

BLESSING BAGS MELBOURNE

ANNUAL REPORT



2023



Blessing Bags would like to acknowledge the many sacred lands and waterways we work on. While our work is predominantly on Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung lands, we know our bags travel far and wide across the many traditional lands in what we now call Victoria. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and that First Nations people are shamefully over-represented in the population of those experiencing homelessness, and accessing homelessness services in Victoria. Our aim is to help those experiencing homelessness, and our ability to provide meaningful change naturally extends to joining the struggle for true and meaningful reconciliation with our First Nations peoples. This was and always will be Aboriginal land.

AT A GLANCE



01 — 1,313 Blessing Bags made and Distributed

Through our outreach program and community day events, we managed to make and distribute 1,313 bags. This was a considerable increase on our numbers from last year when we were still recovering from Covid-19.



02 — Five Schools Participating in our New Outreach Program

In the past year, our outreach team developed two interactive, flexible workshops appropriate for primary and secondary schools. Both workshops provide schools and students an opportunity to learn and give back to the community.



03 — Gained Six New Team Members

We were lucky enough to gain six new team members and now have nine ongoing volunteers in our team. Although this may sound small, everything we do is dependent on our team's capacity. As we grow, we are able to make sure that what we do connects with community needs.

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HOMELESSNESS IN 2023

On any given night in Australia, over 122,000 people experience homelessness (Homelessness Australia, 2023). This problem is often hidden from public view - while 6.2% percent of people experiencing homelessness sleep rough, most endure homelessness in less visible ways, relying on crisis accommodation; couch surfing; overcrowded, or insecure housing; or rooming houses (HA, 2023).

This crisis is on the rise across the nation, primarily due to the escalating cost of living (UNSW, 2022). 52% of those seeking assistance attribute their situation to financial and housing affordability issues (HA, 2023). As living expenses surge, the dream of a stable home becomes increasingly elusive for many.

Violence, including family violence, continues to contribute to a growing homelessness problem. 28% of those accessing services cite violence, including family violence, as a key factor behind their homelessness (HA, 2023). People should live free from violence and abuse. Much-needed action to reduce family violence in Victoria will also help to tackle homelessness.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are vastly overrepresented in homelessness figures, making up one in five people experiencing homelessness (HA, 2023). Blessing Bags calls for urgent, decisive action to address this injustice.

As these figures show, homelessness and disadvantage continue to affect Australians to an unacceptable degree. We will continue to advocate for compassionate, evidence-based policy aimed at ending homelessness, and will aim to reach even more people experiencing homelessness and disadvantage with our services in 2024.

Homelessness Australia. (2023) *Homelessness Facts 2023*, accessed 27 October 2023.

Pawson H and Parsell C (2022) *Homeless numbers have jumped since COVID housing efforts ended - and the problem is spreading beyond the big cities*, UNSW, accessed 27 October 2023.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

It has been a significant year for us at Blessing Bags Melbourne!

Although we have made some incredible strides in our growth as an organisation, these have come as we enter an unprecedented time of housing stress and cost of living pressures that continue to be felt deeply across the community.

A pinnacle point for Blessing Bags Melbourne came early in the year with a substantial financial contribution from Jack Lyons, who nominated us as the beneficiary of his "50/50" campaign. This has meant that for the first time since our formation, we have been in the position to plan more substantially for the future, and our place in the homelessness sector.

Another big milestone, this year, was completing our registration with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission. We continue to adapt by listening to people's ever-evolving experiences and needs in the services we provide.

On a personal note, I would like to thank our amazing team of ongoing volunteers for making my transition to Director of Blessing Bags Melbourne seamless. A huge thank you goes out to Hayley Gould, our previous director, for her hard work and dedication over the years. Our team wishes Hayley all the best as she continues to do amazing things with the Office of Public Prosecutions, Victoria. T

This coming year, I am looking forward to growing our team and its reach.

Monique Isla Murray
Director

OUR IMPACT

With the help of volunteers at our community days and our school outreach program, we made and distributed a total of 1,313 blessing bags in the year ending 30 June 2023. This takes our grand total to 15,243 blessing bags distributed since 2015.

| Place / Organisation | # Blessing Bags |
|---|-----------------|
| Ardeer Kindegarten | 90 |
| Department of Justice and Community Safety, Dandenong | 80 |
| ERMHA365, Dandenong | 60 |
| Fusion, Mornington Peninsula | 40 |
| Mallee District Aboriginal Services, Mildura | 30 |
| Mediclinic, Clayton | 110 |
| Mobilise | 339 |
| Salvation Army Employment Plus, Rowville | 160 |
| SHARPS, Frankston | 284 |
| Winter Shelter, Frankston | 80 |
| Yarrabah School, Aspendale | 40 |
| Total | 1313 |

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

For year ending June 30, 2023

INCOME

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| Donations - Individual Contributors | \$20,908.30 |
| Fundraising Income | \$ 2,157.20 |
| Grants Received | \$ 1,000.00 |

| | |
|---------------------|-------------|
| TOTAL INCOME | \$24,065.50 |
|---------------------|-------------|

| | |
|--|-------------|
| GROSS PROFIT | \$24,065.50 |
| AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL INCOME | 100.00% |

OPERATING EXPENSES

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| ATM Operating Fees | \$2.90 |
| Fundraising Expenses | \$1002.92 |
| Postage Expense | \$31.65 |
| Product for Blessing Bags | \$3,019.6 |
| Website | \$416.24 |
| Other Expenses | \$122.40 |

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES | \$4,595.77 |
|---------------------------------|------------|

| | |
|--|-------------|
| NET PROFIT | \$19,469.73 |
| AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL INCOME | 80.90% |

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This year, we focused our efforts into further refining and developing our school outreach program. Through consultation with educators, we were able to develop a primary and secondary program, made up of a range of learning activities and workshop options. Our understanding that schools need flexibility formed the basis for the way we structured these programs, allowing schools to tailor their involvement to their students' needs and school resources.

Schools can opt to engage in a number of ways including:

- Running an items donation drive;
- Packing hygiene items into blessing bags; and
- Writing/decorating notes for our blessing bags

Collectively, the school outreach program contributed to 914 blessing bags. We really enjoyed partnering with the following schools this year:

- St Macartan's Primary School, Mornington
- Cornish College, Bangholme
- Bayside Christian College, Langwarrin
- Kangan Institute, Broadmeadows
- Catholic Ladies College, Eltham

The response we've received from schools so far has been really encouraging. We are hoping to continue to develop a range of resources schools can access online, in addition to the in-person learning activities we provide. Additionally, this coming year, we will start to develop monitoring and evaluation tools to help assess our school outreach program.

We are excited to continue our work in schools across Victoria.

POLICY & RESEARCH

Blessing Bags Melbourne is committed to pursuing a more sustainable and environmentally responsible approach to our mission of providing essential items to people experiencing homelessness and disadvantage. In light of our dedication to reducing our plastic waste and carbon footprint, we are committed to transitioning from the use of polyethylene ziplock bags to Biogone landfill-biodegradable resealable bags for use in our outreach programs.

We recognize the profound impact of climate change on people facing homelessness and disadvantage. Climate change not only contributes to the emergence of homelessness through extreme weather events, cost of living increases and resource scarcity, but also exacerbates the hardships endured by vulnerable people. By embracing eco-conscious products and practices, we aim to address this dual challenge.

The switch to Biogone bags represents a significant step forward in aligning our operations with eco-conscious principles. These bags are designed to biodegrade in landfills, reducing the persistence of non-biodegradable waste. Unlike many non-plastic bag options, they do not produce higher emissions during production than single-use polyethylene bags. Importantly, they offer the convenience and durability required to ensure the well-being and dignity of our community members.

We will continue to explore options to move towards an ever more sustainable model, ensuring that client voices are at the heart of decision-making through community consultation. To further mitigate our emissions, we will continue to focus on finding ways to reduce our overall plastic consumption, promoting recycling and composting, and investing in alternative materials that have a lower environmental impact throughout their life cycle.

Blessing Bags Melbourne is excited to embark on this journey towards reducing plastic waste and embracing more sustainable practices, all while continuing to serve our community with the utmost compassion and care. Together, we can make a positive impact on both the lives of those we assist and the health of our planet.

CAMPAIGNS & MEDIA

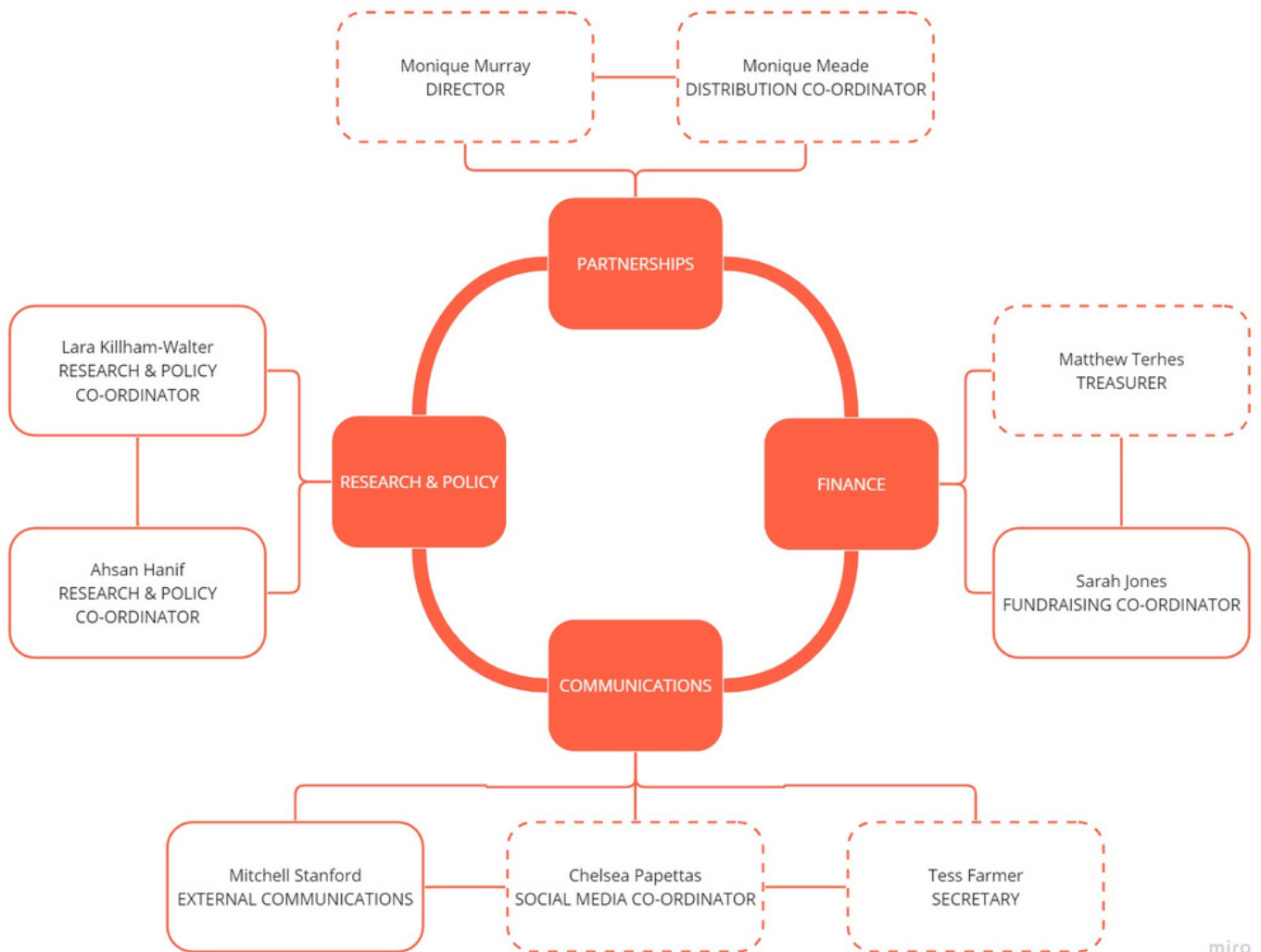
Blessing Bags Melbourne social media aims to provide a cheerful, connected and happy appearance. We have had a recent rebrand with the addition of yellow and purple to our colour scheme to create a warmer feel and to help add some variation with our posts.

In June, we were excited to relaunch our website in alignment with our new branding. As a team, we wanted the website to be easier to navigate, with clearer ways to get in touch with us. We expanded user capabilities to include online donation processing and event signups for our community pop-up days and fundraising events.

In addition to social media channels, this year, we have made a resurgence with our Blessing Bags Melbourne online newsletter that is distributed via email. The newsletter includes organisational updates and upcoming volunteer opportunities, as well as, resources and media updates about homelessness.

We aim to keep our community engaged in homelessness awareness and education. This year, our team published six articles on a broad range of topics, including: Inclusive Language; Housing; Climate Change; The Covid-19 Pandemic; Federal Budget; and Homelessness Week 2022.

OUR STRUCTURE '23



- Team member**
- - - Committee member**

FUNDRAISING

On the 22nd of October, we held our main fundraising event, the Amazing Race 2.0. it was a fun-filled event with over 40 participants. We were able to raise \$1,152 after expenses.

From the 1st of January, 2023, Jack ran 50 consecutive marathons in 50 days. We were overwhelmed by the generosity and support this campaign received from the wider community, raising a staggering \$20,000 for our organisation.

We were fortunate enough to be invited to Nepean Special School's Fun Day on the 25th of March, where we ran the sausage sizzle for the event and raised \$1,005.

In April, Blessing Bags Melbourne successfully applied for Australia Post's 'People of Post' Grant and received \$1,000.

Throughout the month of May, we partnered with Grill'd and participated in their Local Matters initiative. This initiative raised \$300 for our organisation.

For the first time since 2020, we have had the capacity to assign fundraising as a portfolio to one of our amazing team members. From June, Sarah Jones has stepped into the role of fundraising co-ordinator; researching fundraising opportunities and organising events, including managing community and partner engagement.



NEXT STEPS

Blessing Bags Melbourne wishes to thank all of our partnerships, volunteers, supporting schools and subscribers in helping to increase our profile to make a real impact on the lives of so many men, women and children less fortunate than ourselves. As we look to next year we hope to focus on the following areas:



01 — Community Consultation

We want to make sure that we're meeting our community's needs. We are planning a community consultation project through our partner organisations to ensure that we hear straight from those we serve about what's working and what can be done better. This will help us make decisions that are evidence-based and collaborative.



02 — More Community Days

As with everything we do, our ability to put on community pop-up events, where members of the public can pack items, is dependent on our capacity as a volunteer group. This is something we want to bring more focus to in the coming year.



03 — Growing Our Capacity

Whilst we continue to grow our team and our partnerships with organisations, we would love to be in the position to give more bags to more places across Victoria.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the people who worked tirelessly on the projects mentioned within. Additionally, the amazing contributions and donations from the community is what makes everything we do work.

Monique Murray - Director
Tess Farmer - Secretariat
Monique Meade - Distribution
Chelsea Papettas - Social Media
Sarah Jones - Fundraising
Matthew Terhes - Treasurer
Lara Killham-Walter - Research
Ahsan Hanif - Research
Mitchell Stanford - Communications

**We thank you for your continued support
in our efforts to support the community
and people experiencing homelessness**

Contact

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-  [Friends of Blessing Bags](https://www.facebook.com/Friends of Blessing Bags)

