

ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL 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.

We also honour the incredible resilience of our nation's first people, and their often under-celebrated contributions to our nation's economic, social and cultural development.

We are proud that our Acacia Ridge heartland boasts one of South East Queensland's strongest Indigenous communities, and we are grateful for everything that they teach us.

We are proud of the achievements, courage and resilience of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people we rub shoulders with every day.

We are proud to be headquartered in a Queensland state electorate led by the first Indigenous woman to be elected to Queensland parliament.

We aim to tread gently on these lands, to listen to the wisdom of our elders, and to do what we can to help bridge the gap and contribute to the preservation of culture and lingo.

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.

Leadership & 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 & Wellbeing

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

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

01

President &
Director's Reflection

03

Leadership &
Community Engagement

07

Financial Inclusion

13

Health & Wellbeing

14

Lifelong Learning

19

Active Citizenship



PRESIDENT & DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION



Another year has flown by with lots of exciting activity at belong. I think we had all thought that COVID-19 would be farewelled in 2020 but it has resolutely followed us into 2021. While we have been very fortunate with limited spread in Queensland compared to our sister-states down south, mass relocation up to Queensland from New South Wales and Victorians has seen unexpected impacts on housing affordability and availability, culminating in additional financial pressure and food insecurity in our region.

But belong's community-minded staff and volunteers have all stepped up to respond. Additional Emergency Relief funding has been getting to those who need it, our Social Space café has been feeding people healthy, home grown free lunches, and our Food Co-op has extended opening hours to provide even more low-cost groceries for Acacia Ridge community members.

We, and the management committee, extend a heartfelt thank you to all the committed belong staff and volunteers who have stepped up and worked hard to help our community flourish. By increasing access to food, clothing and funds, by skilling people up to start new careers and by providing caring and support services through our NDIS program, you have been there when your community needed you.

As we look forward to the new year, we will continue to advocate for and support the Acacia Ridge and Moorooka communities and the diverse, warm, resilient and generous people who make them up. We will also work to grow our NDIS business to build a more financially sustainable organisation.

Sadly, we will also say a very sad farewell to Trish Cattermole, our steadfast leader and Director for the last 11 years. Trish has deftly rebuilt the organisation after funding slashes have left it on the precipice. She has found creative ways to raise money, written winning tenders and gotten the place back on its feet. She is adored and deeply respected by the staff, the community and her Government and sector colleagues. While it will be a loss for belong, we are excited to for Trish to retire and enjoy time with her family and grandchildren. We know Trish will stay connected to belong into the future and want to extend our most sincere gratitude for the beautiful organisation she has built.

NIKKI & TRISH

PRESIDENT & DIRECTOR

LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

belong constantly provides opportunities for the community to voice their aspirations. This allows belong to continuously work towards supporting the communities needs through community development and service-based responses.

QLD DAY AWARD



belong was honoured to receive the QLD Day Award from Leeanne Enoch earlier this year. It was a great recognition of all the hard work the staff and volunteers do at belong to strengthen the community. From providing food parcels, supportive services, community assistance and much more.

PARTY IN THE PARK



Every year belong holds it's infamous Party in the Park, attracting many locals and providing an opportunity for the community to enjoy a night of activities under the stars alongside neighbours, friends and family. This year we added an extra touch by teaming up with Multicultural Australia and incorporating the Luminous Lantern Parade. The community got to hand make some lanterns and witness the Giant Kookaburra light up the sky. There were plenty of rides, entertainment, live music, delicious food and more.

UNIFORM 4 KIDS



belong had the pleasure of meeting with the Queensland Police Service who gifted us some creative and fun children's clothes made by Uniforms 4 Kids. The clothes are made by repurposing donated law enforcement and emergency service organisation uniforms. Every piece that is created is unique as the next. The talent, imagination and skills that the volunteers have, really shows through their work. We are very grateful to be a part of this cause and to pass the clothes on to disadvantaged children in our community.

CAREERS DAY



The Careers Day event went ahead in June 2021, with 11 employers in attendance and approximately 50 trainees / program participants visiting throughout the morning. The Business trainees who were employed with belong at the time, were coached through the event planning and delivery as part of a 'mini-project' to develop skills and gain further experience with real life work tasks. The event was successful with the trainees feeling that they had accomplished all tasks and felt a sense of pride with their efforts.

This event provided additional skill-building opportunities and built up confidence and self-esteem in participants. The business trainees also had an opportunity to meet the employers and enquire about any employment vacancies, for which they could apply.

A special thank you to the employers who attended the event: Ingham's Chicken, DGT Employment & Training, MEGT, WPC, Australian Defence Force, QLD Correctional Services, Housework Heroes, Plantmark, Wallum Nurseries, B4C and Stance Global.

COMMUNITY MEALS



Every Wednesday and Friday throughout the month of June, belong invited local members of the community to come along and join us for community meals. On average 63 people attended each week. It was an opportunity for the community to come along and share their aspirations for Acacia Ridge and voice the changes they would like to see take place. At the top of the list was the chance to participate in more activities, providing further support to those experiencing homelessness or difficulty in securing housing, getting involved in community groups and having access to a community bus.

Of the activities suggested the most popular ones were; sewing classes, art classes, cooking classes, kids activities, community trips & dinners. We look forward to working on these suggestions to provide the community a better, more connected experience in the coming year.

A big thank you to Billy Cummins, Aunty Marg Riley and Dorothy for their contributions in sharing language and their personal stories in connection to country. Billy's teachings at the beginning of the dinners gave everyone a sense of belonging and was a great ice breaker activity.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

belong continued to support some of the most vulnerable members of our community through the delivery of food parcels, financial assistance and basic household needs through the food co-op while riding the waves of COVID-19.

COMMUNITY LINK WORKER

During this year belong received extra funding from the Government both State and Federal over the COVID-19 year. This year being difficult due to lockdowns and job losses for many. Emergency Relief was sought after during that time. Belong serviced many community members through both the Food Co-op and the Community Link Worker for Emergency Relief.

Access to food parcels of low cost food remains a constant need and is well provided for in the Food Co-op. Many of the Community exist on low income, benefits or no income. Acacia Ridge has a very mixed population of cultures and backgrounds and often trauma has been experienced by people fleeing war or violence in their own country. Adjusting to the systems and expense of Australia can be daunting for people from non-English speaking countries.

There has been a substantial increase in people migrating from other states into Queensland. This has meant rental and property prices have increased and has created a housing crisis for low income earners and those requiring affordable State Housing.

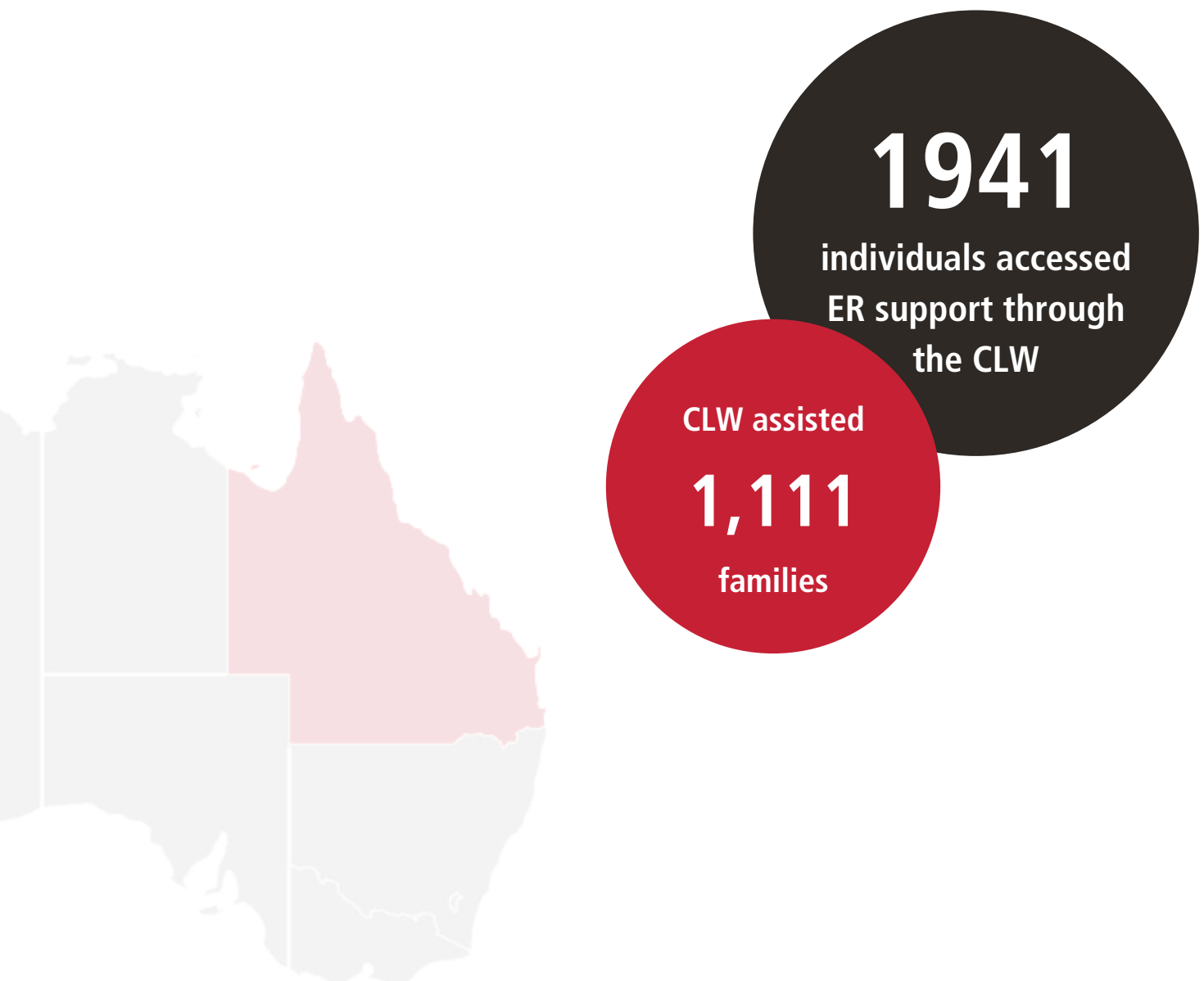
The Community Link Worker has been flexible in meeting Community needs with COVID-19 funding.

WHAT THE WORK LOOKS LIKE

Recently the CLW (Community Link Worker) has had contact with homeless families and couples who are without housing, they have been evicted and unable to establish new housing in the private rental market. Therefore they live in motels or Air B&B's stretching their incomes to cover accommodation that is not sustainable. belong has no housing stock and there is no public housing available.

Therefore the CLW contacts other local agencies with housing stock to list the families as waiting. The CLW also assists people to connect with specialist housing agencies and suggest people apply for community housing as another option.

ER has provided support for transport if housing or family in another region can support the homeless family or couple presenting in Acacia Ridge.

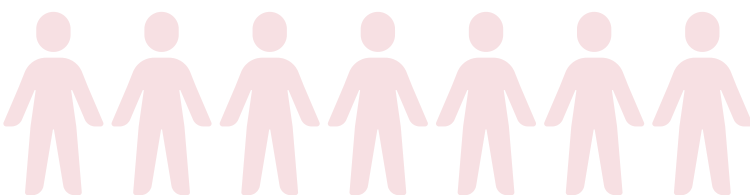


FOOD CO-OP



The Food Co-op has increased from operating 2 days a week to 4 days a week with increasing patronage and volunteer support. Through the Food Co-op belong is able to assist individuals and families to purchase a greater quantity of items than what they would be able to purchase at the local grocery store. The Food Co-op has been able to provide a range of items to meet individual needs and continues to offer a wide selection of products to suit the community members from CALD backgrounds.

In the last financial year the Food Co-op was able to serve close to 7000 people and indirectly supported 4581 children.



served close to
7,000
individuals

INDIKA'S STORY



Recent migration to Australia is a factor in many people's decision to retrain and reposition themselves for a better future. Doubly so when said person is a mother returning to work.

Indika Satharasinghe migrated with her family to Australia from Sri Lanka in 2012 after working for many years in a successful tyre exporting business. Motherhood happened, and then a significant hiatus from work. 8 years in fact. Indika was eager to resume her former career in a new nation and with the added challenge of time spent outside the job force.

"One of my friends had done the same program before, and she's the friend of a belong team member. That's how I found out about the program and got involved," Indika said. "It helped me regain my confidence and skills and learn about work in a very different country," she said.

Since graduating from the traineeship project, Indika has gained employment at belong as the Food Co-op Administrator. She has brought order and life to the Food Co-op with her positive can-do attitude and built lasting relationships with many of our volunteers, food rescue organisations, colleagues and community members.

THE SOCIAL SPACE CAFE



on average serve

50

meals a day



served close to

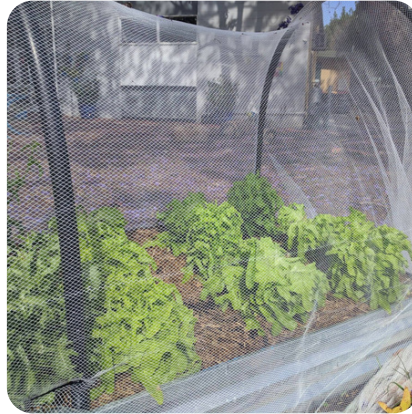
8,000

meals

The Social Space Cafe was initiated with the assistance of the Australian Government through the Australian Council, its arts funding and advisory body. It has since been self sustainable with the help of approximately 30 volunteers, who also manage the free shop and the community garden. The Social Space Cafe on average serves 50 people daily. The cafe offers anything from coffee, sweets to vegetarian lunches and has served just under 8,000 meals in the last financial year.

It has become a popular meeting place for locals and provides the opportunity to come together as a community.

THE SOCIAL SPACE GARDENS



The Social Space Gardens are cared for and run by local community members who live close by. The gardens have been blooming and providing food for the cafe. The garden group have plans to extend the garden to be more productive and to establish a community perma-culture garden. Earlier this year in May they held a composting workshop and information centre for 6 weeks with the support of Brisbane City Council.

THE FREE SHOP



The Free Shop is open to the public during the same hours as the cafe. It is completely run by volunteers. It accepts donations on Wednesdays and has an average of 15 people visit the shop daily. It has become a hidden treasure providing goods and clothing to the community. Any surplus goods are then donated to local opportunity shops.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

belong saw an increase in NDIS participants over the last financial year. As the NDIS program grew, belong introduced a new NDIS team to better support the needs and requirements of those participants.

NDIS

belong's reputation as a quality service provider has continued to grow in our community as reflected by the growth in the number of clients we support. We have seen a 100% increase in NDIS participants and to ensure we are delivering the best possible service we recognised it was time to introduce a dedicated NDIS team.

The newly formed NDIS team aim to support our increasing diversity opportunities, to develop and offer a responsive, collaborative approach supporting participants needs, goals and aspirations, connecting to the best supports available, with honest, open communication.

The team also aims to increase and further develop a high performing, engaged team, with processes providing excellent services, that facilitates outcomes.



Increased
participants by
100%

LIFELONG LEARNING

belong continued to provide learning opportunities to people facing a variety of barriers to enter or re-enter the workforce. From people seeking their first job to those who are returning to work after a long period, belong believes everyone deserves the chance to learn, grow and participate in the community.

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:

- CaLM Dogs (MT5131)
- Environmental Landcare (SE5154)
- Scenic Rim Conservation (SE4989)
- Greening Jimboomba (SE4809)

Community Work Skills programs:

- Cleaner Futures (MT5015)
- Business (MT5078)

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.

Skilling Queenslanders for Works funding was significantly reduced down to only 1 round available from the Queensland Government yet we have managed to assist 141 people in the last 12 months of which 42% have gained full time employment and 7% have secured part time work.

To date, 114 individuals have completed accredited training to receive a Cert 1 in either Conservation & Land Management, Cleaning and/or Business.



Most significantly our CaLM Dogs project delivered in partnership with Dogs Qld in the Durack area achieved 100% completion and employment outcome, with all participants completing the Cert 1 in CaLM and all finding employment within the contract period.



CaLM Dogs project
achieved

100%

completion
& employment

TENISHA'S STORY

Greening Jimboomba - Cert 1 in Conservation & Land Management



Tenisha is a young 21-year old Indigenous woman who was very shy when she started her traineeship and was dealing with family issues at home. Tenisha immediately displayed excellent work ethic right from the beginning of the Traineeship, but she needed a boost in self-confidence. Throughout the traineeship, trainees were asked to research and deliver short presentations to the team. With practice Tenisha's confidence was improving. The belong site supervisor also put Tenisha in lead roles to help her give direction to others. Tenisha has always talked of her desire to work in Hospitality.

Through the belong Job Readiness sessions, Tenisha explored opportunities in the hospitality industry. She applied for a job at Ayres Rock Resort located in the Northern Territory as a long shot, and was surprised when she was offered the opportunity to work full time whilst completing a Certificate 3 in Hospitality.

JAMES STORY

CaLM Dogs - Cert 1 in Conservation & Land Management



James is an immigrant from Borneo, where he worked in farming and horticulture and had a basic education. James arrived in Australia in July 2019 and worked casually with labour hire companies when his permanent visa had been granted. He was only gaining a few hours per week and needed to find a more stable option of employment. He and his Australian partner live in Wynnum Brisbane and are both employed in the same sector of the economy.

James graduated from this most successful SQW team; CaLM Dogs, and was offered an apprenticeship with the Bulimba Creek Catchment Coordinating Committee (B4C). James had shown his great work ethic for belong and was recommended for the opportunity to further his knowledge and experience, while also gaining a Certificate III in Parks and Gardens / Conservation and Land Management through TABMA Training.

Feedback from B4C's Catchment Manager, Wayne Cameron, is that James has become a hard-working and dedicated employee for B4C in its program of contractual and community works across Greater Brisbane. He has proven a reliable and keen team member who is willing to learn.

When you see potential in a young man, who has barriers to overcome and basic skills to master, you look past the now into the future. B4C is committed to seeing James become a valued member of the workforce and a contributor to land management practices in his future career. He is well worth the investment.



Wayne Cameron
B4C's Catchment Manager

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

belong recognises the importance of a strong and connected community. We believe everyone can contribute in building the type of community that supports one another. belong provided numerous avenues for civic participation 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 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 2020-2021, belong's 60 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
- The Social Space Cafe
- The Free Shop
- The Social Space Gardens
- 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 we will match you with the right opportunity.

Contact info@belong.org.au



UDAY'S STORY

Business Workskills Traineeship- Cert 1 in Business Admin



Uday was originally from India, 17 years in New Zealand and then Brisbane beckoned. Life was normal. Uday was employed at the airport as an Aviation Protection Officer and then the pandemic struck. Life was not the same for many in the aftermath. It was not long before Uday was stood down and eventually lost his job.

Uday says he was fortunate to be accepted as a volunteer at the belong Community Center at Acacia Ridge, in the Food Co-Op, assisting with restocking, pricing and serving customers.

"I believe life placed me at the community center to reset my career path. The negativity, loss of hope encroaching my thought process was taking its toll. The administrators of the center stepped in and encouraged me to enroll in Cert. 1 Business Administration Program" says Uday.

Uday was placed at Host Employer TADQ at the request of the Manager, as Uday was currently volunteering at the time of application. Mid-program, things changed with the Host Employer and Uday felt that he was not being supported or treated with respect and voiced his concerns with belongs Project Coordinator. "It was not always great compatibility with our hosts for some of us, but the course administrators backed us always. When things were not working out with the original host that I was placed with, I was found an alternative host with the Salvo's stores. I worked with my host as if I belonged there always." said Uday.

Uday goes on to explain what he found most beneficial, "The assistance and support provided through belongs' Job Readiness Training was invaluable. We learned that it is a given that job seekers will have to work hard and smart to convince prospective employers of their employability. The onus is on job seekers to be eager and willing. With the guidance, support and motivation provided by the belong team, I was encouraged to speak with the regional manager of the Salvo's and inform them of my eagerness to apply for upcoming vacancies."

Udays' efforts were recognized and he was offered a role in their new store at Moorooka as a Casual Manager; managing operations of this busy store of an iconic Not For Profit Organization in a vibrant locality.

Udays' final comment on the Business Workskills Traineeship,

Truly we came out as stars from this course.I would recommend this program to any person, young or old, who is looking for direction with employment, or who needs the extra support that belong is able to provide.

”

Uday
Business Admin Student

