



Women Taking Action

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN REGIONAL
AND RURAL COMMUNITIES



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The wealth of a community lies within the people who live in it.

Wealth cannot be created without understanding and love for all people at the grass roots.

Wealth is an inclusive process.

Wealth does not relate to money – money is only the by-product of new ideas, new energy and new inputs.

Wealth is when each and every person is encouraged, educated and assisted to reach their full potential.

Wealth is about the freedom to be who and what you want to be.

May you have a long, wealthy, healthy and terrific experience in this life. Embrace change and enjoy the challenges.

Joy Engelman





FOREWORD

The Federal Government's objective for regional Australia is to provide the economic, environmental and social infrastructure necessary for Australia's regions to realise their potential. The contribution of women is essential to this.

We need the diverse talents and perspectives of women to meet the challenges of the new century. Regional and rural women are in a position to make a significant contribution to policy debates. Their views broaden the dialogue on ways to strengthen regional Australia, and their range of experience and knowledge brings an important and often innovative perspective to meeting Australia's challenges.

As an advocate for the involvement of women in regional policy development, I established the Regional Women's Advisory Council in September 1999. The nine members of the council, representing every State and the Northern Territory, have consistently provided me with advice to assist the government to better target policies and programs to meet the needs of regional Australians.

It has become apparent to me that women are able to manage change well and come up with practical solutions to meet community needs; they can turn challenges into opportunities. I have also seen that women are frequently better at social infrastructure issues, making the most of the changes being experienced by their communities. Regional and rural women are often an energising force in their communities and have shown themselves to be skilled at community leadership.

The Federal Government has demonstrated its commitment to the principles of community leadership, entrepreneurship, continuous learning and the participation of women in decision making. These skills and practices are found amongst the women featured in this book, and have enabled them to capitalise on opportunities and to be a vital part of their communities' progress.

This book of case studies pays tribute to rural and regional women taking action in their communities and across the wider society. The studies demonstrate how individual women are managing change, and building and using their networks to make a difference. These shared experiences are inspirational. I envisage that many Australians, male and female, can learn from the challenges successfully met by these women making a difference in regional and rural communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Anderson', written in a cursive style.

The Hon John Anderson MP

*Deputy Prime Minister and Minister
for Transport and Regional Services*



INTRODUCTION

These are the stories of women who have made a difference. As leaders and builders of their communities they have used their enthusiasm, skills and wisdom to seize opportunities to change things for the better. Whether the changes are big or small these women share the ability to inspire, to engender confidence and to promote a positive outlook amongst others.

This book is about giving due recognition to the very real and practical contribution women make to regional and rural Australia. It resulted from a recommendation of the Regional and Rural Women's Roundtable in June 1999, which was hosted by the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Hon John Anderson MP.

In regional and rural Australia there are more than two million women and they contribute significantly to their local communities and local economies. Whether it be paid or unpaid, their work in farm businesses, in town based professional and commercial fields, and in community work is critical to the rural economy. However women's contributions are often undervalued and are often taken for granted; they can seem to be invisible.

Gender stereotyping and assigned roles in the rural culture lead to expectations that women will adopt the role of carers and take on other traditional expressions of a woman's place in society. Such expectations serve to reduce the capacity of women to participate in roles within the public sphere, and marginalise women as leaders.

Barriers to women wishing to participate in leadership and decision making roles were identified by the *Missed Opportunities* social survey¹. The survey reported that the greatest barriers were the male-oriented culture of many organisations, the competing demands of work and family, and women's own perceptions that their skills are not adequate. Other barriers were the absence of role modelling and mentoring, the lack of recognised experience and poor access to training.

The Federal Government's initiatives to enhance the role and participation of women in rural, regional and remote Australia, include the establishment of the Regional Women's Advisory Council in September 1999.

This council was created to inform the Minister on issues of concern to regional and rural women and their communities, and was established through the Department of Transport and Regional Services.

The Regional Women's Advisory Council commissioned an Action Research Project in regional, rural and remote communities. The research was undertaken from the perspective of women, and aimed to identify the characteristics of communities that successfully deal with change, including how those communities handle change and what motivates them. The project highlighted the skills of women to facilitate change and growth in their communities, and to motivate others to join them. The final report for the research will be released in September 2001.

The women profiled in this book come from all parts of Australia, from small coastal towns to larger inland centres. Their backgrounds are also diverse and they include migrants, Indigenous Australians and women whose families can be traced back to Australia's early days of European settlement. What they have in common is that they have a go at making things better in their community. These stories show women inspiring others to join them in taking action. This in turn works to strengthen the positive self-image of each community, so that hope is nurtured, supplanting indifference. Their belief in their cause enables these enterprising women to persist in the face of set backs and difficulties, and to succeed - to make a difference.

¹ Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation and Department of Primary Industries and Energy, 1998.

Missed Opportunities: Harnessing the Potential of Women in Australian Agriculture. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.



GLORIA JONES

South Australia

I like to work towards being part of the solution – not part of the problem.

I am married and we have three married daughters and six grandchildren. We have lived in Clayton since 1962 as commercial fishers. When we arrived at Clayton, we were the only people to live here with no electricity or telephone. Initially a small population of 30, we managed to win some grants to develop the town's facilities, in particular, the community hall. Clayton is now 250 strong and is growing.

With everything that I have done and continue to do, I have tried to keep a holistic approach by bringing the fishing industry into my community. Strong communities, when supported by a balanced and healthy ecosystem, can provide maximum benefit to our country.

The hall is the base for the Clayton Community Association where I have been president for the past two years. I nominated a group of younger people to participate in the Community Builders Program. With their new skills they are now very active within our community.

In 1974 we established our own tourist complex at Clayton to market our fish and yabbies. This is a successful way of value adding to our primary product, and to showcase our local products and industry. I have been a major player in our fishery, working toward Marine Stewardship Council Certification. I am a chef at our restaurant, Yabby City, and I also train apprentice chefs and kitchen hands.

I am an inaugural member of the Women's Industry Network (WIN) working with the Fishing and Seafood Industry of South Australia – this is where my passion lies. It was difficult to find the women in fishing at first. This search has been a very rewarding challenge for me. Internet access has been wonderful for regular communication amongst our members.

WIN actively networks via a number of promotional events. I am the South Australian WIN Secretary and events coordinator. I provide support to younger people joining our network. We offer a leadership training program to many young people.

I was involved in preparing an action plan to best use women's talents within the industry for the WIN in South Australia. I was privileged to be part of a delegation of 100 women to Washington, representing the Australian Fishing and Seafood Industry. As a result of this trip, I am part of a group that will provide technical support for educational books on the fishing industry.

I have made submissions to various Parliamentary Inquiries and Select Committees pertaining to the Fisheries, Regional Development and Food and Fibre Plan. I presented a paper: *Fishing Women Empowering Networks at a national conference.*

I was instrumental in preparing the Southern Fishermen's Association's presentation that won the South Australian Fishing Industry Environmental Award for 2000. I have been a participant in the National Natural Resource Management Program at a Federal and a State level. I have worked with the Southern Fishermen's Association developing our Code of Practice and more recently the Environmental Management Plan. This was a world first.

I like to work towards being part of the solution – not part of the problem.



LOUISE DUXBURY

Western Australia

We always tried to maintain dialogue: it's critical with different groups in the community expressing different views.

The Denmark Environment Centre, set up in 1987, was a community initiative to do something positive about conflict at that time around the management of natural resources, specifically the old growth forests around Denmark.

A local timber mill employed around 70 or 80 people at its height. People employed or associated with the mill were in conflict with others in the community, many who had moved to the Denmark community more recently and who had different values and feelings about the way natural resources were managed.

In that context, a group of conservationists agreed that establishing an environment centre would be a positive idea. It could be used to run campaigns from and also to provide education for the local community about the natural environment – and how to keep and build up a sustainable resource based on a farm forestry industry rather than old growth forest.

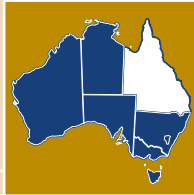
The campaign to stop the expansion of the local sawmill to wood chipping was successful: the mill actually closed down in 1992. That understandably caused a lot of anxiety. But because of the growth of nature-based tourism in Denmark the amount of displacement for the people working at the mill was not very large – they were able to relocate and get jobs elsewhere within the Denmark area. That has meant there hasn't been the level of conflict that there may otherwise have been.



We had lots of meetings during that time and we tried very hard to listen to the other perspectives. Some were very hair-raising with over 300 people expressing their views in opposite directions, although by the time the environment centre was actually set up, this situation had cooled down. We always tried to maintain dialogue: it's critical with different groups in the community expressing different views.

The Denmark Environment Centre is successful because it has become the resource centre for a whole range of other activities. It is in the main street of town with an attractive shop front. Groups using the centre include Greenskills, which I started with a desk and a chair in the back corner, the Lets System (community barter), the Forest Campaign, the Campaign Against Sandmining, a local magazine called Changing Times and as a depot for the local women's collective soup kitchen. Greenskills quickly grew to three people in the back corner plus the chair and the phone; we then needed two offices and other facilities. The second expansion of the environment centre has just been completed. There are now six office spaces and a meeting room with more than a dozen people working in them in addition to the original shop front.

When groups are able to piggyback and work with each other well they can achieve so much more. There's no point in doing it alone. Another reason the centre has been successful I think, is that we focus on what the main game is while allowing a whole range of other groups to use the facilities but to get on with their particular projects. There is an important sense of support and sharing of concern between all the people working on different projects.



NIKKI HART

Queensland

Part of the project at the moment is to give our women self-esteem and confidence in themselves.

I was born in Cloncurry and have lived here all my life. My family and extended family all live here. My mum is Elaine McKeon. I don't think I will ever leave Cloncurry because it is where my roots are and where my family has always been.

I have worked with Indigenous women for six years. The most successful community activity I have been involved with is the Women's Issues Group. The first group of ladies met in about 1992. The group became incorporated then. The ladies used to sit down and have cups of tea at each other's homes. They would talk about issues relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this community. I wasn't involved at this time.

I became involved in about 1994, I had seen the projects change, as issues relating to the community changed. We get funding from ATSIC, which is for Indigenous people only. If we do access funds from elsewhere, we involve the whole community.

Part of the project at the moment is to give our women self-esteem and confidence in themselves. We are seen as a community organisation that is there to provide advice and help. We have educational programs. I see these as important issues that will bring Aboriginal people out of their homes and mix. Lots of them stay at home with the kids and don't think that anyone else wants them involved in anything.

You need to have a leader to lead and guide others. I have visions. I probably learnt from my mum, I don't know. With women's issues, I keep stressing it is a project for the community but you feel that it is your own. You don't want anyone else to get in there and pull it down after all the hard work we have put into it over the years. With the 10-year plan that we are in the middle of doing I would like to see it go on for another 10 years after that.

The community has not supported us much. There have been barriers, mostly jealousy - a lot comes from Aboriginal people. The group is getting stronger with the projects that we are doing. We are not letting jealousy get us down as we are very determined. One of the women in the group has only been in Cloncurry for three years and can feel the response from the community. They see that you are doing something positive in the community and networking with people that they wouldn't give the time of day to.

I am motivated by all of the criticism. When someone criticises you it makes you do it better. It wouldn't make me leave Cloncurry. Nothing would make me leave here. Where I come from is where my heart is.





ROBYN GREEN

Tasmania

I was driven by passion and a determination to succeed.

I was born in Devonport. I went to school here until I went away to Uni in Hobart, where I completed a BA and then a Dip Ed. My passion at that stage was to become an early childhood teacher. While at University I met and married my husband. We returned to Devonport and I taught for two years before I fell pregnant – we had three daughters. My husband started up his own business. Whilst home with my daughters, I became involved with school activities, the Red Cross, and coaching gymnastics with young children.

I had an idea – *The Playhouse*. This idea grew from my experience as a parent, interest in young children and working as a Playcentre Leader. Through my observations and interactions with families, I felt that parents with babies and pre-school aged children needed opportunities to interact more with each other.

Existing community supports for young families provided few opportunities for parents to socialise, and gain knowledge, skills and confidence in parenting. Playgroups only operated for two hours, once a week. We needed facilities that opened all the time, where parents could have a coffee, share experiences and access information while their children played.

There was a vacant room adjacent to where I ran gymnastic classes – it was ideal to set up *The Playhouse*. I researched the concept, drew up a business plan and organised a survey to see if people were interested. There was a good response. Most responded that it would be a break from home – a little bit of sanity during the early years of parenting. I put a management committee together, and negotiated a lease.

I wasn't sure how it would all work out, but I was driven by passion and a determination to succeed. I spoke to politicians and service providers to explain our vision, and obtain funding. The common response was it is a really good idea, but we don't have the money. Obtaining funding was more complex than I first thought.

We have never had on-going funding until this year. We started because my Dad was very supportive of the idea and provided money to me for start up costs, which *The Playhouse* has paid back. The centre is fee based. We also raise money from fundraising activities and community donations. Until this year all management and supervising staff at *The Playhouse* worked voluntarily. Now we are able to employ a part-time coordinator.

We opened our doors nine years ago. Over 100 families use *The Playhouse* each week. The most successful publicity we get is through word of mouth within the community. We paid for a TV community service commercial, which has been broadcast free of charge over the last 12 months. People come from everywhere to meet at *The Playhouse*. Many people have said they would like to start one up in their community and one or two groups have done so.

We are open Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4.30pm, 48 weeks of the year. Parents who are new to the community particularly appreciate the opportunity to meet and make new friends. In these terms *The Playhouse* is great for socialising and supporting the community. *The Playhouse* is there every day for young families, meeting their needs with a warm, friendly and supportive environment.

This year I won a Devonport City Council Citizenship Award. It was presented to me on Australia Day for my work and involvement at *The Playhouse*.

Information about *The Playhouse* is available on the web: www.devonport.tco.asn.au/playhouse/home.htm



JOY ENGELMAN

New South Wales

As a project officer you are only as strong as the networks you create.

I am a woman, mother of two sons, and 51 years old. I am a lateral and creative thinker, as well as an artist. I am strong and resourceful having overcome many adversities in my life. I was born and bred in Orange and am well known in the community.

In 1997 Cabonne Shire Council was funded by the New South Wales Department of State and Regional Development to run a small towns development project for the eight villages in Cabonne Country. I became the project officer and have been working on the project for the last four years.

Between myself and the village residents, we came up with an innovative methodology that was so successful it is now used in 20 different communities along the eastern seaboard. We organised a photographic survey at the grass roots level. We made it inclusive; we had people with disabilities, youth, elderly, non-English speaking backgrounds, Indigenous, business people and tourists who used the villages.

When I first went out to the villages I met with a lot of negativity due to the recent rural down turn and the major social restructuring of the Eighties which they, rural people, had borne the brunt of. There was a general lack of support from governments, corporations and financial institutions to the bush. Banks had closed and it was difficult to attract major funding for our events and ideas. The villages themselves were insular;

they were not aware of each other. There was a lot of apathy and weariness. As an outsider and part of council, I was viewed as yet another imposition of government.

Networks are the absolute underpinning of any sort of social engineering project that you undertake. As a project officer you are only as strong as the networks you create.

With very little money and few other resources, we relied on our community to respond to council's leadership. What resulted was an amazing process and plan that brought people together, gave them hope and bonded the eight villages into a regional community.

We started by inviting the progress associations and other local service groups to firstly involve community members. Six volunteers in each village were asked to go out with their cameras and take six photos of the things they 'liked' about their town and six photos of things that they 'disliked' about their place.

We followed this with a community mapping process and by using the photos, we were able to bring out the major issues affecting each community. The things we 'liked' became the things we could promote, preserve and embellish immediately. The things that we 'disliked' were the things that we aimed to develop, change or improve.

The resulting information and issues became a strategy and plan for the future of Cabonne Country villages 'Vision 2007'. This strategy and plan has gone on to win major awards throughout Australia and New Zealand and became a leading process for developing other areas.

You can find the methodology for the photographic survey at <http://Joy.Engelman.com>.





LEAH MUNRO

New South Wales

As our service is based on the needs of the community, and is an ever changing process, it's a bit difficult to plan too far ahead.

I was born in Victoria and moved to Dorrigo with my two sons in the early eighties. I am a trained nurse and have completed a three year welfare course with Coffs Harbour TAFE. I am also a loss and grief counsellor and a writer.

In May 1992, my partner of 17 years was on his way home from work when he was killed by a drunk driver. I didn't know what to do, where to turn to. I felt so incredibly alone and helpless.

In November that year I called a public meeting to look at the needs of bereaved people in our community. Thirty people turned up and voiced concerns similar to my own. We identified three main issues. These included a need for information and appropriate support especially in the case of sudden death. There was a lack of choices concerning funerals and a lack of knowledge in the community of what the grieving process was.

Initially we formed a support group, slowly expanding over the years to provide a bereavement service for the residents of the three towns in our shire. This is a free service entirely run by trained volunteers. As part of the services our group provides, we offer a safe environment for people to learn about loss and grief and to feel supported to make their own decisions during difficult times.

Living in a rural area, there is always the challenge of not having services close by. Other challenges we have faced include finding financial support, lack of proper equipment and a lack of recognition that volunteers can be highly trained people.

I have written and produced three books on the subject with the help and support of many people who have attended our support groups. Proceeds from the sale of these books keep us going.

As our service is based on the needs of the community, and is an ever changing process, it's a bit difficult to plan too far ahead. However, besides me, there is a small dedicated group of people who are very capable of keeping this service going.

Ideally I would like to see the notions of loss, death, grief and dying become an accepted part of everyday living, one we can all talk about comfortably. Maybe then, a service such as this wouldn't be needed.

Friends, relatives and the community would provide it naturally.





JEANANN BARBOUR

Western Australia

I am passionate about the women here, we now have this lovely women's network in the region and I can see the positive effect it is starting to have.

I was born in colonial Kenya and went to boarding school all my school life. When I was fifteen years old I clapped my eyes on my husband and decided that he was the man for me. However, my parents had other plans and I had to first go to England to finish my studies, which I did in physiotherapy. I was engaged the day I finished my last physiotherapy exam, went back to Kenya and became a farmer's wife - until we were compulsorily bought out by the British Government eleven years later.

At this time (1974) we had three children (9, 8 and 6) and had to look for a place to move to. We looked at England and Canada but decided on Western Australia - it was the best thing we ever did.

We moved to a farm at Boyup Brook, farmed there for thirteen years and were again bought out by the government, this time for reforestation. We then moved to Albany and bought a health and squash club. It was a successful venture but we eventually sold the business because we, at 50 odd, had become too old for the job. I took up selling real estate and my husband started a timber flooring business.

Those first years in Albany gave me the first real opportunity I'd ever really had to take a lead in community life. I became involved in the Chamber of Commerce (president) and the Albany Youth Support Association (chairman).



The Youth Support Association was a very satisfying time of life because I had never come in contact with young people who needed the sort of help that was being given there. It opened my eyes to the real problems that people face, things I had never been exposed to.

Through the Chamber of Commerce I became interested in fostering women in business throughout the area. I got a committee together, just rang them up and said, 'Let's do this', very ad hoc, we got a good speaker and organised a conference around her and called it 'Women Going Places!'

The conference was a huge success. It was literally created from a thought, and we discovered there is huge demand for it, not just from women wanting business knowledge, but also women needing more opportunities to network.

As a direct result of working on the conference I started a business in Albany with Janet Owen, who had been employed in the Chamber of Commerce at the time. We saw an opportunity to make a difference in the community while earning a living. We started the Excellent Events Company to run anything from a private party to an airshow! I can use my networks from my real estate work, my health club days, and my rural contacts, as well as, all the people I am in touch with through the Chamber of Commerce. Through our events we can promote the produce of the region and

help make them well known, we can perhaps increase employment by showcasing our part of the world. I want our region to be known as one of the best. We grow beautiful produce such as strawberries, blueberries, asparagus, farm marron, barramundi and yabbies, and wine. All sorts of wonderful things!

I am passionate about the women here, we now have this lovely women's network in the region and I can see the positive effect it is starting to have. A great deal of work is being done within the network by lots of different organisations and people. Working together is very important. Albany has become an interesting place with more women in prominent roles.



LUCY ABBOTT

Victoria

It is one of the most successful
community organised activities
by young people for young people

I moved to Hamilton with my parents when I was 10. I have an undergraduate degree in science from Melbourne University and a postgraduate diploma from La Trobe University. I returned home after I completed my studies about a year ago.

Very few young people return to Hamilton after they leave school. Out of the 150 young people who went through secondary school with me (in my year and the years immediately before and after), only about ten have returned to this area.

I work for Western District Health Service - Community Services. Part of my work involves supervising the local drop-in centre.

It is important for all young people to have a social focus or an activity to look forward to. The Freeza concerts provide something for them to do. Freeza stands for free of drugs and alcohol. I assist with these concerts.

The concerts are fully organised by a committee of eight young people. They set it all up, take the tickets, choose the music, and ensure that everybody has a good and safe time on the night.

The concerts are usually held about eight times a year on a Friday night in the local nightclub, *The Attic*. The manager is very supportive and the kids love the venue. They go until about 11pm.



Huge numbers attending the concerts are an indication of the kid's enjoyment - on average around 270 young people attend. Around 400 kids under 18 years of age went to the final concert last year.

We have DJ's and get high profile bands like Area 7. The concerts also provide an opportunity for local bands to be heard.

Keeping the concerts drug and alcohol free is the main challenge for everyone involved. We receive good support from the police. Unfortunately, some of the kids smoke. Parents appreciate our efforts to ensure the welfare of their children and can give us a call if they have any concerns. We try to accommodate parents' needs and work to allay any concerns they may have.

It is one of the most successful community organised activities by young people for young people in this area.

We all look forward to the concerts and hope they continue to be successful.



TAMMY CARNEY

New South Wales

**Our traditional cultural practices
can enhance the quality
of wellbeing for our people.**

I am an Aboriginal woman, from the Gamilaroi clan. I have worked for the past six years in a voluntary capacity for an Aboriginal community organisation known as Yulawirri Inc. I have a background in Aboriginal education and criminal justice.

I was part of the working party that established the Aboriginal Women Post Release Program, which is a support service to Aboriginal women released from custody. It's the only known service of its kind and is currently being funded by the Department of Corrective Services.

I am currently working on a vision for a spiritual healing place. Our traditional cultural practices can enhance the quality of wellbeing for our people. This land acquisition, acquired through the Indigenous Corporation is a 49 acre property at the base of Wattagan Mountains in the Mandalong Valley. You can hear the bellbirds and the frogs. It is really exquisite!

The Yula-panaal Healing Centre, which will be its business name, is open to women. We will have external and internal components. We are going to grow herb bushes and make our own aromatherapy products, anything natural and native, that will be our focus.

What I envisage is having 'summer time under the stars', where there are bathtubs filled with hot water from the campfire. Women can lay in baths with candles near the campfire beside the hills. Women just letting it all go under the stars.

It took a long time to get the land. We had all these submissions for funding and kept missing out. Now we are back to networking, consulting and negotiating with agencies who want to be a part of this. We are hoping to get funding for five years and to then be self-sufficient after that time. We are working on programs and moneymaking strategies to generate income.

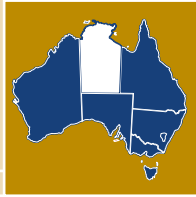
With limited resources out here, women get burnt out quickly. Hopefully this place will help them inside, heal their inner self. Aboriginal people in general are nurturers, carers and sharers. This is what we are trying to reflect with our programs. Women need that little bit of extra help. If we are going to make a difference in today's society, it's going to be the women who are going to do it.

Our networks are never-ending, even international. In Canada, we have established networks over there to exchange information and ideas.

We have a lot of young people involved in our organisation. They input into the programs that target their particular age category.

There is a need to reconcile. We can all walk together and share the history and information that we have.





CLAIR O'BRIEN

Northern Territory

If we can acknowledge rural Australia as a valuable resource, it will be sought after, respected and cared for forever.

I have spent all my life on the land being brought up on sugar cane farms, then pioneering isolated cattle properties in northern and western Queensland and now for the past eight years, in the top end of the Northern Territory with my husband and our family. I am a very practical person and have always been involved in primary production, its associated industry bodies and my community - with an interest in the national and global perspective as well.

Currently I am very involved with Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA) and Landcare. As the Northern Territory member on the national board of management of AWiA Ltd, I found I needed to establish a good network of fellow Territorians if I was to be an active, contributing member of this dynamic and evolving team.

In August 1999 in New Norcia, Western Australia at the AWiA national conference and annual general meeting, I offered to host the next one in the Northern Territory and it was readily accepted! I think we had five financial members scattered across the Northern Territory but I was sure that holding a national conference was the way to showcase the diversity of our agriculture and the women involved in it. I called a couple of meetings in the rural areas of Darwin and met lots of enthusiastic women who were willing to join the association as well as set up our own Northern Territory reference group and host the conference.

Twelve months later we had 29 financial members; 60 to 90 people at the two-day conference and about 25 who were able to take advantage of the post conference tours we also offered.

It is so rewarding to see these rural women come to the fore as a team, developing skills they may not have previously realised they had and at the same time raising the profile of all women in agriculture. We have three sisters who are members and they were able to present a very informative session on the use of fire in natural resource management. Their Aboriginal background and cultural perspective integrated with their current cattle grazing operations gave conference participants a realistic picture of how they are giving their children the best of both cultures.

Our members are all involved in different things and I believe true networking is sharing your ideas and experiences from other industries, communities and cultures. Women are very good at networking as they openly share ideas across all aspects of any operation or business. They have the natural ability to take in the whole picture - the human resources, natural resources and the financials. Through necessity we have had to develop multiple skills to survive, so we wear lots of hats. We can be found successfully juggling family and business, as well as voluntary, community and industry commitments.

Getting young people involved is the best way to ensure networks and groups like the women's association survive. We should encourage diversification in rural communities. Change can do so many things to a community even build it up again. Young people can stimulate that change and in some cases handle it better. We have to listen to new ideas and try to take them on board, let the young have a go. Encouragement builds a positive person, community or industry.

I also believe that family units in rural regional remote Australia are an endangered species who need protection - they need that nurturing, encouragement and support. If we can acknowledge rural Australia as a valuable resource, it will be sought after, respected and cared for forever.



ANGE NEWTON

Victoria

The only way to address
a challenge is to rise above it.

I am a 37 year old mother with three children. I come from Harrow, which is a small community of 90 people.

In 1994, things were very sick in our community. There was no cash anywhere. We needed to find a solution that would bring outside income into the township. To do that we needed to have something that people wanted to see.

Harrow has a significant historic place within Victoria. The cemetery was literally riddled with ghosts and folklore. We began to think we could use this and bring lots of money into the community. So from there, we developed the Sound and Light Show.

The Sound and Light Show is a community-owned and operated project, with over half our community involved. Opening night was in October 1996, and it's been running continually since. There is an average of 52 shows a year, mainly on Saturday nights. We receive hundreds of visitors, they come in busloads. It has been very successful.

The idea was mine initially. We had this gorgeous old town. We had this beautiful history, we had heaps of folklore. I got so caught up with what we could do. We scripted the story, got some friends over for a BBQ and lots of beer. It went from there. I have had no experience of theatre or arts, and I'm practically frightened of the dark!



The Sound and Light Show brings tremendous income into our community. The money is distributed all the way through town in an octopus effect. The community receives enjoyment and a sense of achievement. It is quite a big thing to entertain thousands and thousands of visitors every year. It has had a tremendous effect on the locals. It's been excellent for our self-esteem and community bonding. It has given everyone a sense of purpose, and ownership of community. It has been a great exercise.

One of the challenges was the research involved, we had no experience. Also, the exercise itself was not taken seriously by everyone. This in turn, put a lot of fire in our bellies. If you can turn the way you look at things to make it work for you, it's to your advantage. The only way to address a challenge is to rise above it.

We had a serious need in this community. We had to focus. We have a sense of pride because there was so much negativity about our idea. We had the determination to persevere. There are networks and support out there! Take advantage of the help that is available!

I believe we are producing a much more confident youth. We are giving our children the best possible grounding from home and community involvement.



ANKA MAKOVEC

Tasmania

Great hardship in life can be turned into a great learning experience!

I was born in Slovenia, and at the age of 24 I graduated as a nurse. I was struck down with osteomyelitis, a bone marrow disease when I was 10. This disease can kill you very quickly.

It was just the end of the Second World War, so I was very lucky that an army doctor woke up some assistants in the dead of the night, removed a bone from my leg – and saved my life! This experience influenced my decision to go into nursing.

I started to work in a hospital but my spirit of adventure was boiling over, and I had always, always wanted to see Australia. I had seen the movie *The Overlanders* and that sold me – this is the country I want to see and the Aboriginal people I want to meet and this is where I want to do things. It did come true...

I arrived in Australia and started working in a hospital on the coast of New South Wales. At that time (1962), there was segregation between Indigenous and white people, and I said to them, you have to break this! I went and asked for my pay and I left on protest.

I then moved to Sydney and worked in a private hospital. Here I met the up and coming Aboriginal writers and poets. The Sixties brought the winds of change and true multicultural activity. We started up a Saturday Centre of Prose and Poetry Group

in Neutral Bay. I met Aboriginal poet Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal), together with her close friend, the great Judith Wright, through this group. Kath launched her first book of poetry at that time, which we grabbed hot off the press.

I visited Kath Walker when she was teaching children on Stradbroke Island. I didn't take a Uni course in teaching, I just learnt practical teaching skills from her. I learnt how to engage children's imagination and how to praise them when they were good.

One day in 1981 I read that the Franklin was going to be dammed! I thought this is not right, to put a dam in a National Park! There has to be some mistake! I rang my friend Dr Bob Brown in Hobart and said that I would join him to protest against this dam. The protest finished in 1984. Our biggest challenge was getting media from all round the world in the right spots, so they could capture the action and bring it into people's living rooms.

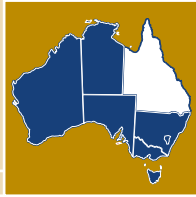
A little house in Devonport became available in 1984 and I moved in. I love my house I have lived here for 17 years! I became involved in teaching at the local school, and began work on breaking down the race barriers. People in Tasmania have been very isolated with very little contact with Aboriginal people. I was invited by the Aboriginals and instructed by them so I was allowed to do that sort of thing.

Being able to relate to who our ancestors are and the history of the country is vital. I show people down a local cave, where Aboriginals lived and talk about their lifestyle. It is OK to speak about the past but it is NOW that one can do positive things, such as seeing minds open particularly those who had been closed for a long time. Some did not want to respect or understand the different spirituality of the Indigenous people. I think we should go parallel and respect each other's beliefs.

The best way to drive change is to engage parents of young children. This occurred to me when I was teaching handicapped children. Parents saw their handicapped children creating dot and line paintings (Aboriginal style of art) – they were proud! Creating Aboriginal art painting was a practical way of starting to understand and appreciate their unique style.

I always remain positive. When things get bad I look for the lesson in it. Great hardship in life can be turned into a great learning experience!





LESLEY LAFFEY

Queensland

If a community wants to be successful, it needs to coordinate all of the resources it has available, to identify its needs and then work towards those goals.

I'm the director of nursing at the local hospital and have been since I moved back to Cloncurry five years ago. I have two children, a husband and have travelled a fair bit.

I get involved with different groups as needed. I'm a member of the Show Society, have been the secretary of the pony club for five years and have been involved in community housing organised by the council. I've also been on a committee organising transport for older people between Cloncurry and Mt Isa.

The oldies who make day trips into Mt Isa used to leave here at 5.30 in the morning and couldn't return until 8.00 that night. It was a long haul for people of their age and quite stressful. Now they can get the bus to pick them up at a time convenient for them and return them early in the day so that the trip isn't so traumatic.

The funding for the bus came from Commonwealth Health and Aged Care funds. We got a group of people together from the council and community who worked as a team and applied for funding for this project. It worked really well when everyone got together, and if they hadn't worked so well together, this whole thing might not have happened.

It's a tough situation as Cloncurry doesn't have a nursing home, so people who have lived here all their lives have to move out of town when they need regular help as we don't have the facilities here.

It's a regular problem for rural communities - trying to find funding for different activities or projects. You first need to know where to look for the funding programs (local, State or Federal governments) and then you have to be organised enough to apply within their timeframes. There is usually one time a year that you can apply, and if people are all excited about doing something at a different time of the year, they might not think it's worth the wait. It forces people to think a year or so ahead, which isn't always practical and it doesn't solve the immediate need of a community.

Another problem that we face here in Cloncurry is that we don't have any local press, so raising community awareness about issues is much more difficult and not such a public process as in other places.

You also need to concentrate on the young people and their needs as well. You have to make sure they have sporting facilities and arts facilities, this way they can become good community members, but if these facilities are lacking, they'll become bored and want to move on.

I think that if a community wants to be successful, it needs to coordinate all of the resources it has available, to identify its needs and then work towards those goals.



SANDRA KELLY

New South Wales

It's about harnessing community passion, as it is through this passion that great things come together.

I am 33 years of age and I have four children. I was born in Gulargambone and I have spent most of my life here. I studied a course in rural business administration through Orange Agricultural College. We run a mixed farming property of cattle, wheat and sheep as well as share farming with Rodney's father. Apart from the bookwork, I see my role on the farm as a facilitator.

From the time our children were little, I have always been actively involved in the farm business and our community. The most successful community activity I have been involved with was setting up the Rural Transaction Centre (RTC).

It has changed our town. Not only has it returned physical services to our town, it has also made a huge difference to the people. They believe that they can do things if they get in and have a go. All these new ideas are springing up everywhere. In 18 months our town has gone from being very stagnant to being very active and everyone wants to get involved.

The RTC Program is a Federal Government initiative to return services to the bush. In Gulargambone we secured a licence for a post office. It's the first community owned post office in Australia. We then brought in Reliance Credit Union who provide online banking facilities. The government also provided some services in the package like Medicare easyclaim, and Centrelink.



The town also wanted things like office services. We offer photocopying and faxing facilities, a gift shop and post shop, courier services to Coonamble for dry-cleaning, photos, Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) and NSW lotteries. We were also able to secure funding to put in an internet room with four terminals. We have classes to teach people how to use the internet. Some of the older ladies come down from the hospital to do their family history - it's great that everybody is involved.

The big challenge to overcome was having the confidence to know that you could actually do it. There was so much negotiation involved. At the end of the day it was just common sense; you had to be realistic. You couldn't get caught up in too much of the hype.

Another big challenge was volunteer burn out. However, I think this was addressed really well in our community, as we were prepared to delegate.

The RTC has been instrumental in offering support to other groups in town who are working to make our little piece of Australia a great place to live, work and raise our families. We are actively promoting a shop local campaign, focusing on 'Business of the month' and the 'Gulargambone Dollars' competition. The community is looking to use the RTC as a vehicle to grow Gulargambone.

I have plenty of networks, there are obviously different groups in all communities. You have to work out the best way to approach all of those groups. We have learnt that you can't just dish out a proposal and expect everyone in the community to accept it.

I think the beauty of this program is that it has come from us and belongs to us. That is why it is so successful. As community members, we know that at the end of the day the success of the centre is totally up to us. It's about harnessing community passion, as it is through this passion that great things come together.



VICKI WEBB

Western Australia

My personal goal is to be a valuable and a valued member of my own family and local community.

I am 45 years of age and live on a sheep farm, 45 kilometres west of Kojonup. I was born and raised in Perth and trained as a preschool teacher. My first posting was to Wagin, 200 kilometres south of Perth. I transferred to nearby Kojonup where I met my husband. We have three teenage children, who board away from home to continue their education.

A few years ago we set up an enterprise called First Steps Planning and Promotion as part of our farming business. I have a home office and work on a contract basis to assist community groups establish various projects. I have worked with a local Ram Breeding Company, farmer groups and local shire projects.

The Kojonup Community Employment Project is one of the most successful projects I've worked on. It is a two year pilot project to find a workable model for managing employment in rural areas. Our community started planning the project over two years ago now. Farm work was seasonal and mostly done on contract. Work is casual and there is a long off season. The local shire council wanted to help farm workers settle in the district by finding them full time work.

We decided to help seasonal workers find work during the off season, for example, shearers and shed staff can drive tractors for farmers over seeding. Some of them find work planting trees for Landcare. This gives them work all year round.

A lot of young people are registering with us. I encourage them to do extra training and work experience. There are lots of on the job training opportunities in rural communities now. We are developing a skills record book for farm workers. The farmer or contractor signs the book when a worker has reached a skill level.

We are really pleased with how popular the project has been. So far 22 employers and 31 workers have used the project. We were lucky to have some very early successes to boost everyone's confidence.

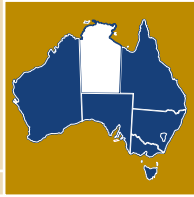
We've set up quite a good mentoring program as well. Mentors are attached to young people who register and they help them with their résumés and job search skills. There's a lot of support in our community for these young people. We are creating a buddy system that will help keep young people in Kojonup.

The project is very broad based now. As well as farm workers there are positions available for carers, nurses, childcare workers and clerical staff. There are often training packages attached to these positions. It is difficult to find childcare workers and nurses locally. We are advertising to attract people with these skills to relocate to Kojonup. We also have tourism and hospitality opportunities.

We have a wide network of contacts including local farmers, agricultural contractors, local businesses and service providers like the school, childcare centres, hospital, aged care lodge and a Telecentre. Government bodies, farmer organisations, service clubs, and community groups like the Tourist Association, Aboriginal Corporation, Landcare Group and women's groups are also supportive. The local shire council, Western Australian Department of Training and the Area Consultative Committee have provided financial support to set up the project.

I would like to use our model to help establish employment projects in other towns like ours. My personal goal is to be a valuable and a valued member of my own family and local community.





KERRY TAYLOR

Northern Territory

I have real confidence that because the young have had a full life in a rural situation, they are happy to come back.

I came to Katherine in 1974 as a teacher. In 1990 I became Principal of Katherine South Primary School. I have a partner, John, we have no children. Katherine is a place where you have to make an effort to be part of the community. I think it's an interesting and exciting place to live. I love it.

In 1993, I purchased the bookshop here in Katherine. I am really happy that I have done so well. I rely heavily on my networks to tell me about books. It was a big change of lifestyle, but allowed me more time for community activities.

The most successful activity I have been involved with is establishing the Katherine Branch of the Crafts Council. When I came here, I had been involved in pottery and wanted to continue. I lobbied the Darwin division of the crafts group, I virtually pestered them until they came to Katherine to do a series of weekend workshops. I was able to show them the degree of interest we have here.

The main challenges we faced were financial. We do a lot of fund raising and make sure we are doing exciting projects because our funding depends on that.

At first we were just using the facilities that were available in local schools. Over the years we have successfully lobbied to have our own premises at the old Katherine High School. For the last eight years, we have had a funded project officer who is paid for two days per week, but who gives a lot more than that.



We are currently working on a project called Hand in Hand. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are working together to make a series of artworks, including quilts. We learn from the Aboriginal people and they learn from us. We will have an exhibition of these works in November.

Networks are hugely important to facilitate getting access to tutors, and travelling exhibitions. We are lobbying to get a decent gallery and cultural centre in Katherine. One of the most useful networks is the Fibre and Textile Art Group. Even though we are isolated, we can get access to see our contemporary fibre arts.

We have a good membership base and have a packed program, including visiting tutors. The main fruition is the children's workshops. That is where our future is – in keeping the crafts alive!

We are lucky in Katherine because there is employment for young people. We do have problems keeping people here who are between the ages of 18 and 25. The availability of jobs and training locally is really important. I have real confidence that because the young have had a full life in a rural situation, they are happy to come back.



KAYE SCHOLFIELD

Victoria

Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world.

My family has been in this district since 1839. I was born in Hamilton and only left to go to teachers college. I now live about 50 kilometres out of town. My children are seventh generation locals.

The area suffered a major setback in the early Nineties with the decline in the wool industry. However, other activities have started up more recently.

The drain of young people from the area presents a real difficulty for us. We need to provide opportunities for our children in the area, or to attract others here.

Education is a major industry that has remained and is growing. It is an industry where women have tended to take the initiative. I am proud to be part of the group that brought the university to Hamilton.

We started by bringing international textile students here so they could see where wool was produced and talk to the farmers. With growing support from the community, we decided to pursue it further. We were really persistent. I phoned a number of textile training providers until the Melbourne College of Textiles saw the potential.

They sent a busload of Asian students for an initial weekend in 1993. The students really enjoyed the visit and learned a lot. It was due to their positive feedback that (more) Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) students came in 1994. Support for the concept grew among the Hamilton community, the university hierarchy and students.



In 1996 we formally launched a partnership and the old regional veterinary laboratory was purchased in 1999. This has provided benefits for the university, the students and the local community. We have succeeded in establishing a flexible learning centre and have had students from 45 different countries stay here.

The hosting program at Woodhouse has expanded to about 200 hosting families in the larger district. A sewing course for Koori women commenced in 1999 and includes Koori garment construction. We were thrilled that they were the first students at RMIT Hamilton.

I feel particularly inspired by working with some amazing people at RMIT as well as with committed people within my community. Personally, my family has always been actively involved in the community. Early on, when my father was mayor, he was one of those who saw the potential of Hamilton as a centre of educational excellence. He led some efforts to attract a university here, so it is great to be part of the team that has realised this dream.

So many people have been a part of our success and all deserve acknowledgment. We have sought to establish a learning community and I think it is happening. There have been challenges for the program at the Hamilton RMIT campus, but with strong community support we have been able to work through these.

Our motto is, 'never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world!'



ESMÉ HORSWOOD

Queensland

**We started in 1984 with no money,
no experience and big hearts!**

I am now retired, having worked for six years as a part time personal carer. Prior to this, I worked as a teacher-aide for 15 years. Before marriage and after the children went to school I worked as a nurse. I am the eldest of eight children, a mother of three and a grandmother of five. I am currently serving on the executive of three committees and am a member of another three.

The most successful project in which I have been involved is the Chinchilla Family Support Centre, locally now known as the One Stop Shop. We started in 1984 with no money, no experience and big hearts! We just knew there was a big need in the community for a support service. A room, which we soon outgrew, was rented. We then moved to the house next door, which we now lease for \$115 per week. We are one of the few community centres in Queensland where we have had to provide our own premises. Initially, we were able to rent rooms to other organisations but as the demands on our centre have increased, this is no longer possible.

We attend to about 200 inquiries a week including Centrelink queries. We provide emergency relief, funded by both the State and Commonwealth Governments. The centre focuses on providing support services and programs in areas such as men's issues, domestic violence, young mums and mental health. Basically we answer people's questions and give

information and referral options to appropriate services. Queensland Department of Families provides funding for one full time and one part time workers.

One of our greatest challenges is accessing sufficient funds to meet the demand of our services. We have to work to a tight budget. It is rewarding to receive a cheque from someone who was grateful for the help they received from us several years previously.

Another challenge is the long term planning for the centre. People are unwilling to belong to organisations due to the litigation concerns. Many volunteers do not want to take these risks. People are also afraid to take on the responsibility of horrendous paperwork that involves statistics, surveys, quarterly returns, correspondence etc. If a paid position was offered it may be different.

It seems difficult to involve young people in our committee and as is the case with most committees, our volunteers are ageing. Governments do not seem to appreciate the tremendous input given by volunteers, many of whom are pensioners, and that there are costs associated with volunteering such as travel costs, phone calls, etc.

We started-up the first centre and flew by the seat of our pants, and learnt as we went along. Since then, we have supported other communities to get their centres up and going. We all form the South West Area Network known as SWAN. We used to attend several conferences a year, however with email, it is a lot easier now to talk to each other more regularly. We also liaise with groups like Saint Vincent De Paul and ministers of local churches. We utilise services from Lifeline and we have a good rapport with our social worker.

For over 44 years, I have always been involved in all types of community organisations. I have inherited this work ethic from my parents and grandparents who were also involved in community work.





MARIE EWING

Victoria

I found it better for my husband to do the talking where traditional roles are followed in the community.

I call it 'couple power' – when both spouses work together.

I am a mother of 10 children. My husband and I run a small grocery/banking/wine bar/café business in Peshurst, which is situated in an area of several extinct volcanoes 40 kilometres from Hamilton.

I teach music, and my husband also manages a local farm. I am very active in the community.

I am involved in various activities, such as school boards, meeting and greeting new members to the community, arranging community celebrations and agitating for tourism and other facilities (such as the volcanology institute) to be located in Peshurst.

I helped organise the Peshurst celebration for the new millennium. It seemed right to develop an event that involved the volcanoes, to celebrate and usher in the new millennium in Hamilton. We decided to have a 'lighting of the fires' ceremony on the surrounding extinct volcanoes. This ceremony held a profound meaning for a lot of people.

We decided that October 1999 was the best time for the 'lighting of the fires' ceremony. This way we maximised the chances of attracting people from other areas to the event.

In organising the event, we needed to seek permission from, or gain the cooperation of, a number of organisations. This included the local shire council, the State Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, the local fire brigade, the Country Fire Council and others.



We were not taken seriously at first. However, our persistence paid off and the organisations were very cooperative. The Shire Ranger met with us on one of the mountains to discuss possible problems and we went over the proposal so as to ensure that it would be safe for everyone and not damage the environment. Sometimes I found it better for my husband to do the talking where traditional roles are followed in the community. I call it 'couple power' – when both spouses work together.

We put signs all around the town, promoting the ceremony. We made sure that reference was made to the original inhabitants of the area. Over 100 people turned up.

The outcome was a very successful event that everyone enjoyed immensely. This was one of the first major things to happen in the shire and we even put details on the internet for other communities and people to read about it.

In terms of my learning from this event, it reinforced the importance of being persistent to get what you want. You also have to have a feel for timing – the right timing is important. You have to push for what you want at the right time and not give up – persistence and the capacity to move on from there are very important qualities.

We have found that activities that are fun and events that have meaning get support. These events can help us to rediscover our identity, energise us and give us hope and a sense of belonging. That is paramount!



BETH DEW

South Australia

Change of any sort can be hard to manage, especially in rural areas, which historically haven't the resources available to make change and improvements happen easily.

'Oysterfest' is a carnival held on the long weekend in October, to celebrate and encourage the oyster industry in Ceduna and surrounding towns.

In 1991 a small group of people comprising of the local dentist, the sports store owner, an oyster grower and three businesswomen, including myself, started the Oysterfest Committee. The first year we managed to raise \$14,500 from which we scraped together a carnival. There were fireworks that didn't work and people that didn't turn up! But we had a great time anyway.

Saturday being the main day of activities with Sunday having a breakfast on the foreshore. It was exhausting work on the actual weekend as the committee had to convince people to participate and donate and give up their time. Some business people committed a huge amount of time and money for it to be a success. Ten years on we have a budget of around \$150,000 and attract huge crowds.

Thinking back to the start, the hard part was getting people motivated. Oysters were a new venture in Ceduna, so there was a lot of sceptical people. We'd had three or four droughts and the town was really suffering. Change of any sort can be hard to manage, especially in rural areas, which historically haven't the resources available to make change and improvements happen easily. We had to get them thinking positively.



Getting sponsorship money for a new venture was very difficult. This was a new carnival, which was competing with other established festivals for the much sought after government funding. For Tourism South Australia to give Ceduna some funding, meant that some other town had to go without.

The first two 'Oysterfest' weekends were solely supported by donations from the local people. Business operators and their staff played a major role in this. Getting sponsorship is always a huge ongoing problem.

Looking back, we did a lot of pestering. We just kept asking until someone would do the work required. If no one would do it, we did it ourselves. One of our local electricians donated hours of time and huge amounts of equipment. A few years later the local council provided this from their tourism budget and each year more infrastructure is added.

The 'Oysterfest' is definitely successful and has been a catalyst for bringing all facets of the Ceduna community together in a fun atmosphere. It is a time to remember the good times and create more good times together as a community. It has given the community the chance to show Ceduna in a positive light to the rest of the country and to be openly proud of our town and our achievements.

It is a challenge and project that I will always remember.



BRONWYN COLEMAN SLEEP

South Australia

It's imperative to be confident and proud of what one does.

There is a bit of a history to setting up the current Minya Bunhii that provides an Indigenous pre-school and childcare service. It took a commitment over 25 years to achieve this. In Ceduna there was a need to provide targeted childcare because the Indigenous parents and families were choosing not to use the existing childcare service. It wasn't meeting the cultural needs of Indigenous families and they felt uncomfortable.

State and Commonwealth Government support was provided for a new service targeting Indigenous families. Opposition in the community was strong, particularly from the existing childcare service. The fear was that their service would suffer financially and not be economically viable. Indigenous families were not using their service anyway, so how was this going to affect their viability? Due to this, a service for Indigenous children and families was needed, as the current service was not meeting that need. Data strongly supported the establishment of such a service.

The whole process was extremely difficult. There was ignorance and resistance within the broader community. Even the local council became involved. Suggestions were made about a possible structure [another committee] that could oversee the existing childcare service and Minya Bunhii. This would have led to disempowerment and destruction

of self-determination of the Indigenous people in their management and service provision. It would also have been difficult to provide a service that was culturally appropriate. We wanted a service that would not duplicate something that already existed in the community. Issues of racism and prejudice had to be addressed via the Steering Committee managing the project.

The level of consultation with the Indigenous community was excellent, involving a lot of meetings. They had input into the building's design, and were asked what they wanted for their children. Indigenous staff, had input into what we know that works for our children in education. Due to this fact, we've got what we have today (Minya Bunhii). Known statewide as the 'Lighthouse in Childcare', not just in Indigenous education, but also mainstream.

The centre opened about three years ago and is going from strength to strength. Minya Bunhii, (with the former Aboriginal pre-kindergarten), Ceduna pre-school centre and the Ceduna Early Learning Program (which is a service set up to meet the needs of children with special needs), work very closely together in a shared leadership. Located next door to each other they are like a campus. Close links also exist with other Aboriginal services in the community (eg Ceduna Koonibba Aboriginal Health Service).

Demand for our service by non-Indigenous families was not envisaged, however Indigenous families have priority. It is inclusive, and other early childhood services are often invited to participate in activities. Indigenous adults are also involved. Sadly, racist comments are still made about our service. It's imperative to be confident and proud of what one does. What's best for children needs to be the focus. When we can do that well, the wind can be harnessed, in terms of sailing ahead in providing the best possible quality outcomes in care and education for children in this community.





GAIL BECK

Western Australia

The mentoring program helps people realise that they can achieve whatever they put their minds to.

My name is Gail Beck and I am a Balardong Yorga. I did not know about my Aboriginality until I was 30 years of age, then it took five years to track down my original family. I was extremely worried about making contact with them as I did not look Aboriginal and didn't think I would fit in.

When I finally did make contact I was overwhelmed with emotions. My cousin said I looked like his sister and I was immediately taken in as part of their family.

A few weeks after meeting my family, I noticed an ad in the paper for an Aboriginal Project Officer in Melville. I talked with my family to see if it was something they would support and if they thought I could do the job. They encouraged me to apply. I did, and got the job!

My first project was called the Willagee Aboriginal Reconciliation Project. I first needed to gain the trust of the Willagee people. I did this by sharing with them who my family was and as it turned out, I was also related to many in Willagee. I then set out to discover what services the Willagee people wanted available to them.

The purpose of the project was to gather information on what the Aboriginal people needed, provide information and educate council members about Indigenous history and culture. The project also

encouraged the community to participate in Indigenous celebrations such as reconciliation week and the National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebrations (NAIDOC).

Another part of my work was to help the local Aboriginal play group to run smoothly and make it culturally appropriate for Indigenous children as well as participate in the mothers group (Djidi-Djidi).

Networking is a great tool for community workers and I network all the time to get the right information and services up and running. As I see it, Aboriginal people have been networking for thousands of years, and today is no different. Community workers and service providers always pull together for support and information sharing as it was yesterday, it's part of our culture.

Mentoring is also very important for Aboriginal people as the past has left many thinking they are unworthy. The mentoring program helps people realise that they can achieve whatever they put their minds to. I have mentored the Djidi-Djidi women and many of them have been successful in gaining more education or employment that is meaningful to them.

I have organised many Aboriginal professionals to have a yarn with the kids in the youth group, this has been very successful for all concerned. It is important to remember that it's not just sports personalities who kids look up to, it's also teachers, lawyers and doctors as well as many others.

Young people are our future. It is vital to get as many involved in community work as possible. Here, we have awards for youths that participate in community work. This gives them pride in themselves and encourages them to pursue a positive future as an adult. It also gives the wider community an opportunity to see our young positively contributing to their lives.



TRIXY ALLOTT

Victoria

It's all about boosting confidence
in people to have a go.

I'm 44 and a professional potter. I run a small gallery here in Welshpool. I have two children and I'm a qualified fitness instructor. I've been teaching fitness classes for about nine years, and right now I teach aerobics, circuit, a fitness class for people who are intellectually disabled, as well as Tai Chi to a group of people who have arthritis.

In 1996, Welshpool lost its bank and since then we have set up a Rural Transaction Centre (RTC) to get financial services back into the community, as well as other services. I'm the chair of the Welshpool and District Rural Advisory Group that manages the RTC. When we lost the bank and we were trying to come up with a solution to get banking services back we didn't know where to start, we just knew what we wanted.

I heard of the Creditcare program the government had set up and got in touch with the local field officer. We worked with them to try to get a credit union into town, but that proved unsuccessful.

The RTC Program has been very successful. The fact that it is owned by the community has been a big factor in people responding well to it. They support it because they own it and they treat it differently than they would a regular bank.

Our RTC has banking, Centrelink, and internet access. People can come and use the computers, get taxation information, use the meeting room or the office.

I'm very aware that a lot of this project has come from me, however I don't think anyone should consider themselves to be indispensable. Anyone should be able to walk in and take it up. I'm in the process of producing a manual so that anyone can walk in and run the centre, just in case.

We have one fully funded employee for the RTC, the rest of the work is done by volunteers. We ask people from the community to do small jobs for us and get them involved in different ways without burdening them with a heavy workload. We find that by extending that network we're getting more people involved.

We like to encourage young people to help out after hours and work with the internet. We've got a scheme going where young people can use the internet for free - if they take the time to help an older person use it.

Our biggest problem here is that the young people leave the area after Year 12. We would like to have more young people here. The whole community gets out of balance because they're the ones with the new ideas to challenge and reinvigorate the old ideas.

When the bank initially closed it was really hard to look at our town in a positive light because you could see that it was dying. When we opened the RTC it was just like this spark of light came back and people opened their eyes and thought 'Wow!' People are now coming back into the town for banking and have started looking at things more positively. They now say 'we don't have to accept it and we can fight back!' Since the RTC opened another group in town got together last year and reformed the Cricket Club which disbanded a few years ago, they made the finals this year!

It's all about boosting confidence in people to have a go.

I just want to say that this is a really good program and it's been the answer for our community.





PAULA FEBEY

Tasmania

I have learnt with life that you have to make the most of it yourself and create your own opportunities.

I was born and bred in Devonport. I am 30 years old and my family live in the area, which is a big part of why I am still here. Most of my friends left Devonport. This is disappointing, as we need a lot more people in my age bracket here. I am single and live with my two Labradors. My family is complex. My parents both have new partners with children of their own.

I work in marketing and public relations as my main job, but also work in a supermarket on Sundays.

I worked with a newspaper for a few years. I have been a dental nurse and had a lot of hospitality jobs. I often have two to three jobs going at one time. I am buying two houses as an investment for my future. I work hard, but enjoy life fully, probably burn the proverbial candle brightly at both ends!

I have learnt with life that you have to make the most of it yourself and create your own opportunities.

One of my most successful challenges has been my involvement with Devonport Commercial Promotions; a retail based promotional group. It runs promotions to attract people to Devonport. When business dropped off in other places, Devonport remained stable due to the great work done by this group.

I am also involved with Taste the Harvest Festival, a food and wine festival. The Devonport community is diversified with a large agricultural base. The weather is a challenge for festivals. Some people do not want to pay to see things, they expect everything for nothing, others just criticise. I like making things happen by being stubborn, impatient and unrelenting, this is my way of overcoming negativity so things get done.

The council can be a bit frustrating at times, slowing things down. I am involved with a Development Working Party Group within the council. I would like to be more involved with the council in the future so I can help more things happen, like attracting and keeping people in the area.

Devonport lacks social stimulus and entertainment and is unable to attract or keep a younger population. The community seems to be made up of mainly young families and older people.

There is a whole lost generation of kids out there, and drug problems and street kids arise as a result. I want to implement programs to give kids social stimulation and let them know they have choices in life.

There are no universities in Devonport, so young people go away to Uni and never come back. Devonport does not have jobs to offer. I think if you have the social stimulation everything else will take off. I would like them to build a technology-based school here and review the relevance of the current curriculum. I would like to see every kid have access to a computer. If social and educational stimulation is developed in Devonport everything else will take off.





LUCY PIZZINI

Victoria

It has brought the community together and we all can appreciate the diversities we have in our district.

I was born in Melbourne and moved to north east Victoria when I was three. I now live in Markwood, in the King Valley Wine Region. I am married with two children who are now women that are working and sharing the family home with me and my husband.

A couple of years ago I was asked by a friend to be on the Living in Harmony Committee, a local project involving immigrants. I agreed, and we proudly published a book called *Voices from in Between*, which was a collection of stories from immigrants that live in our area. I would consider this the most successful community activity that I have ever been involved in - very satisfying. We felt it was a response to the immigrants' need to be recognised for their input into their communities. It was an opportunity for the migrants to be heard in their own words.

It was a collaborative effort among the Wangaratta community. We involved young people from various high schools and colleges. Each school was asked to participate, some teachers took it on as part of their teaching curriculum. Students actually went out into the immigrants' homes from not only in Wangaratta, but Myrtleford, King Valley... in fact the whole area.

My role as a member of the Management Committee was to research and determine policy to ensure the confidentiality of the interview results and to avoid duplication of effort. Also covering continuity, if we needed to go back for more information. The book has been published locally and is available through the Melbourne Immigrants Museum and the Centre for Adult Education, Wangaratta.

We got a *huge* response from the schools for the interviews. The book was obviously something the community needed and wanted. They really embraced it with a sense of ownership. A project officer was employed to do the administration side of the publication and he accessed the funding for the project.

Personal networks of the committee formed the basis for selecting people for the interviews. There were a few of us on the Management Committee who ruthlessly used our own community groups. I come from an Italian background and was able to tap into the Italian community. Some children knew migrants within their own networks. They were asked to interview those they felt comfortable interviewing, rather than sending them out to strangers. That way everyone was comfortable.

I have had feedback that more people would have liked to be involved. There is a possibility for another book. To produce another book in several years time would give an opportunity for those who were not involved the first time to be interviewed and to revisit some of those covered last time to track changes in their lives and perspectives. We will actively pursue funding, as we know that there is community interest too.

It has made our community more aware of what has happened to the migrants here. My parents are just two of the many migrants who came to Australia to make a go of it. They naturally drew on people they knew and trusted and therefore became very close to their relatives here. They didn't really see what was happening outside their circle. The book has opened up a lot to them too. It has brought the community together and we all can appreciate the diversities we have in our district.



LOUISE OSBORNE

New South Wales

My challenge was to show that children have a place in the church as much as anyone else does.

I have been encouraging families with young children into the church community for quite a few years. My passion is that children should be seen as part of the community: religion is not just a one-way thing between you and God - it must involve other people or it doesn't mean anything.

About ten years ago, the church community was literally dying. Most of the regular congregation was retired, although younger people were still wanting to be involved for funerals, weddings and Christmas services and the like.

My challenge was to show that children have a place in the church as much as anyone else does. If children are comfortable in a place that is formal, they are less likely to run around. I would use opportunities to take children from school and have them visit their own church to show them that church is a place they can be comfortable in.

I introduced toys, big cushions and activity bags, with scribble sheets and coloured pencils, so that parents can take these to where they are sitting. There is also a pram service for mothers, grandparents and kids where we sing a couple of songs and tell a story. In these ways, church becomes a place where children have fun.



One of the challenges with this approach has been in educating older people in the congregation to be welcoming to children. One of our services is always 'family-friendly', so that if people feel they may be disturbed by children, they have a choice to go to another service.

This approach allows children to grow into the church. You don't bring everything down to their level - some services remain formal, but in some family services, children are actively encouraged to participate by reading the prayers or the lessons. I unashamedly ask children to do things within a service to involve them.

There is now a group of young mothers, for instance, who meet informally, purely as a friendship group. They provide support to one another. One of those women organised a raffle for the church fete. Normally this would raise about \$300, but she put so much into it that it raised \$1,500. Because she had been supported through difficult times she wanted to give something back.

Over time, these approaches have taken hold: word is spreading that church is changing.



JANE MOURITZ

Western Australia

I always encourage communities to acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate what has been achieved – that is the essence of nurturing rural community spirit.

I came to Hyden, a small wheatbelt town, as a young bride. I felt welcomed by the community and knew I would be happy here. I have now been married for 24 years and have four children. I married a farmer and I too am now a farmer, but I really don't like dirt and dust!

I am the office manager and only get my hands dirty at tree planting time. We have a mixed enterprise farm of 3,000 hectares. We grow crops and value add these with a cattle feedlot. We are very committed to farm quality assurance and are accredited, and now market with our own Wave Rock Gold label. We believe there are still exciting prospects for Australia's agriculture, so long as farmers are prepared to change and meet changing customer and environmental needs.

I didn't go to university, but I suggest I have earned a degree in rural community development, just by having lived and worked here and done it passionately. I do community work every day and have always been involved with the community.

Like many mothers, I started helping with the preschool. I found I was quite a good organiser and a good communicator, so before long I was also involved in the progress association and many other community groups. My volunteer work is sometimes challenging, but mostly fun and always rewarding. I enjoy things that bring the community together.



The most rewarding project in Hyden that I have been involved with was getting a Telecentre. A community planning workshop in 1993 identified the need for access to adult education, culture and other resources that could improve the quality of life for our isolated rural community. As project coordinator I worked with other volunteers on a committee and we were able to access funds to build the Hyden Resource and Telecentre – a community owned facility that incorporated school and public libraries, public internet access and computers, community newsletter, craft room, small business offices and more. This was my first real experience of working with government departments – my ongoing challenge is now to identify and communicate rural people's changing needs to government.

The Telecentre became the information and communications hub for our town. It is such a busy and vibrant place and gets used by locals, small businesses and tourists. I strongly encourage other small rural communities to improve their access and lifestyles through similar communications and technology based centres.

I am privileged to communicate daily with many people in other rural communities across Australia, sharing ideas, learning about their projects, and creating new friendships. Distance is no longer a barrier, because of communications technology.

I am fervent about keeping young people in rural communities. It is important for them to go away, gain skills and broaden their experience, but then hopefully they return with new ideas and new job opportunities. By giving our country youth a positive experience and community involvement in projects that meet their needs, I hope they will come back to their country roots.

Community work must be fun so that people enjoy taking on community volunteer roles. It is rewarding, not in a monetary way but through enjoyment, sharing work with friends and seeing shared projects achieved. I always encourage communities to acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate what has been achieved – that is the essence of nurturing rural community spirit.



JEANETTE LONG

South Australia

I view that all women living in the country are rural women but not everyone sees it that way.

I am 35 and the mother of two children. We have two family farm businesses, one is a cropping business and the other is a viticulture business. Along with my husband Bill, we run an agriculture consultancy business. I also work part time for TAFE as a rural business management lecturer.

I am a member of the Women's Rural Advisory Council of South Australia and as part of that, am the chair of the Rural and Regional Standing Committee.

I am involved as a chairperson of a South Australian reference group for the Grains Research and Development Corporation Project called Partners in Grain. I am also a committee member for the Yorke Peninsula Women's Network. I was born and bred on Yorke Peninsula and live on the farm that I grew up on.

In 1998 I was a member of the committee which organised the South Australian Rural Women's Gathering. Feedback from the women who attended, overwhelmingly stated a need for more training and networking opportunities on Yorke Peninsula. Based on this, we established the Yorke Peninsula Women's Network. The network organises three dinner meetings a year in different locations to give women from various regions an opportunity to attend. These meetings have been hugely successful.



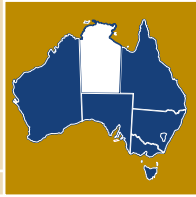
At the end of the first year we had over 100 members in the network with up to 140 women attending our dinners, which is just amazing for a rural community. I was the chair of the women's network for the first two years and as part of that organised training events such as grain marketing workshops and agronomic trial tours for women. This year the network is organising a trip to the Clare Valley, to visit women who are running businesses successfully in their own right.

One of the things that I have been really impressed with, is the diversity of age (mid 20's to 70's) and vocation of the women involved in the network. We are getting women from rural towns involved as well as farm women. We needed to ensure that there weren't too many farm type activities, so town women would feel that it included them. I view that all women living in the country are rural women but not everyone sees it that way.

We have a few young people in our network but not a lot. I guess it depends on your perception of youth. A new standing committee has just been established by the Women's Advisory Council looking at issues for young women. There is a very good representation of young women on the Women's Advisory Council. At the board level I believe it is important to have people from all ages involved, including young

people. It is often very difficult to get young country people involved because many do not remain in the country areas.

I strongly believe we need to portray agriculture in a more positive light. I think that it is a really exciting industry with so many opportunities but we were not getting that message across. We have to change the attitudes of the farmers and the people involved in the industry to portray a positive image to attract young people back. We need to do a lot of work in local and state media to get positive publicity. I think though, it comes down to attitudes changing at the grass roots level.



HELEN KEMPE

Northern Territory

There had to be a conscious change in our culture because up until that point, not many girls were employed to do that kind of work.

I come from a pastoral background. Both my father and grandfather managed a property called Macumba out of Oodnadatta in the far north of South Australia.

I'm fifty-one and was brought up on Macumba. My sisters and I received the majority of our primary education through the South Australian Correspondence School and I was one of the first children to be enrolled with the Port Augusta School of the Air in 1958. I was sent to boarding school in Adelaide in 1960 - there was nowhere else we could go for further schooling out there. Four years later my parents were transferred by the company to Adelaide so my sisters and I continued our schooling as day scholars.

I really missed my life in the bush and hoped I would return to it some day. That opportunity arose in 1967 when my cousin invited me up to the Northern Territory to be a governess for a year. I moved up to Phillip Creek Station, just north of Tennant Creek and seven years later I was still there as a home tutor for my cousin's children who were enrolled with the distance education program. During 1974 - 1989 I was also employed as a home tutor for the Hagan family at Muckaty Station. I was also involved with all aspects of the day to day running of the cattle property.

During that time I became the state secretary for the Isolated Children's Parents Association (ICPA) and looked after the register of home tutors. The ICPA was (and still is) a formidable lobbying group. ICPA lobbies governments for equal access to education for children living in isolated areas. I learnt how to debate motions, organise and run meetings and things that I'd never had much to do with before.

Over the years, I have developed extensive networks throughout the Northern Territory, mainly due to the work I've done as a home tutor and as secretary of the ICPA, but also because of my recent work in the public service. I think it was one of the reasons they hired me.

I've participated in the organisation of many activities involving horse sports such as, campdrafting, racing and rodeo, but one of the most rewarding community activities was the Northern Territory's major bicentenary celebration called Droving '88. I got involved because my employer at the time was appointed stock manager for the whole event.

Young people between the ages of 15 and 19 came to the Northern Territory from all over Australia and overseas to participate in the various station camps and treks. I was a supervisor in two of the big camps and oversaw young people who were taken out there for work experience on the stations. All of these young people could ride but the majority had never experienced life on a cattle property. I, along with other supervisors was there to provide assistance and guidance.

It was a great opportunity for these young people who joined camps set up all over the Northern Territory from Darwin to Alice Springs. They would be on a property for a week to ten days. It also had an impact afterwards on the type of people being drawn to the bush for work. There was an influx of girls wanting to move up here to be jillaroos. This meant that there had to be a conscious change in our culture because up until that point, not many girls were employed to do that kind of work.

To help our communities change and support young women moving into isolated areas to work, Carmel Wagstaff set up a regular function called the Brunette Downs Women's Day. She organises guest speakers from Tennant Creek and the Barkly region or interstate to address topics ranging from life experiences, health issues to finance. It's a lot of fun and it's useful to the young women. These gatherings started off as being a fairly formal presentations on health and other issues, but have evolved to 50-60 women who regularly get together to share experiences and support each other.





GAIL WIPAKI

Queensland

Our aim is to involve other community organisations, we need to work together to make it successful.

I was born and bred in Cloncurry. I'm married and have a lot of family in and around this area, including three children of my own, who live and work in the region.

I'm an active member of the Show Society, Cloncurry Arts Society, Arts Council and a former member of the RSL Women's Auxiliary. I'm the manager of the Cloncurry/Mary Kathleen Memorial Park, a museum and information centre for visitors to the region. The museum houses a comprehensive minerals and gem display, historical information, photographs and memorabilia of Cloncurry and Mary Kathleen.

I'm a founding member of the Cloncurry and District Historical and Museum Society formed in 1985, following the centenary of the Cloncurry State School and Cloncurry Shire. We conduct research as well as record and compile historical information about Cloncurry, the region and its people. The society produces a newsletter, which has many different sections, including *Grave News* containing stories about the people buried in and around the district. Another section allows members to write about their memories of Cloncurry when they were growing up as well as *Pub Crawl*, a section that covers the history of the hotels and their people.

The society will take over the Cloncurry/Mary Kathleen Memorial Park in the near future, we hope to make it like a heritage village, something that the townspeople can become a part of, not something that just targets tourists. Our aim is to involve other community organisations, like the local Girl Guides Association, the Country Women's Association (CWA) and other groups in the community. We need to work together to make it successful.

This won't happen until the building of the new Discovery Centre at the shire hall is completed. The Discovery Centre will become the new information centre, where the visitors will go and get a taste of what Cloncurry and the surrounding areas have to offer. The Historical Society will then take over management of the park.

Some of the major challenges we've faced over the years are fluctuating membership numbers and the threat of losing Cloncurry/Mary Kathleen Memorial Park – a site which was not favoured by the council for the Discovery Centre. They wanted something more at the centre of town. But the society could not sit back and see the park and its history disappear.

It's a very positive sign that in a town the size of Cloncurry, the Historical Society is still going strong and active. I'm very committed to it and believe you need to work for what you want and believe in, which is what we do.





TERRY THIEMT

Western Australia

It's essential when building networks to also honour them, the information and assistance goes two ways.

I'm 44 years old, have three children and live in Carnarvon, Western Australia, a town of over six thousand people. I run my own business, have worked on several community projects and I'm currently doing a Masters in Regional Development.

My business is called Bold as Bras. I sell lingerie to rural women in the Carnarvon region, as well as provide a mail order service. It's only 12 months old, but it's a start and so far going really well.

I wanted to prove that you could run a business in a rural area that provides services locally, and nationally. My thoughts were that if people in rural areas support it then you're supporting your rural networks, which is essential to survival here. It takes a commitment from people who buy through mail order, but in the bush, you're used to waiting - it's not like you can go shopping on the weekend.

I'm currently building a website for the store, however, with my target audience being in rural and remote areas, I'll have to create a text-only version, as internet speeds in a lot of our communities won't cope with anything more complex. I'm also providing a version of the site on a disk for people who have slow modems. This way, if someone hears about the store, they can email me and I will post them a disk with all the information on it. A lot of people out here still aren't computer literate, or if they are, the internet services aren't nearly as good as other areas due to the phone lines.



The two most rewarding community projects I've worked on are the Gascoyne Business Expo and the Western Australian Most Enterprising Rural Community Award. The Gascoyne Business Expo has been going for seven years now and is extremely successful. I think this is due to the fact that it has a core group that involves new committee members every year. I think it's very important that the chairpersons of your community groups don't stagnate. You need to involve new blood. It gives more people the chance to learn how to participate or be leaders of a group and encourages the chairpersons to move on to new challenges. It also expands your networks.

Networks are vital and I can't see how you could do any community work without them. I've seen some great networks develop in Western Australia through the Progress Rural Leadership courses and the Rural, Remote and Regional Women's Network. I've also seen good responses to that in Carnarvon. It's mostly women who participate in these things, and I think it's because women form into networks more easily than men do.

My networks have made it a lot easier for me to study as I can email my network contacts a question and get responses from women all over the world. Between them there is extensive experience in community development. It's an incredible resource to have.

It's essential when building networks to also honour them, the information and assistance goes two ways. I think it's the knowledge of people in these networks that will make or break regions in the future - so contribute.



LYN SEYMOUR

Queensland

I just want women to have a go – have the confidence to trust their judgement.

I have been a Queenslander all my life, and raised in a rural community. I moved out here in the late Seventies and then moved back to the city for a career in education. I spent 13 years in education, then I moved back to Blackall. We decided to move to Blackall because we saw that it would provide a family lifestyle, we were not able to experience in the rush and bustle of the city.

Our time and experience here has exceeded our expectations. I have been given many opportunities that I would never have experienced in the city. I have been offered many roles to fulfil including being elected to council last year.

Being here has opened up doors and learning opportunities for me that I would never have had. I like a challenge and learning something new. I have a small business, and recognise that there are many challenges faced by small businesses in remote communities.

We've got a small population, our accounts aren't as big as other areas, and a lot of the large companies wanted to close accounts on the small businesses here. This would have forced our customers to shop elsewhere, taking their money with them. It would effect the jobs available and hence our population. I lobbied against this trend and eventually I got a seat to present our case to a senate inquiry.

As a result of the inquiry none of us lost our accounts with one of our major suppliers. It was a big learning experience fronting up to a senate inquiry. Both before, during and after the inquiry I was exposed to a very interesting variety of learning experiences when dealing at this level.

Five years ago, I never thought that this would be the sort of thing that I would be doing. I have been appointed to a ministerial advisory council (Queensland Rural Ministerial Advisory Council) to represent small business for all of rural and remote Queensland. We were looking at taxation issues and differentiating between regional and metropolitan businesses and rural and remote businesses. I haven't got all that I wanted but at least it is now on the agenda of government.

When we got here the challenge for us was to become a part of the community. That was our responsibility. In a small community you have to make the effort to go out and meet the people. I must say the people here made it easier by accepting us. I was invited to join the women's public speaking group called forum. This afforded me with the opportunity to meet a number of people from varying sectors in the community. In the last five years I have been involved in ICPA (Isolated Children's Parents Association), president of our local swimming club, and chairman and co-founder of ABCD (Association of Blackall Community Development) which commenced this year.

Blackall is typical of any rural area with a small amount of young people in the community. It is our challenge to try and tap into what interests and motivates them. While this is very difficult at times, we also need to engender confidence and provide support to this generation who will be our future leaders and decision makers.

I want women to see that small business is not just for men. A lot of women think that it is men's work. I want them to know that it is possible, you can do it, you don't have to be in the city. I just want women to have a go - have the confidence to trust their judgement.





PAM DIMENT

South Australia

I would like to see more respect and sharing in the community from both sides of the fence.

Since returning to Ceduna I have been involved in a lot of teaching in schools, and a lot of community work teaching people the ins and outs of what's involved in pottery. This has taken me up north as far as Cook, Yalata and Tarcoola.

Pottery is my full time professional job. Teaching is a sideline where I enjoy teaching people different skills. I suppose I spend about a month each year teaching.

I was born in Ceduna, then went away for about 14 years and have been back for the last 16. So I have done a full circle. I became interested in pottery when I was at school and went on to get a Diploma in Ceramics from the South Australian School of Arts.

I really enjoy teaching around here and even more in remote areas. People out here don't really get the chance to do many hands on skills.

They have a really good arts set up here. It comes under the umbrella of the South Australian Country Arts. People from remote areas can contact the network and they will recommend people to go out into the community to teach. I suppose through word of mouth they got me to do a two day workshop in Tarcoola and the arts officers in this area usually recommend who and what different skills people have here in Ceduna and further abroad.

I do a lot of work with the Ceduna Aboriginal Women's Group in pottery and community groups like Koonibba, Yalata and Scotdesco. The Women's Group in Ceduna was set up as a support group for women in the area. They also have a family violence support person and they did have a nutrition program for more itinerant people of Yalata and up north.

I get on really well with most people, Nunga or white. I don't distinguish between colour. I have a really good trust relationship with the Women's Group. I worked for the Women's Group as a training coordinator - that was about seven years ago. Working with the women, especially Merlene Miller, my boss, has to be one of the most fulfilling experiences and one I will always treasure. I still drop in there every now and then to have a chat and see what's going on, or help the women out if in need.

Ellenor, one of the people I have taught and who has also taught me and grew up with, has the job of setting up an Aboriginal arts gallery here in Ceduna. I always go into the gallery and see what progress has happened over the past months. Ellenor has tremendous potential in many areas such as the arts, teaching, running a business and is a great spokesperson for all the people in this community. What Ellenor is doing now is fantastic for the area - especially for people to show their talents and a place to sell their work and is run by Aboriginal people.

In a small community like this, you don't get any support from the council or much help promoting arts or local artists. They don't seem to think art creates the interest, but many people are interested in the local arts. Promoting your local artists always creates an interest with most tourists.

I see myself hopefully still a potter when I am about 80! I don't like to plan - I am a bit more laid back. Just as long as I can keep potting, learning and teaching people skills. I would like to see more respect and sharing in the community from both sides of the fence.





MARG COUCH

New South Wales

The community knew we would do a good job.

The Riverina Film Festival – the Flickers Film Festival – is a festival of short films. The origin of the idea was to promote culture and the arts, and especially to focus on youth in the town, to encourage them creatively and to give them opportunities in creative careers. Griffith has great multicultural diversity, but under the layers, culture is not one of its strengths.

In the tertiary and open category, films are ten minutes long, and for secondary and primary school age, four minutes. We offer the biggest prize money for such a festival with last year's winner going away with \$6,000.

The idea came out of the Griffith Adult Learning Association (GALA), where, over three years, we managed to increase enrolments from 1,000 to 2,000. At the end of those three years when we looked at running a film festival, we had some credibility as an organisation – the community knew we would do a good job.

Initially there was some resistance. I think some people may have felt we were moving too quickly – the idea took some people out of their comfort zone.

Traditionally GALA had offered hobby and leisure courses, so to go out with an idea for a film festival was very different. Some committee members were not convinced we were on the right track, that we were

dabbling in the unknown, but members of the wider community were very supportive. In the end we just had to keep encouraging the members who supported the vision of a film festival. It's important to look outside the square.

There were also fiscal and human resource challenges, but there was support from the community for funding. We raised \$60,000 from scratch and it all came from local businesses. To do that you have to have credibility. We had a lot of support from Winemakers of the Riverina in particular – as well as putting up cash, each prize in the festival was tagged with a dozen good bottles of wine.

Last year the festival judges were Chris Noonan who directed *Babe* and Glenys Rose Rowe who produced *Feeling Sexy* and *Idiot Box*. We sent them an invitation wrapped around a good bottle of wine! They are now patrons of the festival. Last year we paid their accommodation and travel and this year we hope to pay the presenters as well.

This year we have John Lucantonio, who grew up around Griffith and who has appeared on programs like *The Bill*, and Madeleine Swain, who's an art critic working at the ABC in Melbourne. We've also invited Prani (from *Seachange*) which should help to involve the increasing Indian population in Griffith.

One of the judges will be going into schools around Hay, Griffith and Leeton to give presentations to students and short screenings before the festival.

We have added a contemporary art and writing exhibition and prize for this year too, open to primary, secondary and open categories. Everyone has to submit work on a piece of corrugated iron, worked to however they want in A3 size. As well as approaching famous artists like Pro Hart and up and coming artists like Marian Rennie, we are approaching celebrities to complete artwork – on corrugated iron – to be auctioned off.

The major challenge for our next festival is that a lot of people don't have extra cash for sponsorships because they're pretty tired out with GST and the Olympics. To get the people here and the dollars here, we're going to hook into world music. We've had minor success with a government sponsorship – \$2,500 from the Film and TV Office – which means we still have to work hard by going to more people in community for smaller amounts.

The Flickers Film Festival is the only film festival in regional Australia, and one of the few film festivals anywhere in Australia that didn't go broke last year: In fact, we made a profit!



JANE BENNETT

Tasmania

A challenge with planning is finding the fine balance between forward thinking and realistic outcomes.

I am the Production Manager for our family business in Tasmania which we started about eight years ago. This is my real role in life. I am 32 years of age and was born, raised and educated in Deloraine. The Bennetts go back five generations in this area.

I am actively involved with a number of organisations within Tasmania. I am the President of the Tasmanian Rural Industry Training Board and a member of the Food Industry Council. Over the last couple of years I have been involved in a group developing a 20 year strategic plan with the State Government called 'Tasmania Together'. It has been a tiring process although a really worthwhile experience.

The Community's Leaders Group, originally 24 people, is now down to 18. We were chosen as individuals. The project involved the community leaders going out and consulting with communities at town meetings around Tasmania. One consultation I was involved in was at a Prefects Conference of 120 year ten students - our leaders in 20 years time. We also held meetings with stakeholders, organisations, and other groups.

We had to utilise our own networks. My networks include, the farming organisations, women in agriculture, rural youth, and food industry sector and a large local network. I have a lot of people as mentors. If I have difficulty keeping focused, there are a number of people I can ring for *Help!*

There were a number of challenges. It required a lot of energy and time from all of us. Benchmarking, we planned to take a month however it took six months. It was a passionate process. We managed to get together in one room the environmental, forestry and farming groups to discuss emerging issues over the next 20 years, albeit fiery discussions sometimes, it remained positive - this process was a highlight for me.

One of the drawbacks with community consultation is that people who come along to these meetings already have an issue. The bulk of the community would like to ignore it and not get involved. Therefore, the biggest challenge you face is engaging the *whole* community. A challenge with planning is finding the fine balance between forward thinking and realistic outcomes.

Usually when you talk about government at these meetings, the community expects that you are going to tell them what you are going to do, and you just want them to agree. But in this case, we were going out and presenting concepts and giving them a blank sheet of paper to write their thoughts. We were asking, *'Where do you want your State to be in 20 years time?'* The community found that confronting.

Our major and most rewarding challenge is encouraging our young kids leaving school that there is a future here in Tasmania. That it isn't a dead end! We are investigating how we can introduce the youth to the older support networks.

Our youth are Tasmania's future - they will be our leaders in 20 years time.

'Tasmania Together' has a lot of potential to reward the state - with a brilliant future!





MARG PEARSON

Victoria

But as we made each step forward, it became easier.

I grew up in Swan Hill. I went to Melbourne to do teacher's training. I have three children. I have worked in community groups in Melbourne including community projects for unemployed women and youth. I then had my own gift shop for three years. In 1989, my family and I moved to Bairnsdale. I then taught at Bairnsdale TAFE for nine years.

In 1995, I was approached by the head of a large Kurnai family, Gloria Hood, to provide sewing classes to Aboriginal women. They were interested in learning to sew for a living. We began a sewing group every Tuesday with 12 women.

After completing four units, the TAFE told us we had to go to TAFE to finish the certificate. The women wanted to stay on their own territory where they feel comfortable. We began planning in 1997, we established the DJEETGUN Kurnai Women's Aboriginal Corporation. The elders of the Kurnai thought that by getting incorporated, they could set up their own training centres and run their own programs – have more control.

We were granted funds from the Department of Transport and Regional Services. We established training centres at Bruthen and Newborough. The first pilot project was producing Aboriginal Porcelain Dolls and the other projects were jewellery, pottery and cane ware. Over the two years we had 44 Aboriginal women coming in regularly.

Last year in 2000, we delivered accredited training in both locations. We had enormous retention rates: 100 per cent completion in Newborough and around 90 per cent in Bruthen. The developmental projects also enabled us to develop a number of small businesses. The dolls have been very successful even without marketing; it is difficult to keep up with demand.

The successes have been largely due to the dedicated women that I have been working with since 1995. They have worked to achieve options for their own children and generations to come. When we were setting up, we were a small group of women with a bunch of ideas and nobody wanted to know about us. But as we made each step forward, it became easier. As we did each pilot project, it gave us more credibility.

When we were setting up the project we were challenged by a major lack of resources, transport, telephones, isolation and widespread poverty throughout the community.

Networks are very important to us. We've asked the Kilmany Family Care, an agency of the Uniting Church, to help us set up childcare arrangements and to address some of the barriers to women attending. We have networked with the Gippsland Rural Women's Network, a large group of 800 women. We started our relationship when we were invited to participate in a conference 'Having your voices heard' They sponsored

20 of our women to attend. It was an amazing, educational and eye-opening experience for the women. We are currently working together to seek funds for a joint leadership skills project called 'women working with fibre'.

In everything we do, we try to include our young Indigenous people. Our program is centred on families and getting the youth 'skilled-up' to take over our roles. We have always asked for help when we've needed it. We now have a large list of supporters from the wider community, including philanthropic trusts, businesses and government.

My mission is to develop the economic, social and educational aspects of the Kurnai community to such an extent that they do not need me here any more.





SUE MCGINN

New South Wales

It is a good idea to know when to step back and allow other women an opportunity to also realise their potential, while recognising that some women do not want to be in leadership roles.

I am 37 years old. I grew up in Brisbane and chose window dressing as a career after leaving school. When I left window dressing to marry a dairy farmer, I had become Queensland's visual merchandising manager for a national clothing company. I was 30 when I changed my career due to marriage. I had never lived on a farm before then and had very little idea on what rural or regional Australia was all about.

My husband and I put our finances together to buy our own farm. We began our future together as genuine business partners as well as newlyweds. We found a farm in our price range in Kempsey and made the move from Queensland. We didn't know a soul when we first arrived.

We relished the challenge. My passion for rural Australia has flourished since then. I had no preconceived ideas but was committed to being an equal partner with Brett. I started to get involved in the farm here and in the industry. I guess it was because I was green and keen. We went along to meetings, and I asked a lot of questions. Since then, my interest and knowledge has grown and I am now deeply involved in the dairy industry on many levels.

I became involved with the local sub-branch of the Holstein-Friesian Association of Australia and was also involved with various local discussion groups. In most cases I was the only woman on these committees. In 2000, I instigated the First International Forum for Women in Dairying, which was a concurrent session

at the 10th World Holstein-Friesian Conference. As my involvement in the dairy industry grew, I was awarded with a Nuffield Scholarship to study women in leadership roles in the dairy industry.

In November last year, I was elected to the Board of Directors of the Dairy Farmers Cooperative. The cooperative just celebrated its centenary, and they had never before had a woman on the Board.

When a company like the Dairy Farmers Cooperative has such a large geographical spread from South Australia to Far North Queensland, geography can be a very big barrier to being elected. I had to be known by our farmer owners who are shareholders in the cooperative and be elected by them. It is quite rare for a candidate to run the first time and be successful.

Getting elected was about building up credibility within the industry and being a good listener. I mean, we are born with two ears and only one mouth. You have to listen twice as much as you speak.

Networks are incredibly important and I'm involved in a number of networks including Women in Dairying, Nuffield Scholars' Association and Australian Women in Agriculture.

It is a good idea to know when to step back and allow other women an opportunity to also realise their potential, while recognising that some women do not want to be in leadership roles. It is all about encouraging others to be as involved as they want to be at any given point in time.

To attract young people to the dairy industry, we need to promote a positive image. We also need to recognise ourselves as multi-skilled. Formalising the skills that farmers have built up during their careers through recognition of prior learning will provide professional credibility to people in this industry. We should never sell ourselves short as being *just* dairy farmers. We are, in fact, business people running successful agri-businesses.



IRIS LOVETT-GARDINER

Victoria

I think the way to change attitudes is through the young and through education. That way we can reach parents too.

I was born on the Aboriginal mission at Lake Conder. I then lived in Melbourne for over 35 years - there is a hostel named after me there. I taught Aboriginal culture in schools for many years and assisted in writing the syllabus for teaching Indigenous culture in the Catholic Education System in Victoria.

I started writing when I was 70 years old. I am now 74 and I am doing my PhD. I also write poetry. I am a member of the Heritage Trust of Victoria, patron for the National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebrations (Victoria) 2001 and a Tribal Elder.

The local history for Aboriginal people is one of dispossession. White people rounded up local Aboriginal people and put them on a mission at Lake Conder. Children on the mission lived in dormitory conditions and not with their families. This has resulted in the total loss of our language and the loss, by most of those in our community, of a sense of belonging to a family.

Since returning here three years ago, I have been concerned about doing something for future generations of our people. There is not much for young people here and it's hard for young Aboriginal kids. I am particularly worried about the young girls who seem to have given up hope.

That is why I wrote about my people. The local community didn't actually help me. Help for my research came mainly from libraries in Melbourne and the Heritage Trust.

The best way to raise awareness in the local community is to go through schools. I think the way to change attitudes is through the young and through education. That way we can reach parents too. Young children need to meet Aboriginal people in person.

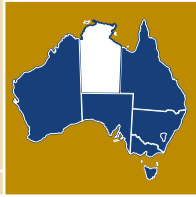
I believe that it is important to have Indigenous people teach Indigenous culture, at least in the beginning. This helps people to identify with their teacher and the Aboriginal culture. It is also important to have Aboriginal teachers because very few non-Aboriginal people have a good understanding of Aboriginal culture or history.

We have built a mosaic sundial near the man-made lake at the edge of Hamilton. This sundial has been funded, at least in part, from money provided through the Centenary of Federation.

The sundial has important Aboriginal motifs, including the clan's totems of black and white cockatoos and an eagle, surrounded by other animals like the rainbow serpent. The sundial was opened on 7 April 2001 with Aboriginal dancers and other special celebrations. Everybody had a lovely day. We hope that many people will come and enjoy the sundial. It is part of the first step towards understanding Aboriginal culture.

It is important for Aboriginal people to have the freedom to practise their own culture. The Aboriginal Co-ops are not as successful as they should be in promoting what is good for Aboriginal people. I think the most important issues for Aboriginal people today are education, health and housing and I think understanding Aboriginal culture is the first step to reconciliation.





SHARON KINRAID

Northern Territory

I get things done through persistence and treading on toes when necessary.

I ended up in Tennant Creek by accident. In 1992 I was on a journey around Australia. We planned to stop over to save money, and we have been here ever since.

I was born in New Zealand and am half Chinese and half Maori. I have lived in Australia for the last 12 years.

I am a founding member of the domestic violence counselling service in Tennant Creek. I was gathering information within my own area, about alcohol and drug abuse, and it became apparent that violence is rife in Tennant Creek.

In 1995 I went to Beijing to the International Women's Forum with 10 other women from Tennant Creek. Our fund raising team raised \$28,000. The Beijing experience really developed my passion further. We came back enriched and with a drive to establish a counselling service for women here. We did this in 1997. We received start up funding from Territory Health Services.

There have been many challenges and difficulties in setting up the centre. Many people and organisations thought that domestic violence shouldn't 'sit' with alcohol and drugs. I wanted to prove those people wrong.

Another major challenge was finding the right person to do counselling. It is hard to attract suitably qualified people who have worked in an outback environment and with Aboriginal people. We have employed four counsellors since the program began.

We started off small and then developed. We cover Tennant Creek really well. Given the distance and seasons we don't always cover the outer areas as well as we would like to. This is being addressed by using consultants.

I am a member of the Chief Minister's Women's Advisory Council. I get things done through persistence and treading on toes when necessary. I am not particularly liked in some areas, but I am respected. My boss gives me a lot of support as long as I have all the facts and I believe in it.

Women from an outer isolated area have fought for the right to open their own safe house. Many other women are getting together to do the same. Some of the workers at the house are my past clients who have suffered horrendous domestic violence. A lot of people drive this program from town and all around Darwin, Alice Springs and other outer areas.

A while ago, I opened the women's resource centre without funding. My funding application had been turned down three or four times over the years; once again advised that drugs, alcohol and domestic

violence were not related. At the time I was very angry. I believed in this project so my boss organised accommodation to house the centre. I then begged and borrowed around town to set it up.

In Tennant Creek domestic violence has minimised but not to an acceptable level. Aboriginal women have received a lot more information, but there is still a long way to go. They are becoming stronger. All women are becoming more educated and informed.





VAL WISEMAN

Australian Capital Territory

There are challenges in building trust and it takes time to build understanding, to build relationships and the trust that flows on from that.

I grew up on a beautiful little farm that unfortunately didn't make much money. That gave me a strong love of the land, but early on I decided that I wouldn't be dependent for an income on the vagaries of farming.

So I went to University - the first in my family to do so - and did a degree in plant sciences. I taught in that area for a few years. For the last 20 years I have lived on a small property near Canberra, which provided an ideal rural environment for a growing family. We have run some stock and done quite a bit of revegetation, as well as having a big garden and orchard.

I was fortunate to join Greening Australia at the start of the One Billion Trees Campaign, about 12 years ago. I really enjoyed that job which was very challenging and interesting. I was in the right place at the right time to become involved with the development of Landcare and with catchment management. For the last 12 years I've been involved with various community forums and government advisory panels working on landcare and catchment management.

One such forum was the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Coordinating Committee which formed about 1992. I was one of only a couple of women involved at that early stage of development. This organisation has flourished and recently we've incorporated, after reviewing our membership. I've been privileged to chair it for the last six years.

We bring together local government, conservation bodies, government agencies, landcare groups, and key service providers. We meet monthly, where we have presentations and discussions on current issues and get updates on what members are doing.

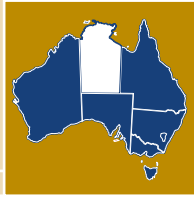
It sounds like a very simple concept but it's been a very effective one. It has allowed all participants to be pro-active and better coordinated, get up-to-date information, discuss issues and take back and apply ideas. It's the simple act of getting information out to people in a timely manner, and having a forum where people can discuss issues.

Some of the projects we have been involved in have included catchment planning that was probably ahead of its time, and which was embraced enthusiastically by landholders. The plan looked at issues in natural resource management in the region. We have also made numerous submissions including a major one to the inquiry into the Snowy River. Other work has focussed on weed management, and we were leaders in the recognition of seeding willows as environmental weeds.



I think we have been able to tackle these big issues because of the trust and the understanding that has been developed in the forum. We seem to have credibility in the broader community, probably through the social capital that has developed through movements like Landcare.

To get big projects running we really have to have strong networks in place. There are challenges in building trust and it takes time to build understanding, to build relationships and the trust that flows on from that. I depend on networks in just about everything I do in this part of my life.



LYNDA SHARPLES

Northern Territory

When I include people in community activities I am giving them an opportunity to meet other people that I know in different areas.

I came to Tennant Creek in the early Eighties. I am married with four children aged between 16 and 31. When we moved into our home it was the only place in Martin Court. There was nothing for miles. We had no trees, just salt bush and brush. We had just come from Tasmania.

It took awhile to adjust. I had not even seen an Aboriginal. It didn't take me long to fit in and get work because somebody heard I was a hairdresser. I have my own business now – *Hair on the Move*. I work from our home salon and I have a mobile service too. I have a good customer base and I think it is successful. I do go to the nursing home. I have Aboriginal clients and I need to be sensitive to their needs and wishes. I never thought I could have my own business, and I don't see myself as being a successful businesswoman, I love what I do.

During my youngest's pregnancy, I was alerted to my medical crisis. I had a Pap Smear, the hospital forgot to tell me. At four months, the hospital decided to ask me who my oncologist was – I had no idea what they were talking about. I survived the cancer. I did not stop the pregnancy. I returned to Tasmania to a hospital and doctor of my choice, and spent seven months there.



This medical crisis was a huge thing for me, it made me push for a Pap Smear Register. I worked behind the scenes making phone calls and writing letters to make sure that this would not happen again. We have our Pap Smear Register now but I do not attribute that to me. I can say that I was pushing quietly and talking to the right people. I asked for the register during the lawsuit; it was part of the settlement. I did not want the money. I wanted a register for women. I just kept saying that's what I want – I will go national and I will scream, if you don't do it. All of a sudden a Pap Smear Register appeared.

As a hairdresser I hear lots of privileged things. My role is to hear what people want and need and find the right people to make things happen. I do this in confidence to both parties and don't want any kudos.

I do face some difficulties in providing community support. I have found people like to knock tall poppies. You are going to get that sometimes in a small town – it becomes like a big family, of course families do fight, they get jealous at times, it is all just human nature.

When I include people in community activities I am giving them an opportunity to meet other people that I know in different areas. You don't need recognition to be successful. You need self-satisfaction that you have done something good that day, and the day after that, and that ... I often think to myself: 'Yesterday's history. Tomorrow's a mystery. Today is a gift.'



LYN DONALDSON

Victoria

I believe character is formed
by life's experiences.

I moved from Kyneton into this area with my family in 1974. I live 65 kilometres from Hamilton and have four children. They have all grown up now but three have stayed in Hamilton.

In 1982 my husband had an accident. I started cooking in a restaurant to help support the family. I also became a hotelier for some time. It is through this work and my nursing background that I became involved in the training of people with disabilities in catering and hospitality. I found this very rewarding. I believe character is formed by life's experiences.

I currently work for the South West Sports Assembly, Access for All Abilities Program at a local leisure centre in Hamilton. The centre has excellent facilities for squash, gym, basketball and netball. It is important to the area because it not only provides facilities for locals to use, it also generates income for the community. I have responsibility for the planning and development of inclusive sport and recreation for people with disabilities, including an annual Community Sports Expo.

I believe that if sport and recreation is inclusive it draws on a range of 'abilities'. I know that participation does not necessarily mean inclusion, but in sport it allows people with disabilities to recognise what they can achieve and builds self-esteem and confidence.

The first Community Sports Expo for people with disabilities took place a year ago. It was great for Hamilton. Although Warrnambool and Portland were also included in the proposal, Hamilton was chosen to host the Expo because it had a strong sporting tradition. The Expo was publicised throughout the region. Five community principalities were involved - spreading well beyond the outlying region of Hamilton itself.

I managed to get the community behind the Expo by working with the schools and disability service providers. We found targeting grade five and six children most effective. At that age you can really have an impact on changing the perception of disability within the community. The local radio station 3HA provided sponsorship for the Expo. I also worked closely with State organisations (such as Wheelchair Sports, Victoria).

I think I saw the community's attitude really start to shift when I was organising the Expo's State of Origin Wheelchair Rugby Competition. I believe this sport definitely provided the catalyst for community support because it required a range of services for it to be successful (such as accommodation and transport). People started to really get involved.

Of course, raising the awareness of disability needs within our community was a goal, but the best result for me was seeing kids of all 'abilities' getting out there and having a go!

I became very ill in the lead up to the first Expo. Fortunately, I had done a lot of early preparation work, which paid off and assisted other staff to pick-up where I had left off. Apart from my illness, there were no negatives and, thankfully, I was able to get to see some of the events.

I don't like working on negatives. If things don't go well, the key is to reflect - learn from the experience and then move on. This year the whole Expo has been a breeze in comparison.





MARY ASH

Western Australia

I was taught when I was a kid that everybody's got something special to offer – that's how communities become special.

I am 44. My first husband and I had three kids, he died, and I remarried and had another two kids.

I am a child and community health nurse with a midwifery certificate. I have lived for the last 16 years at Horrocks Beach, a local holiday place.

I grew up in a large family and being part of the community is an essential part of my life. My community is special. Years ago, one family donated their coastal area to the shire so the community could enjoy it – this is now Horrocks. As a community in Northampton we are having a lot of success: like replacing our jetty, forming a Youth Advisory Council, building a skate park, and staging 'Battle of the Bands'.

The planning for the Skate Park has taught us a lot. It came about because our kids wanted a place to hang and do things. We got the kids involved and they chose a multi-use park because they all wanted to be together. The kids started fundraising and we looked at suitable grants. Our challenge was to get the shire's support, we eventually got a grant and an area to build. It's about three and half years since we started planning.

It's had lots of involvement from the kids and credit goes to them for their patience. Kids need everything done yesterday and some who started with the initial designs, have actually grown out of skateboards but have still been there to support us.

From that skate park, we identified a need for the kids to have a forum, so we've formed a Youth Advisory Council. They said they had nowhere to play in their band, a couple of them were too young to go to the pub and the audience they wanted were young kids. We got the kids to put together a 'Battle of the Bands'. We got a grant to pay for setting it up. One of the bands actually got offered recording rights – very exciting. They got over 200 kids there. It gave the kids confidence. The money raised went towards the skate park.

Networking increased for me. Once I start talking about an idea then more people add to those ideas and want to help. When we put the 'Battle of the Bands' on: the local footy club were bouncers; friends in the Lions Club did the drinks; school friends did the sausage sizzle; local drug counselling group organised the grant, police helped; one kid did the advertising; and the kids got their local bus drivers to bring kids from Geraldton. I was taught when I was a kid that everybody's got something special to offer – that's how communities become special.

The kids want another 'Battle of the Bands' in six months, hopefully I'll get them to do more and I'll do less next time.

We approached the jetty differently to the skate park. We were more successful in a shorter amount of time. We got the community and shire behind us early. We matched the shire in funds with community donations and a grant – we each put in a third. We did a planning report, including a list of tradespeople who would provide their services in-kind. We got a lady who has expertise in lots of different grant applications to do ours for us. The jetty is still ongoing and we hope to have it built by the end of the year.

To get other people involved, I try to identify what their interests and needs are and what works for them. I'm a stubborn bitch and I nag a lot ... it gets things done – that's for sure ... just joking!



CATHARINA DENDULK

Tasmania

It was successful in that we settled them and helped them to feel secure enough to move on.

I have been in Devonport, Tasmania for 27 years. I was born in the Netherlands and left there when I was 21. I went to England for a year as an au pair, then migrated to Canada where I lived for 12 years all up. Halfway through my Canadian stay I hitchhiked around the world for four years, two of which were spent in Japan.

I moved to Devonport because of my husband. In Holland, when I was 17-18 we went out together. It did not work out however, and he migrated to Tasmania. While hitchhiking around Australia I visited him and his wife. In 1974, I went back to visit him after his wife died - we decided to get married. He had four children.

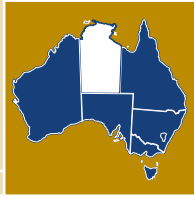
In 1981 I became involved in sponsoring and settling refugees. The first were Vietnamese boat people. Devonport Reformed Church sponsored two families. Since then my friend Tea and I have gone on to sponsor many more families including Vietnamese, Czechoslovakian, El Salvadorian and Bosnian. Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) would ask us to sponsor families for six months which meant we would meet the refugees at the airport, have a house, furniture and food ready for them. Take them to Centrelink, bank, doctor, dentist, schools, you name it, and generally get them used to life in Tasmania. Since the government has changed the system we now work together with the Migrant Resource Centre if they need help.

Unfortunately the sponsoring was not successful in keeping the refugees here in Tasmania. However it was successful in that we settled them and helped them to feel secure enough to move on. Not being able to find full time employment was the main factor for families leaving Devonport. Especially the Vietnamese, the men and women all wanted full time employment. They were extremely hard workers. Most moved to Melbourne and all have done well - built their own houses. The only group that has stayed here is the El Salvadorians, there's about 13 or 14 families. Quite a few of these are related and are from the same small town in El Salvador.

The Vietnamese were the most challenging, because they were the first ones, but also because their lifestyle was so different. That is why I enjoyed sponsoring them the most. We had to teach them how to sleep in a bed. We couldn't understand why they were so cold at night until we found out they were sleeping on top of the blankets. We had to teach the parents to use nappies for the babies.

The Devonport Reformed Church wanted it to be a community effort and, once the families arrived, people did help. It was hard for the families and the community because the Vietnamese did not speak English and, at first, we did not even have a dictionary! The families attended English classes so we had to make up a roster for women to look after the children. Overall, the community was supportive.





ROSEMARY PLUMMER

Northern Territory

**My main interest is the future
of our language.**

I am a Warumungu Woman, one of the custodians of Tennant Creek. I was born about 45 kilometres north of Tennant Creek at a place called Phillip Creek Mission - in 1956 all the residents, black and white, had to leave as the water had gone bad - salty, to another government settlement. My family returned to Tennant Creek because my mother died in 1970. I was the eldest daughter. I had to play the mother role. It was very hard for me, working different jobs, for example cleaning lady to Greek people who owned the shops, to support my family. I did not have the opportunity of training myself, until I was older. I went back to school and studied linguistics and did a lot of small workplace training certificates to build self-confidence. I lived in Darwin for a little while but I came back home.

I am a mum, a granny and an aunty. I have five children and two grandchildren. I am a writer and artist. Last year I won the Northern Territory Literary Award - I was so surprised - it was not expected.

I have just been awarded the 2001 Northern Territory History Award to record Aboriginal oral history in the Barkly region.

I work with the Batchelor College, an Aboriginal Institution, on the Tennant Creek's campus which was set up in the late Eighties. I am on the college's council and I represent this region. There are 60 or more people accessing the college here. There were no difficulties with the institute, every body wanted it.

My main interest is the future of our language. I am one of the founding members for the language centre. My granny, Dora Nangala, said to me one day, 'Don't speak in English, speak your own language'. I thought about her direction, I thought a lot about what she said to me as my Aboriginal teacher.

My granny made me think about the future - kids who were born in the late Sixties and later became parents, do not speak to their kids in their own language. They speak to them in pigeon English. The main reason for setting up the language centre was to help children come and learn their own language, as well as, recording dreaming stories and history.

Language is important because in 50 or even 20 years time it may die out because of inter marriages - people marrying into different language groups within the Barkly region and with people from interstate.

There are 13 languages in Tennant Creek. A committee was formed to set up the language centre in 1985. Many people have worked over 15 years to set up the centre. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission provides us with funding.

The language centre employs quite a few people and Community Development Employment Program workers. People wanting to learn a language and interpreters can go there. The language centre is now conducting cross-cultural programs - another way of bringing our languages out into the community.

I believe you are never too old to study. I want to keep learning, maybe do a degree in English language, Masters or PhD and learn more about languages.





ELAINE MCKEON

Queensland

Nobody likes change – it takes a while for people to support change.

I was born in Cloncurry and have always lived here. I am a descendant of the Kalkadoon tribe. I have worked in health, housing, welfare, and drugs and alcohol. I have been on many committees.

I was always interested in policy but could see things were not happening on the ground for Indigenous people. Being a representative of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission for nine years, I saw people's needs and knew we needed to help ourselves. As a result, I have worked towards developing community social infrastructure and investigated ways of using economic development for self sufficiency.

I lobbied to get a registered nurse's training course. This course is for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to work and train together, to learn from each other and know each other's culture as this is how reconciliation happens. We need to train people from out here that won't leave the region. We have had real outcomes in this area.

I was on the inaugural committee for the Royal Flying Doctors. I worked with the first Indigenous health liaison officers within the flying doctors. It was a first in Australia.

I have been involved with the north west Queensland's Community Housing Project, initiated and run by the community rather than by government.

I set up a domestic violence committee involving meetings with police, nursing staff and schoolteachers. Starting the women's group was a real challenge; you had to talk to them over many years to show them the need. They began to come together, give each other support and share experiences. The women needed a voice to speak on their issues.

I barely made it through school because we never had support. Everything I know comes from experience. My people lost their dignity when they were put into missions. It destroyed the social fabric of our people. People lost their dignity for generations. I am trying to get it back. I don't ever want to see our people live like that again. We had to do something for ourselves and this was a challenge because people criticised, condemned and opposed our group. Nobody likes change – it takes a while for people to support change.

I set up a company on behalf of Aboriginal people to take advantage of opportunities from mining projects, the end result being training and employment. I am interested in contracts that have the capacity to employ and train. I would like to upskill our people with transferable skills. It is about giving people a choice. You had all these severely disadvantaged people with no opportunities.

Going into business and creating employment and training has changed our life. People have more self-esteem and confidence – there is no dignity in welfare.

My group wants opportunities. We don't get that for nothing. We have to work hard. When I negotiate with industry, it is never about money; it is about opportunities.

I can't stop because the need is so great. Life is not just about you, and what's in it for me – don't ever think like that. Always think about the world around you, be considerate and do what ever you can to help the others. Make a real contribution to society! I grew up in poverty and it's motivated me to try to prevent others from it.

I got the 'fire in my belly' from my mother. She always said 'pray for your sins and work for what you want'.



JANE LOWE

South Australia

The rewarding thing was that it brought the community together (farmers, businesses and the Aboriginal community).

I think one of the most successful and the most rewarding community activities I've been involved in was the reclamation of Yumbarra Conservation Park. The changing of a piece of legislation relating to a National Conservation Park had never been done before.

Yumbarra Conservation Park consists of four million hectares of mallee scrub. We battled to get the legislation changed to allow exploration and mining in a small area of the park. The primary purpose was to get the company in there to find out whether in fact there is something in this area of the park. This project had been on the drawing board for seven years. I firmly believe that if industry development is approached in a sustainable manner it will not damage the environment.

The rewarding thing was that it brought the community together (farmers, businesses and the Aboriginal community). It got people working as a group where they hadn't worked together before. It also created cooperation and trust between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations/groups in the town. Since this time it has established some very strong links with all the community groups involved and all sides of government.

I was confronted with many challenges. From a female perspective, I was working with initiated Aboriginal elders (men) and men from local businesses and industry. I had never worked so closely with Aboriginal men before, and I soon learnt where I sat in the whole scheme of their world, culture and values. I had to rely a lot on a couple of Aboriginal elders as well at the time with the president of our business association. He had a strong relationship and understanding of the Aboriginal community because he had grown up in Ceduna.

In the end, I think I earned some trust and a bit of respect along the way. I was invited to help mediate an initial native title meeting between the mining company and some of the elders. I have always had an enormous respect and appreciation for the different views and I have endeavoured to help find that middle ground or a win/win solution for all parties.

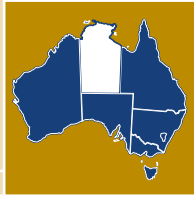
Our isolation was a challenge too. Against our metropolitan counterparts our rural voice is often lost and not heard. We were determined to be heard and to make the city people realise that this was a decision which the local community and regional South Australia desperately wanted. We developed petitions and got letters of support from this region and from other regions around the State in order to convince those in power.

When it came to voting on the legislation, it came down to three independents and none of us knew which way they were going to vote. We needed two of them to support the changes and that is what happened. I really think they did the right thing by regional South Australia – they stood by what people in the bush wanted. I admire what they did and they have earned a fair bit of respect out here because of Yumbarra.

There were a few frustrations but we rode through them. The decision has been an enormous boost for morale around the town particularly, since the company has agreed to base itself locally and also to employ local Aboriginal people. It's given everyone a bit of hope that there is a strong future for Ceduna. Along with the company we all are optimistic that there is something out there in the park but you never know which way the dice is going to roll.

I firmly believe that as a council and business association, we have a responsibility to ensure that there is a secure future for the town economically. In doing this we will reduce our dependence on social welfare and stop the rural drift that has been happening here.





BARB SHAW

Northern Territory

Over 10 years there has been a lot of changes and I notice many changes have come from the Aboriginal communities and people themselves.

I am a local Territory woman. I have worked in many areas, but mainly in Aboriginal organisations and the public sector. I have held management positions and participated on organisational committees. Health has been my focus for the last six years.

I am committed to bringing about social changes within a community, working with Aboriginal people living in remote communities. I aim to influence and encourage Aboriginal people to be involved with health service delivery. I encourage people to take community responsibility and get involved.

I think it is really important for a wide range of health practitioners to be involved in health programs, and should appreciate each other's role. They all have something to offer. It is these skills when pulled together that are important for working with people in remote areas. Because of the isolation, you have to rely on each other's skills regardless of what profession you are. We are about improving health standards and conditions amongst people living in remote areas. Working as a team is the only way you can do it - it is also a survival mechanism.

We now have a lot of Aboriginal designed posters that give out messages of the things to do as preventative measures. They are culturally appropriate. They are putting these messages into their own languages and images that Aboriginal people can relate to. Over 10 years ago when I worked in health services there were limited resources available.

We still have to break down the old welfare mentality, which has resulted from the colonisation process. The importance of getting the community to take responsibility for one's own health and getting involved is a real challenge if you are working in this area.

Having an appreciation for the social, cultural and economic situation of the community and the relationships between people is important. Having an appreciation of the constraints, difficulties that community's face living in remote areas is also important. I think getting health practitioners to think in a new way, working with people, is a challenge.

We have a training program that is ongoing for Aboriginal health workers. We see them as key players, they are from the community, they are Aboriginal people, they play the up front role for providing services. The ongoing training program covers a lot of areas like trauma skills, child health, and health promotion.

Over 10 years there has been a lot of changes and I notice many changes have come from the Aboriginal communities and people themselves. They have recognised the need to do something and have sat down and worked out strategies. The way in which organisations are working with Aboriginals has certainly changed because Aboriginal people have demanded it.

What is important to me is to nurture decency within the community. Decent for me is having respect for people, regardless, of who they are. It is a strong value that I possess.





COLLEEN DONNELLY

Western Australia

Friction can easily arise in a small community. The issue of finding suitable land for development showed me the importance of communication and of always looking at the issue, not the personalities.

I am in my second year as President of Denmark Shire and my sixth year as councillor, and my interest is the success and independence of communities.

There is a strong environmental focus in Denmark, and more and more people are wanting to retire here. The challenge is trying to balance the needs and values of the community against the conservation of our natural environment.

Trying to find a location to build a new school recently brought to light the fact there is a lack of suitable land in Denmark for this kind of development.

Friction can easily arise in a small community. Sometimes too, communities feel as if they are being used as 'bunnies' by other levels of government, with conflicting reports coming through from different government departments.

Denmark is clear about what it wants for the future: to retain its village atmosphere and its natural environment, to hold onto this beautiful place we live in despite the fact that in future the population will double or treble. The issue of finding suitable land for development showed me the importance of communication and of always looking at the issue, not the personalities.



There are now two schools in Denmark, and we have planning documents that give us a framework for dealing with future development. These documents clearly show where future development can take place, this will guide developers when considering investment opportunities in Denmark. We are currently preparing a tourism strategy in recognition of the economic benefits of tourism whilst understanding the potential adverse impacts to the natural environment.

All of this planning is in response to the wishes of the community through many years of consultation by local government, truly representing the people.



VICKI BROWN

Western Australia

Resident support is high and gradually an increasing number of farmers have become involved, our community bank is proof that communities can make a difference and the value in self-reliance.

Establishing and opening a community bank for the Tambellup and Cranbrook communities took nine months of my life. In retrospect, having children was easier, but we now have a community bank, in partnership with the Bendigo Bank in Victoria that has been operating for around 12 months.

Tambellup was one of the first rural communities to lose its bank about 12 years ago. Its loss was felt very keenly by people, showing up as a major issue in community surveys.

I was on the shire at the time we started to investigate the options in providing financial services for our community. We sought expressions of interest from surrounding shires to be partners but had a very poor response; only Cranbrook was interested in a community bank.

In terms of location, we went in with an open mind, but what we've ended up with is one bank that operates out of two locations - Tambellup and Cranbrook, opening two and a half days in each town.

We needed \$285,000 in start up funds. We raised money by selling shares in the company, but no one could own more than 10 per cent. Initially there was scepticism and a lack of community spirit, and we had to work hard to assure people it wasn't a rip-off.

Resident support is high and gradually an increasing number of farmers have become involved, although local business is the core business of the bank. It's proven to be great for older residents too, who like to be able to walk into a bank and deal with a person who knows them. We also offer school banking, involving local school kids.

Our community bank is proof that communities can make a difference and the value in self-reliance.





KAYLENE PRICE

Queensland

Each little community is different! What might work for one won't work for another. That's where it's a challenge. But it is possible if the community takes ownership and becomes part of its local solution.

I was born and reared in a small country town.

I have lived my whole life in small communities of six hundred or seven hundred people. We're now living in the big smoke of Cloncurry with a population of 2,500.

Two years ago, I was invited to Canberra to represent rural and remote Queensland for the breast cancer unit in Australia. When I went to Canberra, I thought I was the only survivor of breast cancer and I was quite overwhelmed to find another 350 women who had also survived. It was a bit of a shock. I'd lived in isolation and everyone I'd ever known that had cancer had died.

Immediately, it was evident there was a gap between city and rural. We did not have a local Oncologist let alone a long-term doctor; grievance and support counsellors; internet and regular telephone services. I am driven to bridge that gap – for all areas – not only in cancer services.

The Cancer Fund invited me to Brisbane to talk about the Canberra experience where I had put forward a solution to initiate a buddy system. I suggested some one could help us when we go to the city, with things like catching buses and filling out forms, we just weren't used to that way of living. The benefit of this proposal was the relationships formed with doctors, and cancer survivor families.

The Broncos football club, in Brisbane, has a support program now. Families meet there on Mondays. They have doctors and counsellors who volunteer to provide medical support and direction to whole families. The Broncos' Chairman was very interested in our solution linking Cloncurry to a suburb of Brisbane.

The buddy system is successful because it's so simple. We've got ladies who are teachers who are happy to come and fill out the forms. We have doctors who will explain the big words. Even if you're just providing friendship over a cup of tea with someone who has just been diagnosed – it is still a big help.

I lived through cancer over 17 years ago. I was away from home for 12 months, my baby was six months old and I also had a three year old, when I was diagnosed. I willed myself to recover – I wanted to go home. Absences from families within small communities leave a big gap too. People from here know I am a survivor. It's just a matter of standing up and saying let's do something about this. Many of my friends who have been diagnosed, have all died, and the children and dads have had no opportunity for on-going professional support.

When representing rural Queensland in Canberra, cancer survivors proposed a plan to scientists and doctors, of what health structures need to be put in place. We want them to ask: 'What do you need in Cloncurry?' rather than giving us something they think works and then leave us to make it work. The sad thing is, half of the time it doesn't work and every one gets frustrated. They make you think you're not allowed to make it different – but each little community is different! What might work for one won't work for another. That's where it's a challenge. But it is possible if the community takes ownership and becomes part of its local solution.

We are now winning the early detection war! The next challenge is to reduce stress and time away from the family and community for treatment and follow-up appointments.





GAIL O'SULLIVAN

Queensland

Once you have built up trust, mentoring becomes something that happens spontaneously.

I am 46 years old, married with three children. We run five cattle properties in Queensland and live 130 kilometres out of Charters Towers. We cover a distance of seven hours from the furthest property so we spend a lot of time travelling. Our two sons work our properties and our eldest daughter is a schoolteacher.

My most satisfying community project is my work with the Priority Country Area Program (PCAP) Committee. In Queensland we break the State into four areas, each area is then broken into local PCAP groups. I am a member of the local PCAP group as well as the Area Management Committee.

PCAP is a Commonwealth funded project. It is our challenge to enhance educational opportunities for rural students who live in geographically isolated areas. By funding projects, students can access experts to assist with sport and such to lessen isolation. One of the exciting things that is happening is that one of the smaller towns is hosting a large touch football carnival, instead of holding it in a larger town. We fund students' newspapers, as well as projects based on developing their technological skills.

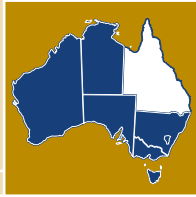
The area committee organised a conference to bring all the groups together. We consulted with our communities to set an agenda. We had an attendance of 95 per cent of members. When you get people

together who have never met, yet have the same passion, it is quite wonderful to see the dynamics come to life. They were eager to be there and struck up friendships straight away. We saw networks form with people from small towns and schools, and Indigenous communities.

One of my personal interests is technology, particularly for isolated students and rural women. A Professor of Education that I had met from the USA wanted to visit us. He spoke at our PCAP conference while he was here. It was through my networking that we were able to have an international speaker at our conference. I use email everyday as my networking tool to find out and pass on information. It has been invaluable to people in isolated areas. We want our children to develop a sense of community - technology enables them to access the wider world.

I am also involved with the establishment of video conferencing in the rural centres in North Queensland. A PCAP member told us they couldn't access language training for their students at their small school. As a result of my networks, I was able to advise that a video conference facility at their local hospital had just been installed and can be utilised by the whole community. I have learnt a lot from my PCAP colleagues and I have also been able to give to them. Once you have built up trust, mentoring becomes something that happens spontaneously.

Just because all my children have finished their education doesn't mean that my job has ended. I am still a community member. I belong to PCAP because I believe that I have experience to offer. I have learnt that you have to get out and do it, it won't be handed to you on a platter.



SUE SWALLING

Queensland

As with all events in a small town, this was not a one man (or should I say woman) effort, but a combined effort between many groups which mainly consisted of women.

I'm 43 years old and have lived in Cloncurry most of my life. I'm married, and have a number of businesses in the town: a hairdressing salon, a fish and chip shop, a cleaning business and I also work for an airline.

I'm also very involved in the community and in the past I organised the school fête every year. In 1999, I helped organise a reunion for anyone who ever attended Cloncurry State School. This was quite an event, it actually started as a reunion for my final year, but it grew...

In the end the reunion was a two-day event with tours through the town, memorabilia and a dance held on the last night. Over a thousand people descended on Cloncurry for this event, which provided a range of benefits: economic benefits for Cloncurry; socially - networks developed, friendships renewed; historically - people had a chance to relive the past.

I started working on this project with a man from my class and eventually we recruited 12 other people to help organise the event.

The major challenge was the scale of it, the timeframe and trying to organise a dance for around 800 people. I think what made it a success was that it wasn't over organised. It was well run and economic, but mainly we let the people be their own entertainment, to share and enjoy each other's company in a safe environment.

Networking was essential, the reunion wouldn't have been possible without it. I did a lot of work to promote the event, using the internet, government newsletters, radio, TV, word of mouth, newspapers, and faxes to anyone who was ever involved with Cloncurry.

It was a great success!

As with all events in a small town, this was not a one man (or should I say woman) effort, but a combined effort between many groups which mainly consisted of women. I find living in a small town means that often the same people appear at many meetings of groups, organisations and clubs, therefore when you are involved in a certain area, you are aware of the resources available and the skills that can be used.

I feel that just because we live in an isolated area we should not miss out and should have events that we can attend and enjoy. I love being involved in the community and organising events that promote Cloncurry.

Recently I was convenor of the catering and community events for an air show. It was in conjunction with Airshows Down Under and a federation event. It was great.

My next event is a Cloncurry town reunion in September 2001. We are hoping that this will be as good as the school reunion.





KAREN BURGESS

Tasmania

This project was a springboard for changing the community's attitude to a positive one and fostering a spirit of social entrepreneurship and cultural investment.

Well, I'm 37 with two kids and a husband. I was born and bred in Hobart and from there I moved to Dover – a small Tasmanian community of around 500 people. I've been working in the community sector for over 20 years; my mother was involved with the Women's Electoral Lobby and encouraged me to participate in community issues from a very young age.

In 1998, I was President of the Dover Community Telecentre when we heard that the local council wanted to demolish the Old School. The school was located in the centre of town and was falling to pieces due to lack of use and TLC. Many loathed it and others just simply ignored it.

At this time the future of the Telecentre was uncertain: paying commercial rent in shopfront premises for many years had crippled the organisation financially and we were desperately in need of rent free premises as originally promised.

We decided to join forces with the group already fighting to save the Old School and give the campaign credibility by providing the skills, infrastructure and resources we had. We undertook the strategic and business planning processes. We also found funding for its restoration and utilisation. The intention was to be able to use the Old School to house the Telecentre and Far South Regional Arts Group. It solved both groups' problems and maintained a part of the town's history for future generations.

To actually get this project running and get people involved, the Telecentre undertook community consultations to find what our community's needs were. This took some time as the community first needed to divest itself of anger and resentment before moving on, but move on we did. This project was a springboard for changing the community's attitude to a positive one and fostering a spirit of social entrepreneurship and cultural investment.

There was a lot of doubt to begin with, but we overcame it by breaking this massive plan into manageable sub-projects. We also needed to raise the profile of it to give it 'clout', so I promoted it in the press and to politicians. Timing was also important: upcoming State and Federal elections gave us enormous leverage.

Networking was vital for our success. I had to get people involved on an individual level by ensuring there were individualised positions or tasks where people could participate and use their skills to really contribute. We couldn't have done this without their participation.

One of the main things I've learnt from working on this project is the skill to see every disadvantage as an asset and disaster is just a new opportunity for investing in ourselves and our unique lifestyle.





CHERYL PURCELL

Victoria

The whole community has got behind the project, not just one person.

I'm 51 years old. I moved to Bemm River in 1994 from Melbourne when my husband fell ill. We used to holiday here and loved it. We now manage six holiday units with a regular clientele, some of them have been coming for over 50 years.

The most satisfying community activity I have worked on is the one I'm on at the moment. Bemm River is one of the last small towns in this part of the country that is still without any community facilities or buildings. All we have is two public telephone boxes, a tiny general store, and a hotel that has just been rebuilt after a fire in 1995.

I live in a small two bedroom flat. It's very, very tiny. If we have a town meeting I can use the Country Fire Authority's shed, providing they don't need it at the time.

We have all been working with East Gippsland Shire to develop a community recreation centre since 1998. We have introduced adult education classes. I managed to get some funding from the Department of Adult Community and Further Education to put that together. The classes are held in my kitchen. I also run an internet café out of my kitchen with fax and photocopying facilities.



We first applied for a seeding grant of \$500 from the Department of Adult, Community and Further Education and received \$1,800 to pay for and run classes. We continued from there and now run classes in arts and craft, IT, and fishing. Arts and craft are very big here. Our ladies have been very successful and are well known for their work. We're hoping to market their work on the internet.

With the seed funding we bought a fax machine, and paid for the internet to be put onto my computer so everybody can use it. We also used the funding to network. We hope to be able to service the wider community through our centre.

We've applied to the Community Support Fund for dollar for dollar funding to get our centre built. The full cost of the project is \$158,000. Community Support Fund will give us 50 per cent and we have successfully raised the other 50 per cent. I have just been through Native Title to secure a block from Aboriginal elders in the area. We were told that this could be a slow process. But it has only taken eight months. So we are very happy with that.

We are now waiting on an Indigenous land users agreement to be signed. We will have a plaque in recognition of Aboriginal support for our project within the building when it is finished.

Most of our fund raising was done outside of Bemm River. People from Melbourne and Sydney have donated towards the building. I made a list of regular visitors to Bemm River and I wrote to every one of them explaining what we were trying to do. I organised tax deductibility through the Australian Sports Foundation for donations made. The whole community has got behind the project, not just one person.

When I first suggested a community centre in Bemm River, people laughed. They just didn't think it would happen. Then people began to come on board and now they are really excited about the project.



WILL MEAD

New South Wales

People in our community, like so many others, are willing to give their time when they see an event important to them.

I have been involved with several community activities in my ten years in Griffith. One has been the Gown of the Year travelling show, which raises money for Soroptimist International. Over the five or six years I have been involved with organising the event here in Griffith, we have supported a range of local causes, including the local youth refuge, the local hospital and an innovative computerised 'baby' which discourages teenage pregnancy, 'Baby, think it over'.

We have regularly had 300 to 400 people attend the event, which is pretty good for a town this size. It's always a challenge to get people to go. Ads promoting the event are okay, but I've found over time that what really works is the personal touch - nothing beats good word of mouth.

Another more recent event at the school here, was the opening of a new pathway and rose garden dedicated to the memory of two important community figures in Griffith.

Elspeth Howie taught in Griffith for many years. She must have taught every subject under the sun, and she was also the first female cricket scorer and scored for state games. She left money for a trust fund. Last year the trustees decided to wind up the trust and give the money to the school. The funds were used to build a new path, which connects the new foyer with the car park.

John Ritchie was another well loved community figure who started a successful bus company in the town. He always maintained his contact with people and especially kids. The idea of a rose garden dedicated to his memory which complemented the new path was suggested.

It was one of those events that just grew. We originally planned a low-key opening, but more and more people heard about it. A lot of people contacted us, wanting to attend. At one stage I felt it was totally out of control. I even put an ad in the paper to make sure that everyone who wanted to participate had the opportunity to come.

In the end 150-odd people in the community turned out for it, in about the only half-hour of sunshine in a week of solid rain. It was a great success: people in our community, like so many others, are willing to give their time when they see an event important to them.





LYN SYKES

New South Wales

When people are able to combine the wisdom and experience of one generation with the energy and enthusiasm of another, great things are possible.

I am married with five children, all of them are boys. I live in Dubbo, but was born and raised in a little town called Harden Murrumburrah. I moved to Wagga, and did my training at the base. I met my husband in Wagga while at college. It's interesting that I married someone who works in agriculture, as I had absolutely no interest in it at the time. Now we both work full time in agriculture.

I was retained as a marriage councillor in 1986 and now have a small consulting practice where I work primarily with agricultural families.

I was once asked to facilitate a family business meeting for a large farming family in conflict. That began a series of changes for me. It is now an enormous part of my work. I spend between two and three days a week facilitating family business meetings. Recently I began training other people to facilitate family business meetings.

My interest and my passion is in families and relationships, particularly in married relationships. When someone is in a business with family members and their marriage breaks down, it can have an enormous impact on their asset base.

Looking at these impacts has been a great way to get men and women to think about the importance of sustaining their intimate relationship not only to secure their quality of life, but to protect their business sustainability.

When opportunities present themselves I aim to alert people to the common problem areas experienced in family business relationships – between couples, between generations and with new family members (such as in-laws).

Agriculture can be a very tough and critical market to work in and so to do the sort of work I do, you need to be strong, not someone who needs a lot of encouragement or affirmation. I guess if there is one change I would like to make to agricultural families, it's to develop their ability to encourage and affirm each other. In this market it's really hard to know when you are doing a good job, both within and outside the family.

The biggest challenge has been the lack of contact with anyone doing similar work, it can be fairly isolated. Most of my networks are with agricultural organisations, consulting companies, government departments and agricultural women's groups.

The focus of my work is to encourage long term planning, to work out how families make their decisions and ultimately improve the people component of their business.

When people are able to combine the wisdom and experience of one generation with the energy and enthusiasm of another, great things are possible. The ability to respect difference allows us to harness diversity rather than marginalise those who may seem different.





NICHOLE DUREGON

South Australia

My motivation was to provide a facility not only for myself but other nursing mothers and fathers.

I joined the Nursing Mothers' Association of Australia (NMAA) around four years ago. As a new mum I was aware there were no baby care facilities in Ceduna for locals, farmers or tourists. Through becoming a member of the NMAA, one of my main goals was to assist in the development and the establishment of a suitable baby care room.

We now have a five-star facility accredited by the NMAA where people can go and breastfeed or bottle-feed. It's also a room that husbands or fathers can use with a microwave, private feeding area for mothers, tea and coffee is available and toys for toddlers.

It's located behind the tourist centre. One of the difficult things about setting up the room was finding a central spot that was a community facility and could be maintained by the council.

Money was difficult too, when we put it to the council that our town needed a baby care room, immediate funding was not available.

Council funds enabled us to have a standard baby care room. But our ambition was to have a five-star facility, therefore requiring additional funds, of which community support was sought. We needed painting done and wanted chairs, some sort of curtaining, tea, coffee and microwave.



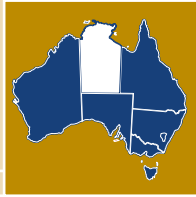
This community support, which totalled approximately \$1,100, consisted of personally contacting business houses for donations of materials and equipment to meet the criteria that we needed to become accredited as a five-star facility.

Continued community support has been secured for provision of consumables, simply by our local Foodtown supermarket offering to continue to supply tea and coffee.

Once established our group was concerned about the security of the facility due to the access door being on a side street. To overcome this we raised funds by holding street stalls and selling chocolates to purchase a video camera. This is monitored by staff at the adjoining tourist centre.

Setting up a five-star baby care facility was approximately a two to three year project. NMAA members spent considerable time in approaching council and explaining the need for the facility along with follow-up letters. I organised the business houses to be approached for either materials or equipment as a donation or at cost price. I coordinated the fitting out of the room with the various contractors, like the electrician and painter, in conjunction with the council. We found when people were available, you just have to make the effort and fit in with them.

My motivation was to provide a facility not only for myself but other nursing mothers and fathers. This motivation came from attending to my two-year old and four year-old sons, either changing nappies on the back seat or breastfeeding on the front seat of my car in between shopping and attending to my business matters. You get motivated if you really want it done.



JENNY PURDIE

Northern Territory

It is not going to happen over night, these things take time.

I came to the Northern Territory in the late Sixties. I have been lucky, I have worked, studied and have seen opportunities and taken them. I worked as a technical person in the Northern Territory herbarium in the days when Commonwealth Departments employed all public servants in the Northern Territory. I was in the Alice Springs and Darwin herbariums for about 10 years. We mainly supported the cattle industry, such as investigating suspect plant poisoning but also added to the plant collection. I was the first female in the department to do fieldwork in the Northern Territory – most other women were in administration.

Looking for technical challenges, I was lucky to join the parasitology section, which agreed to train me. Whilst at the veterinary laboratory I studied for a medical laboratory technical certificate. I moved up through the ranks to become the senior technical person and later became the first, and only, female stock inspector in the Northern Territory.

My job evolved into a regulatory role representing the Northern Territory meat industry and I studied for a meat inspection certificate via correspondence that led to my job being upgraded again. I rewrote the Northern Territory's meat industry legislation because the existing legislation was hopelessly out of date.



The Commonwealth meat inspectors pulled out of local abattoirs, so we trained existing staff to cope with the shortfall. We ran the meat inspection certificate by correspondence and reduced it from two years part time to nine months part time. We got 11 people through the course, including two females.

For many years I had longed to get back to the desert country of central Australia. Two years ago I was lucky enough to get the job as Regional Director of Primary Industry and Fisheries in Tennant Creek and I have been here since December 1999. The Territory has been good because of the opportunities and, because of our small population, younger people are given more responsible jobs than their interstate colleagues.

I have been involved in Tennant Creek's Barkly Blueprint, launched by the Northern Territory Government under *Foundations of our Future* – a strategy for regional development, and developed by the community and business sectors in partnership with government agencies. One of the community projects identified as part of this was developing horticulture for the region.

I chair a sub-committee looking to establish large-scale horticulture ventures. We are trying to attract established industries from interstate. They need to have knowledge, markets, finance, and flexibility to change things to suit local requirements. It is not going to happen over night, these things take time.

We do have some marketing advantages – good water supplies and soils and crops that mature earlier here.

Land is cheaper but availability is a challenge – it is either Aboriginal land or pastoral lease. Last year we held a workshop looking at the potential of horticultural joint ventures on Aboriginal land. The sorts of horticulture we are looking at are table grapes, citrus, figs, asparagus, stone fruit and vegetables.



TRINA CHAN

New South Wales

There was no real challenge – we just had a feeling we wanted to do something and we did it.

In our restaurant we have been involved twice in raising money for disasters – for Cyclone Tracy in 1974 and the Sydney bushfires in 1991.

We're into doing our own things here and we just had a feeling, had an urge to contribute in some way, so it was acting on impulse. When ideas form, we like to do it straightaway. The restaurant is open six days a week. My husband and I work together, and our staff is like family too.

So there was no real challenge – we just had a feeling we wanted to do something and we did it.

I've always had a strong spiritual belief. I don't do things in a big scope – more on the level of person to person. You've got to be brave, to be head-on and welcome people: I always talk to strangers.

To promote the fund-raiser, we relied mainly on word of mouth, but there was also some advertising on the radio and we put a note on the window of the restaurant.

What we did was put on a buffet lunch and dinner for a set price and donated all the proceeds to those disasters.

The Sydney Bushfire Appeal was the most successful of the two, raising \$5,000 in just one day. We had more than 100 people through. We were serving the lunch from 12 noon, but people were arriving and waiting for it all to start from 11am and 11.30am, and then we went right through to dinner. As soon as the food came out from the kitchen, it would disappear and it went on right through the day.

The atmosphere was fantastic.





HELEN SHEIL

Victoria

My main focus in community activities is ensuring there is access to educational resources within rural communities to meet the current challenges.

I consider myself a Gippslander. Right now I live in a community of about 1,600 people in Mirboo North, in South Gippsland. I am a mother of two young adults, who both had the benefit of growing up in a place of a size where they were known and cared for.

My main focus in community activities is ensuring there is access to educational resources within rural communities to meet the current challenges. For this reason I became a founding member of the Centre for Rural Communities Inc based at Monash University in Gippsland in 1995. I have been involved in producing a study circle kit and a professional development manual aimed at supporting rural people take a more active role in determining their futures. More recently the centre has received funding from the Commonwealth Government to pilot this work into mainstream learning at a TAFE and University level beginning with a Graduate Certificate, to educate workers across a range of sectors.

When the shires amalgamated, many communities no longer had a central group to represent the interests of the community. Strategies within the study circle kit enabled people to develop skills of working democratically together, being tolerant of difference and yet be able to identify areas of common interest that they could work on together. This way of working was inspired by the Aboriginal Reconciliation study

circle kits that provided a forum for discussion within communities. The kits could be used by any interested group, and did not require expensive infrastructure.

Our study circle kits offered a form of print networking by sharing stories of the great resourcefulness that goes on in rural communities. The material covers a range of cooperative ventures such as hospitals (where the community was responsible for health services), agricultural cooperatives, agro-forestry cooperatives, financial ventures (like community banks) power cooperatives and a range of social ventures such as newspaper cooperatives or organising festivals.

I have been involved with the Rural Women's Network since it began in Victoria, and it was this experience that provided an inclusive way of working that led to my research identifying strategies to assist rural people participate in public decision making. These nine strategies are designed into the study circle, now used by both women and men, with outcomes that have exceeded our expectations. A number of communities have gone from feeling angry and frustrated to being very optimistic about their community's future and their role in determining the future. Within these communities there is now a group that is able to speak up about issues the community regards as important.

One of the really big issues that challenges rural people is a concern about how to reinvest in their communities to ensure a future for their young people. This is a situation that is not going to turnaround overnight, but one in which there is a new focus. The initiatives are slowly starting to work, which gives us hope. Young people are so important, without them, there is no future, no new life. This is not about trying to stop young people from leaving, but trying to provide opportunities for young people to grow and learn, to develop skills, then have an opportunity to come back to rural communities if it is their choice.



HELEN GEARD

Tasmania

Once you start something, other people will follow, so take the time to get them involved, everything will just flow on from there.

I am 30 years of age. I live on a small property near Hobart and work part time as a Landcare Facilitator in Oatlands which is a rural community in the midlands of Tasmania.

I work with Landcare Groups and Catchment Management Groups to make a difference to the environment we live in. I'm also studying part time for my graduate diploma in environmental studies and I'm involved with the Rural Youth Organisation of Tasmania.

The most successful event I have been involved in is AGFEST, a three day field day event. I'm chairman of the AGFEST Committee. It is one of the largest events in Tasmania, with over 68,000 patrons, attending in 2001, to see displays provided by over 600 exhibitors. It's a statewide event, held in May each year, at a place called Carrick.

AGFEST is organised by Rural Youth volunteers and has been running for 19 years. I have been involved since 1989 holding various positions. AGFEST happens because each person has a position they are responsible for, we divide the work and meetings are held with report back mechanisms. Youth are given the opportunity to be part of something big and challenging. They learn a lot from it.



Our focus is to always try to do things better. Because we are an organisation for young people there are always new ideas flowing. There is a 'can do' attitude and we achieve a great deal. There is a willingness to receive and genuinely understand the feedback people give us.

Organising a large scale public event is becoming increasingly complex. Our committee members are now spending more time and money working through legislative requirements. New legislation was recently introduced to regulate fire and health standards and it was a hassle to ensure appropriate implementation. It is a challenge, but we believe it's important and are working with the council and State government bodies.

The rural network is fundamental and I suppose you rely on it more than you realise. It's friendship and a support network. Getting people together, talking together, meeting together and finding out things in common. It is important to build regional communities. AGFEST works with the local community and there are considerable benefits for everyone.

We have so many benefits, belonging to Rural Youth, the chance to travel overseas on exchanges, training opportunities, the chance to be with young people and to have fun.

You have to believe in yourself. If you have a goal, make a start and go for it. Once you start something, other people will follow, so take the time to get them involved, everything will just flow on from there.

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