

Championing men's health and community connection



1Matthew Etty-Leal and Simon Wheelton

Balwyn Evergreen Centre

An important theme in the work of Balwyn Evergreen Centre is the active support they give to the health and wellbeing of men in our community. The Centre recognises the vital role that community-driven support plays in encouraging men to stay physically active, mentally engaged and socially connected. Programs such as the men's exercise classes and Men's Kitchen offer men the opportunity to look after their own health, while being there for one another.

Matthew Etty-Leal, a long-time Balwyn Evergreen client, has spent his life giving back to the community. A historian and passionate volunteer, Matthew's involvement in his local area spans more than four decades, from raising funds for charities to leading history sessions at aged care facilities. And it's his participation in Evergreens men's exercise classes that has also been one of his most rewarding commitments.

'I attend the exercise sessions on Tuesday and Thursday mornings,' said Matthew, who was recognised as Boroondara's Joint Volunteer of the Year in 2022.

'The exercise keeps me active, but it's the friendships I've formed that make the real difference. After class, we gather for a coffee and chat, which has become just as important as the physical activity. It's great to feel part of something where everyone is supportive, and you're not alone.'

Matthew, who grew up in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, has a deep connection to the area and to Evergreen itself. He is also the President of the Balwyn Historical Society, which holds its meetings at the Centre. 'Evergreen is a warm, welcoming and inclusive environment offering a wide range of interesting services and activities for the local community,' Matthew said.

Simon Wheelton, who joined Evergreen on Matthews recommendation, shares a similar view. Simon, known for his life of service, including directing operations for the Marsh Foundation and volunteering to support international students during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as distributing free meals to international students at Deakin University weekly, now looks forward to the weekly exercise classes.

'Thanks to Matthew, I've been part of the Evergreen community since 2019. The friendship is one of the best parts of the men's exercise class. Its light exercise, but

it's good for the spirit. The fellows in the group are supportive and it's become a wonderful way to spend Thursday mornings.'

Simon, a former businessman who worked in everything from car sales to toy exports, continues to lead a life dedicated to helping others. But his time at Evergreen has also given him a space to relax and recharge.

'Being a part of Evergreen is not only about staying fit; it's about the social aspect. We all look forward to being here. The welcoming atmosphere and friendly conversations make it so much more than just an exercise class.'

Tina Hogarth-Clarke, CEO Balwyn Evergreen Centre, says, 'Men's health is not just about seeing the doctor or having check-ups. Staying active and connecting with others are key parts of maintaining physical and mental well-being. At Evergreen, we're proud to offer a supportive space where men can engage in light exercise, enjoy a coffee and have meaningful conversations with others in their community.'

Evergreens Men's Kitchen provides a space for men such as Simon, to learn new skills and form stronger bonds. Cooking with the Men's Kitchen is a fantastic way to stay engaged and learn something new,' says Simon. 'It's just one more reason why Evergreen is such a special place.'

For more information on Balwyn Evergreen Centres men's exercise programs, the Men's Kitchen, and other services, visit balwynevergreencentre.org.au