

Program's beating heart on show

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A WIDE cross-section of the community turned out for the Wangaratta Grit and Resilience Program's second Heartbeat event last Thursday.



All available tickets to the gathering at the Wangaratta Rovers Football Netball Club rooms were snapped up by those keen to hear about the community-led initiative, which aims to better address and improve mental health and wellbeing, and support for those affected by suicide, in the Rural City of Wangaratta.

As well as celebrating the achievements of the program to date, the event was a much-appreciated chance for COVID-SAFE social connection among those already, or seeking to become, involved.

People attending heard about new initiatives such as Book Circles, Blokes Time Out, Project 365, and Art is in Our Heart, and received an overview of the program from program coordinator Bek Nash-webster, as well as hearing the thoughts of community partners John Davis and Caz Sammon.

Alana Hulme, who represents the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing on the Federal Government-funded program's consortium, said it was encouraging to see such a diverse mix of people at the Heartbeat.

She said Grit and Resilience was unique in that most government-funded programs were led by agencies and had pre-determined outcomes.

"In this case, the community is able to decide what happens, so it's not just one of those cookie-cutter programs that are done in lots of places, it's about your community," she said.

"We heard from a few groups which have started up, and people are starting to see that through this

program, they can do what they think their community needs.

"For instance, the Art is in the Heart initiative is mapping out all the local opportunities that have an artistic bent to them, and Blokes Time Out is giving men a chance to be connected in different ways.

"The night just inspired a wonderful sense of pride in the community, which is

really starting to bloom and understand this program is for us; we can do things and we're going to be supported.

"People are having these ideas, and the Grit and Resilience team is able to provide structure and framework.

"I'm really excited to see where we can go with this; it's such an authentic way of doing community development - true community development which will have huge benefits and will last longer."

Alana said while the program is funded until June, 2023, moves are under way to ensure its longevity beyond that time.

"We will be reaching out to interested community members to join our longevity working group, because sustainability will come from a variety of ideas," she said.

"We want Grit and Resilience to continue to march to the beat of its own drum, because it's so unique, so rare to have an opportunity to establish something like this and we are trying to make the most of that, and embed it in the community."

Another Heartbeat event will be held in three months, but in the meantime, Alana said any locals with ideas for initiatives they would like to get started in the Rural City of Wangaratta to support mental health and wellbeing could contact the Grit and Resilience team via email at gritandresilience@wangeratta.vic.gov.au.

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