



FORCES at WORK

HOW 10 NON-PROFITS
TACKLED UNEMPLOYMENT AND MORE
IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

FOREWORD

In 1989 it was my privilege to establish an organisation called the National SkillShare Association, a small office of originally four staff who provided industrial relations and information services to 400 community organisations funded to work with unemployed people. Some of those organisations were created by the SkillShare program, others had existed before. Each SkillShare project had a unique identity and its own way of responding to the needs of unemployed people, in part owed to the non-profit ‘hosting’ the project, in part to the communities where they were located, and also, quite obviously, to the outlook of the managers and leaders of these programs.

In 1996 with the advent of the Job Network, the NSA changed its name to Jobs Australia and expanded member services to support the capacity of organisations to survive in a new more competitive market environment. In the 12 years since then, I have been excited and impressed by the achievements of many organisations in this new environment. I have witnessed the financial survival of many more organisations than we all believed would be possible back in 1996, and I have been inspired by the ability of our member organisations not only to respond to changing needs in their communities but to anticipate them.

The 10 case studies in this publication are like biographies. They tell the story of non-profit organisations created to help people learn skills and find jobs (except for the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre, which added an employment program after being created to meet more basic needs). All of them manifest a protean quality, adapting and making use of new opportunities, responding to new challenges, trying new things to work out what they do best. It has been an honour to work alongside these organisations, and so many others in the Jobs Australia network like them.

David Thompson AM CEO JOBS AUSTRALIA

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A COMMUNITY INVESTMENT MODEL as observed from case studies of non-profits contracted for employment services.



INTRODUCTION

HOW 10 NON-PROFITS TACKLED UNEMPLOYMENT AND MORE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

The case studies in this book describe the activities of community sector organisations around Australia working with disadvantaged and unemployed people to help them get jobs or the skills leading to employment. The organisations are strikingly diverse, operating in remote locations and urban centres, serving people of all ages and backgrounds and delivering an extraordinary range of employment, training, environment and community services.

In the Atherton Tablelands, Q.I.T.E is funded by the Commonwealth Government¹ to provide a range of employment and job search services, but makes working more viable for unemployed people by also providing a bus service that takes people to work as well as doing school runs. In Hobart, STEPS has attracted investors to a multi-million dollar project to build affordable housing for low-income Tasmanians. In Ballina, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby and Lismore, a series of business incubators initiated by BETC has achieved near 100 percent occupancy; BETC also offers microfinance to support business start-ups. In Central Victoria, FEO has created employment by starting a rubbish recycling centre at Eaglehawk, and is investigating waste water recycling and the recycling of straw for garden mulch. These kinds of activities operate in the sphere of civil society, the social institutions other than those of the state or the market that identify and meet human needs.

- The Young Foundation² suggests there are five ways the third sector can make a particularly good contribution to direct service delivery:
1. By delivering services **more efficiently and effectively than the state or the private sector** (either because of lower costs or because of superior service models);
 2. By being **responsive** to user needs and input (because organisations are more directly mission-oriented than government bodies);
 3. By developing **innovative ways** to meet needs (perhaps benefiting from fewer constraints on risk and innovation than government bodies);
 4. By creating distinctive kinds of **added value or externality benefits**, such as participation, social inspiration and civil renewal;
 5. By **joining up services** which are siloed within the public sector.

The case studies here demonstrate the unique paths of growth and development taken by ten organisations. They represent only a small selection of hundreds of similar organisations around Australia, but their stories reveal how government funding for employment programs has built substantial community capacity that has been applied widely and well. Each organisation was originally constituted for a single purpose, but each has evolved into a more complex form, networking with a wide range of other local, state and national entities to meet an increasingly diverse range of local needs.

Origins

Most of the case studies have common origins in Commonwealth Government funding for services to unemployed or disadvantaged people. Some came into existence through grant funding for the Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS) in the 1970s. This was succeeded by funding for Skillshare in 1989, which established or consolidated around 400 community organisations around Australia as providers of employment assistance. During the early 1990s, a series of Commonwealth Government training, community and wage subsidy schemes, supplemented by State Government programs, kept these organisations operating and diversifying, and this was succeeded by funding for contracted case management in the mid 1990s to help people find jobs.

I saw a program on TV about a café in Geelong that had been started by a lady who had a daughter with an intellectual disability. She was concerned about what would happen to the daughter when she left school, so they started a small café/sandwich bar – the mum, the daughter and two part-time volunteers. The project developed into two café-restaurants and a big catering business. The day after I saw the program I arranged to visit ... Now our own Café Best employs 13 people with special needs.

Ron Stone BEST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

1. Refer to entry for DEEWR in the Glossary.
2. Discovery, argument and action: How civil society responds to changing needs, The Young Foundation, 2006.

By 1996 when the government announced the establishment of the Job Network,³ many organisations had already acquired 15 to 20 years of experience, not just as organisations delivering services to unemployed people, but as viable business entities capable of surviving and growing in a shifting landscape of needs, challenges and opportunities.

This did not mean that all organisations won Job Network contracts. These entailed higher financial security guarantees, more commercial risks, and larger service infrastructure, so many organisations did not meet the criteria to win contracts, or lost them after subsequent tendering rounds. Some organisations chose not to be involved in the Job Network. But even for Job Network contract holders, as well as those who were not market players, other strategic directions were signalled.

Diversification

For the decade from the early 1990s, it became increasingly obvious that to survive financially, organisations needed to diversify. Community organisations also realised that whether they held Job Network contracts or not, they would need to fill some obvious service gaps if they were to provide a holistic service to support people to find and sustain employment. There were unmet needs for services such as transport in remote areas, microfinance, or low-cost premises for small business start-ups, for example.

Though in some cases governments funded these kinds of programs, they could be hard to access because of program funding limits, or restrictive requirements about who could be eligible for assistance, and the kinds of expenditures allowed. As repositories of expertise about unmet or emerging needs for social and community services, and fuelled by financial reserves, organisations like those in this study were in a good position to pursue opportunities to generate revenue, jobs, or both, through social and community enterprises. Sometimes they simply stumbled upon them.

All these self-generated initiatives have been funded by the surplus from previous contracts, from loans and capital-raising, from fee-for-service activities, other community sector partners, businesses or philanthropists.

Not all new initiatives were successful. Mistakes have been made and we thank case study organisations for sharing these, and the learning that comes from them.

Perhaps surprisingly, funds flow out of these organisations too. The case studies provide examples of small and more established corporate social responsibility programs to support other local community initiatives, even for organisations that generate only a modest surplus, and STEPS and BETC support community programs in East Timor and Nepal.

Values

The surprising diversity of these activities is informed and propelled by a sense of mission held by all the organisations described here: a common commitment to reducing poverty and disadvantage. This is immediately evident in programs providing training, employment, or work experience, but other income-generating activities also represent the accumulation of resources to serve that mission.

Also manifest in the case studies is a common sense of staff commitment to the best ways to work with unemployed and disadvantaged people. When staff and CEOs talk about the people they work with, the words ‘values’ and ‘mission’ are frequently mentioned. These are realised in the recognition and respect evident to any casual observer in the multitudinous everyday encounters of staff with the people they serve.

Community entrepreneurs

CEOs of community sector organisations often joke that though they are ‘non-profit’ organisations, they would also like it known that they are ‘not-for-loss.’ The end of a grant-based approach to employment services funding in favour of competitive, performance-oriented contracts intensified and hastened the acquisition of financial management and strategic planning skills in the community sector. This experience is frequently realised in long-serving managers and Board members, and perhaps it is no coincidence that nearly all the CEOs quoted in this publication worked for their organisations decades ago when they were grant-funded. They have become social entrepreneurs who have learned on the job, taking risks and occasionally making mistakes, but in each case the case study organisations have remained viable.

Contracting and the ‘public good’

When the Commonwealth Government let Job Network contracts in 1997, neither public, private, nor non-profit organisations were guaranteed any particular share of the market. The government argued instead that contracts should be won and profits made by organisations delivering the most employment outcomes, weighted towards outcomes for the most disadvantaged. The structure of fees paid, the allocation of business based on performance, and the contract management framework were aligned to support these outcomes, defined in terms of placement for people into unsubsidised jobs sustained for 13 and 26 weeks.

In the decade following 1997, both for-profit and non-profit Job Network providers began to express concerns about the sustainability of continuously increasing performance based on the threat of losing business to higher performing providers. Non-profits worried about the loss of incentive and capacity to work cooperatively with other providers. It also became more obvious over time that some disadvantaged clients needed a longer investment in training and support, or had service needs that could not be provided for in the terms of Job Network contracts. These weaknesses are being addressed in the new employment service system being tendered in 2008.

3. Refer to Glossary.

Though the terms of employment services contracting can be improved, a broader view of the introduction of market competition shows that something else has been achieved. In the non-profit sector, the discipline of competition has undoubtedly contributed to the management skills base, the service culture and the strategic outlook of non-profits. Funding for SkillShare, then the Job Network and other programs like Work For the Dole has bestowed the physical resources, staffing capacity and service infrastructure through which to attract and deliver other programs. Finally, the opportunity to accumulate financial surplus has enabled organisations to fund and design their own programs.

No figures are available for the proportion of Job Network funding overall that has been realised as profits by private sector providers, or as ‘surplus,’ the preferred term, in the case of non-profits. However it is clear that non-profits have re-invested substantially to extend their services or to support other community initiatives. As the case studies illustrate, this has been made possible through growing organisational capacity, aspirations, leadership and learning, through partner networks, and through accumulated cash reserves. Though the benefits arising from this indirect form of community funding have not been catalogued or quantified, they are a form of public good that deserves to be recognised and valued. (See diagram on page 4).

Implications

Government and non-profit organisations working with disadvantaged people share the same objectives: reducing poverty and improving the capacity of individuals to become economically independent. Around Australia, non-profits have demonstrated their capacity to deliver diverse and locally relevant services that supplement and complement Commonwealth and State programs. They have struck a productive balance, pursuing innovation while remaining financially viable and accountable: to the people they serve; to the communities in which they operate; to government funders; and to their businesses and philanthropists that support them.

This has four policy implications: **For all its weaknesses, the institution of a market for the delivery of employment services has proved to be workable, sustainable and effective.** This has accelerated non-profit organisations’ focus on performance and accountability, and has promoted financial self-reliance.

Identifying problems and delivering solutions is best done locally. As the case studies show, non-profit organisations arguably have a bigger stake in achieving the most sustainable social and economic outcomes possible, since their mission and values typically commit them to working with people who have been failed by, or who have failed in, the labour market or government programs, or who in some cases have lost their benefits. Some of these people return regularly for help.

Though this does not mean that the government should be any less concerned with evidence of performance outcomes and value for money, it does indicate **the need for flexible funding structures and service design to support local responses** to address entrenched disadvantage, skills deficits, and poverty of employment opportunities. Changes to the Job Network are a positive signal that this greater flexibility will be achieved.

The third implication of these case studies is that the **non-profit sector has tremendous learning about the needs of the most disadvantaged people and programs to meet them.** This body of experience and learning joins with the commercial discipline of competitive contracting to create sustainable activities and enterprises that promote greater social equity. These have been nurtured and shared through the Jobs Australia network of 250 organisations which **is a vital policy resource for the government** in its consideration of ways to fund and promote the agenda for social inclusion.

Finally, the case studies indicate that entrepreneurial non-profit organisations have immense capacity to meet individual and community needs creatively and at low cost. The extent to which this is so merits more research and documentation, and there is a need to develop **an economic model that recognises multiple and multiplier benefits of indirect government investment through letting contracts to third sector organisations:** community ownership of assets, a commitment to apply them to the capacity-building of individuals and local areas, and the sharing of ideas and solutions. We hope these case studies will start that process.

A note for readers

The case studies in this publication are intended to cover the main features and activities of each organisation but are not a full record. Contact details and web addresses are provided for those seeking more information. The case studies include program names, agencies and sources of funding that are explained in the glossary provided on page 60.

I suppose the greatest satisfaction I ever feel is when you don’t have to turn a client away. Having enough pieces of the Lego or the jigsaw, that’s the way we see it, so that when a person isn’t able to be assisted through one program, we’re still able to do something through another. That is our relentless task ...

When we’ve had to turn someone away, we ask ourselves: ‘where should we be going for funding to help that person?’ ... We don’t want to do everything but if there is a need we have to ask why we’re not meeting it ... It’s about helping the client ... it’s about what we do to assist individuals to achieve their goals.

Shane Cowan CAREER EMPLOYMENT AUSTRALIA

SOUTHERN TRAINING EMPLOYMENT AND PLACEMENT SOLUTIONS

CASE STUDY ONE

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Like so many non-profit employment services organisations, Southern Training Employment and Placement Solutions (STEPS) started life with funding for a single program, the Community Youth Support Scheme.¹ Again like many others, its employment and training services have led to a much broader range of activities. Reflecting this, the organisation’s mission is ‘to alleviate the effects of poverty and disadvantage by seeking and initiating employment, training and community development opportunities, which facilitate and support positive change for job seekers, employers and communities.’

Diversifying into community development has seen STEPS taking the initiative on ambitious ventures such as financing and managing large-scale affordable housing

its new head, Ken Langston, who had previously worked in the armed forces, as a correctional officer, then as a community worker at a neighbourhood centre in Huon Valley. Ken remembers: ‘There was a lot of change at the time, 1996, 1997, with banks closing, mills closing, no work at all for a lot of people, depression and darkness everywhere.’

Ken’s first task was to keep the organisation going. ‘I found I had nine days to write the Job Network tender. So I said ‘hello’ to the five staff when I walked in, told them who I was and what I’d be doing for the next few days. I said: ‘I’ll come out and ask questions every now and then, but it’s up to you to run the show.’

The tender was successful and by 1999, the organisation was delivering Job Network services from two sites in Southern Tasmania, extending to two more in 2000.

quoted earlier, in consultation with the staff and the management committee. That mission statement has survived to the present day.

Balancing the books

As early as 1999, as Ken puts it, ‘It became clear that there was the potential to make fairly significant surpluses from the Job Network contract, and we began to face the question of what our responsibilities were to use those surpluses. After a lot of talking, we decided to invest a bit in ourselves, so that staff and clients worked in good environments. After that, we still had plenty of surplus left, so we became clear about our responsibility to invest in our communities because, after all, they are our shareholders. We couldn’t at that stage see how, but we did see what the responsibility was, and that when a need or opportunity presented itself, we would find a way.’

Until 2004-05, the annual cash budget for grants to community organisations from the STEPS Community Fund was up to \$30,000 per annum. In 2005 STEPS formed a new Community Solutions Division and set aside \$100,000 a year for grants to community organisations to help them build their capacity, with a focus on support for disadvantaged groups: Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, newly arrived refugees and migrants, people with a disability, parents wanting to return to the workforce, and mature age workers.

At around that time, there was a crisis in affordable housing for low income people in Tasmania. STEPS went to the Department of Housing and offered \$2 million of its cash reserves, but this proved so difficult that STEPS decided to do something by itself. Quickly realising that \$2 million does not go very far in the purchase of housing units, STEPS embarked on a bold course of action, creating a housing property trust to raise finance to build affordable housing in a way that could be sustained over the long term. The property trust is complemented by a Community Housing Division created within STEPS, to which the property trust contracts the work of developing and building the housing.

If an organisation wants to get something done that isn’t straightforward and needs linking up with others they know that they should come to STEPS. Making connections isn’t easy for small community groups, but we’ve got such a reputation now that even the State Government comes to us, saying ‘we’ve got this idea, can you do it for us?’

Phil Leed STEPS COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS DIVISION

developments, managing a wooden boat-building tourist centre, and financing and supporting an African restaurant run by Sudanese immigrant refugees. On a different front, STEPS has created an organisational function to form and fund strategic partnerships with other agencies to engage and employ young people, refugees, and indigenous people.

The first year of operation in 1984 was funded with a CYSS grant of \$11,000 to provide a drop-in support service for young unemployed people. A recurrent annual grant funded services until 1989, when the CYSS project became Huon SkillShare, the Commonwealth Government’s program to provide training for unemployed people.

When the SkillShare program ended in 1997 there were five people on the staff. The future of the organisation rested with

By 2006 there were a total of six sites, plus the STEPS main office and training centre in central Hobart. Staff numbers have been as high as 150; currently there are just over 100. Ken jokes that the move to Hobart was a case of ‘the country people coming to show the big city how it’s done.’

Governance

In the long period of waiting that followed the submission of the Job Network tender, Ken found to his surprise that Huon Skills Training did not have a mission statement, and that its committee of management ‘were just wheeled out of the mushroom cupboard once a month to do a bit of rubber-stamping and then wheeled back into the cupboard again.’

During the early part of 1998, Ken drafted the organisation’s mission statement,

1. Refer to Glossary.

A man turned up to do Work For the Dole and asked if his family could remain with him during the day. This was because their ‘home’ was actually their car... People were living in tents ... We started to say to ourselves ‘how can we get people into work when they’ve got no home?’

Although we were primarily an employment and training organisation we had a social responsibility ...

Ken Langston STEPS



MILESTONES

1983	Established under the name of Huonville CYSS to deliver Community Youth Support Scheme
1989	CYSS succeeded by SkillShare and name change to Huon Skills Training
1997-1998	Job Network contract and Registered Training Organisation
1999	Expansion of Job Network to two sites, change name to STEPS Southern Training Employment and Placement Solutions
2000	Bought the Shipwrights Point School of Wooden Boatbuilding; expanded into four Job Network sites
2002	Launched Wooden Boat Centre Tasmania visitor centre and wooden boat building school
2003	Expanded into six Job Network sites
2004	Funding for African Enterprise Inc; African restaurant venture
2005	Created Community Housing Solutions division and Community Solutions Division
2006	Established Tasmanian Community Housing Property Trust; International community development through assistance to Belta Tres group in Timor Leste
2008	Established Riverside Nursery and Community Garden at Bridgewater

STEPS IN 2008

Effective full-time staff: **100**
Turnover last year: **\$8.92 million**
Net assets: **\$4.5 million**
Sites: **7** in Southern Tasmania
Number of people using training services last year: **950**
Number of people using employment services last year: **6,000**
Number of people employed through Labour Hire service 2007-2008: **293**

ENTERPRISES

Gross assets Tasmanian Community Housing Property Trust: **\$4.6 million**
Visitor numbers 2007-2008 Wooden Boat Centre Tasmania: **13,000**

AWARDS

State Government 2006 Educational Excellence Award for the ‘World is my Oyster’ program to promote school retention and post-school options.
In 2008 STEPS’ work with African refugees earned recognition by being included in the Commonwealth Government’s ‘Empowering Refugees: A Good Practice Guide to Humanitarian Settlement.’

CONTACTS

Website: **www.stepstas.com.au**
Phone: **03 6213 4000**
Email for general enquiries: **jspriggs@stepstas.com.au**



ENTERPRISES AND ACTIVITIES

The Tasmanian Community Housing Property Trust

Over the past several years there has been a major shortfall in affordable housing for low income earners and people on benefits. The property boom in Hobart, fuelled by investor speculation, has seen low-income earners priced out of buying their own homes or even being able to afford the rent. Increasingly, people were living in tents, even in their own cars.

This was brought home to STEPS when a Work For the Dole participant turned up one day and asked if his family could stay with him for the day. The family's 'home' was actually their car, and they had no other place to live. STEPS wanted to do something.

'We started to say to ourselves 'how can we get people into work when they've got no home?' Although we were primarily an employment and training organisation we had a social responsibility,' says Ken Langston. He went to the Department of Housing (Housing Tasmania) and said 'Look, we've got \$2 million in our reserves – have you got a project that can use it?' They said, 'no, we don't.'

The State Government did not intend to increase stocks of state-owned and operated housing; instead it was encouraging community providers to undertake the development and management. It became obvious that STEPS would have to do something themselves. The first thing needed was for STEPS to address the lack of supply, and for Ken, the solution was obvious. 'We need to build, build, build, it's as simple as that. We've got years of inaction to make up for.'

Ken describes how the idea for financing all that building came about. 'When we started to think about what we could do with our \$2 million we realised that we could only make a small impact. We also realised that if it was to be on-going and sustainable we could not ask for government money. It's not reliable enough – like Job Network money, it can go up and down, it can be switched on and off without notice. We thought we needed to collect together and mobilise others and we realised that there were potentially big resources sitting in people's own private equity that could be mobilised.'

Early in 2005-06 STEPS bought a development site in the Hobart suburb of Warrane. It bought more land on three adjoining properties from the State Government's housing department, and an adjacent commercial property that had been privately owned. This was renovated to relocate the existing STEPS Employment Services Division office for that area. Plans were drawn up for 11 new homes on the site, a mix of 2 and 3-bedroom units. An existing home on the land was relocated to Huonville.

One of the 11 new houses was to be given to the State Government as part of the land acquisition arrangement. The remaining 10 land plots and the commercial property, had an estimated market value of \$650,000 in February 2006. STEPS used this as equity in the Tasmanian Community Housing Property Trust (TCHPT) it established to raise capital to construct the housing.

The TCHPT is a for-profit Unit Trust owned by its investors, who for the Trust's first project consist of 20 unit holders. One unit holder is STEPS, which subscribed \$650,000 (51 percent) of the Trust's

formation capital of \$1.274 million, represented by the value of the land it had purchased for the first Trust development at Warrane, the commercial building nearby which STEPS rents from the Trust, and the house relocated to Huonville.

The other 19 unit holders, subscribing a total \$624,000 (49 percent), are individuals and organisations. They include the national non-profit organisation, Jobs Australia, a leading Tasmanian community organisation, Colony 47, three small superannuation funds and a number of individuals. Some are staff members of STEPS and they include Ken, who believes it is important to be personally involved, because 'after all, I can't go to colleagues and friends and say 'what do you think about getting involved?' if I'm not in it myself, can I?'

A trustee management company, Fourth Sector Enterprises Pty Ltd, was created to undertake the day-to-day management of the Trust. Three of the five directors of Fourth Sector Enterprises are STEPS personnel: the Chairman, CEO and Deputy CEO of STEPS. The other two directors represent the lending bank and the 19 other unit holders.

Against the funds subscribed by the 20 unit holders, a loan of \$983,000 was negotiated from Community Sector Banking. This gave the Trust the \$2.257 million it needed to construct the houses on the Warrane project site. When the building was completed, in May 2007, the properties were head-leased at full market rent to Tasmania Affordable Housing Limited (TAHL), which then rented them to people experiencing housing stress. TAHL is a non-profit organisation, underwritten by the Tasmanian State

Government, which works in partnership with six community organisations to manage rental subsidies and make public land available for community housing developments in Tasmania. One of those organisations is STEPS.

At the completion of the Warrane development in May 2007, its estimated total value had already grown to \$2.88 million. By October 2007, when the Trust held its first Annual General Meeting,

Division for real-life pre-apprenticeship training.

There are financial advantages to STEPS playing the role of builder/developer. STEPS' tax concessions as a Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) work to reduce costs. Typically in Tasmania, a builders' margin is 25 percent on top of on-costs, but STEPS can manage a 10-15 percent margin, reducing prices.

STEPS' status as a non-profit

When we started to think about what we could do with our \$2 million we realised that we could only make a small impact. We also realised that if it was to be on-going and sustainable we could not ask for government money. It's not reliable enough – like Job Network money, it can go up and down, it can be switched on and off without notice. We thought we needed to collect together and mobilise others ...

Ken Langston STEPS

14 families were accommodated in homes built by the Trust, and the net value of the Trust's portfolio had increased to \$3.15 million.

The Warrane/Huonville project was merely TCHPT's first project. The aim in future is to construct at least 60 new homes per year and sell an estimated three to fifteen homes a year either to existing tenants or on the open market. This will generate the extra funds needed to build up the trust's capital, which together with further loans will finance future affordable housing property development.

The Trust is committed to supporting and enabling home ownership wherever possible. Ken Langston describes how the process of selling the homes might work: 'After, say, three years renting, we could give 18-months-worth of it back to the tenant towards the purchase, who would also qualify for a first-home-buyers payment. Then we could also discount the purchase price and there would of course be no estate agents' fees to pay. So the same monthly amount that was being paid as rent becomes a mortgage payment ... It can be done.'

STEPS Community Housing Division
As well as being the majority investor in the TCHPT, STEPS has other roles through its Community Housing Division. This Division acts as the developer/builder for the property trust, with a small STEPS construction team subcontracting much of the work to private builders. The building sites are also used by STEPS Training Solutions

organisation with PBI status also means it can access grants and opportunities that would be denied to the Community Housing Trust, since that is a for-profit entity. In May 2007, for example, STEPS gained funding from the Commonwealth Government's Community Housing Program to put towards 6 new housing units in various locations. At the same time, the State Government transferred to STEPS, ownership of nine dwellings across the northern part of Hobart, all occupied by humanitarian refugees from central America and the Sudan. STEPS has already renovated and upgraded some of the houses and now maintains and manages the properties.

In this way, STEPS has been able to tackle the affordable housing problem in Tasmania on two fronts. This has meant the capacity to achieve a good housing mix on new developments, with some properties owned by TCHPT and others by STEPS. By August 2008, a total of 44 houses were either completed or under construction: 15 of them owned by STEPS itself, and 29 by the TCHPT. 2008-2009 will see construction start on 55 houses for TCHPT. Proposed starts for 2009-2010 number more than 100 houses.

STEPS Community Housing Solutions Division is also helping two community groups, in Huonville and Dodges Ferry, to coordinate projects to build social, recreational and educational facilities in their communities.

Wooden boat-building and tourist centre

Established as a reputable provider of Job Network employment and training services, STEPS was ready by the year 2000 to invest in the community development activities to which its mission statement had committed.

In December that year STEPS bought the Shipwrights Point School of Wooden Boat-building on the banks of the Huon River. The school had originally been established by private owners in 1990 to teach and preserve the skills of building wooden boats and ran a nationally accredited diploma course. The major learning project for all students is the construction of a full-sized sea-going vessel, and the owners were looking for a buyer who would continue to operate the facility as a training site.

The purchase was entirely consistent with STEPS' mission as a training organisation, and it was also a way to make a contribution to the community, to stave off negative effects of the decline of major traditional activities in the area since the 1970s, apple growing and timber industries. However STEPS did not have the resources to buy the school. Forestry Tasmania provided an interest-free loan of \$50,000, and a grant from the government's Regional Access Program enabled STEPS to employ a manager during the transition period. STEPS turned both teacher/trainer positions into permanent rather than casual posts, and later built a second workshop and a visitor centre. For these, STEPS contributed \$115,000 and Regional Tourism Tasmania a grant of \$85,000.

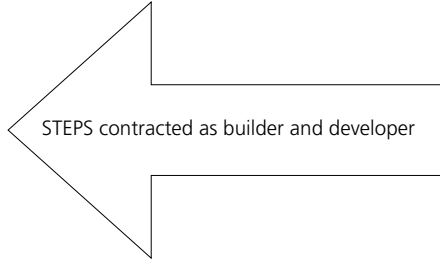
The Wooden Boat Centre Tasmania was opened in 2002 and attracted over 1,000 visitors per month in the summer. This stimulated the establishment of new small businesses in the vicinity, including two café/restaurants, and it enabled the existing antique and bric-a-brac shops to grow. Through the Work For the Dole Program, the nearby foreshore of the river was developed and landscaped. In 2003 the visitor centre was leased to a local tourism operator, while STEPS continued, as a Registered Training Organisation, to run the school and to own the building.

In late 2006 STEPS invested almost \$100,000 to construct a further new workshop at the centre to enable it to construct large-scale boat-building, and leased the workshops and the training program to the same commercial operator.

THE TASMANIAN COMMUNITY HOUSING PROPERTY TRUST MODEL

STEPS

Public Benevolent Institution Not for profit
Community Housing Division
Training Division (pre-apprenticeship training)



Trustee company: Fourth Sector Enterprises

STEPS	Others
\$650,000	\$624,000
51% 1 unit holder	49% 19 unit holders

STEPS Community Fund

The work done by STEPS towards community development was initially done on an ad hoc basis and the Community Solutions Division was formed in 2005 to provide a more coordinated approach that would achieve best value for money in the community - a reasonable aim given that CEO Ken Langston estimates STEPS’ community contribution to be around \$1.5 million to date.

Some of Community Solutions’ activities simply consist of cash grants from the \$100,000 annual budget for this purpose. Examples of some grants made are for:

- A part-time project officer for 12 months for a Migrant Women’s Health Project;
- A seed grant to support a program aiming to reduce teenage pregnancies;
- Funds to buy two cars to enable migrants to get the 50 hours driving experience they need to qualify for a driving licence;
- Funds for two schools in disadvantaged areas to provide nourishing breakfasts for students for a year;
- Scholarships to enable disadvantaged students from schools in rural areas to go from Higher School Certificate to the University of Tasmania;
- Funds to support Riding for the Disabled; and
- Many small grants to sports clubs.

Making cash grants to community organisations is only one aspect of the work of the Community Solutions Division. Phil Leed, its manager, spends a lot of time talking to other public and community sector organisations to develop partnership initiatives to tackle poverty and disadvantage. Phil has found that ‘Making connections isn’t easy for small community groups. If an organisation wants to get something done that isn’t straightforward and needs linking up with others, they know they should come to STEPS. We’ve got such a reputation now that even the State Government comes to us, saying ‘we’ve got this idea, can you do it for us?’

For example, STEPS provided 41 computers to the Tasmanian Association of Community Houses through Business to Community of Melbourne, which recycles and refurbishes used office computers. STEPS also enlisted Microsoft to donate the software and TasFreight to ship the computers to Melbourne for free.

Other examples of the work of the Community Solutions Division:

- In partnership with the Adult Migrant English Service and local employers, a two-day workshop for African job-seekers on aspects of Australian workplace culture and communications.

- The production, distribution and promotion of a video funded by the Tasmanian Office for Post-Compulsory Education and Training to advocate for the employment of refugees and migrants. This was prepared with the assistance of employers and former refugees.
- In partnership with the South East Tasmanian Aboriginal Council, the development of outreach services to indigenous people in the Huon Valley. STEPS is also forging links with Karadi (an Aboriginal Women’s Centre) and Palawa (an Aboriginal youth organisation) with a view to developing joint programs.
- A multi-school program involving providing buddies from more privileged schools, to promote the value of education and post-school options for young disadvantaged people. This is being facilitated by volunteer STEPS staff members.

African restaurant

STEPS supported an association formed by the African refugee community in Hobart, African Enterprise Inc, which aimed to develop small enterprises. When this association started its first enterprise, the AfriTas restaurant, STEPS contributed the amount needed to pay rent on the premises for a year. It also engaged two hospitality industry trainers for a two-month period to develop the skills of those involved.

After being open for 2 years, the restaurant ultimately went into

administration, but there were many positives in the experience, according to Ken. ‘Up until that time, many Africans had been in Tasmania for about five years, but the only work most people had been able to get was casual and seasonal work. In fact STEPS was one of the first employers to engage a refugee from the Sudan, other than the Migrant Resource Centre. That person was engaged as an employment consultant and later was involved in establishing the restaurant.’

While it ultimately failed, the restaurant did a lot to raise local and employer awareness about the plight of the refugees. When the restaurant came to an end all of its employees got jobs elsewhere. And for Ken the whole experience provided ‘great learning for us when we later became involved in international projects.’

East Timor community enterprise

Through its work with refugees and migrants, the awareness of STEPS staff about life and conditions in less developed countries grew, alongside a desire to become involved in some way with community development in such countries.

In late 2005, through the connections of a member of its staff, STEPS was approached to see if it would support a community self-help initiative in Timor Leste (East Timor) known as Belta Tres. The project made hand-crafted furniture and wanted to expand the operation by taking on six trainees and selling the furniture more widely to generate funds for

the local school of 320 students. The local area, Los Palos, had been badly affected by the conflict that preceded East Timor’s independence, to the extent that the representative who subsequently visited STEPS, Cesario, was a village elder at the ripe old age of 26. Of the 800 people in the Los Palos village, 500 of them were under 16.

Cesario made a request for \$5,000 to set up the enterprise for six months and take on the six trainees. STEPS’ Community Solutions Manager Phil Leed remembers: ‘We were totally captured by the idea and we just wanted it to happen. So we talked, and we said: ‘Yes, of course we can help, but no, you’re not asking for enough. Go away and come back and tell us what you really need ... you need IT, you need a digital camera to take pictures to advertise your products. Think about it and come back.’ They were totally blown away! Then they came back and we agreed on \$10,000.’ We took it to the STEPS Board and they were happy.

STEPS maintained personal contact and support while the group opened a shop in Dili, and took on trainees, but the shop burned down in a more recent period of unrest. After it, Belta Tres provided emergency aid to their fellow villagers, re-established their enterprise and registered it as the country’s first indigenous non-profit organisation. Like STEPS itself, Belta Tres has since become as much a community development organisation as an enterprise.

STEPS has successfully appealed to several other members of Jobs Australia in Tasmania and interstate to assist in covering the cost of buying and running a vehicle and maintaining a web site/internet contact. STEPS’ involvement has also persuaded Australian Volunteers International to support Belta Tres by placing their initial STEPS supporter there, Freya Merrick, as a volunteer. The Lonely Planet publishing company made a \$25,000 grant to the project, and leading figures of Belta Tres are increasingly in demand to work with other community groups across Timor Leste to help them establish similar initiatives. Belta Tres have since become the first indigenous registered aid provider in Timor Leste. Before their registration all aid was provided through the United Nations.

THE FUTURE

The Tasmanian Community Housing Property Trust has inspired other community organisations around Australia and STEPS CEO Ken Langston has shared the model and how it works with people in Perth, Sydney, Nowra, Newcastle and Canberra. In return for its advice to those involved, the general intention is that STEPS will get a small share of equity in any new developments. The potential for a national trust of community housing providers is being investigated.

In Tasmania, Ken Langston is already looking to the longer term future of the property trust. ‘If we can increase our rate of building (determined by availability of land and credit), the Trust could in ten years time have built around 810 homes, selling 213 and retaining 597. The portfolio would have a total value of \$231 million, of which \$127 million would be debt and \$104 million would be equity, achieving a debt to equity ratio of 55 percent and housing more than 1,600 people.’

A further role being developed by STEPS is to consider its future as a community infrastructure provider. As STEPS grows its assets will be leveraged to build disability group homes, childcare facilities and possibly renewable energy sources.

QUALITY INDUSTRY TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

CASE STUDY TWO

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Operating from five sites in the Tablelands area, Q.I.T.E. describes itself as ‘a community based organisation committed to assisting people to gain, retain or enhance their position in the workforce and their lives.’ The phrase ‘and their lives’ is a clue to the growing range of different services delivered by Q.I.T.E. to build and develop the capacity of unemployed and disadvantaged people to work, given that Q.I.T.E. works with so many long term unemployed indigenous people. Q.I.T.E. has 486 indigenous clients on its caseload, around 95 percent of whom have no recent employment or have never been employed within the mainstream labour market. A series of community enterprises started by Q.I.T.E. supports this work.

At the northern end of where Q.I.T.E. operates, the Mareeba-Dimbulah Irrigation area produces a wide range of farm produce such as fruit, vegetables and value-added products for the local and export markets. Sugar and horticultural products have largely replaced rice and tobacco industries. The southern areas of the Tablelands produce dairy as well as traditional animal and plant products such as sugar, maize, peanuts, potatoes, and other vegetables, citrus and other fruits. Employment on the Tablelands is dominated by agriculture and forestry, followed by retail trade, health care and social services, and education and training.

Q.I.T.E. started in 1987 when a group of concerned people in the area got together to establish the Mareeba Shire Job Training Association to provide services to young

unemployed people through the then federal government’s Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS). In 1989 CYSS was replaced by the SkillShare program, and the organisation continued and expanded, providing services largely focused on vocational training.

Katrina Spies joined Q.I.T.E. in 1992, starting as a trainer on one of the courses but she progressed quickly, becoming first the training coordinator, then the Chief Executive Officer in 1993 at the age of 23. Katrina has always believed that the organisation is founded on a simple core value: ‘The culture that we’ve got in our organisation is founded on mutual respect. You make sure you treat the others like you’d like to be treated – that’s a very fundamental principle that I insist on with all interactions, whether it be staff or clients.’

Under Katrina’s leadership in 1995, the organisation won contracts to deliver case management services to unemployed people from Mareeba and Ravenshoe sites. These services were previously provided by the Commonwealth Employment Service, and gave Q.I.T.E. the experience it needed later to tender for Job Network services.

When in 1996 the Commonwealth Government announced the end of SkillShare funding, all the 10 staff at Mareeba SkillShare received redundancy notices. At that time, national unemployment levels were high and the local region of the Tablelands had up to 26 percent unemployment. Yet Mareeba Skillshare was making a very positive contribution during this time for individuals and the local community, with sustained employment

outcomes of up to 62 percent from a wide range of programs and training.

The Management Committee and Katrina Spies responded by giving the staff unconditional support for whatever they wanted to do. The choice that presented itself was to close up shop or to stay open and fight on. With Katrina’s support, the staff took up the challenge, taking a pay cut, working consistently hard, and looking for opportunities in an environment of change. Fuelled by the belief that they made a difference in their community, the staff and committee were determined to re-emerge from the experience as a stronger organisation.

In 1998 Q.I.T.E. became the biggest provider of Job Network services in the Tablelands, through offices in Mareeba, Atherton and Ravenshoe. In 2000 the Job Network service expanded to another office in Kuranda.

In 2000 Q.I.T.E. also began to undertake Work For the Dole projects, and its contract trebled in size from 2002. Though the organisation was nominated several times for the Prime Minister’s Work For the Dole awards (and received Highly Commended recognitions), the contract was terminated in 2006, the first time that Q.I.T.E. lost a contract.

Although Q.I.T.E. calls itself ‘The Employment Specialists’, for most of its history it has also offered training programs on a fee-for-service basis, currently in subjects as diverse as anger management, health and safety at work, horticulture, business administration, driver authorisation, mining and hospitality.

This fund of experience has supported and multiplied into a broader range of enterprises and initiatives to supplement the Job Network program, with other services to support employment and community development: a labour hire service, transport to the available jobs, a quality childcare service and plans for an alternative education centre. Other initiatives in indigenous employment, enterprise development and emergency response represent Q.I.T.E’s growing and important role in the community and local economy.

I’ve always believed that you should never ask staff to do anything you wouldn’t be happy to do yourself. You have to be able to say: ‘it’s got to sit right with you – if you don’t feel comfortable with something and it doesn’t feel right – don’t do it, don’t do anything that’s not true to yourself.’

Katrina Spies Q.I.T.E.



MILESTONES

1987	Mareeba Shire Job Training Association is established to run a Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS)
1989	CYSS replaced by the SkillShare program
1995	Mareeba Shire Job Training Association wins ESRA case management contracts for Mareeba and Ravenshoe
1997	SkillShare funding ends; Registered Training Organisation (RTO) Status and Traineeship delivery
1998	Job Network Services increased offices to include Atherton
2000	Work For the Dole; Accredited training services under auspice of a national RTO – Jobs Australia’s Australian Training Network
2002	Community Learning Program (Q.I.T.E. self-funded program for disadvantaged youth, disengaged from traditional education)
2005	Queensland Government Community Jobs Plan – Cyclone Larry/Disaster Relief and Farm Force I-IV (2005-2008)
2006	Community Development Employment Projects; Harvest Labour Services; Structured Training and Employment Program Employment Related Services

Q.I.T.E. IN 2008

Effective full-time staff: **54 full time, 29 part time or casual**
Sites: **5** sites across the Tablelands in Far North Queensland, and **2** more sites supporting self-employment and enterprise development
Number of people on Q.I.T.E’s Job Network active caseload: **1,830**
Proportion of caseload in Intensive Support classified as ‘highly disadvantaged’: **51%**
Proportion of Job Network caseload who are Aboriginal or Torres Straits Islander: 45%
People placed through Job Placement service: **1,273**
People placed through Harvest Labour service in the 18 months from February 2007: **3,476**
Local indigenous people joining Community Development Employment Project (CDEP): **315**
Indigenous people from the CDEP placed into work: **116**
People placed in work through the Job Network program: **1,937**
Employment through Job Network retained for more than 13 weeks: **around a third**
Training courses: **103**; total people attending: **1,146**

AWARDS

1997	Training Provider of the Year for North Queensland (competing against TAFE State Finalists)
1997	Trainee award for Travel Scholarship and Youth Leadership Award
1999	CEO, Katrina Spies is Telstra Queensland’s Young Business Woman of the Year
2002	Highly commended – Caring for our Community Category – Work For the Dole

CONTACT

Website: **www.qite.com**
Phone: **1800 354 414** or **07 4092 9700**
Email for general enquiries: **kbertola@qite.com**

Our organisation’s focus is about more than looking after individuals who are disadvantaged and getting them into work – it’s actually about the whole community.

Katrina Spies Q.I.T.E.

Risks and turning points

In 2006 Q.I.T.E. applied to the Federal Government for funding to run a Community Development Employment Program (CDEP).¹ This was a decision based on considerable thought, as Katrina Spies explains: ‘Previously we had been reluctant to go after funding from programs for indigenous people, mainly because of Q.I.T.E.’s historical commitment to principles of indigenous self management. But the previous indigenous services provider had faced difficulties and we were not prepared to lose this valuable service to the local community.’

CDEP offers work in various kinds of community activities and though it intended to offer unemployed indigenous people further opportunities to develop skills and improve their employability, criticisms of the program have centred on a general tendency for the program to be unable to move people on to mainstream jobs. In its tender to deliver the program, Q.I.T.E. wrote: ‘It is highly unusual for a non-indigenous organisation such as Q.I.T.E. to seek funding to deliver CDEP services, because it has great respect for the notion of indigenous self-management.

Nonetheless, the tender went on, ‘We continue to be disheartened about the level of disadvantage and poverty suffered by local indigenous people and more broadly across the nation.’ As an ‘interested, friendly and neutral party in relation to internal indigenous community relations’, Q.I.T.E. proposed to bring its organisation’s commitment, management experience, and delivery capacity to provide a service that would help indigenous people move beyond CDEP to jobs and business enterprises in the real economy.

Q.I.T.E. also saw it as important to fully integrate indigenous people into its mainstream employment services, having had experience of this already through Work For the Dole and the Job Network. It argued that it could use its dominant position in the local jobs and employment services market, to achieve more and better access to jobs, employers, and training opportunities for indigenous people. Further access to jobs would be available through Q.I.T.E.’s successful labour hire service, which had been originally developed to open up job opportunities to highly disadvantaged job seekers.

The tender was successful, and the program now operates from offices in Mareeba, Atherton and Ravenshoe. CDEP

activities are spread across the three key areas of activity. One strand, community activities, focuses on meeting the needs of the indigenous community itself for improvements in health, the living environment, attachment to culture and indigenous identity and mobility. Measures to tackle drug and alcohol abuse are included in this strand.

Another strand of business development activities focuses on the development of both individual self-employment ventures and co-operative-owned enterprises. Q.I.T.E. does not generally seek to own these enterprises itself but adopts a mentor/incubator role in supporting detailed planning and feasibility testing to develop the enterprises, which wherever possible are owned by individuals or groups of people through co-operative structures. Current business activities under way are Funky Timber Creations and the Murri’s Delight indigenous catering company. A parks and gardens maintenance service and an aboriginal art enterprise directed towards the tourist markets in Mareeba, Cairns and Kuranda are at the stage of feasibility investigation.

A strong focus of the Q.I.T.E. model to engage, enthuse and empower indigenous people is to promote real employment, discouraging them from seeing CDEP as a goal in itself. Working with local employers and other stakeholders, Q.I.T.E. is increasing indigenous employment opportunities in agriculture and horticulture, manufacturing, construction, retail, local government and personal services sectors.

This is a deliberate strategy to address inherent discrimination and fears expressed by some employers. Efforts in these directions are being supported by the Commonwealth Government STEP ERS Program² and other Federal and State initiatives to open up new job opportunities for indigenous people.

Balancing the books

Funding for Q.I.T.E. comes mainly from its Job Network contract, labour hire service and the CDEP, but the Job Network star-rating system has reallocated business more or less automatically away from providers whose performance falters. This means it has been unwise to rely on this source of income, especially given the proportion of people on the Q.I.T.E.

caseload who are highly disadvantaged. People coming to the Ravenshoe and Kuranda offices in particular need more time and resources than are possible within the terms of the Job Network model.

Q.I.T.E. enterprise developments create jobs, contribute to the health of the local economy and more generally support and develop the community, but they are also motivated by a desire to decrease reliance on government funding. A retired local businessman, Tito Srhoj, Chairman of the board of Q.I.T.E. for 15 years, is concerned about the consequences of lost or reduced Job Network contracts for those communities.

‘We’ve invested a lot in setting up those offices. But that’s not the reason why we don’t want to close them, we don’t want to close them because the few people who use them really need them, and there are no other organisations there now serving those communities ... Another organisation, maybe a for-profit one, will come in, get good stars for a while and then it’ll tail off ...and then what? What good will that do? Doesn’t the fact that in Q.I.T.E. we’ve got 55 staff all committed to doing good for the community mean anything?’

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND VALUES

Just as the mission of Q.I.T.E. is to support, empower and enable the individuals and the communities it serves, the organisation applies the same philosophy to its staff. In service delivery, Katrina Spies, the CEO, believes that ‘You should never ask staff to do anything you wouldn’t be happy to do yourself. You’ve got to say to the person: ‘It’s got to sit right with you – if you don’t feel comfortable with something and it doesn’t feel right – don’t do it, don’t do anything that’s not true to yourself.’

It’s a tough labour market, it really is, and you need a gentle hammer to crack it open. If you sit back and wait for a vacancy to occur, it won’t happen. You have to go out there and sell your job seekers. It does work.

Katrina Spies Q . I . T . E .

‘The whole aim is for our people to understand what we’re here for, what our position is in the community, right from the selection process, through the induction process, through all our staff training. So the Q.I.T.E. mission statement, together with treating others as you’d like to be treated yourself, means that when our people are making decisions they can’t go too far wrong.’

Debbie Nolan, a trainer with Q.I.T.E., believes that her job is so easy because her values align so well with those of the organisation. ‘Getting a job with Q.I.T.E. showed me there are like-minded people still in this world that have similar values and beliefs as I do, of mutual respect, caring for others, giving everyone a fair go, no matter where they come from: race, religion, or socioeconomic status. Q.I.T.E. has a true community spirit that wants to encourage, support and give people options to help improve their lives.’

Debbie feels that she has not worked anywhere else where her knowledge and skills were so appreciated. She believes that the loyalty of the staff to the organisation is based on the way all staff are shown how much they are valued, from managers right through to the transport staff.

Robyn Schindelbacher agrees. Robyn is a sole parent with caring responsibilities for her 91 year old mother who suffers with dementia and for two of her seven children who are still at home, the youngest of

whom has Asperger’s Syndrome. A trainer with Q.I.T.E., Robyn feels she can’t praise her Manager enough for understanding her situation as a carer and the flexibility she has been given in order to maintain employment under difficult personal circumstances.

‘My manager, Natasha Taylor, offers me the option of completing non-contact work from home and when she plans and books class times she makes sure all sessions are scheduled to fit in with my personal circumstances. It would be so much easier for her to employ someone else without

restrictions on when and how many hours they can work, yet Natasha makes the extra effort to organise my job around my caring responsibilities. When I have needed to take time off or leave work at short notice to deal with emergencies at home, she tells me ‘Don’t worry, I will work around it!’

This support has enabled Robyn to stay involved in meaningful employment, and she believes ‘it has been a vital part of maintaining a measure of personal wellbeing through social contact at work and an opportunity for intellectual challenge. I’ve been able to continue with my caring responsibilities without burning out. I’ll be able to maintain and develop my skills, and when Mum eventually passes away I’ll be fully equipped to re-enter full time employment. This would otherwise prove to be very difficult as a long term unemployed female looking to return to work in her 50s!’

ACTIVITIES AND ENTERPRISES

The Labour Hire Service

At the same time it won its first contract to deliver Job Network services in 1997, Q.I.T.E. established a labour hire service. National unemployment was at that time just under 9 percent, and regional unemployment on the Atherton Tablelands was even higher. In that period, what was then the major agricultural industry, tobacco growing, was being restructured. A tobacco crop worth \$50 million a year in 1997 shrank to nothing by 2003. The timber industry also shrank dramatically after large parts of former timber areas became part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area in the late 1980s. Deregulation of the dairy industry saw many dairy farmers leaving. These restructures had a marked impact, and labour market conditions in the Tablelands from 1997 were poor.

Against this background, Q.I.T.E. needed to position its own job seekers to access the scarce employment opportunities available. Launching its own labour hire service, Q.I.T.E. sought to address the needs of indigenous and other disadvantaged job seekers, and at the same time to meet the needs of local farmers for seasonal labour. The service manages all administrative responsibilities associated with employing staff: payroll; tax declarations; superannuation; public liability insurance; work cover; and professional indemnity.

The labour hire service does not just meet employers’ immediate needs for labour, it is a way to engage them, enhancing opportunities for long term unemployed people on Q.I.T.E.’s Job Network caseload to access more sustained employment. As Katrina explains it, ‘It’s very important for us to establish relationships with employers if we are to market our clients. This means understanding the employer’s business and especially their labour needs. Even if there’s no vacancy, if we are confident a particular job seeker will enhance the business, we’ll spend time with the employer and discuss the person in detail. In some cases this results in an opportunity where none existed before ... It’s a tough labour market, it really is, and you need a gentle hammer to crack it open. If you sit back and wait for a vacancy to occur, it won’t happen. You have to go out there and sell your job seekers. It does work.’

1. Community Development Employment Projects. Refer to Glossary.
2. Refer to Glossary.

The transport service

A great deal of agricultural and horticultural work is available in the Tablelands, with as many as 3,000 vacancies per year needing to be filled. While the work is seasonal, many of the different crops and fruits have seasons which follow one from another. So while there are gaps here and there during the course of each year, there is nevertheless some continuity.

A far greater problem and a significant barrier to individual job-seekers and the farming community is how workers can travel to and from the farms each day. Many potential individual workers do not have their own transport and they can be a long distance away from population centres. Also, many of the backpackers who come to the region do not have the transport to access jobs during harvest seasons.

From the early days of the Job Network Q.I.T.E. knew it needed to overcome this problem. In 1998, it launched a transport service – simply by buying a bus – to provide free transport to and from jobs and Q.I.T.E. offices.

Since then the transport service has expanded to 4 buses and a ‘troop carrier.’ The transport service was initially free, though since 2006 Q.I.T.E. has made minimal charges for the services, to ensure it can keep operating in a sustainable way. There are other uses for the transport fleet. Q.I.T.E. operates a school bus for indigenous pupils. This service is proving very popular and feedback from the school is that attendance has improved.

Farm Force

The idea behind the ‘Farm Force’ project is to create a supply of skilled labour for farmers to meet labour needs throughout the year, and to create opportunities for highly disadvantaged indigenous and other very long-term unemployed people. It was established originally in 2005 with funding from under the Queensland State Government’s Community Jobs Plan.

The idea was simple: to train a group of 15 indigenous job seekers over a 20-week period to enable them to get jobs in the local horticulture and small crops industry. The first project was extremely successful with high retention rates and outcomes. More than 70 percent of the first group of 15 course graduates gained regular employment.

been on benefit were involved in clearing up cyclone damage. It gave people who didn’t have skills new skills, in using machinery like chainsaws for example, in working as a team, even working as supervisors. They became and were seen as part of the community, as a very crucial part of the recovery effort.’

Childcare Centre

The lack of childcare or the cost of it is a major barrier for parents that want to return to work, or who are now compelled to. There is also significant unmet demand in Mareeba for other parents needing childcare; in 2007 only 50.2 percent of overall demand for childcare in the Mareeba shire was being met. Q.I.T.E’s most recent and boldest initiative is to

If parents have obligations to work they’ve got to have adequate childcare where they feel safe and happy enough to let their children be there so that they can go and work whole-heartedly ... that was one part of it. The other part is that as an employer, Q.I.T.E. has a lot of staff who would love to put in more hours but they can’t get child care.

Katrina Spies Q . I . T . E .

As a result, three further training courses have been conducted, both in the Ravenshoe district and Mareeba.

Participants do not simply learn how to pick and harvest fruits and other crops. They learn all activities required by farmers over all the seasons of the year, including propagation, grafting, pruning, irrigation equipment installation and operation, tractor driving, nursery work, field work, welding, and picking, packing and sorting.

Cyclone Larry

When Cyclone Larry struck Innisfail and southern parts of Q.I.T.E’s service area in 2006, Q.I.T.E. was keen to do what it could to help the recovery and reconstruction effort. Initially this was aided by a State Government Community Jobs Plan Disaster Relief Project, and after the immediate needs were addressed, Q.I.T.E. launched a ‘100 jobs in 100 days’ project to stimulate the local economy. Q.I.T.E. exceeded the target, delivering 149 jobs during the period, but better than that, more than half of the jobs were filled by people who had been previously unemployed for more than 12 months.

Looking back on it, Katrina recalls: ‘While Cyclone Larry affected the area detrimentally, it created opportunities. People who had

establish a childcare service.

Katrina describes how the idea came up: ‘As with most good ideas here, it comes from the staff or the clients and it’s really just stating the obvious. We regularly have what we call ‘Q Days.’ They are brainstorming days involving all the staff. The idea of a childcare initiative came out of one of those days a couple of years ago.’ ‘If parents have obligations to work they’ve got to have adequate child care where they feel safe and happy enough to let their children be there so that they can go and work whole-heartedly ... that was one part of it. The other part is that as an employer, Q.I.T.E. has a lot of staff who would love to put in more hours but they can’t get child care.’

‘Finally, I really believe that if you can have an influence on children early on, it pays off. You learn a lot in your formative years. We want our childcare centre to be a learning centre. We want to be innovative. We want to have a strategy that from the start is very much focused on developing the way that we think about things, the way we interpret the environment that we’re in, develop confidence in ourselves, understand how to think and how to socialise. We don’t necessarily learn those things at school.

So if we can have even a small impact on those things with these children, I think it would be a good starting point for their development as well.’

In 2008 Q.I.T.E. has secured land and is in the process of calling for tenders for the construction of a 74-place state-of-the-art childcare centre in Mareeba. The facility will be used as a training site for Q.I.T.E. clients who are interested in working in childcare. It will have a strong focus on environmentally sensitive processes and will offer a high quality service that can be accessed equally by all.

Murri’s Delight Catering

What started out as a small training initiative to provide new skills for indigenous people is growing into a mainstream, potentially financially viable business serving the Mareeba community. Murri’s Delight, a popular café and commercial catering enterprise, was established by Q.I.T.E. as a CDEP activity in 2006.

According to Alita Jennings, Manager of Indigenous Programs, the concept behind the activity was to train and develop skills in hospitality and to teach nutritional cooking. ‘We wanted to teach CDEP participants many new skills – skills that can be used in the home kitchen and in a restaurant. The idea was conceived after a three-day workshop with the CDEP participants working together to identify activities that would be beneficial to indigenous communities. It has been an overwhelming success because it responded to a need in the community while also providing hands-on training and experience for participants.’

Murri Delights operates a regular lunch service and has already catered for a wide range of major events, including the State Government’s launch of its ‘Blueprint for the Bush.’

It has been a vital part of maintaining a measure of personal wellbeing through social contact at work and an opportunity for intellectual challenge. I’ve been able to continue with my caring responsibilities without burning out. I’ll be able to maintain and develop my skills, and when Mum eventually passes away I’ll be fully equipped to re-enter full time employment. This would otherwise prove to be very difficult as a long term unemployed female looking to return to work in her 50s!

Robyn Schindelbacher Q . I . T . E . TRAINER

Funky Timber Creations

Q.I.T.E. Timber Creations grew out of a Work For the Dole project that involved the manufacture of hand-crafted timber furniture and household and office items. After losing the Work For the Dole funding, Q.I.T.E. recognised the need for a high quality product that could be individually made to suit the customer. At the same time it saw that there is a skills deficit in construction of hand-crafted quality timber furniture.

Q.I.T.E. saw opportunities to develop the skills and employability of local unemployed people by providing them with a Certificate II in Furniture Building. A skilled, qualified and experienced supervisor provides on-the-job training, and the timber furniture manufactured through training is sold to the public, at markets and placed in businesses on a commission basis. The staff have now advanced to building and installing full kitchens.

GEELONG
SOUTH WEST VICTORIA
MELBOURNE

MATCHWORKS

GROWTH AND
DEVELOPMENT

The story of Karingal is closely tied to changes in community attitudes about the integration of people with disabilities in communities and workplaces over the past 50 years. From sheltered workshops Karingal has moved over time towards commercially viable services that support mainstream workplace participation for people with disabilities. Karingal is growing up in other ways. As the children it started working with in the 1950s are beginning to age, the organisation is increasingly focusing on residential aged care.

Like so many other case studies in this publication, Karingal started small. In 1953 a group of parents in Geelong aspired to better lives for their young children with disabilities, and as a voluntary association, they started a playgroup in a church hall. By 1958 there were five groups of young people, divided according to aptitudes and capabilities in the Karingal Children’s Occupation Centre. Group 5, the post-school students, began to operate as an independent unit, doing craftwork, making lunches and working in the garden.

The father of one of the children started visiting factories in Geelong looking for work that could be done by the people at Karingal. Commando Wools, the Ford Motor Company and Goodchild Shoes were early clients. Karingal began to raise funds for a sheltered workshop, and this opened in 1961. By 1966 the workshop employed 43 young people. Karingal began to handle large numbers of diverse sub-contracts and the building size doubled.

Karingal was developing in other directions during the 1960s, building a new pre-school facility and the beginnings of what is now Karingal Community Living. A residential unit opened in 1973 and various kinds of support and respite services followed.

In 1971-1972 the Karingal sheltered workshop began to offer commercial laundry services on a modest scale to local businesses. Shell, Alcoa and the Phosphate Cooperative were early customers. In 1978 a second sheltered workshop started

in a rural setting at a farm purchased by Karingal. This took in work contracts but over time, trading as Mollers Lane Industries, it also generated employment washing and packaging vegetables from the farm’s market garden, running a greenhouse and a commercial plant nursery. Trainees at the site were taught sheep husbandry and general farming skills. A flower shop, an offshoot of this facility, opened in the city in 1989-1990.

In 1981 Karingal took over the management of a commercial laundry operation, the Geelong Laundry, keeping all the existing employees. In 1982 these were joined by 12 Karingal trainees. This was Karingal’s first attempt to integrate people with disabilities into a mainstream working environment. Mollers Lane Industries followed this direction, placing and supporting people with disabilities into open employment. In 1992 these activities evolved into a service called SupportWorks, providing a wide range of employment services for job-seekers with disabilities. By 1997 SupportWorks was supporting over 100 people with disabilities in open employment.

From 1994 the government began to contract out the functions of the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) through the Employment Services Regulatory Authority (ESRA).¹ Karingal successfully tendered for a contract to deliver services for people with disabilities.

In 1997 the Commonwealth Government invited tenders for Job Network contracts. Karingal decided to tender to deliver these mainstream services to help unemployed and disadvantaged people find work. This was successful, and since 1998 MatchWorks’ Job Network services have grown enormously. In 2006 Karingal had 8 offices in Greater Melbourne, one in Bacchus Marsh to the west of Melbourne, and four in and around Geelong. MatchWorks Job Network staff number around 170 full-time equivalent staff. The Job Network contract generates approximately 40 percent of Karingal’s total business revenues, and is the major contributor to Karingal’s annual surpluses. It has also contributed substantially to the company’s accumulated assets.

CASE STUDY THREE

Risks and turning points

The economic downturn of the early 1990s affected manufacturing centres like Geelong badly. The Mollers Lane Industries farms and the Geelong Laundry Company were affected, and both lost jobs and income. At the same time changes in government policy marked the end of the old ‘sheltered workshop’ in favour of greater integration of people with disabilities into open employment. Karingal was committed to inclusion and integration and was ready to change.

In 1993 Karingal approached Alcoa to discuss the formation of an ‘enclave’ with the Alcoa Plant at Port Henry. This meant transferring a group of workers out of Mollers Lane to work on Alcoa sub-contracts as a group within the plant at Port Henry, incorporating them with other workers at the plant. The enclave started in January 1994 and was an instant success, with the social interaction between staff and enclave workers described as ‘sensational.’ Alcoa treated the enclave workers as employees, even though they were officially sub-contractors. They were invited to participate in any Alcoa activities and everyone in the enclave, including supervisors, wore the same uniform. In 1996 a similar enclave was established at Geelong Wool Combing with the same results.

The Geelong Laundry Company burned to the ground in 1995 and was discovered to have been under-insured. Following a decision not to re-open the laundry, the 19 workers with disabilities were found new employment, and later in 1995, following a review, the Board decided to close the Mollers Lane complex entirely and sell the site. By 1998 what had been the Plant Farm became the MLI Garden Crew, operating at 18 different commercial and private sites.

Julie Graham, General Manager of Matchworks from 2003 to early 2008, the employment services division, started working for Karingal in 1995. She remembers the deliberations about whether to get involved in the Job Network.

‘When Job Network first came in there was no opportunity to tender only as a specialised disability provider. So we asked ourselves ‘Should we tender in any case?’

When Job Network first came in there was no opportunity to tender only as a specialised disability provider. So we asked ourselves ‘Should we tender in any case?’ The answer was ‘Yes – we will go into mainstream employment services, to enable people with disabilities to walk through the same door as others. It was about inclusiveness, the kind of inclusiveness we believe in.’

It was a commercial decision as well, but at that stage in 1998 I don’t think anyone realised just how ‘profitable’ it might be.

Julie Graham MATCHWORKS



MILESTONES

1953	<i>A playgroup in a Church Hall is established for children with disabilities</i>
1956	<i>Karingal Children’s Occupation Centre opens in East Geelong</i>
1961	<i>Sheltered workshop opens and contracts with local manufacturers</i>
1964	<i>Karingal Farm purchase at Mollers Lane in Leopold in 1964 provides skills and work opportunities</i>
1973	<i>First residential facility for supported accommodation opens</i>
1981	<i>Commercial laundry service acquired to integrate people with disabilities</i>
1992	<i>SupportWorks open employment division launched to support people with intellectual disabilities into the general workforce</i>
1998	<i>MatchWorks launched with successful Job Network tender to provide mainstream employment services</i>
1999	<i>Karingal merges with Barwon Independent Living to bring a range of other disability services across the region</i>
2002	<i>BacLinks is established to bring business and community organisations together</i>
2006	<i>MatchWorks has expanded through successive tenders to 21 contracts including 13 Job Network sites plus Work For the Dole and Personal Support Program; also commenced residential aged care with acquisition of low care facility</i>
2007	<i>Expanded mental health services to include Personal Helpers & Mentors Program and mental health respite; took over the operation of Alcoa cafeteria in Geelong, the only industrial café site in Australia with supported employees</i>

KARINGAL IN 2008

Full-time and part-time staff: **1,140**
Volunteers: **100**
2007-2008 year turnover: **\$42 million**
Net assets: **\$28 million**
Sites: **45**

AWARDS

2003	Winner of Geelong Business Excellence awards
2004	Winner of Geelong Business Excellence awards

CONTACT

Website: **www.karingal.org.au**
Phone: **03 5249 8925**
Email for general enquiries: **corporate@karingal.org.au**

1. Refer to Glossary.

The answer was ‘Yes – we will go into mainstream employment services, to enable people with disabilities to walk through the same door as others. It was about inclusiveness, the kind of inclusiveness we believe in.’

‘It was a commercial decision as well, but at that stage in 1998 I don’t think anyone realised just how ‘profitable’ it might be. In fact in the early days we didn’t think it was going to be commercially viable ... For an organisation that had been community and disability-focused, to move into the world of running a large-scale commercial operation resulted in major challenges for three or four years.’

Surpluses generated from the Job Network have enabled Karingal to improve its facilities for people with disabilities and also to diversify its activities. ‘Job Network was the springboard for Karingal to expand into new areas of work,’ says Julie. Retired Innovation Director at Karingal Brian Donovan agrees. ‘Ten years ago we had a lot of vibrancy but we were doing things on a shoestring. Now on top of the vibrancy we’ve got the dollars to do things.’

Karingal’s surplus funds are put towards initiatives in its divisions for Community Living, Business Service (supported employment) and Aged Living. Increasingly since 2002, Karingal has begun to play a role as a broker between business and other community organisations, as its ideas for productive links and its experience and matchmaking skills have grown. Karingal is also committed to giving back to all the communities in which it delivers services. One example is ‘Café.com’ in Brunswick in Melbourne, which offers computers, internet access and staff guidance to people who need to use computers but don’t have access to them. Karingal also contributes to community festivals and local sporting clubs.

Another initiative led by Karingal was the establishment of ARCSupport in 2006. ARCSupport is deficit-funded by Karingal to support families who have members with acquired brain injuries (ABI). Karingal is committed to developing both permanent and respite accommodation options for young people with ABI.

Balancing the books
Karingal’s 55 years of operation has made the company wary about over-reliance on government funding. Though the Job Network has generated financial surpluses not previously experienced, Karingal does not assume that this will always be the case. Karingal has no desire to return to the

financial struggles it experienced in its first 50 years of operations. Strategic, controlled growth is a key goal to ensure that Karingal has a range of income streams from State and Commonwealth Governments as well as from non-government sources.

Karingal’s divisions other than Job Network represent not just diverse activities and aspirations to support people with disabilities, but a balance of income and expenditure.

In 2008 Karingal services fall into four groups:

- Karingal Community Living offers a range of support services to people with a disability and their families and carers. Services include accommodation (supported residential and independent living units); respite care (residential and in-home); educational, recreational, vocational and leisure day activities; support and personal care to enable ‘own home’ living; individual case management and outreach support; and a range of special activities that include art classes, adventure-based learning, and initial literacy education programs.
- Karingal Aged Living was recently established to run Karingal’s newest venture in the field of residential aged care.
- MatchWorks offers employment and related support services to job-seekers who are disadvantaged (including people with disabilities) funded through the Commonwealth Government Job Network (Job Network), the Disability Employment Network (DEN), the Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS), the Personal Support Program (PSP)² and Work For the Dole.
- Kommercial initiates and runs a range of enterprises that provide employment for people with disabilities in a range of different jobs at different skill levels: for example, in mailing services and packaging, land care, timber cutting and recycling, large cafeteria or assembling gift hampers. Kommercial aims to offer employment to anyone with a disability who is ready, willing and eligible to work.

The Kommercial division was challenged in 2006 when the Commonwealth Government changed the way subsidies were paid to employers of people with disabilities, subsidies to meet the costs of extra supervision and support. Previously, the amount of subsidy was a standard amount for all employees with disabilities, but under the new system the subsidy varied according to each employee’s support needs. For Karingal, this resulted in reduced government subsidies. At the same time, wage costs soared after the introduction of a fairer wage assessment tool. Essentially, the division’s turnover needed to be

increased to meet costs and operate in a sustainable way. This was successfully achieved, though it is a challenge to break even financially. In 2008 Kommercial employs 120 people with disabilities and has a wide variety of contracts with both very large and small/medium size businesses.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND VALUES

Working on the frontline of the Job Network is hard and stressful work. The CEO of Karingal, Daryl Starkey, attends team-building meetings and lets everyone know how important they are. All new staff members are taken on bus tours to see how the surplus funds they help earn are being spent in other divisions of Karingal’s activities or at other sites.

‘It’s important for them to see this’ says Matchworks General Manager Julie Graham. ‘They are highly motivated, not just by the profits they generate but by seeing – and being involved with – what it’s being spent on. Their jobs are hard, not necessarily that intrinsically rewarding or satisfying, and if at the end of the day you wonder if you have really been able to help, it may not be that motivating. But when you can go out and see what’s being done by Karingal as a result of your work you can be proud, and be part of it.’

ACTIVITIES AND ENTERPRISES

Business and community links
In 2002 Karingal established BacLinks (Business and Community Links) to guide businesses who wanted to be more involved in developing social programs for people with disabilities but didn’t know how. The idea for BacLinks came about in an unusual way. The year 2002 was International Year of Volunteers, and Karingal decided to pay tribute to the work done by its volunteers by holding a black-tie dinner. The actor Guy Pearce, who had a relationship with Karingal, was to be the guest of honour, but at the last minute he could not come and by way of apology donated \$10,000 to Karingal.

The volunteer coordinator at the time, Sheree, remembers asking him what he would like to see the money spent on. ‘He said he wanted it to ensure that Karingal’s clients extend their networks and opportunities within the broader community, as he, like us, felt that people with disabilities in residential communities often tend to mix with the same people all the time, even when they have good family support. So we thought about that and asked ourselves: ‘What about if we

approached businesses and asked them to become more involved in developing social programs for people with disabilities?’

Karingal talked with United Way, which facilitates businesses giving grants to communities and community organisations. They were very willing to be partners. Then Karingal talked to businesses, but while they were enthusiastic, they said that they and their employees wanted to be involved not just with Karingal but more broadly with organisations in their communities. They had found that though they were willing to be involved and approached community organisations to offer help as volunteers, the organisations weren’t

The staff are highly motivated, not just by the profits they generate but by seeing – and being involved with – what it’s being spent on.

Julie Graham MATCHWORKS

sure what to do with them. On their part, community organisations reported that what businesses offered them was not necessarily what they needed.

BacLinks was started to meet this need. It operates as a kind of independent broker, making various kinds of connections between businesses and community agencies: in-kind support (including volunteering by employees, access to resources and equipment, donation of goods and services, and sharing of skills and knowledge); sponsorship of events; and cash grants and donations.

BacLinks injects over \$200,000 worth of support annually into the Geelong Region. This includes around 40 community based projects, and 60 community agencies and involves over 50 businesses. Some projects are recurrent. Alcoa, for example, has a monthly volunteer project, with each project typically involving 10 to 20 employees. Baclinks sets up an agreement for each project, specifying what is to be done and when. It initiates links as well, talking to community organisations about their needs, then finding the business that can help.

The Workplace Big Day Out
The Workplace Big Day Out offers employees of businesses in Geelong to spend a day with people with disabilities. It is run twice every year and involves all other agencies working with people with disabilities in the region. Workplace Big Day Out fulfills Karingal’s goal, one shared by other agencies, to focus on ability rather than disability, and achieve inclusion for people with disabilities through fun and games.

On the Big Day Out, people are divided into mixed teams and then compete against one another in different games such as mini-basketball and tug-of-war. Typically about 300-400 people attend, including about 100 workplace volunteers, 120 people with disabilities, carers and staff. The day is attended regularly by business and community leaders from a wide range of industries and workplaces: telecommunications, sport, unions, law, media, finance, construction, automotive, emergency and defence services, and information technologies. Feedback on the day has consistently been excellent.

Girls’ Big Day Out
The Girls’ Big Day Out is a response to trade skill shortages in the Geelong region and an urgent need to market careers in the trades, particularly to girls who may not have considered these non-traditional roles. It started when Karingal’s BacLinks was commissioned by the Local Learning and Employment Network and the Geelong Region Employers’ Reference Group to bring industry and schools together.

Background work for the project established that to make informed career decisions, students need a taste of a trade career to enable them to see the link between learning and eventual employment. The event gives industry representatives from a variety of trades the chance to offer hands-on trade activities and explain to students and teachers what it is like to work in their industry.

Kommerical Café
In 2006 Alcoa put the management of its canteen at the Port Henry plant in Geelong out to tender. Karingal won it. Karingal had already placed an enclave of its workers in the firm, but won the tender on merit. Alcoa set up a refurbished facility in early 2007. The café operated at a slight loss for the first 12 months of operation but is now operating at just above break even. The café employs 18 people, 12 of whom have disabilities. Hospitality employment is frequently sought after by people with disabilities and Karingal has now successfully diversified the supported employment opportunities it can offer.

Aged care
Like the rest of the population, people with disabilities are living longer and consequently need to be cared for until they are much older. Being a registered aged care provider can provide opportunities in the future for Karingal to deliver such services to people with disabilities.

Karingal has bought land in Geelong to develop it into a mainstream retirement village that will offer a continuum of accommodation and care that supports ‘ageing in place.’ This community village is intended to incorporate unit living, serviced apartments, residential aged care, flexible care packages, a community centre and recreational amenities for people aged over 55 years.

For many young people with acquired disabilities the only option has been a bed in an aged care nursing home. This outcome is recognised as a highly undesirable and extreme form of exclusion, and two years ago the Council of Australian Governments began to make funds available to deal with the situation. For example, Geelong has no residential facilities for young people with acquired brain injuries. This will soon change as Karingal was successful in 2008 with a submission to the second my future my choice accommodation funding round. The funding is for the establishment costs to accommodate 6 people (5 long term and one respite) under the age of 50 years who are presently living in or at risk of entering residential aged care. Substantial recurrent funding for nursing care, therapy, and other services has also been provided. The service is expected to commence in late 2009.

THE FUTURE

In 2009 Karingal will start the construction of a mainstream retirement village in Geelong that will include around 100 independent living units, 8 apartments and a residential aged care facility.

Karingal plans an expansion of both disability services and mental health support programs into Melbourne over the next few years.

Opportunities for further expansion in Melbourne of employment services including Job Network, Disability Employment Network and Vocational Rehabilitation Services are expected in the 2009 new Employment Services Contract.

A Karingal Foundation will be established in 2009 to raise funds for the establishment of new facilities for people with disabilities.

NOOSA COMMUNITY TRAINING CENTRE

CASE STUDY FOUR

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Like many community organisations involved in providing employment and training services, Noosa Community Training Centre Inc (NCTC) began in 1987 as Noosa Community Youth Support Scheme.

In those days its primary activities were hobby courses with some personal development and self esteem activities. With the introduction of the SkillShare program in 1989, this focus evolved into accredited vocational training in computer/office skills, hospitality, retail and horticulture.

‘The Committee agreed that it wasn’t their vision either, that they were here for the Noosa community, and that we should do our best to survive for as long as we could. The community is strong. We have a long-standing mayor and councillors, there’s a strong sense of local pride and identity. People work together. We know what to do, whether it’s about how best to support our unemployed or look after our environment.’

While NCTC initially took on some Job Network services, in the third round (2003-2006) the organisation decided not to apply for Job Network services as it did

specialist storage companies that have appeared in recent years are one manifestation of this trend. More broadly, there is growing awareness and concern about the need to preserve the environment, and a willingness both to act and make consumer choices for environmental reasons.

There is not a large profit margin in the waste recycling business, with private companies tending to be contracted for collection and disposal on a larger scale and some formal employment generated by waste collection companies collecting materials such as scrap metal and batteries. However, a great deal of the work in this area has not been formalised and tends to be disaggregated among self-employed people or voluntary workers in opportunity shops. NCTC believed that more sophisticated intermediaries and a more organised approach to recycling could generate employment.

A series of discussions with the local Council, was followed by funding for a feasibility study from the local Area Consultative Committee, a federally-funded coalition of employers, government and other agencies looking at the development of employment opportunities. From this the Brite Side Industries recycling venture was created, with an initial 12-month contract from the Council, ‘to see if we could really do it,’ according to Glenda. It has now been operating for nine years.

With the demise of the SkillShare program the organisation changed its name to trade as Noosa Community Training Centre. However, it has taken time for this name to become known in the community and many long term residents still call NCTC ‘the old SkillShare.’ Glenda doesn’t correct them. ‘In fact we often use the name as a point of reference ourselves as people can relate to the name and the fact that we have been around for many years.’

The end of funding for the SkillShare program and the beginning of the Job Network in 1997-1998 posed a threat to the continued existence of the organisation. ‘You heard that the little organisations like us wouldn’t survive in the new system,’ Glenda recalls. ‘There were a lot of organisations doing take-overs of the small ones or small ones doing take-overs to get bigger. I reported that to my Management Committee and said that if that was the way they wanted to go then I wasn’t the right manager any longer.’

not agree with the prescriptive approach. ‘We believed we could provide better service to the unemployed and disadvantaged of our community without the assistance of Job Network’ says Glenda.

As a Registered Training Organisation NCTC runs regular training courses for skills in demand such as hospitality, other programs for young and mature-aged job-seekers through State Government programs such as the Community Jobs Program and other programs such as Work For the Dole and Queenslanders Working Together. However, NCTC believed that if it was to play a role in serving the local community, it would need to stay small.

At about the same time the Commonwealth Government announced arrangements for the Job Network, it made another quite unrelated one about the need to reduce landfill. Talking about it with one of the members of her Committee, Glenda decided this was something the organisation could get involved in.

NCTC recognised that increasing affluence means that people dispose of more, and do so more frequently: the

You heard that the little organisations like us wouldn’t survive in the new system. There were a lot of organisations doing take-overs of the small ones or small ones doing take-overs to get bigger.

Glenda Lane NCTC



MILESTONES

1987	Incorporated as Noosa Community Youth Support Scheme
1989	SkillShare grant funding
1997	Job Network Job Matching contract, with Job Search Training next contract round; Quality Systems certification AS-NZS ISO 9002:1994
1998	Registered Training Organisation status achieved; Work For the Dole contract for 100 people for 12 months Quality Management System AS-NZS ISO 9001:2000
1999	Brite Side Industries recycling enterprise opened
2004	Community Jobs Program – Work Placement managed for Noosa Council to the present

NOOSA COMMUNITY TRAINING CENTRE IN 2008

Full-time staff: **7**
Part-time staff: **14**
Volunteers: **3**
Turnover 2007-2008 financial year: **\$806,064**
Net assets: **\$110,453**
Sites: **2** in Noosa Shire
People using NCTC employment and training services in 2007: **900**
People achieving National Accredited Competencies from Certificate 1, 2, 3 or 4 training: **170**
People trained in hospitality to Certificate level in 2007: **40**
Customers of Brite Side: **16,500**
Annual turnover of recycling project: **\$345,227**

AWARDS

2001	Nominations for Sunshine Coast Environment Awards
2003	Sunshine Coast Environmental Award to Brite Side Industries for Best Waste Minimisation Initiative
2007	Highly Commended Award by Sunshine Coast Environment Council recognises Brite Side contribution to waste minimisation
2008	Nomination for Channel 10/Telstra Environment Awards

CONTACT

Website: **www.nctc.com.au** and **www.briteside.org**
Phone: **07 5449 7700**
Email for general enquiries: **info@nctc.com.au**

ACTIVITIES AND ENTERPRISES

Brite Side Industries recycling and sales

Alongside broad aims to reduce landfill and generate employment, Brite Side Industries also aimed to make affordable products and mobilise the support of the local community through donations.

Brite Side started on 20 January 1999 supported with resources from a range of sources. The Noosa Shire Council provided a metal shed about the size of a double garage and a licence and contract to operate at the tip. NCTC provided or purchased tools and equipment. The Work For the Dole Program enabled the service to operate initially for two days a week for the first six months. Funds from the State Government’s Community Jobs Program provided for two successive groups of 10 unemployed people to develop their skills over periods of 18 weeks.

Brite Side Industries changed the way Noosa residents disposed of things they took to the tip. In the old system, people would drive to the tipping area, consisting of three stations into which a car is reversed. Tipplers threw their stuff into one of three large waste bins operated by Cleanaway, the Council’s waste disposal contractor. When they were full, the contractor took away each bin to the landfill area behind.

In the new system, on seven days a week a Brite Side worker helps people separate what they are about to throw away so that only truly non-useable or non-recyclable things are discarded. People are advised where to put cardboard, which is handled by Visy, another private company. Other than that, Brite Side workers separate wood, metal, and other materials, and identify things that can be mended or remade to sell in the shop. Under the terms of its contract with the Council, Brite Site has a right to occupy the site and to own and deal with the material brought to it.

Brite Side proved that the recycling business could be run on a sustainable basis. The first 12 month contract was extended for a further 5 years, followed by a second 5-year contract. After the first six months, the business outgrew the space needed to store, sort, repair and re-make the stuff brought in, as well as the space to display and sell it.

The historic old Noosa Surf Lifesaving Club building was moved to the tip and restored to create a dedicated show room/retail space. A series of quick-fix solutions to the ever-growing space problem saw extra sheds provided by the Noosa Council and through a grant from Queensland’s Gambling Community Benefit Fund. In 2006 Noosa Council allocated \$363,500 for the project to provide considerably more space for storage and sorting, making/repairing and retail work at the tip, and the separation of each function into a discrete area. This has been brought together in an

attractive landscaped, grassed and paved area so that both staff and customers feel that the environment is attractive. ‘It’s important to all concerned that it doesn’t look like a tip,’ says Glenda.

A second application to the Gambling Community Benefit Fund enabled Brite Side to buy a truck so that it could collect things directly from households. Most recently the Fund has granted \$23,500 for the purchase of a fork-lift truck.

By 2008, Brite Side was employing 10 people, 6 part-time and 4 full-time. Though superficially this kind of work may seem unappealing, dull or repetitive, the workers report good job satisfaction. When they are not attending to customers, they have things to sort, repair, or dismantle into their constituent parts. There is the satisfaction of fixing things, and the creative appeal of making new products from old materials. Decisions about what might sell, what can be repaired and what can be turned into something else require a good deal of judgement and experience. Each trailer and ute-load is a new unknown quantity, and this work appeals to certain kinds of people with a creative, problem-solving disposition.

Robert Bunn, one of the workers at Brite Side, enjoys teaching the public about recycling. For Col Rodwell, ‘It’s an enjoyable place to work, with good team morale, cohesion and direction ... In the big picture, Brite Side is paramount in recycling for the future – reducing landfill, and providing affordable goods for the public. On a personal level, I feel fortunate to have the

scope, using my skills, to create recycled furniture for sale.’

Greg Shallis brings environment conservation zeal to his work. ‘During my many years of building site experience I have seen a lot of materials wasted that could well have been recycled. At Brite Side we have the opportunity to turn this waste around and sell it back to the community, so it’s a ‘win-win’ situation. When it comes to recycling we are only limited by resources, space and imagination. I enjoy my work here because it’s backed by people with vision and long-term goals

It’s an enjoyable place to work, with good team morale, cohesion and direction ... In the big picture, Brite Side is paramount in recycling for the future – reducing landfill, and providing affordable goods for the public. On a personal level, I feel fortunate to have the scope, using my skills, to create recycled furniture for sale.

Col Rodwell BRITE SIDE INDUSTRIES

rather than short-term gain, especially short-term financial gains.’

Brite Side reports its achievements to the Council on a quarterly basis, and has ready measures of its success over time, with cubic-metre volumes of waste returned to landfill reducing dramatically in relation to volumes received and a corresponding increase in stock available for re-use and re-sale. Brite Side has estimated that around seven or eight jobs are needed to convert waste to 10 percent of its original volume, a ratio achieved in 2007.

The Noosa Council has come to recognise that as a community partner, Brite Side brings a degree of efficiency and cost-effectiveness not available to the same degree in the private or public sector. As a community organisation, Brite Side has been able to mobilise the community support and trust needed to turn growing environmental concern about waste into action; mobilise resources from the public and from philanthropic bodies; make profit in areas where profitability may appear marginal or non-existent to other sectors; and turn this not just into jobs but into broader community and environmental benefits. Local people value the service and show their appreciation of it in the most important way, simply by using it.

Balancing the books

Since 1999 all wages for Brite Side Industries have been paid out of its earned revenues. In 2007-2008 Brite Side Industries reported turnover of \$345,227, representing 43 percent of NCTC total annual turnover from all activities. Brite Side generated \$83,000 in profit, 24 percent of its turnover.

Most of the income for Brite Side is spent on wages and associated staff costs. In 2006-2007 this was 86 percent, in 2007-2008 it was 69 percent. In 2006-2007 Brite Side contributed \$19,000 towards the operation of NCTC; in 2007-2008 it contributed \$83,000. This enabled NCTC to support the community in other ways. In 2007 for example, NCTC provided non-accredited training to senior men to learn cooking skills, and internet and email training to community groups.

Brite Side Industries aims to expand operations so it can continue to provide affordable goods to the local community as well as employment opportunities.

During my many years of building site experience I have seen a lot of materials wasted that could well have been recycled. At Brite Side we have the opportunity to turn this waste around and sell it back to the community.

Greg Shallis BRITE SIDE INDUSTRIES

THE FUTURE

In 2007 NCTC was invited to submit an application by the Queensland Department of Employment and Industrial Relations to provide job preparation assistance to local unemployed people who were not eligible for Job Network services.

The program met its target of 100 clients in 10 months, 2 months earlier than expected, with over 50 percent employment or training outcomes. The project has been funded for a further 12 months until October 2009.

NCTC also continues to provide Hospitality Accredited Training, an identified skill in demand, and has a contract with the Queensland Government for at least the next 2 years.

Get Set for Work, an employment program for disengaged youth under the Queensland Government’s ‘Earning or Learning’ strategy, continues to be a successful program for NCTC. NCTC hopes to gain new funding in 2008-2009 to continue with its successful Business Training Program for people aged over 45.

A major concern for NCTC as a small organisation is ongoing accommodation in the Noosa Shire. The property it currently rents has been sold and with commercial rents in the area extremely high, NCTC is working closely with the local council to find suitable accommodation at a reasonable price to continue its operations.

In the coming years NCTC aims to continue to think and act locally as well as globally, guided by the needs of the community.

WORK VENTURES

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Since it started working with young unemployed and disadvantaged people in 1979, the company now called WorkVentures was prepared to take risks. ‘We did some pretty wild things,’ remembers Steve Lawrence, the founder of the organisation and CEO of WorkVentures for 28 years. From 1979 to the early 80s, the organisation’s adventures included taking kids out on Botany Bay on a 27-foot navy sailing whaler, building a mud brick village, creating a community mural around a large storage tank of a local oil refinery, and starting a postal agency, a recycling venture, and a recycled clothing shop.

and Community Services funded his college fees while he studied at university. Graduating in 1974, he joined the Department’s Community Liaison Bureau and was given a job distributing \$500 grants to support projects in community development and innovation. He quickly realised how little innovation existed ‘out there,’ and how dependent charitable organisations appeared to be on the government. At that time Steve was living in what he called an ‘alternative lifestyle’ group in south-east Sydney. After a tour to look at innovative projects in different parts of the world, including kibbutzes in Israel, ashrams in India, development projects in

CASE STUDY FIVE

community projects and enterprises mentioned earlier, some of which generated income.

In 1984 the organisation separated itself structurally from the parish and incorporated as a non-profit company, Peninsula Community Services (PCS). That year, it opened in Matraville a computer training facility called Compuskill, with support from the Evatt Foundation. The idea was to build people’s skills through computer technology training while doing useful things like book-keeping and desktop publishing for community organisations. The Commonwealth Government offered funds through the new Community Employment Program, an international computer manufacturer offered six computers and a software company donated software. An IT-experienced manager was appointed, and is still with WorkVentures to this day.

Apart from a good service to community organisations, the scheme delivered jobs in IT to more than 90 percent of the unemployed people trained. In 1986 PCS, by then a team of 10 people, reviewed its various activities. The central question was whether the organisation was in the business of local community development or employment and training. Deciding it was the latter, PCS closed some of its community projects and handed over others.

In 1986 the then Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Ralph Willis had been inspired by some promising projects in the UK, providing IT training to young unemployed people. The Minister wanted to see similar Information Technology Centres (ITeCs) established in Australia. Following a visit by the Minister to Compuskill, PCS was invited to establish one of three pilot ITeCs in Australia.

The opening in 1986 of Sydney ITeC at Surry Hills, the first in Australia, saw PCS becoming a major player in the rapidly growing field of information technology skills training and support for self-employment in this field. ITeCs had a strong and visible media profile, and a range of computer manufacturers: Microsoft Australia and the Australian Information Industry Association both lent

During the 1980s and 1990s, WorkVentures progressively established a series of more ambitious community and commercial ventures. Some of them were outgrowths of government-funded projects and some were self-started; some failed but more were successful, sometimes spectacularly so. ‘We didn’t want to be dependent on government – generating our own revenue gave us choices about how we did things,’ says Steve. In 2008 successful WorkVentures initiatives include an expanding IT repair service, a series of Neighbourhood Technology Centres on housing estates and other low-income areas, and a computer recycling venture serving low-income individuals and organisations.

The growth and development of WorkVentures is tied to Steve’s own story. In the early 1970s a traineeship with the New South Wales Department of Youth

Indonesia and groups working with drug addicts in Norway, Steve returned home full of ideas for social innovation. His local parish challenged him to put his ideas into practice and in 1977 he started as the Neighbourhood Ministry Coordinator in the parish.

During this time areas like the ones Steve worked in were being hit hard by rising unemployment. A Community Youth Support Scheme was started locally in 1979 by another group. Malabar parish tried, at around the same time, to start a separate scheme, funded by the Commonwealth Government’s Volunteer Youth Program, to involve young unemployed people in community projects. The project could not attract its target group due to a lack of interest in volunteering, so they sent the grant back and became determined to do something on a more self-sufficient basis. There followed the diverse range of

Australia is a secular society, but people are still interested in the spiritual dimension of life, very interested in doing things that will change the community for the better and willing to work cooperatively with others.

Steve Lawrence CEO 1979-2007, WORKVENTURES



MILESTONES

1979	Starts at La Perouse as Peninsula Exchange; early activities focus on young people
1980	Developing community enterprises: a food co-op, clothing recycling and retail ventures
1984	Incorporated as Peninsula Community Services Ltd; Opening of a computer training facility, Compuskill; Focus moves towards employment services
1986	Opening of Sydney Information Technology Centre
1989	Business incubator of 15 units and electronics repair business established in Surry Hills
1992	Change of name to WorkVentures; new emphasis on diversification and growth
1996	Founding of Job Futures, a national network of community organisations tendering jointly for Job Network
1997	Job Network contract won for two sites and later expansion
1998	WorkVentures Group Training offers traineeships in partnership with host employers
2001	WorkVentures Connect Neighborhood Technology Centre network and PC refurbishment venture established
2002	Social Ventures Australia established by Work Ventures and three other partners
2006	Aids Local Enterprise Centre established
2007	Job Network sites down to one

WORKVENTURES AT 31 DECEMBER 2007

Total staff and regular contractors: **167 including 35 trainees placed with host employers**

Volunteers: **Over 550 committing 10,700 hours valued at \$338,000**

Turnover last year: **\$15.9 million**

Net assets: **\$4.44 million**

Sites: **8** in Sydney and **1** in Melbourne

Value of products and professional services from corporate partners during 2007: **\$1.26 million**

People from disadvantaged communities accessing IT and support services in 2007 through the 68 Unlimited Potential Centres WorkVentures supports: **over 18,000**

People from disadvantaged communities using one of WorkVentures’ five Connect centres in 2007 for training and other development services: **3,203**

Number of volunteers at Work Ventures computer Connect Centres on public housing estates in 2007: **519**

Computers refurbished and sold to low income users in 2007: **over 3,000**

ENTERPRISES

Electronics repair jobs completed in 2007 by Sydney ITeC Repair Centre: **over 70,000**

Work experience placements provided in 2007: **35**

Annual turnover of Sydney ITeC Repair Centre during 2007: **\$8 million**

AWARDS

1995	Sydney ITeC Repair Centre business wins NSW Small Business Training Award
1996	Newtons Restaurant wins Botany Small Business Award
2004	Steve Lawrence, CEO of Work Ventures, is named ACT/NSW Entrepreneur of the Year for Entrepreneurship in a Social, Community or Non-profit Enterprise
2005	Prime Minister’s Award for Excellence in Community Business Partnerships, Longevity category (with Microsoft)

CONTACT

Website: **www.workventures.com.au**

Phone: **02 9282 6999**

Email for general enquiries: **info@workventures.com.au**

their support. This was the first of many long productive partnerships with the corporate sector.

The Managing Director of Microsoft Australia adopted PCS as Microsoft's first community project, not just donating software but encouraging her staff to volunteer with PCS on company time and writing to Microsoft's hardware provider network to cajole them into supporting PCS. Steve remembers benefiting from the partnership in more lasting ways: 'She also taught us a fair bit about how to run a business, did business planning with us and spent lots of her own time teaching us 'social workers' how to run a successful operation!'

From 1986 until the mid-1990s, a number of activities went forward quickly at PCS. The ITeC national network grew from the three pilot projects to thirteen around the country and PCS provided training and support to the newcomers; developing a national electronics curriculum, helping to recruit electronics training staff and establishing a national ITeC association.

In 1988 an ITeC Training Services division was established to exploit under-utilised resources to generate income. Two commercially viable services were identified: self-paced supported learning paid for by individuals; and training courses for the employees of businesses and other organisations. PCS invested some of its surplus funds to set up the enterprise and charged it a monthly fee for the use of computers for the training.

Apart from training people to use software, the Surry Hills ITeC delivered electronics training in computer hardware assembly and repair. This provided the ITeC with the beginnings of an electronics repair and maintenance service in 1988, which over the next two decades achieved success and growth through a series of repair centre takeovers. By 2007 the Sydney ITeC Repair Centre reported an annual turnover of \$8 million.

In 1989 the government introduced the SkillShare program and this brought the ITeCs under its wing. In the same year, PCS established a business incubator of 15 units in Surry Hills. The State Government also helped PCS to set up an Enterprise Development Unit, to develop local small business enterprises and employment initiatives. In 1990 PCS was invited to take over the Sydney Business Enterprise Centre in Sydney CBD.

By 1996 when the SkillShare program ended, PCS had changed its name to Work Ventures. At that point, its staff numbered

just over 100, around half of whom worked in the Sydney ITEC Repair Centre and there were 53 volunteers working with the organisation. As well as the activities already mentioned, Work Ventures had started a restaurant training enterprise called Newton's, in inner-Sydney. It had also become a Group Training Company, a scheme through which a government-funded organisation employs and trains young unemployed people and contracts them to host employers.

Risks and turning points

Not all Work Ventures enterprises have succeeded. A project in 1988-1989 called MusITeC established a music centre using sound synthesisers and related software. That lost the organisation over \$20,000. 'We just didn't know the music industry well enough,' says Steve. 'And again there was a need to find someone to run the business as if it was their own.'

In 1991 ITeC Training Services became a joint venture with the ITeC in Western Sydney, based in Parramatta. Initially there were positive results, with training carried out for a wide range of companies and government departments, but a change of manager in 1993 saw business fall. Promising contracts failed to materialise

as the IT training market became more competitive. A lack of marketing skills was identified as a problem. Also, as Steve put it, 'there are difficulties trying to mix a commercial entity with a strong social justice commitment. And there is the image question. The ITeC had a lot of unemployed people around who did not necessarily dress the same way as the business community, and while PCS chose to accept this, it meant that some people were not doing business with the organisation who might have otherwise. Also, with computer technology changing all the time, there was the cost of ensuring that people could be trained on rapidly changing state-of-the-art equipment.' In 1994 the venture was reluctantly closed.

A 1992 weekend workshop in the Blue Mountains reviewed the organisation's history, strengths and weaknesses and future directions. One outcome was a

decision to change the name of the organisation to WorkVentures. More importantly, its new vision was to become more business-like. To Steve, 'this meant in part embracing scale and really seeing how effectively we could grow the organisation. But it also meant focusing some energy on innovation – doing new things, more diverse things; and some energy on improving our quality of service in what we were doing already.'

The organisation decided that apart from its repair centre in the IT industry, it needed to get into other growth industries that could drive future employment in the early phase of their emergence. The hospitality industry was one such growth area at the time. As a result, in 1994 WorkVentures got into hospitality training, but again in a real business setting.

The project came about in an unusual way. As part of a commitment to corporate social responsibility, the health and transport company Mayne Nickless invited non-profits to propose ideas for a project to engage its staff with the community. WorkVentures made two suggestions: a bicycle maintenance and recycling venture and a restaurant along the lines of Jamie Oliver's ventures in training young unemployed people. Mayne Nickless put \$10,000 towards funding for a business plan for the restaurant, then \$250,000 to start the business in 1995.

Premises for the restaurant, called Newton's, were rented in an inner-city area with many restaurants, close to Surry Hills. Designers were brought in to make it a 'fairly trendy place,' as Steve puts it. Other funds came from the SkillShare program and elsewhere. Newton's was, however, a commercial failure, and lost \$300,000 over the following three years.

What went wrong? Steve thinks there were two main reasons: 'Firstly, finding a manager who both knew the hospitality industry well and was a skilled and experienced business person in their own right, who would run it as if it was their own business.' And the second reason? 'Well, let's just say that a restaurant is very much a cash business, shall we?'

After three years the restaurant was turned into a joint venture with another partner, then sold in 2000 after the 5-year lease expired.

Balancing the books

When in 1997 SkillShare ended and the new Job Network was being competitively contracted, WorkVentures decided to work with other non-profits around the country.

They created a new national organisation, called Job Futures, to put together a large-scale tender to deliver Job Network services across Australia. Job Futures would then contract out the work to its member organisations. This was driven by a concern that many small non-profit organisations and the social capital they represented would be lost with the introduction of the Job Network. Also, Steve had looked at research about the effects of commercial tendering on the non-profit sector in the USA and Britain and seen a trend towards loss of market share for the non-profit sector after the first years of tendering.

By joining forces for the purposes of tendering and contract management, Job Futures hoped to compete with the big players, both for-profit and non-profit. Twenty three organisations were initially involved, and though several founders were linked to the Anglican Church, Job Futures welcomed and included secular organisations. In 2008 Job Futures members number 55.

Through Job Futures, WorkVentures won business to deliver Job Network services at three sites in Sydney, at Maroubra, East Sydney and Redfern. After the second round of the Job Network tender in 1999, two further sites were opened in Sydney. In the 2003 contract round, only Maroubra and Redfern were retained, but when another organisation experienced financial difficulties and lost its Job Network contract in 2004, WorkVentures added five new sites in and outside greater Sydney. By 2006, three of those sites were lost or handed over to other organisations, and by mid-2007 only the Chatswood site remained.

For Steve, this short-cycle contracting process accompanied by business reallocation based on performance demonstrates how fickle government funding can be and how challenging it is to base a secure business upon it. Creating a profit centre like the Sydney ITeC Repair Centre gives WorkVentures its own source of funds to create services in disadvantaged communities, as well as employing people who found it difficult to get secure jobs.

GOVERNANCE

Steve has been in his own words 'a relatively conservative financial manager,' and had set aside profits made in most years, so the organisation was able to live with a couple of bad years.

The learning from its losses taught Steve the importance of investing in people. 'Looking back over the years, while we had grown the skills base internally among our staff, we needed financial skills.' In 2004 Work Ventures hired a Chief Financial Officer, Arsenio Alegre, who had previously worked in the private sector, more recently at American Express in Europe.

Work Ventures also recognised that it needed a broader mix of skilled people on its Board, people with business contacts and experience. Over the years, it appointed to the Board people with extensive experience in finance, law and human resources management.

One face on the Board is Neville Cox, formerly a senior executive in the Commonwealth Bank. For an organisation like WorkVentures, he believes in a different conception of value. 'In a downtown corporation your responsibility is to increase shareholder value, but our responsibility at WorkVentures is to do things with our available resources to maximise the impact for good in the community. It's not about the dollars you make but the number of lives you change.'

ACTIVITIES AND ENTERPRISES

Sydney ITeC Repair Centre

The Sydney ITeC Repair Centre (SIRC) is one of Australia's largest business equipment repair operations, fixing not just computers but most kinds of business equipment such as ATMs, cash registers, scanners, and even parking meters.

In 2007 the SIRC had 85 full-time employees, completed over 70,000 repairs, turned over \$8 million and generated significant profit.

The SIRC was started in 1988, and grew out of a PCS Information Technology Centre (ITeC) in Surry Hills that was delivering skills training and work experience in IT for unemployed people. As part of its program to train people to use computers and their software, the ITeC provided electronics training on the hardware. An important element of that training involved computer repairs.

During 1988 a small computer repair service was set up. Initially just based in a corner of one of the ITeC training rooms, it employed one of the training graduates on

a casual basis to repair keyboards. This was the first contract.

From there the business grew, driven by the need of the ITeC – funded by the government on a dollar-for-dollar basis – to earn income. It was driven also by broader changes in the IT industry. Though many of the ITeC's first graduates were taken on by large companies, at around this time companies increasingly began to outsource their work. WorkVentures took the opportunity to pick up service contracts. At the same time, companies tended to throw away broken equipment rather than fix it. ITeC staff believed it could repair equipment more cheaply than it would cost the companies to import replacement equipment, as they were already doing with keyboards.

The repair service moved into the business incubator in Surry Hills, established with a grant from the State Government. Over the first four or five years, all profits made by the service were reinvested in its growth and development. By 1994 the Repair Centre employed 34 full-time staff and occupied three factory units. Between 1995 and 1999 WorkVentures took over the repair centres of a succession of computer manufacturers in Sydney and Melbourne, including the retrenched staff in some cases.

In 1999 the business had grown to the point of needing to be re-housed in its current premises near Mascot airport. Clients of the Repair Centre include IT companies such as NCR, Fujitsu and IBM. The Centre continues to train clients in electronics, and its expertise lies in ATMs, telephony, power supplies, retail equipment, monitors, printers and banking products.

Neighbourhood Technology Centres

Steve Lawrence was asked for advice in 2000 by the NSW Department of Housing, who recognised the need for an employment strategy in its public housing areas.

On its own part, WorkVentures welcomed the opportunity to return to its roots in community development. It proposed to create Neighbourhood Technology Centres, where people could learn basic computer skills, access the internet, e-mail and office applications. This contact might lead to ownership of an affordable quality recycled computer, engagement with a broader range of community activities through the Centres, and perhaps pathways to further skills development and employment.

A Neighbourhood Technology Centre was opened in Macquarie Fields in 2001, followed by three more, in Redfern,

Claymore and then Woolloomooloo over the following three years. The Department of Housing provided premises for the Centres, which were also supported by Microsoft and the Westpac Foundation. A total of ten Centres was planned for the Sydney's inner city and south-western suburbs, and other support has come from the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, NSW State and Regional Development Department, the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services and major grant-making foundations.

Though the Centres have a strong technology leaning, they are essentially community centres, running such activities such as homework clubs, women's groups and sausage sizzles alongside IT services. This is based on the principle that community development begins by meeting needs as identified by local people themselves, and means that each Centre will develop in a different way.

The Centre in the Airds area of Campbelltown, for example, has a job club, small business training, a community craft group, community markets, a community garden, counselling and a legal advice service alongside its IT training and computer access. After opening in late 2006, the Airds Centre had 457 local resident members by the end of 2007. Frances Jamieson, who setup the centre and manages it stresses the importance of the membership principle. 'It's not a drop-in kind of community centre: membership gives a sense of belonging and ownership, which is essential. When people come through the door, they are treated with respect. We're 'demand driven.' As at the other centres, membership and most services are free.

Each Centre costs around \$100,000 per year to run. Funding and in-kind assistance for them comes from a variety of sources, and includes cash contributions from WorkVentures. Volunteer support, mostly from local residents, is a key contribution to the resources they need to run. There are around 500 volunteers working in the five WorkVentures Connect Centres.

Steve believes that a long term commitment is critical to the contribution the Connect Centres can make to these communities. 'You can't make a sustainable difference in any of these communities in under 10 years – you've got to commit to that length of stay.' He also believes that there needs to be a venture within each centre that is a profitable activity, to help fund community development.

Work Ventures Connect IT
In partnership with Westpac, Microsoft, other corporations and government departments, Connect IT has since 2002 recycled surplus business computers for re-use by low-income people, non-profit agencies and schools who could not otherwise afford them. Connect IT collects the computers, refurbishes them, loads them with software donated by Microsoft and sells them to the new users at affordable prices.

Connect IT also offers free technical support through a call centre, training, and 25 hours free internet access. In 2005 the scheme was extended nationally through partnership with other non-profits in other states and regions.

The number of computers being recycled this way is growing. The Westpac Bank, for example, donated 107 pallet-loads of decommissioned computers in 2002. In 2005 around 1200 computers were sold to low-income individuals and 212 schools and non-profit organisations. By 2007, this had grown to around 3,000.

Social Ventures Australia
In 2002 along with the Benevolent Society, the Smith Family Foundation and the AMP Foundation, Work Ventures funded a new organisation, Social Ventures Australia (SVA), to support the non-profit sector to deliver innovative solutions to solve Australia's critical social issues. These issues can range from the environment and education to employment and economic development. SVA provides resources such as educational material, workshops, business mentoring, and where possible, seed funding.

Work Ventures made an investment of \$250,000 over three years towards SVA's starting capital. This investment was also provided by the two other non-profit founding agencies. One of the organisations supported by Social Ventures Australia is Future Employment Opportunities (see page 34).

THE FUTURE
During 2007 Steve Lawrence stepped down as CEO of Work Ventures after 28 years as its key leader.

This decision was provoked by a personal review and his recognition that he is 'best at lighting fires, but not so good at tending them.' Steve recognised that to achieve its potential WorkVentures could not just remain a community innovator, it would need a CEO who could build a high performance organisation.

The Board of WorkVentures created the role of 'Founder and Social Entrepreneur,' to give Steve opportunities to develop innovative responses to the social challenges faced by socially excluded communities and groups. Steve has been involved in the establishment of the Australian Social Innovations Exchange, a multi-sector collaborative network closely connected to a UK-based global Social Innovation Exchange led by the Young Foundation in London.

Under the leadership of its new CEO, Arsenio Alegre, WorkVentures is focusing on building its core operations in employment services, the Group Training program, computer refurbishment and reuse, community regeneration in high need neighbourhoods and WorkVentures' job generation in business equipment repairs. The organisation's five key priorities are to: narrow the 'digital divide;' create pathways and opportunities for employment; support people to build sustainable small enterprises; encourage individuals to re-engage with learning; and work with indigenous communities to build sustainable solutions to long-term challenges.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

1. There's a big difference between doing a business plan or feasibility study and running the real business. No matter how well you plan, the market doesn't necessarily respond the way you might predict ...
2. You have to capitalise ventures properly.
3. Government funding is often too fickle to base a business on.
4. There are not too many businesses around that work well with the disadvantaged as their employees, enable them to learn skills on the job and also make profits.
5. For every venture you have to have an enterprise champion who has the skills to do things and make things work, running that business as if it were their own business.

Steve Lawrence WORK VENTURES CEO 1979-2007

SHAREHOLDER VALUE

In a downtown corporation your responsibility is to increase shareholder value, but our responsibility at WorkVentures is to do things with our available resources to maximise the impact for good in the community. It's not about the dollars you make but the number of lives you change.

Neville Cox WORK VENTURES BOARD MEMBER

You can't make a sustainable difference in any of these communities in under 10 years – you've got to commit to that length of stay.

Steve Lawrence CEO 1979-2007, WORKVENTURES

FUTURE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

CASE STUDY SIX

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

There’s a long quote about change and enterprise on the wall of the office of the CEO of Future Employment Opportunities, Peter Cox. Enterprising people and organisations are not just able to survive change, it says, but will drive and create change, quite deliberately. This might account for the survival and growth of FEO, which lost two of its main programs in 1998 and decided not to tender for the Job Network. Now FEO manages a range of largely self-funded employment projects designed to give people – mainly unemployed people – the opportunity to create work or activity for themselves.

Future Employment Opportunities (FEO) started as a Community Youth Support Scheme in 1981, helping young people into work through personal support and employment training. This was succeeded by the SkillShare program in 1989. In 1990 FEO, then known as Eaglehawk SkillShare, moved into its current premises at the Eaglehawk Railway Station before expanding its focus to enterprise development to address the lack of jobs. Over time, FEO has moved into job creation and support for business start-ups as a way to promote economic security, personal dignity and freedom.

This was a response to the experience of delivering the SkillShare program, which prepared people to get jobs that at that time were simply not available. As Peter Cox put it, ‘FEO realised that anyone could train people for existing jobs, but the fundamental problem with unemployment is that there are not enough jobs in the area for people that actually want them.’

The first major initiative was the Eaglehawk Enterprise Park. In 1991 the Commonwealth Government was making \$250,000 grants to local councils for public works programs. By this time FEO had a vibrant Management Committee made up of successful business people. When the Borough of Eaglehawk got its grant it decided to build something lasting that would also do something to create employment.

Eaglehawk SkillShare was a registered training organisation and proposed to the

council that it could maximise the value of the \$250,000 grant by building the enterprise park through mobilising the local pool of unemployed people, who could get on-site training that would result in formally recognised qualifications.

At that time there was an acute shortage of steel fabricators, welders, plant operators and other skilled tradespeople. Eaglehawk SkillShare was able to access training funds to train people on the job. This was better, says Peter than being in ‘some classroom where they’d weld two bits of metal together and then throw them in the recycle bin.’

Spent this way through FEO, the original \$250,000 capital grant funding mobilised several times its original value in training dollars over the 1992-1996 period. It meant that many more enterprise park units were able to be built than if the grant had been used to pay a private contractor.

This FEO and council initiative went on to inspire the construction of similar enterprise parks across the region. In 1997 FEO and the council formed a steering committee to see whether the Eaglehawk project was a feasible model to apply in other parts of Central Victoria. It was timely; a number of public services were being closed by the State Government at the time. In Castlemaine there was a derelict three-storey building because of hospital amalgamations. In Gisborne there was an old Works Depot owned by one of the Shires that was unused due to council amalgamations.

A new company limited by guarantee was formed, the Regional Enterprise Network Central Victoria Ltd, to develop these opportunities. FEO made a deliberate decision to cede control of the enterprise, both to support its growth and because FEO recognised that to be true to its own philosophy of regional development, the Board of the new company would need members from different shires across the region to make decisions in the best interest of the region overall.

Risks and turning points
FEO’s Peter Cox remembers the period of 1997-1998 as the worst time in his working life. In that period FEO lost its

\$250,000 annual funding for SkillShare. Though that was expected, the other event was not. FEO had submitted a tender to the Regional Enterprise Network Central Victoria, which it helped to create, to administer and develop the new network of enterprise parks. FEO did not win the tender.

In the same period, FEO made a conscious decision not to tender for contracts through the Job Network. Peter recalls ‘We didn’t have a problem at all with the competitive tendering aspects of it, we didn’t have a problem with that at all. We did put in an application but withdrew when it was clear that we’d get too tied up with the guidelines, with regulation ... Having control of your own finances and your own guidelines is just so vital. You can’t police jobseekers on the one hand and then seek to help them on the other. You can’t be a compliance officer as well as being a helper. We’ve never regretted the decision; that’s what helped us to concentrate on our goals.’

Still, at the time, ‘It was devastating, the two things happening together. We were on our knees.’ FEO continued on a smaller scale as a provider of adult community education and two years later regained the contract for the administration of the Regional Enterprise Network, now known as Workspace Australia Ltd. It has retained it ever since. From \$840,000 turnover in 1998, FEO has grown to \$2 million, according to Peter, simply by ‘concentrating on the things we’re interested in.’

Balancing the books
A guiding principle held dear by FEO is re-investing the income earned into the enterprise that generated it.

Peter Cox cites the recycling business, the biggest growth area for FEO, as an example. ‘If we took money out of the recycling business and put it into another enterprise, then that business may not be where it is today. The people involved deserve to be rewarded. It might be through buying a new piece of machinery, it might be through putting another staff member on. If you’re going to say, as many people in non-profits say, that you are going to empower people, you need to

Our organisation realised that anyone could train people for existing jobs but the fundamental problem with unemployment is that there are not enough jobs in the area for people that actually want them. So we started to look around for job creation ideas ...

We can learn a lot from successful business people by using their strategies but directing them towards a social goal. That’s what drives us.

Peter Cox FEO



MILESTONES

1981	<i>Commenced Community Youth Support Scheme</i>
1984	<i>Incorporated as Eaglehawk CYSS Inc</i>
1989	<i>Received SkillShare grant funding and changed incorporation to Future Employment Opportunities Inc</i>
1991	<i>Joined with Borough of Eaglehawk to construct a 15 factory industrial estate</i>
1994	<i>Commenced Eaglehawk Recycle Shop in partnership with City of Greater Bendigo</i>
1994	<i>Commenced On Track Personnel</i>
1998	<i>Lost major funding sources</i>
1998	<i>Became Adult Community Education (ACE) Provider – On Track Employment & Training</i>
1999	<i>Won contract to manage Transfer Stations</i>
2000	<i>Won contract to manage 7 Business Incubators in Central Victoria</i>
2001	<i>Started Enhance IT to recycle computers</i>
2005	<i>Commenced TradeStart for 15-19 year olds</i>
2007	<i>Published Community Recycling Venture Guide</i>
2008	<i>Commenced Eaglehawk Light Steel Fabrication</i>

FEO IN 2008

Effective full-time staff: **34**
Volunteers: **20**
Turnover last year: **\$1.9 million**
Net assets: **\$634,000**
Sites: **13** in Bendigo, Eaglehawk, Gisborne, Maldon, Strathfieldsaye, Huntly, Heathcote, Donald, Dunolly and Castlemaine
Number of people using the organisation’s services last year: **500**
Customers of goods and services: **20,000**
Percentage of total income generated by social enterprises: **75%**
Number of enterprise centres managed in the Central Victoria region: **7**
Number of start-up enterprises using the enterprise centres: **75**
Annual turnover of recycling project: **\$450,000**
Waste diverted from landfill by recycling project: **4,000 tonnes**
People in sustained employment at the recycling service: **14**

CONTACT

Website: **www.feo.net.au**
Phone: **03 5446 7046**
Email for general enquiries: **info@feo.net.au**

demonstrate it, and not just talk about it. People need to be convinced that they've got a budget and that if they make a surplus, they decide what happens to that surplus. That's how we've operated over many years.'

Another example is the \$180,000 earned by FEO to manage the regional enterprise network sites. That money stays with the enterprise network, and has been used to increase staffing. Now there is an accountant to manage the operation, a full-time business advisor, a part-time business mentor and a full-time administration role, and centres are continually being upgraded.

Governance

Membership of the Board of FEO is strategically determined.

Though a core of long-standing Board members ensures continuity, some Board positions are turned over regularly to ensure a flow of new ideas. Some people bring influence; the local councillor, for example, who supported FEO in the enterprise park development. Other Board members bring the new areas of experience and expertise needed, which change over time.

Just as each FEO unit controls the spending of its own surplus, units are also encouraged to set their own directions within the context of the organisation's overall vision and mission. Peter Cox urges different units of FEO operations to generate their own advisory groups. 'Just as I need a Board of Directors to sit round the table with me so that we go forward together by making informed decisions, what better idea than having an advisory group for our skills training unit, made up of employers?'

FEO has attracted funding, mentoring and consultancy support from Social Ventures Australia (SVA) because, in the words of SVA, 'FEO has an outstanding, nationally-recognised track record of establishing start-up social enterprises that are sustainable and create real social and environmental impact. It has demonstrated exceptional creativity and entrepreneurship in stimulating meaningful long term employment.' Peter Cox attributes FEO's decision to set ambitious growth targets to the support and guidance of SVA.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND VALUES

Many non-profit organisations cherish staff whose commitment and loyalty to the organisation is long term. But at FEO, where up to 75 percent of the staff were

previously unemployed, the organisation hopes to train them and move them on to something better because it doesn't have the wage capacity to pay them what they could get elsewhere.

It is important that the management staff at FEO are entrepreneurial. Peter Cox remembers one manager, employed a couple of years ago who 'just wasn't up to our creative thinking. It was too much for him. We don't leave any stone unturned to get a jobseeker a job or help someone who's starting a business to make that business profitable. To be so emphatic about those outcomes means that you've got to have direction, you've got to have policy, you've got to have rules you abide by. To my way of thinking non-profits don't have them enough.'

Peter believes that non-profit organisations can learn to be successful from the approach and strategies of for-profit businesses. 'It's exactly the same, it makes no difference whether the goal is getting people into employment or making a million dollars profit ... We can learn a lot from successful business people, using their strategies but directing them towards a social goal. That's what drives us.'

ACTIVITIES AND ENTERPRISES

Eaglehawk Recycle Shop
The Eaglehawk Recycle Shop is on a landfill area next to the site of Eaglehawk Enterprise Park. Originally known as the Eaglehawk Recovery and Sales Yard, it started in 1994. At the request of FEO, the local council granted FEO a licence to recover recyclable materials from the tip face at the landfill, and the Commonwealth Government provided start-up training funds of \$20,000. FEO put an advertisement in the local paper and ten volunteers responded.

Peter Cox remembers: 'On the first day the 10 volunteers – all job seekers – began their training session with a walk to the tip face. Each picked up an item. As they stood in a circle, a question was posed; 'What next?' The response from the group was to 'sell it' and from this came more questions like 'How much for?' 'How are we going to let people know we are here?'; 'What times are we going to open?'; and 'How are we going to bring this stuff back from the tip face? The group had started constructing their own business plan.'

This was training in a real-life setting. The workers started making sales immediately and this income was used to purchase a shed, a ute and a trailer, all essential for the operation of the enterprise. Now the machinery at the site includes a

fork-lift truck, a front-loader and a flat-bed tray-truck, all purchased from sales income.

Skills taught on-site include cardboard baling, tyre rims removal, degassing of refrigerators, electrical testing and tagging, daily and monthly record-keeping, occupational health and safety, first aid, sales, and of course recycling.

In 2005-2006 over 3,700 tonnes of material were recovered, roughly 2,500 tonnes of which were then sold (generating 59 percent of the total income) through the Eaglehawk Recycle Shop. Of the remainder, 800 tonnes (generating 30 percent of the total income) were sold as scrap metal.

The work at the Recycle Shop, along with other Council initiatives such as curb-side pick ups and green waste and concrete recycling has been credited with extending the lifetime of the Eaglehawk landfill by at least nine years.

Annual turnover is now over \$450,000 per annum and funds the employment of 9 full-time and 5 part-time permanent waste management staff, all paid out of income generated from sales.

The Eaglehawk Enterprise Park

The Eaglehawk Enterprise Park has operated since 1994. Its 15 factory units were built using unemployed people in training to learn trade skills. It was important to do the training on a real-life site because the people involved were long-term, low-skill unemployed males not used to working in a classroom and not likely to go to a TAFE college.

FEO had to be creative in resourcing the project. For example, a plant operators course would have needed around three quarters of a million dollars just to buy the appropriate machinery. When an excavator was needed, FEO found an old rusty one down in Warrnambool. They trucked it back and for the first month of the course, the trainees pulled the excavator to pieces, rebuilt and repainted it. After using it for four years, FEO sold it for \$16,000, what they paid for it. In the meantime, 60 people had got their excavator licences on it while doing work on the building site.

FEO employed three trainers: a qualified builder, steel fabricator, and plant operator. Each had a team of eight people. As they finished their training, new groups would start. Though it was commonly believed that unemployed people didn't have the skills, there were a lot of highly skilled people out of work at that time. The site was transformed.

Since 1996 more units have been built at Eaglehawk Enterprise Park, using profits from rental income from the original development. Now there are 18 units, each housing start-up businesses ranging

from one to organise workshops, a small foundry, and one to repair and retro fit coffee machines.

Other Central Victoria Enterprise Parks

FEO is the managing agent for Workspace Australia Ltd, a separately incorporated company that operates enterprise centres in Eaglehawk, Bendigo, Castlemaine, Maldon, Gisborne, Dunolly and Donald.

This arrangement means low-cost management and administration overheads for the centres, which 'run on the smell of an oily rag,' according to Peter Cox.

In total, Workspace has 75 tenants and occupancy rates run at an average of over 90 percent. The staff in FEO's Workspace unit also support people with business ideas who come into FEO.

Workspace Australia Ltd is a fully sustainable enterprise. In partnership with five local government authorities and a hospital Board it collects rents to sustain its operation without any government funding.

Enhance IT

Enhance IT recycles unused computers donated by local government, businesses, banks and schools, distributing them at low cost to low-income families.

FEO enterprises are established on strict business criteria based on market niches that will not compete with existing jobs in the local economy ...

The key characteristic of these enterprises is that they are business opportunities which are clearly good for the local community and which are commercially viable. Above all, they must create employment. They must pay their own way. Together they will solve some of the problems of unemployment, poverty and economic decline.

FEO 2008 BUSINESS PLAN

This was in response to studies showing that children in such families are falling behind at school. Enhance also provides a low cost repair service to health care card holders.

The important partner in this enterprise is Microsoft for, as Peter Cox points out, 'It's pointless recycling computers if you haven't got software.' FEO has a written agreement with Microsoft to use their software, and back in 2003 was the third organisation in Australia, and the first in regional Australia, to have that kind of partnership with Microsoft.

TradeStart

Tradestart was funded by the AMP Foundation through Social Ventures

Australia, and was established in 2005 to work with 15 to 19 year olds (25 each year) who are unemployed or at risk of leaving school. This social enterprise teaches new trade skills in a workshop environment, develops literacy and numeracy skills, and arranges work experience placements, apprenticeships and traineeships.

TradeStart began when SVA brokered a \$50,000 grant by putting the AMP Foundation in touch with FEO. FEO explained to the Foundation that there were a thousand young people under 19 not attending school in the Bendigo area. Children were leaving school as early as Year 7, and missing out on an education. Within that group there were some who wanted to work with their hands on a factory floor. The \$50,000 enabled FEO to employ tradesmen to help the kids learn skills, making real products for sale. In the first year \$10,000 in sales income was generated, \$20,000 in the second year and in the third \$37,000.

Tradestart products include conference tables, work benches, gates, bike racks, clothing racks, gymnasium equipment, trolleys and display stands.

FEO goes to schools and tells them 'We're taking your kids. Doesn't it make

On Track

On Track provides training and employment services as a Registered Training Organisation. These services were first offered in the days of the SkillShare program but now most of them are funded by various programs of the Victoria State Government, for the most part through Adult, Community and Further Education funding.

In 2006-2007 about 500 participants received Accredited Certificates or Statements of Attainment from On Track training programs. Aged Care and Children's Services are growth areas gaining the most employment outcomes.

Community Recycling Ventures

Social Ventures Australia also provided start-up funding of \$20,000 for FEO's Community Recycling Ventures, which aims to build on the success of the Eaglehawk Recycling Shop. To this end, FEO has produced and launched the Guide to Starting a Community Recycling Venture, which outlines the concept and benefits, along with a detailed guide on how to get started. Visitors come to visit the Eaglehawk Recycle Shop from around Australia.

The Guide is available at www.communityrecycling.com.au and FEO provides support to organisations wanting to establish a similar enterprise.

THE FUTURE

FEO has finalised its strategic plan for 2008-2010 and aims to double its income from \$2 million to \$4 million in order to create new employment opportunities.

Seeking new income-generating social enterprises that are financially viable, FEO is currently looking at the issues around climate change, childcare and plastics recycling to consider how services in these areas might create the next wave of jobs. FEO is also considering how a resource such as waste, disused buildings, or unwanted computers might generate income, and how the non-profit sector might be able to support FEO enterprises by purchasing goods or services known to be creating new jobs FEO hopes to partner with another regional community, to replicate what has been achieved at Eaglehawk.

sense that if your school is going to buy, say, some furniture or equipment, you should get the kids that aren't attending school to actually manufacture them?' Though some baulk at the fact that Tradestart does not pay the kids for their work, FEO argues that by being in TradeStart for one or two days a week, working with a tradesman, the young people have a better chance of getting a job, returning to school, and generally staying out of trouble. The goal for TradeStart is 6 employment outcomes a year, with around 12 people returning to school. It is a small community response to the high numbers of young people who leave school early.

CAREER EMPLOYMENT AUSTRALIA GROUP

CASE STUDY SEVEN

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

In an era of unprecedented competition in the employment services market the CEA Group of eight Queensland community non-profit organisations represents an admirable blend of unity and diversity, sharing values, a group manager, most of its staff, and program delivery experience.

The head of the Group, Shane Cowan, prefers to be known as Group Manager rather than CEO. He leads the group of eight community non-profit organisations¹ delivering a wide range of State and Commonwealth programs in 18 locations from Cairns to the Gold Coast. The shared values of this network were what brought the original six members of the CEA Consortium together in 1997, when so many smaller community organisations like them were wondering whether to tender for the new Job Network.

Shane remembers, ‘There were a number

The first move to cooperative working had come earlier in 1989 when two CYSS projects were merged to become the successor service to CYSS, SkillShare.³ This was not entirely easy: two boards of management were merged and all staff positions in the newly merged organisation had to be re-advertised and filled.

That experience of changed organisational structure to meet new conditions laid the basis for the later consortium company formed to tender jointly for Job Network contracts in 1997. Again, though, it was not easy. ‘None of us wanted to step forward and be the leader of the organisations,’ says Shane, ‘but essentially we kept moving forward.’ The Career Employment Australia Consortium Ltd company only won a small slice of Job Network business, signing up apprentices and trainees through the newly created New Apprenticeship Centre (NAC). CEA had to become very lean. Only three of

affiliations, and the trust each enjoys locally, built up over many years. What the CEA Group does is to add other strengths, one of which is to tender for contracts. It recognises that different member organisations have different capacities, strengths and historical relationships with funding bodies. One member organisation has done a lot of work and has a demonstrated track record with families and communities through a state program, so tenders for that work are submitted through that particular organisation.

Through the Group, programs previously run by one organisation can go ‘multi-site,’ widening the scope of employment, training and support services and building up staff expertise. The NEIS⁴ program, for example, was offered initially by just one of the member organisations but then was delivered by several. In this way, CEA brings together and benefits from nine sets of expertise, nine good reputations.

I think the most important thing is that we were all client-focused. We were all about how we could value-add and deliver the best, most holistic service to our communities.

I think that is the strongest driving point still today.

Shane Cowan CEA GROUP

Risks and turning points

CEA has confronted challenges to its intention to stay with its values and delivery strengths, remaining client-focused. At one point the Group took on a tree planting contract to enable it to train people in horticultural skills. But other skills were needed, to set up the barricades around the sites for example, or to deal with signage and safety and traffic control. CEA found that staff ended up doing all that. Committed to finishing, they had staff working weekends and nights to ensure the contract was delivered on time.

The organisation won’t make this mistake again. As Shane puts it, ‘It took us away from being client focused. It wasn’t what they were there to do but we still had to do it. So we are now very careful in our choice of contracts to tender for. We only take a contract that meets our clients’ needs, not just any old contract that keeps us in a job. That has been a

of other community organisations we’d been networking with over a number of years, from the Sunshine Coast to the Gold Coast. We all got together. Five or six² of us that thought we could work as a united team. We all had very similar values which made that extremely easy to do. I think the most important thing is that we were all client-focused. We were all about how we could value-add and deliver the best, most holistic service to our communities.

I think that is still the strongest driving point today.’

the original consortium members survived. Stones Corner changed its name to become CEA Inc. and transitioned to a leadership role for the survivors and the four other organisations that would join the group between 1999 and 2003. The CEA Group emerged as a group of independent non-profits, with no legal binding structure and bound only by shared values and passion.

The consortium was not a full-blown merger and neither is the CEA Group. Each independent member has retained what it cherishes most – its local identity and

1. Organisations forming the CEA Group are: Bay Islands Community Services Inc; Bridging the Gap – Job Help Gold Coast Inc; BTC Cooperative Ltd; Career Employment Australia Consortium Ltd; Career Employment Australia Inc; Gold Coast Skills Centre Inc; Northside Skills Training Project Inc; and Wynnum Manly Employment & Training Inc.
2. There were in fact six organisations created what was originally known as the Career Employment Australia Consortium in 1997: Stones Corner SkillShare; Puddington SkillShare; Northside Skills Training Project Inc; Gold Coast Skill Centre; Maroochydore SkillShare and Milton SkillShare.
3 and 4. Refer to Glossary.

We do the things that we think are right and important and not necessarily always the things that are financially astute. That’s why we’ve invested over a million dollars saving community organisations that were going down the tubes, some now part of CEA Group.

Shane Cowan CEA GROUP



MILESTONES

1980-1981	<i>Some of the original CEA members started as Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS) Projects</i>
1989	<i>Merger of two Brisbane CYSS projects to create Stones Corner SkillShare</i>
1997	<i>Creation of a consortium company bringing together six Queensland community organisations to tender for Job Network</i>
1997-1998	<i>Job Network contract won for a New Apprenticeships Centre</i>
1999	<i>CEA decided to tender for a Work For the Dole pilot program</i>
2000	<i>Independent non-profits transitioned to operating as a group</i>
2002	<i>Creation of the Business Development Centre through Career Employment Australia Inc</i>
2006	<i>Formally using the term CEA Group</i>

CEA GROUP IN 2008

Effective full-time staff: **70**

Volunteers: **50**

Turnover last year: **\$8 million**

Net assets: **\$5 million**

Sites: **18 in:**

North Queensland – Cairns & Townsville

Central Queensland – Rockhampton & Maryborough

Western Queensland – Toowoomba

Southern Queensland – Sunshine Coast, Northgate, Redcliffe, Coorparoo, Manly, Salisbury, Woodridge, Ipswich & Beenleigh

Moreton Bay – Russell Island & Macleay Island

Gold Coast – Southport & Miami

Number of people using the organisation’s services last year: **15,000**



ENTERPRISES

Annual turnover of recycling project: **600 computers**

Occupancy rate of business incubator during 2008: **95%**

Employment placement rate for people in training schemes: **around 80%**

Building company - subcontracts State Government Work

AWARDS

The CEA Group has not nominated itself for awards, believing that it is well repaid by recognition from the thousands of people it helps each year.

CONTACT

Website: **www.ceagroup.com.au**

Phone: **07 3397 9899**

Email for general enquiries: **cea@ceagroup.com.au**

very good lesson.’

Another more complex decision was whether CEA should become involved in the federal government’s Work For the Dole scheme⁵ in 1999. ‘We were philosophically opposed to it,’ Shane recalls. The CEA Board said ‘We’re not going to tender for it.’ Then I started to hear from the community concerns that people were going to be exploited.’

Shane proposed to the Board that the only way CEA could address the concerns was to win a Work For the Dole tender and do it properly. They agreed to go ahead, and we were successful in getting a pilot program. CEA ran the first project in the country and had 100 percent completions and participants going into employment for the first two years of operation. To achieve this, CEA focused on skill shortage areas and on practical skills that would enable people to find jobs. As part of the process they included job-search. ‘We just used our historical experience and common sense and it worked. What was clear to me is that you’ve got to do it the right way and show them. We were written up in Hansard for our Work For the Dole scheme as a good project with excellent outcomes.’

Like many other organisations running Work For the Dole, CEA sees it as a means of creating or renovating community assets such as historic buildings and recreational areas, and has done a large amount of this kind of work. Shane believes it is not just the community that benefits, but the clients as well. ‘It’s good to have clients involved. Programs that take our clients into the community so they can demonstrate their value to others, whether through an industry placement or a project that builds a facility like a community centre. At the opening I like to see the clients themselves handing over the keys; that’s really a proud moment for them. It’s not really about CEA. What’s good is the pride and self esteem the clients gain from getting the job done.’

From these kinds of experiences have come lessons about how to keep a client-centred focus. When CEA or one of its member organisations tenders to deliver a service, ‘We write our tender our way and then if we’re successful we can do it our way. If we don’t get it, then it means that it’s not the kind of program we can run in our own way ... We’re not focused on grabbing programs that might drift us away from being client-focused.’

Balancing the books

CEA sees the financial surplus it might make from a contract as being secondary to the quality of the services it provides.

If the service is improved by buying a warm coat for the person who needs it or by spending more time than would be regarded as ‘profitable’ by a less client-focused organisation, CEA is clear about its priorities.

CEA also does not believe in spending too much on image. Though it wants to create for its clients an environment that supports their dignity and self-respect, CEA does not spend its money on ‘flash advertising, flash premises, flash furniture and brand new cars,’ in the words of Shane Cowan. Though Shane supports advertising for a purpose, such as getting into a new market, in his view, ‘The best advertising is doing the right job and doing it properly and having a commitment to each person and fulfilling that commitment. You will then get in countless other referrals as a result of the goodwill you generate, which will last for years.’

CEA firmly believes that any remaining surpluses it has should be regarded as assets belonging to the community. ‘We do the things that we think are right and important and not necessarily always the things that are financially astute. That’s why we’ve invested over a million dollars saving

community organisations that were going down the tubes, some now part of the CEA Group. The CEA Board are very strong about this, that with all the regulatory and governance requirements that non-profits have to meet, it’s actually very hard for small community organisations to exist. We’ve helped all kinds of other community organisations along the way.’

As one example, every CEA facility is used by other community groups at night and on weekends. They are given a key with no charge, just a request to respect the place, keep it tidy and recognise that it’s a working place for staff.

Some staff sponsor groups themselves from their own income, such as one that hands out food to young people in the parks at night. CEA also sponsors a group of retired people who like to do things with their hands, making toys that they donate to churches and hospitals for kids who are sick. CEA is helping five organisations in South East Queensland at present. The Board backs each proposal, and each commitment is annually budgeted in advance, to guarantee and deliver the support needed. This has been going on for about eight years. CEA’s cash support to community groups was around \$100,000 last financial year and CEA is proud to be able to support other community activities from its contracts and tenders.

I suppose the greatest satisfaction I ever feel is when you don’t have to turn a client away. Having enough pieces of the Lego or the jigsaw, that’s the way we see it, so that when a person isn’t able to be assisted through one program, we’re still able to do something through another. That is our relentless task ... When we’ve had to turn someone away, we ask ourselves: ‘where should we be going for funding to help that person?’ ... We don’t want to do everything, but if there is a need we have to ask why we’re not meeting it ... It’s about helping the client ... it’s about what we do to assist individuals to achieve their goals.

Shane Cowan CEA GROUP

Governance

Shane Cowan sees a committed board as a key to CEA’s success as a community organisation, along with a good deal of continuity on the board.

In its infancy CEA had a 12 member board, but soon decided it would make for more effective management and decision-making if this number was reduced to five. Those same five still hold office today.

At the moment it’s easy to find someone a job. What’s hard is to prepare them and keep them there.

Shane Cowan CEA GROUP

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND VALUES

CEA’s client-centred approach is oriented to serving the most disadvantaged, people who remain unemployed despite a buoyant labour market, not out of contrariness or laziness, but because of the multiple and often complex barriers that many of them face: physical or intellectual disabilities, demanding and difficult family circumstances, criminal records, health problems, housing problems, addictions.

For these people neither skills training nor simply job search skills can make an impact. What they most need, according to Shane Cowan, is time.

‘The most important issue beyond seeing people as individuals is taking the time to understand each individual’s issues and barriers and then deal with them. It’s all the support programs that are important. At the moment it’s easy to find someone a job. What’s hard is to prepare them and keep them there. Programs like the Queensland Government Work Placement Program give you time to be able to train the person to meet employer’s expectations and in what is needed to have a job. It gives them some budgeting skills. You have to turn a cheek when they’ve been late three times and then counsel them on it. It’s the same with the Personal Support Program: if clients haven’t turned up for an interview, we need to find out why. Maybe they are homeless living on the street and it’s cold and they’ve not got clothes. One phoned up yesterday and said ‘I don’t have any clothes to go out in the wind.’ We didn’t know that. We can fix that.’

The compliance-oriented approach of what Shane calls the ‘hard core’ of the Job Network is just unsuitable for the most disadvantaged clients. ‘To meet compliance

requirements can result in not actually delivering the service properly. Instead, you’re filling in compliance forms, you’re cutting corners because you have to spend so much time dotting every ‘i’ and crossing every ‘t’, making duplicate copies and ensuring it’s stored in a fire-proof safe. Compliance is the worst thing I’ve seen in all the years I’ve been involved.’

Of the 70 or so staff employed across

the CEA Group, 50 are employed by CEA and the remaining 20 by the constituent organisations. If and when the need arises – for example a new program requiring specialist skills not available among existing locally-based staff, or when there is a problem that needs fixing – CEA Group staff from elsewhere can come in for short or longer periods, to undertake the work. This ability to share and manage staff across all the organisations means that good people can be retained across many contracts and seconded to different organisations as needs arise.

CEA staff are paid above award rates but ‘not high’ salaries and Shane believes that staff value the intrinsic job satisfaction and their own continued commitment more than the size of their salaries and the extent of their perks. Even in today’s buoyant labour market, CEA staff have tended to be retained: one for 26 years, another for 22 and several others until they reached retirement age.

Shane is determined never to get too far away from the real work of CEA. Though he is the Group Manager, he believes ‘We’re not about hierarchies, we have a very flat structure, we’re about service to individuals. I never want to get too far away, up there in some ivory tower. Once you start wearing the suit and displaying the plaques on the wall ... I don’t know why that should be necessary.’ Shane becomes concerned when he hears staff calling CEA ‘the company’ and talking about ‘company policy.’ ‘I drum it into them that we are a community organisation, that we are a non-profit organisation: that’s the most important thing we are. We are not a company: once we start saying we are, we lose our values. I feel really strongly about that.

ACTIVITIES AND ENTERPRISES

Programs for ex-offenders

One feature of CEA’s activities is its diverse range of programs serving the training and employment and community reintegration needs of offenders and assistance for those at risk of offending.

These include services for those in custody or recently released through Advance 2 Work or the Offender Reintegration Support Service; prison-based training; and activities for those under court orders through the Youth Justice Service.

Shane Cowan explains. ‘From the early days of CYSS at Balmoral and Woolloongabba we always saw a lot of ex-offenders. We would quite regularly get visits from the police: that was a common occurrence. In SkillShare too, we got a very high number of ex-offenders wanting to go into training programs, such as office cleaning, horticulture, engineering and retailing. We’ve counselled them about when and what to disclose. It’s always their choice. Advance 2 Work and prison-based training came in around 1999. We tendered for them because we felt we already knew a lot about this group and felt we could help them walk their way through some of the problems we know they encounter: housing, drugs, alcohol, relationships with their families, dealing with Centrelink, getting registered with Job Network and all that. We already had a lot of the experience needed so we were able to write that experience in the tender.’

‘Among the marginalised and most disadvantaged, offenders and ex-offenders face particular difficulties. People with a physical disability or even with a mental disability are easily identifiable. What we’ve found is that ex-offenders are the most disadvantaged because they’re not so recognisable and what they’ve done is not something they’re proud of. So they don’t tell anyone. They don’t necessarily tell Centrelink so it would be something we’d perhaps only find out during the course of a program and we’d have to deal with it. We find out because they develop trust in us. Why? I think we’ve always been fairly upfront with them; we say ‘you don’t have to tell us. We need to know some things because we want to help you find employment but we don’t want to know everything, we don’t want to know the detail.’

5. Refer to Glossary.

Small business development

CEA has over time supported thousands of people through the NEIS program, around 3000 people at this stage. While many of these NEIS small businesses were home-based a number of them needed workshops for engineering, carpentry, welding, spray painting and panel beating, things like that. There were plenty of office-type incubator spaces around but no workshop-type ones.

In 2002 CEA's business incubator started at the Salisbury Business Development Centre, where clients are given a first free month's rent. 'There is no lease, all people have to do is sign an agreement that they will work in a cooperative environment, because it's all one big open space. For the first two years tenants pay 80 percent of market rent, then it becomes 100 percent, and then at three years it becomes 110 percent. Then they move on and make space for others. For the first few years it went OK, but actually now it's going very well. We're hoping at some stage to go back to the department so that we can do a second one.'

The Lady Caroline bay cruiser

Through the Training in Communities (TIC) state program , CEA's Brisbane site was able to get funding to train a hundred people in fibreglassing and engineering in the boat building industry which Shane Cowan knew to be experiencing skills shortages early in the 2000s. They started making small boats at the Salisbury workshop, some with sails and some for rowing. CEA had a relationship with a company called Heritage Boats from about 1999 who said they'd help as partners. CEA started by building small nose cones for boats and 10-foot tinnies so that the trainees could have some practical experience as they learned engineering competencies and boat building.

After about 20 clients had been trained for about 8 or 10 weeks, all were found work experience placements and every one of them got jobs in the boat building industry. According to Shane, 'The feedback from the employers was really good. They

said things like 'for the first week they're walking around with their mouths open because they're going from working on little tinnies that are 10-foot long to working on vessels up to 300-foot in length!'

Heritage suggested that CEA should think about building a big boat and proposed to arrange donations of the plans, the survey and the time of an engineer. The Board approved a budget of \$40,000 (though in the end it was much more) for a 34-foot launch – a bay cruiser. The trainees still built a few small boats but then concentrated on the big one. The bay cruiser was constructed by 100 trainees over 12 months and it was displayed in the Sanctuary Cove Boat Show in May 2005.

Ownership of the boat was taken over by Wynnum Manly Employment & Training, the CEA Group member based at Manly. It is used by community groups, schools and special education units. Centacare take out their disabled clients, their parents and other carers. The Centacare people had to get a boat license first, then they had to be inducted into using the boat. It takes 12 people and chugs along at a speed of 6 or 7 knots. All users have to do is top up the fuel.

Among the marginalised and most disadvantaged, offenders and ex-offenders face particular difficulties. People with a physical disability or even with a mental disability are easily identifiable. What we've found is that ex-offenders are the most disadvantaged because they're not so recognisable and what they've done is not something they're proud of.

Shane Cowan CEA GROUP

SUMMARY OF CEA PROGRAMS

This table summarises CEA's programs at July 2008

STATE PROGRAMS

Program	Sites	Target group/services provided
Accredited Training	Coorparoo	Five programs: aged care; disability; business; community work; horticulture; engineering; diversional therapy.
Advance 2 Work	14 of the 16 Queensland prisons	For ex-offenders who have registered with service prior to release. They are assisted with training/employment services; work clothing; referral services; links to indigenous agencies; voluntary work / work experience; general support services.
Bay Island Community Services (BICSI)	Russell Island and Macleay Island	BICSI (mainly staffed by volunteers) offers a range of activities and training opportunities, including: emergency assistance; food vouchers; counselling; assistance with domestic violence issues; use of computers; assistance with tax returns; photocopying; statutory declarations; Medicare. Other activities include a youth group and an op shop.
Community Jobs Plan (renamed Work Placement Program) Brisbane and Gold Coast	Community organisations	These programs facilitate the development of community projects and provide valuable work-related skills for long term unemployed job seekers in a range of vocational areas. Target groups vary over time and can also differ from project to project.
Get Set for Work	Miami	This program is for 15 to 17-year-olds at risk of disengaging from school who do not have a Certificate II or above qualification. It is open to school leavers who are unsure of where to go next and are not ready to commit to formal education or vocational training.
Offender Reintegration Support Service	8 Queensland prisons	This is a through-care program for people who have developed plans for their transition prior to their release. CEA Case Managers work with clients post-release to link them to community agencies to support successful community reintegration.
Prisons Training	Various prisons	Free training for unemployed job seekers in many fields. CEA provides accredited training courses for prison inmates to improve or develop skills that will assist them post release. CEA specialises in Engineering and Adult Literacy.
Training in Communities (TIC) now called Skilling Queenslanders for Work	Used for the <i>Lady Caroline</i> and other projects	This program funds organisations that provide training to those who are least competitive or marginalised in the labour market through projects that link to skill shortage areas or training priorities.
Youth Justice	Woodridge Ipswich 1	CEA Employment Project Officers provide employment, training and education assistance and advice to young people under the jurisdiction of the Department of Communities Youth Justice Service. Each young person is interviewed and an individual career plan developed, which may include links to specialist agencies such as Job Network providers and TAFE colleges.

COMMONWEALTH PROGRAMS

Program	Sites	Target group/services provided
Connections	Coorparoo, Northgate	Assists 13-19 year-olds who have disconnected from mainstream schooling for 3 months or more to re-engage with education, training or employment
Indigenous Youth Mobility Program (IYMP)	Cairns, Toowoomba, Townsville	This program encourages and supports regional and remote area young indigenous people to move from their communities to a major town or city to participate in tertiary or vocational education .
Job Placement Licence	Coorparoo, Beenleigh	This provides a ‘no cost’ recruitment service to employers. Potential employers contact the Job Placement Officer to list their vacancies on the Australian Jobsearch site. The Job Placement Officer screens, matches and refers suitable applicants through to the employers and arranges interviews and follow-up calls.
Newly Arrived Youth Support Service (NAYSS)	Salisbury, Coorparoo	This provides culturally appropriate services, ranging from early intervention to transition, for newly arrived young people aged 12 to 21 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS)	Miami, Northgate, Salisbury, Southport	This program assists people to develop their own business ideas. It provides income support for 12 months, during which CEA provides training and mentoring. Outreach – Beenleigh, Ipswich 2; Manly; Redcliffe; Sunshine Coast; Toowoomba.
Personal Support Program (PSP)	Northgate, Salisbury	This assists disadvantaged unemployed people having multiple barriers to employment to increase their self confidence and self esteem.
Structured Training and Employment Projects (STEP) Employment and Related Services (ERS)	Manly, Brisbane, Toowoomba, Townsville	CEA connects with potential employers across a variety of fields to determine their requirements, then trains and matches indigenous jobseekers to vacancies that best suit their aspirations.

STATE PROGRAMS

Program	Sites	Target group/services provided
Work For the Dole	Brisbane, Gold Coast & Russell Island	This helps job seekers improve their employment prospects by providing opportunities for work experience. All projects undertaken through this scheme must benefit the community.
Productivity Places Program	Brisbane and South East Queensland	Training in skill shortage areas for unemployed people in selected qualifications from Certificate II to Diploma level.
National Disability Coordination Officers (NDCO)	National Regions 18 and 19	This creates an accessible source of information for disabled people about available training and education.

UNFUNDED COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Bayside Information Centres	Wynnum	This centre is run by dedicated volunteers who provide a one-stop community information service for the Wynnum-Manly area.
MudFlat Toys	Lindum	Operated by volunteers producing wooden toys to distribute to underprivileged children.
Job Pledge	Northgate	A work placement project funded through donations in the form of voluntary pledges by staff in schools.
Computerbank Queensland	Coorparoo	Recycling and distribution of donated computers.
Tax Help	Wynnum & Macleay	Tax help is a network of community volunteers who provide a free and confidential service to help people complete their tax returns at tax time.

BALLARAT
BENDIGO
WESTERN VICTORIA

BEST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

GROWTH AND
DEVELOPMENT

The story of BEST Community Development has taken it from a resource centre for schools, on to employment and skills training, community renewal, property development and a community enterprise to employ people with disabilities.

All these activities are readily recognisable as community development, but so too are BEST's more recent ventures in building renovation and property development.

The organisation was originally incorporated as the Ballarat Community Education Centre in 1974 as a co-operative society funded by the Commonwealth Government to deliver professional development and support services to school communities. One of approximately 35 Commonwealth Education Centres around Australia at that time, it enjoyed stable recurrent core grant funding each year, adjusted for CPI increases.

Ron Stone, current CEO of BEST, joined the organisation as Executive Director in 1992, when it had an annual budget of \$300,000, 5 staff and a Management Committee of 23 people. To Ron, previously the Secretary of the Victorian Teachers Union, 'it was clear that the comfortable days of Commonwealth funding were going to come to an end.' Aiming at a broader community development role, the organisation renamed itself the Ballarat Community Development Centre (BCDC).

In the mid 1990s the Commonwealth Government announced the end of the core grants but Ron and colleagues from other Education Centres ran a campaign and negotiated instead for a phase-out of funding over a 4-year period. The case was based on giving the Centres time to review and restructure their operations so that vital community infrastructure would not be lost.

During the early 1990s BCDC had already begun to look for ways to expand its services to provide for the broader community. In 1994 the Brotherhood of St Laurence was closing regional offices and needed an organisation to take over its employment and training services. BCDC took over these services, at the time federally funded through the Employment

Services Regulatory Authority, to provide case management to help unemployed people find jobs.

In 1996 an employment arm, Ballarat Employment Services and Training (BEST) was also established. From its experience of running employment services, BEST was able to tender successfully for Job Network contracts in 1997-98. Successive Job Network tenders saw the expansion of employment, training and other services areas beyond Ballarat, in Ararat, Bendigo, Horsham, Maryborough and Stawell.

In 2008 BEST Community Development provides Job Network services, Work For the Dole, vocational industry-specific training, computer training, youth services and disability services. Its enterprise activities include Café BEST, providing training and employment for people with special needs, a digital printing service, conference facilities and community property development.

Job Network contracts are currently worth almost \$6.5 million per annum, generating a significant proportion of the total surplus that builds BEST's assets base and supports a range of community development activities. BEST Community Development, which is debt free, currently owns more than half of the 23 properties and sites from which it operates and frequently shares these resources by making them available at low or no cost to other organisations.

Risks and turning points

Several years ago the State Government Departments of Human Services and Victorian Communities encouraged BEST to become involved in a neighbourhood renewal program to upgrade housing in community renewal areas. BEST employed a general maintenance builder and the idea was to build up a team of two or three unemployed people from within the renewal areas who could then tender to paint and repair local houses. The aim was to train unemployed people then move them on into the regular workforce.

The project worked well for a couple of years, changing the face of a fairly run-down old commission house area, and generating a reasonable income. But after

CASE STUDY EIGHT

the on-site Manager left, the project lost its direction. It was losing too much money and stretching staff resources so the project was reluctantly disbanded.

The original decision to tender for a Job Network contract was not difficult for BEST, and the organisation is still looking at expanding its Job Network contracts. In 2006 it looked at buying another agency. There were a lot of negotiations but in the end BEST decided the price was too high. BEST will try to win more Job Network business by keeping its 'performance rating' up, which is how it won new contracts in the Grampians and Bendigo regions. The organisation clearly remains attracted to potential alliances, mergers and acquisitions.

With encouragement and assistance from Jobs Australia and other JA member organisations, BEST Community Development is currently investigating the possibility of establishing an affordable housing program. As a multimillion dollar enterprise, this will be subject to a detailed feasibility study for consideration by the Board of Directors.

Balancing the books

Despite being interested in expansion, Ron believes it became harder over time for Job Network providers who believe in making a real difference to improve their clients' prospects. 'As the unemployment rate has gone down, the clients coming in are facing more significant barriers to working. At the same time, the payments for Job Network had, by 2007, effectively been reduced, due to the fixed fee regime of contracts despite significant rises in staff costs since contracts were originally let.'

On another front, 'Trying to educate employers is our biggest task, making employers understand that we may not have what they're looking for, but what we do have is somebody that with a bit of patience and a bit of retraining would be able to meet their needs down the track. That's really our biggest challenge – getting employers to start someone from us.' This is also the case with finding employment for people with disability.

Each new community or commercial activity for the organisation involves an

The challenges that face a lot of non-profit organisations like ours are absolutely no different to those of a fully commercial operation. The only difference is that if the organisation is successful the profit goes into whatever your mission is as a non-profit – community development in our case – instead of being distributed to individual shareholders.

Ron Stone BEST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



MILESTONES

1974	Established as Co-operative Society, federally funded as Ballarat Community Education Centre
1992	Relocated from Education Department portable buildings into permanent accommodation
1993	First employment related programs through DEET Youth Strategy Action Grant for disadvantaged youth; Established Ballarat Industry Education Network
1994	Commenced Employment Case Management Accreditation through Employment Services Regulatory Authority (ESRA)
1995	Rebranded employment arm as Ballarat Employment Service and Training (BEST); Computer Centre established
1997	Commencement of Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET); Won WorkCover Return to Work contract; Commenced School Industry Links Demonstration Program; Commenced Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) program
1998	Won first Work For the Dole program contract; Won first Job Network Contract
1999	Change of name to Ballarat Community Development Centre; Successful tender for Futures for Young Adults program; Began Youthworks program for disadvantaged youth
2000	Second Job Network contract extended services to Maryborough
2001	Introduction of Vocational Industry Training unit
2002	Rebranding as BEST Community Development; Community Jobs Program
2003	Third Job Network contract expanded to Bendigo and Grampians Employment Services Area (ESA); First Courier Charity Fund building project; Established Interclub – a social club for people with intellectual disabilities
2004	Offices established in Ararat and Stawell; Second Courier Charity House Fund project; BEST in the West Property Services launched
2005	Third Courier Charity Fund House development
2006	Established Simplicity is BEST (PC Recycling and PC Club); Fourth Job Network Contract
2007	Café BEST launched; Commenced redevelopment of Golden Point Primary School into Cultural and Learning Centre

BEST IN 2008

Full-time and part-time staff: **160**
Volunteers: **3**
2007-2008 year turnover: **\$13 million**
Net assets: **\$8.5 million**
Sites: **Head office** and **10** in Ballarat and **6** in Bendigo and Grampians Region

AWARDS

2002	Prime Minister's Work For the Dole Awards: Best Caring for our Community Activity; Best Work For the Dole Activity in Australia
2004	Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Community Business Partnership, Victorian Medium Business
2005	Bendigo Business Excellence Awards – Best locally managed branch; Ballarat Business Excellence Awards; Finalist Community Involvement
2006	Ballarat Business Excellence Awards; Winner Community Involvement; Overall Winner
2007	People's Choice Award winner – BEST Community Development
2008	People's Choice Award winner – Café BEST; Diversity@Work Award winner Best employer of people with a disability, Medium business category; Ballarat Business Excellence Courier People's Choice Award for Café BEST; Ballarat Business Excellence Food and Beverage Award for Café BEST

CONTACT

Website: **www.bestcd.org.au**
Phone: **03 5329 1500**
Email for general enquiries: **admin@bestcd.org.au**



assessment of the balance to be struck between spending and sustainability. For Ron, the challenge is ‘to maintain an appropriate balance between delivering and increasing our community development services and at the same time remaining financially viable ... We could significantly expand our community services simply by contributing more human and physical resources to them, but there would be no long-term value in doing that if it were at the expense of our financial viability. On the other hand, we could readily enhance our financial outcomes by cutting back on community services in areas that don’t provide positive financial returns. But the resulting increase in our operational surpluses would be unacceptable if it were at the expense of achieving our community development outcomes.’

One example is the business model for the Golden Point Cultural and Learning Centre in which BEST has invested \$400,000 to supplement a State Government Community Support Fund grant of \$800,000. Other organisations involved in the consortium will lease space for their programs and activities on a non-profit, cost retrieval basis, while BEST will realise its investment in capital gain on the property over time.

Governance
BEST Community Development is still incorporated as a cooperative, although now its Board of nine directors is elected by members. Membership of the organisation is open to anyone. It costs \$15 to join but then members get \$15 dollars worth of vouchers to use at BEST’s Quick Print facility or on other BEST services.

As a cooperative, BEST does not allow the distribution of dividends to members and profits are reinvested in the organisation or the community. It has considered other legal structures, but BEST sees no reason to change its structure at this point.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND VALUES
Work at the frontline of Job Network employment services has undoubtedly become harder as unemployment has reduced and activity requirements for getting benefits have increased. Ron speaks of ‘huge’ annual staff turnover throughout the employment provider industry, due to the high pressure nature of the work.

BEST has explicitly committed to low staff turnover which was as low as 5 percent a few years ago and is currently running around 7.5 percent.

Debbie Fankhauser, who previously led the intensive support team at the Ballarat Office of BEST Employment and has recently taken on a training role across the organisation’s employment division, believes that people could not do this kind of work ‘if you were not in it for personal reasons, helping people to get a result, seeing people’s lives changing. You couldn’t be successful in this role unless you are that sort of person.’

Through its approach to staff management, pay and conditions, BEST aims to demonstrate its commitment to the organisation’s values of inclusiveness, social justice, transparency, open communication, and workplace trust and harmony. BEST pays competitive salaries to staff, with annual increases generally in excess of CPI and annual across-the-board bonuses. Long service leave payouts are available after five years’ service and all staff are offered a minimum \$1,000 each per annum for professional development. BEST also invests heavily in other staff training, conferences and workshops and regularly sends large teams to the National Employment Services Association and Jobs Australia annual conferences.

BEST also provides four bonus days of leave over the Christmas period and pays half the fees (with a \$150 ceiling) for gym memberships for staff, or for any other health-related project that will benefit them. Every staff member is provided with a free company uniform and a uniform maintenance allowance. Staff can also take driver education programs. At all regular meetings staff are encouraged to contribute to the agenda development and an in-house newsletter reviews staff meetings and publishes all evaluation feedback.

ACTIVITIES AND ENTERPRISES
Interclub
Interclub is a social club in Ballarat for people with disabilities. About four years ago the club was going to be disbanded because of financial problems. The State Department of Human Services approached BEST, and at the same time a local football club was looking for new club room premises. BEST bought the old club-rooms and renovated them to create a new drop-in social centre for Interclub, using Work For the Dole program teams.

This infrastructure work and a \$40,000 plus annual contribution from BEST have allowed the social club to continue to serve its 100 members. There is no joining fee; people turn up when they like so that they can do washing, cook, play games, use computers and generally have a pleasant time together. It operates in the afternoons and on one evening, when there is football training. The social club has its own football team, the Northern Knights, which plays in the State-wide disability league and over the past two years has won in both the first and second divisions.

BEST is building into its overall budget a target figure each year for income from philanthropic sources and other BEST supporters to apply to activities like Interclub. This would help BEST free its resources to undertake other non-income-generating community development activities.

Futures for Young Adults
The Interclub building also houses BEST’s Futures for Young Adults program. This State Government funded activity helps young people with learning and other disabilities to make the transition from high school into open employment. The program offers pre-employment training focusing on the development of self-esteem, confidence and relationships, and advice on budgeting, diet and nutrition, cooking, and job-search and job-readiness.

Each client comes with funding that lasts three years, and they are free to choose their provider and how to spend their money. If BEST doesn’t measure up, the clients will go elsewhere. BEST has delivered this program for six years and it has grown from 24 clients two years ago to around 60 clients in 2008.

Youth Works
At the rear of Café BEST and under the same roof is another BEST project working with disadvantaged young people for whom traditional schooling is inappropriate.

YouthWorks aims to build learning and personal skills. Currently more than 60 participants are undertaking the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning in Work Education, Certificate 2 in Business, and a Youth Participation and Access program.

Funding is variable and the project may at times break even or even generate a surplus, but generally, with three full time staff members, it requires a subsidy from BEST Community Development.

Café BEST
In 2005 Ron saw a television program about a café in Geelong started by Marie Kuchenmeister, a woman whose daughter’s intellectual disability had caused her concern about what would happen when she left school. Twelve years after starting a small café/sandwich bar with her daughter and two part-time volunteers, the business had developed into two café-restaurants and a big catering business. Ron immediately rang to congratulate her and arranged a visit to find out how she did it.

Supported by generous advice from

Trying to educate employers is our biggest task, making employers understand that we may not have what they’re looking for, but what we do have is somebody that with a bit of patience and a bit of retraining would be able to meet their needs down the track. That’s really our biggest challenge – getting employers to start someone from us.

Ron Stone BEST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Marie, BEST decided to convert one of its buildings in central Ballarat to make premises for a high-quality café and catering business, one that would also provide work and training for people with disabilities. This was a significant investment for BEST with building works commencing in 2006. In view of a total development cost of well over half a million dollars on top of the original cost of the premises, there were a few sceptics: Was the location right? Would the customers come in? Was the building too dark? As often happens with building projects, costs over-ran, although \$90,000 in grants from philanthropic bodies covered this.

Café BEST was officially opened by Marie Kuchenmeister in March 2007. Business at the café is flourishing and in addition to two cooks, an administrative assistant and three supervisors, the café now employs 9 people with special needs. Of the 13 staff with disabilities who started with the café, five were graduates of BEST’s Future For Young Adults program, and some are Interclub members. All jobs were advertised on the open market and the official opening was preceded by an intensive period of training and team building for all employees.

In 2008 Café BEST won the Diversity@Work awards for best employer of people with a disability in the medium business category and was also winner of the People’s Choice Award which was contested by all finalists in the 2008 Ballarat Business Excellence Awards. The Café’s administration officer won a silver medal in the national 2008 Worldskills Australia National Competition, putting her in Australia’s top two trainees in the business services category.

Building and renovating fundraisers
In partnership with the Ballarat Courier newspaper, the Ballarat Foundation and various community and commercial organisations, BEST Community

Development has built or renovated and then sold three residential properties, with the proceeds going into a community fund for distribution by the Ballarat Foundation to Ballarat-based charities and other non-profits. To undertake the work, BEST has integrated Work For the Dole project teams with local builders and subcontractors and to date this partnership has raised \$450,000 over the past 5 years.

These high-profile building activities, which have won a number of awards, have provided valuable work experience for Work For the Dole participants, significant funds for other non-profit groups and boosted the positive image and public awareness of BEST Community Development.

The Golden Point Cultural and Learning Centre
The former Golden Point Primary School in Ballarat had been derelict for over 15 years. A consortium of organisations, including the University of the Third Age, the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Society and Mount Clear College tried to buy the building to renovate it and applied to the Victoria Community Support Fund for financial support. But even when working in a strong consortium, the group lacked the organisational infrastructure to take on large projects. Through the local state MP, they approached BEST Community Development, which agreed to buy the property for \$200,000 and contribute another \$200,000 towards the renovation.

BEST also argued for an increase in the initial grant from the Community Support Fund, from \$500,000 to \$800,000. This created a \$1 million renovation fund to which the Ballarat City Council, the Department of Education, and Ballarat Goldfields all made significant contributions. Stage one of the building is scheduled for occupancy in August 2008 and will provide Ballarat with a community asset for people of all ages and cultural backgrounds

The consortium of organisations will lease the property from BEST for their activities and programs, on a non-profit, cost retrieval basis. BEST’s investment will be returned in the form of capital gain on the building and fulfilment of its mission to enhance the lives of individuals and enrich the community.

BALLINA EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING CENTRE

CASE STUDY NINE

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The Ballina Skills Development Centre (BSDC)¹ started in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales in 1988 with funding from a recurrent SkillShare grant.

Though the region has traditionally relied on agricultural production inland and a healthy tourist industry on the coast, and has seen growing numbers of retirees attracted to the area, for two decades the local unemployment rate has remained high relative to the rest of New South Wales. Structural unemployment dogged the area until recently and this more than any other factor gave rise to the business incubators as a way for people to create their own employment.

In 1997 BSDC tendered successfully to deliver the Job Network, but the subsequent loss of major parts of that contract in 2001 underlined the importance of maintaining a broad base of programs and activities. Work For the Dole, Personal Support Program and the Mature Workers Program funded some of the organisation’s employment and training activities, but by 2001, BSDC had also generated enough surplus funds to take itself in new directions to meet other locally identified needs.

From a very early stage BSDC was interested in promoting self-employment and fostering small business. In 1992 for example, two seven-day training courses in small business management were delivered through SkillShare, and these were followed

at other incubators. He found them quite large and accordingly fairly costly to run. For Ballina the plan was to create a light industrial incubator. This was a first for regional Australia, remembers Garry. ‘The feeling at that time was that you needed a large population base – about 100,000 people – to make an incubator viable. Ballina’s population was only 12,000. But we came up with a new model, basically one in which there was no on-site management. That cut down most of the overheads.’

The State and Commonwealth Governments eventually contributed a total of \$246,196. Each agreed to be involved subject to a contribution from the other, and after six months of each wanting to see the others’ money, Garry had to act. ‘I had to round them all up in the same room and get the cheques from them.’

BSDC bought the building for the incubator, called the Ballina Business Centre, in 1992. It had been used for spray painting, the gutters were rusted out, and it was leaking. A major makeover was required. Though there were mistakes made with the renovation along the way, the incubator justified its existence almost immediately, filling up in the first three months of opening.

By 1999 BSDC looked at setting up the second incubator in Byron Bay, and at that stage felt confident about what it wanted to do. Instead of renovating, the organisation decided to buy a block of land and purpose-build 15 incubator units and also a training room, an information centre and a common room. In Byron the need was different. Ballina had required light industrial units but in Byron, which had a lot of creative people, the incubators were pitched towards art/craft businesses. As Garry put it, ‘People come up here for the lifestyle. Then after a while they think ‘better get some kind of business going.”

This time the Commonwealth Government made a grant of \$500,000 but, as with the Ballina centre and those that would follow later, BETC put financial resources of its own into the project and

Many of the original members of the Board were themselves small business people, and given the lack of employment in the area, right from the start there was this interest in promoting self-employment.

Garry Bargh CEO 1988-2008, BETC

When he was appointed by the Ballina Shire Council, the organisation sponsoring the SkillShare project, Garry himself had been a local unemployed person. Despite having worked overseas in the development field for most of the previous 20 years, he believes the project committee took a risk engaging him. ‘I wasn’t really employable ... I didn’t think that I had relevant skills, so I was taking a risk coming here and so were the committee that appointed me!’

BSDC initially ran the range of programs typically provided by SkillShare-funded organisations: structured skills training courses and literacy support, an open access job search and advice service, and support for self-employment. Increasingly, the organisation took on other Commonwealth and State Government programs, such as Job Clubs to help people look for work, JobTrain vocational training, JobSkills work experience, and other programs for young and mature-aged people.

by eight-week business management training courses funded by JobTrain.

Garry attributes this orientation to the organisation’s early Board members. ‘Many of the original members of the Board were themselves small business people, and given the lack of employment in the area, right from the start there was this interest in promoting self-employment.’

With a government grant, BSDC developed a Level 3 small business curriculum, which is roughly equivalent to a contemporary Certificate IV in business. It was the first small business curriculum developed at that time and was accredited on the national register of accredited training and sold by BSDC around Australia.

Early in the 1990s, BSDC investigated setting up a small business incubator, a place where through low rent and overheads, start-up small businesses can find their feet in the early months of operating. Garry toured Australia looking

1. Ballina Skills Development Centre begin to trade as Ballina Employment and Training Centre (BETC) in 2002, so the name used will reflect the relevant reference year(s). Since a merger in March 2008 with another organisation in the region, the organisation has become NORTEC.

If you really want to claim to be non-profit, which means you’re exempt from paying taxes, you should be prepared to put a substantial amount back into the community. We resolved the debate about whether to make a surplus some time ago. The issue now is how much of that should be reinvested in the community.

Garry Bargh CEO 1988-2008, BETC



MILESTONES

1988	Ballina Shire Council created Ballina Skills Development Centre to run a SkillShare project
1989	SkillShare funding on a recurrent grant basis
1992	Opening of a light industrial business incubator in Ballina
1997	Job Network contract won
1999	Opening of an arts-crafts incubator in Byron; Work For the Dole
2001	Job Network contract lost
2004	Opening of a knowledge industry incubator in Mullumbimby
2008	Merger with Tweed Training and Enterprise Company to become NORTEC

BETC IN 2008

Ballina Employment and Training Centre in 2007 (pre-merger)

Turnover last year: **\$1.4 Million** (BETC only)

Net assets at time of merger: **\$2.4 million**

Sites: **3**

Following the merger with Tweed Training and Enterprise Company

Effective full-time staff: **53**

Net assets at time of merger: **\$4 million**

Estimated number of business incubator tenants since 1992: **around 350**

Occupancy rate of business incubator during 2007: **98%**

Number of hours of literacy training funded and delivered by BETC in 2007: **4,645**

NATIONAL INCUBATOR AWARDS

2001	Regional Incubator of the Year
2001	National Incubator Innovation Award
2002	Graduate Tenant of the Year
2003	Minister’s National Incubator Award for Excellence
2003	Incubator of the Year

CONTACT

Website: **www.nortectld.com.au**

Phone: **1800 667 832**

Email for general enquiries: **nortec@nortectld.com.au**

is the owner of the land and building. As with the Ballina centre, the incubator units at Byron Bay, called Byron Creative, have been full since opening. Occupancy rates run at 100 percent, and sometimes only 24 hours pass before the next tenant arrives.

After these successes, BSDC attracted another Commonwealth Government grant of \$236,000 to open in 2004 a 12-unit incubator for knowledge-based businesses in Mullumbimby. Again BETC invested resources. Renovations were finished on time and on budget, within eight weeks. This incubator, the Community Learning Innovation Centre (CLIC), quickly achieved 100 percent occupancy, quite an achievement given that the Mullumbimby population is just over 3,000. One tenant had started the now-famous www.crikey.com in Sydney, sold it, then started a new web-based business at the CLIC incubator.

The incubators are part of a longer term objective to generate local employment. Apart from the 45 small businesses currently occupying the three incubators are many previous tenants who have been moved on, in line with the policy of a maximum three years of tenancy. Most of those are still operating successfully, and most move out because they have outgrown the space. This is a result of the policy of renting incubators to businesses with growth potential, resulting in a constant turnover of businesses starting and maturing. The incubators don't only promote self-employment, they promote the employment of others in an area where 80 percent of all businesses are small businesses with 1-15 employees.

BETC incubator ventures rely on partnerships: with local councils for the incubators at Mullumbimby and the latest one to be built in Lismore, and with the Adult and Community Education Centre for the incubator at Mullumbimby. BETC is also a member of a consortium of organisations – Destination North – in delivering the Commonwealth Government's Youth Pathways Program in Tweed, Murwillumbah, Lismore, Byron and Ballina. This partnership took BETC all the way to a merger with Tweed Training and Enterprise Company in March 2008.

Risks and turning points

Following the end of SkillShare funding in 1996, BSDC tendered for Job Network services. Though it won a Job Network contract in the first tender round, the organisation lost the major components of its contract in 2001 due to a relatively low star rating.² This was not a complete surprise for the organisation, which had worried anyway about its capacity under the terms of the contract to make the long-term investment needed to achieve sustainable employment. According to Garry, 'Some people just can't find employment even if they're forced into Job

This is demonstrated, Garry says, by the projects created through Work For the Dole, such as the community facilities created at the amphitheatre at Missingham Bridge Park in Ballina. These are assets of tangible use and value to the local community. While there has been initial resistance on the part of some participants, Garry has encountered many positive stories of people who have been on Work For the Dole projects. I still get people coming back to me saying, with pride, 'we built that at such-and-such a place.' To some it was a highlight of their life, that they've contributed to something long-lasting ...

Balancing the books

In 2007 BETC had a turnover of approximately \$1.5 million per year, most coming from contracted employment services such as Personal Support Program and Work For the Dole. This enabled BETC to employ around 12 full-time staff and 12 part-timers. A small annual surplus of approximately \$12,000 pa has been available for re-investment into the community.

In 2007 Garry was concerned about the effect of reducing employment service income on BETCs ability to re-invest in the community. 'Its getting much more difficult. The profit margins have dropped off because of the high administration and compliance requirements.' Owning the two incubator buildings helps and owning the office in Ballina means that BETC can lease out some office space to other community organisations. If it had to pay full commercial rent, as many community organisations do, it would not be in the sound financial position it has maintained, with good cash and assets reserves.

Governance

In Garry's view, the Achilles heel of many voluntary, non-profit organisations is their Boards of management, who can tend to be well-meaning, amateur volunteers, but who lack the skills, professional and technical knowledge demanded by the complex work of non-profits and the considerable resources many of them receive and disburse. Though it's resource base has been relatively modest, BETC changed and grew considerably over 20 years, becoming involved in projects demanding a high level of technical expertise.

Still, continuity has been important, and three of the original members of the project committee in 1988 were still on the Board in 2007. Unusually, Garry himself has been a member of the BETC Board. 'I know a lot of non-profits won't have staff on the Board and I think that's wrong. The CEO should be on the Board, to have that connection. Your CEO has to be entrepreneurial, prepared to take risks and act decisively. You can adopt policies to deal with any conflict of interest that might arise. Too many non-profits don't give enough power to the CEO, insisting on Board approval and permission for everything. It slows them down and makes them more vulnerable: you see a lot of that in the community sector.'

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND VALUES

As well as bridging the gap between the Board and the CEO, Garry refers to the need to avoid any divide between the CEO and staff.

'There are some organisations that have a giant gap between the workers and the CEO, with CEOs earning twice what the senior workers do. It's important for staff to see that the CEO isn't there just for the money and the benefits.'

Garry is convinced that what builds staff commitment and loyalty is an organisation's values. 'When people sign up to work for an organisation, they need to know what its values are.' For BETC, they have been 'People-centred, providing services to the community and to people on the lower end of the social and economic scale.' Some staff have worked for BETC for more than ten years.

Garry also believes that it is a community focus that has sustained the organisation as a viable and continuing entity. Wages paid at BETC are basic award wages, no bonuses are paid, Garry never had a personal assistant, and an operations manager was only appointed a few years ago. Board members are not paid either. 'It's always been a pretty strong ethic in terms of putting back into the community,' says Garry. 'We would like to think our staff are attracted by this community focus and commitment.'

It is to this outward community orientation that Garry attributes the survival of BETC. Though there were 18 SkillShare projects in the area that started in 1989, only two of the organisations that sponsored them were still operating in 2007. The other organisation, Tweed Training and Enterprise Company (TTEC), also has a strong community focus. BETC merged with TTEC in March 2008. The two organisations have a complimentary suite of programs that together give the new entity a stronger claim to securing employment service contracts and other government contracts in a range of areas. The merger presents the new entity with a broader and deeper staff skill set. Financially there are certain economies of scale but more importantly there is a wider geographic footprint.

While the advantages of the merger were attractive it had to be underpinned with a compatible value system. Agreement about a common vision, mission and values statement and the objectives of the organisation as set out in the Constitution were preconditions of the merger.

ACTIVITIES AND ENTERPRISES

Lismore business incubator and environmental design

The latest incubator project in Lismore for a 15-unit incubator is expected to be opened later in 2008. It is being constructed by an innovative building company using a new product from China, a new environmental wall system. The incubator will be a collection of building 'pods', all solar powered, with double-glazed windows, and an air-circulation system instead of air-conditioning. Each building will have its own water tank, and water features are planned for the site to create an interesting atmosphere. At present that industrial estate is just a series of concrete buildings with tin roofs.

The full occupancy rate of the business incubators shows just how entrepreneurial the North Coast of New South Wales really is. The three year limit for tenants ensures that there is turnover and dynamic movement among the occupants. The incubators are a point of differentiation between us and other employment service providers, in a landscape where we have seen more and more of less and less.

Martyn Mills NORTEC

People see it as something they were part of.'

Reflecting on the 2001 loss of Job Network funding in 2007, Garry thinks, 'It was a good thing. It made us look at other sources of income, at diversifying a bit.'

In 2007 BETC started talks with the Tweed Training and Enterprise Company (TTEC), which operated in an area to the north of BETC. The two organisations considered a merger. Already delivery partners as part of a consortium for the Youth Pathways Program and for many years, they had been aware of each other's work and community-oriented values.

Both organisations accepted that the viability of their programs was best protected by joining together both entities. This would be based on an understanding that Ballina Skills Development Centre would convert to a company limited by guarantee, with TTEC agreeing to move its assets over to the new entity. Effective from March 2008, the merger was based around an undertaking to staff that no redundancies would result and no-one would be disadvantaged. At the time of printing no staff have left because of the merger.

Nepal F-Skill franchise

In 2002 Garry was contacted by a colleague from his earlier work in developing countries, someone he last saw in The Sudan in 1979. This man was in Nepal, and wanted to organise a study visit for a group of five Nepalese people to look at business incubators and development centres. His organisation, Helvetas, was a Switzerland-based non-government organisation involved in development work, financed by the Swiss Government.

The study tour group was also very interested in how franchising works, something that did not exist in Switzerland. Though Garry know ‘absolutely nothing at all’ about franchising, he did some quick research. He quickly learned that ‘Jim’s Mowing’ is one of Australia’s biggest franchises. ‘I flicked an email off to Jim in Melbourne, not expecting to get a reply, saying ‘I’ve got these people coming out from Nepal – can you give us any help?’ Two hours later he had a reply, putting him in touch with the Jim’s mowing master franchisee in Brisbane, to set up an interview to get copies of all their franchising agreements and training programs. Garry was impressed by his willingness to share.

From this beginning came F-Skill, (the ‘f’ standing for franchising), a community-based skills franchise across Nepal that offers employment-oriented technical and vocational training to improve the livelihood of Nepalese young people and ensure they are gainfully employed or self-employed. This approach has harnessed private sector principles to develop a new model for training and getting people into work.

The link between the two non-profits, F-Skill and BETC has become permanent: BETC staff have delivered small business training courses in Nepal and helped F-Skill establish its management and training systems. F-Skill staff have attended management training courses in BETC. F-Skill is now regarded as one of Nepal’s most successful non-government organisations delivering training and employment.

Within BETC the link has led to other initiatives. Two years ago, the staff decided to contribute to a fund to sponsor the education of two young children in Nepal whose families are among the Dalits (untouchables) and too poor to afford education for their children. Now, three-quarters of BETC staff contribute to this sponsorship, where all the money donated goes directly to the school providing the education.

In 2007 BETC was fund-raising to provide loans to small businesses in Nepal and had already sent money to provide for loans through a local cooperative. Though loans have been small, at around \$300, it is enough to start a small business in Nepal.

Toolkit for vocational training

Following the F-Skill project the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation in 2005 asked BETC to take on another assignment: preparing a manual and ‘toolkit’ for centres providing vocational education and training services in developing countries. In the first instance it would be used by a network of 45 such centres in Vietnam. This was completed by 2006, and has already been translated into a number of languages, with the Vietnamese version financed by a grant from Jobs Australia.

The manual covers the entire range of vocation education and training services, everything from enrolments, designing training courses, assessments, distance learning, and recognition of prior learning. There is a section about setting up a financial system for a VET training institution and information about how to cost and price services. Around 10 experts from different fields, such as distance education, worked on the manual, which is designed for managers and course coordinators,

supervisors and finance people. It includes a lot of case studies and examples from different organisations in different parts of the world: good practice, what works and doesn’t work, such as voucher systems which have been successful in South America but less so in Asia.

Since the release of the manual and toolkit, BETC has been asked by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation to turn it into a web-based distance learning package.

Micro-finance

Recognising that small businesses need finance as well as space in order to grow, BETC responded to a National Australia Bank (NAB) invitation to tender to manage a micro-enterprise loan scheme to be funded by the NAB to provide loans to people on low incomes with restricted access to affordable business credit.

The loan scheme was launched by BETC and the NAB in October 2007. It will offer loans ranging from \$500 to \$20,000 to incubator tenants throughout Australia. BETC’s role will be to administer the scheme, selecting loan applicants and referring them to the bank, which will make the loans directly. Related mentoring and business assistance will be provided by the managers of the incubators where the loan recipients are based.

There are some organisations that have a giant gap between the workers and the CEO, with CEOs earning twice what the senior workers do. It’s important for staff to see that the CEO isn’t there just for the money and the benefits.

Garry Bargh CEO 1988-2008, BETC

Community investment

The Community Learning and Innovation Centre (CLIC) in Mullumbimby is run as a partnership between BETC and Byron Adult and Community Education. Together they have helped establish a Community Foundation to use the interest on money donated by local philanthropic people back into the community via community groups.

On its part, the Board of BETC has over the years aimed to fund a major community

We, and the community in general, supported the concept of ‘mutual obligation’ that is a core principle of the Job Network, meaning that if you are receiving a government benefit that you should, if you are able, make a contribution in return for that benefit ... I still get people coming back to me saying, with pride, ‘We built that at such-and-such a place. To some it was a highlight of their life, that they’ve contributed to something long-lasting ... People see it as something they were part of.

Garry Bargh CEO 1988-2008, BETC

project each year. For 2003-2006 it provided funding of \$84,000 to the Community Learning and Innovation Centre (CLIC) in Mullumbimby for a project aiming to develop activities promoting innovation in the Byron Shire area. That has included a business mentor scheme and a program to encourage new inventors with new products.

Before the CLIC project, BETC pulled resources together to redevelop Missingham Bridge Park, helped also by a Work For the Dole project grant. This included building the Ballina Amphitheatre, an outdoor concert/performance area. Again this involved a cash contribution from BETC, additional finance from the Federation Fund, and a Work For the Dole project contribution. The amphitheatre is regarded as a major local community asset and is now owned and maintained by the local council.

BETC has over time made contributions to about 60 local community groups in Ballina, Byron and Lismore, from museum societies to seabird rescue groups. The amounts of money can be small, but they honour a commitment to community reinvestment.

Inspiring ON-Q

ON-Q delivers employment placement services for people with a disability in Northern New South Wales and was established at around the same time as BETC. Garry was invited to join the Board of ON-Q in 2002 and after he shared information with On-Q about BETC’s links in Nepal, ON-Q established an Innovative Project Fund in 2005, into which it puts a percentage of its surplus each year.

ON-Q staff and the Board make proposals for grants awarded by the Fund, which must be for projects meeting a demonstrated need but not funded through government provision.

To date, four projects have been funded – one in Nepal, one in Kenya and two in Australia. The Kathmandu-based project enables a community organisation there to provide outreach services to young people with disabilities through the purchase of a vehicle, equipment and wages for staff.

ON-Q staff also decided to make voluntary donations from their wages into another project to assist the Kathmandu project, enabling the local purchase of 12 wheelchairs. Two ON-Q staff visited Kathmandu in October 2007 to share skills and help develop the organisation’s administrative, finance and training systems.

THE FUTURE

The formation of NORTEC presented Garry Bargh with an opportunity to move on. Though he had been due to retire, late in 2007 he decided to return to his origins in development work and took a job in Nepal with the Asian Development Bank as chief technical advisor in a national vocational education and training program.

NORTEC is positioning itself to continue to provide employment services under the DEEWR 2009 Employment Services Contract and is also pushing forward to complete a number of community projects such as the Lismore incubator. An expansion to the volunteer program that TTEC has ran in the Tweed Region of NSW is under way and involves a move into the coordination of corporate volunteering.

ASYLUM SEEKERS RESOURCE CENTRE

CASE STUDY TEN

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The Asylum Seekers Resource Centre in Melbourne began in 2001, when a group of students and its tutor, lawyer and social worker Kon Karapanagiotidis, became aware of the needs of asylum seekers in Australia. As an alternative to the course requirement to do a work experience in an existing community organisation, Kon suggested to the students that for their assessment they could create one. Eight weeks later the group started a food bank in Footscray and ran it as volunteers.

Kon was deeply familiar with non-government organisations, having volunteered with more than 20 by the time he was 28, his age when the ASRC started. ‘That was my training ground. I knew what I was getting into, and how to do it.’

As soon as it opened, the volunteers realised the scale of people’s needs that they faced. The food bank managed with donations and some key support from Grasslands Grocery, which provided the shopfront premises for the food bank and donated money and food when supplies were exhausted. Support for the Centre grew through donations and people volunteering to help, particularly after the Tampa incident in 2001, which drew

How asylum seekers are treated by the government depends on their method of entry. A range of visa types, the terms for which are being reviewed by the government in 2008, have meant that most asylum seekers have not been able either to work or to claim income support from Centrelink. In 2008, the government is developing policies intended to support faster and more decisive processing of asylum seeker claims, and has acknowledged government responsibility to ensure material support while asylum applications are determined. In the meantime, asylum seekers have largely relied on charity to survive.

The ASRC in 2008 has a total staff of 27, which includes a number of part-time staff. An unusual feature of the ASRC is its enormous volunteer labour force. In 2008, there were around 700 volunteers working for ASRC, which is a ratio of about 25 volunteer staff, on average, for each staff member. Many of these staff are qualified professionals: lawyers, counsellors, social workers, teachers of English as a second language. The value of this volunteer effort was estimated in 2008 as being worth around \$15 million dollars per year.

The ASRC describes itself as a ‘one stop shop.’ Its services evolved in a relatively

Kon describes how things developed: ‘When we started the food bank it kept growing because people came to us and said ‘We’ve come for food but no-one will teach us English.’ So we thought, ‘Well then, we’ll teach English. We put an ad in the local paper asking if anyone would teach English. People came in and said ‘Yes, we’ll teach English.’ Then people would say, ‘No-one will take on my case as a lawyer.’ So someone said ‘I’m a lawyer, I’ll take on your case.’ It just grew organically. We didn’t have the means or the money but the need was there and we said we’re just going to do it. That’s how it grew.’

But the evolution of services was not only driven by demand. On the supply-side, more and more people involved as volunteers meant a constant influx of new ideas. ‘People brought new skills,’ says Kon. ‘For example, someone said ‘I’ve got an idea – teaching people in their homes. ‘We said ‘that sounds like a great idea – do you want to head that up?’ So now we have 75 people going into homes doing tutoring.’

Johanna Burns was one of the two original ASRC volunteer coordinators and is now a senior case worker. Like many other paid staff, Johanna started as a volunteer herself when she was a social work student. Johanna estimates that about 30 percent of ASRC volunteers are ‘specialists’ with the professional skills the Centre needs: doctors, physiotherapists and psychologists for the health services, lawyers for the legal work, caseworkers for intake and assessment. Some are practising professionals, others are still studying for professional qualifications. The other 70 percent of volunteers are generalists, helping with ‘meet and greet’, reception, the food-bank, kitchen work, social and recreational activities, and fund-raising. Some volunteers are themselves asylum-seekers.

It just grew organically. We didn’t have the means or the money but the need was there and we said we’re just going to do it. That’s how it grew.

Kon Karapanagiotidis ASYLUM SEEKER RESOURCE CENTRE

attention to the issue of asylum seeker detention and the processing of their applications to remain in Australia.

The growth of the ASRC has been remarkable, with services developing to meet the many needs of people attending the Centre for food and clothing, health services, legal advice with asylum applications, English language classes, social and recreational activities, help to find work and counselling. In the early days of the centre, most clients came from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, but increasingly they are coming from a greater range of countries.

unplanned way as the ASRC sought to respond to people’s needs holistically. After the food bank was established, those involved realised that it was not enough to provide direct help in the form of food. Most apparent was the need for professional legal help and representation, for social services of various kinds, for health services, for education services. At the same time, the capacity of people to support themselves needed fostering, so that they could exert a degree of control over aspects of their lives, whether in Australia, or on return to their country of origin.

Part of our success is that there’s been no government support. This was the driving force that inspired and mobilised people to get involved ... There is that real pride about being able to do something without government support, but on the other hand there’s a risk that this will be an excuse for the government to underfund or not fund organisations like ours.

Kon Karapanagiotidis ASYLUM SEEKER RESOURCE CENTRE



MILESTONES

2001	<i>Food Bank started in Footscray, English as a second language classes and volunteer support program</i>
2002	<i>Funding for coordinator position from Myer Foundation; Human rights law program, health service, counselling and casework, community meals, friendship and recreation programs</i>
2003	<i>Move to larger premises in Jeffcott Street West Melbourne; home English tutoring, program to support asylum seekers at hearings</i>
2004	<i>Employment, small business and social enterprise program, micro-credit scheme</i>
2005	<i>Asylum seeker catering enterprise</i>
2006	<i>Outreach Children’s Playground, post-detention release and repatriation support programs</i>
2007	<i>Move to larger premises in Batman Street West Melbourne</i>

ASRC IN 2008

Effective full-time staff: **23**
Volunteers: **700**
Turnover in 2007: **\$1.5 million**
Total asylum seekers registered for assistance: **5,567**
Asylum seekers registered for assistance 2007-2008 financial year: **1,472**
Number assisted to find employment in 2007-2008: **167**
Proportion of total funding from State Government: **6%**
Proportion of total funding from fundraising and donations: **94%**
Hours of legal advice and assistance provided: **21,000**
Total hours of all assistance provided: **215,000**

AWARDS

2003	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Human Rights award for a community organisation
2005	National Australia Bank State and National Volunteers Awards for Community Service and Development
2007	Kon Karapanagiotidis, Victorian finalist, Australian of the Year Award

CONTACT

Website: **www.asrc.org.au**
Phone: **03 9326 6066**
Email for general enquiries: **home.of.human.rights@asrc.org.au**

Balancing the books

Services delivered at the Centre are free.

The ASRC receives no Commonwealth Government funding and has relied heavily on grants and donations from foundations and individual philanthropists, corporate donors and other individuals. Though grants from the Victorian Government have been made for individual activities and programs such as a training program and some funds for emergency relief, 94 percent of the Centre’s funding comes from donations, philanthropists and income raised from the Centre’s social enterprises. In the 2007-2008 financial year, the ASRC reported around \$1.6 million in income. But with the enormous contribution of hours worked by its volunteer labour force, the centre estimated that it was able to deliver services to a value of \$15 million.

ACTIVITIES

Support for asylum seekers at the Centre can be grouped into these categories: food and material aid; legal advice, representation and advocacy; lobbying and campaigning; health care, counselling and casework; and capacity-building.

The capacity-building cluster of services covers the broadest range of skills and employment services and activities to promote social participation and personal well-being. As with other ASRC services, the ‘building capacity’ cluster has been made possible by a series of small grants, donations of expertise by businesses and organised volunteer labour. The largest of these was a recurrent annual donation of \$41,000, starting in 2004, from a Job Network provider organisation called WISE Employment. This provided for the appointment of an employment services coordinator to marshal and manage volunteers and a range of other offers of support.

Given the relatively low cash flow of the ASRC, these services represent an approach to service design that is inherently opportunistic: available resources are like parts of a puzzle that fit together, matching or moulding bits of resources supplied to service users’ needs.

Employment Assistance

The Employment Assistance Coordinator, Sophie Dutertre, has trained volunteers to provide assistance with resume writing, job interview skills, and job seeking skills and techniques.

Sophie believes that the opportunity for asylum seekers to develop relationships with volunteers in the program is an important factor in the program’s success. There is no limit to how much time a volunteer can spend with a ‘client’, and the relationship is often closer to mentoring than to straight employment advice.

During the period July 1 2007 to June 30 2008, 167 clients were referred to the Asylum Seeker Employment Assistance Program (ASEAP), a 38 percent increase on the previous year. Since its inception four years ago, the program has now assisted well over 400 asylum seeker clients.

Sophie Dutertre finds that while asylum-seekers may need intensive support to understand the Australian job market, they are highly motivated to work. ‘This is partly because they do not receive income support and must work to survive financially, but also because work is key to their identity and dignity. Not working is not seen as an option.’

An important development in the ASEAP client base is that women now make up 33 percent of clients, a 10 percent increase on the previous year. There has also been a marked increase in the last three months of the number of females being referred to the program. This poses a challenge: in the experience of the program, female clients are likely to have less previous work experience than men.

Since 2004, 60 to 65 percent of the ASRC Employment Assistance Program clients have found employment, typically casual but also permanent jobs in commercial kitchens, aged care, retail outlets and cleaning services. Job retention is difficult due to uncertain visa status, legal processes and other difficulties being confronted in the attempt to settle in Australia.

Training

Encompass Community Services in Geelong, a Registered Training Organisation, donates 2,000 hours of free training a year to people with work rights, to enable them to become more employable.

Ten courses a year for 10 participants on average include training in first aid, food handling and customer service, under the umbrella of Certificate III in English as a Second Language.

In 2007 with a grant of over \$180,000 from the Victoria State Government’s Workplace Participation Partnership Program, the ASRC delivered in partnership with WISE Employment a new training program for those without Centrelink entitlements. This provides 10 weeks of training in hospitality, customer service and first aid, followed by intensive assistance and reverse marketing.

Small Business Unit

This pilot program was established with the aid of a grant from the Aspire Foundation to help asylum seekers to establish their own small businesses.

A small business course was run during 2007. The one year pilot is now completed and the ASRC is now researching opportunities to set up small business incubators and loan schemes to help asylum seekers access seed funding to start their own businesses.

Social Enterprise Unit

Conscious of a need to generate its own funds as well as to create jobs for clients, the ASRC established a unit to develop its own social enterprises.

The first is the ASRC Catering Service, which has employed more than 30 asylum seekers in the past 3 years. The Catering Service employees work as chefs, kitchen hands, waiters and delivery drivers. In the 2007-2008 financial year the ASRC catering service has realised an annual turnover of \$127,531, a 58 percent increase on the previous year. The Catering Program has been a true success story for the ASRC.

From its kitchen in Nth Fitzroy, provided by the Melbourne City Mission, the program has been catering events including conferences, cocktail parties, openings and weddings.

Micro–credit scheme

Supported with a \$5,000 grant from the Mercy Foundation, this scheme provides small interest-free loans to help people to become more work-ready, for example, by getting a fork lift or truck licence, recognised qualifications, or work wear to attend job interviews and start work.

English as a second language

A team of 10 qualified teacher-volunteers provide English classes for around 60 asylum seekers per week.

This program is complemented by the Volunteer Home English Tutoring Services, through which 70 volunteers provide one-to-one in-home English tutoring.

Metcards

Lack of transport is a major barrier faced by job seekers in their search for work, so to help these people and other Centre users, the ASRC has in 2008 set aside \$75,000 to provide public transport tickets, 30 percent of which is from a State Government grant.

Services to help asylum seekers improve their well-being include:

The drop-in centre

This offers lounge and dining areas, private meeting rooms, a women’s room, access to computers, telephone, email and the internet free of charge. Weekly computer classes are available on an open access basis.

Community meals

These are prepared each week-day lunchtime, usually for around 40 to 60 people.

Health promotion programs

These supplement other medical services offered by the Centre, such as a workshop for mothers focussing on dental hygiene and caring for the teeth of babies and children.

Financial counselling

This is provided in conjunction with the Bendigo Bank and offers financial guidance workshops covering topics such as credit cards, bank accounts, debt and budget management.

KidsZone and TeenZone

These therapeutic programs are run by volunteer family therapists to provide support and family strengthening services to families.

The Asylum Seeker Outreach Children’s Playgroup

This is a weekly playgroup run by qualified volunteer childcare workers.

It just grew organically. We didn’t have the means or the money but the need was there and we said ‘We’re just going to do it.’ That’s how it grew.

Kon Karapanagiotidis ASYLUM SEEKER RESOURCE CENTRE

GLOSSARY

Australian Apprenticeships Centre

A ‘one-stop shop’ providing information, recruitment and administration services and support to employers and apprentices.

Business incubator

Business incubators promote small business development by offering flexible and shorter-term accommodation leases, access to loans, and on-site small business management advice and support.

Information and some support for business incubators is available through the Commonwealth Government’s Building Entrepreneurship in Small Business program.

Community Development

Employment Projects

The Commonwealth Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme was started in 1977 to provide an alternative to unemployment benefit payments for indigenous people in remote regions. It arose out of government concern about ongoing indigenous dependence on welfare payments and was intended to provide opportunities for work in local communities. Over time, critics of the program pointed to its failure to achieve a transition for CDEP participants to the mainstream labour market, and the scheme has more recently put greater emphasis on transition to real jobs, training and mainstream employment programs.

Community Jobs Plan

The Community Jobs Plan targets areas of high unemployment or population groups with high unemployment levels to fund organisations to provide paid work and job experience on community based projects.

Community Youth Support Scheme

The Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS) was introduced by the Commonwealth Government in 1976 to provide personal support, counselling and advocacy, life skills and vocational training, craft and work co-operative activity, and job search assistance. CYSS was succeeded by SkillShare in 1989.

DEEWR

In 2008 the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) was renamed he Department of Education, Employment and

Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

This Department and its predecessors, the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) and the Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) has managed Commonwealth Government funding for employment services including the Community Youth Support Scheme, SkillShare (1989-1997), the Job Network (1997) and Work For the Dole.

ESRA

The Employment Services Regulatory Authority, which managed the contracting of case management services for unemployed people before the Job Network was introduced.

Job Network

The program through which the Commonwealth Government contracted out support and services to unemployed people, starting in 1997. This created a competi-tive market for unemployment assistance in Australia.

NEIS

The New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) is a Commonwealth Government program to help unemployed people registered with Centrelink to start their own new business if they have a promising business idea.

New Apprenticeship Centres

A ‘one-stop shop’ providing information, recruitment and administration services and support to employers and apprentices. These have been renamed Australian Apprenticeship Centres.

Personal Support Program

A program for people who need support and referral to extra assistance to address difficult circumstances such as homelessness, mental health conditions, or addictions.

Registered Training Organisation

An organisation registered with a State or Territory accreditation body to deliver training and/or to conduct assessments and issue nationally recognised qualifications in according with the Australian Quality Training Framework.

SkillShare

SkillShare was a Commonwealth labour market program (1989-1997) funding non-profit organisations to offer work preparation and skills training to unemployed people.

Social Ventures Australia

Social Ventures Australia is a non-profit organisation supporting social investment that aligns the interests of philanthropists. SVA support a carefully selected portfolio of non-profit ventures lead by outstanding social entrepreneurs, and we also help strengthen the broader social sector with customised consulting, mentoring, workshop programs and web-based learning.

Star ratings

A system to measure and compare the performance of providers of employment services programs, based on information about employment outcomes, the level of disadvantage of people placed, and labour market conditions. Star ratings in the Job Network have largely informed business allocation for Job Network providers.

STEP ERS

The Structured Training and Employment Projects (STEP) Program provides flexible funding for packages of tailored assistance, including structured and accredited training, to help employers give long term jobs to Indigenous Australians. Assistance is tailored to business needs and can include approaches such as funding for apprenticeships and mentoring that can lead to lasting employment.

Work For the Dole

A Commonwealth program managed by DEEWR providing unpaid work experience opportunities in non-profit organisations so that unemployed people can develop work skills and meet an obligation to contribute to the community. This program will be continued under the Employment Services contract 2006-2009.

ABOUT JOBS AUSTRALIA

Jobs Australia (JA) is the national peak body for non-profit organisations that assist unemployed people to get and keep jobs.

The network helps members to make the most effective use of their resources and promotes the needs of unemployed people for the services and support that will help them to participate fully in society.

With 255 members, Jobs Australia is the largest network of employment and related service providers in Australia.

Jobs Australia is funded and owned by its members, who range from large charitable organisations to small local community-based agencies. The mission of Jobs Australia is to contribute to a fairer and more equitable Australia by:

- Representing community-based employment and related services organisations;
- Strengthening the capacity of our members, and of the communities and individuals they serve; and
- Promoting better understanding of the needs and interests of disadvantaged unemployed people.

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Jobs Australia
708 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne Victoria 3000
03 9349 3699 or 1800 331 915
ja@ja.com.au
www.ja.com.au