

Waterfront / Port Welcomers

From greeting tourists to connecting neighbours –volunteers step up to help out

Waterfront Welcomers coordinates and trains local volunteers to greet and inform cruise ship passengers at Station Pier. Ordinarily, 50 volunteers contribute over 800 volunteer hours and greet over 12,000 visitors during the peak tourist season. Waterfront Welcomers has multiple benefits - it acts as a gateway to Port Phillip, provides volunteering opportunities for older residents to keep them active, connected and engaged, and it encourages visitors to spend time (and money) in Port Melbourne and surrounds, boosting our local economy and bringing tourists to our streets. In the 2019-20 financial year, the Waterfront Welcomers program operated from July 2019 until mid-March 2020.

In late March this year, in response to the early end of the cruise ship season, and observing the social impact of COVID-19 on local residents, SPCC developed a pilot program: Port Phillip Welcomers. This pilot program was an opportunity to assist the local community by retraining existing volunteers and reallocating community resources to provide practical and social support for older and isolated local residents who were feeling the impact of COVID-19. In the 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2020 period alone, SPCC managed two Port Phillip Welcomers programs that:

1. Retrained and supervised existing volunteers, keeping them up to date with community information, referral pathways and current COVID-19 information.
2. Provided a coordinated phone-based intake program, screened new referrals of older social isolated Port Phillip residents, and referred people to the appropriate resources.
3. Matched older isolated residents with existing volunteers who provided weekly social phone contact and practical support.
4. Supervised a pilot apartment/neighbours support program, which supports experienced volunteers who live in local apartment complexes to reach out to their neighbours and provide practical and social support as needed, in line with COVID-safe guidelines.
5. Coordinated with partner organisations and linked in with key stakeholders in various forums.

In the 12 weeks from April – June 2020, the Port Phillip Welcomers have provided much-needed support to isolated local people - friendly social contact, specific COVID-19 information, general information, practical advice and problem solving, and referrals via telephone/video. The program has engaged and coordinated 35 volunteers, supported 67 isolated residents, and provided an additional 536 volunteer hours and 620 participant contacts.

Port Phillip Welcomers – Stories of Change

Case Study 1 – Social Contact Improves Mental Health

‘Judith’ (not her real name) is an older woman living alone. She enjoys being involved in the community and is a volunteer for several local organisations. Due to her age and some pre-existing health issues, Judith had to self-isolate from her community during the COVID-19 pandemic. She stepped back from her volunteer work, which in ordinary times gave her a sense of purpose, achievement and the vast majority of her social connections. In the absence of these important things, Judith has struggled. She is a very active person, and prior to COVID-19 she enjoyed being out and about, bike riding and walking to maintain her physical and mental health. Not being able to exercise as usual led Judith to become anxious. A Port Phillip Welcomer volunteer worked with Judith during the pandemic, calling her regularly and helping her to manage her anxiety through regular conversations that explored her interests. She enjoys the history of Port Melbourne and has a lot of knowledge about the area, and was interested in talking about health, allergies and the COVID-19 situation. Judith was particularly concerned about the mass demonstrations and second ‘wave’ of COVID-19 in Victoria. Judith enjoys the twice weekly calls and finds them supportive and beneficial - they have made her feel connected to the community, which she was missing. She is now feeling more positive and less anxious about COVID-19. Port Phillip Welcomer volunteers have also assisted Judith to join a couple of online groups and a yoga/meditation class, keeping her connected to other people.

Case Study 2 - Living Alone Doesn’t Have to Mean Isolated

‘David’ is an older man who enjoys the outdoors and sport, but during COVID-19 is self-isolating due to health issues. He has never accessed mainstream welfare support and initially found it difficult to ask for help – he has no family living in Victoria to assist him, but didn’t feel comfortable approaching charities or ceding any independence. Port Phillip Welcomer volunteers worked with David to organise grocery deliveries through Coles and 13cabs, which he insisted on paying for himself. We organised for his medications to be delivered, and matched him with another male resident of similar age and interests. The two men now make weekly phone contact - they talk about sport and outdoor activities, and are looking forward to watching the footy together via Zoom.