



# GREEN CONNECT

Green Connect is a social enterprise based in Wollongong, NSW. We create jobs and employment pathways for young people and former refugees in work that helps the planet and the community. We run a farm and an op shop, provide zero waste services at events, and staffing solutions to businesses and councils. We also provide training and support so our team can use employment experience as a springboard to sustainable and fulfilling jobs and careers.

## OUR IMPACT



**174**  
Employment opportunities provided



**154**  
Training and development outcomes



**102**  
Tonnes of waste diverted from landfill



**35,250**  
Kilograms of fair food grown and distributed



**13,621**  
Community visits to Green Connect

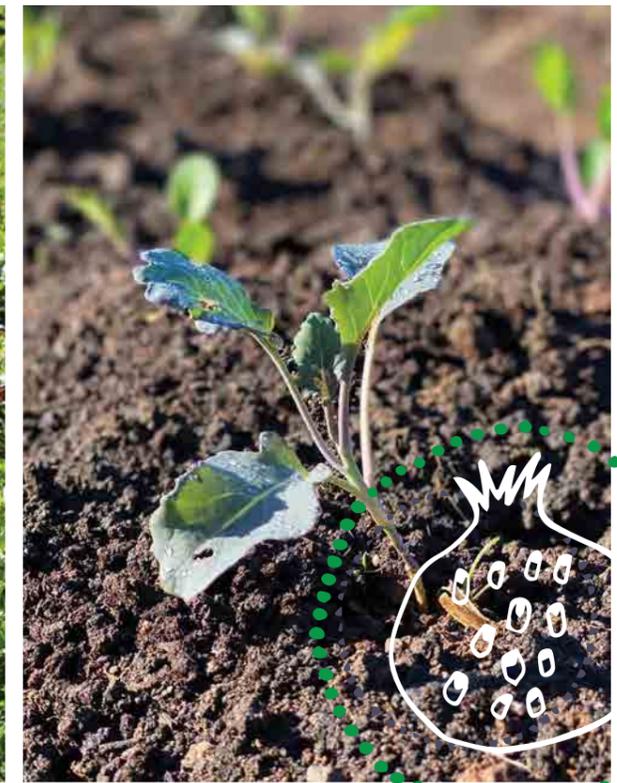
Photo at top: Nambibi Nasine Josiane



## A WORD FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER

Over the past year, many people have told us that Green Connect is unique because we're a for-purpose business that tackles both social and environmental issues simultaneously.

Some of those people were judges for the prestigious Green Globe awards, in which we were bestowed the highest honour – the **NSW Premier's Award for Environmental Excellence**. Others were young people or former refugees wanting to work for us because they saw meaning and purpose in what they do at Green Connect. Some were customers, buying our veg boxes, browsing in our op shop, engaging our staff through labour hire, or booking us to help their business or event manage their waste better. Others were funders such as **The Ian Potter Foundation, Westpac Foundation, the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, Scanlon Foundation, the Australian Department of Home Affairs and Qantas Foundation**, who have provided grants that will enable us to establish environmental education at the farm, move the farm hub, open two more op shops, provide greater support to our staff and invest in business development activities.



For almost 10 years, a passionate, hardworking team of inspiring and eclectic individuals has tackled every possible challenge. This year that included bushfires that devastated our crops and cancelled hundreds of hours of work at music festivals over summer, and COVID-19 that cancelled even more events, indirectly led to us relocating our op shop in the midst of all the craziness, and put our already vulnerable staff on edge both emotionally and financially. Even in those dire circumstances, the team dug deep and adapted. We couldn't offer farm tours and workshops so we offered online learning instead. We lost the lease for our old op shop so we found a better location. All of our zero waste work was cancelled but thanks to JobKeeper dozens of our staff could stay employed and they built an amazing children's garden at the farm instead. In addition to this, we supported 23 young people into long-term employment.

This year is dedicated to all the staff, customers, funders and supporters who recognised the value of the work that Green Connect does to create jobs, reduce waste and grow fair food, and backed us. Thank you for the awards, the grants, for buying our goods and services, for working so hard, for telling people about us, and for your moral support.

Stick with us – the journey has only just begun.

*Kylie Flament*  
GREEN CONNECT GENERAL MANAGER



## THE GREEN CONNECT OP SHOP

Community and sustainability are the foundations of Green Connect.

In 2019/20, we brought our op shop and head office together under one new roof. Community support from local tradespeople and volunteers, and the commitment of our own team, made the move possible, and the re-use of materials made it sustainable.

In February we were given notice to vacate our shop in Bellambi, north of Wollongong. Negotiations to move to a different part of the site fell through, and the op shop found itself without a home in March, right as COVID-19 restrictions came in.

We put the call out to our community for a large warehouse and shop for lease or for sale. With all our stock packed up and in storage, we needed to move quickly. We soon found a site for lease in Unanderra, south of the city, which was perfect and allowed us to bring our op shop and office together.

Our community network mobilised to help us move and set up the new shop, with minimal waste and maximum re-use of materials. As much as possible was repurposed from the previous op shop, the previous shop at the new site, and from local businesses and residents. Work experience participants and volunteers helped our staff to tidy, clean, paint and prepare the new shop for opening.

Volunteer handyman John Ruperto drew up plans for the new space.

“John gave so much time, love and energy,” project manager Jacqui Besgrove said.

“He drafted plans to make our retail assistant Alana’s vision come to life, meeting the needs of the space and the team. His passion and talent for upcycling helped create a purpose-built space with maximum reuse.

“We re-used walls and doors from the Bellambi site, our new landlord pitched in with energy efficient lighting, and a local builder donated carpet tiles for our meeting room. The team and volunteers helped in countless ways. Our retail assistant Mark spent days grinding down the floor and discovered a talent for renovating and repurposing.”

For John, working with Green Connect was an opportunity to give back.

“Jacqui and I worked together with the motto ‘get it done’. We would sit down and work out how to get things done with minimal waste. It was a full-time job but with 85% re-use, I am proud of what the team achieved.”

JOHN RUPERTO VOLUNTEER



John Ruperto



## WORK EXPERIENCE AT THE FARM

When Kyle Hanby started work experience at the Green Connect farm, it was the first time in many years that people treated him as Kyle, not Kyle with Asperger’s.

Working at the farm for one day a week when he was in Year 12 also gave him the opportunity to turn an interest in propagating different plants into a career. At the time, school was a stressful environment and he’d been told he may have to repeat Year 12.

Kyle is now working part-time at Patio Plants in Camden and studying a Certificate 3 in Horticulture.

**He is one of many young people in the Illawarra who have found an employment pathway through Green Connect.**

Our youth employment program is funded by the NSW Government and aimed at 15 to 24 year-olds who are unemployed, not at school or TAFE (or at risk of dropping out of school) and have multiple and complex barriers that make it hard to get and keep a job.

After work experience, Kyle went on to do paid work with Green Connect. He secured the job at Patio Plants after connecting with them through one of our volunteers, who saw Kyle’s potential.

“Working at the farm showed me a lot of things you don’t usually see – the variety in people’s life experiences, different cultures,” Kyle said.

“It gave me a different perspective, and a break from the things I was finding stressful.”

His mum Kim said: “Farm Manager Cal and the rest of the team were amazing. It was such a happy experience, for people to listen to his ideas, and push his boundaries a little. He felt like part of a family there.

**“He was always on time, prepared to work in the rain, always happy and cheery.”**

“He worked with former refugees and learned about their experiences in life. He realised he had it pretty good.

“Green Connect supports people on many different levels, not just employment.”

**This year 44 young people joined the program, 33 started paid work and 23 secured long-term employment.**

Photo at top: Kyle Hanby



### THE ZERO WASTE TEAM

Our Zero Waste team helps schools, events and organisations to reduce the amount of waste they send to landfill, with the aim of producing “zero waste” – 90% or more composted or recycled.

“For several years we’ve been making event organisers aware of alternatives to single-use plastic,” Zero Waste Manager Jacqui Besgrove said.

“We were excited when Wollongong City Council partnered with Plastic Free Wollongong and Green Connect to hold its first event that was free of single-use plastic.

**“It was great to see Council taking the lead on such an important issue.”**

At large events and festivals our Zero Waste team hand-sorts waste to make sure it’s diverted to compostable and recyclable waste streams, reducing the amount going to landfill by up to 90%.

We also provide waste education for patrons and provide event organisers with a report that outlines achievements and future improvements.

At the Viva La Gong festival in Wollongong in 2019, 88% of waste was composted or recycled.

We’ve also been working with corporate clients including NRMA and Mirvac on waste audits.

Our Zero Waste work was put on hold in early 2020 when bushfires then COVID-19 led to event and festival cancellations.

**We can’t wait to start this work again; we see real commitment from the community, organisations like Wollongong City Council and our corporate clients to reducing plastic use and choosing compostable alternatives. That commitment will see us all working together for a Zero Waste future.**



### THE FARM UPDATE

When supermarkets were low on stock and a lock-down was looming in 2020, it made sense for people to order fresh, local food delivered to their front door or a local hub.

Our fruit & veg boxes were more popular than ever – we doubled our customer base to more than 240.

This meant we could provide more paid work for young people and former refugees at a time when other parts of our business, like Zero Waste, were put on hold.

When face-to-face activities at the farm stopped due to COVID-19 restrictions, we launched online tours and workshops, on topics ranging from home permaculture to caring for chickens.

JobKeeper allowed us to provide more work for team members who were not working in other parts of Green Connect; they worked on the farm development, which will provide new eco-tourism opportunities and an estimated 111 new jobs and 262 employment pathways over the next 3 years.

**Made possible through the support of funders including The Ian Potter Foundation, Westpac Foundation and the NSW Government through My Community Project, the development includes a new children’s garden and a new farm entry and packing hub.**

Earlier in the year, drought and flood had a major impact on the farm’s soil.

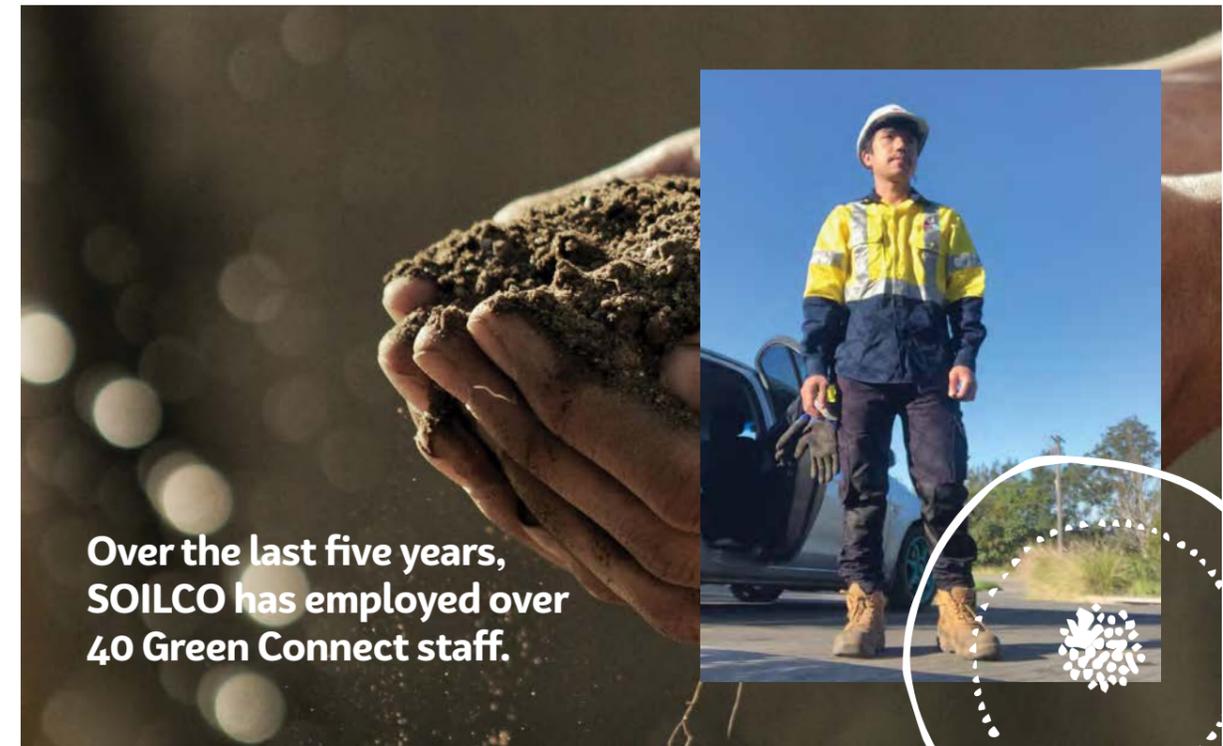
With Level 2 water restrictions remaining in place, we purchased a drip irrigation system with the help of a donation from a local business.

Farm Manager Cal Champagne said: “Once the soil gets dehydrated it is very difficult to rehydrate. This has major impacts on our ability to grow a variety of foods.

**“Drip irrigation is the most efficient type of irrigation out there. The new system will help us solve the dehydration of the soil.”**



Meh Reh



**Over the last five years, SOILCO has employed over 40 Green Connect staff.**

### STAFFING SOLUTIONS

**Labour hire is a term that is often associated with exploitative work practices. For Green Connect, nothing could be further from the truth.**

“We prefer to be called Staffing Solutions because we provide reliable and hardworking staff,” Staffing Solutions Manager Bron Williams said.

We recruit, train and manage people who can pitch in at a day’s notice, for businesses that need hardworking, reliable staff either temporarily – or for regular, ongoing work. We offer a supportive work environment, working with each person to ensure they have all the key skills that employers expect.

“We focus on providing the right staff and supporting them to enhance their skills. We spend time educating our team on their employment rights and responsibilities, and supporting them in the workplace,” Bron said.

**“Our ultimate goal is to see each person define and achieve their goals – which often includes transitioning to meaningful, long-term employment. The highlight of my job is hearing how working with Green Connect has improved someone’s confidence and purpose, connection to the community, employability and financial independence.”**

Illawarra business SOILCO is a Staffing Solutions partner and producer of soil, compost and mulch products.

“SOILCO focuses on protecting and regenerating the environment, just like us. We started helping them by providing casual staff over the busy summer period back in 2015,” Bron said.

**“Over the last five years, SOILCO has employed more than 40 Green Connect staff. Our team love working with SOILCO because work is local with a variety of hours and shifts that can work around family and study commitments. The best part is that SOILCO is managed by good people who care about their team and the environment.”**

When SOILCO began recruiting for two full-time depot hand positions, it looked to Green Connect.

HR Manager Monica Veljanovski said: “We knew the Green Connect team and their work ethic. We knew how they worked as part of our team. We thought it was a good opportunity to get someone into permanent employment.”

“We were proud to put forward nine of our team for interviews,” Bron said.

“The work ethic of our team stood out and SOILCO offered Koh Reh and Prae Reh full-time positions starting in late March 2020.”

**Staffing Solutions has almost doubled in size over the last two years. In 2019/20 Staffing Solutions provided 18,375 hrs of work to 75 young people and former refugees.**

Photo at top: Prae Reh

