

# ConnectMates Handbook

A guide for councils

**Target group:** Young people with disabilities

**Setting:** Arts, culture, music

**Key health promotion strategies:** Direct participation; community strengthening;  
Organisational and workforce development

# Acknowledgements

## **Traditional owner acknowledgement**

VicHealth acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which these programs operate. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and future.

## **Acknowledgement of contributing councils**

We would like to acknowledge the work of the City of Maribyrnong and others who co-created and developed the BandMates Victoria (BMV) program in 2017. Some of the content in this handbook is taken from the Bright Futures Challenge Project Implementation Guide written by the City of Maribyrnong in 2019.

We would also like to acknowledge the City of Greater Bendigo who adapted the BandMates Victoria program during 2019-2020, developed a range of new options for young people and contributed to the writing of this handbook.

VicHealth has re-named this handbook 'ConnectMates' to reflect the changes made to the program during 2019-2020 and the development of a unique and adaptable program which is now distinct from BandMates Victoria.

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>2</b>
Traditional owner acknowledgement	2
Acknowledgement of contributing councils	2
<b>Contents</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>About the program</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The 'social model of disability'</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Is this program right for your council?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Case study: City of Greater Bendigo</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Where to start</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Funding &amp; costs</b>	<b>15</b>
External funding	15
Youth grants	15
Arts and cultural sector grants	15
Rural and regional grants	16
Internal funding	16
Cost considerations	16
<b>Build the team</b>	<b>18</b>
Core team	18
Volunteers	18
Intra-council connections	19
	3

External organisations	19
<b>Marketing &amp; promotion</b>	<b>21</b>
Social media	21
Platforms	21
Page or handle	21
Traditional media	22
<b>Key activities</b>	<b>23</b>
Establishment	23
Delivery	24
<b>Outcomes &amp; reporting</b>	<b>25</b>
Outcomes	25
Reporting	25
<b>Adaptations</b>	<b>27</b>
Adaptations in the City of Greater Bendigo	27
Other adaptations	30
<b>Project close</b>	<b>31</b>
Opportunities for young people beyond program close	31
Reporting to council and funding partners	31
<b>Contacts</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Further info</b>	<b>33</b>

# Background

The BandMates Victoria (BMV) program was first created as part of the [VicHealth Bright Futures for Young Victorians Challenge](#) (or Bright Futures Challenge), a key initiative within the VicHealth strategic imperative to 'improve mental wellbeing'.

The Challenge aims to build resilience, social connection and mental wellbeing in young people (12–25 years old) and also to strengthen the leadership of local governments in improving the mental wellbeing of young people.

We know that this age range is a critical period for personal development – characterised by important transitions through education, work, family and relationships. During this time, young people are developing physically, intellectually and emotionally, while forming autonomous identities, building independent social networks and initiating intimate relationships.

In 2015, in partnership with CSIRO, VicHealth released the [Bright Futures Megatrends Report](#). The research report described five global 'megatrends' that are likely to have an impact on the mental wellbeing of young people in the next two decades. These megatrends are likely to affect the social, environmental and economic aspects of young people's lives and also on the transitions and changes that occur during this critical period.

The Bright Futures for Young Victorians Challenge was launched by VicHealth in 2016, supporting Victorian councils to develop responses to the identified megatrends and solutions to promote young people's resilience, social connection and mental wellbeing.

The first phase of the Bright Futures Challenge enabled 12 local councils to work directly with young people to co-design and create new programs and initiatives in their local area.

The second phase of the Bright Futures Challenge provided further funding for several of those local councils to expand their program. This phase provided funding for several new councils to join the Challenge by creating new programs and initiatives.

The third phase of the Bright Futures Challenge saw a focus on councils integrating the learnings and achievements of the most promising projects from the first two phases.

In consultation with councils, and based on program evaluation data, VicHealth identified four Bright Futures projects in 2018–9 that showed strong promise for positive health outcomes and potential to be replicated and embedded by more councils. The four councils that initiated these programs were appointed as 'Integration Mentors' with the specific goals of (a) supporting other councils to replicate the program, and (b) sustaining and embedding the program within their own council business and services.

The BMV program was one of the four Bright Futures programs selected for integration. Maribyrnong City Council was the Integration Mentor for this program and worked closely with the City of Greater Bendigo to replicate the program in their council and to adapt toward the ConnectMates program.

VicHealth was proud to lead the Bright Futures Challenge during 2016-2020 in partnership with local councils and with young Victorians. Following the evaluation and integration phase, all four of the most promising Bright Futures projects are now available for all local councils to deliver and adapt in their local area. For more information see the [VicHealth website](#).

# About the program

**Target group:** Young people with disabilities

**Setting:** Arts, culture, music

**Key health promotion strategies:** Direct participation; community strengthening; Organisational and workforce development

"It's good to be with someone different to family in a concert setting. It gives me freedom to be myself and to explore." Peter Tolhurst, former BandMates participant

Bandmates Victoria was the original program in 2017 that matched people with disability and/or mental health issues (the 'Bandmates') with volunteers to see live music in local venues and at music festivals across Victoria. The program made the live music experience possible for people who may not otherwise be able to attend live performances.

By partnering volunteers with people with a disability and/or mental health issues, Bandmates Victoria was able to break down participation barriers and enhance the wellbeing of the community through access to popular and independent music and cultural events and experiences. During 2019-2020 the Bandmates Victoria program continued to grow into a statewide program.

Meanwhile, as part of the Bright Futures Challenge, local councils sought to adapt the program into a rural area in the context of COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions and the impacts on young people's movement and their mental wellbeing. The resulting program was based on but distinct from BandMates Victoria and has been renamed ConnectMates for the future.

This handbook includes elements of both programs, including in-person and online options, so that councils have a range of evidence-based options for service delivery and meeting the needs of young people with disabilities in their community.



# The 'social model of disability'

The social model of disability contrasts with the medical model of disability (that a disability is a health condition dealt with by medical professionals). The medical model of disability is all about what a person cannot do or cannot be. People with a disability are thought to be abnormal (or different to what is 'normal') and disability is seen to be the problem of the individual. From this perspective, a person with a disability is in need of fixing or a cure, disability is seen as a 'tragedy' and people with a disability are to be pitied.

The social model sees disability as the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. It follows that the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment must change to enable people with a disability to participate in society on an equal basis with others. This perspective does not deny the reality of impairment nor its impact on the individual. However, it does challenge the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment to accommodate impairment as a natural part of human diversity.

The social model supports the view that people with a disability have a right to be fully participating citizens on an equal basis with others. It seeks to change society in order to accommodate people with a disability, rather than the other way around.

In this context:

- impairment is a medical condition that leads to disability
- disability is the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and barriers in the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment.

For example, it is not the inability to walk that keeps a person from entering a building by themselves but the stairs that are inaccessible that keeps a wheelchair-user from entering that building.

The social model of disability is now the internationally recognised way to view and address disability. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) marks the official paradigm shift in attitudes towards people with a disability and approaches to disability issues in practice and policy.

People with a disability are not 'objects' of charity, medical treatment and social protection but 'subjects' with rights, capable of claiming those rights, able to make decisions for their own lives based on their free and informed consent and be active members of society.

*Source: People with Disability Australia (<https://pwd.org.au/>)*

# Is this program right for your council?

There is a growing understanding in Victoria as to how valuable the arts, live music and cultural events can be to local government; strengthening economies, creating more liveable communities and improving social outcomes. <sup>1</sup>ConnectMates is all about pairing-up like-minded music lovers, with and without a disability, to share live music experiences in their local community. The program creates solid foundations that facilitate social access, build community connections and enhance wellbeing through providing access to popular and independent arts, music and cultural events and experiences. The program also provides industry development for local music venues and staff to help them feel confident and capable in understanding disability and diversity in their workplace.

The key to the success of this program in your community is ensuring it aligns to a real need. It is important to use existing research, team knowledge and trends to identify a problem and tailor the program accordingly. Listed below are several key considerations:

- Consult your youth strategy to identify populations of young people and people with a disability. How does the program align with relevant council plans such as 'All ages and abilities', 'Disability Action' and Health and Wellbeing?
- Consult with your youth council, advisory groups, reference groups, disability organisations and education providers to understand current barriers to accessing live music for young people with a disability. Are you in a rural or regional area? How does this create enablers or barriers?

---

<sup>1</sup> ConnectMates is the adapted program based on BandMates Victoria.

- Consider logistics, safety and accessibility issues of public transport for participants.
- Do you have many local live music events/venues in your area?
- Do local music venues have an understanding of accessibility requirements? Are they requesting for more information about how to be accessible?
- Listen to community feedback including carers, families and disability organisations. Is the community asking for events that are accessible and inclusive for everyone? Have you been receiving complaints from people with disabilities who are unable to attend events?
- If you're a small community, consider numbers of willing peers to participate as 'companions'

# Case study: City of Greater Bendigo

The City of Greater Bendigo was scheduled to run the BMV program over the 2019-20 period. They registered the interest of Bandmates and volunteers using the [Better Impact](#) software platform and began an advertising and communications campaign, engaging relevant agencies in the Bendigo area. This included a segment on the local news. Bandmates and volunteers filled out application forms and completed their police checks and working with children checks. The BMV team interviewed young people and volunteers. Momentum and interest in the program was building.

Then in March 2020 COVID-19 hit, and the project needed to pivot in response. The BMV team collaborated with other youth projects in the City of Greater Bendigo that were also facing challenges of not being able to deliver face-to-face programs. Online content was created to address the needs of the young people in the local area, specifically those with a disability and/or mental health issues. By utilising the existing Facebook page – [Yo Bendigo \(Youth Online\)](#) – the BMV team were able to quickly provide relevant and accessible content for this audience. Content included yoga, tai chi, meditation, art projects, songwriting tutorials and live music performances. [Headspace](#) ran a virtual tour of the Bendigo office, showing young people around and talking them through the process of seeking assistance and what they could expect as a result of doing so. All sessions had high attendance rates, often with an average audience of 300 young people. The live music performances every Friday night were extremely popular, with many young people attending every week.

Connor was a regular participant and tuned-in to the live music event every Friday evening. Having muscular dystrophy and being confined to a wheelchair, Connor found it difficult to get out especially during the COVID-19 restrictions. He found the sessions very beneficial, both socially and mentally.

# Where to start

When preparing, establishing and delivering this program in your community, it's important to consider the cohort you will be engaging with, the specific needs they may have, and the resources and skills required to support this group.

When the original BMV program was established in the City of Maribyrnong, it was aimed at the 'all ages disability sector', using live music as the platform to engage participants. When the City of Greater Bendigo ran the program they initially targeted the 'youth disability sector', (also using the live music platform), to address the funding requirements of the VicHealth Bright Futures program.

Focusing the program on the 'youth disability sector' comes with several challenges that should be addressed. Participants in the disability sector may range from high functioning to high needs and consideration should be given to inclusion and accessibility for all. How might a carer be included in a program for a high needs participant? Consideration should also be given to mental health issues in this cohort. Volunteers may not be trained in mental health and therefore police checks and working with children checks may not be enough to ensure adequate support for participants. What are the needs of the parents, disability services and community organisations you'll be engaging with to reach the cohort? An understanding of the motivations and beliefs of the people you are engaging with will assist in building relationships that will result in better engagement with your cohort.

Broadening the platform from live music events to include other arts and cultural activities can provide the necessary flexibility and adaptability to tailor the program to your community. Working with a broad range of venues and events to ensure that physical spaces are accessible and that staff are adequately trained builds a diverse and vibrant community where everyone feels safe and connected.

# Funding & costs

## External funding

Securing external funding can be challenging however the cross-sector nature of the ConnectMates program may make it eligible for funding and grants across a range of sectors (like the philanthropic, arts and music, and disability sectors). An increasing focus on young people and mental health in Victoria may offer new opportunities to apply for funding and work with new partners.

### Youth grants

There are many grants available to local councils to provide financial support for programs created for young people.

[Youth Central](#) is the Victorian Government's website for young people aged 12-25 and has numerous grants available for local councils in Victoria.

[Youth Affairs Council Victoria](#) offer 'Hey' Grants (Health Equal Youth) on an annual basis to local councils (and youth groups). They're a unique opportunity for mainstream and non-LGBTIQ+ based services to develop work and new activities which better target and include LGBTIQ+ young people and enhance their mental health and wellness.

The [Victorian Government](#) offers grants for local government youth programs which can be accessed via their website.

### Arts and cultural sector grants

Several organisations and agencies are offering regular grant programs targeting the arts and cultural sector and the live music industry. These are:

[Creative Victoria](#) offers funding and support programs designed to stimulate high quality and diverse creative activity across the state.

[Australia Council for the Arts](#) offers grant programs that support a diverse range of artists, artistic practice, organisations and arts activity.

[Music Victoria](#) provides advocacy on behalf of the music sector, actively supports the development of the Victorian music community, and celebrates and promotes Victorian music.

### **Rural and regional grants**

[In a Good Place](#) is a national grants program funded by CCI Giving that provides support for community-driven initiatives that reduce social isolation, increase social participation and connectedness, and encourage people in rural, regional and remote communities who are at risk of or are experiencing mental health issues to seek help.

## **Internal funding**

If no external funding is available, consider how to allocate funding within your youth services budget or arts and cultural programs to deliver activities. How might you advocate to council through budget and business planning processes for funding to support the program?

## **Cost considerations**

It can be difficult to determine detailed information about project delivery requirements as these will vary considerably from council to council, however, there are several cost considerations which have been outlined below. Utilising resources within the team, this project can be developed over time and could be absorbed into a youth or disability role within the council.

- Project Officer.
- MetroAccess Officer (or Disability Access/Inclusion Officer).



- Venue hire is required for information sessions, volunteer training, matching meetings. Consider council venues, meeting rooms, underutilised performing arts spaces, libraries, youth spaces to save costs.
- Ensure you check your organisational catering policy regarding the provision of catering.
- Promotions.
- IT and AV equipment.

# Build the team

## Core team

Establishing and delivering a successful program requires leadership with vision, skills and knowledge of how to promote change communities. The ability to have an empathetic relationship with young people and people with a disability (and their supports) builds trust and fosters inclusivity.

Consider mental health support for the participants in the program, from within your team, or externally. Core staff should be trained in working with young people and people with a disability, ideally also having specialist training in mental health. If specialist training does not exist within the team consider how a youth support service may be utilised.

## Volunteers

Do you have volunteers willing and able to assist? Do they have experience working with people with a disability? Talk to your Human Resources or People and Culture department about considerations regarding the use of volunteers and what is required by your organisation to recruit and train those volunteers. Ensure any training meets the organisation's requirements to ensure volunteers are covered by insurance, like agreeing to or signing up to things like a code of conduct, values, or duty of care. Interview your volunteers to ensure they are part of the program for the right reasons.

Training for volunteers should cover language, occupational health and safety, roles and responsibilities and council requirements.

The City of Greater Bendigo used a program called [Better Impact](#) to register volunteers, hold personal information, roster shifts and to ensure staff training is complete. This came at a cost of less than \$500 for the program but contains all the information required for reporting and evaluations.

## Intra-council connections

Make use of contacts across your council. By linking the program across units, you can create groups with a vested interest in the sustainability of the program.

- **Communications and social media teams** – these people will be an integral part of your team to assist in planning a comprehensive communication strategy and producing content.
- **Human Resources or People and Culture department** – can advise on recruitment and training of volunteers.
- **Events team** – talk to your events staff or those who work at council venues about how your own organisation can make events more accessible and how Bandmates could work with their events or performances.
- **Youth and disability/access and inclusion staff** – include key staff with subject matter expertise.

## External organisations

- Contact relevant and known networks, organisations and colleagues to promote and publicise to their community and members
- Use opportunities to present to groups at key stakeholder gatherings/networks

"We're building relationships with external agencies to ensure there is a well-established referral process" City of Greater Bendigo

## Growing good practice

- Build connections with councils that have previously led this program and/or councils that are adapting it now.

- Consider developing a 'community of practice' for program officers across councils. During 2019-2020, VicHealth's Bright Futures Community of Practice supported the growth of good practice by providing regular opportunities for knowledge exchange, joint problem-solving and peer support across councils.

# Marketing & promotion

Engage your council communications and marketing teams early to assist with all forms of communication. Together, you should build a comprehensive communication plan to promote the activities, training, events and groups delivered throughout the program. Develop strategies to celebrate and promote key successes of the program. A combination of traditional and digital media work well for the target group but also consider the demographics of the specific cohort you'll be working with.

Your communication plan should consider council disability and inclusion plans to ensure alignment of long term planning.

## **Social media**

Councils that take a strategic approach to social media are more likely to achieve desired outcomes. Social media can be used effectively to promote events and activities but also to communicate with hard-to-reach groups and to develop networks within the community around specific issues.

### **Platforms**

The choice of social media platform to use should be made in line with strategic goals and objectives. Some of the platforms most commonly used by councils include Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, YouTube and Vimeo.

### **Page or handle**

In addition to promoting the program on your own council pages (ie. home page or council youth page), there may be external pages which may be valuable in engaging your audience

such as community groups, volunteer centres, local schools, neighbourhood houses and libraries.

## **Traditional media**

Stories in local newsletters, newspapers and radio can resonate well with a community, helping to build engagement through pride and identity.

Your communications team may be able to develop media releases to send to their contacts. This may contribute to further promotion through radio and TV interviews. Local networks/ mailing lists are also very helpful.

# Key activities

## Establishment

- ❑ **Establish a steering committee.** Consult with existing local youth and disability groups for consultation on the program.
- ❑ **Write a project plan** (with help from the steering committee). The plan should consider service resources, staffing, budget, physical spaces and community partnerships.
- ❑ **Establish sources of funding.** Apply for grants if necessary.
- ❑ **Establish an internal team.**
- ❑ **Identify and engage with networks.** These may include disability support agencies, volunteer organisations, local venues, theatres, concert venues and festival coordinators.
- ❑ **Marketing and promotion.** Develop a social media promotional plan. Prepare marketing material for young people, venues and other relevant cohorts. Advertise on local TV and other media. Develop a media release for print and social media.
- ❑ **Information sessions.** These sessions are held to provide an opportunity for interested Bandmates, volunteers, parents, carers and others to meet, get to know each other and find out more about the program.
- ❑ **Engage cohorts.** Facilitated matching meetings can be set up in any venue that is safe and inclusive such as libraries, neighbourhood houses, local cafes.
- ❑ **Volunteer training.** Training on the rights and responsibilities of volunteering.

- ❑ **Volunteer checks.** Carry out police checks, Disability Worker Exclusion Scheme checks and referee checks.

## Delivery

- ❑ **Matching meetings.** Set meetings up in music venues (or other cultural/arts venues relevant to your program) close to public transport. Support each matched pair by facilitating discussion around how they will plan and manage their outings. (See pullout box).
- ❑ **Growing good practice.** Provide learning and networking opportunities for program staff, for example by connecting with other councils who are also adapting the program or by creating a 'community of practice'.
- ❑ **Evaluation & reporting.** Develop a report presenting the outcomes of the program.

### **Prompt card questions for participants (note: these can be tailored for your program)**

- What music do you like?
- Have you been to any gigs lately?
- Where do you, or where do you want to, see music?
- What kind of venues do you like?
- Do you like big stadium shows?
- Do you like smaller venues where you're able to be closer to the performers?
- How do you expect to get to venues?
- How do you feel about travelling (e.g. on public transport, in taxis, alone or at night)?
- How would you like to communicate with each other?
- What is the best way for us to keep in touch (e.g. Facebook, phone call, text message, email)?
- How often do you want to contact each other to organise a meetup?



- Is there someone else you would like involved when we are making arrangements?

# Outcomes & reporting

## Outcomes

The original BMV program run by the City of Maribyrnong received many awards including the 'Diversity and Inclusion' category at the [LGPro Awards for Community Excellence](#), and a highly commended for excellence in creating inclusive communities in the [DHHS Awards](#) 2018, but the outcomes go much deeper than official awards. The biggest successes were the relationships formed and the improved confidence, independence and general mental wellbeing for participants with disabilities and/or mental health issues.

"I see people building confidence and community networks, and venues making changes to their space once they've done the training," she said. "It's the cultural shift that I love watching and being a carrier of this cultural shift." Former Bandmates Project Officer

## Reporting

"In order to achieve program sustainability, we need to present our evaluation data (to council) and show that we've achieved what we've set out to do" Host council

Reporting is essential to help monitor the effectiveness of the program and ensure funding is allocated where it can be best utilised. Consideration should be given to data collection according to the needs of the council and any external funding bodies (if required). A council plan or funding body guidelines should ideally guide reporting.

**Considerations:**

- Develop appropriate systems to capture data. Frameworks may include local government area, age, sex and geography.
- External organisations and institutions can work in partnership with the council to support the development of monitoring and evaluation processes.

# Adaptations

We know that community-based programs can't be standardised in the same way for all councils. What worked in one place may not work in other places. What worked at one time may stop working as the context changes. Whilst it's important to remain 'true' to the core purpose and principles of the program, a continuous process of learning and adaptation is required to ensure that the program continues to create a positive impact in your community.

## City of Greater Bendigo adaptations

The onset of the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 forced the rapid adaptation of the original BMV program by the City of Greater Bendigo. They joined in partnership with other youth lead projects that had been affected by the pandemic and ran a Facebook page called [YO Bendigo](#) where they streamed live music performances, and provided mental health and wellbeing content. Some of the sessions hosted on the site included the following:

**Chair yoga:** This yoga session was approximately 45 minutes long, it was pe-recorded and uploaded on the site. The session was done in a chair, so it was accessible to anyone who had mobility issues. It was an event that helped with the young person's mental and physical health.

**Live music:** Every Friday evening between 6 pm and 8 pm, City of Greater Bendigo held a live musical performance. The performer was a young person between the ages of 14 and 25 who would perform original music to showcase the talents of the young people in the Bendigo area.

**Tai Chi:** These sessions were run by a young Tai Chi master. The class focused on the physical and mental well being of the young people in the target audience.

**Meditation:** As part of an emotional and physical wellbeing program, City of Greater Bendigo offered a mediation session to help young people with disability and mental health issues who were suffering from the added stresses of COVID-19 in 2020.

**Songwriting:** Sessions were run by a local songwriter who taught young people the fundamentals of songwriting including structure, rhyming and themes. Music, and being creative in general, is a great outlet for stress, depression and other mental health issues.

**Watercolour:** Online workshops were conducted using pre-prepared watercolour kits which were available from various locations in the community.

**Kokedama:** Online workshops were conducted using pre-prepared kokedama kits which were available from various locations in the community.

**Tenants rights:** A workshop on tenants rights in regards to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Headspace tour:** A virtual tour of the Bendigo Headspace office allowed young people to experience the space and learn about what might be involved when attending a face-to-face session.

The Facebook page provided a platform to keep young people in the community connected. It also provided a place to share relevant news, events and information which was especially relevant during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. These adaptations resulted in a different program, now known as ConnectMates.

**Headspace  
Bendigo live  
online tour**

Wednesday 24 June @  
4pm




**ONLINE LIVE SESSIONS**  
Listen. Play. Join. Connect.


BEEN STUCK AT THE DESK ALL WEEK?  
TUNE IN WITH US TOMORROW FOR A

*free yoga class*

WITH KATE FROM  
**YOGA EARTH LOVE**

**ONLINE LIVE SESSIONS**  
Listen. Play. Join. Connect.

**flora**  
LIVE 8PM FRIDAY  
YO BENDIGO FACEBOOK




**ONLINE LIVE SESSIONS**

Listen. Play. Join. Connect.



## Other adaptations

The BMV program in its original format had positive outcomes for those involved but it can be adapted to meet the needs of the community. Whilst the original program focused on live music, participants can also engage in events ranging from popular and independent arts to cultural events and experiences.

The original program involved a 1:1 matching of a participant and a volunteer however this may be too intense an experience for some. Other alternatives may be to establish a group of trained volunteers who can be mobilised for large events or festivals in your area. A participant may register their assistance requirements on their ticket and can be provided with support from one or more volunteers at the event.

The City of Greater Bendigo developed a training program for volunteers but this was unable to be run due to COVID-19 so they decided to leverage the content to train other groups including The Capital Theatre, Ulumbarra Theatre and the Intercultural ambassadors. The training provided an opportunity to increase participants' knowledge and understanding of considerations when running events attended by young people with a disability or mental health issues.

At the time of writing, (September, 2020), the City of Greater Bendigo were planning a one-off, multi-act concert in partnership with The Capital and Ulumbarra theatres. The concert will be viewed on-line as a pre-recorded event, and is expected to attract an audience of over 20,000. All performing artists will be local, with 2 high profile artists in the mix. The lead act will speak about his own mental health journey, and about how music can be a powerful force for healing. Video messages from young people will be shown in the breaks, offering ideas and support regarding mental health.

# Project close

One of the strengths of the BMV program was the carefully considered matching process which has led to many successful relationships that continue to build and grow beyond the project close. During the COVID-19 period of 2020, the program pivoted to a multi-faceted online offering (ConnectMates). This has brought about many new and unforeseen opportunities for young people beyond the normal program pathways.

## **Opportunities for young people beyond program close**

In 2020, the young people who participated in Bendigo's live Facebook music sessions had the unique opportunity to showcase their music to a new audience online. They were also paid for their involvement with this event. Some of the young people were also invited to perform on The Capital Theatre live performance site which provided invaluable experience and an opportunity to further develop their musical careers.

The art workshops also provided a platform for participants to nurture their talent and promote their original artworks. It opened up a new audience to appreciate and purchase their artwork.

## **Reporting to council and funding partners**

At the completion of the project, it's advisable to develop a report presenting the outcomes achieved and the relationships that were developed as a result. Highlight internal relationships that developed across council units throughout the program, in addition to community relationships.

The use of evaluation data will become a key strategy in building a case for the program to become a budgeted part of the council's regular service delivery. This will help to ensure the long-term sustainability of the program within the council.

# Contacts

## **VicHealth**

Level 2/355 Spencer Street,  
West Melbourne VIC 3003  
Telephone: (03) 9667 1333

## **Maribyrnong City Council Disability Services**

Corner Hyde and Napier streets  
Footscray, Victoria 3011  
Telephone: (03) 9688 0200  
After hours: (03) 9688 0200  
Email: [email@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au](mailto:email@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au)

## **City of Greater Bendigo Community Partnerships Unit**

15 Hopetoun Street,  
Bendigo VIC 3550  
Telephone: (03) 5434 6000  
Email: [requests@bendigo.vic.gov.au](mailto:requests@bendigo.vic.gov.au)



# Further info

See the City of Greater Bendigo's website for their [Accessible Events Guide](#) which provides further information on creating the right physical and social environments for all community members.

The [Inclusive Towns](#) website also offers information and resources on creating inclusive environments.





ARE YOU A YOUNG PERSON  
AGED 18-25 WITH A DISABILITY  
OR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE WANTING  
TO SEE LIVE MUSIC?

If you want to meet a person who has the same musical tastes, then Bandmates is the program for you! After a meeting, Bandmates will match you with a volunteer.

So enjoy live music with a new mate!

*Bandmates*  
Victoria

BENDIGO



For more info contact Bandmates Victoria Bendigo:  
p. 5434 6000  
e. [communitypartnerships@bendigo.vic.gov.au](mailto:communitypartnerships@bendigo.vic.gov.au)  
[www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/volunteering](http://www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/volunteering)

