

## A Grassroots Collaboration

### Gathering under the 'Have you thought about ...?' banner

As part of the Living and Ageing Well in Hepburn project, Attitude. Ageing Well in Clunes (Attitude) with project partners Central Highlands Rural Health (CHRH) and Clunes Neighbourhood House (CNH) formed an informal working group to develop a collaborative community engagement project. The central idea was to build connectivity between each partner and the Clunes community and to do this at a regional event, in this instance the Clunes and District Agricultural Show, which attracts around 6,000 local and regional visitors.

The purpose was to showcase each partner's 'brand' at a community expo, themed around the title 'Have you thought about...?' The theme was designed to encourage locals to think about their health, what services were locally available and new interests that might help them stay, or become, connected to their community.

It was agreed that each partner would bring their own flavour to the event, focusing on their individual strengths.

For CHRH, the central theme encouraged people to think about what a regional health service might offer to the Clunes community.

CNH saw it as an opportunity to engage with community, to remind visitors of their activities and for the community to reflect on, and communicate, any gaps in CNH day-to-day operations.

For the third partner, Attitude, here was a chance to showcase their expanding program and encourage program participants to bring their passions to a larger audience.

The CHRH project officer brought an enthusiastic mindset to the table and with the support of her team offered a range of interesting activities. A smoothie bike, which for the uninitiated is a bicycle powered smoothie maker, was more than popular, as were the soft activities led by their physiologist and discussions about fitness and the benefits of keeping our bodies moving. Also in attendance were allied health professionals, such as a diabetes educator, for informal questions and discussions. A range of larger-than-life games for the thinkers were steadily utilised during the day. For those more likely to absorb information at their own pace, 90 show bags were packaged for people to take away and digest. These contained leaflets of support services offered by CHRH and other items.

The CNH Manager worked in conjunction with their exercise instructor and the CHRH physiologist to set up a highly visible area full of equipment to create interest. As well as CNH representatives being available for conversations, a free raffle was run to encourage participation and conversation about the neighbourhood house in Clunes. This created opportunities for follow-up contact. CNH also developed a survey to gauge community knowledge around its operations, with 36 online survey registrations on the day.

The team at Attitude focused on making sure that participants in the program could engage with visitors to the Show. The invitation to take part was also extended to other active groups in Clunes through a newly formed Clubs of Clunes alliance that the Attitude working party had initiated as part of the broader project. The Clunes Angling Club, Clunes Golf Club and the Clunes Football and Netball Club joined the activity.





## What we learned

The project, 'Have you thought about...?', provided a practical exercise for the three partners to work together on a single event. It helped communication between the partners and afforded understanding about each other's approaches and models. It was an important step towards collaboration.

The CHRH project officer reported that, overall, her team received positive feedback and there were good connections between members of the public and their health professionals where assistance was sought and provided at the coal face. Through their interaction with show visitors, CHRN staff felt that not too many people knew what the organisation actually did. It was also felt that they needed to make their brand more evident in the pavilion, and this could be remedied in future years by introducing an identifying banner. Initially the CHRH team focused on establishing connections with their peers in the pavilion, which extended into curiosity about other groups participating on the day. It was felt that this event was ideal for increasing activity at a local level for networking. The location of the pavilion was inviting and approachable. Logistically, access was a bit of a problem, making it a long day. Team communications also needed a bit of work in terms of making sure everyone understood the operating environment.

CNH agreed that access was also an issue that needed to be considered before any next event in this location. Overall, CNH considered it a sustainable event model and commented positively on the freedom of each group to present to their strengths. CNH was very happy with the response from visitors to the Show on the day and added survey material.

Following feedback from its program participants and Clubs of Clunes, Attitude reported highly positive experiences with community engagement. Many groups had their expectations met, with general enquiries and increased memberships overall. Without exception, all agreed they would participate in a similar event at the next Show Day in 2024.

## What can we take away from this?

It was agreed that the joint Show pavilion project brought together under the banner of 'Have you thought about...?' was a remarkable success, and that this success was based on all parties coming together at grassroots level.

***Prepared by the Attitude. Ageing Well in Clunes working party***