



Media Release – 17/06/26

Greater Shepparton community partnership secures \$2.5 million investment to transform youth mental health across the Goulburn Region

The Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project is proud to celebrate a major milestone for youth mental health in regional Victoria, with the announcement of a \$2.5 million, four-year investment from the William Buckland Foundation, managed by Equity Trustees, to support the Goulburn Region Open Dialogue Connect (GRODC) initiative.

Delivered in partnership - Lighthouse Project with the Open Dialogue Centre, Berry Street Yooralla Shepparton Youth Foyer and Goulburn Valley Health, GRODC represents a new, community-led approach to youth mental health - one that shifts the focus away from crisis-driven responses and towards long term, connected support for young people, families and communities.

The Goulburn Region continues to face significant challenges in youth mental health, including high rates of disengagement from education, employment and community life, alongside increasing pressure on already stretched services.

Rather than creating more disconnected services, GRODC focuses on strengthening how existing organisations work together across health, education, youth and community sectors. The initiative supports young people to navigate mental health and wellbeing challenges through coordinated care that includes their family, friends, peers and trusted support networks and places themselves at the centre of decision making.

At the heart of the initiative is the Open Dialogue Approach which is an evidence informed way of working that prioritises listening, relationships and shared decision-making. Through facilitated network meetings, young people are supported to direct their own care alongside the people who matter most to them.

The solution was initially championed through strong local leadership of; Anita McCurdy at Berry Street's Youth Foyer and Sally Thomas the director of the Infant Child Youth Mental Health Service at GV Health. Their passion, the connection with ODC, Lighthouse and funders assisted to create what is now known as the GRODC. For the Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project, the initiative reflects a strong commitment to community-led collaboration and long-term systems change. Lighthouse's backbone support of GRODC working alongside local partners and the Open Dialogue Centre is strengthening this local solution by providing governance support, impact measurement and project implementation expertise.

Training is already underway across the region, with 35 professionals from health, education, youth and community services participating in a year-long Foundation Course delivered by the Open Dialogue Centre. Participants include psychiatrists, peer workers, youth housing staff and school wellbeing teams, all learning together to build a shared approach to supporting young people.

Network Meetings which are the core practice of Open Dialogue are also being trialled with young people at the Berry Street Yooralla Shepparton Youth Foyer, co-facilitated by a Senior Project Manager and Lived Experience Peer Worker.

Amy Robinson, Executive Officer of the Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project, said the initiative is already changing how organisations work together across the region.

“We are deeply grateful to the Trustees of the William Buckland Foundation for their bold commitment to advancing critical systems change that will strengthen mental health outcomes for young people in our region.”

“Grounding our work in the Open Dialogue Approach, and having the Open Dialogue Centre alongside us, has been transformative. We are building something that belongs to this community and that will endure.” Stated Ms Robinson.

Alex White, Granting Specialist at the William Buckland Foundation, said the investment reflects a commitment to sustainable community change.

“The William Buckland Foundation is proud to back a partnership that is built to last. What makes GRODC compelling is not just what it does, but how it does it - services working together in a way that becomes their own, sustained by the community long after the initial investment.”

Keith Bryant, CEO of the Open Dialogue Centre, said the project demonstrates how communities can reshape mental health support systems for the future.

“Community partners are committed to ensuring this investment leads to long-term change. What the William Buckland Foundation has backed is something genuinely different — philanthropy catalysing systemic change that sticks.”

About Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project

The Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project is a community led initiative focused on improving education, wellbeing and employment outcomes for young people across the Greater Shepparton region through collective impact and cross-sector collaboration.

About GRODC

Goulburn Region Open Dialogue Connect (GRODC) is a whole-of-community initiative transforming youth mental health and wellbeing across the Goulburn Region of Victoria. Core partners include the Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project, Open Dialogue Centre, Berry Street Yooralla Shepparton Youth Foyer and Goulburn Valley Health, alongside seven community partner organisations.

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For further information contact:

Amy Robinson

Executive Officer Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project

arobinson@gslp.com.au 0438 308 581