

Growth on horizon for Shepparton drug and alcohol recovery facility

The Cottage

By Charmayne Allison



The Cottage co-founder Rob Bryant, Think Impact consultant Yussra Medani, The Cottage residents Harley, Geoff, David and Bryce, with Think Impact senior consultant Alischa Ross and The Cottage chief executive Maria Hutchison.

The Cottage will be better equipped to grow and even replicate its life-changing program after recruiting an advisory firm to measure its impact.

ADVERTISING The Shepparton drug and alcohol recovery facility recently enlisted the help of Think Impact, which measures the social impact and sustainability of organisations.

Rob Bryant, who co-founded The Cottage three years ago, hoped the assessment would allow the organisation to move from strength to strength.

“We have anecdotes of what The Cottage is doing in people's lives, but to have it externally researched could allow this model to be replicated elsewhere,” he said.

“The benefit of this program is enormous. It's a hugely effective way to address the drug and alcohol crisis.

“BUT THIS PLANNING AND RESEARCH IS WHAT'S BEEN MISSING.”

Think Impact kicked off its assessment in March, just as COVID-19 hit.

From there, senior consultant Alischa Ross met virtually with residents of The Cottage to develop outcome frameworks.

These frameworks used the language of residents and other stakeholders — including residents’ family members and employers — to articulate primary areas of change achieved through the facility.

“We live in a world focused on volume, where bigger is better. And while that can be part of the story, it's not all,” she said.

“We help organisations that are clearly trying to create change in clients’ lives to see what's actually changing as a result of their efforts.

“We create frameworks to figure out how to better measure that.”



Think Impact consultant Yussra Medani and senior consultant Alischa Ross.

Through her ongoing online meetings with residents and other stakeholders, Ms Ross identified five clear steps in The Cottage's "theory of change".

Step one is meeting physiological needs: providing an environment that is safe and secure, away from negative influences.

Next comes meeting safety needs — such as personal security and healthcare — before providing a sense of love and belonging.

This can then open up vulnerability and opportunities for friendship and family connection.

Step four is building self-esteem — creating an environment to grow in respect and self-esteem and learn to live again.

This all leads to the final step: delivering the capacity to reach self-actualisation, the inner desire to become the most one can be and find the freedom to be anywhere.

“The power of these words lies in the fact they are from people who have had these lived experiences,” Ms Ross said.

After developing the outcome framework, Ms Ross created measurement tools to capture data and stories.

“These will include surveys for residents to fill out which measure change,” she said.

“SO IF WE KNOW CHANGE IS HAVING BETTER SELF-ESTEEM, THE SURVEY WILL ASK QUESTIONS AROUND THAT.”

In addition to supplying measurement tools, Think Impact will support The Cottage to implement them.

This will include aiding the organisation in collecting its initial rounds of data, and then helping staff build this evidence into daily practice.

“The team at The Cottage has a strong vision to grow and even replicate the program,” Ms Ross said.

“This will help equip them to do that.

“And when you decide to focus on measuring the change your organisation makes, it gives you the chance to always improve.”