



# Improving Health Equity for Young People? The Role for Social Enterprise

## GREEN CONNECT case study

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### **About this Report**

This is one of four case study reports prepared as part of the Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage project: *Improving Health Equity for Young People? The Role of Social Enterprise (LP160101793)*. Green Connect Illawarra (Green Connect) is a social enterprise based in the southern region of Wollongong, NSW and is a participating case organisation in the wider research. This report draws on data collected between March and July 2019, and therefore should be understood as providing a ‘snapshot’ in time.

### **Research Team**

The research project is being delivered by the Centre for Social Impact Swinburne and the Centre for Social Impact UNSW under the leadership of Professor Jo Barraket. Data collection for this case study and authorship of this report was led by Dr Joanne McNeill. The full research team also includes Professor Jane Farmer, Associate Professor Gemma Carey, Dr Andrew Joyce, Associate Professor Chris Mason, Dr Roksolana Suchowerska, Dr Perri Campbell, and Ms Batool Moussa.

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### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This case study is one output generated through a three-year research project funded by the Australian Research Council through its Linkage Scheme (LP160101793). The research team also acknowledges its industry partners - VicHealth, Social Traders and Foundation for Young Australians - for funding support and expert input into the study.

The research team acknowledges the invaluable contribution of Green Connect – its staff, participants and external stakeholders – who contributed to this case study report.

The research project involves four social enterprises: two in NSW and two in Victoria. The team gratefully acknowledges the involvement of participants from all four case studies. Together, the four case studies will inform a cross-case analysis that will present the broader, thematic findings of the study as a whole.

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study report examines the role of social enterprise, Green Connect, in producing health equity and wellbeing outcomes for young people and their communities. Forming part of a wider comparative case study project, the research focuses particularly on the organisational context and features of Green Connect that produce these outcomes, with a particular emphasis on whether and how Green Connect fosters the social conditions – referred to as the social determinants of health – through which health equities are realised. The case study involved interviews with key informants, participant observation at Green Connect, and secondary analysis of organisational and media materials.

The research finds that Green Connect supports the social determinants of health equity by: engaging and empowering young people, with a focus on helping them build their confidence, self-efficacy and relationships, as well as their financial independence; improving employability of young people by providing personalised support, personal development and training opportunities in diverse work settings, and supported transitions into other work and educational opportunities. In meeting the needs of its participants, Green Connect also attends to the context-specific social determinants of health equity – for example, transport access – that are particularly problematic in their region. The findings further suggest that Green Connect influences the conditions for community-level economic and social wellbeing through its business activities – which stimulate local spending and provide locally needed services – and its contributions to developing the region’s workforce.

*Contextually*, Green Connect’s origins in employment-focused development, its recent merger with a larger community development organisation, and its purposeful focus on the needs and opportunities arising from its location in the Illawarra region of NSW inform how it produces health equity outcomes among young people and their communities. *Structurally*, Green Connect’s purposeful design of wrap-around support, inter-related commercial streams, network building, and flexibility and tailoring inform how the organisation both produces

outcomes and creates or responds to opportunities to deepen its impacts. *Culturally*, the features of Green Connect that enable its approach to supporting the improvement of health equities can be characterised as: a strengths-based approach to people and place; no cookie-cutter responses; a focus on supportive transitions both within and beyond the boundaries of Green Connect; and genuine engagement with participants, partners and communities. The study also identifies specific challenges for Green Connect arising from its organisational context, structure and culture.

“I just think it’ll go from strength to strength. I honestly do. I think it’s the best contact we have without a doubt. You talk about Bunnings, Coles, which are all great, because it’s a big brand to have on your resume. But the hands-on work they’re doing, the experiences that they’re getting at Green Connect, we haven’t got anything like it. . . we’ll keep taking the kids there. And I think we’ll always have kids to take there, there’s just so many learning skills out there that we can’t teach in the classroom.”

*Green Connect Partner*

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### 1.0 BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 About the Study

The wellbeing of young people is critical to Australia’s productivity and success. The social determinants of health (SDoH) are the structural conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.<sup>1</sup> The SDoH include education, employment, income, housing and social networks. Health inequities stem from imbalances in the availability and accessibility of these determinants and are known to affect wellbeing.

Many social enterprises are established to support the social and economic participation of young people (in this study, aged 16-25) around Australia, but to date there is limited evidence that shows *how* they create wellbeing outcomes. Social enterprises are organisations that are led by an economic, social, cultural, and/or environmental mission consistent with a public or community benefit; derive some substantial portion of their income from trade; and reinvest the majority of their profit/surplus in the fulfilment of their mission (Barraket et al. 2010).<sup>2</sup>

In its ‘Fair Foundations’ document (Figure 1), VicHealth identifies seven strategies through which the fairness of social conditions can be improved. Amongst these, social innovation and initiatives designed around specific ‘healthy settings’ contexts are identified as central to promoting health equity. Social enterprises often employ both these strategies in day-to-day operations. They engage in social innovation by developing new programs, new types of workplaces, and designing other bespoke initiatives with the aim of formulating novel solutions to address persistent social problems. Social enterprises create healthy settings by targeting specific geographic or organisational factors with the aim of making them fairer and more equal.

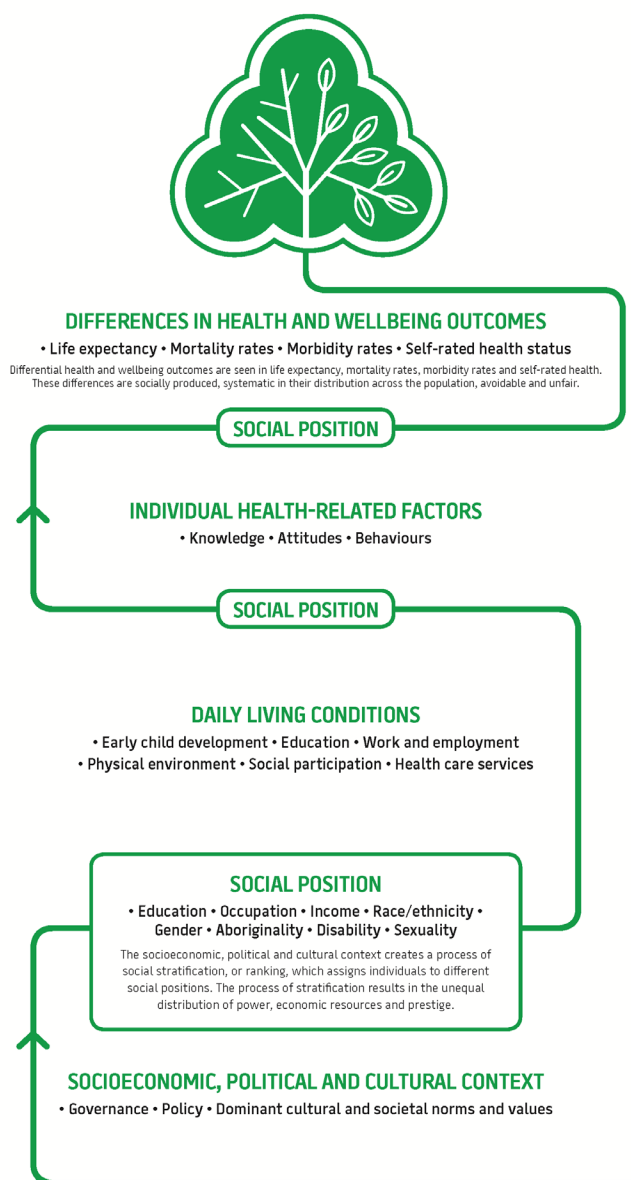


Figure 1. Fair Foundations: The VicHealth framework for health equity

<sup>1</sup>World Health Organisation (n.d.) “Social determinants of health”. Available at: [https://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/en/](https://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/) (accessed 28/11/2019).

<sup>2</sup> Barraket, J., Collyer, N., O’Connor, M. & Anderson, H. (2010). *Finding Australia’s Social Enterprise Sector: Final Report*. Melbourne: Social Traders.

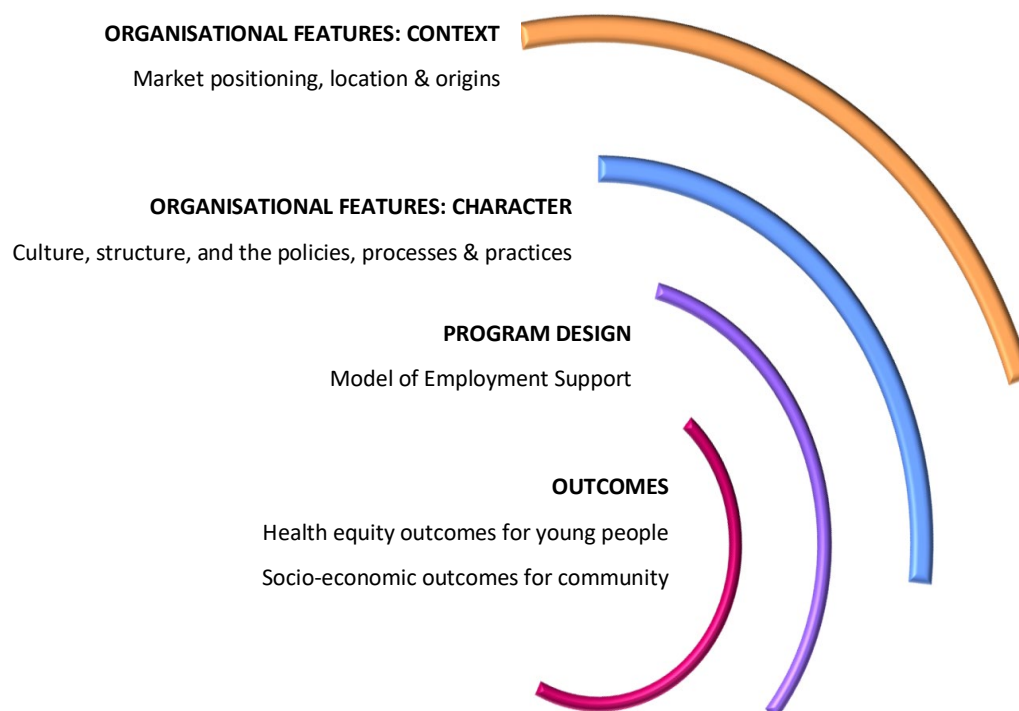
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### 1.2 About the Research Design

To improve understanding around these issues and opportunities, four social enterprises are contributing to addressing the following research questions:

1. Do social enterprises affect the outcomes of social determinants of health for young people? If yes, how?
2. How do organisational features, such as market positioning and governance structure, affect the impacts of social enterprise on social determinants of health for young people?
3. How do institutional factors, such as industry structures and public policy frameworks, inform the effectiveness of social enterprises concerned with improving social and economic participation of disadvantaged young people?

The research questions recognise social enterprises as complex organisations with diverse stakeholder relationships. As a result, they acknowledge the role of and seek to explore the effect of various organisational features. Some of these organisational features - such as the geographic location, market positioning, and origins – position the organisation within particular communities. Other organisational features – such as culture, structure, and the policies, processes, and practices - characterise the ‘personality’ of the organisation. These two sets of organisational features strongly influence the design of specific programs. **Figure 2** shows the nested relationship between these features.



*Figure 2. Nested relationships between organisational features and outcomes*

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Taken together and considering the inter-relationships, these organisational features provide a framework for understanding how social enterprises are helping to improve the health equity outcomes of young people. As with any social enterprise, each element is constantly shifting and program improvements are often made on an ongoing basis. This report should therefore be read as a snapshot at a point-in-time. The case study reports developed at this stage of the project respond to **Research Questions one and two**. The **third Research Question** is being investigated through a cross-case analysis, to be completed in the next stage of the study. This will add another layer to the findings, generating insights from across the four enterprises – and aiming to assist policy makers interested in providing targeted support, and social enterprises to improve their strategic positionings.

### 1.2.1 Data collection

Data for this case study were collected between March and July 2019 using ethnographic methods. Specific inputs included: 21 semi-structured interviews, 26 hours of observation at enterprise sites, a management team workshop, and analysis of internal and external documents. In keeping with the participatory approach adopted for the project, the study has involved a range of stakeholders including: the young people participating in the programs; staff; community organisation partners; customers; funders; and others identified by the enterprise as being important to their work. More information about the research design is provided in **Appendix A**.



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### 1.3 About Green Connect

Green Connect is one of the four social enterprises participating in the study. It was established in 2011 and is based in the Illawarra region of NSW, with its head office in Port Kembla. Its organisational aims are to:

- reduce waste to landfill;
- grow and distribute fair food;
- create good jobs and employment pathways, particularly for former refugees and young people;
- connect and engage its communities; and
- be a sustainable business.

To achieve these aims, it delivers four interrelated streams of commercial activity:

- Permaculture Farm – selling fair food via a weekly box for households and individuals, and a subscriber service for commercial customers.
- Zero Waste services – waste consultancy, and an events waste management service.
- Op Shop – retail and wholesale sales.
- Staffing Solutions – short-term labour hire, and a recruitment service for longer term positions.

In the 2019 financial year, Green Connect employed 122 young people and former refugees, and 16 people on permanent or fixed term contracts; transitioned 21 people to mainstream employment; kept 119 tonnes of waste out of landfill; composted 59 tonnes of waste; and grew and distributed 35 166 kilograms of local, chemical-free food.<sup>3</sup> It covered 79 per cent of its expenses with income generated through its trading activities.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Community Resources (2019) *2019 Annual Report: Creating jobs that make communities better*. Tuncurry, NSW: Author. Available at: [http://resourcerecovery.org.au/CR\\_2019\\_Annual\\_Report\\_HR-optimized-for-mobile.pdf](http://resourcerecovery.org.au/CR_2019_Annual_Report_HR-optimized-for-mobile.pdf) (accessed 28/11/2019).

<sup>4</sup> Green Connect (2019) *Green Connect Business Plan 2019*. Wollongong: Author.

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### 2.0 ORGANISATIONAL FEATURES

As shown in **Figure 2** above, there are two dimensions to the key organisational features considered in this research. Contextual features include the market positioning, geographic location and origins of the enterprise. Characteristic features include the culture, structure, and the policies, processes, and practices of the enterprise.

#### 2.1 Contextual Features

##### 2.1.1 Origins

Green Connect was established in 2011 by local community organisation SCARF, as a project that had received funding to pilot a resource recovery social enterprise working at events that would create employment opportunities for former refugees. In 2013, it moved under the umbrella of Our Community Project and entered a consolidation phase for the resource recovery business and added labour hire services. In 2014, Green Connect took over the Urban Grown farm, which was about to close as its funding came to an end. This marked the launch of the third business, fair food, and the incorporation of young people as the second target cohort. In 2018, a new office in the main street of Port Kembla was established to accommodate the larger operations.

To support its growth and development plans, during 2018 Green Connect merged with Community Resources. Community Resources was established in 1987 and is a national not-for-profit community development organisation. It exists to create jobs that make communities better. Its family of social enterprises currently include: four environmental repair social enterprises (Green Connect, Soft Landing, Resource Recovery Australia, and Helping Hands); and a community services arm, which includes Homebase Youth & Aboriginal services, Great Lakes & Manning Youth Homelessness Services, and WasteAid Australia. Community Resources also facilitates and supports a number of local community initiatives in the Great Lakes NSW region, where its head office is located. The parties agree that it was a 'perfect match' for the two organisations to come together - sharing resources, learning from each other, and supporting further growth in social impact. Following the merger, in April 2019 Green Connect took over management of the Op Shop in Bellambi.

As with many social enterprises, the trajectory of establishment, consolidation and growth has not been a linear pathway but rather has responded to opportunities and challenges as they arise. In Green Connect's case, a number of these stem from factors arising from Green Connect's geographic location and its orientation to markets, which are discussed in the sections below.

##### 2.1.2 Geographic location features

Historically, the Illawarra region has relied heavily on mining and manufacturing for employment opportunities, particularly coal and steel. However, the region has had one of the highest unemployment rates in Australia for over 20 years and its traditional industries continue to shed jobs today. Local jobs are in short supply and, as a result, those who are working are often travelling out of the region and so can be subject to extended journey-to-work times, with associated health and wellbeing impacts. Among those not in work, refugees and young people have the highest rates of unemployment in the region (Partner).

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The suburban areas within the region where Green Connect operates are particularly disadvantaged. Warrawong, where the Farm is located, has the highest level of disadvantage in the Illawarra, at the second percentile on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index; and Bellambi, where the Op Shop is located, and Port Kembla, where the head office is located, are in the lowest 10 per cent of socioeconomic areas in Australia.<sup>5</sup> For young people, the unemployment rate is double that of the general population in the region. One of Green Connect's partners noted that, as a result of locational disadvantage factors such as generational unemployment, many of the local high school kids just don't have the knowledge to even think about what work opportunities could possibly be available, and so what skills and experience it would be useful for them to focus on developing (Partner).

“... whose problem is youth unemployment? It's not necessarily just the governments', not just the community. And let's stop blaming the young person. It's not the young person's fault that... they've grown up in an area that's got really high youth unemployment and not many jobs.”

*Customer*

Data at the Australian level shows that, for refugees, only 23 per cent have a job two-and-a-half years after resettlement.<sup>6</sup> A local specialist service provider observed that finding work is 'a big part of leading a dignified and fulfilling life in a new country', so as to be a role model and to support your family, and that this is perhaps the biggest challenge refugees face. She suggested Green Connect's approach provides an important starting point and stepping stone for addressing this in the local area, and that the enterprise also contributes to improving local social connectedness in the region by bringing young people and refugees into contact through its work and training programs (Partner).

With its high levels of locational disadvantage, access to 'fair food' is also a significant issue in the region. Food Fairness Illawarra reports that "Approximately 21,600 people are food insecure in the Illawarra, meaning they don't have access to sufficient, fresh, nutritious, safe and sustainable food (NSW Health 2015). Food insecurity can cause health effects such as childhood developmental delays, poor physical and mental health and social isolation".<sup>7</sup> A Green Connect partner articulated the complexity of this issue - involving availability of food, access to food, and effective utilisation of food. She noted this means food fairness is an issue that can only be tackled through collaborative approaches. Green Connect is one of the biggest local growers of chemical-free products, and as such is a key player in how the region can improve its capacities around this social determinant of health (Partner).

“If a family's sort of struggling week to week, we can offer food drop-offs... a lot of them are reluctant to ask... [but] if a kid's hungry he or she's not going to come to school and fulfil their potential or participate in what we're offering.”

*Partner*

### 2.1.3 Market positioning features

In a region with high unemployment and with large numbers of young people and refugees lacking even entry-level employability skills, the team identified there was a need for an approach that offered developmental pathways for participants. With few existing jobs in the local area, they were also going to need to create new work so as to offer these opportunities.

The origins and geographic factors outlined above have played a key role in shaping Green Connect's market positioning. Enterprise viability is dependent on offering a product and/or service that responds to a market

<sup>5</sup> Id Community. (2019). "Wollongong City SEIFA by profile area". Available at: <https://profile.id.com.au/wollongong/seifa-disadvantage-small-area> (accessed 28 May 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Rioseco, P. and De Maio, J. (2017) "Three charts on: job prospects for refugees in Australia". The Conversation. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/three-charts-on-job-prospects-for-refugees-in-australia-83724> (accessed 28/11/2019).

<sup>7</sup> Food Fairness Illawarra (n.d.) "About Us". Available at: <http://foodfairnessillawarra.org.au/about-us/> (accessed 28/11/2019).

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need or opportunity. In regional areas, ‘responsiveness’ is important as it can be serendipitous opportunities that create the opening for establishing a particular market offering. For example, Green Connect’s Staffing Solutions (labour hire) service was originally established after a brief conversation at a Wollongong business networking event between the previous CEO and the CEO of a national firm that has a locally operating waste services arm. He mentioned they had a lot of difficulty accessing casual staff for litter picking work on their sites. Much persistent follow-up eventually resulted in a trial placement. The relationship has now been established for over six years, and the firm is one of Green Connect’s largest and most consistent customers. Importantly, the connection has also survived staff changes in the customer’s team (GC team).

Green Connect is now a complex enterprise that includes four commercial activity streams, two social impact target cohorts, and environmental goals relating to waste reduction and local fair food production. It is the interlocking nature of all these activities that makes Green Connect’s model unique.

As identified by a Partner organisation, this is evident in the markets chosen as the focus for commercial activities – where the fair food and waste reduction objectives are complementary. The combination of the four streams also allows Green Connect to create a range of real job opportunities in a supportive environment, where young people and former refugees can develop confidence, purpose and skills. The streams are outlined below.

**Zero Waste Services** incorporates waste consultancy and waste services for events. It is the current iteration of the original trading activity. Today it provides these services to Councils, event organisers, and a number of other medium-large organisations in the local area. It is responding to market trends that include: projected growth of 2.4 per cent in the \$2.6 billion Australian waste treatment and disposal industry over the next five years;<sup>8</sup> rising costs associated with sending waste to landfill (including at the local level) increasing the attractiveness of recycling; and the introduction of a NSW government target to increase waste diverted from landfill to 75 per cent.<sup>9</sup> However, recent changes to the NSW government’s requirements for large outdoor events and festivals are also affecting activity and the potential for longer-term effects are being closely monitored (GC team).

**Labour Hire & Recruitment Services** was the second commercial activity developed by Green Connect, with the aim of providing a stepping-stone into work beyond its own waste services enterprise. Labour hire is a growing industry nationally and Green Connect has developed a specialised niche, working with medium to large organisations that have an interest in the social outcomes generated and that have connections to the local area across horticulture, agriculture, cleaning, waste management, construction, event assistance, and general labour roles. Green Connect has developed a reputation for providing reliable and highly productive staff (Customer). This stepping-stone on the employment pathway was described as a ‘quasi employer-employee’ relationship (Customer), where each staff member continues to be supported by Green Connect whilst taking on more responsibility and initiative in the role.

The **Green Connect Farm** uses permaculture and organic principles to produce fruit, vegetables, herbs, eggs, honey and, recently, free-range meat. Demand for organic produce is growing across Australia and globally, but much of it is expensive and involves high food-miles. The Farm offers a weekly box for households and individuals, and a subscriber service for commercial customers. Many people pick their boxes up from the site, and

“... people understand the farm ... they think that’s what Green Connect is.”

GC team

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<sup>8</sup> IBISWorld Industry (2019) “Report D2921: Waste Treatment and Disposal Services in Australia”. Available at: <http://clients1.ibisworld.com.au/reports/au/industry/default.aspx?entid=5024> (accessed 28/11/2019).

<sup>9</sup> NSW Environmental Protection Agency (2014) *2014-21 NSW Waste avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy*. State of NSW and Environment Protection Authority: Sydney. Available at: <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/recycling-and-reuse/warr-strategy> (accessed 1 April 2019).

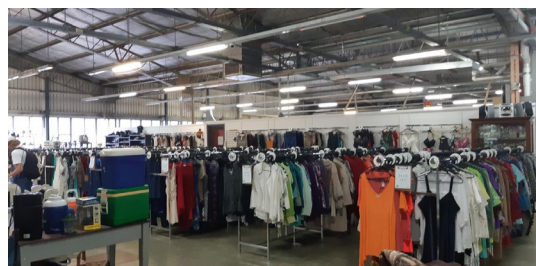
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the team also runs regular and popular tours and community activities, making the Farm a highly visible and recognised part of the enterprise. For many of the program participants it also offers opportunities to start their journey towards developing entry-level employability skills in a calm, safe, and welcoming space free from customers, technology and other distractions.

**The Op-Shop** is the newest trading activity, moved under the Green Connect umbrella as part of the merger with Community Resources. It is located in Bellambi, in the Illawarra region, and has a waste reduction focus so it was a natural fit for Green Connect (GC team). Goods re-use is a growing trend and the team is pursuing a strategy that centres around an attractive, appealing store experience and quality goods. The addition of the Op Shop is broadening out the types of work and work experience Green Connect can offer to its program participants, and there are ideas developing to expand the Op Shop operations to other locations in the region.

Green Connect's focus on waste reduction services and fair food production as its commercial activity streams are enabling it to create new local employment opportunities. Through specialising in these niches, it is tackling local unemployment and local sustainability issues at the same time by creating jobs and employment pathways into industries that contribute to improving environmental impacts.



### 2.2 Organisational Features: Character

An organisation's structure is how its functions and people are arranged to implement the organisation's mission and strategy. Green Connect's structure is characterised through the following features:

- Wrap-around support
- Inter-related commercial streams
- Network building
- Flexibility and tailoring

An organisation's culture is the collection of stated rules and rules-in-use, values, and principles that are enduring and guide how people engage in their work and with each other.<sup>10</sup> Culture also often has its roots in organisational history, including the values and customs of the founder/s. Green Connect's culture is characterised through the following principles and features:

- Above-and-beyond
- Hands-on, fair, and meaningful learning options
- Product and service quality
- Come as you are

<sup>10</sup> Ostrom, E. (2011) 'Background on the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework', *The Policy Studies Journal*, 39(1), pp. 7-27.

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An organisation's policies, processes, and practices facilitate its work – they include mechanisms through which information is managed and shared, staff are recognised and rewarded, resources are allocated, and goals are articulated. Green Connect's policies, processes, and practices are characterised through the following features:

- Coaching style, constant feedback
- Bespoke Model of Employment Support
- Persistence and responsiveness
- Holistic orientation

“they are genuinely . . . it’s just Green Connect, it’s just who they are. It’s a real passion about building community. And . . . the social enterprise element gives that passion sustainability.”

*Partner*

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### 3.0 ORGANISATIONAL CHARACTER AND SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

In this Section organisational features that strongly influence Green Connect’s character as a social enterprise – its structure, culture, and the policies, processes, and practices – are discussed in more detail. The social outcomes Green Connect seeks to generate with its program participants, partners, customers and other stakeholders are to increase confidence and sense of purpose, employability, financial independence, and wellbeing amongst the two cohorts that are its focus. The majority of Green Connect’s program participants face complex and multiple barriers to these social determinants of health (SDoH), and therefore improving access to and engagement with each has been identified by Green Connect as central to improving conditions in its region and amongst its cohorts.

“We have a well-being group . . . where we highlight all the issues that our kids face . . . and I think there’s 38 parts to it . . . [with] . . . Green Connect we cover 25 of them, which is massive.”

*Partner*

To achieve these outcomes, Green Connect’s participants are involved in a combination of training, employment, personalised wrap-around support services, and connection to community. The outputs that act as stepping-stones in making these outcomes possible are the provision of wages, skills, and work experience. Together, these establish a foundation designed to enable participants’ individual journeys towards stable employment that fits their interests and skills.

The organisational characteristics that support each of the social outcome goals are discussed below, and specific program features and innovations that contribute are identified. Social enterprise development is an iterative process, and the discussion below reflects ongoing engagement with the broader contextual organisational features outlined in Section 2. Overall, the features of Green Connect’s **organisational character** that enable its unique approach to supporting the improvement of health equity with its program participants can be characterised as:

- Strengths-based, always
- No cookie-cutters
- Supportive transitions
- Genuine engagement

#### 3.1 Confidence and Sense of Purpose – ‘strengths-based, always’

Central to Green Connect’s approach to improving health equity is building confidence and a sense of purpose. This goal underpins the others, as it is seen as fundamental to improving employability, financial independence, and wellbeing. Key organisational characteristics identified as supporting this outcome goal are: a structured wrap-around support program, coupled with a culture of ‘above-and-beyond’ support provision; and a coaching style to giving constant feedback and positive reinforcement. Drawing these together, the characteristic feature of Green Connect’s approach to increasing confidence and sense of purpose is described as ‘**strengths-based, always**’.

Many of the young people participants are in difficult situations at home – where there may be issues like trauma, violence, and risk of homelessness, and also aren’t doing well at school due to learning difficulties or mental health issues.

“Normalising it really, so . . . some of the young people who might be coming from traditionally a lower socio-economic background, intergenerational unemployment - for them to see other role models that might have similar conditions [and] barriers . . . [They’re] a little bit further along and still okay.”

*GC team*

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As a result, most “haven’t had a lot of instances in their life, certainly that they can recall, where someone has told them they’re great at something” (GC team).

Green Connect provides a highly **structured wrap-around support program**. This is primarily through its Model of Employment Support, the elements of which are discussed in detail below in relation to employability outcomes. The model is also generating specific outcomes relating to the building-block of confidence and sense of purpose.

This **Confidence building** is evident across different types of participant, and around the different kinds of roles Green Connect is able to offer. One young person

“... in terms of the skills, I’ve definitely found that I’ve become more assertive... All the liaising that you need to do. Also leadership, not just of other people, but of yourself. Self-leadership is definitely a real thing. It’s all part of the motivation, the initiative. And on top of leadership, it’s teamwork skills and communication skills.

*Program Participant*

described how it was the confidence she gained helping with administrative tasks at the Green Connect head office, beyond just the specific skills, that helped her secure a temporary role at the local university as a data assistant (Program Participant). Another had previously completed a Diploma, but even at the end was still very nervous about speaking English – he said the way he was encouraged and supported to develop his skills in his role with Green Connect helped him gain the confidence he now demonstrates (Program Participant). A third participant, who suffers from acute anxiety, said he used to spend a lot of time worrying and planning out his tasks so that he wouldn’t ‘run into someone’ on the shop floor that he would have to talk to. He says now, through the encouragement and mentoring received, he walks confidently around the shop doing a variety of tasks, and is even involved in some supervision of other staff members (Program Participant).

For the referring service providers among Green Connect’s partners, the benefits to their participants are tangible. For example, for the young people doing work experience at the Farm, the physical environment is well outside their usual comfort zone. Working outdoors, with their hands, learning to use tools and equipment doing tasks that result in an immediately recognised useful output, these young people are gaining a **sense of achievement** many haven’t experienced before. Participants are also encouraged to take ownership over tasks and responsibilities, including working independently where suitable. Peer-to-peer support and mentoring is also encouraged and supported, helping to build essential socialisation skills and ensure participants don’t become dependent on the core team. Farm work isn’t for everyone, but Green Connect’s referring partners are finding that many of the young people they work with ‘just absolutely love it, they’re just so into it’ and that it can be a transformative experience for many. One participant, who arrived at Green Connect withdrawn and disengaged, was excited to advise his confidence has grown to the extent he’s even starting to think about sitting for a certificate around the skills he’s learnt – including lawn mowing, brush cutting, plant bed preparation and planting, and looking after sheep (Program Participant).

“...you’ll see soon some of them rock up in their high-vis gear... they walk around so proud... when they go to work, it creates this energy and just this empowerment, this enjoyment in them, that achievement you can see in them. They’re proud of themselves. They’re like young men, another step from young boys to young men. Just for this program. I think it’s just for Green Connect”

*Partner*

“What we do requires a huge amount of support. We’ve got a person doing her first ever paid gig today in her life and so [Manager] is running off... between doing all sorts of other things to go and check on her and make sure she’s okay. And even to get her to that job was... helping her figure out how to get there, talking to her about what she needed, what kind of clothes to wear. There’s a whole lot of support that goes in that [they] wouldn’t normally have.”

*GC team*



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For a number of participants interviewed, it was the changes around a **sense of purpose** that demonstrated the transformative potential of Green Connect’s model. One work experience participant arrived ‘offering single-word answers, not looking anyone in the eye, and really unhappy to be there’ (referred through Juvenile Justice, so not his own choice). Within two weeks his father called to let the team know that his son was now voluntarily telling him about his day. A week later this young man was talking about getting his White Card license and what kinds of jobs he might be interested in when he’s a bit older. Soon after he’d progressed enough to be offered some paid work on the Farm. “A lot of these young people, they’re finding their feet, they’re finding their confidence, they’re really starting to shine in a very short space of time” (GC team).

Green Connect’s support program is characterised by an **‘above-and-beyond’ culture**. Many instances of how team members demonstrate this culture in action on a daily basis were observed. A number of these centred around accessing transport to get to-and-from work placements and other activities. Public transport is infrequent and considered unreliable in the Illawarra. Participants attending work sites through Staffing Solutions placements can also have very early start times at out-of-the-way locations, making public transport impossible. In addition, driving licenses are rare among both of Green Connect’s participant cohorts, and car ownership is not common. Recognising this as a major barrier, Green Connect has developed a car-pool system, where they carefully juggle schedules to try and include at least one person with a car in a team and then help the group manage the arrangement among themselves through providing advice and reminders.

The system isn’t perfect and the issue remains an ongoing challenge. It’s another layer of intensive detail for the team to manage – but this type of support is proving essential for enabling participants to fully engage with placement opportunities. This above-and-beyond’ ethos is conveyed well by the following example:

“Yeah, definitely changed my opinion on work, because I never wanted to work until I came here - and I realised it wasn't that bad . . . [Friends] think I'm crazy, especially as I come back by myself now, of my own opinion. . . Yeah. Everyone expected me to stop, but I've been going for another three weeks now. . . . To be honest, I was just going to come here and stop coming here after I finished the four weeks that I initially had to do. But after the second day I said to myself I'm going to stay here. . . And in my second week [I was] offered paid work.”

*Program Participant*

“. . . her fridge broke down, so she had no way of keeping fresh food so she was living off two minute noodles. . . we put a call out to our networks . . . [and] found a fridge freezer from a local Freecycle community. [Manager] called up a mate with a ute, they went and picked it up and they dropped it to her. Having someone that's got your back and who believes in you and is willing to go out of their way for you is everything. I mean all of us need that and that's I guess what we have inadvertently built because we've got people . . . who go ‘. . . if what you need to get on top of life is a fridge freezer, we will go and find you a fridge freezer’ . . . That makes all the difference because next time we call that young woman and say, ‘Hey are you coming to the farm tomorrow?’ you can bet your bottom dollar she's going to say, ‘Yes, you're backing me, I will be there’.”

*GC team*

## GREEN CONNECT case study

Among all of the support offered, participants often referred to the **patient coaching style** that Green Connect staff use to give instructions, offer reminders, follow up on tasks, and talk about future possibilities. They suggested that this was quite different to what they experience at school, and in other programs some had been involved with. Staff also suggested that this is an approach they are very conscious of and careful to practice, as a key element in the **'strengths based, always'** ethos, because for many participants it's this sort of support they are so lacking in their lives.

"I'm usually a chatterbox but I've learnt to stop and listen a bit more instead of just rambling on. Focusing has been a big problem for me . . . it helped that I had [Manager] just gently saying, 'Mate, you need to stop doing this, need to get back to doing this' . . . gentle reminders, which was good."

*Program Participant*

### 3.2 Employability – 'no cookie cutters'

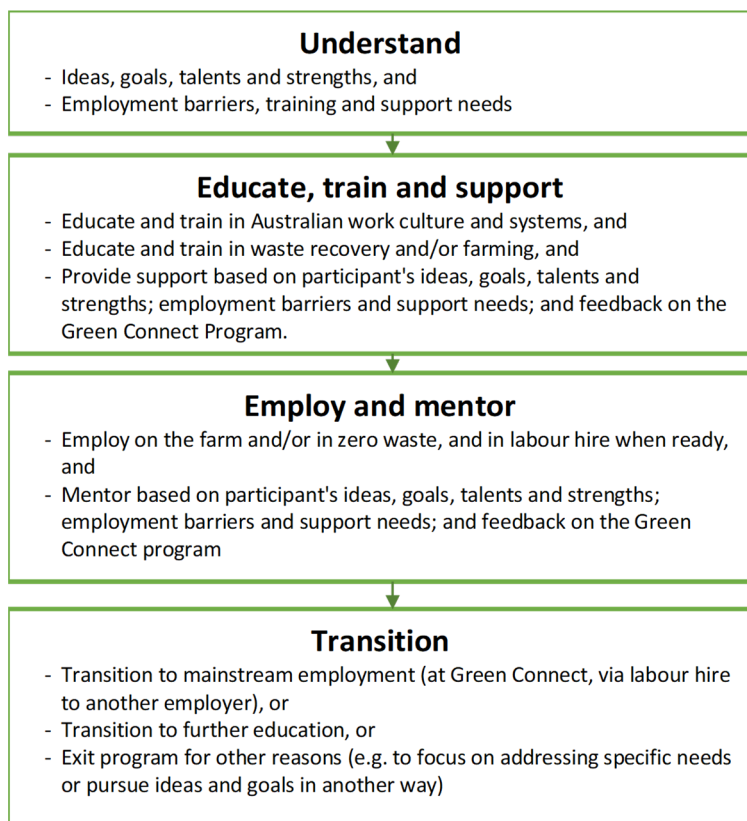
Employment is a critical social determinant of health in a region with high unemployment, and when working with cohorts who face multiple and complex structural barriers to entering and staying in the labour market. Therefore, at the heart of Green Connect's approach to improving health equity with its program participants is improving their employability through involvement in training, work experience, and other support activities. Key organisational characteristics identified as supporting this outcome goal are: a structure based around four

inter-related commercial enterprise streams; a culture that values hands-on, fair, and meaningful learning opportunities; and a bespoke Model of Employment support. Drawing these together, the characteristic feature of Green Connect's approach to improving employability is described as **'no cookie-cutters'**.

Green Connect's **Model of Employment Support** – shown in **Figure 3** – is the overarching policy that guides processes and practices related to employability outcomes. The Model provides a framework for the development trajectories of the organisation as a whole, as each element is inter-related and plays a role in supporting the organisation's commercial, environmental and social impact objectives. As such, it acts as the glue that binds the parts together.

The focus is on improving core competencies so as to support transitions into work. Where participants aren't ready for these transitions, the model provides a supportive approach for identifying and communicating what they need to work on improving.

The elements of the model are combined in different ways to meet the needs, match



*Figure 3. Green Connect's Model of Employment Support*

## GREEN CONNECT case study

the capacities, and build on the strengths of program participants. For example, one Manager described a ‘fairly low functioning autistic man’ who came with the simple goal of meeting a friend again, that he had heard was part of the Green Connect program. He had no work-related ideas or goals as such. She acknowledged it was likely they would be working with him for quite some time, but wasn’t perturbed by this. Unlike other programs that have prescribed timelines and milestone targets, Green Connect offers the time and space many of its participants need to move towards productive outcomes. Program participants are largely referred through government and other service providers such as high schools, Job Active agencies, and Registered Training Organisations. Other recruitment is through word-of-mouth and local communication channels. The possibility of securing real-life work experience and (in some cases) paid employment for their cohorts was a key motivator for service providers to engage with Green Connect. In a region where complex barriers are common, and there are limited employment opportunities, Green Connect’s model is attracting attention.

“Well . . . probably nowhere, if they weren’t going to Green Connect . . . It’s a really important relationship . . . we need it and we haven’t . . . had one before like this.”

*Partner*

“. . . we try and really build it up with . . . all those key skills that people need. The way that the waste work operates is the first job you would do is . . . sorting waste at a table. Then one of the skills we’re looking for for labour hire is can people work independently, can people take initiative. So the next job you go and do is changing bins. . . [which] you have to do yourself. You can stop and watch a band for an hour if you want, but eventually they figure it out.”

*GC team*

On referral or recruitment many candidates complete a language, literacy, and numeracy assessment, and then if they are interested, become ‘participants’ and enrol in either a Certificate I in Access to Vocational Pathways or a Certificate II in Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways with the Registered Training Organisation partner; or they are referred to other training to develop language, literacy and numeracy skills first. For some courses, the Community College partner is able to provide interpreter support if needed. Once three common units from these courses are completed, participants can be offered employment in one of Green Connect’s enterprises - Zero Waste Services, the Farm, or the Op Shop. The experience they gain in these placements provides opportunities to apply and develop employability skills on the job, over time, and in supported settings.

This approach allows participants to develop and demonstrate core employability skills and attitudes, and to discover their own strengths and weaknesses, while earning some income. Once they are meeting the essential competencies of ‘turning up on time, in the right gear, following instructions, working as a team, and working safely’ (GC team), those interested and capable can be offered opportunities with Green Connect’s labour hire customers across a range of industries. Using the diverse opportunities available through the **inter-related commercial enterprise streams** in this way provides a stepping-stone structure for improving employability outcomes, allowing participants to discover and develop their strengths and weaknesses while earning some income.

Across all the activity streams, participants are engaged in **hands-on work and learning**. This is a key feature of the program, as for many program participants classroom-based learning compounds the barriers they face. Being clearly shown what to do and how to do it – not just having it explained - was described as ‘very helpful so I feel secure . . . I was very scared’ (Program Participant). Other participants

“The way I see [it] is you can’t break the permaculture farm, it’s outdoor . . . it’s fresh, it’s rugged, there’s a range of different things you can do. You can be on the grass cutter or you can look after the pigs or you can help with the harvesting or the planting and so there’s scope for . . . different skills, capacities. And you can’t break it. . . So it’s a really good soft entry point for Green Connect to get them in, give them some training and then observe them and see, ‘What is it about this young person that makes it difficult for them or what are the assets about this young person?’.”

*Customer*

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recognised that ‘I understand when people show me hands-on stuff’ (Program Participant), and that ‘out here, you can focus’ rather than being distracted by the behaviour of others (Program Participant). All of Green Connect’s commercial enterprise streams offer these hands-on opportunities, with the Farm offering a ‘healthy setting’ and playing a pivotal role as the starting point for participants’ journeys.

Green Connect places a strong emphasis on offering **fair work** itself, but also takes an active role in building capacities for when a participant transitions into other workplaces. This includes supporting them to understand timesheets, pay slips, taxation, and superannuation; and ensuring they know they have rights at work – such as taking breaks, and other award conditions (GC team). This is an important role and participants provided examples where awareness helped them identify unfair treatment from other (small business) employers, such as undue pressure to work very quickly (Program Participant), insisting on cash-in-hand payment, underpayment, and unsafe work health and safety conditions (Program Participant).

“I think the relationship between a social worker and a client is completely different to the relationship between a supervisor and an employee. And I think that that relationship between a supervisor and employee if it’s done in a supportive way is really empowering in a way that the former isn’t. . . I’m not here to do something for [worker] . . . we’re in a partnership, we’re creating this together. . . neither of us is doing each other a favour. We’re both doing what we need to do to kind of create this.”

*GC team*

Staff also reported that participants are responding to the opportunities to engage in **meaningful work**. Young people who’ve been let down a lot in their lives are sensitive to and see right through ‘fake jobs’ (GC team). When real tasks need to be performed to deliver real outputs that have a commercial consequence for the enterprise, the whole team is needed to achieve the targets. This changes relationship dynamics, establishing a mutual relationship that creates a genuine interdependence that directly contributes to building confidence and improving employability outcomes.

Similarly, meaningful work comes through the nature of the four commercial enterprise streams. Participants are engaged in activities that are contributing to creating healthier settings at various contextual scales – on the Farm, in their local region, and so the world they live in. Seeing their efforts having real-life impacts in improving the environment or supporting others, where they can see their contribution genuinely making a difference, like clearing the creek of weeds or mentoring another student, offers a powerful antidote to accumulated cynicism (GC team).

“[W]e learned . . . that young people really strongly want to do something meaningful. They don’t want to work at a fast food chain, they want to do something that contributes to the community and the environment. That was amazing, it was so strong that that came out.”

*GC team*

Participants are interviewed on a regular basis during their time with Green Connect, across all enterprise streams, so as to monitor changing needs and whether and how other services are being accessed. This information is collected centrally

“There’s one particular young person . . . he was just wild. . . (at school) he would just climb up trees, throw branches down at people, get suspended every second day . . . he’d just been written off. They were just waiting for him to reach 17 where they can kick him off . . . when he came here . . . he would just grab tools, throw them . . . [But] then there was a point where . . . I could ask him to go do something and trust that he would do that. . . Yeah I can’t say [it was just us] but I think this gave him something to do, like gave him some kind of structure, because he got kicked out of school eventually and then was working here. . . [H]e’s full-time employed now. . . I’d say [it took] like a year . . . he was very observant and . . . can look at something and see what’s happening. . . I appreciated that and I think he felt that he was valued for that. . . and it gave him a sense of pride that he wasn’t just taking directions; he could go and sort something.”

*GC team*

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and used to tailor advice and provide assistance with accessing further training, other support services, referrals, and mentoring opportunities. As discussed above, the ‘wrap-around support’ is central to responding to the number and complexity of the barriers Green Connect’s cohorts face, and to the ‘no cookie cutters’ approach.

### 3.3 Financial Independence – ‘supportive transitions’

Related to employability, improving the level of financial independence amongst its cohort is a core objective for Green Connect. Financial independence also has a close relationship with other social determinants of health, such as secure housing and access to reliable transport. For Green Connect’s cohorts, there is also a clear connection with increased confidence. Key organisational characteristics identified as supporting this outcome goal are: a structured approach to network building; a product and service quality culture; and persistence and responsiveness in its policies, processes, and practices. Drawing these together, the characteristic feature of Green Connect’s approach to increasing financial independence is described as ‘supportive transitions’.

At the heart of Green Connect’s approach around this social determinant of health is a structured program of **network building**. The team invests considerable time and effort into a diverse range of relationships - for example, collaborating with other service providers on funding proposals to generate work-related outcomes for different cohorts (Partner), and reciprocating on in-kind support received by speaking at corporate events and team building days (Funder). However, the team is highly aware that it is the commercial aspects of the social enterprise that are central to achieving its goals around increasing financial independence amongst its cohorts.

Green Connect is therefore constantly searching for and building relationships with potential customers across all four of its commercial enterprise streams. For Zero Waste Services, these include event organisers and organisations interested in reducing waste. For Labour Hire & Recruitment, customers are primarily organisations looking for short-term entry-level staff. For the Farm, they include individual householders, commercial food suppliers, and organisations interested in tours and education opportunities. And the Op Shop works with both retail and wholesale customers.

Across the four enterprise streams, a complex web of relationships facilitates the stepping-stones that make up the Model of Employment Support. These require persistent and ongoing maintenance. There is also an imperative to grow business with existing customers and to add new customers so as to increase the number of employment opportunities around and through which supportive transitions can be developed. A range of partners, supporters and other stakeholders assist them in this, and the reach their extensive network now offers is significant.

“... we help to promote them a lot... their internship opportunities, or any jobs that they’ve got going, we will put that through our network... we have about 800 people in our network, in the Illawarra... [and also]... a lot of organisational involvement...”

*Partner*

However, this is more than a numbers game for Green Connect.

For the Model of Employment Support to be effective, it is critical for those that go on to work placements (once deemed ready) that they spend time in an organisation with a supportive culture, that also provides the opportunity to gain experience and learn from being in an ‘open market’ workplace. In practice, this is a constant balancing act dependent on developing a depth of relationship with each labour hire customer. But having a good picture of the customer’s business takes more than this, too. As one team member described it, the visibility required is also gained by ‘working sideways’ through other network contacts - something she suggested Illawarra communities are ‘really great at doing’ (GC team).

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“We are a business . . . we aren't a social project, you might say. We are a business.”

*Customer*

These customers are, of course, running commercial businesses themselves and whilst they have an interest in ‘helping people earn a bit of money’, in ‘educating them in how to work’ through site inductions and other processes, and with ‘what they might do next’, ultimately the staff placed have to be able to deliver efficiently on the tasks required (Customer). There is also no room for expectations that customers will ‘accept sub-par service for the social outcomes’ at the organisational level. Green Connect must be able to deliver at least the same quality of labour hire service as its competitors, and at similar rates (GC team).

Characteristic of Green Connect’s approach is fostering a culture that prioritises **product and service quality**.

Where customers provided examples of issues that have arisen, they also pointed out how Green Connect’s processes of constantly checking in with both the customer and the placed staff has meant that these were identified early and that the focus was on quickly implementing solutions. Green Connect labour hire staff were seen as generally ‘more reliable at turning up’ and seeming to value the work more than those sourced through other companies (Customer).

“It really does help that we’ve got a good reputation in community and people know that we go above and beyond.”

*GC team*

“. . . at the end of the day, people need a good product . . . [they] will buy the first one because they think it’s a good idea and they want to support something. But to actually sustain long term customers, and support, you need to deliver a product that people are happy with . . . I definitely have seen some improvements in that . . . [resulting from better] capacity within the organisation.”

*Partner*

For the two commercial enterprise streams that have a products focus - the Farm and the Op Shop - quality is also important and a few iterations of policies, processes and practices have been the key source of learning around this. At the Farm in particular, finding a balance between the number of ongoing, experienced staff who can work autonomously and how many new, untrained participants could be sustained at any one time has been important. Today a small team of permanent part-time staff provides the backbone for getting the commercial products to market, while all the training and work experience activities take place in and around them (GC team). The attention to quality products and services across all its commercial enterprise streams is fundamental to Green Connect supporting its participants’ journeys towards increased financial independence.

**Persistence and responsiveness** are identified as the key characteristics of the policies, processes, and practices that guide the enterprise’s approach to this social outcome goal. This is closely aligned with the structured wrap-around support program discussed above and provides further examples of how that program is implemented at the daily level.

With customers, Green Connect never misses an opportunity to remind them its participants are available and have capacity to take on more and new types of work; and once a need is identified the team takes a ‘whatever you need, we’ll try and work it out’ attitude to developing a response (Customer). Once a job is secured, persistence and responsiveness are also needed to ensure the participants have truly understood induction programs, including how to implement work health and safety requirements and other procedures. Grateful for the work and often with limited confidence, in these formal settings many participants will ‘always say yes’ if asked whether they’ve understood (GC team). A member of the Green Connect team often attends the induction session with a new group, adding their own expertise to ensuring each person has comprehended all the key points and so supporting their safety at work; and also demonstrating another dimension of the wrap-around-support, discussed above, that is provided.

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The Model of Employment Support also raises challenges around the numerous and complicated strands of administration required to keep on top of all the elements (work health and safety compliance, induction verifications, certificate courses, etc.), and to manage the expectations and requirements of all the stakeholders involved – individual high schools, TAFE, Community College, Department of Education, and other service providers.

“I’ve got constant phone calls with [Manager], so that’s been interesting and challenging and to be honest time consuming. But I think we’ve got a good working relationship . . . we can communicate and . . . tell each other . . . what’s working well, what’s not working so well.”

*Partner*

Supporting participants to become more financially independent is often also about much more than just securing work for them. Even something as seemingly simple as registering a participant so they can be paid can become a monumental and long-ranging task when they don’t have a bank account, tax file number, or in some cases even a birth certificate. Sometimes, even getting parents to sign and return basic paperwork so they can help the participant begin to navigate the maze of bureaucracy can be a challenge. The team also regularly responds to requests for assistance with practical matters, such as transport to referral appointments, and for support when negotiating with Centrelink and applying to study. In all of these roles, amongst all the frustrations and set-backs that occur, the team demonstrates remarkable persistence and responsiveness to maintaining their commitment to each participant through a program of **supportive transitions**.

### 3.4 Improved Wellbeing – ‘genuine engagement’

Improved wellbeing is intrinsically intertwined with health equity issues and is understood to centre around access to the social determinants of health. This more generalised outcome draws on all the organisational features that support the three specific social outcomes goals described above. Other key organisational characteristics identified as supporting this outcome goal are: a flexible and tailored structure; a ‘come as you are’ culture; and a holistic orientation to support provision. Drawing these together, the characteristic feature of Green Connect’s approach to improving wellbeing is described as **‘genuine engagement’**.

As discussed throughout this report, at the participant level Green Connect’s approach is characterised by a **flexible and tailored** approach, working with each participant to identify needs and provide support. Some move quickly through the stepping-stones, flourishing once they get a taste for the opportunities that become possible. Others are best supported through providing a stable location and a regular routine over a longer time period (for example, one young man has been working at the Farm for two years one day a week, ‘two if I’m lucky’ – Program Participant). Participants also explore how different types of work tasks suit them, or not. And

“ . . . these young people were saying – one woman . . . said, ‘I feel like I’m under house arrest. I have nowhere to go, nowhere to be, I don’t know anyone, I can’t make friends because making friends requires money because you’ve got to go and do stuff with them. My days merge into another and I have no reason to leave the house . . .’ And that was repeated over and over and over. Parents were telling us, ‘My kid just sits on the couch all day and plays video games, nowhere to be, nothing to do.’”

*GC team*

all of this is accommodated within the Model of Employment Support. Staff members gave examples of how they are able to respond more flexibly to needs – ‘a Job Active provider can fund PPE but can’t organise a car to pick someone up’ and transport may be the barrier that’s stopping that person getting to an interview or a work placement (GC team). For a young woman in this situation, the Green Connect team were able to organise a buddy system where another participant picked her up on their way.

A key element of Green Connect’s model is that the first work site participants are exposed to is the Farm. For some, the Farm plays an important role as a safe space where they are away from the stigma they’re often subject to. Reflecting the **‘come as you are’** culture, they can ‘leave the baggage at the gate and not be judged’, receiving positive reinforcement doing something ‘actually useful’ (GC team).

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The interaction between the two cohorts at the Farm also contributes to this through peer-to-peer exposure, with the young people learning about the cultures and lives of the refugees, and the refugees learning about Australia from the young people – earning each other’s respect and often with some sense of ‘buddy-ness’ developing (GC team).

Green Connect also maintains that the focus on growing food is particularly suited to improving wellbeing as it can help shift the feelings of powerlessness that many participants experience in response to structural conditions in their lives that are out of their control. The very tangible nature of the work tasks involved in growing food play a big part in this. But at the Farm, participants also watch the plants they planted grow and be harvested, and then see them packed up to feed many families in the region. They can see how the part they played contributed to that and learn at least one way in which they can gain some control, over their own efforts to produce ‘something good’.

“... growing food is always in your control. Like if you prepare this soil, plant it appropriately, monitor it, then you’ll get a good output. If you don’t put in the work, then it’s your fault. You’ve got no one else to blame...”

*GC team*

A **holistic orientation** to wellbeing is generating improvements around physical, mental, and emotional dimensions. The meaningful nature of the work across the commercial enterprise streams and the strengths-based approach to building confidence and a sense of purpose, discussed above, are part of this. For example, one participant described reduced feelings of anxiety and depression, of increased confidence, and of feeling happy to be at work - even going so far as to say he had made friends, and that this was very unusual for him (Program Participant).

At the Farm, the focus on fair food adds another dimension to the holistic orientation. Many of the young people have little opportunity to access fresh foods and limited exposure to different varieties of fruit and vegetables. Participants are encouraged to eat the food they’re producing, surplus boxes are shared out, and the food being grown is ‘celebrated’ (GC team). The physical and mental benefits of eating healthy foods are well established but learning about new plants, vegetables, and fruits can also be significant for some participants. One student who struggles with behavioural issues in the classroom, was described as ‘just so proud and happy’ to bring a box of vegetables back to the staff room and be able to tell the teachers about all the plants they came from (Partner).

“When I was at school I did not sleep hardly at all. . . I might stress about an assignment . . . I was in the [xx] unit for [condition] . . . I don’t go to sport because I don’t like sport. Instead of just going home and sitting at home doing work I’d come here for a whole day and just do work for a whole day. And so that was good. And then . . . I’d go back to school more refreshed. I was able to sleep at night . . . yeah, because hard work. . . Which was good because I didn’t need to go to the gym as much. I actually cancelled my subscription, which was awesome.”

*Program Participant*

The physical nature of the work also works well for participants who suffer from anxiety and/or depression, or for other reasons don’t respond well to sit-down classroom environments. One interviewee described a noticeable difference in the group involved in the Green Connect work experience program, compared to their students who weren’t – ‘a calm feeling, more relaxed, and a sense of maturity’. He attributed this to the physical work, and also to them gaining confidence, feeling useful, and learning about how to behave in a work context (Partner). The guiding ethos of offering **genuine engagement** opportunities, through work and other activities, is generating multi-faceted wellbeing outcomes across the diverse range of participants involved in the Model of Employment Support program.

“Like you see teambuilding exercises in corporate jobs and whatnot, and I just feel like when you’re working for Green Connect, every day, everything that you do with the social enterprise is a teambuilding exercise that every other corporate business would love to have.”

*Program participant*



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### 4.0 COMMUNITY-LEVEL OUTCOMES

The previous section describes many of the individual-level health equity outcomes generated through the Green Connect Model of Employment Support and related activities. Community-level analysis draws attention to the wider context that individual participants are located within, and thereby acknowledges that there are many factors outside an individual's control that contribute to health outcomes.

There are two strands of specific organisational features of the Green Connect model identified through the research that contribute to community-level outcomes. The first strand is the **choice of target cohorts**. By working with refugees and young people, Green Connect has purposefully chosen two cohorts that have significant barriers to securing and remaining in employment. By creating pathways and real-job opportunities for and with these cohorts, it is reducing the burden of unemployment in the region, while also increasing the level of 'local spend' dollars circulating in the local economy. This is a significant community-level contribution in a region where unemployment is high and existing employment opportunities are limited. In the process, it is supporting its cohorts to recognise 'fair work' attributes, improving their capacity to promote and uphold standards in future workplaces and so contribute to building stronger communities among groups experiencing high levels of disadvantage.

The second strand that makes a particular contribution to community-level outcomes is Green Connect's **choice of fair food production and waste reduction services** as its commercial enterprise activities. As discussed in Section 2, the Illawarra region has high levels of food insecurity and so Green Connect is contributing to addressing a complex issue that has broad health equity implications. The waste services focus is similarly improving community-level conditions across the region – through reducing waste to landfill, supporting other local waste-related businesses and strategies, educating the local population about waste-related matters, and promoting a culture of waste consciousness.

Combining these two strands, Green Connect is successfully contributing to addressing two key community-level barriers to improving health equity and wellbeing at a regional level. Its efforts in this regard are gaining recognition - for example, Green Connect was the winner of the 2019 Excellence in Sustainability Award in the IMB Bank Illawarra Business Awards,<sup>11</sup> and was shortlisted in two other categories also - Excellence in Workplace Inclusion and Outstanding Business Leader; and on Australia Day 2019 it won Wollongong City Council's award for Outstanding Community Group.<sup>12</sup>

“. . . local food often is quite expensive . . . definitely do see a big connection between more local production means more jobs, more dollars spent here . . . supporting that local economy, the more jobs there will be, the less food insecurity there will be, the more food there will be. It would be fantastic, the food would be fresher, less waste, because the longer the supply chain, the more waste . . . [Green Connect] are so important in achieving our missions . . .”

*Partner*

<sup>11</sup> Illawarra Business Chamber (2019) "Excellence in Sustainability Winner". Facebook. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/illawarrabusiness/photos/a.147695091958900/2690025851059132> (accessed on 28/11/2019)

<sup>12</sup> Green Connect (2019) "Green Connect wins 2019 Australia Day Award". Available at: <https://green-connect.com.au/green-connect-wins-2019-australia-day-award/> (accessed on 28/11/2019)

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### 5.0 CONCLUSION

This case study report provides discussion of findings primarily related to **Research Questions One and Two** of the broader study, and as such has focused on organisational features – contextual and characteristic – that support the social determinants of health goals of the enterprise.

Green Connect is demonstrating the powerful role that social enterprises can play in improving health equity outcomes for young people, through its unique program attributes and organisational culture. Its Model is gaining attention and there is increasing demand for its programs and activities from across the Illawarra region. This raises **challenges** around capacity to deliver, and around raising expectations among vulnerable cohorts. The team is highly aware of these issues and is considering how it handles its next stage of development carefully, so as to maintain the tailored and flexible character.

“... we've had so much interest... [but] we can't keep taking just any number of young people on the farm... we can't afford to keep adding supervisors and adding days. So as much as we don't want to say, 'I'm sorry you can't start until this date,' we might have to... [W]e know from the interviews and from working with these young people that they don't plan ahead. They cannot see three months from now. Most of them tell us that they don't even know what they're doing this weekend... Monday is ages away. So having to say to them, 'Oh you can start in May or you can start in June,' is really crap and we don't want to do it.”

GC team

As with many social enterprises, the team is also continually challenged by maintaining the unique balance of factors that make the outcomes it is already generating possible. For practical purposes, they are running a small business and a charity at the same time (GC team). Day-to-day precarity is a constant reality. Staff burnout is a real issue in social enterprises, where many are attracted to the work as they have a personal passion for the social purpose. All the senior staff members at Green Connect are highly skilled, qualified people who could be doing (and have previously done) many other things in their work lives. In their own way, each mentioned the long hours, unpaid work, and relatively low wages they accept with their roles. Within their small team, they're attempting to address these issues; however, the capacity to do so is largely determined by the availability of resources. But in an organisation with an incredibly strong 'above and beyond' culture, the drive to allocate these to any number of competing priorities is always present.

These issues provide some glimpses into broader institutional factors that influence the capacities and development trajectories of social enterprises. Institutional factors include matters such as how industry sectors are structured, enabling (or not) policy frameworks, media representation, political engagement, and access to appropriate financing across all stages of development and through a diverse range of sources.

“[Social enterprises]... definitely have a whole set of challenges. I mean everyone in the not for profit sector suffers burnout, but I think the managers of social enterprises are particularly prone to it... They're training up really high needs people, and then trying to move them on, and they've got to get a whole lot of new people, and they're trying to deliver a really competitive product or service. So yeah, it's very challenging.”

Funder

These factors are the focus of **Research Question Three** of the broader study, which asks: *How do institutional factors inform the effectiveness of social enterprises concerned with improving social and economic participation of disadvantaged young people?* These matters are being explored at the cross-case level and will be presented in outputs generated through the next phase of the study drawing on the data across all four cases studies involved in the project.

### GREEN CONNECT case study

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“For each young person that we're getting on the pathway and into long-term paid employment and doing something meaningful that they love - think of all of the health spend, the welfare spend, potentially the justice spend . . . all of that money on all of these social services. This young person is contributing to society economically, they're paying taxes - and in their wellbeing and contribution to living in a great place because they are happy and purposeful and all of those things. That's amazing. And it shouldn't be done by charities because . . . they're not empowering young people in the same way. They don't need a handout, they need a hand up. They need to be given a chance and to genuinely be supported until they can fly. Yeah what we do is . . . I think very undervalued and I'd like to see a lot more investment going into this kind of work.”

*GC team*

## GREEN CONNECT case study

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### APPENDIX A

The Green Connect case study has been developed using ethnographic data collection methods including 21 semi-structured interviews, 26 hours of observation at Green Connect and customer sites, a management team workshop, and analysis of internal and external documents.

#### Interviews

Interviews were conducted face-to-face, except for one which took place via telephone. Most of the program participants were interviewed at the Green Connect Farm, and small number at their other sites. All but two of the key stakeholder interviews were conducted at their own offices/sites. One member of the research team conducted **21 semi-structured** interviews with the following stakeholders:

Program participants	7
Green Connect team	6
Partners	4
Customers	3
Funders	1

#### Observation

One member of the research team undertook 26 hours of observation - primarily at the Green Connect Farm site, but also at the head office and at several customers' sites where program participants are placed for paid employment opportunities. The researcher wrote extensive fieldnotes for each observation activity.

#### Management Team workshop

At the completion of the field research phase, two research team members held a short action learning workshop with the four members of the Green Connect management team. The purpose of this session was to discuss and clarify aspects of the enterprise's Theory of Change, provide input to improve its existing data collection methods, to provide the team with some insight into the early findings, and to seek feedback on aspects of data analysis.

#### Document analysis

A range of documents was collected and reviewed as part of the data analysis, to help identify key contextual factors with which the enterprise interacts. Internal documents included: annual report, business plan, organisational chart, Theory of Change, Model of Employment Support, social outcomes survey, induction checklist, and various newsletters and flyers. External documents included: request for tender documentation, customer internal communications, and funder impact reports.