

Media Release

Ms Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Minister for Regional Development
Minister for Agriculture



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GROWING MORE JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN SHEPPARTON

The Andrews Labor Government is continuing to back an employment program in Shepparton designed to create more jobs for people who face barriers getting work.

Minister for Regional Development Mary-Anne Thomas today met with representatives from the Growing Regional Opportunities for Work (GROW) program at Shepparton's Billabong Garden Complex to reinforce the Labor Government's continued support for the initiative that will help even more locals access new jobs.

The Shepparton program is one of five GROW initiatives across the state to benefit from an additional \$3 million announced in the *Victorian Budget 2021/22*. The funding supports GROW Shepparton to build on its work to help vulnerable members of the community find jobs.

GROW was established in Geelong in 2014 and has since expanded to Shepparton, the Latrobe Valley, Bendigo and Ballarat. Since the initiative began in Shepparton in 2018, it has supported more than 250 people to find jobs.

GROW Shepparton offers life changing opportunities in the workforce for job seekers from migrant and refugee groups, people living with a disability and those stood down from work.

The program also helps local businesses to hire locals, enabling more goods and services to be sourced locally and boosting the amount spent in the community. At the Billabong Garden Complex, GROW has worked with operators ConnectGV to support locals with a disability to learn new skills while working in the propagation nursery.

Other recent successes include the training and employment of 60 job seekers from disadvantaged backgrounds who were offered traffic management roles in a new local business in Greater Shepparton.

The program has also worked closely with local high schools to offer students with disabilities the chance to combine school with part-time employment and training - allowing students to gain valuable hands-on experience and finish school with qualifications.

GROW Shepparton has also been instrumental in supporting workers who lost their jobs during the pandemic, helping to redeploy workers into local businesses in the region including with Unilever, Bega and Tatura Milk Industries.

The GROW program is part of the Government's more than \$30 billion investment in rural and regional Victoria since 2015.

Quote attributable to Minister for Regional Development Mary-Anne Thomas

"We are supporting people of all-abilities and those from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds to find employment – the GROW program is a terrific initiative helping more people find jobs and support local businesses."

Quote attributable to Member for Northern Victoria Mark Gepp

"This funding ensures GROW can continue its important work in tackling disadvantage and addressing barriers to employment, by creating more jobs and boosting our regional economies."

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