



# THE VILLAGE PROJECT

SUMMER HILL CO-OPERATIVE LTD.

**Annual Report**  
**August 2021**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The Village Project acknowledges that the Traditional Custodians of this land are the Gadigal and Wangal peoples of the Eora nation.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge their continued connection to land, water and community. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded and it always was, and always will be, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land.



**Our mission is to provide  
a space where everyone  
in the community can  
gather together and  
participate in a fairer  
and more sustainable  
future, enabling local  
actions that will  
ultimately contribute  
to global change.**



# INTRODUCTION

The Village Project was created to empower communities to make positive everyday choices for themselves, others and the planet. Our initial planning revolved around a three storey warehouse located in Summer Hill which has stood vacant for 16 years.

For the past 2 years our team has been working towards transforming this warehouse into a green building, community hub and ethical business precinct. Our plans are to include retail, hospitality, offices, service providers, a theatre, event space, a classroom, gallery space, a recycling hub, a circular economy and more, all based on the idea of ethical consumerism.

After much planning, we launched the project in March 2020 to our local community, a week before Covid-19 became a serious crisis in Australia and we were plunged into lockdown. We were forced to take a step back, reevaluate our plans and decide if we could continue on.

The origin of the word 'crisis' means 'turning point'. It is the critical moment where a situation can either get better or worse, and a solution is needed quickly to help steer it towards a positive outcome.

We decided to continue on despite being in lockdown and it was, in fact, lockdown that revealed to us what our greatest needs were as smaller communities and a global family. Connection, compassion, sharing and kindness became the ties that bound us together, when we couldn't actually be together.

We came out of the first lockdown with a stronger mission, firmer in our conviction and with even deeper connections with our community. After lockdown eased we hosted community events, began planning with more certainty, established relationships with partners, began our DA process and continued to grow our dedicated team of volunteers.

Over the past two months Covid-19 has once again gripped Australia, and we are now in another, stricter lockdown. This has stopped us in our tracks - and given us pause and a moment to reflect on why we are creating The Village Project and how it can be possible in a Covid/post-Covid world? We are taking on a space that encourages and celebrates our coming together as a shared humanity and so the difficult question has to be asked: *what is the way forward when we don't know how long we will live in a world where our public spaces intermittently close down and we are unable to connect in person?*

Our good intentions of creating a space with ethical retail and food offerings, office space and workshop rooms for supporting community seem to be in vain if it's not shutdown proof - future proofed against times when we can't operate as normal.

How can we use our willingness, assets and resources to best contribute to the stability, safety, health and wellbeing of our community in the context of the current pandemic, the climate crisis and the increasing uncertainty and anxiety about the future?

What does a resilient community look like? How can we build a new solid local economy that can continue to operate and support the community under any crisis or circumstances? If we are going to invite retailers and businesses into the building, how can we ensure they can still function and earn a viable income when curveballs are thrown? How do we create a building, network and systems that are highly flexible and can rapidly adapt to a changing environment?

While we may not have all the answers to these questions yet, we do know that finding the answers to these questions will enable us to weave together a new story. Last year we made the statement, 'Forget about writing a new chapter in history. It's time to start a whole new book.' It is time to put that into action and have this second lockdown teach us how we can work together to create a story that will be a blueprint for a fairer and more sustainable world - whether we are in crisis mode or not.

Through meditation, reflection, conversation and pushing deep into the despondency and discomfort we have all been feeling recently, we have realised that there has been a missing link all along with our vision and mission:

Instead of working to transform a building, we need to shift our focus on transforming our entire suburb, with the building at the heart of it.

Instead of looking at the role of a co-operative in just a local context, we need to broaden our vision and understand what us being a co-operative means in a global context.

And, instead of doing business as usual and trying to work around the effects of neoliberalism and capitalism we need to work towards establishing a new economic pathway that benefits all and is based on solidarity, localism, democracy, resilience, thriving (as opposed to growth) and the overall co-op ethos.

By default, The Village Project became a pandemic baby. Instead of having this crisis stunt our growth or stop us from existing we have used it as a teacher and if anything, it has only proven why The Village Project is needed now more than ever.



Project Manager & Secretary



CO-CREATING A  
CONSCIOUS COMMUNITY

# TIMELINE



Early 2019: Shared our vision with the building owner



Late 2019: Began planning, researching & branding



March 2020: Held community open day at the building



Mid 2020: Formed a group of five Co-founders



Mid 2020: Engaged a consultant to help with co-op set up



June to Dec 2020: Opened up volunteer positions



June to Dec 2020: Wrote our Constitution & Ethos



Nov to Dec 2020: Met with local politicians at building

# TIMELINE



Dec 2020: Was mentioned in Parliament by local MP



Dec 2020: Became a registered co-op & NFP



Feb 2021: Launched our website



March 2021: Held mural painting event at the building



April 2021: Submitted our pre-DA & met with Council



April 2021: Co-hosted e-waste collection event



May 2021: Hosted Smoking Ceremony at the building



June 2021: Co-hosted textile & glass waste collection event

# KEY STAKEHOLDERS



## Co-founders & Board Directors

Three of the five Co-founders became Board Directors in December 2020. The remaining two Co-founders will also join the Board. The Co-founders & Directors have met on a monthly basis (sometimes more) & have led the process of setting up the co-op, forming a strategic plan & managing the daily operations such as project management, governance, finance & admin.



## Volunteer Team

We have a dedicated & highly experienced team of around 45 volunteers. Our volunteers offer their skills in design, marketing, admin, research, architecture, photography, IT, business management, strategic planning, sustainability, impact measurement & more.



## Community

Our local community have been highly supportive of the project. Community members have shared hundreds of ideas with our team, for what they would like to see in the building, and have attended the various events we have hosted. Over 1000 of them have become followers on our social media.



## Building Owner

The owner of the building, Joe Somma, has been an avid supporter of TVP since we first shared our vision with him in 2019. Joe has allowed us to use the building, at no cost, for our events, meets with us on a regular basis and has taken our plans and comments into consideration for his own planning.



## Partners

We have established several strong partnerships and are building more. Our partners include UNSW's SMaRT Centre who are working on sustainable building materials, UTS Shopfront who has provided us with over 80 students for pro bono work and Arnie's Recon. who we co-host e-waste events with.



## Local Government

We have formed strong connections with our local council and have had Cllr Mark Drury visit the building and meet our team. MP Jo Haylen has also been an advocate for us, has visited us, has spoken about TVP twice in Parliament and presented us with a framed Community Recognition Statement.

# FINANCES



## Co-founder Contributions

Our five Co-founders accepted the responsibilities of this role, which included making a financial contribution to TVP for start-up costs. Each Co-founder loaned TVP \$1,000 as an initial amount and some Co-founders gave second loans to help with further running costs.



## Donations

We have set up a donation plug-ins on our website, which allows people to contribute to various areas eg. Getting Started phase or Renovations phase. or to give regular amounts per month. We have also received donations at events we have held.



## Pro Bono Work

Due to us having a team of 50 people volunteering their skills and time, we have not had to pay wages, besides some small consulting fees. Since we began setting up TVP we have been given approx. 8,000 hours of pro bono work.



## Grants

We were successful in winning a small grant of \$400 to host a community event. We are one of the 30 shortlisted applicants in a grant for \$50k for building renovations. One of the Co-founders also applied for a personal grant for \$50k to pay her wages, and from 1850 applicants, is one of 250 shortlisted applicants. The final outcome will be announced shortly.



## Fundraising

In March 2020 we held a crowdfunding campaign where \$5,000 was pledged in the first 5 days. Unfortunately we went into lockdown the following week and cancelled the campaign, not receiving any funds. We held a fundraiser with a partner and raised 2,500 for TVP early 2020. We also started planning for a large fundraiser which is now on hold due to the second lockdown.



## Member Fees

Member fees have been minimal, as we only have 5 Members. Due to the second lockdown our plans to open the building and open membership at the beginning of 2022 have been delayed. We will open membership up in the next 2 months and fees will become an important source of revenue for us.

# NEXT STEPS



## Set Up Digital Platform

Since we are unable to open the building until mid to late 2022 we have decided to create a digital platform which will provide the community with a shared economy, events, resources, information, creative ways to connect with one another and other modes of support.



## Open Up Membership

Instead of waiting for the building to open we have decided to open up membership to individuals and businesses in our local community. Members will both provide and receive benefits from one another and TVP will facilitate and manage the platform on which Members interact.



## Finalise Strategic & Business Plans

We have been working on our strategic and business plan for the past 2 years, however due to Covid-19, this has been difficult. Now that we have a more certain idea of how to proceed in a world of uncertainty we are ready to finalise both plans and put them into action.



## Submit DA

While we have submitted our pre-DA and have met with council on several occasions about the DA, we were fortunate to have not submitted it before the lockdown. Our architects, designers and planners will continue to work alongside the building owner on the DA which we hope to submit early 2022.



## Raise Funds

It has been difficult to ask the public to contribute funds to the project due to many people facing economic difficulties as result of Covid-19. For this reason we have been waiting for the 'right' time to launch a large crowdfunding campaign. Instead of relying on donations and fundraising, we will begin to discuss other ways to create revenue eg. consulting or products.



## Release Expression Of Interest

We have been writing our EOI for the past year and plan to release it once lockdown is over and people are feeling generally more stable. The EOI will be released for both tenants and partners who will be part of a 3 month process of collaborative workshops and placemaking.



# A CELEBRATION OF OUR SHARED HUMANITY.

[www.thevillageproject.org.au](http://www.thevillageproject.org.au)

[info@thevillageproject.org.au](mailto:info@thevillageproject.org.au)