



RE-OPENING OP SHOPS

CENTRAL VICTORIAN PRIMARY CARE PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDY

PROJECT PARTNERS

- Cobaw Community Health
- Macedon Ranges Shire Council
- Mount Alexander Shire Council
- Volunteer Central Victoria
- Central Victorian Primary Care Partnership



CENTRAL VICTORIAN
Primary Care Partnership



MOUNT ALEXANDER
SHIRE COUNCIL



Macedon Ranges
Shire Council

BACKGROUND

Op Shops are the heart and soul of our communities, where those on low incomes and tight budgets can access clothing and household goods and where volunteers love their work, feel valued and part of a community.

Op shops across the Macedon Ranges and Mount Alexander Shires engage between 250-300 volunteers, of which many are older and vulnerable to communicable health conditions.

Op Shops were forced to close during the COVID 19 lockdown measures at a time when vulnerable families were seeking affordable warm clothing for winter. Across both shires it was recognised that op shops needed support to reopen, without compromising on the safety of the community and op shop volunteers.

Volunteer Central Victoria and Central Victorian Primary Care Partnership joined forces to assist op shops to safely reopen.

Op shop volunteers sought

By Jessica McCallif

Macedon Ranges' local wishing to lend a helping hand during the COVID-19 pandemic are being encouraged to turn their attention to op shops.

As state restrictions slowly ease, op shop managers across central Victoria are planning the reopening of their stores.

However, according to health service Cobaw Community Health, many op shop volunteers are considered "vulnerable" because of their age or existing health conditions, resulting in a shortage of volunteers.

Cobaw Community Health's Volunteer Central Vic and Central Victorian Primary Care Partnership have joined forces to help local op shops respond by finding new volunteers who are keen to support their communities.

Carolyn Neilson of Central Victorian Primary Care Partnership said ensuring volunteers are in good health and not putting themselves at risk while volunteering was crucial.

"When lockdowns began in mid-March, there were many people wanting to help in some way," she said.

"Unfortunately, there were very few volunteer roles available but now, if you have a few hours to spare each week, your local op shop now needs you."

Volunteer Central Vic co-ordinator Lisa Richards said op shops, like other local businesses, needed community now more than ever.

"Op shops play a key role in putting themselves at risk while volunteering was crucial."

"So if you can help with Cobaw's Volunteer Central Vic, you can help encourage people about opening hours accepting donations. For inquiries about info@volunteercen.vic

0419 962 374.

LOCAL NEED PUT INTO ACTION

19 op shops in Macedon Ranges and Mount Alexander Shires were engaged to better understand what is needed for them to re-open.

COVID 19 low risk volunteers were needed to work in the op shops

- 12 volunteer organisations were partnered with to support the secondment of their registered COVID 19 low risk volunteers to local op shops
- Volunteer Central Victoria assisted op shops with processes regarding recruitment and retention of their volunteers
- All partners supported recruitment of volunteers through social media and local newspapers.

Financial assistance to re-open

- Draft budget of associated costs was developed to clarify what was required to re-open the op shops eg signage, hand sanitiser, anticipated landfill costs, advertising, recruitment etc.



Communication with community regarding re-opening of op shops and management of waste (dumping)

Some op shops reported that pre-COVID over 50% of the donated goods would go to land fill, at a great cost to the them.

- o Macedon Ranges Shire Council developed a range of communication materials (large laminated posters) for the op shops. These signs guide the community about what can be donated (priorities and condition) to avoid “dumping” or leaving goods that are unusable at op shops.
- o Printed and social media have been published to support op shops waste management
- o Mount Alexander Shire Council worked with Castlemaine's Victoria Police to increase surveillance to prevent dumping at the op shops in Mount Alexander Shire.

Covid-19 prevention process planning

- o Op shops implemented social distancing precautions, regular deep cleans and provision of hand sanitiser
- o some op shops limited the time customers were allowed in-store or opened for a limited number of hours
- o at least one op shop had medical staff as volunteers, who supervised the op shop COVID 19 prevention strategies.

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The signage was very useful, professionally done which had an impact and because they were created by another organisation we felt supported and it legitimised our communications with the public regarding no dumping.

Op shop staff

WHAT DID WE LEARN

The pandemic highlights the essential service op shops provide for the vulnerable people in our community.

For many, volunteering at the op shop gives them a connection with their community and a sense of achievement and purpose. There was a reluctance to relinquish this role despite the risks.

The volunteer secondment process from one volunteer organisation to another is legally complex so the project relied on advertising for new volunteers and linking them with op shops.

INTO THE FUTURE

This project has built a relationship between *Volunteer Central Victoria* and the local op shops. *Volunteer Central Victoria* will continue to assist in recruitment and volunteer management.

The op shops have greatly appreciated the support of local government and they feel it legitimises the important role they play in the community. The local councils will continue to include the op shops in their waste management strategy to reduce dumping and landfill.

A simpler volunteer secondment process is needed to enable a local/regional collective pool of volunteers that can be mobilised effectively to wherever there is a need.

Through this project we have developed an op shop contact data base that will make support and sharing of information easier in the future.