

Gateways continues working to keep participants and the community safe during Covid-19

As an essential disability service, Gateways Support Services has remained open and dedicated to supporting participants, families, and staff during some of the toughest lockdowns and restrictions in Melbourne and regional Victoria.

We are constantly in awe of the Gateways community, who have consistently pulled together to respond to outbreaks these past 18 months, and remained dedicated to protecting our staff and participants and helping to minimise the spread of COVID-19.

Our Teams are following the information and advice from the Australian Government and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services. We are guided by information provided by the Victorian Government and Disabilities Services when making decisions regarding services and whether staff are required to work at home or return to the office.

To minimise exposure risk and keep our staff and participants safe, Gateways has adopted alternative supports to ensure that we continue delivering high-quality, personalised disability support during this unprecedented period.

Changes to services

We continue to provide Covid-safe care to people with disability during what is incredibly challenging times for all.

Some of the many actions we have taken throughout this period include:

- We have put COVIDSafe Plans in place at each of our sites.

- This includes mandatory QR Code check-ins, following the Federal and Victorian Government's guidelines for screening for flu and COVID-19 symptoms, while practising social distancing, hygiene practices and using appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and masks. Only our essential staff are on-site providing face-to-face services.
- Our teams have shown innovation and agility in adapting our services to meet individual's needs. This has included offering online therapy and take-home packs, phone-based Support Coordination, and an innovative program of online activities.
- Our dedicated Health & Safety Team meets regularly to implement measures to keep our participants and staff safe whilst delivering essential services.
- We set up a Parent Hotline/ Covid Hotline to assist with enquiries and support up to 30 people each week with their Covid-related queries.
- Extra staff assigned to Support Coordination
- Our residential services remain essential and at the core of our support. Our Accommodation Team put a number of changes in place to ensure the safety of residents and staff.

Our primary goal has and always will be to provide essential services to our participants while ensuring the safety of our staff.

We strive to put in place the very highest quality of infection control measures and restrictions to ensure we can continue to provide services for our clients in the safest way possible that are in line with current restrictions and COVID requirements.

We thank our participants, families, carers and the broader community for their flexibility and willingness to pivot to new types of support as we navigate the pandemic.

Meet Long: Lockdown measures have not stopped Long kicking (culinary) goals.

Long Bui is one of many participants that have taken to Gateways' online cooking activities – set up during the first of many COVID-19 isolation restrictions in March last year – to try something new and stay social during lockdowns.

'On Saturday, I go shopping, and on Sunday, I do online cooking from my home,' says Long.
'It is good. I like seeing my friends. It's good I can keep seeing them even when I'm in lockdown.'

The online cooking sessions are among a range of activities now offered by Gateways Support Services to ensure participants can keep achieving their NDIS goals whilst having fun in a safe and secure environment.

Gateways Support Services Recreation Coordinator Mandy Pitt says the interactive classes have been hugely popular since starting 18 months ago in response to our first lockdown, now forming part Western Melbourne's regular line-up of activities alongside face-to-face groups.

'Our ability to be creative and adapt to a changing landscape throughout the pandemic has enabled us to provide opportunities for people to feel connected during these difficult times,' says Mandy.

'Long has been an active participant throughout and always sends in photos - it's been fantastic to see him grow his skills and confidence in the kitchen with the assistance of support workers.'

Gateways also offer our Western Melbourne participants one-on-one support to spend time outdoors with their 'Bubble Buddy.'

'Another popular option during lockdown last year which we've recently re-launched is our "Buddy Bubbles" - an opportunity for two people to get together with either one or two workers to enjoy their two hours of exercise with a friend,' says Mandy.

While government restrictions have meant some of Long's preferred outdoor activities can't go ahead – such as swimming and Gateways' camps – Long is developing his culinary and social skills, cooking up a storm in the online kitchen.

'Cooking is my favourite. I like everything I cook,' says Long.

A reminder that if you require information about any Gateways Services and if they are currently going ahead – you can call the Gateways Hotline on 0417 655 980, Mon-Fri 9.00am – 5.00pm.

The Gateways Parent / Carer / Participant Support Hotline is about general information and support. If you require medical assistance or information, please get in touch with your local doctor or call the Australian Government's National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080.