



Lazarus for Geelong





Acknowledgement

We are incredibly grateful to our project sponsor, Jade Hamilton, General Manager at Lazarus Community Centre, and to our project mentor Michael Roberts, Barwon Water. Thank you both for your generous support and guidance throughout this project.

We also wish to thank the participants, volunteers and staff at Lazarus for welcoming us into their community. We are incredibly grateful and humbled by the generosity and spirit of the 11 Lazarus participants who shared their stories with us.

Thanks also to the staff and volunteers at Salvation Army Project 614, Sacred Heart Mission and Neami for their willingness to share their time and journeys with us.

Participating in the Leaders for Geelong program has been deeply rewarding. We wish to thank the Committee for Geelong for affording us this opportunity. A special thank you to Catherine Bell for being such an inspiring facilitator and advocate for the Geelong region, and to the wonderful Karen MacAdie for supporting us along the journey. Lastly, thanks to our fellow Leaders – the friendships we formed, support provided and laughs shared have been an invaluable part of the journey.

The Leaders for Geelong Program is made possible through the support of our generous Program Partners and Scholarship Providers

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A scenic view of a coastal pier. In the foreground, a large green semi-circle contains white text. The background shows a wooden pier extending into the water. On the pier, there is a white building with two domes and a parking lot with several cars. Seagulls are flying over the water in the foreground. The sky is clear and blue.

We acknowledge the Wadawurrung
People as the traditional owners of the
lands, waters, seas and skies on which
we operate. We pay our respects to
their elders past, present and
emerging.

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Foreword



Christine Couzens MP, Member for Geelong

I would like to congratulate the Leaders for Geelong on their outstanding work on this significant project, which sheds light on the experiences of individuals benefiting from Lazarus services and their appreciation for the support received. I commend the Leaders for their dedication to this project and the time they have volunteered towards the project and its findings.

Homelessness is not a new issue, but it continues to grow. Housing security, and access to safe, affordable, and stable housing is a fundamental right that everyone should enjoy. However, the challenges faced by many members of our community who lack access to suitable housing are deeply concerning.

The Geelong region is renowned for its collaborative and supportive approach to addressing the needs of vulnerable individuals in our community, spanning various sectors. We all hold the responsibility to work toward equality, accessibility, and inclusion, as these are fundamental towards making a great community, this has been the leader's focus during this project.

The project has identified critical areas for further development, including expanding networks, collaborating with relevant services, facilitating access to essential services such as Centrelink, and nurturing valuable relationships.

Geelong is a resilient and vibrant community, but it is important to acknowledge that there are individuals who still face disparities in access and equity. We all aspire to foster a supportive community that addresses vulnerabilities. As you are aware, Lazarus plays a vital role by offering essential services such as food, showers,

information, and, most importantly, a caring presence to engage with and provide the needed support. I hope that future Leaders will follow the recommendations of this project and continue to build upon this important work.

Sarah Mansfield MP, Member for Western Victoria

In an ideal world, places like the Lazarus Community Centre wouldn't need to exist. Everyone would have safe and secure housing, enough food to eat, and access to the supports and services they need to thrive. However, we are a long way from ideal. The founders of the Lazarus Community Centre recognised that the essential needs of many in the Geelong community were not being met, leaving them without housing and living in poverty. They created a place where people can access a meal, a shower, rest, wash their clothes, and connect with services. Foremost, they created a place where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

I have watched Lazarus Community Centre evolve over the years. While its fundamental purpose hasn't changed, the focus on holistic support and integration with other support services in the community has grown. As housing, food, healthcare and other costs of living rise, more people than ever are accessing the centre, with increasingly diverse experiences and needs. The project undertaken by this group of Geelong Leaders mapping key services and links within the Geelong community is incredibly impressive, and will be invaluable as the Lazarus Community Centre continues on their mission.



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Our Project Team

Executive Summary



Homelessness is not a choice and is associated with significant disadvantage and poor outcomes. The Lazarus Community Centre supports Geelong's most vulnerable community members. Our mission through this project was to find ways to expand Lazarus' service model so no one falls through the cracks.

The number of people in our community who are, or at-risk of becoming, homeless is on the rise. This is clear in the annual increase of participants at the Lazarus Community Centre in Geelong who provide a safe and non-judgemental environment for those who are vulnerable. The demand for Lazarus' service has increased substantially over the last 12 months.

Through the supply of a daily home cooked lunch, facilities to wash clothes, have a shower and access toiletries, the Lazarus Community Centre has supported Geelong since 2017. Supported by a Board of Directors, staffed with passionate volunteers and a few paid staff, the facility caters for up to 60 participants per day.

Due to the increasing rate of homelessness, our project team was asked to undertake an evidence-based research assignment that would provide a pathway

to improve services for Lazarus' participants. Our research led us to undertake a series of interviews with participants, speak with volunteers and complete both an environmental scan and literature review. This process uncovered a number of themes, which have informed our recommendations that we offer to Lazarus.

We have provided a program logic map and key evidence-based recommendations to provide the direction for Lazarus to grow its networks and increase the support options available for Lazarus' participants. The road to a fully expanded service model is a journey and not a sprint. As such, we have not been able to implement the findings of our research within this project. It will require the partnerships, compassion and community spirit that Geelong is known for, to achieve success.



Lazarus Community Centre

Lazarus provides a valuable drop-in centre for Geelong’s most vulnerable community members to feel welcome, safe and have their basic needs met.

The Lazarus Community Centre (Lazarus) was established in 2017 to address homelessness and social isolation in Geelong. The centre is located centrally next to the Old Geelong Gaol, Myers street Geelong – secured on a generous long-term lease agreement.

The demand for Lazarus’ critical service has increased substantially over the last 12 months, with 751 visits in March 2022, increasing to 1,116 in March 2023. The average number of new clients visiting Lazarus increased from 34 to 53 and the

average number of daily participants from 24 to 36 across the 12-month period.

Lazarus provides a valuable service to Geelong’s most vulnerable community members. Lazarus does not currently offer critical health and social services. However, there is an opportunity to collaborate with local support services to meet clients where they are with holistic wrap-around support.

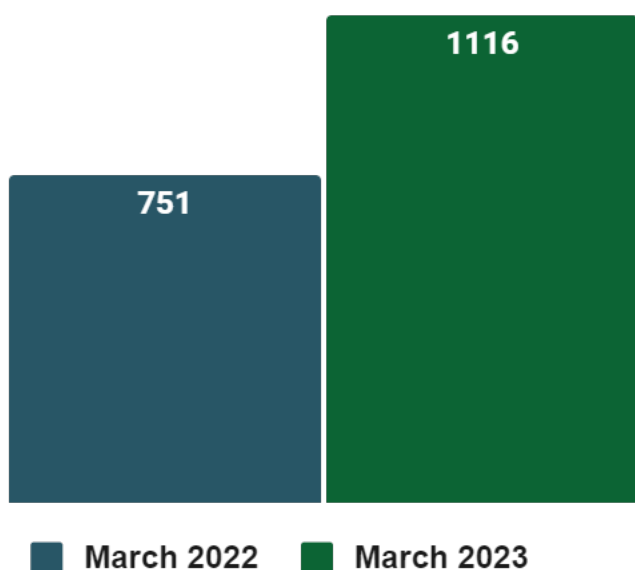


Figure 1: Growth in Lazarus participants

Jade Hamilton

Project Champion & Lazarus General Manager

It has been an absolute privilege to be a part of this project. To be involved with like-minded people who are passionate about making a difference has been both humbling and inspiring.

The final report that this group has managed to produce within the allocated timeframe has been exceptional, and the benefits of the proposals within are invaluable to Lazarus Community Centre and clients.

The time and effort that each person on this working group has dedicated to this project has exceeded all expectations and everyone at Lazarus feels very lucky and grateful to have been given this opportunity.

Lazarus is a community drop-in centre that provides services such as a cooked lunch, a shower, a place to do laundry, and a place to access some warm clothing and toiletry items.

But Lazarus is so much more than just these practical services.

It is a place that offers warmth, comfort, community, connection, and a sense of



belonging & purpose. What is also very important to note, is that Lazarus is predominately ran by approximately 55 of the most selfless and dedicated volunteers. Without them Lazarus would not exist. Each volunteer dedicates anywhere between 3 and 7 hours of their time across an alternating, 7 day working roster.

Those that come through the doors of Lazarus are more often than not experiencing some of their darkest days. Feeling the lowest of lows.

Lazarus' purpose is to hold space for those who need it most. To offer support and advocacy when someone is unable to advocate for themselves. To approach with gentle care, understanding and without judgement. To empower and offer a sense of hope.



Our Project

The overall vision for Lazarus is to provide Geelong's most vulnerable community members access to critical health and social support services *where they are* so no one falls through the cracks. Our project provides the foundational evidence to enable expansion of this critical support.

Background

Housing instability and homelessness are associated with significant and multiple disadvantages. Compared to the general population, individuals who are homeless experience increased rates of chronic disease, disability, lower life expectancy, and increased risk of violence (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021; Comerov et al. 2019). These individuals face personal, practical and social barriers to engaging with and accessing critical health and social support services. Consequently, those with the greatest service needs in our community are at risk of falling through the cracks.

Parliament of Victoria's Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria in 2021 highlighted the benefits of early intervention to address the ongoing negative impacts of homelessness (Legislative Council, 2021). The Inquiry recommended improved integration and cooperation between homelessness services and other support providers (e.g. mental health, alcohol and other drugs) to provide a multidisciplinary homelessness service approach (Legislative Council, 2021).

Our project

Our project aimed to deliver foundational evidence to inform the design, implementation and sustainability of an expended drop-in service model at the Lazarus Community Centre, based on participant needs, and evidence-based best practice approaches.

The specific objectives of the project were:

1. To understand the experiences and needs of individuals who visit Lazarus.
2. To identify evidence-based service delivery approaches for vulnerable individuals.
3. To identify successful drop-in centres for the community's most vulnerable individuals, and elements of successful service design, delivery and sustainability that Lazarus can adopt.





Approach

We conducted three key activities to address the project objectives. A Program Logic map developed in the initial project phase informed the approach.

Project activity

1. Informal conversations with participants of the Lazarus Community Centre.

The team conducted 10 conversations with 11 participants over one week in July. To capture the views of a cross-section of the Lazarus Community, the project team attended the centre at various days and times of the week.

During conversations, participants were prompted to describe:

- What they liked about Lazarus,
- What good support looks like, and
- What would make Lazarus better than it is now.

2. Rapid review of current academic literature on evidence-based approaches to supporting homeless and at-risk individuals.

The team conducted a search of the EbscoHost, SAGE and Google Scholar databases for academic studies published in English since 2015 that examined support services for homeless or at-risk populations. Search terms used were homeless*, drop-in; outreach; sleeping rough; and social isolation.

3. Environmental scan of best-practice drop-in services for homeless and at-risk populations.

We conducted a desktop scan and review of Australian community organisations that delivered health and social support services to vulnerable communities, either through outreach or drop-in service models.

Table 1: Program logic map

Program logic – Lazarus Community Centre: An expanded drop-in service model

*Within the scope of the Leaders for Geelong Lazarus Community Centre Project.

Problem.

Homelessness is associated with significant disadvantage and increased risk of poor health, wellbeing and social outcomes. Individuals who are, or at risk of becoming, homeless in the Geelong region do not have access to critical health and social support services *where they are at*, placing them at risk of falling through the cracks.

Activities	Outputs	Short term outcomes	Mid term outcomes	Long term outcomes
<p>Understand clients' needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with clients and volunteers of the Lazarus community <p>Understand best practice approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct rapid review of effective evidence-based drop-in service approaches Conduct environmental scan of best-practice drop-in centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence based report Program Logic Map Presentation of key findings and recommendations 	<p>Lazarus understands clients' unmet service needs and support preferences</p> <p>Lazarus is aware of evidence-based drop-in service approaches for vulnerable individuals</p> <p>Lazarus is aware of successful elements of drop-in service design, delivery and sustainability</p>		<p>A range of local services provide health and social support from Lazarus Community Centre</p> <p>Geelong's homeless community has access to integrated wrap-around health and social support <i>where they are at</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategically engage with local support services and develop service model agreement Secure funding to expand drop-in service model 	<p>Service model agreement</p> <p>Secured funding</p>		<p>Lazarus building partnerships with local health and social support services</p> <p>Lazarus has an expanded service model – trialing one or two drop in services</p>	<p>Geelong's homeless community achieve social, health and wellbeing outcomes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot an expanded drop-in service model Monitor and evaluate Expand and scale, dependent on funding 	<p>Expanded sustainable drop-in service model</p>		<p>Clients have access <i>where they are</i> to essential health and social support services</p>	<p>Lazarus seen as a best practice drop-in service for vulnerable individuals</p>

Assumptions/Considerations

- Lazarus is able to secure initial and ongoing funding required to build, implement and scale
- Local services are available and have capacity to partner with Lazarus
- At risk individuals will engage with services through Lazarus
- Geelong community service system has capacity to meet the needs of individuals seeking services through Lazarus Community Centre

v 0.1 May 2023



Key insights: participant experiences

Lazarus provides a sense of community where participants feel welcomed and respected. It is a meeting place for relaxing and socialising with others. Lazarus fulfils a critical role and meets many needs. Some participants seemed to value the sense of community Lazarus offered more than access to tangible and basic services.

The participants we spoke to had been coming to Lazarus for up to four years. All 11 visited multiple times a week, with most coming five to seven days a week.

For one participant who had been coming to Lazarus, five-days a week for four years, the volunteers and fellow clients were the only people with whom they talked. Some clients considered the safety Lazarus provides important, and one client admitted they did not feel safe when Lazarus was closed. Another participant felt that the Lazarus staff *actually look after you*. Lazarus enables participants to meet their basic needs. This includes hot meals, shower facilities,

toiletries, clothing, and laundry facilities. Participants valued the ability to watch television, use the computer and access the internet – everyday activities for most people. Some mentioned they had accessed other services through Lazarus, including a hairdresser, housing support and a nurse.

Participants described other drop-in services as not providing a sense of community, being too strict, offering limited availability, or being violent. Another support service was described as wild. One client explained that they feel very at ease here [Lazarus] relative to other places.



“It’s nice to not be judged.”
- Lazarus participant

What would make Lazarus better?

Some participants made suggestions to increase availability and access. These included:

- Wi-Fi for improved internet access, and a new computer,
- More space for daytime sleeping,
- Extended opening hours,
- More hot water for showers,
- Updated signage within the building,
- Improved heating,
- Phone access, and
- A sleeping bag and torch to be warm and safe at night.

A number of clients identified a range of health and community services that they would like to access at Lazarus. These included:

- Alcohol-and-Other Drug (AOD) service,
- Psychologist and/or mental health support,

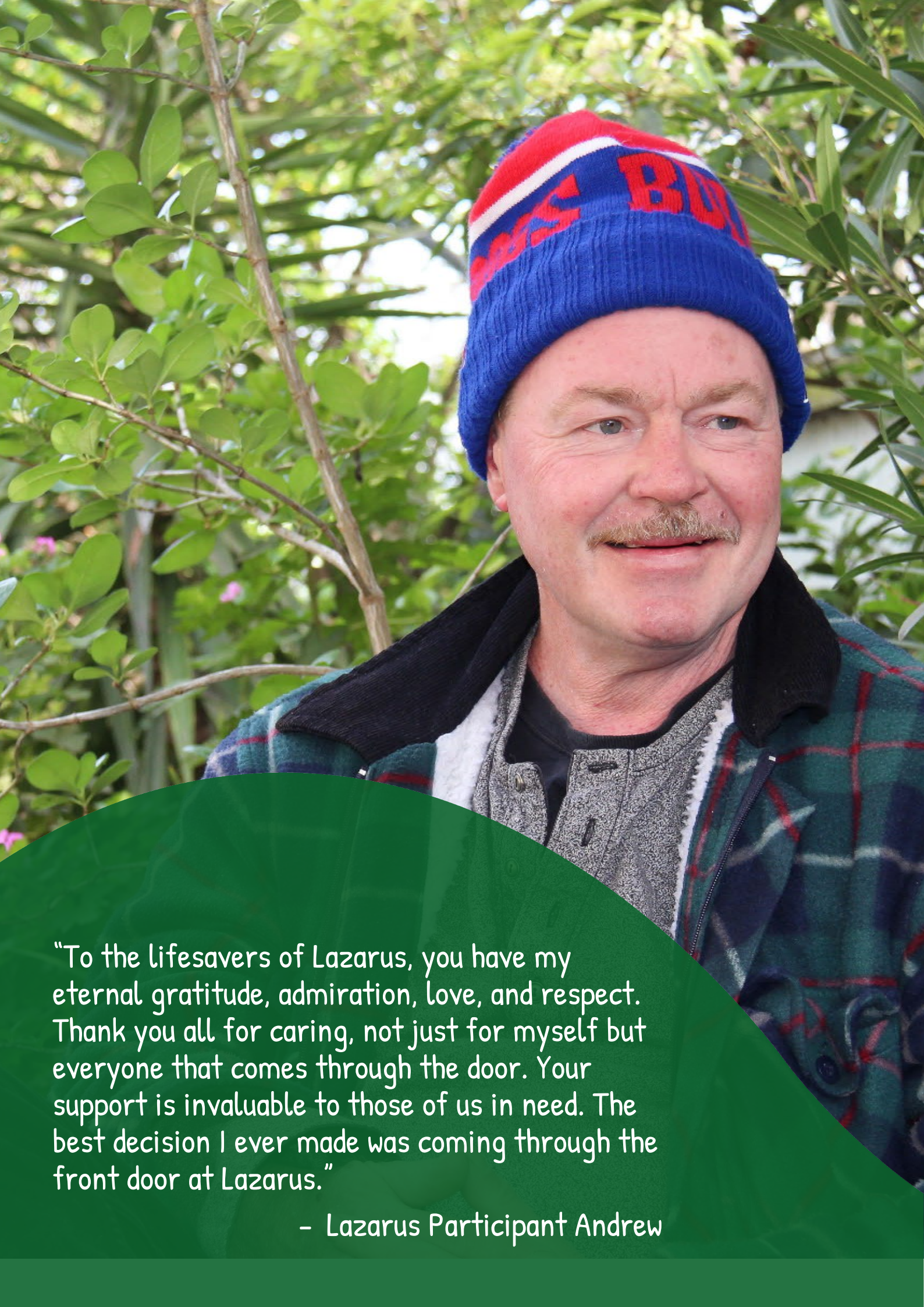
- Dentist,
- Podiatrist,
- General practitioner,
- Nurse,
- Youth support worker,
- Pharmacist, and
- Emergency health services.

Other desired services included an advocate to assist clients to complete applications and to access health services or Centrelink payments, as well as Legal Aid for support with the court system. Clients could access housing support from the Neami Towards Home+ program support through Lazarus but desired greater access.

Other suggestions for additional resources Lazarus could offer include excursion days for clients, art and craft supplies, games, a female hairdresser and petrol vouchers.



“Best cooks in Geelong!”
– Lazarus Participant



“To the lifesavers of Lazarus, you have my eternal gratitude, admiration, love, and respect. Thank you all for caring, not just for myself but everyone that comes through the door. Your support is invaluable to those of us in need. The best decision I ever made was coming through the front door at Lazarus.”

- Lazarus Participant Andrew

Key insights: evidence

Homeless and at-risk individuals experience a range of barriers to accessing mainstream health and social services, which leads to disengagement until issues become urgent.

For success, services need to meet at-risk individuals where they are, move at an individuals' pace, and deliver services flexibly in spaces individuals trust. Coordinated, multidisciplinary drop-in service models are associated with a range of positive outcomes.

Findings

We reviewed 16 research studies that described or examined outreach or drop-in service models for homeless or at-risk populations. Each of these studies were included for review. Due to time and resource restrictions, we did not conduct an exhaustive search of all available evidence as part of this project.

The review identified three key themes within the current literature. These were:

1. Barriers to accessing mainstream services;
2. Necessary conditions for success of support services; and
3. Benefits of a multidisciplinary, coordinated drop-in service model.

Refer to the table over the page for detail.



Table 2: Summary of key themes in the research evidence

Theme	Key finding
Necessary conditions for success of support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer support in spaces where individuals feel welcome. Leads to better engagement • Offer support in accepted and trusted spaces • Offer broad availability and accessibility options • Offer services in an informal and unrestricted manner • Provide support at an individual's pace, listen and communicate to meet clients where they are at • Advocate and coordinate service delivery • Empower through goal-setting and encouragement
Barriers to accessing mainstream services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge of available health services • Prioritizing housing and basic needs over health until urgent health need • Mistrust of services due to past or current trauma or mental illness • Perceived or actual stigmatization, judgement or discrimination from health services • Physical access – lack of transport, funds for public transport, no fixed address or phone to receive appointment reminders • Lack of knowing how to navigate health and government systems • Time and effort to engage with services and work through bureaucracy to receive support • Distress with needing to tell one's story repeatedly to different services

Table 2: Summary of key themes in the research evidence continued

Theme	Key finding
Benefits of a multidisciplinary, coordinated, drop-in support service model fits of a multidisciplinary, coordinated, drop-in support service model	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced Emergency Department presentations and acute Mental Health inpatient stays• Capture at-risk individuals before issues become acute• Prevention of ongoing interaction with justice, health and care systems• Preventative healthcare, and delivery of education about self-managing and prevention behaviours• Increased future engagement in support services and transition to mainstream services• Provision of safe, affordable housing



Key insights: best-practice services

Summary– creating valuable and sustainable partnerships

We identified six best-practice services that supported homeless or at-risk individuals. Table 3 provides a summary of the key services identified in the scan and the supports they offered.

The Salvation Army's Project 614 and Sacred Heart Mission each offer a comprehensive suite of supports within their drop-in service models, aligned with Lazarus' vision to provide Geelong's vulnerable community critical support so no one falls through the cracks. We visited each service and spoke to key people to understand their journeys and learn from their experiences.

Salvation Army Project 614



The Salvation Army Project 614 (Project 614) provides a café style space for Melbourne's vulnerable community.

Around 500 visitors a day are provided a freshly cooked meal. This welcoming space also serves as a hub for health and social services to offer crisis support and intervention, information and practical assistance to an otherwise hard to reach group.

Approach

Adopting a community hub model, a range of services regularly visit Project 614 to build relationships, provide direct service delivery, and establish connections with community members. Most services visit on a weekly-basis. Those in greater demand, such as nurse or Services Australia, provide greater access. Visiting community organisations fund and resource the services they deliver through Project 614's community hub.

Development over time

The community hub has expanded over time and continues to grow. The project team

want to expand their service offering to include access to a General Practitioner, NDIS and Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Project 614's café has evolved from a walk-up window where visitors are served by volunteers through a window and have limited available seating, to an open-plan café and dining area. Corporate volunteer groups provide table service and chat with visitors.

Partnerships underpin the café model, with many organisations providing ongoing support through food donations. Visitors can enjoy a coffee or hot chocolate thanks to a partnership with the local Seven Eleven store who maintains and stocks the self-serve machine.

Strong partnerships established over time with community services delivering outreach support contributed to the ongoing success of Project 614. In addition, generous donations from the community and funding from multiple sources enabled the program to continue to grow. Funding sources included the City of Melbourne, Collingwood Football club and the state government.

At the time of this project, work was underway to secure program funding for a four-year period.



Sacred Heart Mission



The Sacred Heart Mission, located in St Kilda Melbourne, is a long established centre for supporting the homeless and at-risk members of the community. With an ethos of *everyone is welcome at our table* there are many similarities between Lazarus and Sacred Heart Mission – both are focused on providing a home cooked meal, a place of community and belonging free of judgement and stigma. Friendly volunteers, barista made coffee and a modern and expanding facility that is safe and incredibly welcoming greet visitors on arrival.

A core group of clients visit every day, as engagement with this community is key to their wellbeing. Some clients visit sporadically when they are in crisis and others are met through outreach services. No matter how clients connect with Sacred Heart Mission, they are all provided the same opportunities.

Approach

Sacred Heart Mission provides a continuum of tailored care through a flexible support approach. A number of engagement hubs, individual planned and ongoing support programs engage with individuals no matter where they are.

Development over time

Sacred Heart Mission has developed into such a large service through optimising partnerships with a range of services. These provide funding and network support in the right places for the right reasons. Established partnerships achieve the shared goal of reducing homelessness and caring for those who need it most in our community.

“A great starting point would be to establish some key service partnerships and build from there.”

– Operations Manager, Project 614

Table 3: Best-practice service models

Organisation	Approach	Service offering/s
Neami Towards Home+ program, Geelong	Intensive support for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Geelong region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assertive Outreach targeting rough sleepers • Housing support for maintaining housing
Salvation Army Project 614, Melbourne	Day time drop in centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community hub: medical, allied health, housing and social services • Material aid: showers, clothing, toiletries • Magpie nest café offering 3 meals/day • Emergency accommodation for up to 115 individuals
The Outpost, Geelong	Day time drop in centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material aid: clothing, toiletries • Cooked meal offering 2 meals/day
Third Space, Brisbane	Day time drop in centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material aid: showers, clothes, emergency relief funding, meals • Targeted family support program • Individual and daily living support • Visiting medical, allied health, wellbeing, financial, legal and other services • Mobile community outreach support

Table 3: Best-practice service models contined

Organisation	Approach	Service offering/s
<p>Sacred Heart Mission, Melbourne</p>	<p>Continuum of tailored care, flexible support approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement hubs: Sacred Heart Central, Women’s house, meals program, health and wellbeing services • Individual planned support case management, crisis accommodation, women’s services • Ongoing support: in-home support, aged care, NDIS accommodation
<p>St Mary’s House of Welcome, Melbourne</p>	<p>Open access centre</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material aid • Comprehensive monthly program of structured activities (art and craft groups, fishing group, pool competition, choir, gardening)



“Michael, the founding Father of Lazarus Community Centre. The heart and soul of the place who so selflessly dedicates his time, effort and energy into every person who walks through our doors.”

– Jade Hamilton, Lazarus General Manager

Recommendations

A comprehensive coordinated wrap-around support model for the Lazarus Community Centre is possible with strong partnerships across a range of services.

1. Mapping the local health and social services and stakeholders aligned to the needs of Lazarus participants would be valuable to identify potential partnerships and collaborations.

We recommend this be the focus of a *Leaders for Geelong* follow up project in 2024.

2. The Geelong business and corporate community is incredibly generous. They want to make a difference but do not know how.

We recommend that Lazarus approach the Geelong community through its networks to request support for specific tangible products and labour that would make a difference to Lazarus participants, such as a new hot water service.

3. Implementing a corporate volunteer program was a key factor in the success of other drop-in support services. There are existing successful corporate volunteer programs within the Geelong region, such as that run by *Geelong Mums*. Corporate volunteers could assist with fitting out the new premises and landscaping.

We recommend Lazarus explore opportunity to develop a corporate volunteer program to support its existing volunteer base.



4. Neami Toward Home+ Geelong have established a valued and much needed connection at Lazarus.

We recommend Lazarus formalise their partnership with Neami Toward Home+ Geelong including through an increased presence at Lazarus to support participants with their housing needs.

5. Services Australia Centrelink Community Partnership Specialists could potentially provide place-based support to participants at Lazarus. Through the Community Partnership Pilot, Services Australia collaborate with non-government organisations to improve accessibility to Centrelink payments and service, with a focus on supporting people who experience homelessness.

More information can be found here:

[A community based approach to helping customers in need - Services Australia](#)

We recommend Lazarus explore opportunities to participate in the Services Australia Community Partnership Pilot.

6. Strong partnerships with local council was a key factor in the successful expansion of other drop-in support services. The City of Greater Geelong's Community Experience Department are currently developing a Social Equity Framework, with a focus on establishing effective and focussed partnerships.

We recommend that Lazarus build a stronger connection with the City of Greater Geelong's Health and Social Equity Unit, within the Community Experience Department, and explore opportunities to partner under the new Social Equity Framework.



Limitations



We wish to acknowledge a number of limitations of the findings and recommendations of this project.

This project included the perspectives of 11 individuals who currently attend the Lazarus Community centre. The experiences and needs of these individuals may not reflect the views of all individuals who attend Lazarus, or those who may need support in the future. In particular, we did not capture the specific needs of vulnerable individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds in our project.

Additionally, we spoke to participants who had the capability to share their experiences with us. These individuals may have less complex needs than other individuals who were unable to engage with us, due to mental health, drug use, or other reasons.

The experiences and needs of these participants may differ to those with greater complexity.

The project team attempted to identify best-practice service models that could inform an expanded service model at Lazarus. Our limited review may not have captured all successful service model approaches.

Within this report we have made a number of recommendations to improve and expand the services Lazarus provides, and which are available from the Lazarus Community Centre. Ongoing engagement and financial support from the broader Geelong community will be required to realise these recommendations.

“Anyone who is doing it tough needs access to simple and helpful payments and services.”

– Community Partnerships Specialist Officer,
Project 614

Group reflection

This project has changed our lives. We have been humbled to see the world through the eyes of those who call Lazarus their community. It has shown us the true meaning of community. It has confirmed what really matters to the Geelong community – its people. Everyone who calls this city home deserves an equal opportunity to live with respect, care and support.

None of us had previous experience with homelessness. From the moment we each heard Jade's project pitch at the Leaders for Geelong *Pitch Fest* we knew we had to be involved. Jade's passion and excitement is infectious.

The Lazarus Community Centre is more than a drop-in centre for at risk individuals. It is a close-knit community that cares for each other, and enables individuals to experience the same basic comforts that many of us take for granted.

We each feel deeply humbled and privileged to have been welcomed into the Lazarus community, and to spend some time with Jade, her volunteers and the Centre's participants. These special individuals have taught us so much about the experience of homelessness and its' impacts. It has also shown us what can be achieved through compassion, determination, and generosity of spirit. The project has filled each of us with a deep sense of responsibility to help and support where we can.

Our hope is that, through this project, we have contributed to the groundswell of community support for Lazarus, and provided the foundations to develop an expanded service model to provide Geelong's most vulnerable community members the right supports they need to thrive.

It has truly been a pleasure to collaborate on this project with such a generous and supportive team. We hope we have done Lazarus proud.

Participating in the Leaders for Geelong program has been deeply rewarding and inspiring. We have learnt so much about Geelong, its rich history, varied industries and diverse communities. We feel more grateful than ever to call Geelong home.



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* The 16 references included in our evidence review are marked with an asterix.

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