

Media Release

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Mini Woolies opens doors to new opportunities for people with disability

People with disability in Wangaratta are building confidence, practical workplace skills and pathways to future employment through a new Mini Woolies at VMCH. Created in partnership with Woolworths Group and Fujitsu, the simulated supermarket provides a realistic retail environment where participants can learn and practise skills including customer service, communication, money handling, stocktake and teamwork.

Featuring supermarket-style registers, shelving, fresh food displays, uniforms and name badges, Mini Woolies offers a safe and supportive environment where participants can gain hands-on experience while developing their independence and workplace confidence.

The new Mini Woolies was officially opened on Thursday 23 July at a special launch event attended by participants, families, community members, Woolworths representatives and local dignitaries. Guests were invited to explore the simulated supermarket following the ribbon-cutting ceremony, while social enterprise café trainees served barista-made coffee from the VMCH coffee van.

For VMCH participant Eliza Tilly, the Woolies experience is already making a difference.

"It helps people with disabilities to understand the environment of working in a retail workplace," Eliza said. "It's comfortable being with people who are in the same situation. I'm surrounded by people who relate to me, are very kind and have a great understanding. I hope it (the experience) can go on my resume."

VMCH Employment Pathways Coordinator Ben Watts said the program was already having a positive impact on participants.

"Seeing the smiles when our people put on the Mini Woolies uniform, there's a real sense of pride. They know they're part of a team and they're building skills that can help them work towards future employment opportunities."

VMCH Chairman Julien O'Connell AO said Mini Woolies aligns strongly with VMCH's commitment to creating meaningful opportunities for people with disability.

"Mini Woolies provides a safe and supportive environment where people can develop practical workplace skills, build confidence and explore future employment opportunities," Mr O'Connell said. "We're proud to partner with Woolworths Group and Fujitsu to bring this opportunity to Wangaratta and help participants build skills for the future."

Since launching in 2018, Mini Woolies sites have supported thousands of participants across Australia and New Zealand. The Wangaratta store builds on VMCH's strong focus on hands-on learning, social connection and employment pathways through local initiatives including the Where Is My Coffee? social enterprise café, the Green Team and Cre8 Shed programs. Together, these opportunities support participants to build practical skills, explore their interests and work towards employment goals.

For more information on Mini Woolies at VMCH, visit: disability.vmch.com.au/mini-woolies

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About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic, for-purpose organisation, love, joy, hospitality and courage aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and compassionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.

