



Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Co-operative

Annual Report

Executive Summary

Jan – Dec 2021

A full report is available for Members by emailing info@vinc.net.au

Overview

With good reason, we began 2022 in positive spirits because VINC had proved itself to be a resilient and capable organisation after enduring two gruelling years. We'd achieved so much despite the setbacks caused by the pandemic and the Manager's long absence due to illness. The year began with further lock-down challenges but as it progressed, so did our successes. Measured against its aims, objectives, and yearly targets, VINC's productivity, growth, sales, financial viability (equity and cashflow), product diversity and volunteer involvement all excelled. Only our net profit fell short of expectations. Apart from some non-cashflow-affecting accounting adjustments (resulting from VINC's now, annual Review) much had to do with having a reduced stock on hand value, caused partly from shifting more plants than expected and producing less than projected in December.

In 2022, VINC supplied well over 400,000 plants to land managers covering many hundreds of planting projects in the local area. Aside from the social benefits, these revegetation plantings benefited seed orcharding, biodiversity enhancement, wildlife corridors and urban cooling programs in 11 local council areas within greater Melbourne. Our commitment to provide high quality plants with strong genetic diversity and known provenance, enhancing biodiversity and local character is well known and our achievements in this respect, speak for themselves.

As with previous years, many of the plant species we produced were rare and/or threatened on local or regional levels. Some of these originate from populations that are now functionally extinct in large parts of the areas we supply to. We are proud to have again contributed so positively to their ongoing survival.

In late 2022, VINC became a registered charity. Coupled with our existing Environment Fund, our objective is to use our status and these resources to better enable projects that support genetically resilient and sustainable plant populations for the health of the environment and our community. VINC remains committed to this and following is a summary of what we achieved to that end, last financial year.

Accomplishments:

- VINC's Board of Directors – all non-executive (volunteers) - continue to be highly supportive and active towards our organisation's ongoing successes:
 - ✓ Thanks largely to the hard work of our Chair of Directors, VINC became an ACNC-registered charity in November 2022. We were able to successfully demonstrate the benefits that VINC provides, not only for the environment, but also for the countless individuals, groups and agencies that undertake significant projects throughout the local community.

This has also enabled VINC to keep its Environment Fund, a channel that we will use increasingly for special activities relating to the preservation of local flora and fauna. Deep into the year, the board started working on ways to strengthen VINC's rules so that they better reflected objectives outlined in the Fund, a requirement of the REO (Register of Environmental Organisations). We also resolved to improve the Fund itself to create a Terms of Reference (ToR) and strengthen the committee to achieve greater transparency.

- ✓ Developed in late 2021, a key outcome of VINC's 3 to 5-year Strategy Plan was to form several active sub-committees, (comprising board members, outside experts, and staff), to enable us to address current

objectives and meet the future needs of our organisation. Four – education, members, future growth (FG), and seed offerings (SO), were identified as being the primary interests for VINC. Respective ToR's were created, and we now have a clear path ahead for each. Two of these were given greatest priority; FG and SO, as most other activities rely heavily on their success. Some work was undertaken on the latter (e.g., identifying key species and the way to grow them for seed production areas) however given VINC's space and lease predicaments, FG became VINC's driving focus in 2022. Late in the year, plans were drawn up to create a prospectus to aid our organisation's future viability.

- Aside from the type of plants we produce and supply, one of the greatest hallmarks of VINC is our involvement with local community.

- ✓ In 2022, we increased our volunteer base at the nursery. Early in the year, two permanent structures were built for our workers, and we now have many more outdoor volunteers assisting our retail co-ordinator on the days we are open to the public. Additionally, our Sales/Stock Coordinator started taking on a limited number of volunteers within our growing spaces, facilitating weed control and maintenance of plants. During the year, other staff encouraged our volunteers to assist in VINC's rare/threatened seed production area, which proved to be very popular, particularly with students undertaking horticultural courses at nearby institutions like Melbourne Polytechnic. Similarly, we are receiving more work-placement students in our propagation area over summer during peak-production. We hope to extend these programs into the future.



Retail volunteers working underneath one of two new weather structures

- ✓ Post pandemic community planting activities and council-based community programs proliferated in 2022. We assisted with supply of hundreds of thousands of plants, either directly or indirectly to scores of schools, community groups, local councils, and other land managers undertaking projects throughout the year. Not including sales to the public, it is conservatively estimated that at least 60% of all plants supplied by VINC were used in community plantings in 2022. World Environment Day, National and Schools Tree Days and Naidoc Week - all winter events - trigger some of the year's biggest planting activities.

In 2022, VINC supplied approximately 23,000 plants and 150 species to more than 30 community groups spanning over 55 individual projects! Although VINC's plant derived income is minor compared to that from councils and environmental contractors, a proportionately large amount of support is provided by us to foster these projects. And the community impact is immense. Many hundreds of people volunteer their time and efforts to these activities and VINC is proud to play a small part in this.

Some of the more prominent local water catchment projects that VINC was involved with included those undertaken by Abbotsford Riverbankers, Collingwood Childrens Farm, Fifteen Trees, Green St Revegetation Group and Yarra Riverkeepers. We have also had strong support from countless smaller 'Friends of' groups and other community organisations that do local plantings – too many to mention by name. Many of these local groups have been active for several years and continue to support VINC with plant purchases; local groups like the residents from Green St Revegetation Group have planted over 10,000 indigenous plants in little more than a decade. This demonstrates how significant one small community group can be and why it's so important for organisations like VINC to continue and prosper.

It was also particularly rewarding to assist local schools with plant selection in 2022. VINC offered advice to multiple schools spanning countless planting projects and thousands of plants relating to Junior Landcare, Biodiversity, bushfood, education, and Rewilding programs. Notable projects include those at Princess Hill, Parkville Specialist, Collingwood and Viewbank Secondary Colleges, Lynall Hall Community School, and Spensley St, Carlton Nth and Westgarth Primary Schools. Many others were helped via local councils and organisation like CERES. Additionally, VINC supported schools with their fundraising efforts through supply of plants on a sale-on-return basis. VINC provided many primary schools with more than 2,000 plants for on selling at events, which helped each raise hundreds of dollars. The consignment service, which VINC started nearly 20 years ago, remains popular in the local community.

- VINC actively supported many other community-based programs, either directly with community groups or through those run by local councils and agencies. Below are a few that VINC was involved with in 2022:

- ✓ City Boroondara, Backyard Biodiversity – a project that encourages residents to plant indigenous flora and other wildlife-friendly features in their garden. Support from VINC included guided nursery tours with advice on suitable plant selection through seasonal voucher scheme.
- ✓ Brunswick Communities for Nature – a volunteer group that promotes and on-sells indigenous plants for nature strips and open public space to create biodiversity corridors in densely urban environments. VINC support through plant advice, information, and supply.
- ✓ Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne - programs for children centred around themes of Sustainability, STEM, Health and Wellbeing, First Nations and Nature Play. VINC supports with plant advice, information, and supply of specially produced trays of plant germinants throughout the year. Kids learn about indigenous plants, each taking a home a seedling they have ‘pricked out’ from the tray.



Seedling trays ready for supply to the Melbourne Botanic Gardens.

- In mid-2022, Banyule City Council sought to engage a panel of contractors to supply for up to 5 years, a broad range of locally indigenous plant species for revegetation projects in the Yarra River, Plenty River and Darebin Creek catchment areas. VINC's tender was successful and in October, we were awarded a contract to supply plants for 3 years with likely extension of 2 years. Although we had worked closely with this council for over two decades, it was good to consolidate the relationship; their social engagement with local environmental groups is strong and many of the almost 9,000 plants supplied by VINC last year were used in revegetation plantings undertaken by the community. It also strengthens VINC's ability to access plant material from a region that contains a relatively healthy number of biodiverse spaces with locally rare plant species within it.

VINC was also selected as a preferred supplier for DEECA's (Dept of Environment, Energy and Climate Action) Cooler Greener West program. The aim of the program is to have 500,000 trees planted in Melbourne's west by the end of 2024. This region was recently identified as having, by far, the lowest tree canopy cover in Melbourne, causing local temperatures to increase – something known as the urban heat island effect. Late last year, VINC provided a modest 1,500 trees and shrubs for phase 2 of the program however in spring, we were engaged to supply 5,000 more for in 2023 for the phase 3 stage. With assistance of land managers, these are to be planted locally by community volunteers within City Moonee Valley. We expect to supply at least this quantity again in 2024.

Challenges

The small size of our nursery remains by far, VINC's biggest predicament and priority. Our growing space has essentially, been at peak-season plant holding capacity for two years now and we are increasingly turning away lots of worthy groups/projects as demand grows exponentially year by year. We've been able to be creative with the limited space we have, including production of more plants in winter but these gains are minor compared to what is being lost. Storage and work areas including nursery-managed seed production areas, (essential to VINC's ongoing viability), are also being greatly compromised.

Further, being an environmental organisation tenant situated on crown land within a sporting precinct, jeopardises our abilities to extend our short, 10-year lease. We continue to have very little support from our local statutory authority.

Our Future Growth Committee were proactive on this front, exploring all avenues to help VINC find a way out of this bind. Expansion was considered as our most viable option, and we began looking at the best ways to facilitate this as a way forward. The beginnings of a prospectus occurred deep into the year, with plans to have it finished by mid-2023. We envisage this tool being used as the catalyst to raise awareness of VINC's plight and to aid in tangible benefits for our nursery into the near future.

VINC Environment Fund

We received two small donations in 2022. These, together with others acquired recently, remain in our Fund. They will be used for a near-future project related to seed orcharding.

Monies totaling \$2,532.89 for our three-year Arching Flax Lily project (completed 2020 and costed 2021) were released from the Fund following approval (via circular resolution) from our VEF committee in April 2022. These funds were procured through donations from members of the public (largely through VINC's Co-op membership) in 2016/2017. All costs covered staff wages specific to consultations, seed activities, record keeping and plant management. VINC funded production of the actual plants, and this was aided with volunteer support.

Costings for establishment and activities relating to VINC's 'seed security' orchard, ending late 2021, were not finalized by the end of 2022 so remain for now, within the Fund. This should occur soon, and we hope to release the monies (~\$3,000) shortly thereafter. Although relatively small, this orchard project continues to provide VINC with many thousands of genetically diverse seeds from a few locally rare species. Dozens of local council customers (e.g., City Boroondara, City Stonnington) and environmental community groups have benefited from the supply of plants for their individual projects and many healthy populations now occur throughout the region. These in turn

are providing VINC with a rich source of material, taking pressure off the few remnant populations that exist.

At the end of FYE December 2022, total funds in the VINC Envirofund account were \$4896.98.

Seed Collection

Prior to the summer seed collection season of 2021/2022, we were fortunate to hire two experienced seed collectors. They took good advantage of the fabulous seed season we had both in that summer and the summer of 2022/2023. They both have worked diligently to provide us with plentiful seed for our future propagation.

We continue to rely on revegetated sites and our in house SPAs for seed. Tracking plants we have supplied which we can later collect seed from is a time consuming, but well worthwhile process. Our in house SPAs produce large quantities of seed, but are also time consuming to establish and manage, and take up valuable space in the yard which may otherwise be used for saleable plants. However, through tracking revegetated sites and creating and managing in house SPAs we have consistently been able to supply many species which no longer persist in significant quantities in remnant sites.

While we are fortunate to collect plentiful seed from a number of revegetation sites, we have experienced some issues with hybridisation of species such as *Dianella revoluta*, which have been planted alongside the non indigenous species *Dianella callicarpa*. This issue will only worsen over time as plantings increase, and as some nurseries who are less knowledgeable provide plants with uncertain identification. The only remedy to this issue is to increase our own in house SPAs, which will require dedicated space to do so.

Volunteers

VINC would not be able to achieve all that it does without the support of our fantastic volunteers, who week after week, year after year, volunteer their time to assist us in our work propagating, caring for, and selling plants. We now have volunteers in the yard and in retail, as well as our regular 15 – 20 volunteers each week in propagation. Over summer we opened up another propagation day to Melbourne Polytechnic students who participated in a work placement every Wednesday for two months. This was a win/win for students and VINC alike, as the students learnt a great deal, and VINC gained some assistance in the busy propagation months of December and January.



One of our outdoor volunteers working in the recently built weather shelter at back of nursery.

We are also supported by a board of Directors who also volunteer their time and expertise to provide us with governance and expertise. We are extremely grateful to all of our volunteers who not only contribute their work, they also provide a strong sense of community in the day to day.

All of our volunteers contribute a great deal to VINC, not only through the work they do, but also through their stories, jokes, music, plants, food and recipes. They are an integral part of the VINC community, and we are grateful for their contribution and their energy.

Personnel

We thank all who worked tirelessly for VINC during 2022, whether it be in a voluntary or paid capacity. We would not have achieved what we did without their significant efforts.

There are too many nursery volunteers to list by name, but we are grateful to each and all. Representing VINC, below is a list of Directors and staff:

Staff:	Directors: * denotes reappointment at June AGM				
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manager: Mark Hursch• Co-ordinator – Propagation: Naomie Sunner• Co-ordinator - Stock & Sales: Lloyd McRae• Co-ordinator - Retail: Antoinette Celotti• Office Administration: Mary Ann Townsend• Propagation Assistants: Jo Clark, Emma Hammel• Nursery (Yard) Assistants: Jenny Harrington, Tim McKay (starting Jan)• Retail Assistants: Marg Allan, Jake Duyvestyn (starting May), Rowena Groundwater (Jan-Aug), Sarah Garrett (starting Oct) Emma Hammel, Bessie Richards• Seed Collectors: James Kidman (Coordinator), Thomas Dell 'Oro, Claire Ranyard, Rani Sherriff	<table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Current Board (FYE 2022):</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Caroline Sheehan (Chair)*• Michael Ballock (Secretary)*• Rhys Dale - appointed June AGM• Natasha Freeman appointed Dec.• Robert McMillan*• Rowena Scheffer appointed Dec.</td></tr><tr><th>Retired Directors Serving 2022</th></tr><tr><td><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Georgina de Beaujeu* retired Nov• Susan Stanes* retired Nov• Andreas Wenzel retired June</td></tr></tbody></table>	Current Board (FYE 2022):	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Caroline Sheehan (Chair)*• Michael Ballock (Secretary)*• Rhys Dale - appointed June AGM• Natasha Freeman appointed Dec.• Robert McMillan*• Rowena Scheffer appointed Dec.	Retired Directors Serving 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Georgina de Beaujeu* retired Nov• Susan Stanes* retired Nov• Andreas Wenzel retired June
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A personal note from Naomie

This is the last time I will be writing up my contributions to our annual report at VINC. Over the last 11 years and a few months, I have overseen the production of a whopping 4,447,921 plants! It has been a great honour to lead the propagation and volunteer program over the last 11 years, and to see VINC grow from strength to strength. VINC makes a significant contribution to the local ecological restoration industry, and to the education of the local community about the value and cultivation indigenous plants. Leading some of our projects here has been genuinely rewarding, at times very exhausting, and at other times a massive amount of fun. I wish VINC, its staff and the amazing community of volunteers all the best.

Report Prepared by:

Mark Hursch, & Naomie Sunner,
VINC Manager Propagation Coordinator

May 2023

Dedicated in memory to our dear former staff member, Bessie Richards. Sept 1992- Sept 2022. Sadly missed, not forgotten.

MH, AC and the VINC Team.

VINC is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri people, and we acknowledge them as the Traditional Owners of this land. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and future.