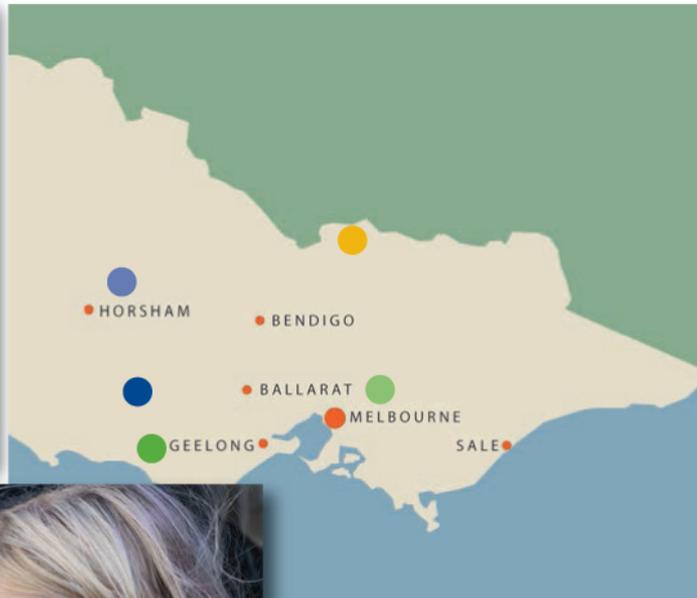


ART RESIDES HERE

An exploration of the role of the arts
in vibrant, sustainable rural communities



RUPANYUP



NATHALIA



CAVENDISH



CROSSLEY



STRATHEWEN

ART RESIDES HERE

An exploration of the role of the arts
in vibrant, sustainable rural communities





Foreword

The Foundation for Rural & Rural Renewal (FRRR) was established in 2000, based on a belief that philanthropy could play a role in enhancing life in rural and regional Australia.

In the intervening years, FRRR has done just that — helping to make the ideas of local community leaders a reality.

Communities come in different shapes and sizes and have different needs and challenges. One thing we've learnt is that no matter their size or location, all communities can think creatively. Among the nearly 10,000 grants we've awarded, many have been for arts projects.

The arts play a diverse role in communities — it can create a public dialogue, enhance creative learning, spur communities into action, provide solace and comfort, and help build community capacity and leadership.

FRRR's *Art Resides Here* project, undertaken with the support of our partners the H & L Hecht Trust, enabled us to reflect on the arts projects we have supported, and their impact.

Art Resides Here involved revisiting five Victorian communities — Cavendish, Crossley, Nathalia, Rupanyup and Strathewen — to explore five diverse arts projects.

“ This process confirmed that the arts can underpin significant renewal and help to create connected rural, regional and remote communities.

It also confirmed that with just a little philanthropic investment, and a lot of encouragement and support, local leaders know exactly what they need to create strong and vibrant places to live and work. ”

Thank you

Art Resides Here provided an opportunity to connect, reflect and share stories that are deeply rooted in the places they come from.

The project involved many people, and my thanks go to everyone who has, with generosity and open hearts, engaged and enriched the outcomes. Special thanks to the H & L Hecht Trust for their generous support; to Mandy Grinblat who conceived and managed the project during her time working at FRRR; to Martin Paten who contributed to the genesis of the project; to Julie Millowick for her extraordinary images and commitment to the project; to Lindy Allen for her wonderful interviews; to Ros Abercrombie for enabling *Art Resides Here* to be part of Artlands 2018; and to Geoff Hocking for his design work on this book.

Most importantly, thanks to the remarkable community leaders for their trust, generosity and willingness to participate: Sue Bell, Andrew Campbell, Merryn Coughlin, Roger Edwards, Anthony Hill, Brian Kearney (Cavendish); Dennis Bushell, Sue Elms, Mick Lane, Geraldine Ryan (Crossley); Lyn Loger, Sharon Atkinson (Nathalia); Marg Lingham, Val Hemphill, Steve Townsend, Adrian Tyler (Rupanyup); and Andrew Alford, Lisal Dorricot, Malcolm Hackett, Jane Hayward (Strathewen). To the many other community members who contributed their experiences and stories to *Art Resides Here*, huge thanks and long may you continue to enrich and enjoy the places you call home.

This publication is a stunning capsule of the creativity and vision of these five communities, and indicative of what happens in thousands of other rural communities around the country. I hope that it provides you as much enjoyment and inspiration as it has for those of us at FRRR.

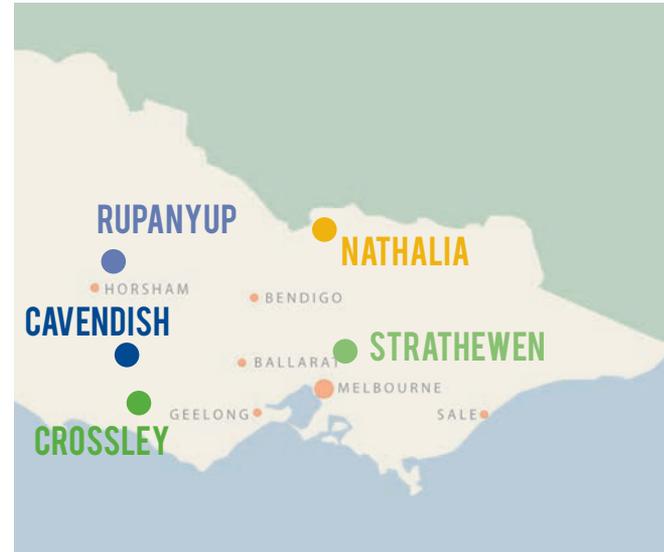
Natalie Egleton

Chief Executive Officer | FRRR

THE GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF ART RESIDES HERE

The arts not only make a significant contribution to the cultural life of rural, regional and remote communities, but also generates significant economic and health and well-being benefits, as well as educational engagement, social cohesion, and sense of place, identity and community pride. It plays a vital role in building and sustaining vibrant community life.

Art Resides Here was conceived to increase debate and share knowledge about the role the arts can play in building vibrant, healthy and sustainable communities. It enabled five communities to reflect on their engagement with arts and cultural projects, and to share their experiences with a broad national audience including other communities, arts practitioners and grant makers.



The project, which was generously funded by the H & L Hecht Trust, had three parts:

1. Community case studies;
2. A presentation at Artlands 2018; and
3. This publication.

The project consisted of a number of layers.

1. Community Case Studies

Five communities worked with photographer, photo-journalist and creative producer, Julie Millowick, to document the role that the arts had played in their community. Julie worked with arts manager and producer, Lindy Allen, who interviewed community members and created a series of transcripts that explored each community's unique arts experiences. This afforded the community the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and tell their stories, in their words. It is this authentic community voice that sits at the heart of the project.

The five locations were identified by FRRR, taking into account different community circumstances, types of activity undertaken, and the outcomes sought — from sharing culture and heritage to supporting better social outcomes for target cohorts, supporting disaster recovery or stimulating economic development. Each community has previously received grants from FRRR to deliver arts-based projects, and while they are all in Victoria, their experiences and reasons for engaging with the arts align with the broader national experience.

The five communities that participated in the project were:

1. **Cavendish:** The inaugural Cavendish Red Gum Festival was presented in April 2018. The Festival used the arts to explore and raise awareness of important local environmental assets and issues. FRRR provided a small grant towards the running costs..
2. **Crossley:** The Friends of St Brigid's are a committed community group who have worked hard to save a much loved old church and hall, recognising that infrastructure is vital to a connected and healthy community. FRRR has provided a number of grants over time to support this work.
3. **Nathalia:** The Nathalia & District Development Corporation worked with the local community — both Indigenous and non-Indigenous — to develop a children's book and performance, produced in both Yorta Yorta and English. FRRR provided a grant to support the performance component of the project.
4. **Rupanyup:** FRRR has a long standing relationship with various Rupanyup groups and projects, including a music program at the Rupanyup Nursing Home, new chairs for the Rupanyup Public Hall and a hand dryer for the Woods' Farming & Heritage Museum.
5. **Strathewen:** Through a partnership between the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the local primary school, the Strathewen community demonstrate the importance of the arts in a disaster recovery context. With funds from the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund (VBAF), FRRR has supported this creative response to the challenge of recovery from the Black Saturday bushfires.



2. Artlands 2018

The case studies were presented alongside an overview of FRRR's history of funding arts and culture in regional Australia at Artlands, the 2018 Regional Arts Australia (RAA) Conference held in Bendigo Victoria. Presenting the community and grant maker perspectives alongside each other stimulated thought-provoking conversations about the role of the arts in rural, regional and remote Australia.

3. *Art Resides Here* — The Book

This book is the final stage of *Art Resides Here*. It brings together stories from the heart of the five featured communities, stories that are poignant, heart-warming and sometimes tinged with sadness. But, ultimately, they are all inspiring and engaging.

The words in this book are those of community members — verbatim and unedited — who generously made the time to talk to Lindy Allen. Unless otherwise indicated, all images were taken by Julie Millowick.

Together, the words and pictures deliver a compelling narrative redolent of what happens in thousands of communities across rural, regional and remote Australia — hard working, committed volunteers, of communities striving to become more inclusive, grappling at a local level to solve problems, rising to challenges, celebrating their identities and making the places they live even better.



Introduction by Julie Millowick, Project Photographer

It was an honour to be commissioned by the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) to lead the documentation of the *Art Resides Here* project. *Art Resides Here* explores the way communities use the arts to achieve goals, aspirations and, quite simply, face challenges. My brief was to tell the story of what arts and culture look like in small rural and regional communities. The five participating communities — Cavendish, Crossley, Nathalia, Rupanyup and Strathewen — are all connected to FRRR through grants they have received. But each community is unique in how they have engaged with the arts to achieve particular local outcomes.

Telling visual stories means images must communicate vital information about the subject in a way that both engages the viewer and offers them a deeper understanding and insight into a topic they have often only just become aware of.

Visual story telling is about the photographer being, first and foremost, interested in their subject and having a desire to understand the situation of their subject as much as possible. The photographer then uses their visual literacy skills to communicate this understanding to the viewer. Just as a writer uses grammar, sentence structure, etc, photographers use visual literacy skills of light, angle of view, composition, depth of field, and crucially, communication with their subject, to create images that do not merely record but make statements. These statements cumulatively form a visual narrative, a visual storyline.

To strengthen the final outcome of *Art Resides Here*, I invited arts manager and writer, Lindy Allen to interview the subjects in each town and provide written transcripts. Lindy and I have a strong working relationship and her insightful and sensitive interviews provided me with further understanding of the extraordinary people we encountered on this project. Lindy's interviews have enriched the project on many levels and I am indebted to her skills and professionalism.

The first town we visited was Rupanyup. As Margaret Lingham said to us, 'Rupanyup is a can-do town', and my explorations certainly uncovered the incredible grit and determination prevalent in the town's small population of 356 people. I have driven through Rupanyup several times a year, I witnessed Rupanyup struggling through difficult times. Now the town is definitely and indisputably meeting those challenges. Its revival is being led on several fronts, and the Silo Art Trail is integral to that. That is, an

arts-led recovery is contributing to the town in a multi-layered way, and the benefits are tangible and manifold. In Rupanyup, Lindy and myself met many memorable people including, Adrian Tyler (Committee Member, Woods' Farming & Heritage Museum), Val Hemphill (Chair, Memorial Hall Committee) and Margaret Lingham (Secretary, Rupanyup Nursing Home Support Group), all of whom work tirelessly for the benefit and enrichment of Rupanyup. We documented Margaret and the residents at one of the FRRR-funded live music events in the nursing home, and it was an inspiring experience. Visitors to the Silo Art Trail have significantly boosted visitor numbers to the Woods' Farming & Heritage Museum and the local caravan park. Bus tours to the Silo Art Trail are offered catered lunches in the Memorial Hall, thus boosting the Hall Committee's fundraising capacity.

At Strathewen, I was emotionally moved to be included in an intimate and very personal reminiscence of Black Saturday by Malcolm Hackett, Chair of the Strathewen Stress and Community Renewal Association. I observed first hand the hugely positive impact of the Bushfire Education Program on formerly anxious children and young people. This included the creation of very artistic creatures by members of the whole community, as they participated with a film crew to produce a clay-animation video and book which has been made available to other communities facing similar challenges.

At Crossley, I encountered Geraldine Ryan, who at 87 years of age is the oldest registered teacher of Irish dance in the world. Geraldine visits St Brigid's Hall in Crossley every Tuesday during the school term. Her teaching, along with other Crossley programs, continues and affirms the culture of those who settled in the area as part of the great Irish diaspora resulting from the potato famine in Ireland in the 1840s.

Moving on to Nathalia, I met dedicated and passionate people who are working at grassroots level to raise awareness of, and address, the integration of Yorta Yorta culture into the broader community. The impact of the FRRR funds supporting the work of Yorta Yorta Elder, Aunty Sharon Atkinson and Bardi Gras Group (Nathalia & District Development Corporation Inc.) Coordinator, Lyn Loger and their colleagues was clearly evident. Engaging a broad cross-section of the community and working with visiting artist Gordon Dowell, they told the story *Po-bonk-I Bunyma Bpalwa* (Po-bonk Creates a Flood). School children presented the





story in a public performance, which was published in a book and CD in both Yorta Yorta language and English.

Finally, I visited Cavendish and despite 90 km/h winds and torrential rain, the community successfully presented their inaugural Red Gum Festival. The event encompassed artistic expressions from across the community — from preschoolers through to members of the Men's Shed. The attention to detail by the Red Gum Festival Committee and their professionalism was

remarkable resulting in a hugely successful event. Lindy and I are already planning a return visit in 2020!

I hope that my photographs and Lindy's interviews do justice to these inspiring people, communities and their extraordinary projects.

Many thanks to FRRR for initiating *Art Resides Here* and inviting me to be a part of this very special project.

Julie Millowick



Cavendish is a small town situated on the banks of the Wannon River in the south west of Victoria, with the Grampians as its backdrop.

First established in the 1850s, the Post Office opened its doors on April Fools Day 1853, however, it was not until 1915 that a railway line linked Cavendish to the nearby larger centre of Hamilton.

Major Mitchell passed nearby on his way south from the Murray River to the sea in 1836. Entrepreneurial graziers soon followed his trail and before long flocks of sheep were growing fat on the rich pastures that thrived amongst the majestic, centuries old red gums that still stand proud across the district today.

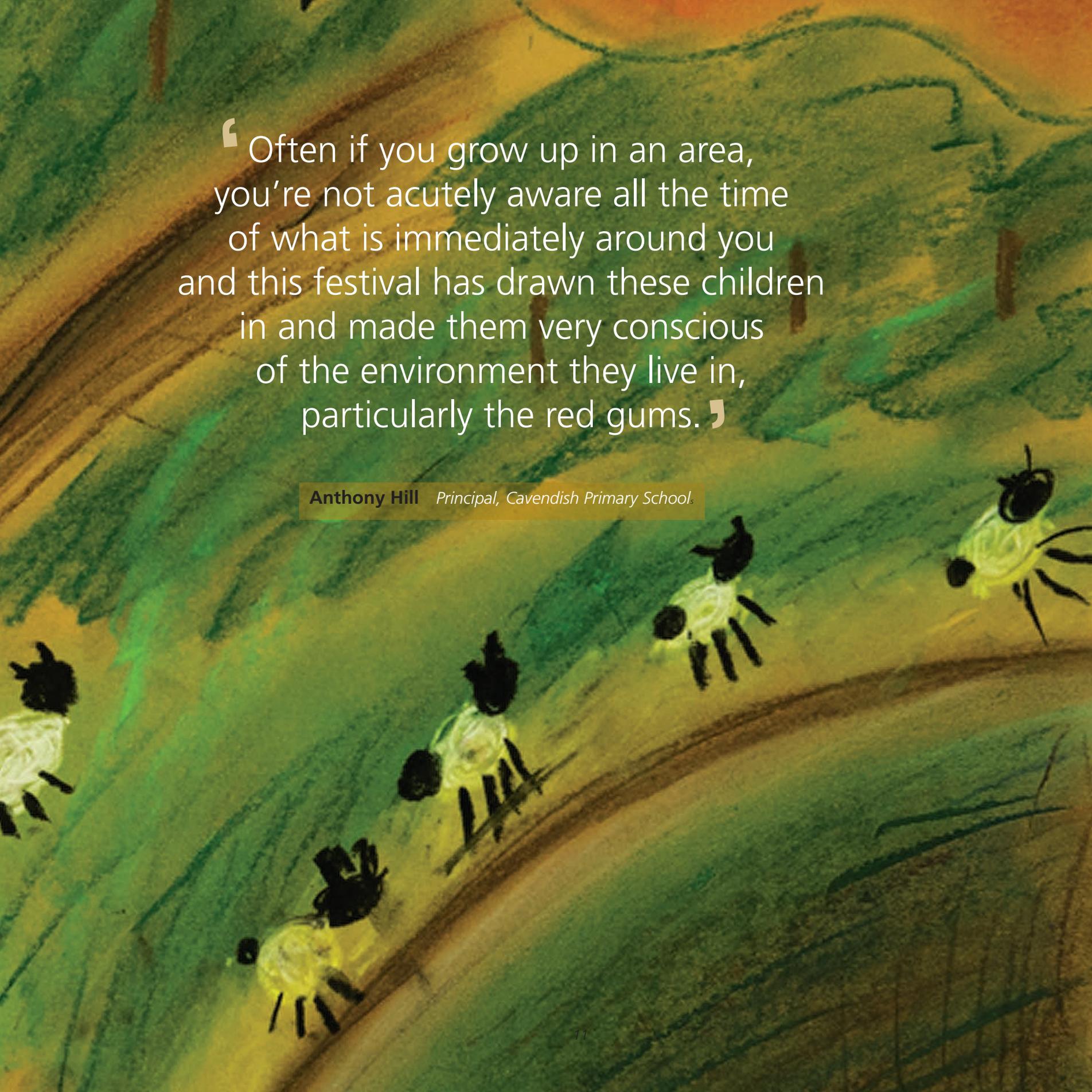
This thriving farming community of around 500 celebrated its inaugural Red Gum Festival in April 2018.



CAVENDISH | RED GUM FESTIVAL







“ Often if you grow up in an area, you’re not acutely aware all the time of what is immediately around you and this festival has drawn these children in and made them very conscious of the environment they live in, particularly the red gums. ”

Anthony Hill *Principal, Cavendish Primary School.*

The Festival was set for 13,14,15 April. It had not rained for 137 days until — the ‘weather conditions’ Bureau of Meteorology forecast:

A deep low pressure system will move to the south of Tasmania and direct a series of active cold fronts across Victoria over the next few days. The strongest of these cold fronts will reach the southwest later this morning before affecting remaining parts of Victoria during the afternoon.

DAMAGING winds of 60 to 80 km/h are likely about elevated areas and the southwest coastal fringe, extending to remaining parts of the warning area from mid morning.

Across the northern plains peak wind gusts of 90 to 100 km/h are possible while over southern and mountain areas peak wind gusts are expected to be between 100 and 110 km/h, reaching 120 km/h near the coast and over elevated areas. These peak wind gusts are most likely during the afternoon.

The community swung into action.

below:

Professor Andrew Campbell



The comments on the following pages have been taken from records of conversations with:

Professor Andrew Campbell: *Ambassador, Cavendish Red Gum Festival, 15 April 2018*

Merryn Coughlin: *Cavendish Kindergarten Teacher & Committee Member*

Roger Edwards: *Committee Member*

Brian Kearney: *Chair Red Gum Festival Development Group*

Professor Andrew Campbell

Ambassador, Cavendish Red Gum Festival, 15 April 2018

I think the festival has an immediate short-term impact which is very substantial. The general consensus in the pub last night from the old timers was that no one had ever seen as many cars in Cavendish. And so there's a great boost of activity and in the immortal words of the film 'The Castle', the vibe for the town is fantastic. But more broadly, it gives the community a sense of confidence that they can actually put on something like this and work together to respond to changing circumstances. It hadn't rained for 137 days, so of course on the day of the festival, the heavens opened and the tempest came. So all the things that have been scheduled to be in gazebos and marquees had to suddenly be moved to another venue indoors and so on. The community had to roll up their sleeves and pull together really quickly in

responding to that, while hosting more people than they'd ever seen in the village before.

Longer term, I think the whole idea of the Red Gum festival is about a shared sense of place, being in the red gum country. We had a very fine environmental forum yesterday but it's not just about the physical environment. It's art, music, craft, industry and economy.

It's good to take time to reflect and to think about all the different aspects of the red gum and what they provide. When you do live in a place where red gums are everywhere, the quotidian regularity of it all, you can't see the wood for the trees. Only a couple of weeks ago the CSIRO had an online poll for eucalypt of the year across the whole of Australia and, guess what, the red gums are the favourite eucalypt in Australia. There's something about that one. They're quite beautiful too. They grow in every jurisdiction other than Tassie but it's also that they are timeless.

The expert consensus is that the big old ones in the paddocks around here are somewhere between 500 and a thousand years old. My personal view is the biggest ones are much older than that. I think they are in the same order of Tasmania's Huon pines, two or three thousand years. So these trees are as old as Christianity and they have witnessed enormous changes and they're sort of timeless monarchs in the landscape that have seen European settlement as a blip.

It's interesting to think about the impact of the festival. Some of my family members are on the organising committee and



above:
**Cavendish Red Gum Festival
Committee**



left:
**Welcome to the Cavendish Red
Gum Festival**

“The vision for the Festival began with Hamilton resident, Sam Middleton. It was a vision that resonated with us. When you drive back into the Red Gum region you feel as though you are home. What about having a Festival celebrating the Red Gum?”

Brian Kearney
Chair Red Gum Festival
Development Group

they've put in an enormous amount of work and I think the initial reaction will be exhaustion and relief. But once they get over that I think there'll be an enormous sense of community pride that they pulled it off and that people came. Particularly for the first one, there's always this pregnant pause where people think, "Will anyone come to our little festival?" And they've come from miles around even in terrible weather.

I think there'll be a great boost of community pride but also a sense of being on the map and being home, being special in some way and a sense of, "We can do this. We can pull it off as a community. We can work together and make things happen."

The other thing here is everyone's been remarking the town's never looked so good. The big spring clean that's associated with putting on a gig like this — someone even put quite a few days into tidying up the old cemetery and things like that, that have been a fraction unloved for a while. The whole town is looking magnificent.

And when you have to put interpretative signage around for visitors it forces you to think about how historically significant and important some things are and perhaps we should have a sign here. I think that sense of having to look at your own situation through the eyes of the outsiders reminds you of why it's great to live in a place like this.

It's so important to involve younger people in this celebration of local culture. Ferdinand von Mueller, the great government botanist of the 19th century, was of the view that people need to learn about the environment before they're four feet tall, while they're still close to everything and they can appreciate things with an open mind. I'm a great subscriber to von Mueller's viewpoint. When you can start people thinking about it before they've got mental frameworks and blockages in their heads, when they're just naturally curious about everything, that's exactly the time to be doing it. The more we can do with primary school level children the better. I think this is fabulous.

The program was very considered indeed. And that's why I think the community, on reflection, should have an enormous amount of pride that they were able to pull off a multi-dimensional event like this.

I think there was great synergy between the festival arts program and the Environmental Forum. We had a fabulous little film about the Aboriginal bark canoe and to have the canoe here and to have Aboriginal Elders talking about it yesterday was sensational. Major Sumner from over in south-east South Australia

opposite, at top: Connor Overton holds the owl he created in the children's area of the VicForests display, relocated to the school hall.

opposite, centre: Due to inclement weather the **Market Place** was relocated to school classrooms.

opposite, at bottom: Despite being completely destroyed by the weather these beautiful red gum displays were very quickly recreated and enhanced festival venues.

brought his big canoe here and we saw the video of how it was made. A lot of farmers are very curious about these scar trees and wonder how the hell they made canoes out of them, and to actually see it being done, for old farmers is just a fabulous thing to see. To see the real thing, farmers love to touch things and to appreciate them in that way. It was just a marvellous combination of events.

An important theme of the Environmental Forum was to convey the sense that this is a landscape at risk. People love the red gum country because it's inherently attractive to a European sensibility: the park-like Capability Brown type landscape with majestic old trees and lush green grass underneath with sheep or cattle grazing contentedly, the von Guerard type landscapes. It's important to convey the ecological understanding that it's actually quite a brittle landscape. These grand old trees can be like, you know, Ming Dynasty porcelain really — ancient relics from an earlier age. One by one, year by year, they are dying off before our eyes. We need to be thinking about how best to look after these red gum landscapes so that our grandkids and their grandkids can continue to appreciate their majesty.

Roger Edwards *Committee Member*

Because I'm a forest officer I've got access to timber. So we got a licence to bring some timber down from the forest to the saw mill for the signage and art displays. I'm on the committee helping in the art portfolio. We invited Ken Knight to be our feature artist because he's been coming here for years painting. He had an exhibition here in 2013 which was very successful which is why we wanted him because he loves to paint all the autumn colours and people love his work. People can see the landscape outside at this time of the year then come inside and see his work painted in the same season and meet him. They see the outside inside. I don't think we'll ever see the Cavendish Hall with such an arts display ever again.

The impact on the local community has just been sensational. I am amazed how many volunteers came out of the woodwork





yesterday just to make sure that we could get it off the ground. The weather we had yesterday meant we had to enact the contingency plans. We were able to use the school, the CFA buildings, and the local church building. I think nearly every person in Cavendish did a job for us yesterday.

Red gum is so important to us, not only for our culture but for our well being. It's just so important, the red gum theme. Getting them back in the landscape is going to be our issue. The Festival has certainly highlighted the fact to everyone living in this particular district. People have come from a long way away to discuss the importance of red gum to us in our environment.

Not one red gum has changed in my lifetime. They are so slow growing. Some of these trees are eight hundred years old. They haven't changed for generations and people expect to see them in the landscape.

If one falls over that just leaves a big hole in their psyche, it's gone. And that's one of the themes we want to get through. Are these trees going to be here forever? No they're not. If one dies

each year on every farm, in 100 years there won't be any left, not of the remnant red gum landscape we've got now. So do we want to replace them or are we happy to live with the fact that this landscape will be completely different in 100 years? Future generations won't see and feel what we do, which is a shame.

This area is saline. The Dundas table lands were very healthy once. We had so many redgums that could transpire so much water and keep the salt down. Now the water tables are creeping up bringing the salt with it. So we have a lot of salt affected areas.

The Festival was absolutely a success in terms of raising awareness in the broader community. These bus tours today will help raise awareness of these issues because we're going out looking at the landscape.

We've raised a lot of attention and we have done such a good job promoting this theme of celebration of red gums right throughout the wider community and online.

Living here, we wake up every morning and expect to see our landscape as it is, we don't think too much about that particular



tree there, but it's about raising awareness of what that tree provides for everyone, not only for us, the habitat, the biodiversity but for our general welfare. This landscape is part of us.

The red gum in the landscape, if they weren't there we'd be looking around and we'd be missing them like our kids had gone missing. They are just so much a part of us for everything that they provide, shade and shelter for farmers, and keeping the water table down, and even the timber.

There are so many ways the timber can be utilised, particularly in our fine furniture or other things that never used to be the case. We used red gum to make railway sleepers once.

It's so important to engage the next generation, vital. And it's amazing what they can come up with when you give them a pencil and a bit of paper and their brains start ticking over. We say "Can you draw red gum tree? Can you draw something that lives in a red gum tree?" And their minds start ticking over, they start looking at red gum trees and thinking about it. Our kinder teacher has done a fabulous job with the kids. We don't really understand

what a child's psyche is when he looks at the red gum landscape, we really don't know but I'm sure he would feel like us or she would feel like, if the tree wasn't there, it's probably something they've climbed up, it's in their backyard. It's part of them.

We sort of had a contingency plan but to roll it out in the way we did early yesterday morning was pretty efficient I reckon. We had to think very quickly.

above: **The Immortal Red Gum** is estimated to be more than 400 years old.

“This exhibition of school kids’ work is the pick for me. The work on the other side is professional but this side is the encouragement side, we have to encourage people, so they can move from this side to the other.”

Peter Hood | *Visitor from Albury*

Merryn Coughlin

Cavendish Kindergarten Teacher & Committee Member

With the kids’ activities, we’ve tried to get the whole community involved. We’ve had local knitters knitting our native animals for the animal hunt and the Men’s Shed have been drilling holes in gum nuts for the necklaces and people have been collecting feathers so I’ve had people I didn’t even know in town dropping things off or ringing me up to say, “Come and collect a few things.”

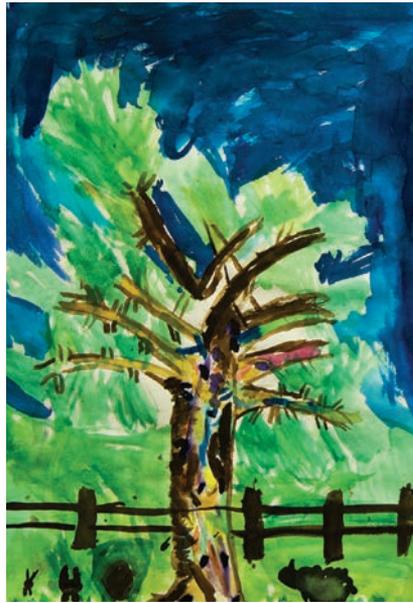
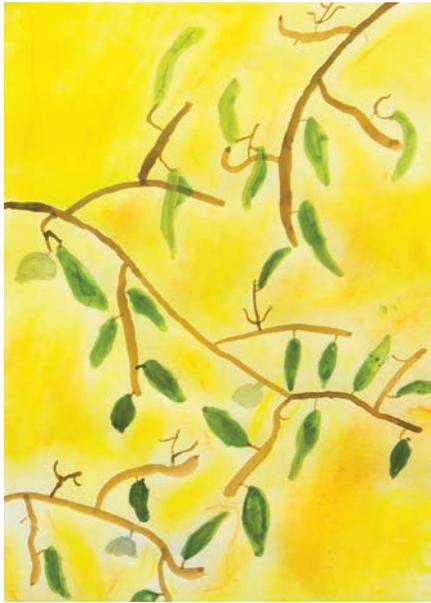
Because I plan activities for kids all the time, I try really hard to use natural materials, all sorts of junk stuff that doesn’t cost any money. So we didn’t spend money on the kids’ activities. And we’ve got clay over there and we’ve had people collecting plants and things and all the feathers and so on. I tried to set up things that will stay up for a while, keep them engaged for long periods of time rather than just quick rides and things that cost a lot.

I think it’s really important for kids to have an event that focuses on their local culture. It’s been great for the kinder and the school because they’ve been collecting materials and people have got pumped up in advance. We’ve had a bin up at the school and so kids go home and tell their parents we need to gather this and that so they go for a walk together, collect feathers or lots things that they wouldn’t normally do.

Even with the weather this morning, everyone rushed around and we changed plans really quickly and it was really good, everyone was very flexible. I would definitely like to do it again.

Having the opportunity to get grants has enabled us to make more family friendly prices. They’ve made a really big difference. It’s only five dollars for all day kids’ activities and we’re just asking for a donation entry which I think is much more accessible. People really appreciate it, especially people with lots of kids. The FRRR grant has made a real difference.





opposite, at top: Kindergarten teacher **Merryn Coughlin** with the children's craft display.

opposite, at bottom: Lexi and Emma Thomas, with Dad Simon Thomas, work on their **Nature Crowns**.

above: **Artwork display** by pupils from the Cavendish Primary School.

left: **Cavendish Primary School pupils** display their creative sculptures.

CAVENDISH SOLDIERS' MEMORIAL HALL.





Brian Kearney (above)
Chair Red Gum Festival Development Group

Our organisation was incorporated two years ago. I live about 8 km out of town and I've lived here most of my life. Sam Middleton lives in Hamilton and she started the vision for the Festival that resonated with most of us, which is that when you have been away and you get back into the red gum region you feel as though you're home. When we all heard that we said, yeah, we can relate to that. Sam got a meeting with the Cavendish townscape group to see whether we could develop that vision. Sam was our first secretary but she had to step back. But she put the idea out there for a celebration of the environment that we live in and the red gums.

I think the idea of celebrating the red gum in the environment we live in just resonated with so many people. We all thought this is a great idea. We all thought this is where we live, why shouldn't we highlight it and celebrate it. It's emphasising that we reckon we live in a top part of the world, so how do we show other people that and bring them to Cavendish? So that's where it all started and the committee members we've had have been brilliant. They all believe in promoting the region, the environment we live in, and the red gums are just so central to our lives so we said, let's focus on that.

We had great ideas, big ideas and we achieved most of them over the weekend. Our first challenge was raising money. So over a period of about 18 months we just kept building, with grants from FRRR and others and this gave us the confidence to think that we could run a bigger show than we were thinking at the start.

Brian Kearney

I've been a part of this community for many years and the take up for this idea has been brilliant. Everyone has just been drawn to the idea and very willing to pitch in. With the weather conditions thrown at us yesterday, the most wintery conditions you could find, everyone just thought clearly and made decisions and said, this is what we're going to do. Everyone worked together and worked beautifully, so that's the community taking ownership. They wanted it to work.

In the beginning we had no idea how we were going to reach our funding targets. We were aware of a number of grant programs and gaining those grants made the festival possible. FRRR was one of our bigger grants (\$3,410 and the overall budget was \$40,000).



above:
Roger Edwards, Committee Member, Cavendish Red Gum Festival,
 MC's the opening of the Art Show.

above, at top:
 Art Show feature artist **Ken Knight** with his paintings that
 honour the majestic red gum and the Grampians.

top left:
 India Madder and Annabelle Mann and above: Jemima Madder
 and Tahlia Mann serving food at the opening of the art show.

opposite, at bottom:
 Guests enjoy the art show on opening night.





at left:
Found-object sculpture on the **Sculpture Walk**. Photo by Lindy Allen
below:
Turned Red Gum, Cavendish Wood Turners.



Brian Jelleff, Hamilton Wood-turners Club. Photo by Lindy Allen

I think wood turning is very creative and creativity is very important. We've had a lot of people come in and watch, they've shown a lot of interest. It's been really terrific. We're hoping it's going to be on again next year and we'll be here with open arms.



above:
Browl, by Ross Tenney.
Made from a 6.5 tonne burl, Sculpture Walk, Settlers Cottage.

opposite page, top right:
Hamilton artist Ian Patience, Sculpture Walk, Settlers Cottage.
Photo by Lindy Allen

Other pieces by the Cavendish Wood Turners.



John Graham, Bush Poet

Art is so important in small regional communities. It brings people together.





A display of chainsaw sculpture and wood milling

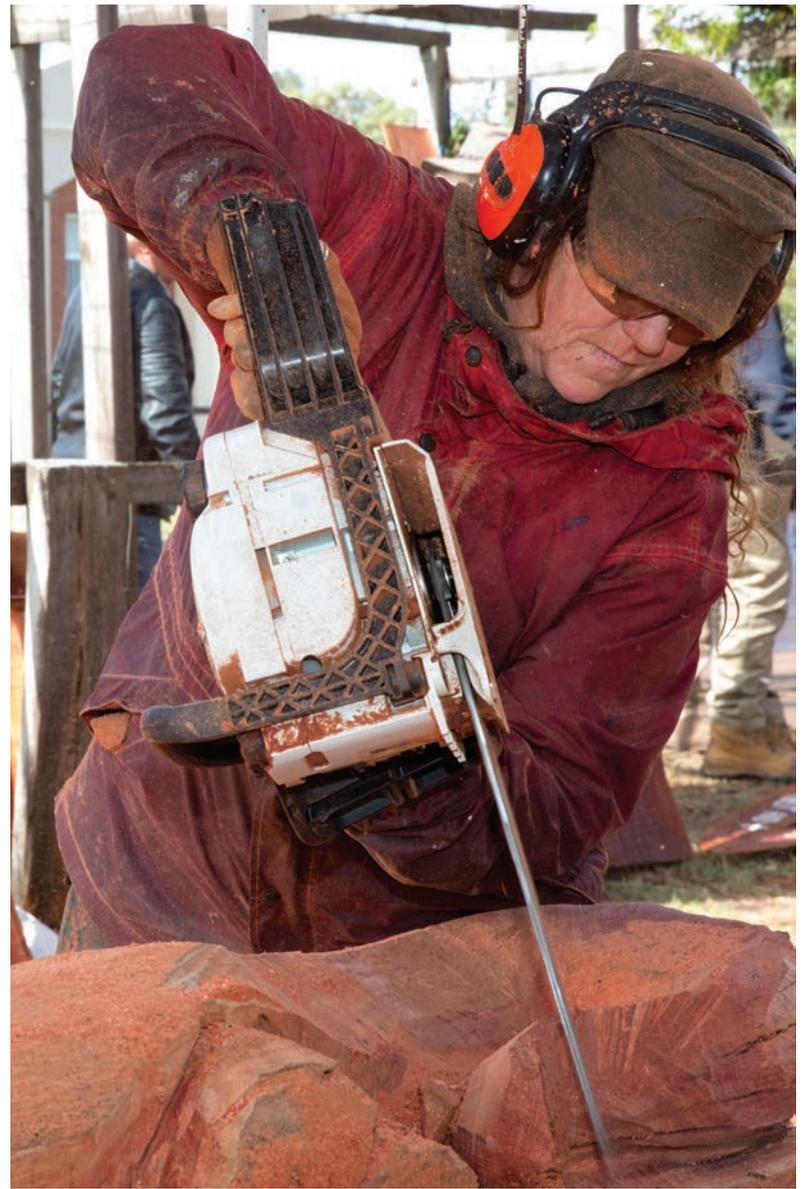


Photo by Lindy Allen



LUCAS MILL
AUSTRALIAN PAT. NO. 606020
FOREIGN PAT. NO. 222 269 000 0 1884
PHONE 0837 82793
INTERNATIONAL +61 207 287 263



Artists, Cate & Peter Whitehead,
Sculpture Walk—Red Gum Crucifix and The Immigrants

'It feels fabulous to have won first prize.

The piece is an homage to my maternal grandfather who ran the forestry lease at Smith's Mill, which is in the middle of the Grampians. During the great fires in the 1930's he saved a lot of people.'

Photo by Lindy Allen



above, at left: A detail of the **Red Gum Crucifix**.

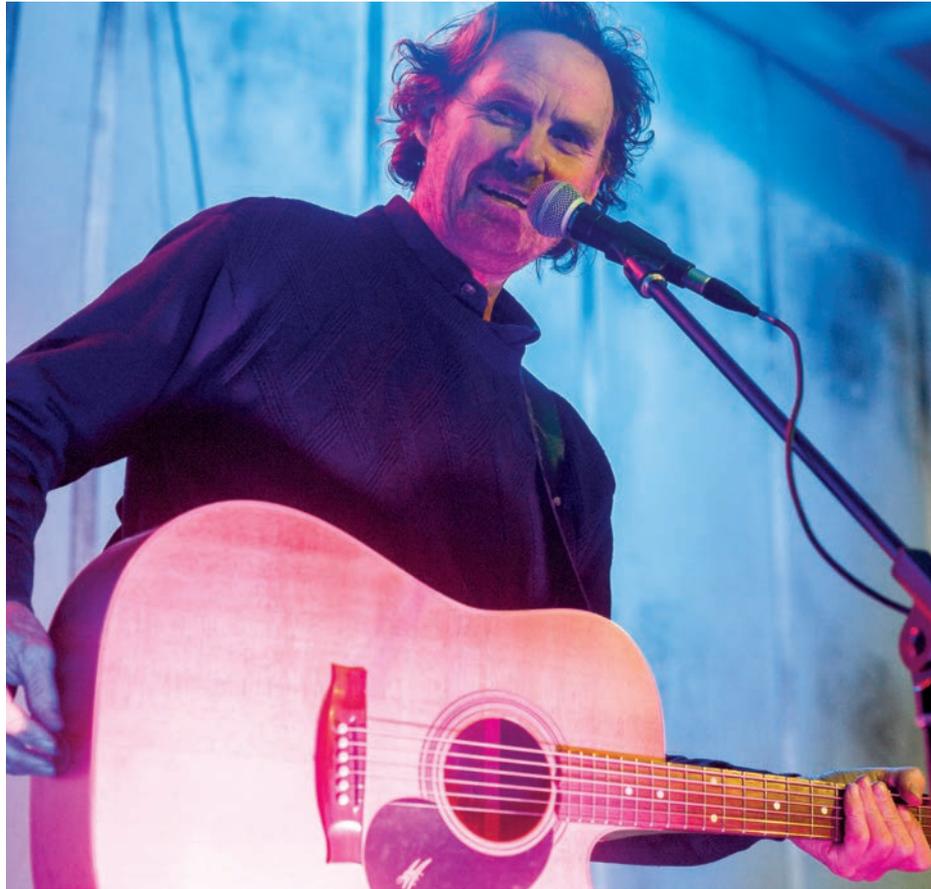
above, at right: **Indigenous artworks** on display at the Art Show in the Cavendish Memorial Hall.

above: Red Gum slab garden seat made by **The Men's Shed**.

left: **The Red Gum Cup**, made and donated by local police officer **Chris Faille**.

below: Neil Murray on The Red Gum Stage.

bottom: As the rain poured down the audience was shifted from the town square to inside the CFA shed and the Red Gum Stage, (the back of semi-trailer) quickly followed.





Performers on **The Red Gum Stage.**
above: **Big TEN Trio**

right: **Cavendish Primary School**
below: **Since Tuesday**





left and below:

John Graham, Bush Poet and inaugural Committee Member, entertains his audience, sheltering from the rain, on the verandah of the historic Settlers Cottage.

at bottom:

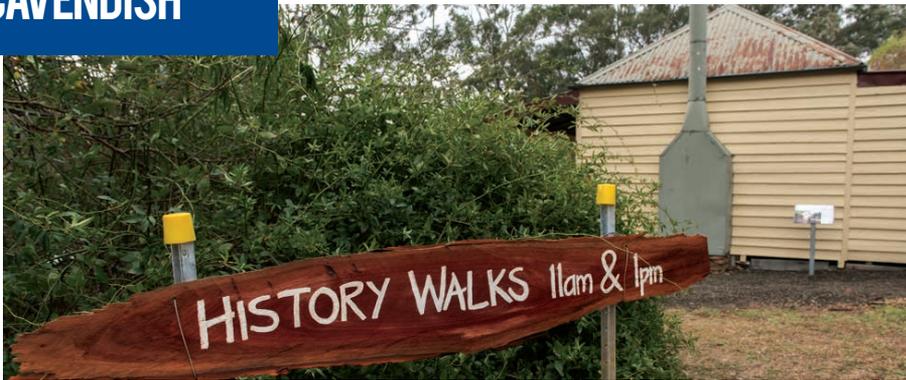
The Big Whistle Competition, Merryn Coughlin (centre) and other contestants, try their skills at gum leaf whistling on The Red Gum Stage.





main picture:
Neil Murray addresses the 'Celebrating Red Gums Forum'.

inset
Roger Edwards, Committee Member, Cavendish Red Gum Festival and Forest Officer, speaking at the same forum.



Roger Edwards

Committee Member, Cavendish Redgum Festival

Getting people out and celebrating the red gum together is absolutely essential. I think that was demonstrated when people came out in the pouring rain.

We didn't expect to get the numbers that we did but people came from everywhere just to be a part of it.

And they are walking through the rain looking at different demonstrations and sites and were happy.

One of the reasons we moved everything within the town centre is we knew we had contingency under cover. If we'd had it up at the recreation ground we would have been jiggered. We wouldn't have had these undercover facilities like the CFA or the church.

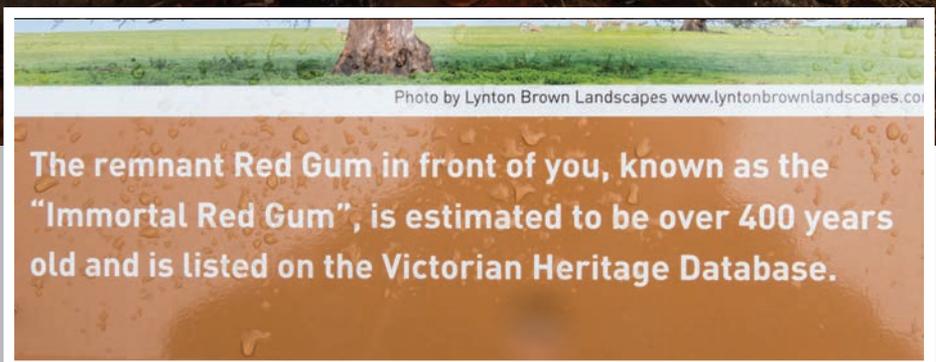
When we debrief, I'm sure there will be things that we could have done better. There's no doubt about that.



History Walks and the bus tour to the Immortal Red Gum were popular activities

opposite page, top right: Peter Watt, leading a **History Walk**.

opposite, centre right: Arborist Phil Kenyon talks to a group at **The Immortal Red Gum**, on the Red Gum Bus Tour.



above: **The Immortal Red Gum** is estimated to be more than 400 years old.



Crossley is a small western district community with a long-lasting relationship to Ireland, its history, traditions and the Catholic Church.

In the early days of the twentieth century Crossley boasted a population nearing 700, but this declined between the wars and has stabilised to around 300 today, although the district, with its rich and fertile volcanic soils, continues to support grazing, dairying, potato and onion growing.

One old resident claims that Crossley is the most Catholic little town in Australia, and he may well be right as the Shire of Moyne itself sits in a region populated by Irish families who migrated at the time of the great famine.

Port Fairy, just 10kms to the south sits along the Moyne River and the old whaling port of Warrnambool is 20kms to the east.

CROSSLEY | ST BRIGID'S HALL





When the Princes Highway was opened Crossley was cut off; as a result the general store closed and the Shamrock Hotel served its last drinks. The Catholic school, which had opened in 1867, also closed down.

However, St Brigid's Church has remained at the heart of this community.

When the Church Hall was decommissioned local residents formed a group 'The Friends of St Brigid's Association' and worked tirelessly to raise the funds to purchase the hall, restore and renovate it to become a meeting place for all the community to use and enjoy.



St Brigid's For Sale

The locals stood tall, linked arms and fought for the right to retain the land and the buildings which their ancestors

Anam
 Antoon
 Bekes
 Bourke
 Braderick
 Bushell
 Carey
 Carmody
 Carrall
 Connick
 Conway
 Cronin
 Crewe
 Dalton
 Darmody
 Davitt
 Devlin
 Drennan
 Faleg
 Farley
 Finnegan
 Fitzgerald
 Foley
 Gallagher
 Gavin
 Gillick
 Gleeson
 Gorman
 Greene
 Griffin
 Tuffus
 Dunne
 Dwyer
 Egan
 Hennessy
 Bourigan
 Hoy
 Hurley
 Joyce
 Keehan
 Kelly
 Lane
 Leadin
 Lenehan
 Linnane
 Lynch
 Madden
 Madigan
 Mahony
 Malone
 McCarthy
 McGrath
 McInerney
 McNaughton
 Melville
 Mulvihill
 Motan
 Maloney
 Muga
 O'Brien
 O'Connor
 O'Casey
 O'Dwyer
 O'Mara
 O'Neira
 O'Neil
 O'Shan
 O'Quinn
 Pekin
 Purcell
 Quinn



CROSSLEY | ST BRIGID'S HALL

During the Irish diaspora of the 1840's, many families from the 'townlands of Shravokee' in Co Clare, migrated to Australia and settled in Crossley, south-west Victoria.

This contemporary painting depicts St. Brigid's Church and Hall transplanted to the dockside in Ireland. Names of those who sailed to Australia from Shravokee are written on the foreshore. The people depicted here are their direct descendants.

Mick Lane, St. Brigid's Committee member and acknowledged Elder Statesman of Crossley is a direct descendant and given an 'honorary' place in the foreground of the artwork.

The St. Brigid's precinct is the heart of a community established by Irish immigrants who settled at Crossley.

Painting by Ester Cloonan

They came to start a new life, farm the land
and to build a church for their future generations.

St Brigid's is a much-loved community asset.

The Friends of St Brigid's Association have received FRRR funding three times. All grants were essential to improving the amenity of the hall to support its use by the community. FRRR support assisted the 'Friends' group in their fundraising efforts to continue to maintain and improve the hall, and to pay the mortgage they undertook when they purchased the building in 2009 from the Catholic Church.

When the 'Friends' acquired it, the hall had been unused for three years and had significant damage to the interior and exterior.

A great deal of community supported work has gone into rejuvenating the building and to improving its functionality, visual appeal and comfort.

It is now a well-used venue for art and cultural events.

The Crossley area has high numbers of socially isolated males, many farmers who lead an isolated lifestyle. Recent population growth has diversified the local community.

The comments on the following pages have been taken from records of conversations with:

Dennis Bushell: *Chair, Friends of St Brigid's Association*

Sue Elms: *Treasurer, Friends of St Brigid's Association*

Josie Farrar: *Committee Member, Friends of St Brigid's Association*

Chantelle Herbert: *Crossley Resident*

Jacqui Kelly: *Crossley Resident*

Geraldine Ryan: *Irish Dance teacher*

Paul Smith: *Friends of St Brigid's Association*

Dennis Bushell

Chair, Friends of St Brigid's Association

It's very important for us to pass on our culture to our kids. Without a hall that would be really difficult. There's no hall like it in the district. It has a sprung floor so they can learn Irish dancing here and they can use the hall for free.

The church, the buildings and the history are all important to us. We wanted to have it in the community's hands.

The hall was locked for 3 years and was in a really rundown state. The roof had rust holes that had been patched up and a lot of people said it should have been knocked down.

Some of the older people on the committee, over 70, did their 'white card' and we got roofing iron really cheap. We paid a man by the hour and we all helped, so the roof was done for a quarter of the original quote.

“It's a very welcoming place, a very social place. We've got a sign here: “You're always amongst friends when you're at St Brigid's,” so it's a really friendly community and it's a happy place.”

Dennis Bushell



Rejuvenated Supper Room - Detail

We knew we had to concentrate on the hall because it's where we could make the money we needed for improvements and the mortgage.

The FRRR grant for the heating made a massive difference between a cold freezing hall and a warm hall. We've managed to do it because of the grants and of course, other things like and grit and determination.



Friends of St Brigid's Association Committee

Mick Lane
Committee Member

I think it's very important for us to teach children about their cultural history.

Most of the early settlers in this community came from Ireland during the famine and they came here to create a new life. It's important to understand why they came and why they settled here and to keep those traditions going.

Killarney was a hundred percent Irish Catholic when it was settled and at the moment it is still the most Irish place in Australia, the most Catholic place outside of Ireland.



Mick Lane (right) *Committee Member,*
and acknowledged Elder Statesman of Crossley

There's something about the hall that's intangible. Complete strangers come here and it's in the air and it sort of draws people in and you make great friends and relationships.

I even found my wife here and now have 10 children. Five of my daughters got married in the church and my grand-daughter was also married here

Dennis Bushell
Chair, Friends of St Brigid's Association

I was born and raised in Killarney right on the sea and I lived there till I was 16 then moved into Warrnambool, but I've always loved this area and came out here often and brought my kids out here too.

The church is iconic, a magnificent building but it's really the hall that's the heart of the place. The precinct was up for sale. There was already a committee formed to buy it and they inspired me, so I joined.

I just love this place; it's part of me; it's part of my DNA. I have such vivid memories of all the great people who have been around here. As a child, we came to church here, we sat in the second seat on the right.

There were dances and always something going on here. Just about everyone in the district met here at Crossley Hall. Having a hall like this that's at the heart of a community is the essence of life. Kids can come here and actually be part of something. It's what life's about, it's a wonderful place to be and we've got to keep these places.

Sue Elms
Treasurer, Friends of St Brigid's Association

When you walk into this building the community feeling is there. It's a friendly place and that's what drew us there.







Geraldine Ryan — (above, right) the longest-registered (since 1953), and oldest teacher of Irish Dance in the world.

“ I think it is very important for this generation to learn about their cultural heritage. We all must know where we came from. The children get a lot of pleasure out of it (Irish Dancing) and the parents get a lot of pleasure out of it too. This is why the Hall Committee feel they have a strong responsibility to hang on to the dancing and let the present generation benefit from it. It's very important. ”

Geraldine Ryan





Chantelle Herbert

Crossley Resident

I've lived in the area three years.

My daughter Saphira enjoys coming along to these Irish dancing classes. It is fantastic.

It encourages them to try something new and it keeps them active.

It's exceptionally important that kids have access to understanding all the different facets of their cultural heritage, especially today when we're such a multicultural society.



Geraldine Ryan (*above*) is the longest-registered and the oldest teacher of Irish Dance in the world. Geraldine visits St Brigid's Hall every Tuesday evening during the school term.

On that day, she leaves her home in Melbourne at 7.20 am and travels on 3 buses and a train, to give a class in Hamilton, and another at St Brigid's.

Jacqui Kelly *Crossley Resident*

We're from Sligo in Ireland, me and my sister. We live in the area. We knew something was going on down here. We are very amazed at Geraldine.

There's nobody we know with so much energy, to teach the kids dancing. We also play with the musicians here. It's actually very important for kids to tap into their cultural heritage.

They love the music and the costumes and it's just fun really, when it comes down to it. It's amazing the community has been able to buy the hall.

Being able to come here, getting to know new people outside your workplace, it just adds a whole new dimension to our lives so it's very beneficial in that sense it makes us feel quite at home.

It's absolutely brilliant.



Sue Elms

Treasurer, Friends of St Brigid's Association

Also, as a result of buying the hall, we established a Men's Shed, which has been really important for the community.

Dennis Bushell

Chair, Friends of St Brigid's Association

There's so much wisdom among the members of the Men's Shed. I really enjoy it. We hang a bit of shit on each other and that is fun.

We talk about a huge range of subjects and I'm learning all the time from other men there. Each one of us brings a different skill.

For some of those men just being appreciated for their wisdom is hugely important.

Fifteen Minutes of Fame gives a start to young performers.

One young, budding musician who started performing in the Crossley Hall went on to win the Rising Star Award at the Port Fairy Folk Festival.

The performances are very popular, bringing people of all ages together; people from both Crossley and beyond. There are often three generations of the one family in the room: the young performers, their parents and grandparents.

Paul Smith

Friends of St Brigid's Association

With Fifteen Minutes of Fame, there's eight acts on the stage for fifteen minutes each.

We've got an audience of 100–150 people sitting down, having a few drinks, having a feed.

Some acts are very good, some are very bad, there are no winners and everyone gets a clap. Where else would you find something like that?



Stage set up for Fifteen Minutes of Fame showing the lighting gantry and sound system funded by FRRR



Compere, Russell Goodear gets ready to perform at Fifteen Minutes of Fame



The Stewart Boys
(average age 70.2 years),
Fifteen Minutes of Fame



19 year old Cooper Lower, Fifteen Minutes of Fame.
Cooper has been performing at Fifteen Minutes of Fame
since 14 years of age and next month travels to America
to 'experience' their music scene.



Josie Farrar

Committee Member, Friends of St Brigid's Association

The more you become involved the greater the camaraderie is between this particular group, men and women.

We all work so well together. I think that just inspires the rest of us to keep going and do the work that the initial group set up.

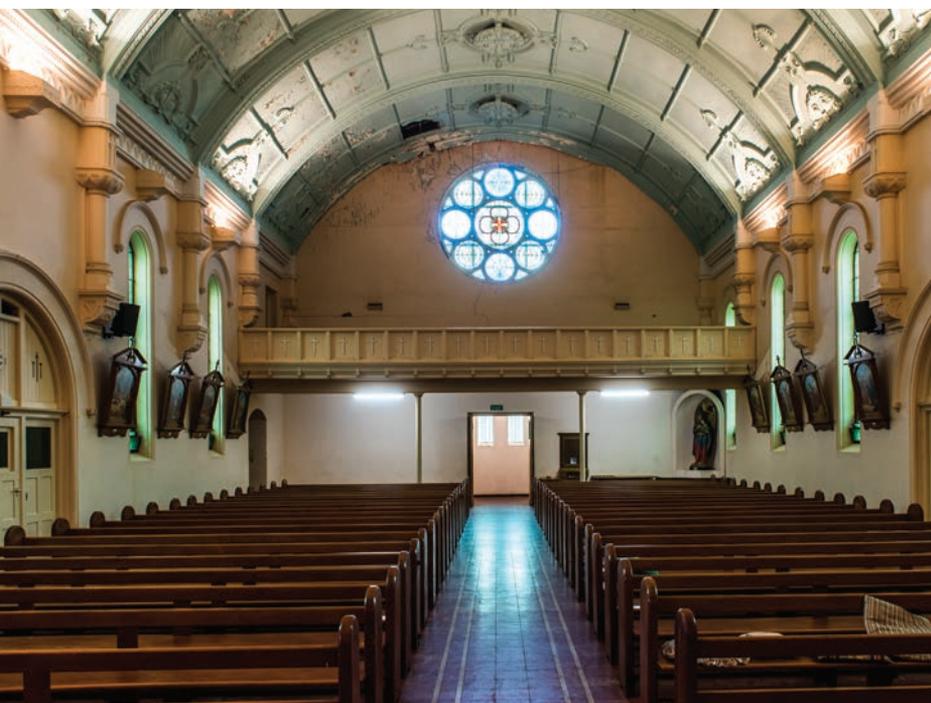
above and opposite: Committee members, and volunteers, working together to prepare the hall and supper for **Fifteen Minutes of Fame**.






SPUDS
for this event
generously provided by
BILL DWYER
of Crossley



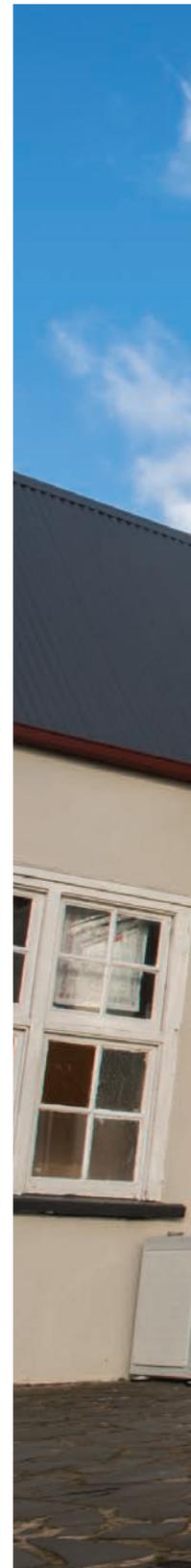



Sue Elms

Treasurer, Friends of St Brigid's Association

The best thing has been meeting all the people involved here now. A lot of them are not living here in Crossley, but in Warrnambool and Killarney. People keep coming and joining us and helping out and I know they're going to pass this on because good things just happen here.

As the catering committee has become more active, you start to see community connections. A couple of weeks ago one of our volunteers put on a hundredth birthday memorial for her mum who came to school here. She had an afternoon tea in the supper room and lots of locals came just to celebrate that fact. You see these connections happening all the time now.





NATHALIA





NATHALIA | PO-BONK-I BUNYMA BAPALWA

Nathalia is in the heart of Yorta Yorta country.

The town was first settled by Europeans in the early 1840s, however the Yorta Yorta people have retained a close connection to their tribal lands which include the site of Nathalia on the banks of the Broken Creek.

The town was first gazetted in 1880 when approximately 150 persons were living on both sides of the creek, today, Nathalia has a population of around 2000.

The Barmah National Park and Moira State Park form the largest red gum forest in the world and are an important breeding ground for migratory birds. Some trees are believed to be more than 500 years old; many canoe trees still bear the scars today.

In the Yorta Yorta language Nathalia means 'place with no stones'.

‘... it is beautiful to hear an indigenous language from the land in which you live.’

The *Po-bonk-I Bunyma Bapalwa* project aimed to address environmental and social issues, positively impacting on the capacity of local people to better protect what is unique in the area.

The funding enabled the **Bardi Gras Group**, under the auspice of Nathalia and District Development Corporation (NADDCO), to create a production of a Dreamtime story, guided by, and in partnership with, **Yorta Yorta Elder, Aunty Sharon Atkinson**, who is pioneering the revitalisation of the language.

The story was based on the *Tiddalik the Frog* Dreamtime story, but featured instead the local Pobble-bonk frog as the central character; it was published locally as a book, *Po-bonk-I Bunyma Bapalwa* (Po-Bonk Creates a Flood). A play was also developed.

Community artist Gordon Dowell created a giant frog, while students and community members created accompanying artworks.

The story was enacted in the main street of Nathalia during NADDCO’s Easter Saturday market and later at Nathalia Primary School, and read out in both Yorta Yorta and English.

One hundred copies of the A4 illustrated book, with accompanying DVD, were made freely available to all educational venues in Moira Shire and Aboriginal organisations across and beyond the Shire.

The comments on the following pages have been taken from records of conversations with:

Sharon Atkinson: *Yorta Yorta Elder and Teacher*

Gordon Dowell: *Artist-in-residence, Po-Bonk Project*

Cameron Lancaster: *Chaplain, Nathalia Primary School*

Lyn Loger: *Bardi Gras Group Nathalia & District Development Corporation Inc.*





Lyn Loger

Bardi Gras Group Nathalia & District Development Corporation Inc.

I was the overall coordinator, Marie O'Brien, represented NADDCO as its President. Aunty Sharon Atkinson, whilst not on the actual committee, her involvement as a Yorta Yorta Elder and pioneer of the revitalisation of the Yorta Yorta language was pivotal to the project's success. Without her Yorta Yorta language teaching and continued cultural guidance, we could not have progressed the project.

The photograph opposite shows myself, Marie O'Brien and Judy Ormond beside Broken Creek where we held all our weekly meetings. Judy Ormond, whilst not on the committee, had the essential role as our valued photographer who recorded the workshops, exhibitions and the actual Bardi Gras event on the Easter Saturday. Judy supplied the photos from the Bardi Gras enactment by students for the book illustrations. We celebrate our beautiful local environment, by publicly holding our meetings outdoors. We held eleven meetings, the final one being five days prior to NADDCO's Easter Market and Bardi Gras on 15th April. Ten and a half weeks of planning only just got us there. Numerous meetings post Bardi Gras, finalised the book for publication.

Meeting at Broken Creek is also a social get together, it's such a beautiful setting with the ducks around us, and people passing often call over to say hello and provide input — it's all about participation in as many ways as possible. I always have typed up minutes of one or two pages of items to cover.

We included the whole community, from Pre-school to Nursing Home Care, so there are a lot of different groups to cater to with workshops and invitations to two art exhibitions. The lead up to the Bardi Gras is as important as the event itself, because it brings people on board.

I write fortnightly articles for the local paper, Red Gum Courier, who always publish updates and photos. Sharon, Philippa Schapper and I wrote the Po-bonk book. Philippa, as chairperson of the GRAIN Store Board, also oversaw three Po-bonk art and book displays in the GRAIN Store Community Gallery.

This creek-side is also where artist Gordon Dowell traditionally creates his cane masterpieces. It's a public event, his act of creation on the creek bank and many people come to see and have a chat. That year, it was too wet so we had to go to the covered outside area of the Bridge Hotel, across the road.

It was still a public space for people to call in and see what was going on.



above: Bardi Gras Group coordinator Lyn Loger, Marie O'Brien, NADDCO President, and Judy Ormond photographer for the project meeting by Broken Creek to check page proofs of the book **Po-bonk-I Bunyma Bapalwa Po-bonk Creates a Flood**

opposite: Co-author **Philippa Schapper**, photographed outside the G.R.A.I.N. store.

Philippa, as Chairperson of the GRAIN Store Board (GRAIN=Growing Rural Arts in Nathalia) oversaw three Po-bonk art and Po-bonk book displays in the Community Gallery during 2017.



THE
G.R.A.I.N. STORE™
NATHALIA
www.thegrainstore.org Affiliated with La Trobe University

Sharon Atkinson

Yorta Yorta Elder and Teacher

The most important thing about doing arts-based stuff, we do all those beautiful sculptures and painting that everyone got into, the social context of art is the most valuable part of the whole project.

It just breaks down barriers and it's like we've been together forever. There's a lot of Indigenous issues, especially in little towns, that people don't talk about because they don't know how.

There are a lot of questions people want to ask but are fearful about how they should ask them.

An arts-based program offers that space where you can have courageous conversations and develop rapport and engage and include people without being confrontational.

Those conversations grow in a social context, people can engage with someone they can relate with, and it allows those questions and those conversations to go to another level.

Lyn Loger

Bardi Gras Group Nathalia & District Development Corporation Inc.

The (FRRR) grant provided us with funding for the Aboriginal storytellers and to have a community artist (Gordon Dowell) come in and create the giant frog, the feature item that sparks all those other things happening because people want to connect and join in. Moira Shire then provided funding for the Po Bonk book. FRRR provided us with similar funding in 2015 and Gordon came in and created two enormous, giant eagles.

Those amazing creatures created such a ripple out in the community of excitement and enthusiasm that everybody wants to join. It sparks everything off. It's like a key to open up the idea.

opposite, at top: Book launch, August 9th 2017, at the GRAIN Store Art Gallery and Performing Space. L-R: Lyn Loger and Aunty Sharon Atkinson. Photo: Julie Moore

opposite, at bottom: Aunty Sharon Atkinson at book launch, August 9th 2017. Photo: Julie Moore

*below: Nathalia Primary School performing **Po-bonk-I Bunyma Bapalwa Po-bonk Creates a Flood**, Main Street, Nathalia.*



Photos: Judy Ormond







above: **Origami frogs** created by Kerry-Anne Rappell. .

above at right: **Artist Gordon Dowell, Lyn Loger and Sharon Atkinson** with the paper sculpture of Po-Bonk the frog, based on Sharon's original artwork shown in the picture on the opposite page.

opposite: **Aunty Sharon Atkinson, Yorta Yorta Elder,** teacher and co-compiler of the Yorta Yorta Dictionary: *Yorta Yorta Language Heritage*, (with Heather Bowe and Lois Peeler) is seen here with her artwork based on the photo of the Pobblebonk frog by Peter Robertson.

Aunty Sharon has been the essential teacher and guide in the development and adaptation of this story to the existing local environment and the local Yorta Yorta language.

Two of her language students, Lyn Loger and Philippa Schapper, translated the story into the Yorta Yorta language as one component of the Yorta Yorta Language Program.

Original drawing of Po Bonk by **Sharon Atkinson**
 Photos of performance by **Judy Ormond**

Selected pages from the book



Po-bonk-I Bunyma Bapalwa

Po-bonk Creates a Flood



Sharon Atkinson Lyn Loger Philippa Schapper



Yedabila garrin.
 The animals laugh.



Po-bonk yorta garrin.
 Po-bonk doesn't laugh.

16

Gaiyimarr ganbinan ganatj bigarrumdja.

The kangaroo jumps over the emu.



17

Yedabila garrin.
 The animals laugh.



Po-bonk yorta garrin.
 Po-bonk doesn't laugh.

18

Biltjimdja yanha djirungana, rokima djuwet danin boganamutj.

The goanna walks tall, shaking his big belly.

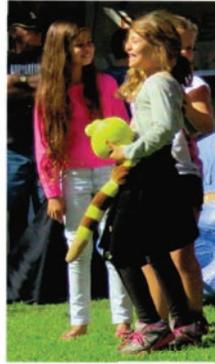


19

You can access the Po-Bonk downloads via this link:
<http://www.wcclp.com.au/yorta-yorta/>

To access both mobile/tablet and web versions of the dictionary app people can also visit: <http://www.wcclp.com.au/yorta-yorta/>

Yedabila garrin.
The animals laugh.



25

Mirran! Po-bonk-l ma ngalmin!
Look, Po-bonk's eyes are shining!

Po-bonk garrin!
Po-bonk is laughing!

Garribak, wala djadjingum muma Po-bonk-l whroo.
Laughing, water gurgles from Po-bonk's mouth.



26

**Wala djadjingum ina gulpaga,
wala djadjingum ina Baala,
wala djadjingum ina Dungula.**

Water gurgles into the waterhole,
water gurgles into the Broken Creek,
water gurgles into the Murray River.



27

**PO-BONK-L BUNYMA BAPALWA
PO-BONK CREATES A FLOOD**
2017

Voices: Yorta Yorta- Sharon Atkinson. English- Lyn Loger.



Frog calls: Dr. Murray Littlejohn University of Melbourne
KAW Entertainment Services

CONTENTS:

1. Yorta Yorta recording
2. Yorta Yorta/English recording
3. Text of story available for printing



28



29

Dungudja wala ganatj woka.
Lots of water over the land.

Po-bonk-l bunyma bapalwa.
Po-bonk creates a flood.

30

Cameron Lancaster

Chaplain, Nathalia Primary School

We have a number of Indigenous families at the school. Football and netball are very big in a country community, so this was an opportunity to engage in the arts.

The students performed the story at the school assembly so the whole school got to hear the Yorta Yorta language which was out of the ordinary.

The kids involved in acting have been engaging with Indigenous language and story and this is nothing like the run of the mill experiences for the kids at the school.

They were very much engaged with the whole project and it wasn't prompted by "let's learn about Indigenous culture" but through doing an artistic project, it just became absorbed along with the project.

Sharon Atkinson

Yorta Yorta Elder and Teacher

We almost didn't have a Bardi Gras this year, because we didn't have funds to bring it all together, that would have been very sad because it's something that everyone looks forward, and every year it gets better, it's very important, we couldn't do it without the funding.

We wanted to use art because art is neutral. It creates a space, people can explore or just enjoy this space or connect with people in a different way.

Having the giant creature, the giant frog displaces people's sense of the work day, so while they're displaced in this way, it opens up a space.

Lyn Loger

Bardi Gras Group Nathalia & District Development Corporation Inc.

Sharon Atkinson

Yorta Yorta Elder and Teacher

I would love this community to take the indigenous language, and just promote that as part of the profile and the demographics of the whole community because regardless of whether I'm here or not, we are part of the history that's around here.

The story telling, the arts-based projects and that engagement, that social fabric, and being related to each other, that's hugely important in very small towns and townships like this. That's where I'd like to see it go.

below: **Students' artwork**



all photos: **Nathalia Primary School** performing **Po-bonk-I Bunyma Bapalwa Po-bonk Creates a Flood**, Main Street, Nathalia.



Photos: Judy Ormond







Cameron Lancaster

Chaplain, Nathalia Primary School

You encourage children and you're not sure what effect that might have down the track but you encourage them in whatever they're doing with this project.

The public performance was at Easter time and families go away and so kids might be really keen and then they don't turn up on the day, you've really just got to be able to roll with it.

Sharon is encouraging a couple of Indigenous students to become part of the Welcome to Country and one of the girls got real stage fright about standing up in front of her peers classmates and couldn't do it.

I don't think anything is a failure, you've got to be able to be very flexible working with kids. An indigenous language program, we planted the seeds and down the track it may be built upon.

That wasn't necessarily the goal, to start an indigenous language program in the primary school, but who knows what might happen.

Lyn Loger

Bardi Gras Group Nathalia & District Development Corporation Inc.

It's a lot of work. This was a double barrel project. Normally we just do the one thing and this time we had to publish the book. You've got to allow a project to evolve and grow and it has to develop its own shape.

Sharon Atkinson

Yorta Yorta Elder and Teacher

When I was growing up, younger people were always at arm's length to most adults in the community. These days, when I come to Nathalia, most of the kids call me Aunty. I'm only used to the Indigenous community calling me Aunty! My head grows big and my shoulders grow wide, but they come up and give me a kiss and a cuddle and I actually feel very welcome in my country in this community.

I loved that when we read out the play and when they got to the part where the kids repeat the word "djadjingum djadjingum," they said it loud, they said it strong and they said it very clearly, they wanted to say it over and over. That was very impressive. They picked it up very quickly.

I worked with volunteers several years ago and they'd often take off overseas, one lady came back and said she was so disappointed, she went to an indigenous village in Canada and they told stories from the village and she said, "I had none, I had none from Australia that I could share with them". These kids now have an indigenous story that they can share, with people around the world.

The interest was so huge, the sale of the books alone spoke volumes about the project. I think we're going into our third printing. That's a big thing for a little area like this. That says a lot for people who want to be engaged. Now they have access to the book who knows where that will be taken, with all the work that's been done in this project.

Lyn Loger

Bardi Gras Group Nathalia & District Development Corporation Inc.

Learning Yorta Yorta language is really exciting for us. One of my friends is a councillor and the other one works for Moira Shire, they want to learn the language.

Once it's introduced into a community and people see other people learning it and proudly speaking it, they want to be part of it too.

So that's lovely, that's building up that 'wanting to' link, that's really important.



Lyn Loger

Bardi Gras Group Nathalia & District Development Corporation Inc.

The main thing was to celebrate our Aboriginal heritage.

We wanted to do that by promoting the Yorta Yorta language. We thought the best way would be to work with children, so we did a children's book based on a Dreamtime story.

It's really interesting, we all know if we hear Italian and we all know if we hear French, but none of us know if we hear Yorta Yorta because we don't hear the language and we thought, in a small way, perhaps we can help.

Sharon Atkinson

Yorta Yorta Elder and Teacher

I think it's important for any community in Australia to know something about Indigenous languages because a knowledge system within the language is so much coded information about the landscape and the ecology and social fabric of Indigenous community. But it's also beautiful to hear an indigenous language from the land in which you live.

Gordon Dowell (above):

Artist-in-Residence, Po-bonk Project

The artistic process is a wonderful way of getting the community involved. We worked on the banks of Broken Creek. There was always a passing parade of people who would stop for a chat and ask questions.

Lyn would have people at the hospitals or aged care hostels making things for the parade, or window decorations. The school kids developed lots of stuff for the window displays.

The frog is drawing on a local Indigenous legend and it involves the telling of that story through the Yorta Yorta language as well as English. The focus is on environment using a non-threatening way of working to get together to raise awareness about various environmental issues.



RUPANYUP BUILDING COMMUNITY ASSETS

Rupanyup is a small town in the north-western Wimmera district of Victoria, 49 kms north-east of Horsham, with a population of around 500.

The name Rupanyup is an Aboriginal word meaning 'branch hanging over water'.

First surveyed in 1873 the Post Office opened in February 1875, when it was known as Karkaroc, but was renamed Rupanyup the following year.

This is a dry-land farming district which produces more than a third of Victoria's grain harvest each year.









Rupanyup has several unique tourist attractions:

Woods' Farming & Heritage Museum

has a vast collection of stationary engines, tractors, tools, farm machinery and household memorabilia on display.

In the middle of town, **Cust's Store** is an old-style general store recalling how people shopped in days gone by.

The **Old Flour Mill** is a rare example of an early portable galvanised iron mill, standing beside the first reinforced concrete silos built in the southern hemisphere. These were designed by John Monash in 1909.

The town is part of the **Silo Art Trail** which also includes artworks at nearby Sheep Hills, Brim, Rosebury, Lascelles and Patchewollock.

The Rupanyup Memorial Hall project addressed the need to have a community facility that is well maintained and which meets the changing requirements of the community.

2016 Census data indicated 33% of Rupanyup's population are over 60 years of age and it is important that this group stay connected to the community and maintain an active lifestyle.

The Hall is appropriately equipped and furnished to meet the requirements of hirers, as it is this revenue that covers the cost of general maintenance and minor improvements.

Larger events in the community attract in the vicinity of 200 people so providing good seating for that number was necessary.

The Hall is regularly used by local schools, Probup and Rupanyup RSL.

The comments on the following

pages have been taken from records of conversations with:

Arthur & Irene Eichler, Residents, Stonehaven Nursing Home

Mrs Margaret Lingham: *Secretary, Rupanyup Nursing Home Support Group*

Mrs Val Hemphill: *Chair, Rupanyup Hall Committee*

Graham Massay: *Mayor, Yarriambiack Shire Council*

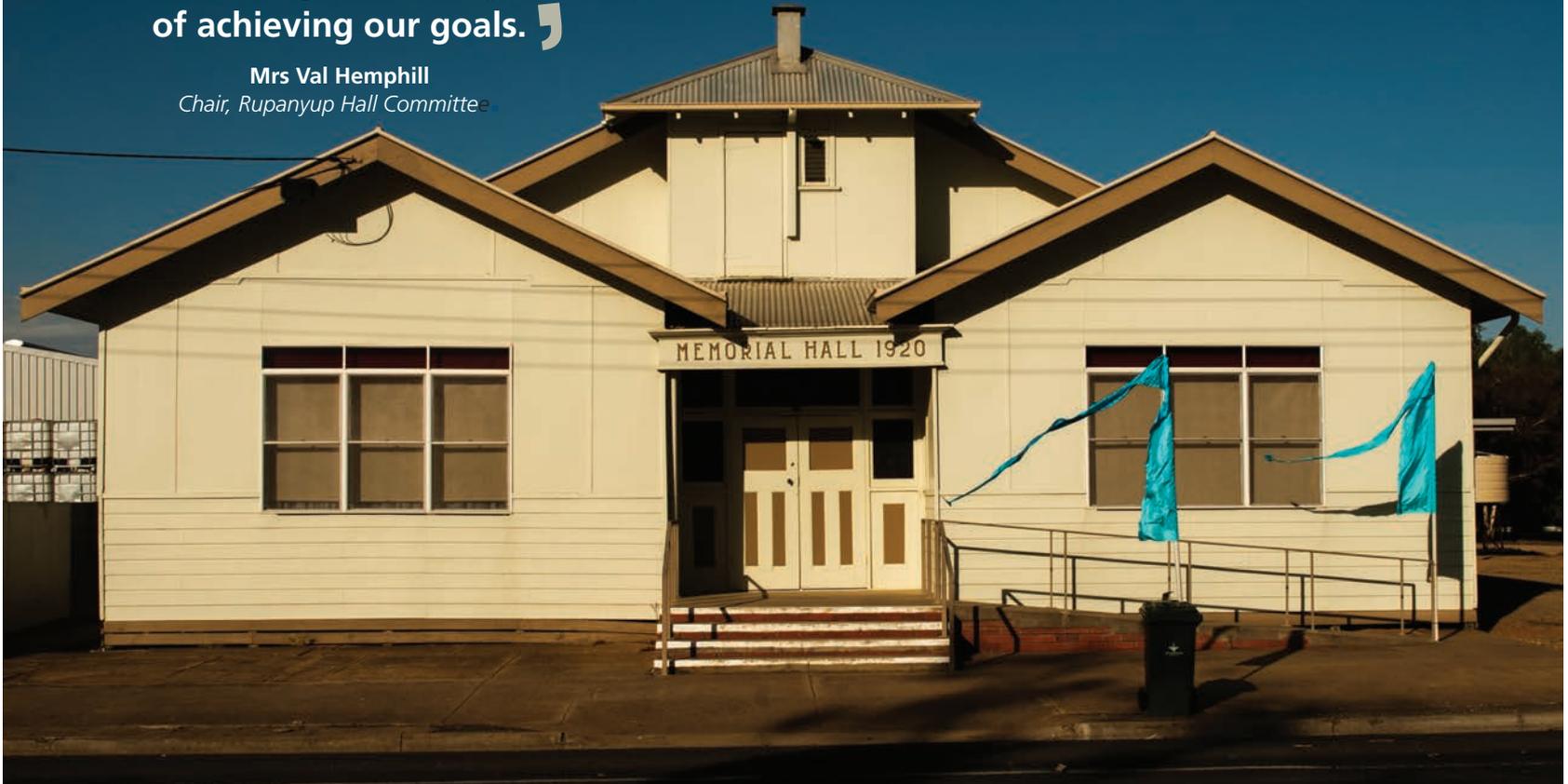
Steve Townsend: *Director of Nursing, Stonehaven Nursing Home*

Adrian Tyler: *Woods' Farming and Heritage Museum Committee*

The Rupanyup Memorial Hall Committee provides a catering service for events including the annual DIRT Music Festival, Vintage Car Club, Polkinghorne Ram Sale, Agent Land Auctions, Big Morning Tea, schools art exhibitions, film nights, sporting functions and fundraising events.

“ Maintaining a comfortable venue with good seating is an important way of achieving our goals. ”

Mrs Val Hemphill
Chair, Rupanyup Hall Committee





left: Crowds gather outside the Hall in readiness for the ANZAC service

Mrs Val Hemphill

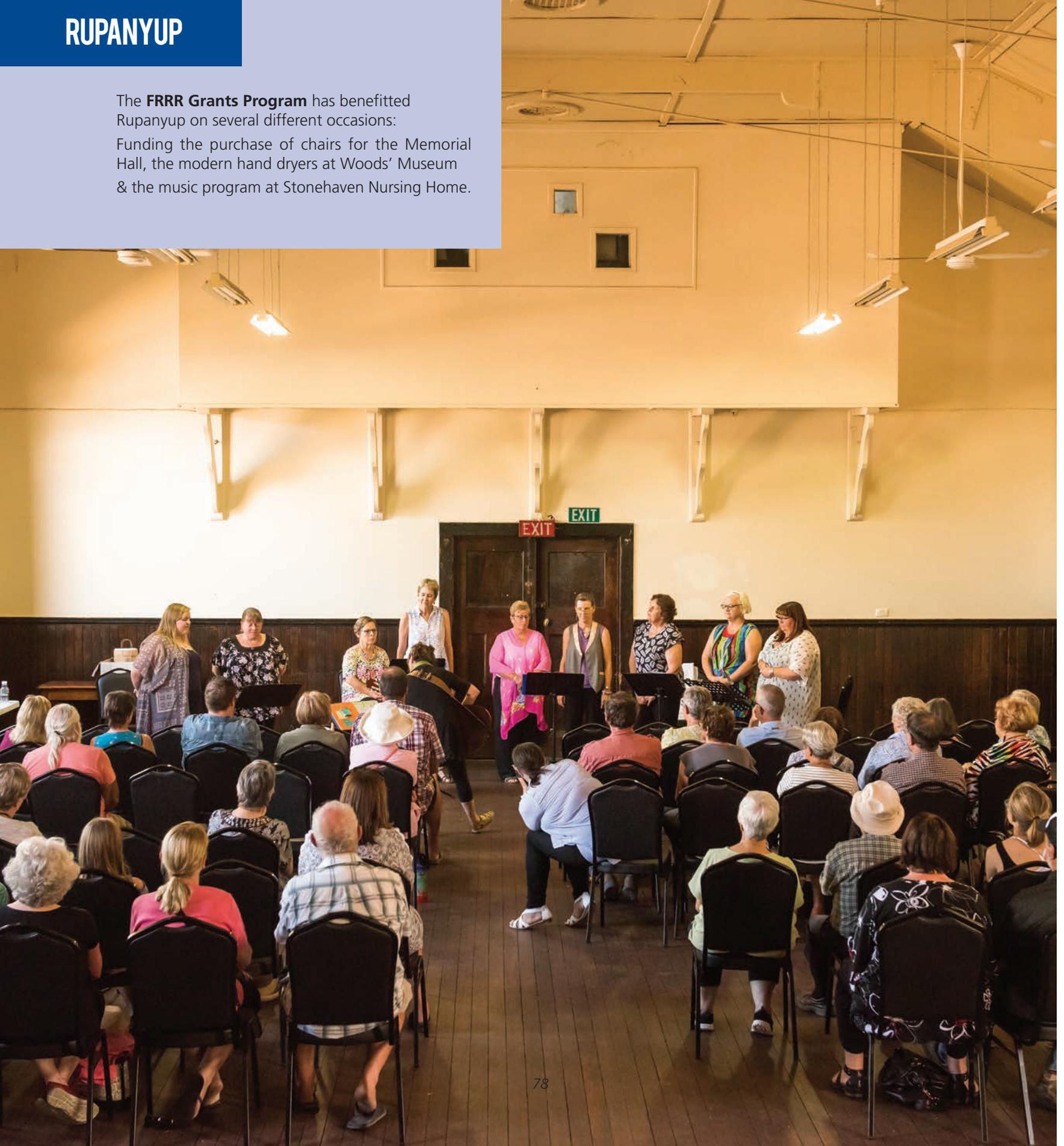
Chair, Rupanyup Hall Committee

The Hall has always been very well used. Back in the eighties a play was put on in the Hall, and it was so popular we ran one annually for about the next seven years. We used to have deb balls. Highland dancing was taught for years.

We had kitchen teas, which is when a couple are about to get married and people bring along gifts for their home. Some were held in the Hall and some in the Supper Room. There would be music and we would dance.



The **FRRR Grants Program** has benefitted Rupanyup on several different occasions: Funding the purchase of chairs for the Memorial Hall, the modern hand dryers at Woods' Museum & the music program at Stonehaven Nursing Home.





above: **Rupanyup Hall Committee**, photographed with the chairs purchased with FRRR grant funds. L to R: Eric Davidson, Ian Morgan, Sandra Loats, Val Hemphill (Chair), Ron Schneider, Graeme Oxbrow.

opposite: **Decibelles** performing during the Dirt Music Festival.

right: **Mrs Val Hemphill**, Chair of the Rupanyup Memorial Hall Committee, displays the commercial quality catering crockery purchased with funds raised from both catering and the sale of Christmas puddings, (made by local ladies).

Mrs Val Hemphill

Chair, Rupanyup Hall Committee

The chairs arrived the day before the funeral, and everyone was commenting on how comfortable they were.

They are well worth the money. They are comfortable, they are easy to get on and off. They are light. They have a handle on them. If you are getting off a 4-wheel walker, the handle enables you to grip the chair.

They stack and come with a free trolley. It is much quicker to set up and dismantle the hall. We are thrilled with them.



Mrs Val Hemphill

Chair, Rupanyup Hall Committee

The Hall is very important to the community. It is used for emergency services. For example when we had the floods through here. Local groups use it, including the school, the Footy Club and the CFA. The school uses it for concerts and when visiting schools come to Rupanyup.

The churches are all closing down, and the Hall is now used for funerals. In the past we had weddings, but not now, they go elsewhere. Occasionally it is used for visiting theatre tours or bands, but not much..

We host morning and afternoon teas and lunches for visiting bus tours, such as the Warrnambool Senior Citizens. The bus tours come to see Woods' Farming & Heritage Museum and now the Silo Art Trail as well.

We use the Hall kitchen for catering off-site at various events — for example Woods' Museum and the ram sales at Polkinghorns. Catering is an important part of our constant fundraising activities which support the maintenance costs of the Hall. Currently we are trying to raise \$30,000 for re-stumping.

Sixty years ago my mother-in-law, and other ladies decided to put curtains up on the windows. They had a piece of material 36 inches wide, and they cut it down the middle. That was my first contact with the hall.

When we brought the toilets in from outside another committee was formed for ladies and younger members. I was on that committee.

The first committee bought the dinner set which is now worth a small fortune. It was purchased with plum pudding money. For twenty-five years we made plum puddings. The first year we made fifty and when we finished we were making 750 a year. We had three sizes. The recipe came from my grandmother. It was released for the (now) Queen on her first birthday and called The Princess Elizabeth plum pudding. We made \$180,000 over twenty-five years from plum puddings, then we got too old and we couldn't find anyone else to take it on. We bought 100 chairs about three years ago using some of the plum pudding money.

When we have a funeral here we can seat about 220. We now have a special smaller stage for funerals which is stored under the main stage. It is on a trolley and you just pull it out. We needed a second set of 100 chairs and we bought these with the FRRR grant money. Country hospitality is about the food, the cleanliness, a comfortable environment and the toilets.

below: The supper room in preparation for the ANZAC Day Gunfire Breakfast



THE SILO ART TRAIL

After the first silo was painted at Brim locals across the region saw what enormous potential this had for tourism.

The Shire responded quickly and attracted funding to paint another five silos, making a total of six, on what has become known as **The Silo Art Trail**.

As each silo across the region was painted people who had already seen Brim made repeat visits. Today The Silo Art Trail is one of the 'must things to see' in regional Victoria.



left: **Rupanyup Prep & Year 1** artwork displayed in Main Street.

main picture: **The painted silo at Rupanyup** portrays two young locals looking forward to an exciting future. The Silo Art Trail brings thousands of tourists to the region.



DIRT MUSIC FESTIVAL

“Anything you can play on a verandah — you know, dirt music.”

— Tim Winton

Dirt Music Performances are on front lawns, verandahs, churches and the Rupanyup Memorial Hall.



above: **The Dirt Music Festival** attracts large visitor numbers to Rupanyup. Chair of the Hall Committee, Mrs Val Hemphill, welcomes Sydney visitor Ben Eadie to the performances in the Memorial Hall.

right: **The Decibelles**, Dirt Music Festival.





above: **James Rigby, Singing Workshop**, Dirt Music Festival. FRRR funded chairs in use during the 2018 festival.



above: **The Decibelles**, Dirt Music Festival.

left and at top: **James Rigby** captivated this young singer at the workshop in the Hall.

WOODS' FARMING & HERITAGE MUSEUM

The museum has preserved a huge collection from two local farmers, John and Michael Woods.

The brothers set up the facility to house the collection for their own purposes. That is, it was not initially designed as a public venue. It was really only when we set up a group the brothers very generously agreed that it could become a tourist attraction.

Adrian Tyler

Woods' Farming and Heritage Museum Committee

The Woods' Museum is going to be there for life.

It has been legally entrusted to the people of Rupanyup, so when people or organisations invest money in the museum it will be a lifelong investment.

The collection is totally under cover and nothing is going to happen to it. It gets a lot of repeat business. One day I was talking to a visitor to Rupanyup and asked if she had seen the Woods' Museum and she said "I have been there seven times".

I think people thought the Woods' Museum would be a flash in the pan, it's not. The figures we have received from Yarriambiack Tourism Council, indicate tourism is growing at 14% per year in Rupanyup. People have done all the big tourism spots and now they are looking for unique experiences in small country towns. Our aim is to hold these visitors a little longer in our town.

Woods' Museum brings an economic benefit to the town. A lot of the visitors are Grey Nomads who drive caravans, staying overnight in the caravan park @ \$10 a site. As they discover the town and all it offers (and that definitely includes Woods' Museum), they often extend their stay out to a week.

The caravan park now brings in \$500 a week. They all talk and as most of them are on WikiCamps they spread the word and we get a lot of publicity.

After some challenging years, Rupanyup is definitely in a revival stage. The Silo Art Trail and Woods' Museum are integral to that.

Adrian Tyler



above: **Michael Woods**, with his dog Lucky, Woods' Farming and Heritage Museum donor





The **FRRR Grants Program** also provided funds for the electric hand dryers at Wood's Museum.

Adrian Tyler

Woods' Farming and Heritage Museum Committee

The new hand dryers are very modern and top of the range.

Initially some people didn't know how to use them — for example people who have never been through airports — but we are excited to have state of the art equipment in a rural museum.

Why shouldn't country people have the same modern design as people have in the city?

below: **Woods' Museum** houses a vast collection from farm machinery, old tools, household goods, to toys and historic costumes — and much, much more.





Volunteer **Lynette Teasdale**



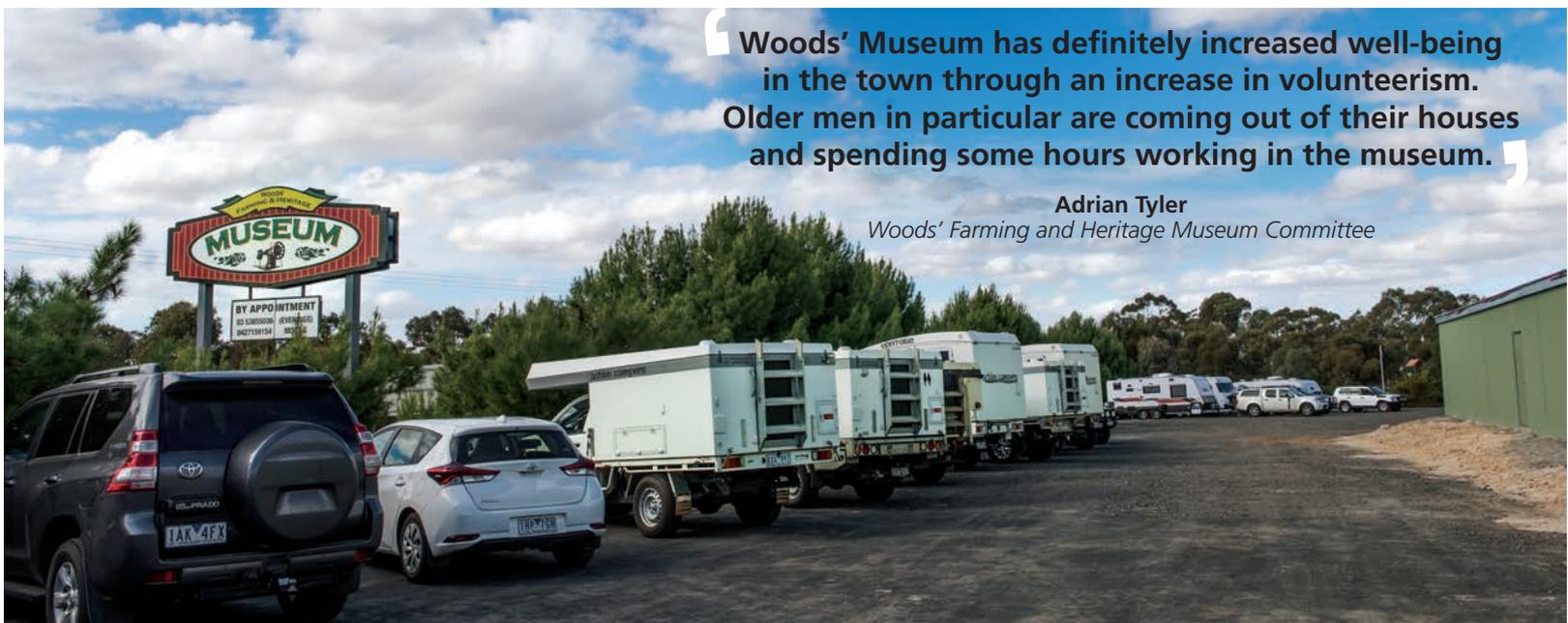
Volunteer **Robert McQueen**



“Woods’ Museum has definitely increased well-being in the town through an increase in volunteerism. Older men in particular are coming out of their houses and spending some hours working in the museum.”

Adrian Tyler

Woods’ Farming and Heritage Museum Committee





top, at left: **Adrian Tyler**, Woods' Farming and Heritage Museum Committee, with the cash register from the original Rupanyup Hardware Store, in use until 1992. The doors into the room where it is displayed also came from the Store.

left: Volunteer **Barry Baker** chose to be photographed with the truck of one of his heroes — Robert Dunlop.

Robert played in the VFL with Essendon and won their Best First Year Player in 1960. He returned to play for Rupanyup and continued farming.

Incidentally a very young Adrian Tyler painted Robert's name on the truck door.

MUSIC FUN & FRIENDSHIP

The Rupanyup Nursing Home Support Group (RNHSG) raise funds to deliver a range of entertainment options to residents of the Home.

It improves the health and well-being of elderly residents through the provision of monthly social events which include live entertainment, games and morning/afternoon teas.

Funds raised cover associated artists' costs.

Entertainers **Sandra & Leo** are always popular.



Mrs Margaret Lingham

Secretary, Rupanyup Nursing Home Support Group

The FRRR grant was influential in leveraging money from the Rupanyup Major Events Committee of \$1,000 per annum ongoing. This committee comprises young people who fundraise via the Barley Banquet, an incredibly successful event that raises approximately \$20,000 per year and they distribute the funds throughout the community.

So many local people come to the music sessions and enjoy it and see how beneficial they are and that helps us with our local fundraising. We sit in the street and we sell raffle tickets for Easter and Christmas and that funds our treats for special days. For example, tomorrow we have Conways little pies and pasties.

Arthur Eichler, Resident, Rupanyup Stonehaven Nursing Home'

The concert today was very good. My favourite song was 'Hang down your head Tom Dooley'.

Irene Eichler, Resident, Rupanyup Stonehaven Nursing Home'

The singing was my favourite bit. It took me back to when I was young.

Steve Townsend

Director of Nursing, Rupanyup Stonehaven Nursing Home

The residents feel a real sense of pride, because throughout the music programme and associated activities we are honouring important aspects of their life. We are getting more people from Horsham ringing up and enquiring because friends have said Rupanyup Nursing Home is really awesome. We love the people we look after and we make it a home.



Graham Massay

Mayor, Yarriambiack Shire Council

The music programme is tremendous. My wife and I called in just before Christmas. Not all the residents are confined to beds and they are able to come and listen to the artists.

Thank you to FRRR for providing the funding, not just for the Music Programme but for the hand dryers at Woods' Museum and for the chairs in the Hall.

All very well received.





above: **Mrs Margaret Lingham**, Secretary, Rupanyup Nursing Home Support Group, prepares morning tea

left: **Lucky Spot winner**, Loris Arnold, with Mrs Margaret Lingham





STRATHEWEN BUSHFIRE EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP 2018

Strathewen, a small community just 45 kms to Melbourne's north-east was completely destroyed in the Black Saturday bushfires, 9 February 2009.

The fire had a devastating impact on the tiny population of 220. Twenty-seven people lost their lives. Homes, vehicles, farm equipment, the local primary school and any infrastructure built up over many years by the community were all lost.

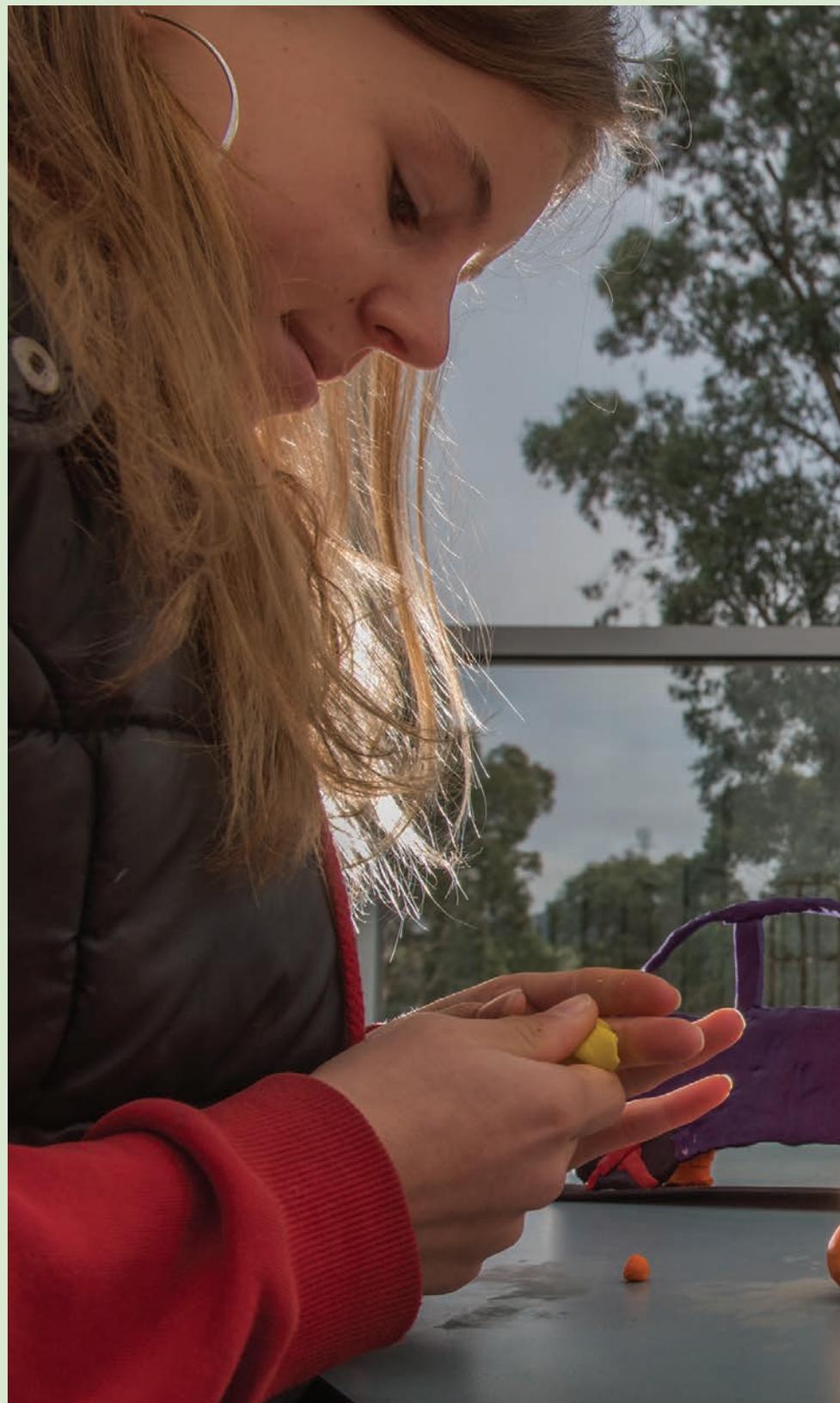
Strathewen started all over again – almost immediately.

The Strathewen Arthurs Creek Bushfire Education Partnership 2018 at Strathewen Primary School involved weekly fire education lessons with the Arthurs Creek Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade and research into the environmental and social history of the area drawing on knowledge from community elders.

The lessons were delivered by members of the Arthurs Creek Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade and Country Fire Authority (CFA) instructor, Jamie McKenzie who plays a vital role delivering some of the more complex aspects of measuring Fire Danger Ratings (FDRs) and measurement of the elements that make up the FDR.

FRRR funds were used to employ Gozer Media to assist with the production of a short creative Claymation film, used to present the information to the wider community.

at right: **Pupils from the Strathewen Primary School** enjoyed working on plasticine models used in the production of their Claymation film which looked at the danger of fire and how to take steps to survive.





Arthurs Creek Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade lends a hand.

The kids treat the program as an absolute highlight. They look forward to it, every Tuesday they're here in their CFA uniforms.

They get really excited by what they're doing. They're proud of what they're doing and what they know.

It's had a huge impact, more than we could have imagined. Our kids grew in confidence, self-esteem and pride in where they lived.

Jane Hayward

Teaching Principal, Strathewen Primary School



above: **Malcolm Hackett** with pupils from the Strathewen Primary School at the outdoor bonfire excursion.

The comments on the following pages have been taken from records of conversations with:

Lisal O'Brien: Member, Arthurs Creek Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade

Jane Hayward: Teaching Principal, Strathewen Primary School

Andrew Alford: Captain, Arthurs Creek Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade

Kate Campbell: past parent Strathewen Primary School

Malcolm Hackett: Chair, Strathewen Community Renewal Association (formed after the 2009 fires and recognised by VBRRA as the local Community Recovery Committee) and member of the trust that manages the Red Cross final disbursement. (Support funding for this project also came from Strathewen's Red Cross funds allocation).

Fire Education sessions were held every Tuesday during term 2 and 3, 2018 with ten Grade 5 and 6 students. Sessions included measurement, mapping and topography of the landscape.

Students learned how to calculate the Fire Danger Rating index for the day and discussed the thought process involved in deciding when to leave Strathewen for the day to keep safe.

The program included an excursion where students travelled by fire truck with Brigade members up to the Kinglake National Park where we looked at aspects and topography and the like.

There was also a **bonfire excursion** in Strathewen where we were able to chat and share lunch and marshmallows with our older townsfolk who told stories about their experience of living in Strathewen.

Ian Hunter, local Wurundjeri elder educated students on the Indigenous history of the Strathewen area, the use of fire and historical fire events.

Two Community Helper Days were held inviting brigade members, the general community and outside experts to the school to assist students with the **Claymation**. Students learned the technical aspects of cameras, lighting, music composition, sound recording, computer software and the full process of DVD production.

The film was presented to the community at the local Strathewen Hall. The project will be formally evaluated by Dr Briony Towers (RMIT Child-centred disaster risk reduction — Research Fellow).



above and following page:
Strathewen Primary School students
becoming familiar with a fire truck

“ I wanted these kids to
love where they lived
again instead of
living with worries
and fears. ”

Jane Hayward

Teaching Principal, Strathewen Primary School

right: **Andrew Alford**, Captain,
Arthurs Creek Strathewen Rural Fire
Brigade





Lisal O'Brien

Member, Arthurs Creek Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade

Our hope was to build a bond between the primary school and the fire brigade. Following 2009, we all worked really hard within the community to cope but everybody was also getting on with their business. There wasn't enough of a bond between the two groups. We also wanted to introduce bushfire education to the children.

The first project in 2016 was based on fire danger ratings. The kids were looking at each of the ratings, what they meant, what our environment looks like and the times that we have to think about whether we need to evacuate.

There was Claymation in 2016-2017 and a picture story book and we were looking at new people moving into our area and needing to know the things about when you live in a high fire danger area. 2018 is a work in progress. We're looking at Strathewen and what our landscape was like from pre-white settlement right through till now and the impacts of fires through that time.

Andrew Alford

Captain, Arthurs Creek Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade

I was born and bred in the district and was eight or nine when I joined the fire brigade. We never received any of this teaching.

In my generation it was all about seatbelts and littering. But if you educate the kids, they'll take it home and educate the family.

If you teach the kids about different fire behaviour in different areas and different topography, different weathers, they've got the tools not to panic but to know this one is not good in our area today. It's amazing what these kids now know.

There's firefighters out there with 10 years' experience that can't recall what these kids have picked up and learned.

Andrew Alford

Captain, Arthurs Creek Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade

The funding we receive not only allows the community to bond over a project, it produces something from the project thing that everyone can see.

Across the state, people are following what we're doing because we've been able to produce DVDs and a book. By having outside experts behind it, it's not something held in-house, it's able to spread and it gives the program viability.

During our community involvement days leaders of Emergency Management in our state come in and spend time with the kids. We've had Chief Office, some Deputy Chief Officers the CFA and the emergency commissioner of the state sit in a session and have the kids tell them how fire behaviour works and explain to them the measurement tools used to follow fire behaviour.

You've got grade five and six kids running training sessions to the leaders of emergency in the state. The students are producing something so important, so special, outside experts in Disaster Resilience are queuing up to see how this program is working.

I'm a volunteer instructor with the fire brigade. You could have these kids on the road every day, teaching volunteer firefighters around the state because they just suck up the knowledge.

I can sit in front of a room with 50 people and drone on all night. But if you throw in four or five of these kids, just the enthusiasm make me re-think how I should train.

I now train differently to what I did three years ago after witnessing how these kids absorb information. So that's where that funding allows it to be recorded professionally which makes it entertaining as well as an instructive tool.

Malcolm Hackett

Chair, Strathewen Community Renewal Association

This project is a bit of a lighthouse in what you can do if you aren't too restricted. Having the ability to be able to hire specialists, have them work with you, document everything you're doing, that's fabulous learning.

When those students have presented their material to the community and do it as experts, it makes adults sit up and take notice and I think that's pretty profound.



above: **Pupils calculate the Fire Danger Rating** index for the day and investigate the process involved in deciding when to leave the district in order to stay safe.





above: Local **Wurundjeri elder Ian Hunter**, educated students on the Indigenous history of the Strathewen area, the use of fire and historical fire events.

Lisal O'Brien

Member, Arthurs Creek Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade

If you're scared, the chances of you learning are highly diminished compared to if you're enjoying yourself and your mind's open and you're ready to learn. You take the fear element out and you're open to anything.

After the 2016 fire danger rating project, I talked with some of our fives and sixes. We discussed what the fire danger rating was for the day. I'd said it's a low-moderate, and they argued with me, they felt it should be higher, because the wind's picked up

and it's been dry for a while. I wanted for it to be an instinct for them.

I want them to wake up in the morning like some of us do and just think, this feels like a bad day. You don't know why but it does. It felt like they were starting to do that. They knew we hadn't had rain for a while. I don't remember as a kid ever thinking about things like that. Never went through my head.

Kate Campbell

Past parent, Strathewen Primary School

For our family and for my daughter especially, the program has achieved massive results. After the fires my daughter suffered extreme anxiety. We had numerous hospital visits, sleepless nights, anxiety attacks and facial tics. She wasn't in a good way. I'd tried all sorts of alternatives, homeopathy, naturopaths and massage. We tried everything and nothing was really working with her. The next step, prior to this program being implemented was to actually put her on medication.

Then along came this amazing program and throughout the course of her involvement, her anxiety levels diminished to the point that by the end of year six she was up in front of crowds of people and speaking about the program. I really believe the information provided in this program empowered her. It took away that fear of a new monster coming over the hill like it did in 2009. She gained an understanding of how fire works and now feels she has knowledge to make sensible decisions in a possible emergency.



Lisal O'Brien

Member, Arthurs Creek and Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade

The program is twofold, one part is heavily based on the art side, the Claymation, and the other side on bushfire education.

Claymation is an outlet for kids to have a lot of fun and that's a bonding exercise between us all. We bring in community members, to help mould armatures for the Claymation, it's a really important side of the learning process.

We've got the Bushfire Education side and we've also got the arts side and the kids respond so well to it.

Kate Campbell

Past Parent, Strathewen Primary School

There's very few kids that don't enjoy getting in amongst a big pile of plasticine or clay or whatever medium they're using and create something with it. Express themselves with it.



Lisal O'Brien

Member, Arthurs Creek and Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade

The grant was very generous and we were working with a production company who were incredibly sensitive to our situation. FRRR were fantastic. They met our needs without us having to push any harder than our original request.

And the end result has been phenomenal. We have funding from the Bushfire Relief Committee supporting activities. So we go on camp for three days, we go on excursions, we have catered community days at the local hall.

All these supporting activities make the end product, our claymation and our education sessions, so great.



above: **It was all hands on deck** when making figurines for the Claymation DVD. Parents, grandparents and others enjoyed working together with primary schoolchildren in this stage of the project and FRRR funded the final production.

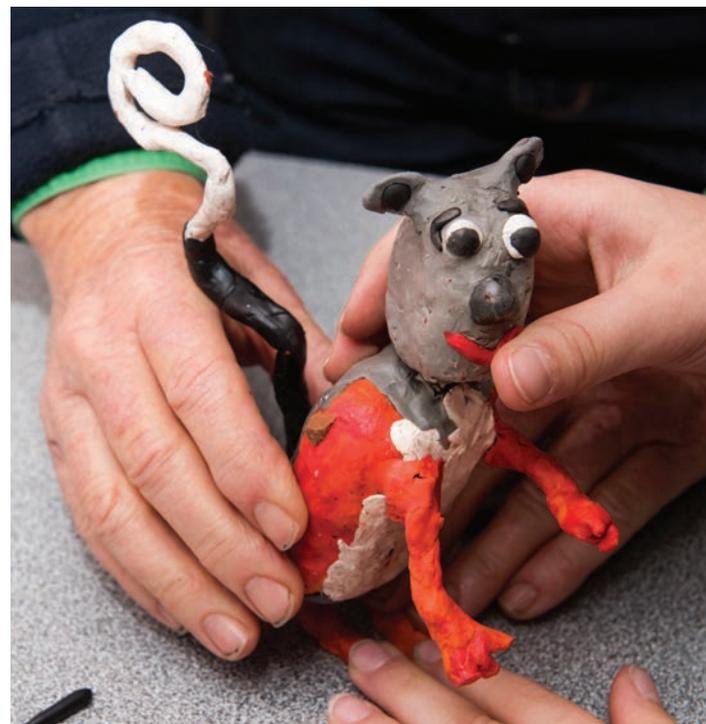
Malcolm Hackett

Chair, Strathewen Community Renewal Association

One of the really significant things about this, is kids making knowledge for themselves, with the help of other people, but answering questions that they're raising and doing it in a way that is collaborative. You haven't got a bunch of adults saying, we know the answers to all this and you're going to find out, then you'll be successful.

You haven't got a whole lot of gatekeepers, people who are more powerful, they're actually doing things together and that's pretty rare.

You can get that in a school setting often with a good classroom and a good teacher but it's pretty rare that you get it across the whole community. That's a pretty amazing achievement in itself.





Jane Hayward

Teaching Principal, Strathewen Primary School

I wanted these kids to love where they lived again instead of living with worries and fears that children shouldn't have. That was certainly what life was like for our kids here.

I understand that living here comes with risk, we live in a high bushfire risk area, but that you can live/work with that risk and understand it and make good decisions. My classroom here for a while was full of kids with facial tics.

Going on school camp was incredible with the heightened anxiety in kids, separation anxiety, sleep issues. You name it, we had it. You could just watch the growth and strengthening happening in the cohort of kids that were part of the program, the impact was incredible.

We'd done loads of welfare work here at school previously, and we've worked on breathing and relaxation. I think the timing of our program was perfect.

Lisal O'Brien

Member, Arthurs Creek and Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade

There's a really nice feeling of community cohesiveness. It just brings the community together a little bit more.

When you're working alongside other people heading in the same direction, there's a feeling of well-being which isn't always easy to come across and in this case it's fantastic.

You spend time with people making plasticine figures that you usually wouldn't spend time with, so you have great conversations and time spent.



opposite: Everyone enjoyed toasted marshmallows at the bonfire excursion where older townsfolk told stories about their experience of living in Strathewen. The students wear their CFA uniforms.

above: Young firefighters take lessons in the use of extinguishers.



Jane Hayward

Teaching Principal, Strathewen Primary School

We've got a very stable staff team and we've been here since before 2009. We've been at the frontline in managing post-traumatic impact on our children and their families, and the welfare role has been huge. In our student population we've managed hyper vigilance, heightened anxiety, separation issues, sleep disorders, all sorts of things.

We've worked with families and worked with outside agencies and we couldn't find a tailor made program that would work for us and build resilience in our children. Good resilience education is about empowering kids through knowledge so children understand risk and make sense of it. Things are a lot less frightening when you can make good decisions.

Bushfire season for us would accelerate everybody's anxiety levels. Children would be watching the sky, listening to the wind. We felt that it was time to run with something that was tailor made for our community and our kids.

To have all that information and knowledge and understand the science of fire and how bushfire travels. All that information just gave a real sense of safety to our children.

They went home and shared information with their families. They know they've got the role of passing on information to other schools, other kids, other adults, other experts in emergency management. Our program has ticked so many boxes and achieved more than what we ever set out to do.

For our young people to know by name, and feel comfortable with, so many valuable older community members, whose children went to the school 35 years ago is just lovely. These locals are coming in and working with our children and really getting involved

They meet up now at different community events and our children know these people by name. It's lovely to have those intergenerational connections in a small community. It strengthens that sense of community and connectedness.

We're empowering our kids so that they can bring about a conversation at home that leads to a safer outcome for their family and their home. We've moved through three years of the project. Something major happened here, it happened to all of us, and we've be able to turn that into something positive. Our children have been able to look at what we can do to spread safety messages, and look at how we can make it better next time.

They're all very aware of someone somewhere managing a disaster, they're very disaster aware, but it's not seen as a weight on their shoulders. I think they're feeling really empowered and that's priceless.

Andrew Alford

Captain, Arthurs Creek-Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade

It is an amazing result. The other week I found myself at a friend's place at Woori Yallock and we were sitting on the lounge room floor with three five-year olds and a seven-year old. They were reading the fire program story book and they live in a high fire danger area.

They were the grandchildren of one of my mates who is a Lieutenant in the Fire Brigade up there. They were able to sit down, and rather than it being anything scary, and it's not a nursery rhyme, the kids were learning and having a ball. For them to have those tools is an amazing thing.

In our sessions, we don't hire a bus, they all travel in fire trucks. It gives them the opportunity to see what a fire truck does, it's not a scary thing that comes screaming up the road. A fire truck doesn't just appear on bad days, it's just another important vehicle in our community and we have taken the fear factor away.

opposite, at top: Students in their CFA uniforms return to school.

opposite, at bottom: Students with Claymation artwork.





Lisal O'Brien (left) is a member of the Arthurs Creek Strathewen Rural Fire Brigade. She is seen here with school teaching Principal **Jane Hayward** (right) at the fire danger rating sign at the entrance to the Strathewen Primary School. A constant reminder of the need to remain vigilant, at all times, especially in the summer months.

Lisal outlines how the program came together:

Jamie McKenzie who works for the CFA but volunteers for Anglesea had supported our brigade emotionally with weekly debriefs after the 2009 fires and become a very respected friend. He was carrying out some work with the Anglesea primary school and pushing for CFA to run a pilot program based on bushfire education in schools.

Jamie always had a vision of the Anglesea and Strathewen kids each having a bushfire education program and coming together annually to compare their programs. He suggested I start one up in Strathewen.

I emailed Jane Hayward, our Teaching Principal, who was very keen. We all caught up and worked out a plan of attack for 2016. Because a CFA funded program wouldn't be sustainable, we needed external funding. I successfully applied for a grant with FRRR to establish external funding.

We fell under the pilot program banner for the year and then took complete control when the pilot program folded. Jamie also still runs his program at Anglesea and we all head down for a two night camp each year as part of the program.

Since 2017 Jane and I have been running the program together each week. We have Jamie McKenzie (expert on fire behaviour), James Armstrong (Gozer Media, Claymation project) and Professor Briony Towers: Research Fellow, RMIT, School of Global Urban and Social Studies (evaluator) also contributing here and there when we need some expert fire behaviour input, filming etc for our end of year piece of evaluation work.





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