SE3746)
- Business South-East (SE4354)
- Community Groceries (SE4399)
- Business Metro (MT4358)
- Community Groceries (MT4397)
- Salvos Retail (MT4326)
- CaLM Dogs (MT4378)
- First Start (MT26654)

Community Work Skills programs:

- Cleaning (MT3743)



184 TRAINING PLACES CREATED



61% OF PARTICIPANTS BORN OVERSEAS

5% OF PARTICIPANTS FIRST NATIONS



92 JOB OUTCOMES



162 INDUSTRY CERTIFICATES AWARDED

Lifelong Learning

The **belong** training team delivers community-based programs tailored to the individual needs, aspirations and life-circumstances of participating people. Our training participants frequently commence with a range of prevocational barriers to employment, including:

- Long-term unemployment, and associated psychosocial, motivational and confidence-related issues
- Recent migration status, in particular people from a refugee/asylum-seeker background who face a range of ongoing settlement and adjustment challenges
- Young and mature-aged learners, who face the added challenges of age-based discrimination
- Welfare-related issues (e.g., insecure accommodation, poverty, etc.)

We offer ongoing individual case management and wrap-around support to participants who experience such issues, leveraging services internal to **belong** whenever possible, and in other cases, offering individual client advocacy and referral to ensure participants can access the services they need.

Our training projects engage the support of numerous partners who provide invaluable site experience along with the benefits of their industry expertise and networks to prepare our participants for employment success.

Some highlights this year have included:

- A widening in our circles of project partners, including trainee employment hosts, and others who have made available to us their sites and industry expertise
- A significant increase in our delivery of paid traineeships. These translated to \$1.65M in wages paid to trainees this year
- The work of our Binna Burra traineeship team - 3000 saplings planted under onerous conditions, including extremes of temperature, and thousands of kilometers of travel accumulated across the duration of the program.

**33% TRAINING
PARTICIPANTS
UNDER 25 YEARS**

**30% TRAINING
PARTICIPANTS OVER 40
YEARS**

65% CALD BACKGROUND

Trainees' Green Legacy

In the context of big cities and surrounding suburban sprawl, it's easy to assume that nature begins where our city limits end.

This couldn't be further from the truth according to Michael Petter, President of the **Bulimba Creek Catchment Coordinating Committee (B4C)**. B4C hosted two *belong* Green Skills Traineeship project this year, which saw participants gain invaluable work experience across a wide range of conservation sites supported by the Committee and their army of community volunteers.

"Cities require a near endless supply of natural resources in order to establish and grow", says Mr Petter. It's no surprise then that our metropolitan cities, Brisbane included, have evolved in regions of global ecological importance.

"Historically, there was always a need for good water, good soil, and lots of tree materials to build our cities out of," he said.

"So we've actually put our city contexts into the most biodiverse parts of the landscape."

Not counting the wet tropics of far north Queensland, the Great South-East rates among the state's most biodiverse regions, with 152 different types of ecosystems, and thousands of species of plants and animals – some of which occur nowhere else on the planet.

"Greater Brisbane is the home of unique and vital biodiversity", says Mr Petter.

"The sites the trainees have been working on in Brisbane are a vital part of the ecological framework that keeps Brisbane's ecology going. It's not trivial work. It's very vitally important work to do," he said.

"They've delivered real work with real significance on real sites. The kind of work they've done is a vital part of nation building."

Nothing goes to waste across B4C's sites, with sustainability embedded in their practices at all levels. The Committee was a past winner of the Australasian Riverprize, the world's foremost award in river basin management. This included recognition for their work restoring The Oxbow Wetland Biodiversity Corridor on the lower reaches of the creek nearing the Brisbane River. The once degraded and heavily polluted waterway has now seen the return of estuarine fishes and crustaceans. Mr Petter has high hopes for *belong*'s trainee graduates who he says will make a tremendous asset to future employers.

"They've worked on some of our key biodiversity sites. We've sent them to some of the jewels in the crown of our worksites here with B4C. Some of these sites we've been working on for twenty years. They're a real credit to themselves." he said.

Active Citizenship

***belong* believes that everyone has a part to play in helping build strong, connected and welcoming communities. We provided numerous avenues for civic participation this year including volunteering, and other programs that prepare newly arrived people to participate fully in our democracy and society.**

Volunteer Program

Our amazing pool of volunteers remained the heart and soul of our work at ***belong*** this year.

A significant amount of our work at ***belong*** simply would not be possible without the skills, commitment, and tireless efforts of our community volunteers.

Volunteering is an important component of Active Citizenship, providing vital avenues for people to contribute to our communities according to their skills, capacities and interests.

In 2019-2020, ***belong***'s volunteers supported:

- Daily operation of our Food Cooperative at the Acacia Ridge Community Centre
- Delivery of community events
- Maintenance of our gardens and facilities

- Citizenship Education Classes
- English Language Classes
- Reception and Administration
- Much more!

belong always welcomes expressions of interest from community members interested in volunteering. We will arrange a time to meet with you to discuss your interests, skills, and availability, and will match you with the right opportunity.

Contact info@belong.org.au

Care Army

Just as Queenslanders banded together as the Mud Army through the 2011 floods, we've come together again to support each other through the COVID-19 crisis. The Queensland Government's *Care Army* initiative invites people to lend a hand to those most at risk during the coronavirus outbreak, especially: Queenslanders over 65 and over 50 if they're of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

belong's contactless outreach work has been enriched by 15 Care Army volunteers this year who have assisted with:

- General operations of our food relief initiatives including the collection of produce from food rescue agencies, sorting, packing, etc.
- Home delivery of food parcels and food relief vouchers to at-risk people
- No-contact collection and delivery of medical prescriptions for at-risk people
- Checking in on socially isolated people in our community.

We are hugely grateful to you all for your support this year! To get involved as a volunteer, or to find out how the Care Army can assist you, visit their website: www.covid19.qld.gov.au/carearmy

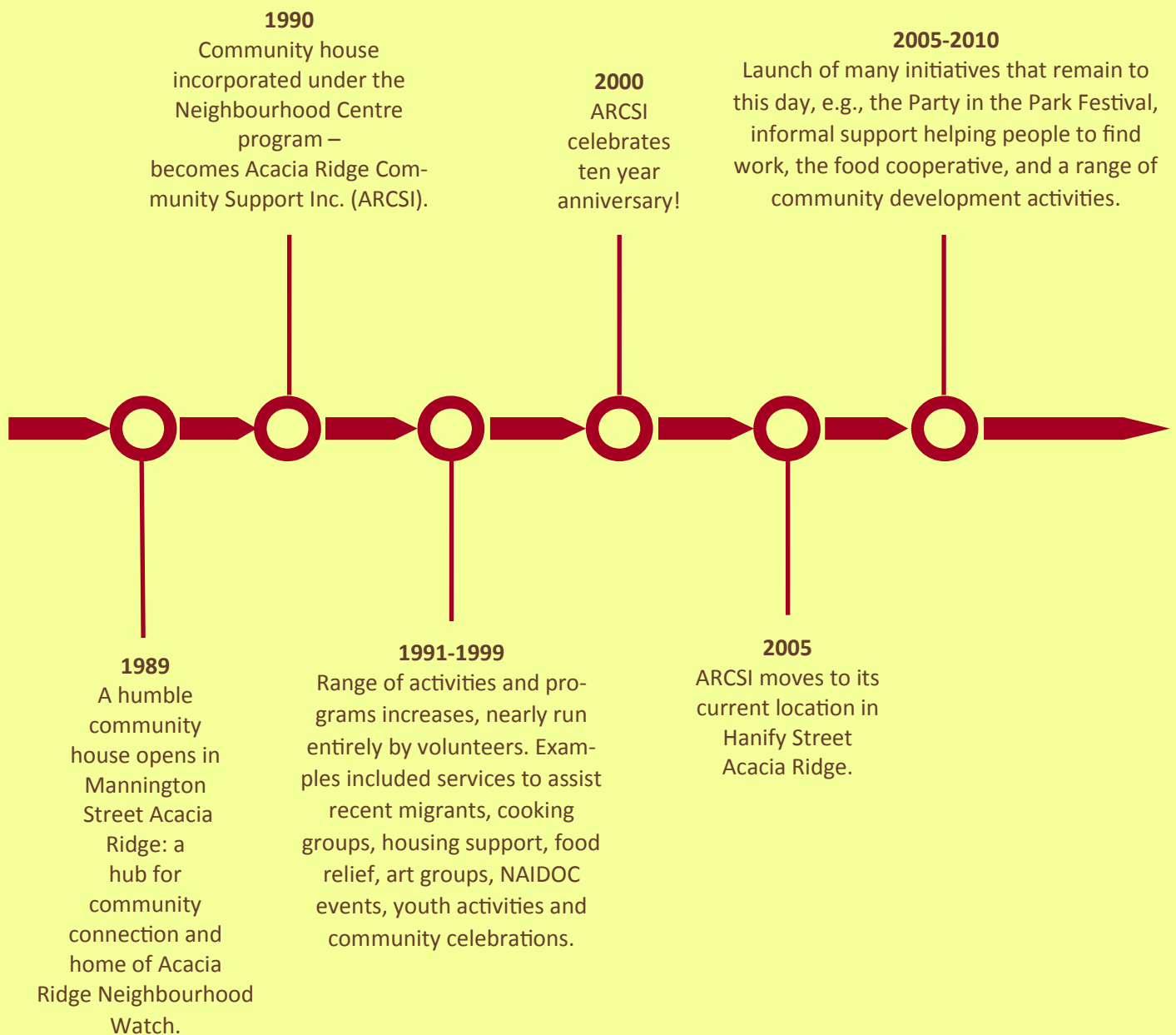
Edison's Story

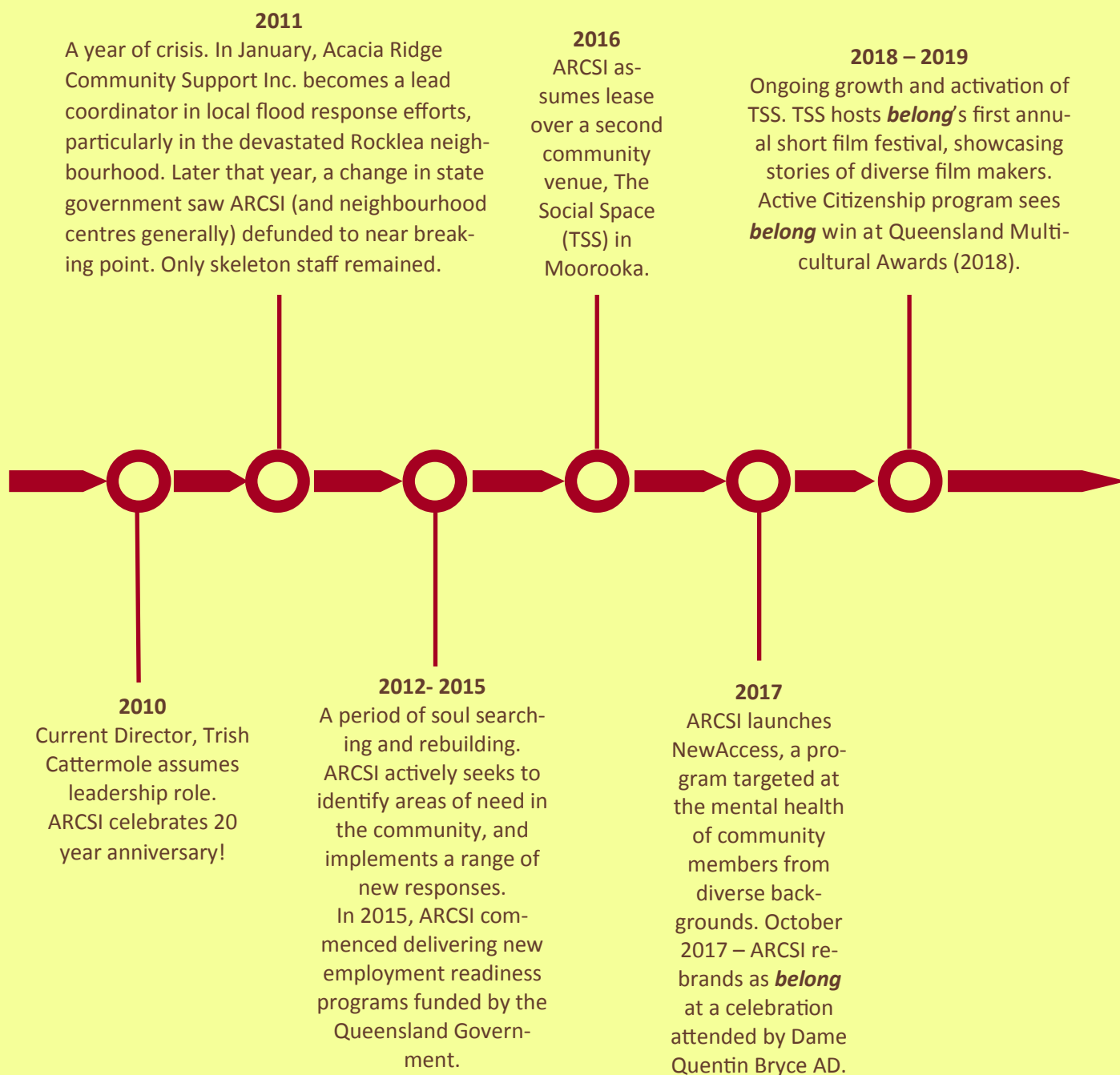
Edison joined *belong* through the *Care Army* during lockdown in March this year, providing tireless support to our food relief activities and the local community.

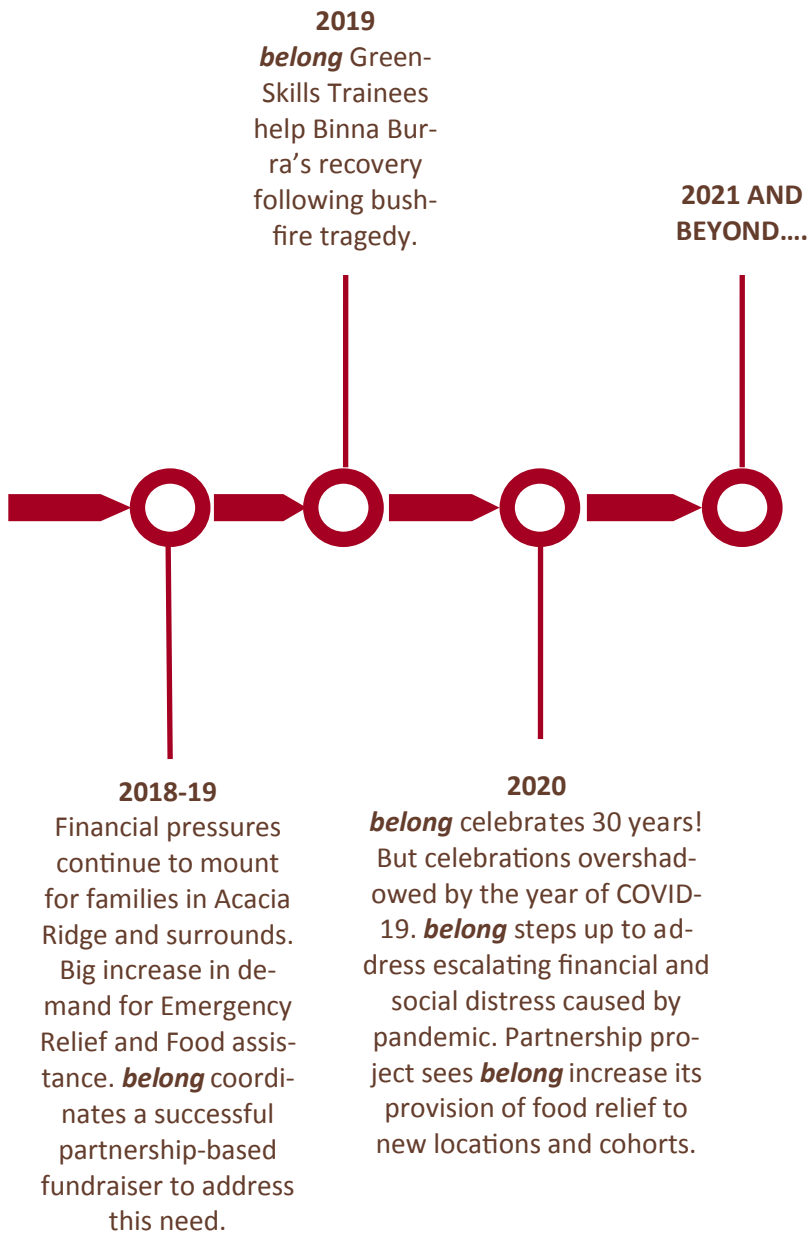


*"I found out about the Care Army when the coronavirus outbreak first started. During the lockdown, I knew so many people out there were doing it tough - people who had lost their jobs and others suffering from isolation and depression. I wanted to do what I could to help ease people's suffering. I know what it can feel like. I myself was affected directly by coronavirus when I was out of work for a period of time. Work has since returned to normal for me, but I know there are thousands of people in our community who aren't so lucky. I'm really grateful to have become connected to **belong** through the Care Army program. It's been great for my own mental health, helping support people less fortunate. I would recommend the Care Army and volunteering with **belong** to anyone!"*

30 Years in Retrospect







What Next??

THE NOT SO BIG DAY OUT

*free c sponsored

and supported by

RETROSPECT - Supporting Killing Heidi
MINDSHAFT
HAPPY 7 TRANSITION
TRACES HORSHACK
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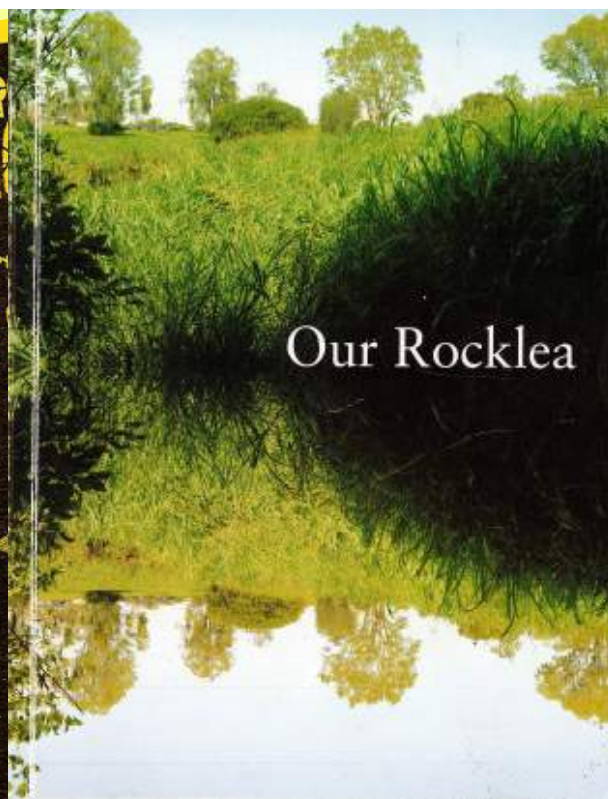
featuring
 the "82 x live pro of tour"
 in the electro net

SUNDAY APRIL 30 3pm-8pm
GRENIER PARK mortimer rd
ACACIA RIDGE

live performances by **PYROMANI-ACTS**

lighting by **bj's**
 Sound & Lighting
 drug & alcohol
 free zone

117 from stops A&B (myer centre)
 city



Group to tackle men's problems

Men battle to with their changing society, a group has been established to help them changes.

Mr Lees said the success of similar women's groups had prompted him to establish Men Too.

"Women today recognise the benefit of getting together and talking about any difficulties or concerns so it will be interesting to see if men catch on," he said.





Acacia Ridge Community Centre: 21 Hanify Street, Acacia Ridge QLD 4110

The Social Space: 21 Clifton Street, Moorooka QLD 4105

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