



MESSAGE FROM OUR EO

Tomorrow Today has a long-standing focus on improving educational outcomes, to give Benalla's children and young people the opportunity to achieve their potential in school, work and life. This depends on a whole-of-community approach, working in collaboration with 120 local organisations and agencies. Since taking on the role of Executive Officer at Tomorrow Today late last year, I have experienced firsthand the strong partnerships and connections that are such a feature in Benalla.

The evidence shows that our approach is working. In 2021, Tomorrow Today commissioned a two-year, independent evaluation to understand the impact and value of the Education Benalla Program. This evaluation indicates that the program is "providing enormous benefit to Benalla's children and young people, and their families by improving young people's readiness for school and improving young people's post school pathways". I encourage you to read the evaluation summary. Click on the publications tab on our website.

While these positive results are extremely encouraging we know there is much more work to do. We greatly appreciate the financial support of our many individual donors, our philanthropic partners, and the Victorian State Government. This funding makes our work possible. We are also exceptionally grateful for the more than 80 local volunteers who share their valuable time, skills and knowledge to help make the programs we run successful.

Thank you to all those who support our work so that together we can continue rising to the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Jodie Fleming – Executive Officer

The gift of reading - Benalla Imagination Library

It's no secret that Dolly Parton is a highly successful entertainer, but did you know she has also distributed more than a million books to children worldwide?

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is one of the most successful global literacy support programs. Research shows that participation in the Imagination Library is associated with improved levels of shared book reading, book appreciation, family interactions, emerging literacy skills, and later academic outcomes¹.

We're thrilled to announce that Tomorrow Today, in partnership with Benalla Rural City Council and the Rotary Club of Benalla will be funding and administering the program in Benalla for children aged zero to two years. Known locally as the Benalla Imagination Library, the initiative provides a free, age-appropriate book every month to children enrolled in the program. Once a child turns three, they can transition to the program administered by Benalla's preschools.

Enrolment is easy. Parents and caregivers can register their child by visiting: <https://imaginationlibrary.com/au/affiliate/BENALLAVIC/> or scanning the QR code below.



We welcome donations to support the program at any time. Just \$120 per year will support one child's participation in the Imagination Library for 12 months. Donations can be made online or in person (see page 4).

1. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2024.2322731>



Jodie Fleming, presents the 2024 Back to School vouchers to Ben Moyle, Winton Primary School.

Back to School voucher program comes to an end

For 20 years the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) Back to School program has helped rural and remote children and young people access educational items like uniforms, shoes, stationery and school bags. Since 2005, Tomorrow Today has secured over \$450,000 in funding to distribute vouchers to local schools to assist families meet costs associated with the new school year.

This year we distributed 705, \$50 vouchers to 10 schools in Benalla and district, of which \$7,500 was funded by Tomorrow Today.

This was the last year this program will run, but we will continue to work with local schools to support families in need of assistance for educational expenses. Eligible families can also access our Participate! Funding program to support organised out-of-school activities.

These initiatives are made possible through the generous support of local donations which can be made online or in person.

Full Circle – Volunteer in the spotlight

When Sabine Smyth was recruited by Tomorrow Today as Volunteer Programs Coordinator in 2011, little did she know that 13 years later she would return as a volunteer in the program she created.

“Connect9 came about because we recognised that there was a need for something at that Year 9 time of school.” Sabine worked with the schools’ wellbeing officers and careers advisors to refine the format of the program, which remains essentially the same today. Year 9 students are matched with a local, adult mentor and over a 10-week structured program they participate in activities designed to strengthen their connection to the community, explore career and further education options and build aspiration for the future.

“There’s always the basic foundation of this goodwill of the program. It comes down to someone saying, I care enough about my community to put my hand up for them. To spend time with a young person because I want to tell them I care about their future and I care about giving them this time.”

For Sabine, being a mentor has brought her back to working with teens. “I have really missed working with teenagers. I love that phase in their life where they’re just saying, ‘I’m looking at the world to work out where I fit and what I want to do’. I’m just loving being matched with Indi and she is quite amazing. She’s someone who’s really quiet, but also very passionate and I’m loving it.”



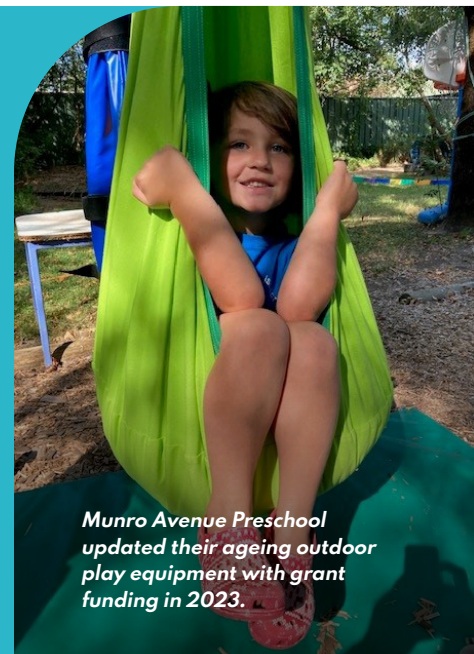
Sabine Smyth and her mentee Indi are embarking on 10 weeks of community connection activities in the Connect9 program.

Grants for local projects

In 2024 we have been pleased to award grants to 11 local organisations who will share in more than \$45,000 in funding. Since 2003 we have distributed almost \$440,000 for more than 170 community-led projects that build local community skills and resilience or have educational benefit for Benalla’s children and young people.

Ongoing grant funding is possible thanks to local people who generously give to our Community Fund. These donations are invested so that the program can continue to provide community benefit for years to come.

“Helping build the children’s physical skills and confidence improves their overall wellbeing which flows on into their families and our community”
Munro Avenue Preschool Director, Michelle Lindsay



Munro Avenue Preschool updated their ageing outdoor play equipment with grant funding in 2023.

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Locals who give

Olive Tree Op Shop is part of Benalla Baptist Church, so, it's not surprising it is in the business of giving.



We met with Jenny Roberts and Wendy True, two of the 20 volunteers who keep the op shop running, to discover what inspires their generosity.

“All the money raised at Olive Tree is donated to other organisations in Australia and around the world. We've got an orphanage in Kenya and an orphanage school in Borneo that we support too.”

Each quarter, the Olive Tree Op Shop donates a significant sum to Tomorrow Today. Jenny explained why they chose Tomorrow Today, “It's local, Tomorrow Today works with children and teenagers...I think that's a really good thing. So, we decided to give to Tomorrow Today, and they can disperse it to where it's needed.”

Many donors who generously give to Tomorrow Today, choose 'the area of greatest need' allowing us to provide timely assistance to those who need it most. Thank you to Olive Tree Op Shop, the Benalla Baptist Church and all the volunteers who work tirelessly to help the Benalla community. Olive Tree Op Shop is located at 57-59 Bridge St West and is open Tuesday and Thursday 10am-4pm and Saturday 9am-12pm. Donations of goods are always welcome.

Year 5&6 Careers Program

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” How many times have you asked a child that question? But it's a tough one for many to answer!

In response to research conducted by myfuture.edu.au, which identified the need for early career support, we launched a new program in 2023 for students in Years 5 and 6. The interactive program had students working on activities to help them identify their values and strengths; meeting with 'Living Library Books', local people who shared their career pathway; and participating in mock interviews. The students also visited workplaces like Benalla Health to learn more about the world of work.

The aim of the careers program is to build aspiration and to encourage children to begin to consider their life as a conscious journey. We're excited to be running the program again this year.



Meet Rachael

If you asked Rachael Heywood her favourite thing about her involvement with Tomorrow Today, you'd find she was hard-pressed to decide. She has been an inspiring Connect9 volunteer mentor to 11 mentees over as many years. In 2023 she joined Tomorrow Today as our PEEP Coordinator and in 2024 she also took on the ConnectParent Community Connector Supervisor role. Recently, she completed the training to be a Youth Mental Health First Aid Instructor. Rachael's passion is supporting Benalla's parents to be confident in their ability to nurture their child's development.

“At PEEP, I think it's important to be working with parents and supporting parents prior to their children going to school because once their children are at school, the focus is on the child. There's a loss of focus around the parents. You don't get that one-on-one opportunity to support parents with their child's education. It starts here and I think it's just so powerful.”

Our new ConnectParent program, which is aimed at newborn parents and parents-to-be, is benefiting from Rachael's outlook, “Everybody's village looks different. ConnectParent is about creating more of a village for these new parents and giving them the opportunity to be well-supported, to be connected to their community...the more people they have around them, the better, because the earlier you create those connections, the better the outcome.”





Fun day for families and young people

Come and Try Day has been a fixture in the Tomorrow Today calendar since 2017, so it was great to change up the format this year by partnering with the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) to host a youth career expo at the same time.

The aim of the collaboration was to encourage older children and young adults to come along and learn about what's on offer in our region. The day was a great success, with beautiful autumn weather and many new exhibitors participating in the event.

Full Impact Squad goes bush

The Full Impact Squad's year started with a massive high when they were awarded the honour of Community Group of the Year at Benalla's Australia Day ceremony.

This group of inspiring young people have gone from strength to strength in the past 12 months, hosting community events and raising funds for and awareness of causes they are passionate about.

In April they had an incredible time at The Summit, an adventure camp in regional Victoria. They tried their hands (and feet) at abseiling, the

giant swing, the high wire and flying fox and challenged themselves to grow as individuals and team members.

"It was inspiring to see them overcoming their fears with the support of others. The staff at The Summit were so impressed with the Squad's spirit. I could not be prouder of them." **Tomorrow Today Youth Engagement Coordinator, Alex Ross**



GIVING MATTERS

YES, I WANT TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF TOMORROW TODAY IN BENALLA.

I wish to support:

- Work of Tomorrow Today, area of greatest need
- Community Fund for local grants
- Other (please contact us)

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Visit tomorrowtoday.com.au and click on **DONATE** or **Scan the QR code**
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