

KIDS CAN THRIVE HERE



\$1 MILLION GRANT FOR AOD SERVICE



BCHS has received a \$1 million grant to redevelop the Pharmacotherapy Clinic, thanks to the Victorian Government's Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Capital Renewal Fund. This will make a massive difference in Bendigo - [click here for the full story on our blog.](#)

Make community health the place

Community Health is the ideal platform to deliver the pending government program Thriving Kids. That was a clear message from the Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health conference last month.

BCHS CEO Mandy Hutchinson joined other health leaders to make a bid to embed Thriving Kids into community health organisations state-wide.

Thriving Kids is a landmark initiative to support children under eight with development delay and/or autism with low-to-moderate needs, and their families.

In February, The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing announced a National Cabinet of state, territory and federal governments would jointly invest \$4 billion over five years to deliver Thriving Kids across the nation, filling a crucial need outside the NDIS.



Acknowledgement of Country

Bendigo Community Health Services acknowledge we live, work and enjoy Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country. We extend our appreciation to the Djaara and Taungurung peoples. We pay respect to Elders past and present for their continued holding of memories, traditions, culture and community aspirations. We recognise sovereignty has never been ceded and express our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of colonisation and their lasting impact. May we walk forward together in harmony and the spirit of healing. It was and always will be Aboriginal land.



We support people to develop and maintain their personal, gender, sexual, cultural religious and spiritual identity.

Community health is the right platform for Thriving Kids initiative

FROM PAGE 1

Former Minister for Health and Aged Care Greg Hunt highlighted Thriving Kids to the 300-strong ARRCH conference crowd via his video link opening address.

Mandy picked up the thread within the panel that followed.

“Success depends not just on policy intent, but in choosing the right delivery platform,” Mandy said.

“Across the state, that platform already exists, and that’s community health services.

“Given we have so many sites, we’re immediately scalable. The infrastructure already exists within community health, and we’re positioning ourselves to be the platform.”

The government’s [Thriving Kids fact sheet](#) states:

“Thriving Kids will be provided in the environments where children live, learn and play. It will include supports that help:

- Improve awareness of developmental delays
- Better identify developmental delays
- Parents and families to build their skills, connect with others and find quality information and advice
- Connect children and families to ‘targeted supports’, focused on development and based on level of need.”

Services are expected to begin in October, 2026.

“We know the impact it has on our families when they can’t get the support they need,” Mandy said.

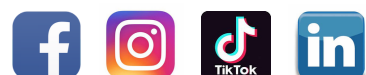
“At Bendigo Community Health Services, not only do we have the skillset and the networks to deliver a successful Thriving Kids service, we also have the very best interests of children and families in our community at heart.

“We know the entire registered Community Health sector has the same vested and caring interest, and we are calling on the government to place Thriving Kids into our care.”

BCHS is proud of:



**Get social
with us:**



www.bchs.com.au

VALUES SHINE BRIGHT

State-wide award for one of Bendigo's most caring health professionals

Bendigo nurse and drug and alcohol service leader Lisa Walklate has won a state-wide award for what matters most; her values.

The Bendigo Community Health Services employee is the inaugural Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health Living the Values Award recipient, chosen from the thousands of community health staff making a difference across Victoria.

The award acknowledges the personal attributes that underpin Lisa and her team's successes – her integrity, philosophy and deep commitment to community health.

Lisa is the BCHS Senior Leader AOD Wellbeing Services.

A nurse of 42 years – 28 of those spent in community health, Lisa says her current role at the coalface of drug and alcohol services is also her passion.

"Working in drug and alcohol services, you can make a real difference with very vulnerable community members that don't get seen at other services due to stigma and discrimination," Lisa says.

"If we can make a person feel good about themselves and give them hope, that's my goal."

It's a goal that wouldn't be possible without Lisa living the community health values.



Lisa Walklate is BCHS' latest award-winning member of staff.

"It's about being non-judgemental, respectful, listening deeply, learning people's stories and working alongside them, not forcing services onto them," she says.

The award recognised Lisa's work to incorporate a Foodshare pantry within the AOD wellbeing centre, to embed peer workers in the service, foster culturally-safe pathways and partnership with BDAC, and for creating a dignified and welcoming access point for people accessing drug and alcohol services.

"I've got one guy who is currently experiencing homelessness who first came into the building because he felt welcome," she says.

"We heated him up a meal, we made him a coffee, and he continues to come and make his own cuppa now because he's comfortable and welcome.

"We talk about providing trauma-informed care, but that welcoming, safe environment is also really important.

"We don't have any behaviour issues with our clients, because they're treated with respect."

BCHS CEO Mandy Hutchinson said Lisa shows us that values are not statements on a wall, they are choices made every day.

"We are so proud to see Lisa be acknowledged for not only the work she does, but the person she is," Mandy said.

"She is a role model to everyone at BCHS, and especially her drug and alcohol wellbeing staff.

"Her values truly set the gold standard for our service, which supports people through some of the toughest times of their lives."

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1 Marong Easter Festival	2	3 Good Friday	4 Bendigo Easter Festival
5 Easter Sunday	6 Easter Monday	7 World Health Day	8	9	10	11 Bendigo Bricks - Prince of Wales Showgrounds
12	13 White Hills Wanderers walking group	14	15	16	17	18 Pride in the Park - Rosalind Park
19	20 Term 2 starts for Victorian schools	21	22 Eaglehawk Explorers walking group	23	24	25 Anzac Day
26	27	28 Pay it Forward Day	29	30		

What's on in April...

Fresh news for fruit intake

We've had a FRUITful funding application, and we're pretty happy about it!

Thanks to the state government's Community Food Relief Program, we will once again be rolling out our free fruit stands, helping everyone take the first step towards healthier eating.

Not only will the fruit stands feature across all BCHS waiting rooms, we'll also have stands in neighbourhood houses, libraries and Haven Home Safe.

Keep an eye out for more information on where you can find the stands coming soon.

Any questions? Or think your community space might be interested in having a fruit stand? Get in touch at healthpromotion@bchs.com.au



OUR HEALTHY REPORT CARD



Dr Mehwish Riaz, Dr Gaurav Movalia and nurse Deb Mayes in the Medical Practice.

A big thank you to the 181 BCHS medical practice patients who completed our recent survey.

Senior Leader Medical Practice Leah Wastell said overall, the feedback was extremely positive.

“And as this was the first survey completed since the medical practice’s Eaglehawk site redevelopment, we were especially pleased to see ‘consultation and waiting area comfort’ make the list of top performing areas,” Leah said.

“We have worked hard to create a beautiful, calm and contemporary space for our community to enjoy when they visit us in Seymoure Street.”

Patients felt staff – inclusive of doctors, nurses and the client services team, were friendly and helpful. Many reported the service as being “excellent”, with limited suggestions for improvement.

“I believe that the community health centre offers the most comprehensive range of services, including a service for refugees,” reported one respondent.

Another comment recognised our bulk billing status: “I could not wish for a better general Medicare organisation.”

Another brightened everyone’s day with the comment: “Just keep being the beautiful people that you all are, maintaining respect and comfort for your patients.”

Areas we performed well in were:

- Ability to listen
- Explanations
- Reassurance
- Confidence in ability
- Able to express concerns/fears
- Respect shown to patient
- Consideration of personal situation
- Concern for patient

- Recommendation
- Treatment by staff
- Staff keep my information private
- Consultation and waiting area comfort

Our lowest scoring areas were:

- Obtaining a home/other visits
- After hours service
- Waiting time in surgery
- Telephone access to doctor/nurse
- Seeing doctor/nurse of choice

“We are now implementing a number of strategies to address our lowest performance areas,” Leah said.

Discover our [medical practice services here](#) or scan the QR code.





In praise of the five ways to wellbeing

BCHS Health Promoters Nat and Sebastian presented at the Preventative Mental Health Conference in Sydney last month.

They shared their experience of promoting the 5 Ways to Wellbeing - which are evidence-based, sure-fire actions anyone can take to improve their mental health.

The 5 Ways are embedded in many of our health promotion activities, and also form the basis of our annual Mental Health Month work. Have you heard of them?

Commit to incorporate the following 5 Ways into your every day, and you'll soon feel the benefits. They are:

- **Connect**
- **Be active**
- **Take notice**
- **Keep learning, and**
- **Give.**



SERVICE SPOTLIGHT

Gender Clinic

Gender Clinic care is here to help



Nurse Sybilla and Dr Haris proudly staff the BCHS Gender Clinic.

Bendigo Community Health Services recognises the Trans Day of Visibility, held annually in April. It's therefore a great month to remind the community we have a dedicated Trans and Gender Diverse Clinic, embedded with our Sexual and Reproductive Health Hub.

The fortnightly clinic is staffed by Dr Haris Noor and nurse Sybilla Marchingo, who provide expert, safe and inclusive care to their clients.

While the clinic only sees individuals 16 and over for Gender affirming hormone care, Haris and Sybilla are happy to chat to anyone of any age to provide guidance, education and specialist referrals.

Services available depend on each client's journey, but may include:

- Hormone replacement therapy.
- Gender affirming sexual healthcare, including contraceptive options; STI testing and treatment; and PrEP and PEP.
- Referral pathways.

No referral is needed to attend the clinic, simply call the BCHS general phone line on 5406 1200 to make an appointment.

THE DEAF EXPERIENCE AND ITS INDELIBLE MARK

Katrina was a just a little girl excited for a train ride when the realisation dawned on her that people saw her as different.

“I saw the word ‘handicapped’ on my ticket and asked my dad what it meant,” she signs. “Even though he explained it, I still didn’t understand because to me it’s just my ears that don’t work, everything else is fine.”

Katrina’s ears may not work but her hands and expressions sure do, and she loves to tell a story. It’s lucky for those who hear that interpreter Teresa is with Katrina for The Deaf Experience. She is the bridge between two worlds, helping the deaf and the hearing to communicate.

In her chosen language of Auslan, Katrina signs for over an hour about her experience living as a deaf person, from social inclusion and the importance of technology to communication barriers, workplace attitudes, and navigating NDIS and bureaucracy.

At the end of her first story Katrina turns to the wall beside her and sticks a Post-it note. For that little girl and her realisation, she signs.

Katrina does this at the end of a number of other stories too – for parents of deaf children who are expected (not helped) to advocate for their child; for the hearing son who was expected by others to speak for his deaf mum; for the little boy who couldn’t leave school to start a trade because the school needed three deaf students enrolled to receive specialist funding support; for those who are ageing out of the NDIS system and into the Aged Care system which many are finding aren’t catering to their needs.



Read the full story at bchs.com.au

From left, Imogyn, Emily, Katrina and Teresa.

By the end of the presentation there are 10 Post-it notes in total stuck to that wall, although there are likely many more she could put up.

Never has a Post-it note been poignant, until now.

“This is a visual representation of my life. They represent moments in time, burdens, placed on me during my life and on my community, because the burden is always on us to fit in with you.”

“I wonder how many Post-it notes you need to put up?” signs Katrina.

Facilitated by Bendigo Community Health Services and Anglicare Family Services Specialist Disability Practitioners, Emily Mynard and Imogyn O’Neill, The Deaf Experience presentation was more than work for Emily, it was personal.

“There’s nothing more powerful than hearing from someone with lived experience,” she says. “And I’m not just saying that because Katrina is my aunt.

“With The Deaf Experience we wanted to bring awareness of and insight to the deaf community, the barriers they come up against time and again.”

Emily is also a bridge of sorts. As BCHS’ Family Services Specialist Disability Practitioner she supports other practitioners part of the North Central Victoria Family Services Alliance (NCVFSA) by helping create understanding and connection between disability and family services. This in turn strengthens understanding of the NDIS which is important for those who live with a disability.

“It’s busy work, but it’s meaningful. The demand never really slows down because the support that we’re advocating for can genuinely change the direction of a person’s life,” Emily says.

Talking endometriosis

Nurse Mary-Anne from our Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic delivered her first info session to Karen-speaking women last month, aided by Boe Htoo, who expertly translated the lively get together.

Mary-Anne's message to those in the room was; "If you're having trouble with your period, and that's causing you to miss out on things you want to do in life, if it's causing you problems, come and see us." In fact, the answers to most questions asked in the session ended with "... come and see us."

The 18 women present also learnt about the use of translators in appointments, of the clinic's confidentiality and care. There were plenty of laughs in the room too.



WHY BOOK A FLU SHOT? READ ON



It's time to ward off the winter flu and its harsh new variant for the good of everyone in our wider community.

Here at BCBS, we're encouraging local residents to roll up their sleeves for an early flu vaccination, to help get on the front foot of a new variant.

Following last year's severe flu season, we're seeing high case numbers of a fast-moving, mutated influenza variant known as Super-K.

Without increased vaccine uptake across the country, vulnerable people, such as babies, young children and older adults, are at greater risk of illness and even hospitalisation.

BCBS offers vaccinations to clients aged 65+ via the medical practice, and to others via our annual Workplace Health and Wellbeing Flu Vaccination program.

The program is now beginning again, and we're really pleased to see a strong uptake, with around 3000 locals set to receive a flu shot from us, courtesy of their workplace.

Each one of these vaccinations will help curb the yearly challenge of keeping on top of the flu, which in Australia, results in an estimated annual 3,500 deaths, 300,000 GP appointments and 18,000 hospitalisations.

As you can imagine, this places an extreme burden on not only the people who are unwell, but on workplaces, the health system, businesses and the economy in general.

Our workplace program contributes greatly to the strategy of 'herd immunity'. This is when enough people become immune to a disease, and so its spread slows or stops.

Our program sees us visit a huge variety of workplaces across the City of Greater Bendigo, Mount Alexander, Campaspe and Loddon shires, from trades to schools, to councils to manufacturing, and more.

As we start to head out to see familiar and new faces again this year, we're reminding the community that we're still taking bookings.

Why take part? Influenza can seriously affect your workplace.

Workers with influenza take an average of two weeks to recover, and because people can be contagious before any symptoms show, it is easy to spread influenza.

Influenza is not the same as a cold.

It can lead to further complications, including pneumonia, so it makes sense to protect your staff and the people in their care.

For costs and bookings call us on 5406 1200 or email healthylifestyles@bchs.com.au and provide us with the following details:

- Organisation name, address & email
- Nominated contact person's name, email & phone number.
- Preferred day/date/time for us to visit
- Approximate number of employees.

Learn more about the [Workplace Health & Wellbeing Program via this link](#) or QR code.



FOSTERING MEDICAL CAREERS

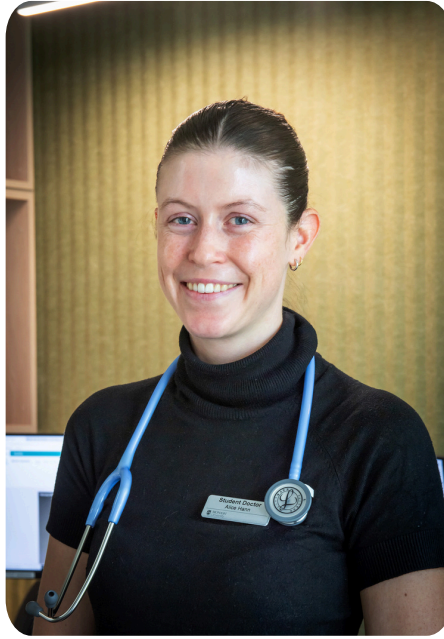
Alice Hann laughs that deciding what sort of doctor she would like to be currently changes every three-four days. But maybe she'll settle on general practice, after her 18 week-placement with our team in Eaglehawk.

Alice is a 4th year medical student with Monash University.

"I'm completing all my training in the north-west region of Victoria, with all my studies completed somewhere between Bendigo and Mildura," she says.

"We actually don't get to choose where we complete our GP placements with Monash, I just happened to get lucky with BCHS.

"Next semester I'll be moving up to Mildura to complete my rotations in paediatrics, psychiatry, and obstetrics/gynaecology."



LEFT: Monash University medical student Alice Hann is a welcome addition to our Medical Practice in Eaglehawk until May.

Alice is with us for two days a week until May, parallel consulting with supervision from Dr Jas, as well as shadowing a few other doctors.

"It's been a big learning curve seeing patients on my own, but I have felt very supported," she says.

"I've also been lucky to spend some time with nursing and allied health staff, giving me an appreciation of all the roles that go into keeping patients well in the community.

"I'm loving my time at BCHS, and am really enjoying the different side to medicine that is General Practice."

As a teaching clinic, we are dedicated to helping foster the careers of up-and-coming health professionals, especially in regional and rural Victoria.

Learn more about our [student placement program here](#).

Bendigo Family Day Care rewards

We recently received some beautiful feedback for our award-winning Bendigo Family Day Care team, and superstar educator Kylie.

"I wanted to take a moment to formally share how blown away we have been by our experience with Kylie in Family Day Care.

"It has been nothing short of exceptional. Our son is genuinely excited to attend each day, and Kylie's care, professionalism, and support have been outstanding."

If you're a family, or an educator, thinking about making the change from a mainstream childcare centre to a home environment, get in [contact via our website](#).

Bendigo Family Day Care has exceeded our every expectation. I've been absolutely raving about the service and our experience. We are so happy we made the change. I couldn't be more impressed."

WORKING HARD FOR OUR YOUTH

The ripple effect of working with headspace Bendigo's Work and Study team can stretch further than you think ... just ask Max.

Reaching out in 2024 for help with anxiety and moving forward in life, Max said the Work and Study Program and team put things into perspective for him.

"They helped identify the area I wanted to work in and worked hard to assist me in getting the right kind of job for me," he said.

Max is just one of many the program has helped over the years.

The team - made up of Vocational Specialists Dean Cosgriff and Lara Eames, as well as Vocational Peer Worker Alex Caines (pictured right) - were run off their feet during March, aka Work and Study Month.

Opportunities and connections are central to the work the team do.

"We really strive to have a good rapport with young people, not just during Work and Study Month, but



all year round," Lara said. "It allows us to better help young people. Plus, there's more awareness about our services and the importance work and study support plays in mental health recovery."

With just 54 per cent of young people feeling confident in applying for a job, Dean said the work the team does bridges the gap between doubt and ability.

"It can be challenging for young people to obtain employment in today's tough labour market, so we try to educate them about what they can be doing to stand out from other applicants," he said.

"It's important to us to guide young people through the process of finding and applying for a job with the proper support and care," Lara added.



Dr Colin and headspace Bendigo senior leader Lindsay.

Congrats Dr Colin!

After 11 years of dedicated study headspace Bendigo is proud to say that Colin Sherlock has successfully passed his GP exams.

Shout out to [Agnico Eagle Australia Community Partnership Program](#), which generously provide funds allowing us to host and train GP Registrars, which then enables us to grow the GP mental health workforce in central Victoria.

Dr Colin says: "This has given me a brilliant opportunity to work with young people in a setting that is welcoming, flexible and above all, allows them time to express and explore the complex mental health issues that they are experiencing. My time at headspace Bendigo has taught me a lot so far and I have no doubt will continue to do so."

Child safety commitment

Bendigo Community Health Services values children from all backgrounds. We are dedicated to making our community a safe, nurturing and welcoming place for children to grow and develop. We are committed to making sure ALL children reach their individual potential. We will do this by supporting families to keep children safe, healthy, happy; helping families support children to reach their full potential; and effectively advocating for children and being a champion for quality outcomes in child health and wellbeing. Visit bchs.com.au to read our child safety commitment in full.



Our services

We run a wide range of services for people of all ages, backgrounds, genders and lived experiences. How can we help you and your family?

Doctors & Specialists:

- GPs & nurses
- Sexual & Reproductive Health Hub
- Endometriosis & Pelvic Pain Clinic
- Trans & Gender Diverse Clinic
- Doctors in Secondary Schools
- Chronic Disease Management

Allied Health:

- Exercise Physiology
- Physiotherapy
- Podiatry
- Paediatric Podiatry

Youth:

- headspace Bendigo

Children & Families:

- Family Services
- Children's Health Services
- Loddon Children's Health & Wellbeing Local
- Bendigo Family Day Care
- Stepping Stones Early Childhood Intervention program
- School Readiness Program
- smalltalk Supported Playgroups

Former Refugees & Migrants:

- Settlement Services
- Cultural Diversity programs to build health and wellbeing literacy
- Community Harmony Program to build refugee & migrant-sensitive practice

Counselling & Mental Health:

- Counselling
- Culturally Sensitive Counselling
- Forensic Mental Health

Alcohol & Drugs:

- Counselling
- Family Support Group
- Residential Withdrawal
- Home-Based Withdrawal
- Pharmacotherapy
- Needle Syringe Program

In the Community:

- Health Promotion in schools, workplaces, clubs and at events
- Workplace Health & Wellbeing Program
- Elmore Social Support Group
- InRoads Community Connections program for people experiencing homelessness
- Community Health Nurse at the Bendigo Multidisciplinary Centre



5406 1200

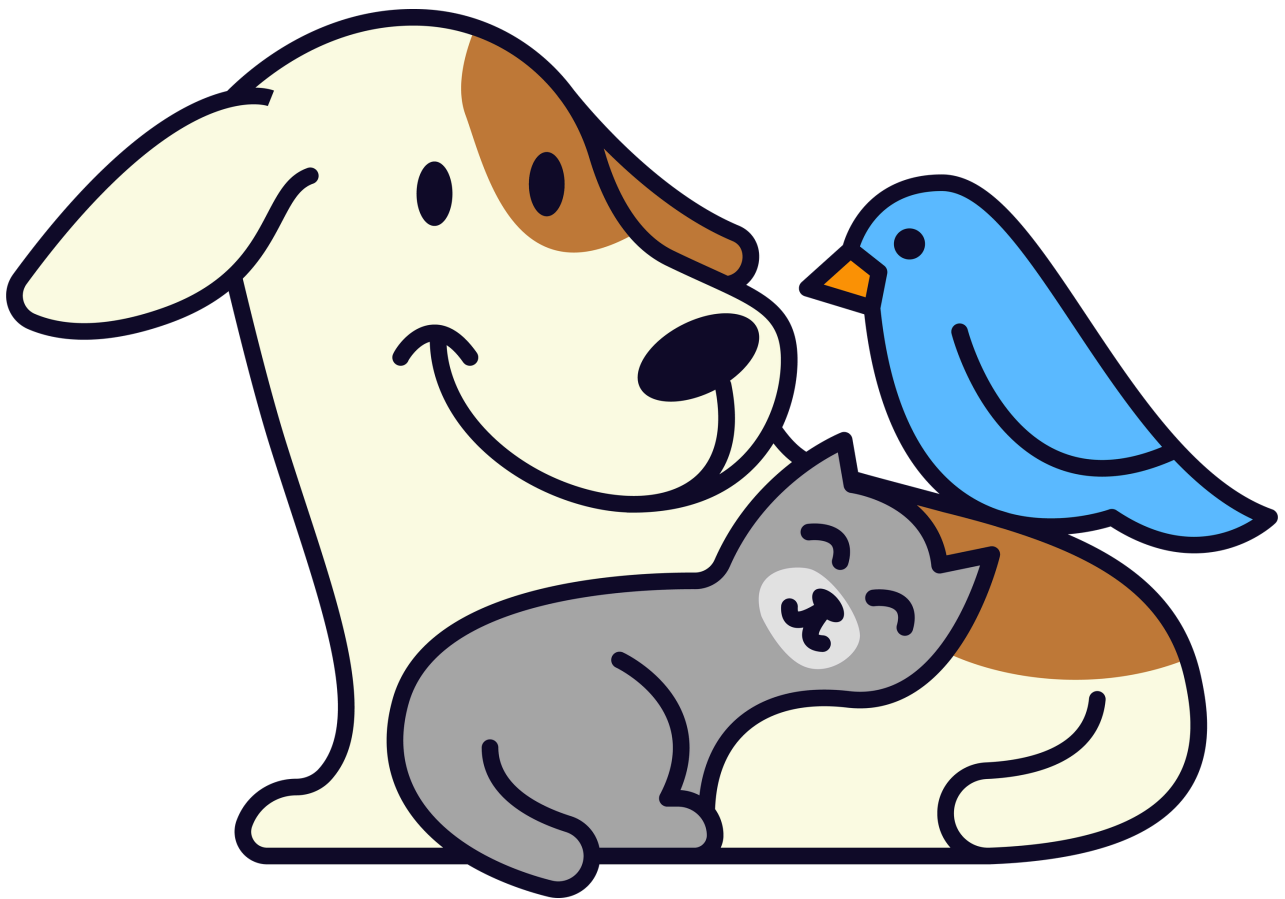


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Pay it Forward

DAY



Tuesday, April 28

Extend kindness to someone who
least expects it.