

# The WISE system builders series:

## Lessons from the quiet architects of more inclusive employment in Australia

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### Case study

How STREAT is leading cross-sector aggregation to create green jobs and a more connected, thriving social enterprise community

Melbourne-based social enterprise STREAT is best known for its success in transforming the lives of young people facing complex barriers to work by offering jobs, training and support in the hospitality industry.

Less well known is the work STREAT is doing to transform the social enterprise system to scale opportunities for young people in the green economy,

by driving collaborations with peer enterprises and cross-sector partners.

This case study highlights the impacts and challenges of STREAT's systems transformation initiatives, and why philanthropy, impact investors and governments who share the goal of building more inclusive employment practices should take notice of this often-invisible area of work among social enterprises.

*Horticulture image.  
Image credit: Alana Holmberg.*



# The backstory:

## A multi-year research program

**This case study is part of a multi-year research project to unpack the role of cross-sector collaboration in enabling Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) to scale innovative employment models that support Australians experiencing disadvantage.**

The research aims to fill a gap in empirical knowledge about WISEs, which are enterprises that operate like most other small-to-medium sized businesses but have a distinct social mission to create meaningful jobs for Australians who face the most complex barriers to employment.

New evidence has emerged which compares the effectiveness of WISEs in creating sustained employment opportunities compared to traditional employment services<sup>1</sup> for those most distant from the labour market. These findings are compelling, particularly in terms of value to government, as WISEs are typically found to absorb public costs and create greater public value than existing employment services.



**Our hope would be that leading social enterprises can ‘step-up’ to start to lead aggregation activities, bringing as many smaller social enterprises into the bids wherever possible. Over time, (this) approach would lead to the securing of larger contracts, enabling the growth of smaller social enterprises who are sub-contracted by their larger peers.”**

STREAT



**In times of increasing uncertainty the only way to predict the future is to design it.”**

*R. Buckminster Fuller, architect, systems theorist, philosopher and futurist*

A number of well-established WISEs, with aspirations to scale their inclusive work models to benefit more Australians, have been looking beyond their own operational backyards and stepping up to lead innovative cross-sector trials and initiatives.

In many cases, this cross-sectoral collaboration has been necessary to achieve scale, given that, despite the compelling value WISEs deliver to governments, they are not recognised or supported in governments’ employment services systems, thereby hampering their growth.

For the WISEs leading these ecosystem growth strategies (on top of managing their own enterprises), it’s hard work to sustain and resource. This is often due to the “invisible” and under-valued nature of the work despite the role it plays in driving social innovation to address the complex social problems experienced by marginalised jobseekers.

To evaluate the effectiveness of these emerging cross-sector collaborations, the research project focuses on the work of three Australian WISEs – STREAT, White Box Enterprises and Jigsaw – each of which is leading transformational projects to indirectly address social problems on a large scale by growing a supportive social enterprise ecosystem.

This case study – one of a series of three – aims to share a summary of the research findings and build awareness of the ways in which potential partners – such as philanthropy, governments and business who share the goal of building more inclusive employment practices – can help the WISE sector to scale.

The research is being undertaken by PhD Candidate Sally McGeoch, through the Centre for Social Impact Swinburne, under the supervision Professor Jo Barraket AM and Dr Krzysztof Dembek. It draws on data collected between December 2021 and May 2024.

<sup>1</sup>Taylor Fry (2023). Costs and benefits comparison of social enterprise employment and Disability Employment Services. [www.whiteboxenterprises.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/WBE\\_PB03-Costs-and-benefits-analysis-final.pdf](http://www.whiteboxenterprises.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/WBE_PB03-Costs-and-benefits-analysis-final.pdf); STREAT (2022). STREAT’s First Decade Report 2010-2020. [www.streat.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/streats\\_first\\_decade\\_report\\_-\\_from\\_2010\\_to\\_2020.pdf](http://www.streat.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/streats_first_decade_report_-_from_2010_to_2020.pdf)

# STREAT: a strong track record of success

**Established in 2009, STREAT is a Melbourne-based social enterprise that supports young people to thrive now and in the future.**

STREAT provides these young people – who typically face significant barriers to employment – with training and employment pathways in hospitality and, more recently, horticulture.

An experienced and dedicated Youth Programs team (including therapy dog, Magic) provides the young people with the support they need, while they gain real-world

work experience and skills in STREAT's cafes across inner Melbourne, or in gardens and urban farms.

STREAT's robust, sustainable model has transformed the lives of more than 3000 young people – a number that continues to grow.

Modelling by STREAT in partnership with RMIT University shows that during its first decade, STREAT saved governments \$49 million (although less than 1 per cent of STREAT's funding was received from governments each year).<sup>ii</sup>

## STREAT's vision for system transformation

As STREAT's leaders have built and refined the social enterprise's employment model, they have come to recognise that to effectively scale impact, they can't do it alone. Instead, they've expanded their collaborative work and set a bold 2040 vision to not just transform the lives of young people but to also transform the system for them.

Given the lack of collaborative infrastructure in the social enterprise sector, STREAT's leaders have stepped up to help fill this void, taking on the additional mission of developing a range of innovative aggregation initiatives to amplify their "direct" and "indirect" impact. A key focus of this work is to build a diverse range of "green job" pathways through their collaborations giving young people more choice and opportunities than if they were working with a single enterprise.<sup>iii</sup>

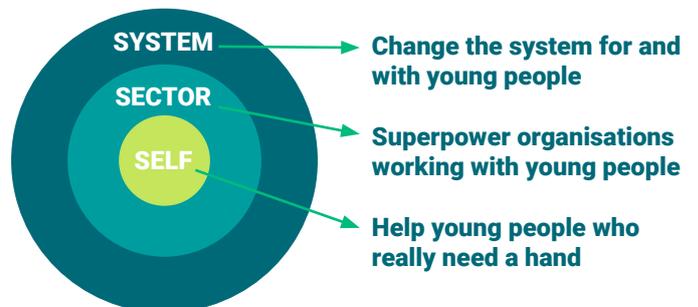
As mature operators in the relatively nascent sector, STREAT is well-placed for this challenge given the experience of its leaders in building bridges between sectors, managing stakeholder tensions, and mentoring other social enterprises which lack the resources or bandwidth to scale. Indeed, STREAT encourages other social enterprises to freely leverage the know-how they've learnt over 15 years, facilitating this through a new team and offer called "STREATwise" – tools, workshops and resources to power-up other social enterprises to become "collaboration ready".



**"Most WISEs in the system are very much focused day to day on 'how do we improve ourselves?' Very few get up and go 'how do we improve the system?'"**

*Paul Ramsay Foundation representative*

■ *STREAT's system approach.*



Source: STREAT

### About STREAT

- Established: 2009
- FY23 Revenue: \$6.5M
- Industry: Hospitality, Horticulture
- HQ: Melbourne
- Target: Young people at risk

### STREAT's Impact

- **3000+**  
young people supported by STREAT since 2010
- **72%**  
of graduates still in employment, education or training at 6 months (compared with 27% in the government's employment services system)

<sup>ii</sup> Scott, R., Edelmaier, G. and Barrelle, K. (2019). Social Enterprise: A Case Study for Government. [www.streat.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/streat\\_a\\_case\\_study\\_in\\_creating\\_value\\_for\\_government\\_a3\\_3.pdf](http://www.streat.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/streat_a_case_study_in_creating_value_for_government_a3_3.pdf); DEWR (n.d) Employment Outcomes by stream April 2016 to March 2017. [www.dewr.gov.au/employment-research/esor](http://www.dewr.gov.au/employment-research/esor)

<sup>iii</sup> International Labour Organisation (n.d) Just Transition and green jobs. [www.ilo.org/publications/greening-jobs-and-just-transition](http://www.ilo.org/publications/greening-jobs-and-just-transition); Climate Council (2020) Clean Jobs Plan. [www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Climate-Council\\_AlphaBeta-Clean-Jobs-Plan-200720.pdf](http://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Climate-Council_AlphaBeta-Clean-Jobs-Plan-200720.pdf)

# Driving major cross-collaboration projects

Among the projects initiated in line with STREAT's bold plan are two major interconnected, collaborative ventures behind which STREAT is a leading force: *The Purpose Precinct* and *Moving Feast*.

## The Purpose Precinct

Established in 2022 and located in Melbourne's iconic Queen Victoria Market, the Purpose Precinct is a retail social enterprise hub designed to help grow Victorian social enterprises and their impact. The Purpose Precinct enables a variety of social enterprises to showcase their products and services, giving them exposure to the estimated 10 million people who visit the Queen Victoria Market each year.

Customers visiting the Precinct can acquire a rotating range of goods and services, such as bicycle repairs, homewares, preserves, kitchen garden and home growing supplies, clothing and accessories. Since launch, its success has seen the initial footprint of the Precinct expand, enabling more social enterprises to join the collaboration.

The Precinct also has a strong focus on promoting the circular economy. Surplus food from traders across the Queen Victoria Market is collected and turned into products such as jams and preserves at an onsite kitchen.

Behind the scenes it is a vibrant "green jobs" hub with the Precinct providing a diverse range of on- and off-site employment and training pathways for young disadvantaged jobseekers from hospitality to horticulture and waste recovery.

The Purpose Precinct was launched as a partnership between STREAT and Good Cycles, with support from:

- Social Enterprise Network Victoria (SENVIC)
- Victorian Government
- City of Melbourne
- Over 20 Philanthropic partners
- Moving Feast network



**The goal for the sector is to find a whole bunch of ways to get the sector joined up and working as an ecosystem. We need to build the social infrastructure to allow people to move into ecosystem approaches."**

STREAT



Training at STREAT café in Collingwood.  
Image credit: STREAT.

## The Purpose Precinct's Impact

Since December 2022, purchases have collectively contributed to:

**2000+ hours**

of training and employment provided by social enterprises at the Precinct

**6,056 kg**

of CO2 emissions prevented by goods or services sold at the Precinct

By the end of 2024, it's estimated:

**80**

social enterprises will have sold products at the Precinct

**75**

jobs will have been created for people experiencing disadvantage

## Moving Feast

Moving Feast is a network of for-purpose social enterprises and individual and group collaborators working together to catalyse a connected, fair and regenerative Victorian food system, in recognition of the food system's place as the intersection point between people and the planet.

To date the network has undertaken more than 30 projects ranging from small, one-offs to large, multi-year projects, enabled by over \$15 million of funding from government, philanthropy and industry. These have included:

- creating a 'Green Job Pathways' pilot to train young people in horticulture and urban farming;
- installing urban food gardens within public spaces including public housing estates and a university;
- establishing 'Epicurious', the first food-based social enterprise food trails and experiences across Victoria to boost the sector's involvement in the visitor economy and regenerative tourism; and
- developing 'Moving Feast Kitchen', a shared preservation kitchen and retail pantry within the Queen Victoria Market Purpose Precinct, available for hire by social entrepreneurs seeking to develop food products for retail onsite.

The network originally operated as a 'hub and spoke' model with STREAT performing many of the backbone functions. As planned, the model has evolved so that decision-making, resource-allocation and collaborative projects are distributed among the network. In 2023, the collective adopted a "challenge-led innovation" approach where major food system challenges are identified and interconnected projects are built around specific goals.

The network's evolution is well underway with major partners Open Food Network, Cultivating Community and Regen Melbourne now leading significant parts of work. The Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation has part-



**Admirably, STREAT took a deliberate choice, that wasn't necessarily the easiest choice, to stop being a pure delivery-focused social enterprise and actually to play the role of 'field builder' which is a more fraught and complex role and is very difficult to do without long term philanthropic funding."**

*Paul Ramsay Foundation representative*

funded this systems-level collaboration, with the CEOs of the major partners working together each week at the Foundation's new Impact Accelerator Hub. The network's first phase had eight core partners, and over 30 other enabling partners, all working at different parts of the food system:

- STREAT
- Open Food Network
- Cultivating Community
- CERES
- Collingwood Children's Farm
- Common Ground Project
- Community Grocer
- Melbourne Farmers Markets



**If as a funder you have trust in your partner and are totally aligned on the strategic intent of the impact, then let them head in the way that works for them as this approach will more effectively enable the social innovation to happen and get better outcomes."**

*Paul Ramsay Foundation representative*

## Moving Feast Impact

- 8 Core partners
- 30+ enabling partners
- 30+ projects

Impact is monitored using a "system mapping" tool to visualise progress towards goals and identify opportunities for action.

# Insights from STREAT's cross-sector leadership

**Cross-sector collaborations led by WISEs not only have the potential to lead to greater employment outcomes but also a range of other positive outcomes...**

Social enterprise infrastructure projects like The Purpose Precinct and Moving Feast are a major attribute of an effective social enterprise ecosystem as they support a broad range of individual social enterprises while also benefiting the broader sector as a whole.

- **New market opportunities:** The Purpose Precinct, for example, has created a physical and online "front door" for a growing number of small and regional social enterprises, giving them access to new markets. For many, the Precinct is their largest trading opportunity. By being integrated into these types of sector aggregation initiatives, WISEs can also gain greater efficiencies, knowledge, networks and financial sustainability, and benefit from new procurement and contracting opportunities to scale.
- **Greater sector visibility:** The initiatives showcase the social enterprise sector to more members of the public, promote conscious consumerism and contribute to the activation and renewal of public places to generate tourism and economic activity.
- **Supports the planet:** The deliberate focus on "planet" and "place" in these initiatives creates the additional benefits of developing a more connected, fairer and regenerative food system in Victoria. The Precinct will promote green industries, showcase low-carbon living and create new circular products and practices and jobs.
- **Better policy delivery:** The engagement with governments and philanthropy in the co-design of collaborative initiatives fosters learning and innovations which contribute to a more favourable policy environment for WISEs. The initiatives also enable the delivery of government policy, such as the City of Melbourne's Green Our City Strategic Action Plan.
- **Strengthen impact and networks:** Collaborations like The Purpose Precinct help build the collaborative capacity of the sector and a stronger evidence base to inform future collaborative initiatives. For example, the team have built an Impact Calculator which aggregates the impact of all purchases at the Precinct and converts them to metrics such as hours of training and CO2 emissions prevented.

**... but collaborations are complex, slow and emergent and require significant management and stewardship.**



**As a funder interested in supporting complex cohorts in a place-based way with a long-term ambition for systems change, you have to create flexibility and trust in the organisations you support so they can learn by doing as they come across challenges."**

*Paul Ramsay Foundation representative*

Although the sector welcomed in 2022 its first national representative body, Social Enterprise Australia, there remains historic fragmentation and a lack of collaborative infrastructure and governance models to enable aggregation and cross-sector collaboration.

- **Often invisible work:** Mature systems-minded WISEs like STREAT have forged ahead to drive greater collaboration to achieve scale drawing on their strong networks, facilitation skills and spirit of collectivism. Yet leading collaborations requires significant "heavy lifting" on behalf of the sector and much of this work is invisible and undervalued.
- **Relationships take time:** Building trust by working on projects together takes time – more complex, higher stakes and riskier collaborations can take longer if partners have not worked together. STREAT's Purpose Precinct was based on up to 10 years of relationship building through smaller collaborations and their active involvement in networks such as SENVIC.
- **Under-resourcing and capacity:** Bringing in other WISEs to collaborations is challenging due to the under-resourced nature of the sector. Capacity building support and shared resources are required to support them to participate meaningfully and sustainably – a key reason behind STREATwise. Cross-sector partners such as government, business and philanthropy are also still building their collaborative practice and skills.
- **Supply and demand needed:** Aggregation needs to happen on both the supply and demand side. If the demand isn't there with social enterprise business opportunities and contracting opportunities with government, the collaborations are not sustainable. STREAT is in the early stages of developing an outcomes model through the Purpose Precinct and Moving Feast but this has only been possible by creating aggregation capability to enable a scalable opportunity for this investment.



**Thank you**

to STREAT and other stakeholders for your invaluable contribution in preparing this case study.

## Key takeaways for WISE supporters

A vital role can be played in supporting the emerging cross-collaboration and aggregation activity in the social enterprise sector by philanthropy, investors and governments who share the goal of building more inclusive employment practices:

- **Consider backing cross-collaborations to drive impact:** Fund mature WISEs to innovate and experiment with models to scale through aggregation and cross-collaboration. Share risk and allow for flexibility and significant time investment to enable these collaborations to develop and pivot as they learn and new opportunities emerge.
- **Pay attention to enabling factors when developing collaborations:** Focus on opportunities that build the business engines of WISEs and are aligned with their inclusive employment practices. Resourcing is required for leadership, learning and long-term engagement. Invest in processes that build a sense of reciprocity among collaborators through sharing power and building trust, to support relationships that grow beyond transactional to transformational.
- **Incentivise and encourage ecosystem investment from WISE and cross-sector partners:** Build systems awareness and shift culture among WISEs and their boards towards the important role they can play in ecosystem development. Strengthen sector networks and intermediaries to help convene, amplify connectivity, and stimulate collaborative initiatives. Support capacity building investments that encourage WISEs to work together to build trust and opportunities for innovation.

## Glossary

**Aggregation:** STREAT defines an aggregator in a system as a component, person or entity that brings together (or aggregates) a set of related products or services. They are commonly used to share knowledge, simplify or improve management, streamline operations, accessibility, optimise assets and infrastructure.

**Challenge-Led Innovation:** A directional approach for change which involves coordinating people, processes and resources to experiment and prototype, shaping and executing projects that align to one or more major challenges. Challenges are fields of action and innovation where projects happen, with outcomes creating momentum towards a broader Impact Goal. See [movingfeast.net](http://movingfeast.net) for more information.

**Cross-sector collaboration:** the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organisations in two or more sectors (e.g. business, government, not-for-profit) to jointly achieve an outcome that could not be achieved by organisations in one sector alone<sup>iv</sup>.

**Green Jobs:** Decent jobs that contribute to preserve or restore the environment, be they in traditional sectors such as manufacturing and construction, or in emerging green sectors such as renewable energy and energy efficiency. The Climate Council's Clean Jobs Plan (2020) estimates the need for 76,000 green jobs in Australia of which approximately one third require minimal training, making them an ideal focus for social enterprises.

<sup>iv</sup> Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Stone, M. M. (2015). Designing and Implementing Cross-Sector Collaborations: Needed and Challenging. *Public Administration Review*, 75(5), 647-663.

**STREAT:** [www.streat.com.au](http://www.streat.com.au)

**Purpose Precinct:** [www.purposeprecinct.org](http://www.purposeprecinct.org)

**Moving Feast:** [www.movingfeast.net](http://www.movingfeast.net)

*The Purpose Precinct.  
Image credit: Good Cycles.*