

Skilling Regional Australia

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MAY 2008



Case studies from *Community
Colleges Connect*... a strategic
alliance of four community colleges
servicing regional Australia

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Introduction

Community Colleges Connect is a strategic alliance of four community colleges servicing regional Australia.

This cluster of four colleges, in alphabetical order, comprises:

1. Central West Community College, with major campuses in Bathurst and Orange NSW
2. Continuing Education Centre, with its major campus in Wodonga VIC
3. Riverina Community College, with its major campus in Wagga Wagga NSW
4. Western College, with its campus in Dubbo NSW.

The strategic alliance was formed in order to increase the impact of the colleges on their students, communities and industries. The overall, shared aim of the alliance is the skilling of regional Australia.

To help monitor and increase the impact of the alliance members, they devised a model to highlight the different domains in which their colleges make a difference - at the regional, community, enterprise and individual student levels.

The following diagram summarises these domains, highlighting the region as the overall beneficiary of the colleges' efforts.



Diagram 1: The impact domains of Community Colleges Connect - region, community, enterprise and individual

Four case studies

To demonstrate how the colleges are providing services that positively impact on regional Australia, this booklet contains one case study from each of the four community colleges.

Each case study illustrates a different example of how the colleges are adding value to one or more of the following:

- the region, by enhancing regional development
- the enterprise, by increasing workforce productivity
- the community, in building social capital
- the individual learner, in improving human capital.

Some brief definitions of these key terms are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Brief definitions of key terms

TERM	BRIEF DEFINITIONS
regional development	regional development is about regional communities improving their economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being by fully developing the potential of the region and its people (Regional Development Council 2005)
workforce productivity	a productive workforce has a level and allocation of skills in tune with those required in the labour market and makes better use of available stocks of physical capital (Australian Government budget papers, Statement 4, May 2008)
social capital	the product of a person's networks or connections (Lesser 2000)
human capital	the capability and contribution of the Australian people (COAG Feb 2006)

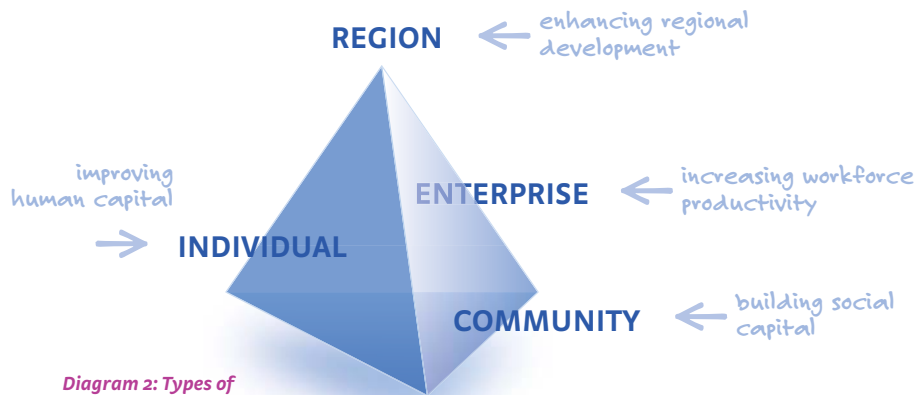


Diagram 2: Types of value added by the alliance members

The diagram above summarises these four types of value.

The case studies in this booklet show that the alliance partners provide a range of different services that add value in the four domains of the region, community, enterprise and individual. These services include:

- services assisting regional development
- customised workforce development services
- programs aiding community development
- personalised training and assessment services.

The following diagram summarises these different services.

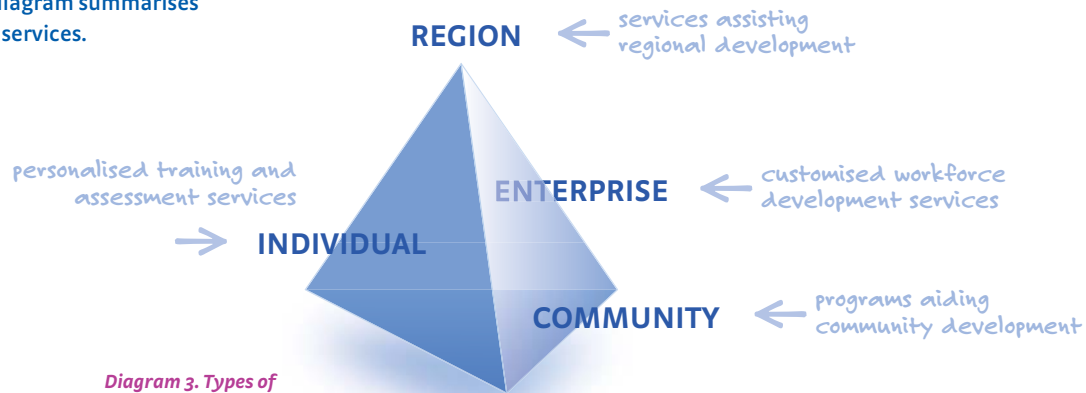


Diagram 3: Types of services of the alliance members that add value

Special features

This model has some special features:

- it is unique to *Community Colleges Connect*, arising from its members' close, collaborative relationships over a number of years
- it provides the alliance with a galvanising framework for their own continuous improvement
- it provides a clear message to the colleges' clients and communities that the colleges are focused on adding value to regional Australia.

Each of the case studies in this booklet reflect the importance of this model as both a reflection of the colleges' current high performance and as a spur to the colleges' ongoing high performance.

References

Australian Government 2008, 'Budget papers, Statement 4: Boosting Australia's Productive Capacity: The role of infrastructure and skills', available at http://www.budget.gov.au/2008-09/content/bp1/downloads/bp1_bst4.pdf

Council of Australian Governments (COAG), 2006, *Communique*, 10 February, available at www.coag.gov.au

Lesser, E. (ed.), 2000, *Knowledge and Social Capital, Foundations and Applications*, Butterworth Heinemann, Boston.

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Executive Summary

Aims

The first aim of this report is to inform people outside the four member colleges of *Community Colleges Connect* about the successful strategies used by the colleges to skill regional Australia.

The second aim is to promote the specific model used by this cluster of colleges. This model performs two immediate functions:

- it clarifies the different domains in which the colleges add value - the domains of the region, community, enterprise and individual
- it identifies the major ways in which the colleges add value, from offering customised workforce development services for enterprises to providing personalised training and assessment services for the individual.

Overview of case studies

To prepare the publication, Dr John Mitchell from John Mitchell & Associates used a survey form and conducted related discussions with staff of the colleges from April-May 2008.

The four case studies in this report are set out in the table opposite.

Key findings

If Australia, including regional Australia, is to prosper, it is urgent that we find solutions to the skill shortages which are holding us back as a nation. This is the message of a recent discussion paper called *Skilling Australia for the Future* released by the Australian Government. The paper outlines the Government's commitment to provide additional training places over the next four years and outlines a roadmap for reform.

Table 1:
Case study foci

COLLEGE	CASE STUDY TOPIC	CASE STUDY FOCUS
Central West Community College	Workforce development in a regional enterprise	This case study shows the college focusing on developing the capabilities of individual meat workers while adding to the capacity of a newly re-opened abattoir in Cowra NSW. The college's work will also benefit regional development.
Continuing Education Centre	Skilling disengaged youth	The case study focuses on how the Centre assisted previously disengaged youth to develop confidence and new skills. This skill building also has benefits for the community and region.
Riverina Community College	Skill building for Indigenous people	This case study focuses on the development of social capital by individual participants. Potentially the project will contribute to community development and assist regional development.
Western College	Re-skilling displaced workers	This case study shows the college adding value in all four domains. It particularly focuses on how the college helped to build the human capital of the individual participants in the program.

The Government paper notes that this increased investment in skills training is targeted at lifting workforce participation and productivity in Australia - allowing the Australian economy to continue to expand and deliver prosperity to future generations of Australians.

The case studies in this booklet provide insights into the capacities of four progressive, contemporary adult and community education (ACE) organisations that are entirely aligned with skills training targeted at lifting workforce participation and productivity in Australia.

The four colleges profiled in this publication demonstrate multiple capacities, including the following:

- **An ability to help individuals increase their human capital.** For instance:
 - Case study one describes Central West Community College assisting meat workers to gain their first ever qualification - a nationally accredited, quality endorsed and transportable qualification.
 - Case study two describes the Continuing Education Centre assisting disengaged youth to develop invaluable employability skills.
 - Case study three describes Riverina Community College assisting talented Indigenous people to expand their artistic potential.
 - Case study four shows Western College assisting displaced health workers to regain their self-esteem and develop optimism for their future.
- **An ability to help build social capital.** For instance:
 - Central West Community College assisted previously unskilled people in a town 300km west of Sydney to acquire new skills, secure their employment and hence become more fully functioning members of their local community (case study one).

- The Continuing Education Centre enables disengaged youths to re-connect with the local community by undertaking training in an adult learning 'village' environment which includes the steadying influence of older learners (case study two).
- Riverina Community College is supporting the emergence of community networks involving Indigenous artists, community organisations, government organisations, various cultural groups and the local art community (case study three).
- Western College helped displaced health workers to regain their confidence and make a more positive contribution to their local communities (case study four).

- **An ability to improve an enterprise's workforce development.** For instance:

- Central West Community College helped the new owners of the re-opened abattoir in Cowra to attract, select and up-skill a labour force, in a short period of time (case study one).
- The Continuing Education Centre formed partnerships with local enterprises and won their support to place disengaged youths in those enterprises, to undertake learning in the workplace, while simultaneously introducing the enterprise owners to possible new staff (case study two).
- Riverina Community College assisted local enterprises and community bodies by developing a database of local Indigenous talent, for access by industry, particularly tourism enterprises (case study three).
- Western College helped an area health service to re-skill workers who were displaced following a major restructure of the organisation - which also lifted the morale of the existing workers who were not displaced, but were concerned about the job prospects of their ex-colleagues (case study four).

- **An ability to enhance regional development.** For instance:

- Central West Community College not only helped the launch of an abattoir business in Cowra, but its provision of services also had a cascading effect in the region by generating new business for transport companies, local primary producers and other service providers, hence impacting positively on local families and communities (case study one).
- The Continuing Education Centre enables disengaged youths to become productive people in the wider community as well as in the workforce, for a growing primary industry and manufacturing local industry sector (case study two).
- Riverina Community College enriches the region by encouraging Indigenous artists to market their talents to the broader community, pursue artistic excellence and promote the Indigenous cultural heritage (case study three).
- Western College helped an area health service to re-skill displaced workers so that these workers were available and able to make a positive contribution in other regional enterprises and communities (case study four).

Summary

In summary, the four colleges described in the publication have demonstrated advanced capabilities for not only meeting the Government's overarching aim of lifting workforce participation and productivity in Australia, but also for increasing human capital, building social capital, enhancing workforce development and improving regional development.

Case study 1. Building the capabilities of meat workers
Central West Community College

Case study 2. Turning around disengaged youth
Continuing Education Centre

Case study 3. Deriving multiple benefits from Indigenous programs
Riverina Community College

Case study 4. Creating opportunities for displaced health staff
Western College

Case study 1. Building the capabilities of meat workers

Central West Community College initiative

Background

In August 2006 Cowra Abattoir was closed by administrators, leaving two hundred local workers out of work. This was a major blow to Cowra, a town 310 kilometres drive due west of Sydney.

Over the following months a consortium of local businessmen led by Chris Cummins and George Kollas undertook negotiations with the administrator and purchased the operation. Through their vision and enthusiasm the abattoir operations re-opened as Cowra Meat Processors (CMP) in March 2007, seven months after the earlier close.

During the three month period leading up to the official re-opening of the abattoir facility, Central West Community College (CWCC) provided recruitment support to CMP. From the start, CWCC's Recruitment Services staff liaised closely with CMP's new owners and management team to identify the employment needs of the operation. CWCC then advertised and successfully recruited ninety five full time abattoir employees. A further twenty five casual positions were filled shortly after the opening.

Staff information and induction sessions were conducted by CWCC and sixty six employees were signed into Certificate II Meat Processing (Abattoirs) traineeships by CWCC's Australian Apprenticeships Centre.

As a registered training organisation (RTO), CWCC was able to support the trainees by developing and delivering customised training that helped the trainees successfully complete the traineeship training program over the subsequent twelve months.

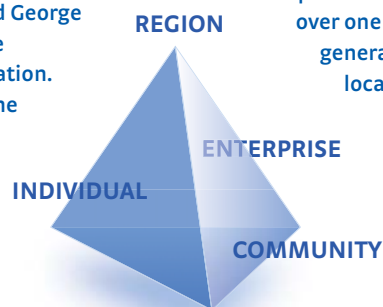
In April 2008, thirty of the original trainees received a certificate of completion, jointly presented by Cowra Meat Processors and Central West Community College.

This inspiring achievement by CMP had a significant economic impact on the local Cowra community through the employment of over one hundred and twenty local people as well as through the generation of associated commerce for transport companies, local primary producers and other service providers.

Focus of this initiative

The focus of this initiative by CWCC was to assist a new enterprise with its workforce development during the critical start-up phase of its operation. To immediately reach viable production levels, CMP needed a fast response to attracting, selecting and up-skilling a relatively large labour force.

CWCC's integrated support services were a critical factor in meeting this need during this start-up phase. CWCC sourced a labour supply and facilitated the up skilling of 25% of the new workforce through a structured traineeship framework with employer incentive funding offsetting associated training costs.



Timely assistance from CWCC with this human resource process enabled CMP staff to concentrate on their core business - meat processing.

Value of this initiative

According to CWCC's CEO Dianne Kitcher, the key value of this CWCC initiative was its positive impact on the capability of the individual trainees who participated in and completed Certificate II Meat Processing (Abattoirs) and the contribution they now make to the enterprise.

She congratulated CMP on its investment in its people:

As a newly opened abattoir, the commitment and investment CMP made in its own workforce through vocational training has provided job security for its staff and fostered confidence and loyalty to the organisation.

The benefits of this investment for CMP are profound, said Kitcher:

The improved skills of the trained workers has supported CMP to restructure its production schedules and line operations to achieve increased productivity through higher quality processing and larger output ratios than had previously been recorded.

Services provided

These benefits were achieved through CWCC's experience and ability as an RTO to "fully tailor to the specific operations of the client enterprise the training resources, learning activities and assessment tasks"; noted CWCC's Graham Draffin, Senior Manager Business Development.

Prior to the delivery of training, CWCC's staff conducted a comprehensive investigation into CMP's production line operations and the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) involved in the trainees' roles. The training and assessment was then modelled to incorporate the SOPs as well as the specific workplace documents, forms, acronyms and terminology particular to CMP, ensuring direct relevance to its operations.

The flexible delivery of the training included on-site instruction, self-paced learning activities and on-the-job competency assessments. This flexibility minimised any impact of employee downtime on CMP's production schedules, said Draffin.

Additional tuition through one-to-one tutoring was provided by CWCC's training staff to support a small number of trainees who had lower levels of literacy and numeracy and were inexperienced in participating in vocational training.

CMP staff were assisted to complete recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessments before the commencement of training. This RPL service identified and credited staff for existing skills and knowledge gained through previous formal training, prior work and relevant life experience.

Drivers

CWCC's organisational belief and ongoing commitment to skilling regional Australia was a key driver for supporting this initiative, said CEO Kitcher.

The College's integrated range of services provide recruitment, training and community support to build the capability of individuals and strengthen the workforces of local enterprises.

Complementing CWCC's commitment, CMP's managers were motivated by their quest for improved quality and greater productivity from their employees.

They recognised the value vocational training provides through skill development and consistency in workplace processes and identified CWCC's capacity as a lead provider of vocational training in the meat industry to deliver the outcomes they required.

Obstacles overcome

As the tailored delivery of nationally recognised vocational education is a core service for CWCC, "addressing CMP's set of challenges was core business for us as an RTO", said Kitcher.

There were immediate obstacles and challenges to overcome in locating and recruiting one hundred and twenty staff within a relatively short timeframe. Given Cowra's population base of just over 13,000 people, CWCC's first challenge was to attract and recruit for this initiative almost 1% of the shire's population.

A second challenge addressed by CWCC involved the strategic scheduling of training delivery around the production-line operations of CMP. As the line could not be stopped during standard production hours, some phases of training delivery were undertaken at 6am in the morning or very late in the afternoon. Effectively engaging trainees after a long day on the production line was achieved through the use of interactive learning delivery methods by CWCC trainers, said Kitcher.

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A third challenge was the volume of trainees requiring training. CWCC's experience in providing nationally recognised vocational training through previous large-scale industry partnerships within the meat and food processing industries ensured the volume of trainees involved in the initiative did not represent an obstacle or challenge in service delivery.

Steps to implement and complete this initiative

CWCC's approach to planning, implementing and delivering involved key staff from a number of the college's service areas. Principally, the College's Senior Manager Business Development and Job Network Business Consultant (Cowra) met with CMP to clearly identify their recruitment needs, time-frames and objectives.

In consultation with other CWCC service areas, a proposal was developed that clearly identified how CWCC could assist with the project. The proposal also outlined the associated employer incentive funding the CMP would attract from the Australian Apprenticeships Centre, for supporting trainees.

CWCC's Job Network staff proceeded to advertise, shortlist and interview applicants to provide CMP management with a viable pool of potential abattoir workers.

Once the successful applicants were selected, CWCC conducted an information and induction session in partnership with CMP. The College's Australian Apprenticeships Centre staff then completed the "sign up" process to engage identified trainees in the traineeship program.

Simultaneously, CWCC's Industry Services staff met with CMP to conduct a training needs analysis. This led to the customisation of Certificate II Meat Processing (Abattoirs) training resources and assessment tasks.

In April 2007, within weeks of the re-opening of the abattoirs, CWCC commenced training delivery for the trainees, with ongoing workplace support provided by CMP supervisors and managers.

Within twelve months, thirty trainees successfully completed the full qualification and were awarded their certificate at a celebratory event held on-site at CMP.

Support and skills provided

The success of this initiative relied heavily on the industry experience and expertise of CWCC's specialist trainers and Industry Services staff. The lead trainer in this initiative was an experienced meat worker with a background as a Meat Inspector with Australian Quarantine Inspection Services (AQIS).

CWCC's integrated approach ensured internal support from each of CWCC's service areas. CWCC's training delivery staff were supported by administration teams who processed enrolments and employer incentive funding and training documentation. The administration teams also assisted with progress reporting and ultimately finalised credentialing requirements and issued to the successful trainees the nationally recognised qualification.

Designing and delivering tailored industry training and assessment services are strengths of the College. "The existing resources and the experience of our RTO and Industry Services staff ensured CWCC's capacity to successfully deliver," noted CEO Kitcher.

The support received from CMP management and its staff was also critical to the success of this initiative, said Kitcher:

Sustained interest, motivation and proactive involvement from CMP was required to ensure the timeframes were met for training delivery and the number of successful completions of trainees was maximised.

Open and effective communication between CWCC delivery staff and CMP was a key to achieving this result.

Innovative capability

CWCC has a successful twenty five year history in skilling regional Australia based on fresh thinking and an ability to innovate in training delivery, said CEO Kitcher.

We are an agile organisation with internal flexibility that enables our staff to provide timely and customised solutions to build the capacity of workforces and positively impact on the productivity of local enterprises. Our tailored training and flexible delivery seamlessly embeds skill development and learning into the work processes of enterprises.

"CWCC is a leading provider of vocational education and training in regional NSW and has a current reputation as the largest training provider in the NSW meat industry. This has been earned through our ability to respond quickly to the needs of employers and the demands of industry," she continued.

Our identification of the opportunity and benefits of tailoring nationally recognised training packages to the specific operational requirements of enterprises has driven our Industry Services for almost five years.

We have extensive experience in tailoring nationally recognised training in the meat, food processing, mining and viticulture industries within the central west region of NSW.

Snapshot of Central West Community College

Outcomes

In April 2008, twelve months after the commencement of this initiative, thirty trainees completed Certificate II Meat Processing (Abattoirs). This was the first vocational qualification received by any of these trainees.

For these individuals, the achievement has provided a sense of value in themselves as employees of CMP and provided job security through their employer's investment in a nationally recognised qualification, said Kitcher.

CMP understands the positive benefits of upskilling its workforce - namely increased quality in production and higher outputs - while at the same time remaining aware of the market value each of these trainees represents within an industry facing a growing skills shortage crisis.



Dianne Kitcher
Chief Executive Officer,
Central West
Community College



Graham Draffin
Senior Manager
Business Development,
Central West
Community College

Central West Community College (CWCC) has a twenty five year history as a registered training organisation (RTO) with a growing employee base of 160 full time equivalent staff and over 130 trainers and assessors. CWCC currently offers a range of training, employment and community support services in twenty five locations throughout regional and rural NSW.

CWCC consistently aims to provide inclusive learning and skill development services for people who experience barriers to employment, education and training, to help them achieve outcomes of independence, self esteem, participation and inclusion.

The college is also responsive to industry and the challenges facing employers with regard to Australia's skills shortage and ageing population. Staff have successfully built the capacity of enterprises through tailored training and flexible delivery options.

CWCC's training program is delivered through a number of streams. These include:

- **Short Course Training Program** - a range of short courses (accredited and non accredited) promoted to individuals, businesses and the community through a quarterly Short Course Guide
- **Customised Business Training** - customised training developed and delivered in response to business and employer needs. Courses can range from one day workshops to six week programs for staff in specific areas.

- **Tailored Industry Training for Trainees** - accredited training and assessment tailored specifically to the work processes and operational needs of large employers with workplace delivery and on the job assessments. Generally full certificate training is delivered over a six to twelve month period with large numbers of trainees and apprentices.
- **Pre-Vocational Training** - short structured accredited training courses targeting disadvantaged client groups including youth, early school leavers, Aboriginal and long term unemployed jobseekers and people with a disability to provide entry level work skills. These courses provide work experience and work site orientation visits and focus strongly on developing the employability skills of participants.
- **Literacy and Numeracy Courses** - accredited literacy and numeracy training delivered through classes accessible to all community members, not just jobseekers.

Other vocational education and training related services delivered by CWCC to provide seamless employment pathways for clients include:

- **Recruitment Services** - a Job Network employment service which prepares jobseekers for employment through work ready training programs (including intensive employability skills training) and assists local employers to access this available labour supply
- **Australian Apprenticeships Services** - provides networks with employers to identify labour needs and training solutions within an apprenticeship and traineeship framework
- **Disability Services** - a support service to assist people with a disability to participate in suitable training and sustainable employment opportunities
- **Aboriginal Services** - key training and employment support which provides short VET courses and practical work placements to build the capacity of Aboriginal job seekers within their local environments.

Case study 2. Turning around disengaged youth

Continuing Education Centre's initiative, via its Albury Wodonga Community College

Background

The Continuing Education Centre (CEC) in Wodonga Victoria was approached by the Victorian Government Department of Education and Training in 2001, as part of its 2010 vision of improved educational standards, to produce a comprehensive research report on the possible linkages between the Victorian secondary school system and the established Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector.

Consequently CEC decided to broaden its emphasis from primarily providing adult education to building a strong, resilient and diverse range of educational youth programs. This decision was strongly supported at community forums and subsequently endorsed by the Community College Board of Directors in the organisation's Strategic Plan.

As an Adult, Community and Further Education Centre (ACFE) delivering accredited training, the Continuing Education Centre believed it was in a prime position to develop pathways that assist young people in the Wodonga community. A feature of its proposal to assist young people was that the proposal did not take any existing students from their current secondary school.

This proposed approach was designed to cater for students *who had already left the local secondary school system and post-compulsory education in NE Victoria and southern NSW*. The initial proposal was also to support its graduates to move on to another level of education such as a TAFE program, the Australian Apprenticeship program or possibly tertiary studies.



Barriers to participation

CEC's initial Youth Pathways enrolments in 2004/2005 provided information about previous or current barriers for local disengaged youth from participating in education and employment, which were collected and collated by the Centre. These barriers align with findings from other research conducted nationally and are summarised in the following table.

Table 1: Barriers to education for local disengaged youth, identified by CEC

Homelessness
Unstable family relationships
Chronic illness / disability
Substance abuse
Mental illness
Involvement with corrective services
Involvement with protective services
Numeracy / literacy levels below student's potential
Unstable peer interactions
Poverty
Unemployment
Lack of relevant career planning or advice
Limited or non-existent transport
Low self-esteem, efficacy or cognitive skill
Lack of significant carer / parent who supports education
Lack of personal goals
Lack of positive learning experiences
Lack of access to technology
Non-relevant / inappropriate curriculum
Presence of racism in the classroom
Family mobility
English as a Second Language
Non-accredited teachers or teachers delivering outside their subject area
Migrant / refugee
Adolescent pregnancy
Geographical isolation
Domestic violence
Sexual abuse
Bullying - by peers or authority figures
Unresolved grief / trauma

These barriers to education for youths reinforce the community and social value of the work undertaken by CEC in providing youth programs that are effective.

Focus of the initiative

The Continuing Education Centre, with its establishment of the Albury Wodonga Community College and an emphasis on youth programs, has provided a holistic response to the needs of the “individual, local industry and community within the region,” said Meads. “The school represents Victoria’s and southern NSW’s first integrated registered independent post-compulsory secondary school in an Adult and Community Educational setting.”

Participating students and individuals within the school are actively re-engaged with curriculum specifically modelled to enhance the participant’s prospective employment outcomes. Meads continued:

The curriculum’s major focus on the employability skills embedded within Training Package qualifications is a substantial part of the students’ training outcomes. These employability skills are a predominant feature of our graduates who become local industry’s future employees.

Value added by the initiative

The first and possibly most dramatic feature of the Albury Wodonga Community College initiative as a registered Independent School is its effect on the participating individual’s re-engagement into education. “The total enhancement of this previously lost human capital was the primary focus in our strategic plan and direction in 2005,” said Meads.

We realised that if we could increase human capital with the inclusion of this ‘lost’ group, the total flow on from this schooling initiative would increase the social capital of the region.

Also, the Albury Wodonga Community College has created true regional development with the maximisation of all the human resources of the region and local community instead of just those people with no perceived barriers to education.

Services provided

CEC’s Albury Wodonga Community College directly services the educational needs of large number of disengaged youth in the region. The training it offers is individually managed and focused to meet the specific needs and desired employability skills of each individual. To further support the training of the young people, local industry partnerships were forged and are sustained with many employers in the region.

The college actively collaborates with organisations such as the North East Local Learning and Employment Network, Chamber of Manufacturers, Chamber of Commerce, Job Pathways, Youth Emergency Services and Local Service Clubs and most importantly with local government in both states, New South Wales and Victoria.

Drivers

A key driver behind this initiative, said Meads, was the desire by the college to re-engage with the otherwise lost youth of the region to enable them to become productive people in the community as well as in workforce, “for a growing primary and manufacturing local industry sector”. As a sign of success, the employability skills developed by the students of this college “are now being sought after within a regional context,” said Meads.

Positive feedback from the public along with the effective provision of extended educational and training pathways to TAFE and the tertiary sectors of Victoria and NSW “have continued to inspire the Albury Wodonga Community College to press forward and extend our operational campuses into Albury NSW in 2009”.

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Obstacles overcome

The major obstacle that needed to be overcome in order to implement the initiative was gaining the recognition of State and Commonwealth government that some of the Independent School sector is not made up of the highly privileged in society. Meads commented:

Despite having an operational budget of only 60% of an equivalent - in student number - state government school, we exist based on the social capital and community input that is derived by our schools existence.

Our entire school population had previously disengaged from State Secondary Schools due to the student's inability to cope and manage within the construct of the State School system.

Steps taken

Some crucial steps taken to implement the initiative included developing the Registered and Accredited Non-Government alternative education model located within an expanded Continuing Education Centre, providing maximum adult learning experiences and access to existing trade, art and computer facilities, and expanding the other existing adult learning and community services.

An exhaustive research, development and application process was undertaken which led to the lodgement with the Registered Schools Board of Victoria of the application in July 2005. Following numerous paper and desk audits of the curriculum and policy development and several physical site inspections, the school was approved to open in January 2006.

"Subsequent audits and inspection over the past two years have concreted our place in the post compulsory school system of the region," said Meads.

Skills used

To implement the initiative, new skills were required of staff, said Meads:

Like most new operations, the skills needed are either apparent at the beginning or they physically evolve as the project evolves. A well ordered, conceived and managed approach to the project must be taken, which is structured enough to withstand the rigours of what may unfold but flexible enough to adjust as needed, in order to achieve desired outcomes.

The commonsense planning and management approach taken from the start of the initiative by Meads and his colleagues was as follows:

Research the subject matter, design a model of operation and talk to as many experts as you can and make a decision on the path that you will follow in the knowledge that you might be required to move quickly in another direction to maintain momentum and ultimately to obtain the desired outcomes.

Innovation

The Continuing Education Centre's first innovative activity involved consultation with the community in the series of community forums in 2004. Meads summarised the consultative approach:

Listen to what the community wants, consolidate their expectation into the strategic direction of the organisation and provide the community with the operational expertise to make it happen and they will always support you.

The next innovative activity was for the CEC's staff to analyse its own organisation:

We needed to know our business's strengths and weaknesses. We confirmed that our business is education, our strengths are structure, quality control and good governance and our weaknesses relate to size and capital infrastructure.

The third innovative activity was to "apply the logic of an adult education model to the post-compulsory school participants," said Meads. The Continuing Education Centre had been delivering the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) for some ten years prior to the approval from the Independent School, hence staff had extensive prior experience in all aspects of the VCE program. "We also had extensive experience in the delivery of the Youth Pathways Program (YPP) which is the representative group that would be participating in the new school structure."

And we had twenty five years' experience in the delivery of children's services which meant we could offer to our prospective students who had children access to funded occasional care so they could participate in education once again. In 2008 we care for 19 children daily while their mothers participate in educational activities at the college with a cost to the mother of only \$5.00 per day.

Reasons for success

CEC's success in recent years in providing youth programs is due to a number of factors, summarised CEO Rodney Wangman:

We provide at CEC a lifelong learning environment that recognises the ability of all age groups to engage in learning for a variety of reasons, and at a variety of stages.

Mainstream education however, still holds to the principle of linear learning, making it difficult to adjust when a young person misses one or more of the early stages of development. This and other difficulties, if not addressed, become barriers to the continued enjoyment and involvement in formal education. These barriers can result in a student disengaging themselves from the 'production-line' and taking their chances elsewhere.

By having small numbers of young students undertaking education in a predominately 'older' adult education environment, in ratios not available in secondary schools or TAFE, the stability of older learners - for support, mentoring and general engagement - establishes a very different 'village' feeling for these young people.

Deputy CEO of the Centre, Steve Meads agreed that CEC's model to assist youth at risk has succeeded because CEC integrates young people within the existing adult learning environment:

Our model is different and works because we integrate young people within our existing adult educational environment, reversing the usual student-to-adult ratios found in secondary schools. This increased adult presence, not available in other institutional models including TAFE and special secondary school classes, makes our situation unique.

Several other factors have also contributed to the success, said Meads, including:



Rodney Wangman
Chief Executive Officer,
Continuing
Education Centre



Steve Meads
Deputy
Chief Executive Officer,
Continuing
Education Centre

...having motivated and qualified staff and tutors, who are persistent and loyal to the students; providing small class sizes, encouraging individual development and self esteem; and surrounding the young students with a stable environment, with different adult learning practices and responsibilities and community interaction.

Outcomes

There are some immediate outcomes of the initiative, said Meads:

We now have a fully functional Independent School that provides significant individual, social and community benefits for the young adults who have been previously marginalised in all aspects of their lives.

In many cases our students are the first individual in their family group to have finished school with a full VCE or VCAL and this achievement has helped them to gravitate towards employment and financial security. This is the most profound outcome for the Albury Wodonga Community College.

Snapshot of the Continuing Education Centre

The Continuing Education Centre (Albury Wodonga) Limited has since its establishment in 1974 created a proud history of community partnerships and educational achievements.

We employ 75 staff and over 200 trainers/assessors, who each seek to impart their knowledge to our 10,000 students and customers, each year.

The Continuing Education Centre has two offices in Wodonga and operates from 25 rural venues, spread within a 100km radius of Albury-Wodonga.

Our achievements for over 30 years have occurred by:

- Being community owned and managed,
- Being created as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee,
- Leadership, based on strong community and business experiences,
- People delivering programs and services with appropriate sector pedagogy, and
- A vision underpinned with strategic directions and targets, set and realised.

Our organisational commitment is as follows:

- The complexities of operating a community not-for-profit organisation as a modern corporate business relies heavily on the connectedness that an organisation like the Continuing Education Centre achieves with its local community, sector peak bodies and government funding agencies.
- In a frequently changing environment, the Continuing Education Centre seeks to remain flexible, responsive and engaged.
- We aim to support community needs, take opportunities when presented and be prepared to modify our organisational structure and delivery methods, within a changing environment.

Case study 3. Deriving multiple benefits from Indigenous programs

Riverina Community College initiative

Background

Riverina Community College (RCC) began delivering training programs in 2007 that were specifically designed for Indigenous students.

These programs were developed following consultations with the Wagga Wagga Elders Group and after the college was approached by the Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Land Council and Wiradjuri Christian Development Ministries.

Although all these programs were for Indigenous participants, they were developed in close consultation with Indigenous community representatives and were very successful, they operated relatively independently of one another. These different 2007 programs were in Tourism, Training and Assessment, Visual Arts and Contemporary Craft, Wiradjuri Language and Cultural Site Identification and Protection.



Development of the RCC Art Studio and Gallery was also progressing during the same timeframe. The Art Studio was intended to be a space for everyone to utilise for artistic pursuits and the Art Gallery a place to showcase the work being undertaken in the Studio. The Studio was designed as a work space, a recreational and learning centre and a place to exhibit and perform arts related activities.

Meanwhile, some Indigenous students at the college began to take an interest in developing their knowledge and skills in artistic and cultural pursuits from these programs, as well as to see career opportunities in this field. The college was also keen to help potential Indigenous tutors and mentors gain qualifications and develop professionally.

Aims of initiative

RCC's Indigenous Arts/Crafts Project was launched towards the end of 2007. Its aims were to identify local Indigenous artists, set up a local Indigenous talent and skills database, encourage Indigenous artists to promote and market their talents to the broader community and the tourism industry, pursue artistic excellence and produce a local directory that promoted Indigenous cultural heritage.

Cheryl Cartwright, RCC's Manager of Access and Equity Programs, noted the impact of the innovative Indigenous Arts/Crafts Project, especially in binding together the various programs and other developments:

Although not formally planned, this project has now become a thread that binds an intricate web of programs, courses and initiatives involving a large number of people and organisations from our local community, with potential for many more. It has also identified many other options and issues that need to be explored.

Drivers

The key drivers behind the Indigenous Arts/Crafts Project were as follows, said Cartwright:

Identification and acknowledgement of local Indigenous talent and skills, promotion and marketing of these talents and skills to the broader community as well as the tourism industry, provision of an avenue for self-determination for local Indigenous people and promotion of Indigenous cultural heritage to the broader community.

Cartwright acknowledges the contribution of her colleagues to the Project:

With recognition of the positive work we were doing and the outcomes we were achieving through individual Indigenous courses and programs, Cynthia Breed, our now Community Cultural Facilitator, joined RCC towards the end of 2007 with a plan to achieve the aim that many people from our Indigenous community have for self-determination. This plan was in the form of our Indigenous Arts/Crafts Project.

Value

RCC's CEO Annita Booth believes that the main value delivered by the Indigenous Project is "currently social capital, but potentially the enhancement of regional development". The initiative is also contributing to community development, and potentially could aid regional development, she said.

"What began as working with individual local Indigenous artists has become something that the broader local community and region will benefit from," added Booth. And what began as a focus on the individual and specific arts and tourism industry "has become a focus for the community, with an emerging regional cultural perspective".

Obstacles

Obstacles that needed to be overcome to implement the initiative included "providing on-going resources to fund an appropriate facilitator and other activities associated with the initiative. This is still an obstacle."

Some other obstacles were removed by "the acceptance by some local Indigenous artists that this initiative will help them".

Steps taken

Steps needed to implement the initiative were explained by Cartwright:

What has become Stage 1 was planned as the original initiative, however other new programs have begun, a trend has developed for these programs to become very inter-related and more new initiatives have started to come from within these programs from the participants themselves. We are now in Stage 2 and anticipate more stages to come.

Stage 1 involved researching, identifying and providing a written context of contemporary local Indigenous artists, creating a database of Indigenous talent, and encouraging and engaging Indigenous artists to participate in and pursue artistic excellence.

Stage 2 will involve seeking additional funding to further develop and co-ordinate art exhibitions, promotion of partnerships and implement on-going training and employment ventures, and promotion of local Indigenous artists and the diverse cultural heritage of the region to the broader community.

Support required

Support was required to fund the employment of the Indigenous Community Consultant as well as a series of community meetings. "It should be noted that this person is particularly passionate about her role and gives much more than she is paid for," said Cartwright.

The initiative is also well supported with positive promotion by the Eastern Riverina Arts Program and individual members of the local art community and the local Indigenous community.

Skills required

New skills were required to implement the initiative, said Cartwright, and in many cases the skills were taught to RCC staff by other people:

Our Indigenous Community Consultant taught RCC staff many new skills in facilitation, particularly when working with the Indigenous community.

We have tapped into the knowledge and skills of other organisations to provide specialist advice for the participants involved in the initiative, for example Viscopy.

RCC's IT Manager has taught our Indigenous Community Consultant new skills in the creation, implementation and maintenance of databases.

Innovation

Cartwright is clear about the innovative feature of the Indigenous Arts/Crafts Project:

Looking at the talents and skills that our local Indigenous people do have, not what they don't have, and focusing on what they can offer the broader community.

Outcomes

Cartwright noted a recent shift in the way Indigenous programs emerged and related to each other:

Early this year a shift was noticeable in the way Indigenous programs and initiatives at RCC began to emerge. As well as many new programs beginning, a trend developed for these programs to become very inter-related and new initiatives started to come from within these programs from the students themselves. We saw many people getting involved in a number of courses and it became quite common for students in one course to become mentors in another. This was the beginnings of seeing self-determination at work.

REGION

According to Cartwright, the immediate outcomes of the Indigenous Arts/Crafts Project include the following:

- the development of a database of local Indigenous talent
- the growth of community recognition of this talent
- the development of a referral base to engage specific Indigenous talent for access by the broader community
- the achievement of financial gain and artistic recognition for local Indigenous artists
- the identification of community issues and needs that need to be addressed
- the ongoing training and support for more people offered by mentors
- the identification of potential Indigenous tutors for a variety of courses
- the emergence of an informal support network for Indigenous artists
- the emergence of community networks involving Indigenous artists, community organisations, government organisations, various cultural groups and the local art community.

Snapshot of Riverina Community College

Riverina Community College (RCC) is a not-for-profit organisation specialising in employment services and vocational training. It enjoys an enviable reputation for flexibility, reliability, dedication and innovation throughout the community in its geographic footprint and in industry at large.

RCC was incorporated 28 years ago and incorporated as a company limited by guarantee in 2003. Since its establishment in 1980, the college has provided quality adult education and employment services to the communities in which it operates with the aim of creating a collaborative, co-operative and accessible learning environment focusing on the needs of the client and the community at large.

RCC currently operates from the following regional centres: Cootamundra; Corowa; Deniliquin; Griffith; Gundagai; Leeton; Temora; Tumut; and Wagga Wagga (Head Office).

RCC comprises two major business units: Employment Services/Job Network including the Personal Support Program (PSP), and RTO activities. RCC delivers Employment Services in Gundagai, Wagga Wagga, Deniliquin and Griffith while PSP covers Temora, Cootamundra, Wagga Wagga, Junee, Finley, Tumut, Griffith, Leeton and Deniliquin. RTO services are concentrated in the field of vocational training.

Vocational training largely comprises facilitating and assessing on-the-job trainees in local industries (traineeships), as well as face-to-face, distance or flexible training in structured courses leading to job qualifications. In 2006/07 RCC established two highly successful new ventures, a Beauty School and Community Art Studio and Gallery. Both deliver short courses and accredited courses up to Certificate III.

Other important services offered by the college include the Community Visitors Scheme (CVS), linking volunteers with lonely people in nursing homes across the Riverina, migrant and Indigenous programs, recreational/lifestyle courses and various literacy classes. Expansion of all of these activities saw RCC's Student Contact Hours (SCH) increase from 11,000 in 2007 to 20,000 in 2008.

The Riverina region incorporates 15 local communities (population 155,000 approximately), however the Greater Riverina includes portions of surrounding communities such as Urana, Tumbarumba and Jerilderie Shires that are home to approximately 175,000 people. There is a growing need for skills, training and employment in the following industries: Business Training - including retail and customer service; Hospitality & Tourism; Aged Care; and Transport and Distribution.

Regardless of its non-profit status, RCC must maintain and promote quality, profitability, productivity and best-practice in the employment and adult education market generally and vocational training in particular. One of the priorities of the business will be to build its marketing and delivery networks throughout the region, while continuing provision of fully funded vocational training programs in areas of serious skills shortages and for unemployed or underprivileged equity groups.

Innovative and Inter-related Indigenous Programs and Initiatives

The case study from Riverina Community College notes some new trends that began to emerge early in 2008 regarding Indigenous programs and initiatives at the College. “As well as many new programs beginning, a trend developed for these programs to become very inter-related,” said Cheryl Cartwright, Manager of Access and Equity Programs.

New initiatives started to come from within these programs from the students themselves. We saw many people getting involved in a number of courses and it became quite common for students in one course to become mentors in another. This was the beginnings of seeing self-determination at work.

Following are descriptions of four examples from a cluster of the College’s current Indigenous programs and initiatives that contribute to these trends.



Annita Booth
Chief Executive Officer,
Riverina Community
College



Cheryl Cartwright
Manager of Access and
Equity Programs,
Riverina Community
College

Dis'course is Deadly

This very successful program for young 15 to 24 year olds helps these young people experiment with different forms of self-expression while they work towards gaining a Certificate II in Visual Arts and Contemporary Crafts. It also helps them build their self-confidence and self-esteem, connect with their culture and their community and explore opportunities that they may not have been aware of previously.

It is arts-based but includes different genres of music, different art mediums, contemporary and traditional dance, web applications and graphic design, “but may also extend to other creative pursuits that people have a passion for,” said Cartwright. “Part of the success of the program comes from being able to work from the Community Art Studio. The Studio is ‘their space’ to be creative in or just feel comfortable in.”

Very positive feedback about this course has come from the Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Elders Group and the Wiradjuri Council of Elders, various local schools and members of the local art community. “Individual mentors from the Indigenous community are regularly involved, including our Deadly Artists students,” said Cartwright.

Deadly Artists

The RCC Community Art Studio and its associated Gallery provides a place for budding and more established Indigenous artists to produce, exhibit and perform arts related activities, as well as mentor and teach others. These artists need formal qualifications if they are to teach accredited courses or go on to further study – and RCC want to employ more Indigenous artists as tutors.

Young Indigenous people who have completed qualifications through the Dis'course is Deadly program may wish to continue their training and complete a further Visual Arts Certificate. This course allows students to work towards gaining a Certificate III in Visual Arts and Contemporary Craft.

Cartwright commented on the value of providing these artists with further training:

Provision of training to these artists will help them gain further confidence to exhibit their work and pursue the arts as a source of employment and potential business ventures, encourage a high degree of professionalism and give them knowledge and skills to mentor and teach others within the Indigenous community.

Arts.Tourism.Business Course

This course aims to assist Indigenous artists move into a business venture as well as give others who might want to work in an arts/tourism business some basic knowledge and skills to help them pursue this. Various units from Certificate II in Visual Arts and Contemporary Craft, Certificate II in Tourism (Operations) and Certificate II in Business make up the course and students use the RCC Community Art Studio and Gallery to develop various initiatives to promote local Indigenous Arts and Tourism.

Hip Hop For Harmony

A new and exciting initiative is the Hip Hop For Harmony program supported by the Australian Government’s Living in Harmony Program. Using Hip Hop music to bring together young people from all backgrounds in Wagga Wagga to socialise, develop skills and self-esteem and have fun in a safe environment is the main aim of this project. The project also strives to develop a sense of community belonging between young people and the broader community, said Cartwright.

We have a relatively high proportion of young Indigenous people living here and a growing number of young African refugees. Both these groups have identified music, particularly Hip Hop, as something they would be very interested in pursuing.

This project aims to bring young people together to experience their various cultures and backgrounds and to develop tolerance and mutual respect. It will also provide on-going activities to keep these young people engaged and mentoring to help them stay motivated.

Case study 4. Creating opportunities for displaced health staff

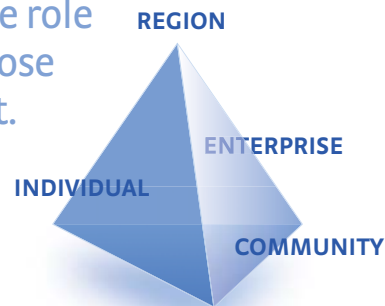
Western College initiative

Background

Greater Western Area Health Service (GWAHS) underwent a major restructure over 2005 and 2006, leading to the centralisation of many core administrative and management services and an overall reduction of staff numbers to perform these roles. This restructure led to the emergence of a number of “displaced staff”, that is people still employed by GWAHS whose role had either become redundant or whose role was being phased out.

GWAHS briefed Western College on this situation and asked the college staff to prepare a program that would:

- allow people to recognise and deal with negative emotions they were experiencing about the restructure
- address self esteem issues
- help individuals to recognise their sometimes hidden vocational skills
- assist displaced staff to make career transitions.



In response, Western College developed the “Taking Charge and Moving Forward” program for these people, many of whom were in senior positions within GWAHS and had been employed for ten or more years.

A three-tier program was developed that would result in a key skills report and suggested vocational pathways for each individual, explained CEO Ron Maxwell.

The three tiers were as follows:

- “Taking Charge and Moving Forward” workshop

The aim of this workshop was to help participants to build a personal foundation to create strategies to move forward. Areas covered included:

- acknowledging negative feelings and developing strategies to overcome them
- recognising and building on strengths using personality profiles
- building self esteem
- exploring new opportunities with confidence

The workshops were highly interactive and participants took away skills and knowledge that they could immediately apply in their professional and personal lives.

- “Skills Audit” workshop

Participants were guided to take an “inventory” of their existing skills and how they might be applied to future employment opportunities. The process allowed participants to identify gaps to determine future training requirements.

- One-on-one skills audit sessions with facilitator

This was to further expand on the “Skills Audit” workshop and assist in the reporting of key skills and suggested vocational pathways.

The three-level program or parts of it were undertaken by GWAHS staff from Dubbo, Orange, Parkes, Forbes and Broken Hill in NSW.

“The overall aim of the Western College program was to ensure participants realised their contribution was of value and that there was opportunity and life beyond GWAHS” said Maxwell.

Clients

GWAHS management proposed the program to Western College, to assist staff displaced by the restructure. The actual staff members involved in the training were from many different parts of GWAHS and from all levels of the hierarchy, ranging from frontline service staff to senior management.

Western College staff were aware that, while it was possible that some of the people employed would ultimately find new positions within the new GWAHS structure, some would need to consider re-locating because the geographic location for their previous role had changed - sometimes by several hundred kilometres.

Staff drivers

Erifili Davis, Western College Training Manager, developed the program concept based on a brief from the GWAHS Manager Learning and Organisational Development. Davis noted:

There was an emphasis on taking the negative feelings that the participating GWAHS employees would have, allowing them to acknowledge these feelings, then empowering them to look beyond their current career situation.

Other key staff involved from Western College were the facilitators Elisabeth Gortschacher and Kate Davis. “Both these women have the ability to empathise with their clients while providing clients with the necessary skills and empowerment to help themselves,” said Erifili Davis. “These skills were well suited to the target group from GWAHS.”

Elisabeth Gortschacher has had three major careers. Her first career was nursing where she worked as part of a multi disciplinary team in middle/senior management. Her second career was in organisational development where she led and facilitated organisational change through leadership and team development in Local Government. Her third career was establishing her own coaching practice since 1998, in which she has assisted many people to fulfil the potential of their personal and professional lives.

In addition to these career strengths, “Elisabeth was in a unique position from having worked within the health industry just like the GWAHS employees,” said Davis.

Kate Davis has strong connections to the community through her many roles at both Western College and in other organisations, enabling her to work with and relate to people from all works of life. She has worked in the areas of domestic violence and was involved in setting up a women’s refuge in Bourke. She is the Regional NSW Coordinator of Links to Learning program conducted by Western College, which provides educational services to young people who have been disenfranchised from the traditional school system.

Focus of the initiative

This particular initiative encompassed multiple levels: individual, enterprise, community and regional.

The enterprise was seeking to act ethically by encouraging its displaced staff to look beyond their immediate circumstances and to look at opportunities away from GWAHS. In order to do this, they needed displaced staff to deal with their negative feelings, boost their confidence and allow them to reflect on their obvious skills and abilities as well as their hidden skills which, previously, they may not have seen as marketable in the labour force.

Participation in the program for individuals was voluntary. The program was designed to appeal to those staff who sought the opportunity to look to the future with optimism.

There was an intentional focus on individuals, and an indirect focus on the organisation, GWAHS. “The intention was to develop a positive perception of the organisation within the community and to build coping skills for those who were faced with the uncertainty of their future employment,” said CEO Maxwell.

Drivers

According to Erifili Davis, the key drivers behind this initiative were to:

- empower individuals to look at career and vocational possibilities beyond their immediate circumstances
- enable an organisation, GWAHS, to shed excess staff and reduce costs while at the same time giving staff the skills to assess and market their individual abilities in the wider labour market
- assist GWAH’s desire to meet its moral and ethical obligations to the community and their employees. It was important to improve the morale of both the displaced staff and their GWAH’s colleagues and to improve the perception of GWAHS within the general community. Also, as a major regional employer, GWAHS managers felt a duty to ensure that their staff members were well looked-after in this uncertain environment.

Value

The work of Western College led to the development of the following value:

- **Increase in human capital** - the program led to a better understanding by participants of their individual skills and abilities and how they may be marketed in today’s workforce. These people, as a result of the program, were better able to market themselves and their skills in the labour market place. They were also encouraged to look beyond their value to the health industry to other industries and businesses to which they could transfer their skills and knowledge.
- **Increase in social capital** - the Western College program decreased some negativity about GWAHS in the general community; and increased individuals’ self-confidence which led to their more positive contribution to the community. In supporting this program, GWAHS was seen to be “doing the right thing” in the eyes of the general community.
- **Improvement in workforce productivity** - the program improved morale of ongoing staff leading to higher productivity as well as to a decrease in surplus staff that were now in a stronger position to look for employment beyond GWAHS. A number of the staff members who had been successful in gaining positions in the new structure were suffering from diminished morale. In supporting and empowering the displaced staff, the Western College program had a positive flow-on effect to these ongoing staff.

REGION

- **Increase in regional development** - the program encouraged highly skilled individuals to change to industries where there were job vacancies, thereby contributing broadly to regional development. The training meant there was increased availability in the regional labour market of skilled personnel. In particular, private enterprise benefited from the availability of the skills and experience that these people could potentially bring to their business.

The overall focus of the initiative was to reinforce the value of the individuals' employment to their future organisations, explained Erifili Davis:

The intention of GWAHS was to ensure that the uncertainty of the work environment [in the health sector] was recognised and that individuals were given opportunities to improve their potential and cope more effectively.

Kate Davis added:

Similarly the individuals responded very well and three have met again as students at TAFE and acknowledged their TAFE study was a response to the earlier skills audit classes [conducted as part of the program for GWAHS].

Key Services

The key service provided by the college was personalised training and assessment. For instance, the "Taking Charge and Moving Forward" and "Skills Assessment Workshop" training provided a general learning environment and a one-to-one session to tailor the service delivery to suit the needs of individuals. "This tailored approach acknowledged the unique qualities that each brought to the workplace," said Erifili Davis.

"Taking Charge and Moving Forward" aimed to put the participants in a positive state of mind to allow them to honestly assess their skills and experience. From there, they completed the "Skills Self Assessment" booklet to prepare for the "Skills Assessment Workshop" and the one-on-one session. The skills self assessment booklet was specifically designed for this program.

Obstacles

The obstacles that needed to be overcome to implement the program for displaced workers included the following, said Davis:

- Employees' negativity to the restructure and anything to do with it. There was much anger in the target group, their fellow colleagues and the community as a whole, about the restructure and the uncertainty it caused. The negative perception of the staff of their workplace was a major obstacle to the initiative succeeding.
- Difficulty in getting information through the bureaucracy to the right people and to confirm details. Some people arrived at the first session not really sure what was happening despite the fact a program flyer had been circulated to GWAHS to pass on to participants. Many staff in GWAHS were frustrated by this perceived lack of communication and this was exacerbated by the uncertainty of their future employment.
- The staff members were also suffering by their experience of helplessness and lack of self-worth. Many had been long term employees, some in senior management positions, who were now seen as "displaced".

Steps

The steps needed to implement the initiative included the following ones taken by Western College staff:

- talk to the project manager about high level needs and propose program
- talk to regional HR management to adapt the program to a particular town's requirements and to the requirements of the individuals. Each location had different requirements. In particular, Broken Hill, being so isolated, meant fewer opportunities for people compared to Dubbo
- coordinate the sessions for each location including venues
- invite individuals to enrol through Western College. After the first group, Western College directly distributed information about the training to ensure the participants had some idea what to expect.

Support

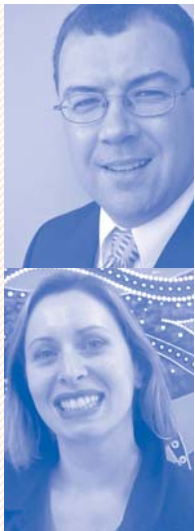
The support required from others within Western College to implement the initiative included the following:

- College administrative staff directly accepted enrolments from the participants and sent out information packs which included a course overview and the "Skills Self-Assessment Workbook"
- The program co-ordinator needed to organise resources such as venues in various locations and printed material.

Skills

Some skills required by Western College staff to implement the initiative included the following:

- adaptation of existing skills and capabilities of the staff to meet the specific requirements of the client
- development of skill self-assessment resources for program participants
- being sensitive to individuals at a particularly vulnerable time in their professional and personal lives
- knowledge of workforce development opportunities throughout the regional economy.



Ron Maxwell
Chief Executive Officer,
Western College

Erifili Davis
Training Manager,
Western College

Innovation

Erifili Davis considers there are a number of innovative features of the initiative:

looking at redundancy as an opportunity rather than a tragedy; looking at human potential rather than simply providing specific vocational training; matching potential with the opportunity to achieve outcomes.

Outcomes

The immediate outcomes of the initiative included that some people decided to leave the organisation to seek other employment and/or training opportunities elsewhere including at Western College, TAFE and Charles Sturt University. Some undertook further training at Western College in suggested vocational areas and some were placed in new positions within GWAHS.

The overall outcomes were significant, said Erifili Davis:

Several of those in the original program are now completing other training as a direct response and others have gone on to achieve their dream jobs within and outside of GWAHS. The major effect was to shift from a blame focus to a shared focus by creating alternatives for those who were faced with losing their jobs.

Erifili Davis emphasised the empowering of the displaced staff:

As a result of the training program, many people shifted from a helpless mindset to feeling empowered and ready to embrace the new opportunities that the restructure opened up to them. They were able to do this by acknowledging and taking ownership of their negative feelings, understanding what they had to offer both in their professional and personal lives and looking beyond the here and now to an optimistic future.

Snapshot of Western College

Western College is dedicated to providing life-long learning opportunities to the people of Dubbo and surrounding areas. Western College has been providing training and assessment services to the people of Dubbo and surrounding areas for close to fifty years.

The college offers regular professional development programs via a course guide which includes training in areas such as computers, business, management, customer service, care services and hospitality. As a community service, the college offers low cost personal interest courses in such diverse areas as Coffee Appreciation, Tap Dancing, Asian Stir Fry and Italian.

Western College specialises in delivering customised training solutions for businesses of all sizes. The college's online and distance training is very popular with people trying to fit training in with their already hectic lives.

The "Links to Learning" program which re-engages early school leavers with learning, is a highly popular and successful offering. Western College offers customised solutions targeted at long term unemployed, job seekers, Indigenous people and people with disabilities.

The college offers a professional yet non-threatening learning environment. There is an avoidance of the "one size fits all" approach in favour of encouraging individuals by ensuring that learning encompasses many teaching styles. Much of the learning is "hands on" with a focus on making training directly applicable to real world situations.

Conclusions

The following conclusions draw attention to the national relevance and value of the innovative approach taken by the four member colleges of the alliance *Community Colleges Connect*.

The new statement of the national challenge

The colleges examined in this publication are soundly meeting the challenge set out by the Deputy Prime Minister Hon. Julia Gillard in her second reading of the Skills Australia Bill in February 2008. “Part of the problem in increasing our national skill levels has been that training has not sufficiently matched industry’s need,” said the Deputy Prime Minister.

The response by her government to this mismatch will be to “align skills development policies and training delivery with industry priorities, and position the training system to better meet the needs of individuals and industry.”

In her speech, the Deputy Prime Minister called on training providers to “play their part and respond flexibly to increasingly diverse industry and individual needs”.

A new model, new functions, new purposes

The four colleges within *Community Colleges Connect* have built not only their staff capabilities to respond flexibly to increasingly diverse industry and individual needs, but they have also developed a model which performs the following functions:

- the model pinpoints the four different domains in which the colleges add value - region, community, enterprise and individual

- the model describes the types of value added by the alliance members - including improving human capital, building social capital, increasing workforce productivity and enhancing regional development
- the model details the types of services of the alliance members that add value, including personalised training and assessment services, programs aiding community development, customised workforce development services and services aiding regional development.

For the four colleges, this new model serves multiple purposes:

- it connects previously separate services such as training services and community development initiatives
- it integrates disparate activities such as training individuals and influencing enterprise-wide workforce development
- it demonstrates the high level capabilities that can be developed and deployed by post-secondary training and education providers.

Sophisticated response

In brief, the *Community College Connect* model summarises a sophisticated approach to both skill building and helping regional Australia to become and remain vibrant, innovative and prosperous.

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