

A Contemplation On Unity



COMPASSIONATE
BALLARAT

creating a nurturing city

OUTCOMES FROM
AN INSPIRING DAY

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Ben Kelly - Chair Compassionate
Ballarat - Chief Operating Officer
Hospitals - Grampians Health

COMPASSION AND UNITY

Dr Lynne Reeder - Compassionate
Ballarat, Adjunct Research Fellow,
Federation University Australia

WELCOME TO COUNTRY

Jenna Oldaker - Murrup Art

CONTEXT

Dr Lynne Reeder - Compassionate
Ballarat, Adjunct Research Fellow, FedUni

SPEAKER PRESENTATIONS

CREATIVITY AND UNITY

Prof Rick Chew - Director, Arts Academy
Federation University Australia

RESPECT AND UNITY

Jacquie O'Brien - Director,
Communications and Community
Change, Respect Victoria

SOCIAL INDICATORS AND UNITY

Sean Duffy - CEO, Ballarat Community Health

CIVILITY AND UNITY

Ellen Jackson - Civility Exchange Lead; Chair,
Ballarat Foundation

LIVING AND DYING IN UNITY

Andrew Howard - CEO, Ballarat Hospice Care Inc

COMPASSIONATE WISHES

The Wish for Unity

ACTIONS FOR UNITY

Individual Actions
Community Led Actions
Social/Systems Wide Actions

A FINAL REFLECTION

Dr David Deutscher - Compassionate Ballarat,
Retired Surgeon

NEXT STEPS

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Contemplation poem
Appendix 2 - Handout
Appendix 3 - Organisations Represented
Appendix 4 - About Compassionate Ballarat



INTRODUCTION - BEN KELLY

Compassionate Ballarat (CB) is a member of the global Charter for Compassion. One of the Charter's signature programs is its work in cities. As with other city initiatives such as smart cities, creative cities, welcoming cities – compassionate cities bring a particular focus, in our case that of compassion by applying it at an individual, community and systems level, and by providing implementation tools and resources for local government and local organisations. The Ballarat City Council formally signed the global charter in 2019, and since then CB has been working with them on a variety of projects including on the Seeds of Compassion project. This event is another in a series of events that was created to respond to the wishes as outlined by the primary and secondary students for our city – a full list of their wishes is listed in the Seeds of Compassion report here:

<https://www.compassionateballarat.com.au/seeds-of-compassion-final-report>

COMPASSION AND UNITY - DR LYNNE REEDER

In our unsettled and uncertain world, one important question arises: why is it so difficult for us all to get on? The initial promise of a more collaborative global world has faltered, leaving us to deal with more fractured and tribal nation states.

Compassion science examines what motivates humans to care for one another. It gathers evidence of the incentives for compassion and its effect on our physiology, including the connections between human wellbeing and compassion training. Importantly, this new science conceptualises compassion as a motivation that, in evolutionary terms organised human attention, thoughts, feelings, and actions in very different and more constructive ways to that of negative human motivations such as revenge.

So, how does the motivation of compassion work? Professor Tania Singer, Director of the Social Neuroscience Lab, Max Planck Society in Germany, in describing the mechanisms of compassion training, observed that neuroscience is confirming that “compassion training work by supporting the upregulation of our systems of care and affiliation. In compassion, you accept the reality that is out there, but you activate the system that will

allow you to be resilient against the potential negative effect of empathic distress.” Perhaps one of the most important reasons that compassion is relevant today is that it addresses humanity’s tendency for indifference to human suffering.

Director of the Compassionate Mind Foundation UK, Professor Paul Gilbert has noted that future studies need to go beyond compassion as an individual support mechanism to systemically address the more harmful side of human nature. This world-leading psychologist challenges us all to modify our harmful behaviours with his observation that, “a motivation of compassion pushes us to understand how we have structured the world, and to ask, how can we structure it better, not because we may suffer, but because others are suffering.”

WELCOME TO COUNTRY - JENNA OLDAKER

Jenna Oldaker gave the Welcome to Country by reflecting that for Aboriginal people unity is deeply connected to their understanding of community, kinship, and responsibility to care for one another and for Country. It is about recognising that we are all interconnected – people, land, water, spirit, and future generations – and that true unity comes through listening, respect and shared responsibility. Indigenous perspectives on unity also remind us that diversity strengthens community.

For tens of thousands of years many different nations, languages, and cultural practices existed across this continent, yet there was still connection through trade, ceremony, storytelling, and mutual respect.

Jenna finished by saying that there is much we can learn from these ways of coming together while honouring difference rather than fearing it.



Image - Artwork by Jenna Oldaker

CONTEXT — DR LYNNE REEDER

This Unity event originated from the Seeds of Compassion project which asked young students across our city what their compassionate wishes were for Ballarat – and they told us they wished for: Inclusion, Acceptance, Belonging, Respect, Unity, Peace, Safeness, Protection, Compassion, Cohesion, Harmony, Equality, Thriving, Meaning and Potential. Forget the skate parks our young students went for the sky with their inspiring human wishes.

Over the last two years members of Compassionate Ballarat have been working to achieve these wishes. As just one example – to achieve the wish for feeling safe – CB contacted CEOs across Ballarat to identify the ways in which they embed psychological safety into their organisations. Those examples were then collected and shared to the participating organisations on the basis that if adults feel safe and supported in their workplaces, they are more likely to model that safeness behaviour within their homes. Today's contemplation event provided yet another opportunity to make these wishes come true. For the specific wish of Unity, the students hoped for community-wide acceptance of all where everyone is heard, acknowledged and valued. Not a small ask in today's fractured world.

SPEAKER PRESENTATIONS

It was hard not to be moved by the presentations at this event – every day we hear about the unlawful and dangerous things that are happening across our city – but in presenting on unity these speakers took the opportunity to inspire us all to take seriously our role in bringing belonging and harmony to all those living our city.

CREATIVITY AND UNITY

Prof Rick Chew – Director, Performing Arts Academy Federation University Australia.

Rick spoke about the importance of our creativity in connecting us to others and that rather than being 'nice' things to do – our creative responses ensure that love and kindness can often be the most creative things we can do. Through live performances, theatre, visual art workshops, music our stories can reflect our vibrancy and diversity.

He suggested that the creative arts engage with diverse practice to tell the story of our region for the benefit of the world, after all Australians have over 60,000 years of story-telling traditions to draw upon.

Rick also spoke about the importance of art in our connections with others across the generations noting that while children learn thorough play, adults consistently learn through art.

In reflecting on unity Rick spoke about two sunflower projects – one the international sunflower soldier and the other the local hidden sunflower disabilities network. The "sunflower soldier" phenomenon refers to a viral video from the start of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, where a fearless Ukrainian woman confronted heavily armed Russian soldiers in the city of Henichesk. She handed them sunflower seeds and told them to put the seeds in their pockets so that sunflowers would bloom on Ukrainian soil once they perished. Sunflowers are the national flower of Ukraine. Rick also mentioned the project the arts academy did in solidarity with Ukraine by projecting in lights the colours of their flag on the Post Office art Gallery.



In addition, he spoke about FedUni's strong support of disability inclusion, through its active partnering with the global Hidden Disabilities Sunflower network. The distinctive yellow and green sunflower discreetly signals to staff and peers that an individual may require additional time, patience, or understanding for their non-visible condition. The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower is a symbol of patience and support, offering a safe environment for all learners.



SOCIAL INDICATORS AND UNITY

Sean Duffy – CEO, Ballarat Community Health

Sean began by asking the question – what creates an inclusive and united community – concluding that we all have a shared responsibility to create wellbeing in ourselves and in our community through considering the social determinants of health which recognises that some people need more support than others.

Outlining its current challenges in supporting unity in amongst its patrons, Sean noted that the work of Ballarat Community Health operates in a rapidly changing and challenging health services environment, which features ongoing reforms of the community health platform, and policy modifications in aged care and in mental health.

Sean emphasised that collectively it is important for us all to acknowledge the challenge we have in addressing the social determinants of health, and in reducing demand on acute services, improving health workforce recruitment and retention, especially in General Practice. All these support networks will need to work more effectively together in developing a united community.

RESPECT AND UNITY

Jacquie O’Brien - Director, Communications and Community Change Respect Victoria

Respect Victoria is the dedicated organisation for the prevention of family violence and violence against women in Victoria.

Jacquie stated that its vision is a Victoria where everyone is safe, equal and respected. She also stated that the Respect project is committed to stopping violence from occurring in the first place, by changing the conditions that drive it. It does this by leading and supporting evidence-informed primary prevention across Victoria, and by acting as a catalyst for transformational social change.

Jacquie highlighted that its prevention work includes driving quality, sustained uptake of prevention work across the state; building knowledge and evidence about what works to prevent violence; about keeping prevention on the policy and public agenda; and supporting social change and educating the community that violence is preventable.



CIVILITY AND UNITY

Ellen Jackson – The Civility Exchange

Ellen opened her presentation by noting that ideas of unity and social inclusion can be often seen as abstract concepts - however she continued that if we flip that around to ask what helps people feel connected in Ballarat, then these concepts become much more accessible.

This shift in perspective is an important task at a time when communities across Australia are grappling with rising racism, tribalism, and distrust. We’re becoming more alienated and less able to bridge deepening social divides, and our social fabric is being challenged. Many institutions are caught between opposing forces or unsure how to respond, while citizens can act in ways institutions cannot, by building personal relationships across divides and creating momentum and space for structural responses.

Key to this is civility is our ability to engage constructively across fundamental differences in common cause. The first national Civility project is being rolled is the Ballarat Civility Exchange, which is being delivered in partnership with the Ballarat Foundation. Ballarat is an appropriate starting point for such work as Ballarat communities continue to grapple with complex social challenges while seeking new ways to strengthen civic life.

Ellen explained that the Civility Exchange brings together local leaders, community organisations, businesses and residents to explore how civility can be embedded in everyday interactions.

The Ballarat trial will include community dialogues,

workshops, small-scale community actions and the formation of a Civility Collective — a network of local leaders and connectors working to strengthen respectful dialogue in the region.

The aim is not simply to talk about civility but to experiment with practical ways of strengthening it. Over the past eighteen months the Civility Exchange has held many forums to bring together business, sporting and community groups together to share and grow what is already happening in Ballarat.



LIVING AND DYING AND UNITY

Andrew Howard – CEO Ballarat Hospice Care

Andrew affirmed that at the centre of a ‘good death’ is unity. A Unity of Purpose. A large team of family, friends and clinicians with the patient at the centre, all working with shared focus of Unity in supporting the patients for individual and deeply personal choices to enable a ‘good death. Unity of Purpose, grounded in Compassion.

When someone is at End of Life - dying - there is a convergence of differing roles, beliefs, histories, and emotions - fear, grief, love, regret, hope – all of this held in the same space. Yet despite the complexities and variations, something remarkable usually occurs: Unity of focus: the wellbeing, the choices and the individuality of the person who is dying. This unity is not accidental—it is our conscious practice, our Model of Care.

Andrew posed the question, what are the values that create unity at End of Life and noted they include:-

- Compassion – seeing and responding to suffering
- Care – practical, relational, and skilled
- Kindness – small acts with deep meaning
- Respect – for the person, their story, and their wishes
- Honesty – about what is happening and what matters
- Trust – built through presence and reliability
- Skill – professional and human.

Andrew emphasized that these are not abstract ideals; they are lived behaviours. In reflecting on the notion of the ‘Best Death Possible’, he said that ‘Best’ does not mean perfect or painless. A ‘Best Death’ is: Feeling known and seen, and not alone - Being heard and respected



- Having comfort and dignity - Having relationships held gently until the end - this outcome is only possible through unity.

Where else might this model of unity be applied? If we can do this at the end of life - why can't we do it elsewhere? - think of the challenges facing our broader community in areas such as: Social isolation- Mental health distress - Family breakdown - Disadvantage and inequality -Cultural misunderstanding - Public debate and conflict.

Andrew considers that unity is not something we declare, it's something we do. It requires: Slowing down – Presence - Courage to stay in difficult conversations. End of life care teaches us how to: Hold complexity - Stay human under pressure - Act with love even when outcomes are uncertain.

He affirmed that the implication of this understanding is to envision Ballarat as a community that knows how to gather around suffering or disadvantage. A place where compassion guides action, a city that learns from the dying how to live better together.

In closing, Andrew offered the following reflections: what would change if we considered more of life to be as precious as its ending? Where can we better apply and practise this kind of unity. How might compassion and unity shape our leadership, relationships, and communities?

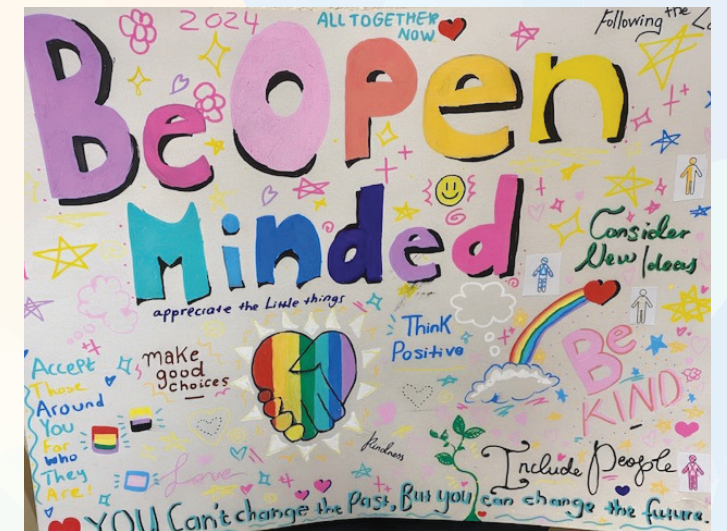
COMPASSIONATE WISHES - THE WISH FOR UNITY

The students' wishes for unity in our city expressed their desire for community-wide acceptance for all. Unity in community combines individual strengths, creating a stronger, supportive whole that fosters resilience, shared joy, and common purpose. It is the conscious choice to stand together, embracing diversity and building a better future through connection and mutual care.

Specifically, wishes work by clarifying what we would like to see in the world around us. Positive psychology helps us to understand how, where we put our attention can stimulate our brain to see new opportunities, As Ralph Waldo Emerson said – where your attention goes your energy flows.

The wishes around unity and togetherness as captured in our Seeds of Compassion project

- I wish that everyone was accepted into the community and felt welcomed
- I wish that bullying, cyber or otherwise, could be eliminated within our community, and we could all come together in unity.
- I wish that people can share opinions with respect and equal value.
- I wish that all the people in Ballarat could work together with social togetherness and peace.
- I wish that Ballarat would act more as a community and not as individuals fighting against each other.
- I wish for a safe community where people of different nationalities and sexualities can live together in harmony and peace.
- We wish that everybody feels safe and supported to be who they truly are.



COMPASSIONATE ACTIONS

The compassionate actions to grow unity in Ballarat as suggested by the attendees have been grouped under three main headings –: 1) Individual; 2) Community; 3) Society/Systems. These groupings assist in identifying the tangible opportunities for implementation.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

The individual actions ask us to take individual responsibility for the ways in which we connect with others, by identifying the ways in which we relate to those in our community as ‘us’ or ‘them’. They call on us to develop our capacity to allow for all opinions to be heard and to see our shared humanity in each other.

- Smile and look for the beauty in others – say ‘hello’ to people you walk past – be welcoming and open to others.
- For the residents of Ballarat forgive each other rather than reject each other. That they place the needs of others before their own wants.
- Greet people as you come across them. To be kind and help someone everyday – individually.
- Act with love and kindness regardless of circumstance in everything we do.
- Support our capacity to stay calm - when we are feeling upset and irritated – think about what you would say to your dear friend if they were in the same situation – then offer that advice to yourself.
- Instead of seeing a person as different, see them as someone whose tastes and experiences might overlap with yours in certain ways, for example while the person may be from a different cultural background, they may work in the same field, barrack for the same sporting team, or love the same music.



COMMUNITY LED ACTIONS

Achieving these actions will require us to work across our community to connect all the wonderful already happening - to improve support mechanisms – to ask for positive messages in our media and leading organisations.

- As a community and as individuals we can talk about positive things. Encourage the media to have more positive stories that show unity, acceptance, hope etc. Tell family and friends positive stories of unity.
- The Ba’hai junior youth program which open to all the community is a strong, vital and joyful program in which young people are engaged is their own critical thinking in making their own choices in life.
- Connect students with the community through public events which promote health and wellbeing in and through art, hospitality, love and kindness.
- Organise more interfaith gatherings as unity of religions/beliefs is an important factor in bringing about unity of mankind.
- That the children in the families where the parent (usually dad) is a suffering ‘returned/discharged/ veteran, receive support and understanding in schools. That all the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Veterans Suicide, particularly when it comes to families are not only adopted but supported.

- Find a way to establish a human library to promote more understanding and acceptance especially if the ‘library’ could be a mobile library and travel to schools.
- Education and safety calling out poor behaviour not only in lower socio-economic groups it’s also very prevalent elsewhere which leads us into the concept of role modelling. Display the children’s wishes in lights in a public space.
- Work together on collective actions and projects and events.



SOCIETAL/SYSTEMS LEVEL ACTIONS

These actions challenge us see and work from the big picture – to better connect our policy organisations - and to implement compassionate design

- Carry the sense of unity and compassion that is present at the end of life through every moment of life.
- Model caring masculine behaviours for our young people to observe.
- Together develop a 'Ballarat Belonging Charter' that could be adapted by schools, businesses, organisations, community groups that publicly commit them to inclusion and respect as a symbol and practical commitment that unites the city around shared values of kindness and community connections.
- Hidden disabilities initiatives such as Sunflower, be spread more widely across Ballarat. Manager, Family Violence (GH) if not already, to connect with Respect Victoria.
- Our family violence committee could reconsider its remit to encompass 'respect' and links to the work of the greater community.
- Connect the work of Respect Ballarat to the work of Compassionate Ballarat in unity.
- Connect Federation University students more with community events/groups. Work as a bridge to help them create that relationship.

- Name the structural problems and think of practical way to address them.
- To share knowledge, values and ideals. To collectively work towards a shared vision for unity in our community.
- Invest in universal design – the 7 principals of inclusion. So Physical spaces events, public spaces be accessible for all no matter their needs. As a person with a disability, it cost me \$40 in taxi fares to just attend today – a barrier caused by cost of living, lack of public transport (Lucas) and we need representations of diverse people in these impactful, change making rooms. We need platforms, microphones. We need real opportunities to story tell, to add our voices, to share our lived experiences to bring fresh perspectives and unique insights, Representatives of diverse voices is true inclusion. But we are often blocked by barriers beyond our control. As a disabled women I crave to be sat a changemaking tables, to advocate for my community, to represent the 16 / 100 people in Ballarat living with disability. I will always say 'yes' to being these rooms despite the barriers.

RESPECT VICTORIA

FINAL REFLECTION - DR DAVID DEUTSCHER

Our stories today have emphasised our common humanity and our need for compassionate interactions with each other. I am reminded of my nephew, a highly skilled plastic and reconstructive surgeon with the British army. His parents fled the communal violence in Sri Lanka, so he knows something of fear and being a refugee.

I was moved to tears on his recounting a story from a foreign battlefield. A story that combined great skill but was wrapped in compassion. My nephew was repairing and reconstructing the jaw of a young soldier, patriot, father and husband whose jaw has been blown off in the fighting at the same time teaching the local surgeons these consummate, life changing skills. Part of the procedure required taking skin and tissue from the soldier's forearm.

About to embark on this, my nephew noticed a sentence tattooed on the soldier's forearm where the incision was to be made. He enquired as to the meaning and was told it was an expression of love and affection from this young soldier to his little daughter.

So, instead of making the incision through the tattoo, my nephew incised around this phrase of love, respecting a soldier-father's words of endearment. My nephew too is a father, soldier, surgeon and husband.

With moist eyes I still contemplate this incredible story of immense skill, clothed in deep compassion, restoring a semblance of humanity in such dehumanising theatre of war. Action that not only recognised the humanity of this young soldier, patriot, husband and father, but affirmed this stance in front of other battle-hardened care givers. One small step to restoration and peace and the common good.

May we be inspired to do likewise.

NEXT STEPS

In contributing to the work of growing unity across our city, Compassionate Ballarat acknowledges the wonderful work already occurring that seeks to unite us, including from all the organisations that were represented at this event, and from those in our neighbourhood houses, the community outreach in all welfare organisations, our creative endeavours through the art gallery and Creative Ballarat, the sporting and communal activities occurring in our schools, the work of organisations assisting our multicultural community, the Indigenous events such as NAIDOC week, Ballarat City Council events such as Harmony week, among many others.

The unique contribution from Compassionate Ballarat to unity is that our approach is compassion-focused and youth-led.

A compassion focus is important because as Dr Sue Carter notes-: when we practice compassion for ourselves and others... it creates a sense of safeness within us that allows us to manage our fears so that we can be more inclusive of others.

A youth-led focus is important because, as one of the young students' wishes stated: 'I wish for children to be understood and to be taken seriously'. This contemplation on unity event took seriously the wishes of its young people, and Compassionate Ballarat is committed to delivering on the actions as offered by those attending this event.

Compassionate Ballarat will continue to work with the Ballarat Council and all organisations represented at this event to embed these individual, community and systemic actions to ensure that the students' wishes for improved levels of unity in Ballarat 'come true'.

In addition, we will share this report through the Charter for Compassion networks at a national and global level and will also invite the local participating organisations to support the relevant outcomes for their organisations.

APPENDIX 1

CONTEMPLATION - GEMMA KELLY

This event was entitled a Contemplation on Unity - so following the speaker presentations everyone in the room was invited to take a moment, while this beautiful poem was read.

A poem by Peggy Green-Ernst - If just for a moment:

If just for a moment,
brothers and sisters are we.
If just for a moment, family all are we.
And let Spirit within shine brightly our light
To instil in each day our love to new heights.

Our mission would unfold
with greatness achieved,
As we send out much joy and
our love was received.

We would open doors wide
and welcome in
Those who seem different
but are the same within.

If just for a moment,
I could walk in your shoes
And you could walk in mine,
we could see the truth.

As our compassion and love
would increase with each day,
Our interactions would manifest
in more meaningful ways.

If just for a moment, we are one harmony.
If just for a moment, we are one song.
If just for a moment, we are one people.
If just for a moment in time.

Peggy Green-Ernst is an author, national public policy analyst, and coalition builder. She has served in leadership positions such as a former State of Texas Commissioner and Executive Director. She continues to build coalitions, and to offer compassionate solutions for public policy, <https://www.unity.org/en/article/if-just-moment-tim>.

APPENDIX 2

Handout to the invited guests

This flyer was handed at the end of the event and very kindly the attendees filled it out.

A CONTEMPLATION ON UNITY

Making the wishes - around unity and togetherness as captured in our Seeds of Compassion project - 'come true'.

- I wish that everyone was accepted into the community and felt welcomed
- I wish that bullying could be eliminated within our community, and we could all come together in unity.
- I wish that people can share opinions with respect and equal value.
- I wish that all the people in Ballarat could work together with social togetherness and peace.
- I wish that Ballarat would act more as a community and not as individuals fighting against each other.

Based on what you have heard today and on the student's wishes - what is the one thing Ballarat or its residents could do to further promote higher levels of unity across our city?

Please write your name and your one suggested action here:

[illegible]

APPENDIX 3

ORGANISATIONS

Arts Academy, Federation University Australia	Prof Richard Chew
Ballarat Bahá’í Community Centre	Anne Goodfellow
Ballarat Cemetery Trust	Annie DeJong
Ballarat Community Health	Sean Duffy
Ballarat Foundation	Ellen Jackson
Ballarat Hospice Care	Andrew Howard
Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council	Suzanne Ryan-Evers/Sundram Sivamalai
Ballarat Interfaith Network	Elham Jamali
Ballarat Legacy	Allan Mckinnon
Compassionate Ballarat	Steering group members
The Civility Initiative	Ellen Jackson
Ebenezer Presbyterian Church	Toby McIntosh
Friends of India	Sami Sentedar
Grampians Health - Nursing/Midwifery	Danielle Beardmore
HB Accessibility	Heidi Biggin
International Retention & Student Experience, Federation University Australia	Dr Shipra Raushik
Let’s Talk Peace Ballarat	Madonna Quixley
Murrup Art	Jenna Oldaker
General Manager Hospitals, Grampians Health	Patriece Shelly
Respect Victoria	Jacquie O’Brien
Respect Ballarat	Emma Mahony
Rural Australians for Refugees, Ballarat	Margaret O’Donnell
Sikh Community Ballarat	Simran Singh
St John of God Hospital	Maureen Waddington
St Peters Anglican Church	Rev Michael O’Brien
Compassionate Ballarat Support	Molly Kelly
Student Partnerships and Engagement, Federation University Australia	Max Ryan

Representatives from many other invited organisations who could not attend on the day, have requested to be informed of the outcomes. These organisations include-: Ballarat Grammar, Child and Family Services, Committee for Ballarat, Victoria Police, Food is Free Laneway, Women’s Health Grampians, Uniting Care, Gender and Disaster Australia.

APPENDIX 4

ABOUT COMPASSIONATE BALLARAT

Compassionate Ballarat is a member of the global Charter for Compassion. The Charter for Compassion is both a document and a worldwide movement designed to restore compassionate thinking and action to the centre of our lives.

The Compassionate Ballarat Steering Group works with other compassionate cities across the world to share information and resources for all those in Ballarat wanting to create a more nurturing and compassionate city.

As a fully volunteer organisation we encourage compassionate decision-making and actions in our city. We provide forums for discussion, promote compassionate actions by residents, publicise the wide range of support services available in the city to assist people in need, and produce timely publications to help people cope with crises. In short, we try to get people talking and acting from a viewpoint informed by compassion.

MEMBERS OF COMPASSIONATE BALLARAT STEERING GROUP

- Ben Kelly (Chair)
- Mary Darcy
- Annie DeJong
- David Deutscher
- Mary Hollick
- Gemma Kelly
- Madonna Quixley
- Lynne Reeder



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