

LIBRARIES AFTER DARK – A GAMBLING HARM PREVENTION PROGRAM

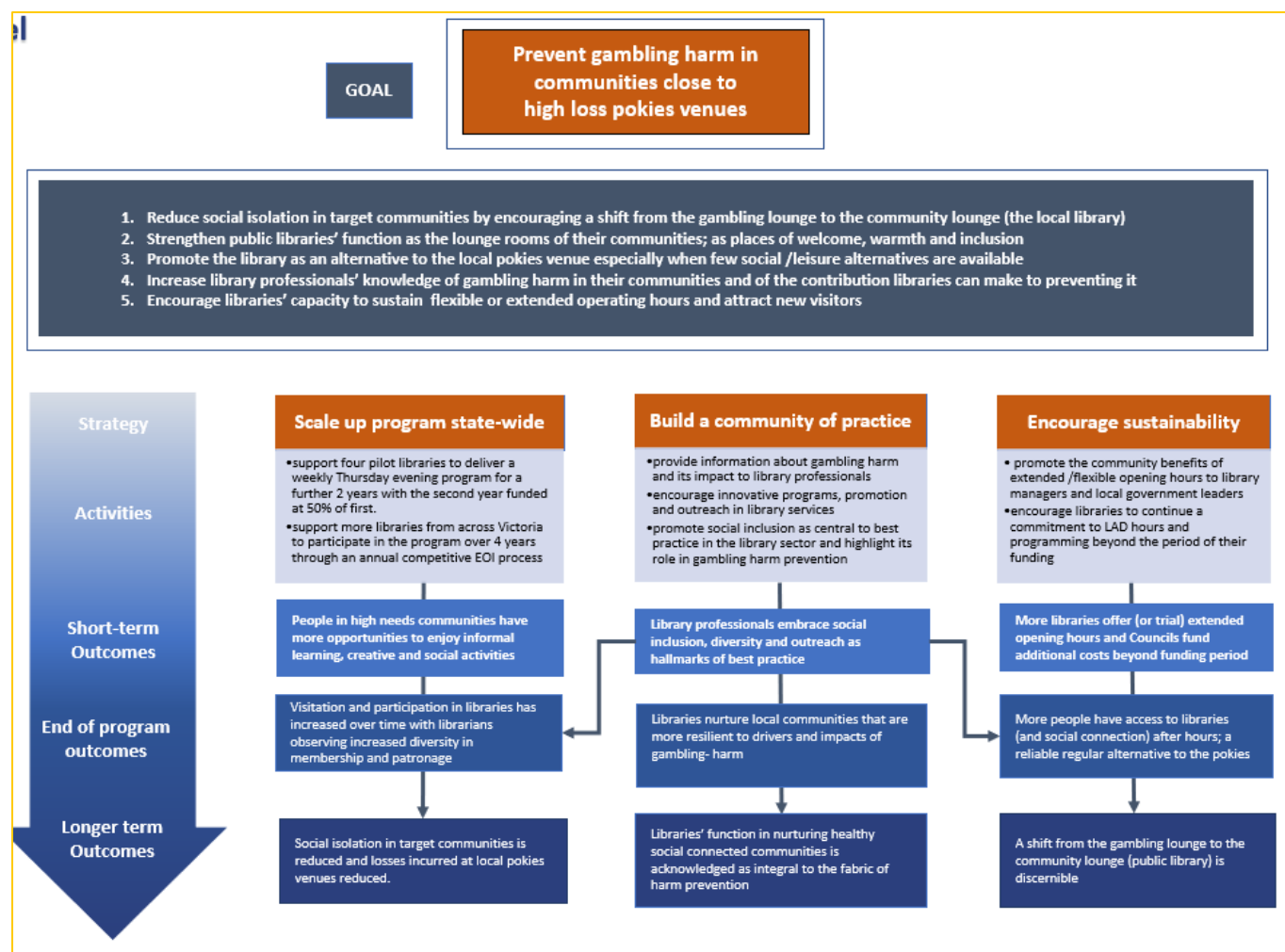
Libraries After Dark supports communities with few recreation alternatives to the local pokies' venue. The program supported 23 public libraries across Victoria to extend their opening hours into the evening on a weekly basis. It promotes the local library as a community lounge - an alternative to the gambling lounge. It seeks to reduce social isolation, a well-established risk factor for gambling harm. The risk is particularly high in communities with high loss pokies venues in their midst.

Coordinated by **Merri-bek City Council** since 2017, Libraries After Dark has been funded by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (VRGF) and participating Councils, many of which have continued to deliver the program after their grant period ended. The program has highlighted the untapped potential of public libraries to build resilience in communities at risk of gambling harm. This potential will be further explored by Public Libraries Victoria as it seeks to build on the legacy of the program beyond the cessation of funding into 2024.

Merri-bek City Council's program delivery model has depended upon 3 levels of strong partnerships:

- strategic oversight of the program overall by peak public library sector agencies (Public Libraries Victoria PLV & State Library of Victoria SLV) and local government partners
- direct collaboration with 23 public libraries and their local government partners
- a multiplicity of partnerships and strengthened networks at the local level in each community

PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL



The key outcome of the program, after delivery in 23 local communities is that many thousands of people had a regular, free evening alternative to the one (and often several) pokies venues in their midst. Funds from pokies losses were redirected (via VRGF) directly into the communities where those losses were incurred– a simple but notable achievement of the program.

Hundreds of library staff with increased awareness of, and sensitivity to, the 12% of populations at moderate risk from gambling harm. They welcomed them and designed diverse events and activities to engage them. Participants in regional centres, outer urban growth centres, and middle-ring suburbs enjoyed diverse recreational and social opportunities and were plugged-in to a trusted, reliable local institutions that forever will offer them free, ready access to support, stimulation and social connections.

This is the key achievement of the program: the enhancement and advocacy of libraries as inoculators against social isolation – a key driver of gambling harm.

ANECDOTES FROM PARTICIPANTS TELL THE STORY BEST:

This anecdote from a library staff -member who regularly delivers LAD at **Carrum Downs** library is typical of many received from our partner libraries that suggests that, though numbers week by week are sometimes small, marginalised, lonely or at-risk individuals are being reached in the program:

“A big highlight (for me) was Lorraine who is in her 70s, swears like a sailor and loves that she can hang out with a young group who don't mind her language. She came in one night just because she didn't want to spend the evening alone at home and has been a regular participant ever since”.

This from a young participant in **Thomastown** is also illustrative:

“Me and my mate got caught doing burnouts behind the library. Freezing cold, starving and needed a coffee. A nice lady asked us to come in to Thomo, we could eat our pizza in the library and grab a coffee. We did, now I got to know the staff, Mum and Dad are happy cause I'm out of trouble and staff helped me write a resume and I got a job. Thanks Thomo!”

Mohamad 19

This comment from **Watsonia** library staff -member is also quite typical of all participating libraries:

“I have no evidence to suggest we have reached the target group but I do know we have connected with people suffering from social isolation”.

These comments from participants at the **Yarra Plenty Regional Libraries** staff demonstrate the program is reaching the bullseye of the target:

“Going to the pub and having a gamble on the machines was important to me and my wife until a year ago. Now we are retired and cannot afford it. So, my wife dragged me to the old tool sessions and it has been fantastic. We enjoyed eating with new people, have a chat then go off to events and enjoyed getting back to books”.

Peter 70

“I have been a gambler for a long time. I reached out and got some help at Whittlesea Community Connections. They mentioned Libraries After Dark at Mill Park and Thomastown. I come along not so much for the events, but for the chat, and not being alone. Now I have saved enough money for a new TV”.

Nick 56

“My life has not been great. I fell into visiting the pub and playing the pokies. Being lonely and on my own I was easily led to gamble and in no time lost a lot of money. I then came along to the Thomastown Library and what a blessing. I love the lace making, food and not being on my own. It is just so nice to share a meal with others and not be on my own.”

Vicky 57

Reflections from library managers and staff attest to the value of the program in increasing awareness and building connections between library staff and local organisations community:

Ballarat City Council (**Sebastopol** Library):

“The staff training component of the program provided a more formal pathway to improve understanding of gambling harm prevention, through the work of specialists in the field. This was most effective where it involved examples of lived experience.”

“Staff have expressed greater awareness of the pathways for referral to support services in Ballarat and have increased in confidence in making referrals and connections to those services. There is also a greater understanding of and pride in, the role that public library staff can play in forging connections within the community and providing safe places for recreation, capacity building programs and social connections.

Also from **Dandenong**, an important legacy of the program:

“I feel like our staff have gained insight into gambling harm through the staff capacity building/training sessions that we were able to deliver to all our staff during COVID. The delivery of the programs through the years and the training have raised an awareness that we may not have focused on had we not participated in the program. We have further developed our connection with Council advocates in gambling prevention and have scheduled additional programming with gambling prevention support services”.

Glenelg Council (**Portland** Library):

Alliance for Gambling Reform

"The enthusiasm and support for this program by partners and individuals in our community has been overwhelming with many approaching the library offering their services, knowledge and talents free of charge due to the community nature of the program and appreciation of those attending."

PARTICIPATING LIBRARIES

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
|  <p>BAIRNSDALE LIBRARY 22 Service Street, Bairnsdale VIC 3875 CLICK FOR MORE <small>Image: HL Photography Pty Ltd</small></p> |  <p>BROADMEADOWS LIBRARY Hume Global Learning Centre - Broadmeadows 1093 Pascoe Vale Road, Broadmeadows VIC 3047 CLICK FOR MORE</p> |  <p>CARRUM DOWNS LIBRARY 203 Lyrebird Drive, Carrum Downs VIC 3201 CLICK FOR MORE</p> |  <p>CRAIGIEBURN LIBRARY Hume Global Learning Centre - Craigieburn 75-95 Central Park Avenue, Craigieburn VIC 3064 CLICK FOR HERE</p> |
|  <p>DEER PARK LIBRARY 4 Neale Road, Deer Park VIC 3023 CLICK FOR MORE</p> |  <p>GLENROY LIBRARY 737 Pascoe Vale Road, Glenroy VIC 3046 CLICK FOR MORE</p> |  <p>GREATER DANDENONG LIBRARY 225 Lonsdale Street, Dandenong VIC 3175 CLICK FOR MORE</p> |  <p>HOPPERS CROSSING (PLAZA) LIBRARY Pacific Werribee Shopping Centre Level 1 MM11 Derrimut Road, Werribee VIC 3030 CLICK FOR MORE</p> |
|  <p>MILDURA LIBRARY 180-190 Deakin Avenue, Mildura VIC 3500 CLICK FOR MORE</p> |  <p>MILL PARK LIBRARY 394 Plenty Road, Mill Park VIC 3082 CLICK FOR MORE</p> |  <p>PAKENHAM LIBRARY Cnr. John Street &, Henry Street, Pakenham VIC 3810 CLICK FOR MORE</p> |  <p>PORTLAND LIBRARY 32 Bentinck Street, Portland VIC 3305 CLICK FOR MORE</p> |



PRESTON LIBRARY

266 Gower Street, Preston VIC 3072

[CLICK FOR HERE](#)



RESERVOIR LIBRARY

23 Edwardes Street, Reservoir VIC 3073

[CLICK FOR MORE](#)



SEBASTOPOL LIBRARY

181 Albert Street, Sebastopol,
Ballarat VIC 3356

[CLICK FOR MORE](#)



SHEPPARTON LIBRARY

41-42 Marungji Street,
Shepparton VIC 3630

[CLICK FOR MORE](#)



SPRINGVALE LIBRARY

5 Hillcrest Grove, Springvale VIC 3171

[CLICK FOR MORE](#)



ST ALBANS LIBRARY

71A Alfrieda Street, St Albans VIC 3021

[CLICK FOR MORE](#)



SUNBURY LIBRARY

Hume Global Learning Centre - Sunbury
44 Macedon Street, Sunbury VIC 3429

[CLICK FOR MORE](#)



SUNSHINE LIBRARY

301 Hampshire Road, Sunshine VIC 3020

[CLICK FOR MORE](#)



SYDENHAM LIBRARY

1 Station Street, Taylors Lakes VIC 3038

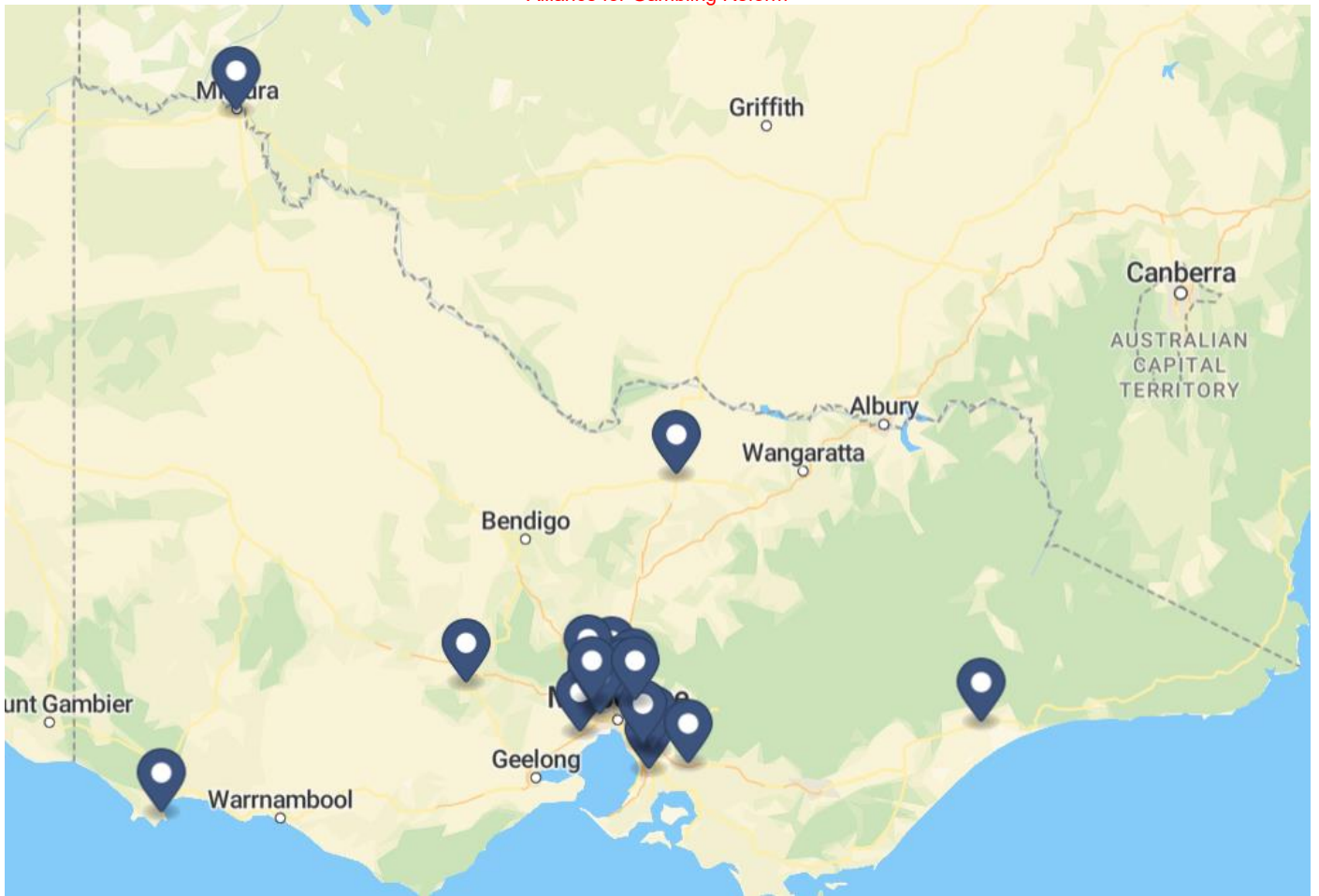
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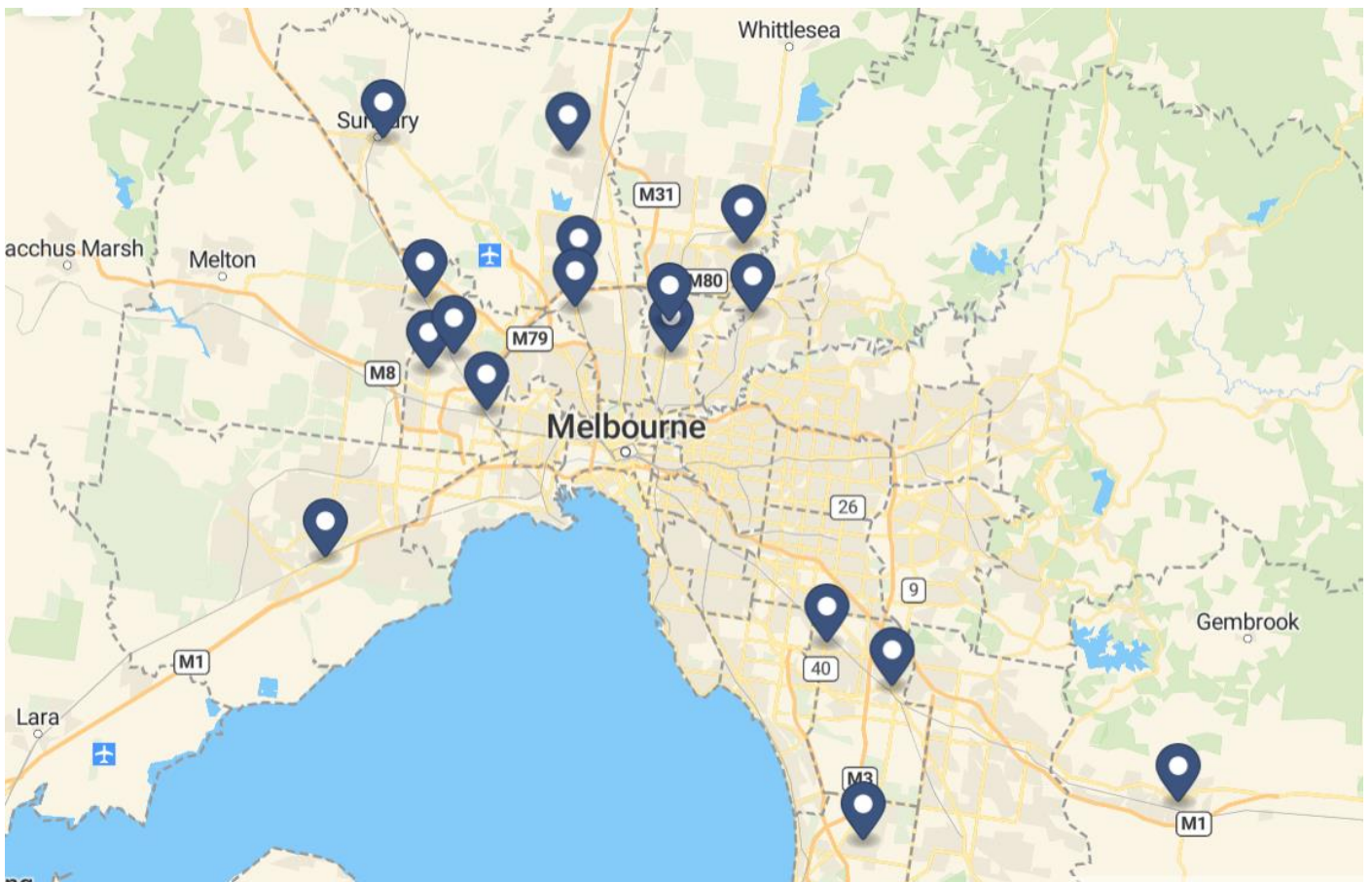
WATSONIA LIBRARY

4/6 Ibbotson Street, Watsonia VIC 3087

[CLICK FOR MORE](#)



Program coverage across Victoria and (overleaf) across metropolitan Melbourne



COVID HAD A VERY SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE PROGRAM

Darebin City Council:

“Our biggest challenge was lack of staffing between July and Nov 2022. Due partly to a number of staff vacancies and also with a number of staff members being away sick with Covid we lacked staff to plan and deliver events in any sort of consistent manner. Also, Covid restrictions limited attendance numbers as well as a number of presenters unwilling to do public events.”

Brimbank City Council:

“From an operational perspective, the biggest challenge was staffing late nights at the library. It was very difficult to find staff to work the late nights, and the programs would run on a skeleton staff with a revolving roster of casuals, thus consistency was not provided.”

East Gippsland Shire (Bairnsdale):

“Our greatest challenge was establishing the project. It was a difficult time for East Gippsland. Firstly, we had a delay with the bush fires of December 2019/ January 2020. Then just after starting with fairly low numbers we had the COVID pandemic which affected the momentum of the program due to several lockdowns. Once the Library reopened, distancing came in and numbers in rooms were drastically reduced, capping the number of attendees who could participate”.

Also, during the pandemic libraries had to pivot to online programs. **Dandenong and Springvale** libraries provided an excellent series of interactive online programs, but other smaller libraries with limited resources struggled.

Finally, The **Shepparton** (GVRL) Libraries Manager offered this reflection for leaders of future programs:

“Be daring with programming – I always tried to encourage staff to do the “I never thought the library would do that” things – with mixed success.”

Further information:

Public Libraries Victoria via www.plv.org.au

View videos at www.librariesafterdark.com