



Respect, growth and the sharing of knowledge between generations...

These stirring themes form the basis for one of Benalla's newest murals.

During the 2026 Benalla Street Art Festival, local artist, Uncle Chris Thorne led Tomorrow Today's Anganya students as they designed and painted the unique circular artwork on the wall of our building at 66 Nunn Street. The piece depicts Elders and young people gathered around a central campfire. The seated Elders are facing outwards and around them are the young people looking towards the Elders and the fire. The significance of the mural is best explained in Uncle Chris's own words.

"When you're facing out, you're teaching knowledge. So these little bum prints are our young people coming to sit with the Elders to learn about their culture," explained Uncle Chris.

From this central point are footprints large and small, leading out to the sky, the water, the wildlife and to men's and women's business. Each path represents the journey taken to learn important cultural knowledge.

"Our young people need to learn this stuff. They need to walk with the Aunties and the Uncles to start gathering that knowledge. You have to chase knowledge but you can't chase wisdom, you have to wait for wisdom. When you have the wisdom that goes with the knowledge, then you have that title of Auntie or Uncle and you're able to then start to teach."

"I'm so proud of our young people that have taken this project on, because as I said to them if they don't get ready now, the day will come and they'll be given that title as an Auntie or an Uncle. If they're not ready for that responsibility, our culture gets lost again. So they're preparing their walk and their journey by learning to get that responsibility of having that title."

"When we have knowledge and we're comfortable and confident with our knowledge, then we can sit down with non-Aboriginal people and teach them. And share what we love, what's in our hearts, what's in our mind. That's what reconciliation is. That's what living together is about - sharing. We've got to get our young people to feel comfortable and confident to be able to do that. And it's through things like this." - Uncle Chris Thorne



MESSAGE FROM OUR EO

It's been a pleasure getting to know the Tomorrow Today community in my first six months as Executive Officer. When I first visited Benalla as an education researcher in 2021, I was impressed by what Tomorrow Today achieves in partnership with the Benalla community. It's a privilege to now be leading this work – and also a lot of fun!

This year Tomorrow Today has sustained our best-loved programs like PEEP, Connect9, Reading Buddies and Kinder Pals, and refined our newer programs like Antenatal PEEP, Motiv8 and Anganya. Our programs depend on the commitment of our wonderful partners and dedicated volunteers. We deeply appreciate those who made 2026 their 'Year to Volunteer'. We aim to make volunteering flexible, fun and rewarding and it's terrific to see volunteers from all walks of life returning to contribute to our programs year after year.

Seeing our young people inspired by the creative energy of the Benalla Street Art Festival has been a highlight of 2026. The Full Impact Squad sold original artworks to hone their entrepreneurial skills, while our Anganya students created the amazing mural that now brightens up our building.

Our work also depends on our donors and funders, and we're deeply grateful to the many community members who have made generous donations this year. Our major funders in philanthropy and government have also continued to support us even in the face of budget pressures – a testament to our value. We recently welcomed the Mazda Foundation as a new philanthropic funder for our successful Prep Immersion program.

Behind the scenes, we're working hard to keep developing as an organisation. We have a new strategic plan this year, and are focusing on better ways to use local data and evidence to drive our programs. I'm excited about what we can achieve together to help make Benalla a thriving community with children, young people and families at its heart.

Jen Jackson – Executive Officer



Mazda Foundation supports Prep Immersion program

In 2017 we launched the Prep Immersion program in conjunction with Benalla P-12 College. Since that time the program has reached 129 students. Together with Prep teachers, our staff identify students who have commenced school but need a little boost to 'switch-on' for learning. The targeted activities help students' comprehension, literacy, numeracy and communication skills.

This year we successfully applied for funding with the Mazda Foundation to extend the scope of Prep Immersion.

"Previously the program ran for 8 weeks and reached around 20 students each year. With this funding we can support more students for a longer period of time," said Education Benalla Program Manager, Sally Matheson. "It means students will consolidate the skills they learn and the benefits they gain will be longer-lasting."

"This program helped [my child] so much. She loved every second of it and was sad when she wasn't working with the support staff anymore."

– Parent of 2025 Prep student

Grants support the whole community to thrive

Often the best ideas for positive change come from within the community itself. Our annual community grants assist local organisations and groups make those ideas a reality, and the whole community benefits. Since 2003 we have awarded more than \$550,000 in grants to support projects that promote education or community building. We're pleased to advise that in 2026 we will be awarding \$39,298 to fund 12 community projects. We can't wait to see this diverse range of projects evolve. Congratulations to all the successful applicants!

In 2025 we funded Benalla P-12 College's Beyond Books project. The grant allowed the school's wellbeing team to purchase a range of books for students and families dealing with challenging situations.

"I believe these books have contributed to a rise in the rate of students returning to classrooms emotionally reset, and has reduced the amount of time these students have spent out of the classroom. Having students who are present for more class time and who have an increased emotional literacy has a positive effect on the students' learning as well as the stress levels of teaching staff. The books have been a wonderful resource for students and families."

- Elise Nolan, Wellbeing Officer, Benalla P-12 College

Ongoing grant funding is possible thanks to all those who generously give to our Community Fund.



Volunteer in the spotlight

Denise Tanner is one of more than 80 volunteers who share their time and skills to support our programs. She grew up in Myrtleford and after a busy career in finance and administration in locations as far away as London, she retired to Benalla. It wasn't long before Denise realised she wanted to do something in the community.

"I thought I would love retirement, but after about a month I'd had enough so I was looking for something else to do and that's when I came across Tomorrow Today. I started volunteering more than 10 years ago."

"I now volunteer two mornings a week at PEEP, and I have other volunteering roles in the community too."

"For me knowing that I'm helping someone, it makes me feel good. You just have to smile, and say hello and have a bit of a chat. Because some people just need a bit of a chat."



TOMORROW TODAY
BOARD DIRECTORS

Louise Pearce Chair
M 0459 810 057

Sally Gamble OAM
Melinda Lawley

Rosie Koop
Larissa Montgomery

Martin Smith
Nicholas Taylor

Florent Thivillier

Encouraging our youngest readers

We are thrilled to be celebrating two years of The Benalla Imagination Library!

Since its commencement in May 2024, the Benalla Imagination Library has distributed just over 5,000 books to local children aged 0-2. The program is part of the international Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. The initiative provides a high-quality, age-appropriate book every month to children who live in Benalla local government area.

To date, the support of Benalla Rural City Council and the Rotary Club of Benalla has made the program possible. Rotary Club President, Di Murphy shared more about the Club's involvement in the program; "One of Rotary's pillars of service is education. We have a lot of educators in the club, ex-principals, kinder staff, teachers, and we've done a lot of work with a school in India. So, to be able to do something to support education in Benalla, was a really easy decision for us to make."



Over three years the Club has provided \$30,000 specifically for this program, but it represents a much longer and deeper connection with Tomorrow Today.

Di elaborated; "Right from the beginning we felt Tomorrow Today was something we want to get behind. It's local, it affects the people in our town, it's something we can do. Whether it's supporting a particular program or supporting the whole foundation, mowing the lawns or cleaning out the leaves or whatever needs to happen to make sure that all the programs that Tomorrow Today are running keep going."

Donations to the Benalla Imagination Library are always welcome. \$120 per year will support one child to participate. We would love to hear from individuals, businesses or organisations who would like to support the program to continue in 2027 and beyond.

Locals who give

Yonnie and Steph - Benalla Veterinary Clinic

Benalla pet-owners will be familiar with the friendly faces of Yonnie and Dr Steph Miechel at Benalla Veterinary Clinic. Together they have owned the clinic for 12 years and are an integral part of the Benalla community. They are one of the many local business owners who support Tomorrow Today.

In 2021, Yonnie and Steph chose to make an annual recurring donation to Tomorrow Today and we caught up with them to learn more about what inspired them to support the Foundation.

"We're passionate about our community. And we've drummed into our children that you have to give back, that everybody is equal and deserves opportunities. So you do what you do and you give back what you can, when you can so that others might have those opportunities as well."

"We love Tomorrow Today because it supports local people - children and young people in Benalla. When we give we are doing that for our community." - Yonnie Miechel



Tomorrow Today acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

