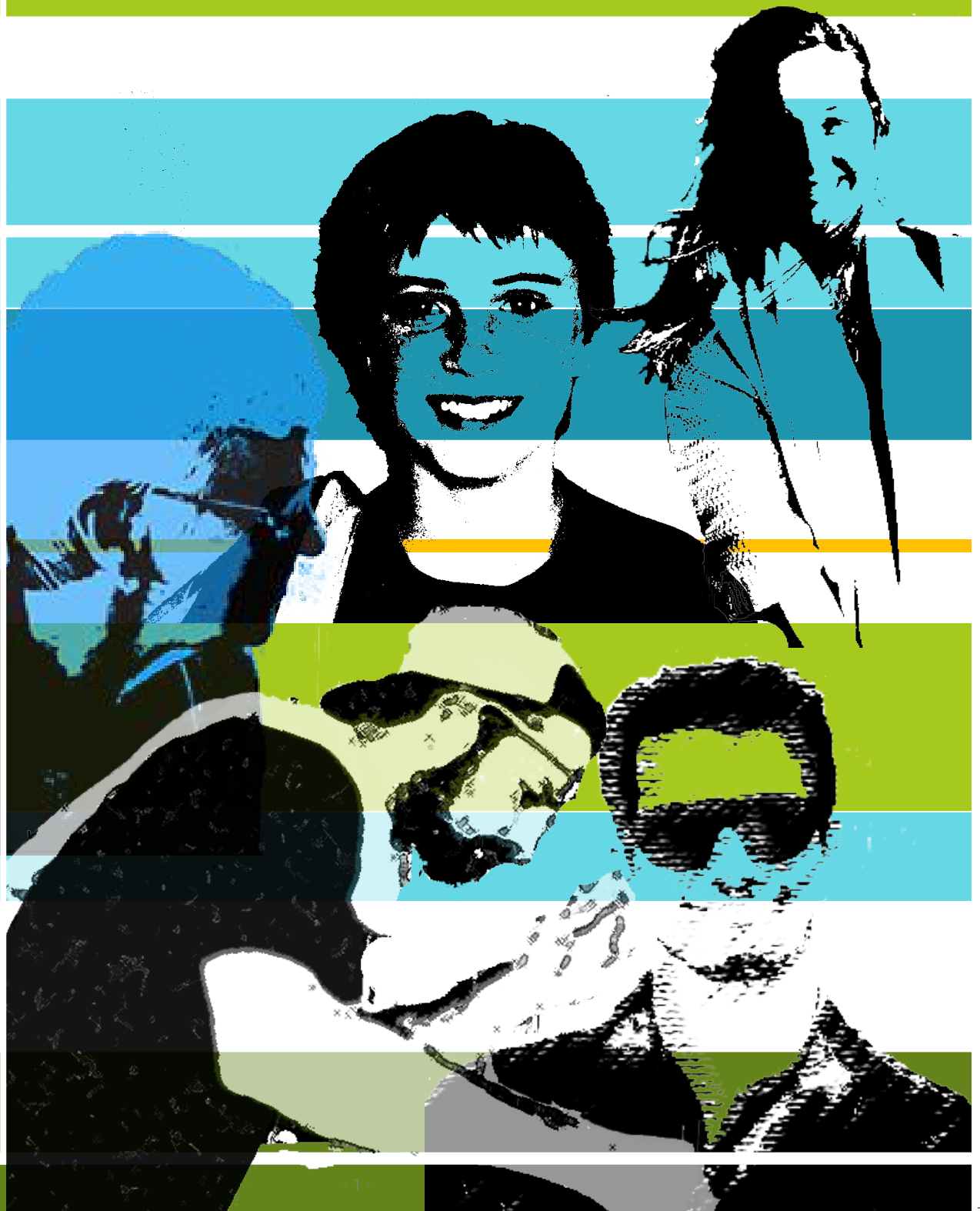


Grant Recipient
CASE STUDIES





Grant Recipient **CASE STUDIES**

Since 2002 the Bass Coast Community Foundation has partnered with community, business, government and other philanthropic groups to encourage a giving culture and to support impactful local initiatives.

“An Engaged, Connected and Successful Community”

5 inspiring stories

Revealing opportunities, enhancing potential and facilitating change drive purpose within the Bass Coast Community Foundation. Our case studies exemplify this ambition and highlight the achievements of five exceptional grant recipients. Their stories reassure our work and demonstrate the appreciable value and positive influence these organisations and individuals manifest in our community.

PICAL Community Garden & Kitchen

**COMMUNITY
GRANTS
PROGRAM
\$ 9,500 [2014]**



This project exemplifies the power of collective energy and shared vision. It responds to local sentiment and creates opportunities for collaboration and growth. An enriching outcome for the entire community.

Bass Coast Community Foundation.



Community Grants Program

A CASE STUDY >

How does a Community become activated? What are the characteristics that create a cohesive lurch forward, a movement that at it's core holds the emotional, spiritual and physical wellness of all of its constituents across all of its socio-economic, cultural and capability spectrum, as its purpose? And, who drives the ideal of an engaged, learning community that creates and shares its abundance?

These are some of the questions we asked the coordinators, participants, partners and observers of the Cowes Community Garden and Kitchen.....

A project supported with funding from the Bass Coast Community Foundation.

movement

'mu:vm(ə)nt/

noun

"a group of people who share the same aim and work together to achieve it."

Case Study:

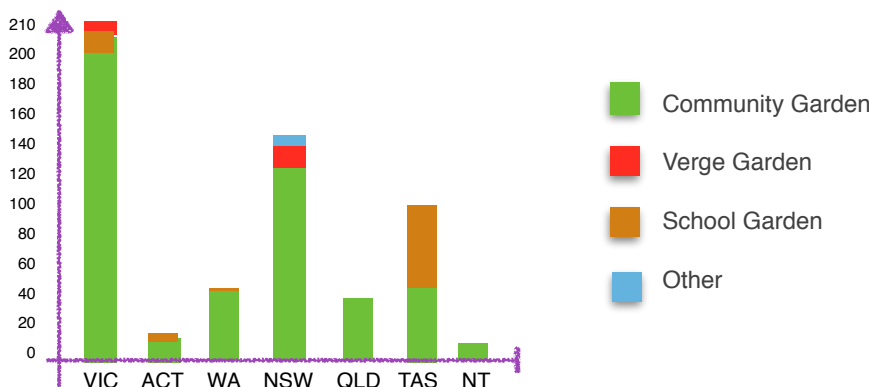
PICAL Community Garden & Kitchen

The 'thing' that is happening at the PICAL Community Garden and Kitchen is definitely a 'movement'. The vibrancy and positivity that surrounds this project comes not from a traditional community model of delivering something to a group of people in need, but rather, building it from the 'ground up'.

Let's begin our close encounter with this garden by first paying homage to the history of Community (or Urban) Gardens. The idea of open spaces in urban environments in which food or flowers are cultivated, is not a new one. Since the 1800's there is record of allotment type gardens within Europe providing nutrient rich food through times of crisis and recession. It seems that growing food in Urban spaces has become a foundation of renewal and hope. During both World Wars 'Victory Gardens' in the United Kingdom and Australia were renowned as a reliable source of fresh food.

Modern Community Gardens are also a response to social conditions. It is estimated that more than 500 Community gardens have sprouted across Australia and increasingly they are considered to be fertiliser for a healthy community.

Australian Community Gardens 1980 - 2015



*"We have been tracking the community garden movement in Australia for over 25 years. The following statistics are a way to see the blossoming of community cultivation across the country."
communityfood.org.*

Case Study:

PICAL Community Garden & Kitchen



So, was it the spirit of renewal and hope that inspired the originators of the Cowes Community Garden? Garden founder and coordinator Adrian James has a long held ambition to foster the values within the community that lead to inclusivity, food security, wellness and resilience. “When we started this” Adrian says, “we had a small plot adjacent to a local business and about the time that arrangement was due to expire, the groundswell started to happen”. Packing up the shovels and gardening gloves wasn’t an option because the seeds of something big had already taken root.

The task at hand was to find a suitable location for a permanent project but within that task Adrian resolved to fully explore the potential of a concerted effort that maximised the benefits for the whole community, particularly those who were disadvantaged and disengaged.

In the creation of a ‘movement’ the leader is of course, important. They’re the one who steps up to to challenge, backs their belief and holds fast when the first hurdle arises. To become a ‘movement’ requires more than just ‘one’ and some folk believe the second person is the the catalyst for momentum. Why, you ask? According the Derek Sivers (TED 2010) “the first follower transforms a loan nut, into a leader, and demonstrates to others how to participate”.

Enter, Vanessa Astbury who technically wasn’t really a follower because she was nurturing an idea of her own which happened to connect seamlessly with the Community Garden model. With an emerging vision and a fire in their bellies, Adrian and Vanessa formulated a plan for the Cowes Community Garden and Kitchen and marched toward the Phillip Island Community and Learning Centre (PICAL) with an irresistible proposition.

Planning and Consultation

220 Signatures
40 regional organisations
100 individuals
Expressions of interest from
Youth Organisations,
Corrections Services, SCOPE
disability services, Men’s
Shed, Chisholm Institute,
CWA, Church groups,
Employment networks,
Primary/Secondary Schools,
Seniors groups, businesses,
individuals and Council, and
others.

As chance, coincidence or, perhaps divine intervention provided, PICAL was in contemplation of what best use could be made of an activity space and buildings recently vacated by the Cowes Kids House. A perfect marriage of need and opportunity was negotiated and with the first hurdle surmounted, the in earnest planning phase commenced. Important to this story is an acknowledgment that at this stage, Adrian and Vanessa were dedicating their energy and fast developing knowledge in a voluntary capacity. Many hours of personal time contributed to the development of a comprehensive business plan that articulated the medium term purpose, embraced the broader opportunities, identified potential partners, participants and beneficiaries and importantly, detailed financial mandates.

The strength of community support had already been garnered through surveys and consultation with service organisations and individuals across the region.

Adrian James is a man on a mission and Vanessa Astbury is equally driven.

Adrian James is a man on a mission and Vanessa Astbury is equally driven. At the heart of their vision sat the desire to create a wholesome welcoming space that recognised various social, intellectual and physical abilities and ages, and delivered solutions around the issues of purposeful engagement, access to a secure, safe and cost effective food supply, varying food knowledge and preparation abilities, detachment from community, and a barrier free gathering place.

Adrian acknowledges “there are a lot of places and groups around town that invite participation for various parts of the community” and goes on to say, “but the community garden is place where everyone is invited.”

With funding partners established and support from the Bass Coast Community Foundation consolidating the coordinators role into a paid position, opportunities to expand the programs became possible.

Case Study:

PICAL Community Garden & Kitchen



Adrian credits the high rate of support and participation by individuals and external organisations to the relevance to people's real lives and their day to day needs. "The garden is everyone's life in action", Adrian says. "Whether you're a young mum trying to discover the healthiest way to nourish your children or an older person keeping active and living on tight budget, the garden provides a solution to those challenges, and a lot of others as well."

Garden plot plantings vary and are specific to the 'gardener'. Individuals stake claim to stand alone 'no dig' boxes capable of supporting a mix of root, vine and bush vegetable and herbs, which when flourishing can harvest into a healthy contribution to the weekly grocery requirements of local families. The 1.2m square crates (1.5m² of growing space) are repurposed, made redundant by commercial growers but destined for a fruitful future. At hip height they're easy to access, simple to pest proof and situated perfectly as the rustic nucleus for the cultivation zone.

"A collaborative effort where everyone works side by side and sees the reward for their toil"

Community Garden Beds

Community groups currently maintaining vegetable garden beds are:

*SCOPE Disability Services
Chisholm Institute Youth
Kitchen Program
Bass Coast Family Day
Care Program
Bass Coast Adult Education
Program
Community Kitchen Program*

Ground beds are plentiful and in addition to boasting raging rocket and enough spinach to feed an army of 'Popeye's', the banners of local organisations and groups peek out between the greenery. Coordinator James believes the plots add real value to these organisations. He describes it as "a collaborative effort where everyone works side by side and sees the reward for their toil". He acknowledges that not every seedling finds its potential and encouragement is as critical as fertiliser, but the application to something meaningful yields loads of learning, along with the odd tomato or two.

Engaging the disengaged and disadvantaged also forms a critical part of building community bridges and their work with Corrections Services Victoria (CSV) and the Work for the Dole Program (WDP) forms a solid plank within the community garden's objectives. Adrian considers these programs among the project's great achievements. "There's enormous benefit both ways" he says, "the program participants get to engage in purposeful work and see physical and structural outcomes from their efforts, and we get to harness a whole lot of fit, strong human power for the tasks that need a bit more grunt".

"Not only are these guys acquiring skills that will increase their employment chances, they're gaining a sense of community, experiencing being valued and hopefully, realising they can live and eat from an organic, healthy source -

Planning is underway for the next stage developments that will compliment the existing box and bed plots. Tapping into the increasing skills and motivation of his CSV and WDP helpers, James is planning a terraced garden that will cascade down the slope to a marshy corner, which they will convert to an aquatic edible garden. The existing sunshade structure which dominates the central garden area will shed its canopy and begin its new life as the garden's visual anchor, transforming with the seasons into an arbour of foliage that accompanies vining and climbing edible species. Whilst the practical and vocational knowledge being gained by the community program participants is hard to

quantify, it is evident and it is significant. "Not only are these guys acquiring skills that will increase their employment chances, they're gaining a sense of community, experiencing being valued and hopefully, realising they can live and eat from an organic, healthy source - that's got to be a good thing", Adrian states.

Case Study:

PICAL Community Garden & Kitchen



Paul Boys, a senior educator with Bass Coast Chisholm has high praise for the work of the Community Garden and Kitchen. "We run a Youth Kitchen program here, designed to give disadvantaged 15 to 22 year olds a chance to gain practical skills for their life, and potential work." Paul describes the project as a "hands on learning experience that leaves participants with a real appreciation how to grow and prepare healthy food". The program which runs over six to eight weeks commences with selection and planting of a range of herbs and veggies in a designated cultivation plot and concludes in the kitchen where the group learn preparation, cooking and general kitchen skills. The trials and rewards of growing produce contribute to the many lessons along the way and according to Paul "this program is often the first time these kids have ever engaged with the idea of where their food originates and they're really enthusiastic about the whole cycle." With the tourism and hospitality sector's status as one of the regions most significant industries Paul Boys is hopeful this introductory program will create pathways for employment locally, and even the possibility of a career in the food service sector.



If it's all starting to sound like a 'walk in the veggie garden' there are realities to a project of this nature that ensure your feet are kept in their muddy gumboots and firmly planted on the ground. Whilst some of the hurdles faced by the PICAL Community Garden and Kitchen are consistent with other visionary community enterprises, others are unique. An infestation in the early days proved a big setback when morale and motivation plummeted after the expected harvest was consumed by hungry bugs. The bounce back was swift however and the situation remedied with a community produce swap that saw friends of the project and other locals contributing bounty from their home gardens. The now monthly gatherings to share, swap and admire the

surplus food supply play an important role in maintaining the excitement and sharing the knowledge.

Adrian is confident, enthusiastic and grateful. "We're lucky really" he says, "sourcing funding, and all of its administration demands is always the biggest challenge, but we've got great support, PICAL are a huge champion, the Shire helps out and of course the support from Bass Coast Community Foundation was the turning point". "We've got real momentum now", he beams, "the place is hive of activity and the Community Kitchen is becoming the pulse of the place".

The community kitchen is a natural extension of the garden project because it enables the connections between sustainably grown produce, active lifestyle and healthy eating. Adrian James and the garden could easily be described as community 'glue', and just as easily, Vanessa Astbury and the kitchen could be viewed as the 'magnet'. The Community Kitchen programs, which extend from guided production days to wellness workshops, are attracting a new and ever changing market of interested participants. "It's not uncommon", Vanessa says "for workshop members to comment that they'd never been to PICAL before and were unaware of what was happening at the centre." "Seeing new faces at every workshop means we are reaching more deeply into the community and satisfying a previously unmet need."

"we are reaching more deeply into the community and satisfying a previously un-met need."



The groundswell of consciousness around organic whole foods and healthful living is global but the community kitchen is fast becoming a place where like-minded locals can connect. Vanessa comments that "we meet young parents feeling isolated in their attempts to have control over their family's food source, who suddenly find themselves among a whole peer group with the same aspirations." The Community Garden Workshop series plays a critical part in forming these linkages and Vanessa values their role as a vehicle for deepening connections as much as for their informative content. So far workshops on growing and cooking bush foods, fermentation and gut health, an introduction to meditation and food as medicine, have delivered practical skills and knowledge as well as the shared wisdom of a group, whilst bridging the gaps in generation, gender and culture. Workshop development and delivery requires a great investment of time and effort and whilst the dream is to a run monthly self supporting program, their immediate future rests on availability of continued funding.

Revenue creation opportunities are always being sought and one of these is a seasonally weekly event where excess pickings from the community and other local gardens, is converted into an 'own range' of bottled pickles, preserves and conserves. The bounty from these collaborative, laughter filled sessions is sold, with proceeds contributing to the purchase of additional supplies and equipment for the kitchen. Additionally, the well resourced kitchen is available for hire to other community groups or anyone in need of a commercially registered space.

The impressive deck furniture is the result of a clever conversion of redundant office tables, a project undertaken by the local Men's Shed.

The Community Kitchen and meeting spaces sit adjacent to the garden with a large sun-filled deck providing a perfect spot to contemplate the garden activity and watch children at play. The impressive deck furniture is the result of a clever conversion of redundant office tables, a project undertaken by the local Men's Shed.



It's not difficult to imagine this rustic and nature filled environment as a thriving natural cafe space and

that thought is at the pinnacle of the project vision. The concept is for a Community Cafe where locals inspire each other through their collective energies and shared ideas and nurture their joint and individual potential.

Whilst its realisation is not imminent there is little doubt that with the methodical planning and tenacity demonstrated to date, it will happen. Vanessa has clarity around the core purpose of a community cafe and doesn't see it as just another coffee place. "There are lots of formal and informal groups, often parents, who need to meet in an environment conducive to children." she says, "I see the Community Cafe operating for a set time a couple of days a week for the specific purpose of catering to these and other groups." With the bountiful garden as a primary food source, the kitchen as training ground for catering and hospitality students, the gardening regulars as cheerleaders and PICAL as the custodian, the enterprise has merit.



Case Study:

PICAL Community Garden & Kitchen



Funding Partners

*Bass Coast Community
Foundation
Bendigo Bank
Bass Coast Shire*

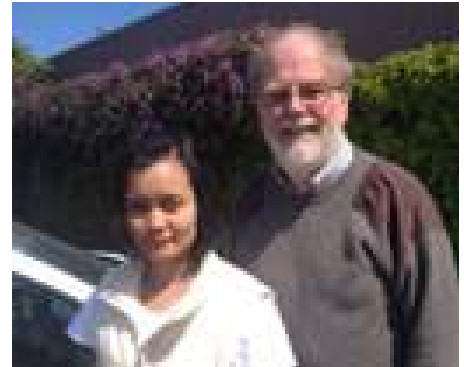
The PICAL Community Garden and Kitchen has evolved into an environment of tranquil energy and it is filled with a life force that emanates from the healthy cultivation of plants and people. There is an animating spirit at work here though, and it comes from a community charged with belief, collaborating on an intention to create change. Access to a secure food source, adoption of a healthy lifestyle, sense of belonging for all residents, inspiring and nurturing potential, and knowledge to feed a learning community.

The seeds of this successful 'movement' are sown in belief, supported by planning and propagated by an active and growing tribe of participants and advocates, and the generous support of regional funding bodies.

Note: The PICAL Community Garden and Kitchen have received a grant valued at \$9,500 through the Community Grants Program. The funds were applied to the employment of a part-time program co-ordinator.

Bass Coast L2P Program

**COMMUNITY
GRANTS
PROGRAM
\$ 40,000 [OVER 5 YEARS]**



The L2P Program can reset the course of a young person's life. Making a drivers licence accessible opens doors to education, employment and community participation. The connections it builds and the belief it instills, is enduring.

Bass Coast Community Foundation.



Community Grants Program

A CASE STUDY ➤

Back in 2007 a Regional Magistrate confronted a Wonthaggi Policeman with a problem. Over many months the Magistrate had encountered a daily parade of offenders appearing on a multitude of driving offences, and a common factor was evident. The unlicensed, unsafe drivers were predominantly recently settled young Sudanese refugees, who in the majority, had no idea that rules for driving a car formed part of their new social structure. With a view to eliminating the unnecessary burden on the judicial system and the equally unnecessary blight on a new citizen's record, the local constabulary initiated a mentored driver scheme which created the foundation of the L2P disadvantaged youth driver program.

A project supported with funding from the Bass Coast Community Foundation.

Case Study:

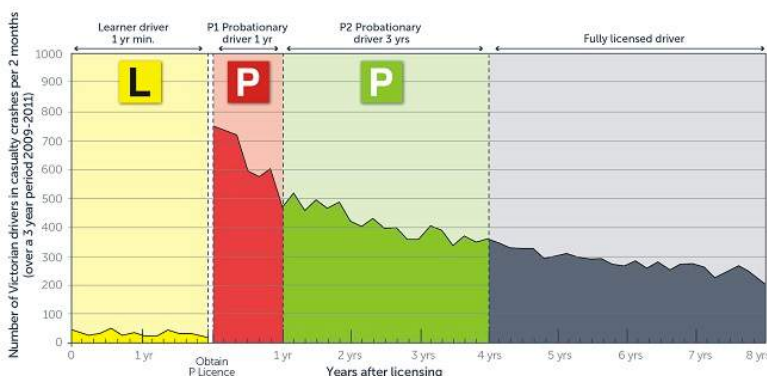
Bass Coast L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program

Establishing a backstory is critical to understanding why all young drivers need extensive practice before earning the right to take full control of a vehicle and drive unaccompanied.

Most recent statistics available from VicRoads and the TAC paint a sombre picture. Almost one in five drivers killed on Victorian roads in 2013 were aged between 18 and 25. Probationary drivers have more crashes than anyone else using the roads. Motor vehicle accidents are the number one killer of young people. In 2012, young drivers aged between 18 and 25 years made up close to one quarter of all driver fatalities, despite accounting for only about 14% of all licence holders.

Perhaps you should read that again and contemplate the gravity, impact and potential ramifications of these statistics, and the importance of giving our young drivers the best opportunity to become safe drivers.

According to the TAC the first three to six months of a probationary licence (red P) is the most dangerous period. In particular, late night driving poses an increased risk with 33% of fatal crashes among first year P drivers occurring between 10pm and 6am. Research has demonstrated that young drivers are in greater jeopardy because they are inexperienced and they are more likely to take risks on the road.



If you are beginning to think 'why does this matters to me', because you aren't a learner driver or you don't have one in your family - Think again. Every time you enter mainstream traffic, probationary drivers are sharing your road.

Case Study:

Bass Coast L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program



With the imperative for developing safe drivers so obviously stated it is easy to understand why the Graduated Licensing System (GLS) was introduced by VicRoads. The requirement for learner drivers to log 120 hours of supervised driving practice forms part of the GLS and this mandatory stipulation brought with it, a significant challenge. VicRoads estimates that around 3000 young Victorian learners do not have access to a vehicle and/or driving supervisor and have a greater likelihood of either driving unlicensed, falsifying their log book, or waiting until age 21 at which stage the mandates change. Any of these scenarios are unsatisfactory, posing risk to drivers and road users and the additional impact of isolating these disadvantaged young people from work and social opportunities.

L2P Objectives, VicRoads 2013

The stated objectives of the L2P program are to:

- Provide supervised driving practice for disadvantaged young learner drivers.
- Reduce the crash and injury rate of disadvantaged young learner drivers.
- Increase equity of opportunity for all young Victorians to obtain a driver's licence and to be safer on the roads.
- Assist the mobility and potential social and economic success of disadvantaged young people.

Whilst conditions affecting our group of would be drivers back in Wonthaggi in 2007 were exacerbated by cultural and language barriers they were not inconsistent with those affecting current learners. The mentored driving program developed to address the problems back then became a foundation upon which the L2P disadvantaged driver program was subsequently modelled.

“Bass Coast was an inaugural program participant and played a major role in the development of the model”

It is not surprising that the Bass Coast L2P Program is now considered a benchmark among Victoria's L2P programs. According to VicRoad's program coordinator Greg Ryan there are 65 programs across the state. He says that “Bass Coast was an inaugural program and their version, established

back in 2007, influenced the development of the current state wide initiative.”

So, what does the Bass Coast L2P program look like and how does it work?

Tucked comfortably in an office at Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre (WNC) sits program coordinator Veronica Dowman. The space is busy and the environment suggests that this is a go to place for everyone involved or interested in L2P. The support from the WNC which includes accommodation within their high profile premises contributes to the enduring success of this Bass Coast Program. According to Veronica “the WNC is where people naturally come to congregate, to share ideas and support each other so it is a perfect fit in this environment.” The centre is always welcoming and there are no barriers to entry - it is a place where everybody, including young people, feel comfortable.

Veronica's days are packed with tasks associated with the smooth operation of a complex program that matches eligible learner drivers between 16 to 21 years olds with willing trained volunteer mentors and managing compliance, and maintenance of the programs vehicles. She spends much of her time in overdrive and whilst managing people and relationships is demanding, it is the financial imperatives of a program such as this, that consumes much of her attention.

Veronica is adamant that the funding relationship with the Bass Coast Community Foundation is fundamental to the program and Greg Ryan agrees. Greg says “whilst the TAC fund L2P statewide with 65 programs, the four million dollars committed represents only about half of the necessary budget.” He goes on to point out that it costs about \$3000 per driver to support 120 logged driving hours and funding from the TAC maxes out at around \$1800 - without supporters like BCCF it wouldn't happen in the region.





Case Study:

Bass Coast L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program

The funding challenge hasn't deterred Veronica or her committee and with support and guidance from WNC coordinator Jan Bourne, the strategies for supplementary funding and greater penetration into the community are constantly being refined. Jan sees the challenges also as opportunities and declares that "connecting local industries, organisations and businesses to the program delivers appreciable community advantage." "It isn't just about raising money" she says, "it's raising the capacities and skills of our succeeding generation and influencing a shift in the life options of this region's kids". She goes on to say that "being a part of that is a considerable enhancement to work we all do in building a stronger community".

"It isn't just about raising money, it's raising the worthiness of our succeeding generation and influencing a shift in the life options and capacities of this region's kids".

In addition to steering the program to exemplify benchmark operation at a state level, the Bass Coast team have continued to grow its geographic coverage and resources. From the initial availability of one vehicle the program now has three cars located around the region. As a result of BCCF funding support they are now able to respond to pockets of demand and willingness of mentors.

Program Information

Program available to learner drivers between 16 and 21 years of age.
Between 30 and 35 learner drivers in the Bass Coast program at any one time.
Each learner matched with a volunteer mentor supervisor.
Learners average seven professional lessons before obtaining their P Plate license.
Mentors complete a Vic Roads approved supervisors training course.
More than 5554 driving hours have been logged .

Putting administrative challenges aside, the program runs remarkably smoothly given the significant challenges faced by the target audience. Social and geographical isolation, cultural barriers, financial hardship and disability are factors that impact on every day in the life of L2P. Criteria for eligibility to participate delivers a cohort comprising a wide cross section of the region's most disadvantaged and often, disengaged youth. Veronica remains ever positive and supremely proactive. "Some of the kids participating in the program face enormous obstacles between them and a well functioning life," she explains. "We have kids from every imaginable background but the very fact they turn up for lessons is testament to their desire to change their circumstances", she says. It seems that getting a licence strongly identifies with life

"We have kids from every imaginable background but the very fact they turn up for lessons is testament to their desire to change their circumstances"

changing opportunities such as getting independence, access to education, finding a job and participating in sporting and social endeavours. The availability of these, and other opportunities is enhanced indirectly through the mentoring process and directly by the achievement of a probationary licence.

Not every participant remains motivated throughout the often three year commitment however, and coordinator Dowman's role regularly extends to nurturing the disconnect, back on track. This is no task for the feint hearted but with quiet determination and a view beyond the short term accomplishment of another P plate, Veronica has navigated her charges through youth pregnancy, jail term, emotional meltdown, and crises of confidence. Jan Bourne has no doubt the program 'ticks the boxes' conducive to building a more resilient young community. Her experience is extensive and she knows that championing the rights of young people is mutually enriching when the process involves two way responsibility. "Participation in L2P requires a level of maturity and reliability and the program nurtures commitment by establishing a dependable partnership between the learner and mentor." "For some kids this is the first time their place in society has been validated" she acknowledges, "an adult who turns up, listens and values their effort can quickly transform a previously held negative self image."





Case Study:

Bass Coast L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program

What inspires this kind of belief in young people where often little or none exists within their own personal environments? “Our belief is rooted in the philosophical foundations of the WNC” says Jan. Both Jan and Veronica hold fast to the principle that “people young, old and in between are capable of achieving amazing things in their life, with the right support and encouragement.” Veronica is quick to point out that the volunteer mentors are significant conduits for that support. She says, “the dedication and consistency of our team of mentors is truly inspiring.” Volunteer mentors are as critical to L2P’s existence as its funding. The Bass Coast program is blessed with a regenerating supply of experienced drivers prepared to allocate significant time and patience to the development of road ready youth.

Currently there are over 30 mentors registered and willing to spend their free time belted in, vigilant and armed with nerves of steel. For the most part it is their quota of guidance, interest, feedback and care that establishes a trusting and enduring match. L2P mentors come from a variety of community sectors and whilst the weighted numbers curve toward retirees, the ranks are also populated with young mums, full time employed locals with a window of after hours time, teachers who have observed program benefits among students and average citizens with a desire to make a difference. Veronica Dowman quickly points out there is nothing average about these citizens. “I am constantly humbled by the generosity of our mentors,” she concedes, “one of our team is a single mum with five of her own children but somehow finds the time and energy to help others, and our most prolific mentor has sustained more than 600 supervisory hours.” For many of the mentors it seems that the inclination to assist young local’s accrue driving hours comes from an appreciation of opportunities they’ve been given in their own lives.

“Currently there are over 30 mentors registered and willing to spend their free time belted in, vigilant and armed with nerves of steel”

Bass Coast Program Data

- 169 total participants
- 33 currently active learners
- 30 currently active mentors
- 62 P plate achievements
- 5251 volunteer hours recorded
- 336 professional driving lessons funded

Regardless of motivation the effort of the mentors is immense. Vic Roads is well aware of the diverse and demanding role these patrons play in L2P’s ongoing success. Greg Ryan confirms that the community benefit of the mentor/driver relationship is quantifiable. “We undertake qualitative and quantitative studies”, and he suggests that “mentors have a direct influence and often reconnect young people with their community values”. He goes on to say that “sometimes their efforts result in access to education or jobs,

sometimes it’s the status of being the first in family to get a licence, but at other times these mentors are steering young folk away from social disconnect, drugs and crime and showing them a road back into a community that values them”. These are compelling sentiments that lend further weight to arguments that have seen the program achieve bipartisan government support and a commitment of funding until 2019.

Whilst data is impressive it is the individual narrative that presents the most potent indication of the program’s value. Paw She Wah is four months past her 20th birthday. Her story is characteristic of a community sector situated as a result of refugee resettlement. She is vibrant, ambitious and grateful. Paw She Wah was born in a refugee encampment in Thailand and for the first 19 years of her life, that was home. Just over a year ago, along with her family she became a Bass Coast local and has since embarked on a steep learning journey starting with the basic attainment of her new language. Gerry Lonegran has been a long term L2P volunteer driver and since becoming Paw She Wah’s driving mentor he has been coopted as an advocate, teacher and family friend.



Case Study:

Bass Coast L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program



For the past year the duo have amassed many kilometres and canvassed myriad issues associated with establishing life in entirely unfamiliar environs.

Although difficult to imagine from our advantaged perspective this young lady had no prior conception of a motor vehicle. As Gerry explained “A steering wheel was an alien object to Paw She Wah, much less it’s relationship to the wheels, movement and direction”.

“A steering wheel was an alien object to Paw She Wah, much less it’s relationship to the wheels, movement and direction”

A lot has been achieved through these last months and in addition to being a confident and enthusiastic driver this determined local is an aspirant student with the ambition to become an aged care worker. A vocation, she believes, that will enable her to reflect her own good fortune back to the community. With 80 hours of driving experience achieved and a licence sitting on a horizon some 40 hours in the future, Paw She Wah will have access to an education in support of her ambition. Many factors, people and programs have contributed to the vastly changed landscape of Paw She Wah’s life but L2P and Gerry Lonegran are instrumental in setting her future in motion.

Lily Hogan’s story is less emotive but perhaps more reflective of the majority of L2P participants. As a Wonthaggi Secondary College student with great potential but a limited support network and scant resources, she felt confronted by barriers to her every aspiration. Like many single parent offspring the time and vehicle requirements of the GLS represented another seemingly insurmountable barrier to Lily’s hopes.



Whilst her logbook demonstrated persistence and effort, the 120 hours required loomed as insurmountable. It seemed that as her driving dream dimmed, so to did her vision of becoming a qualified beauty therapist. With encouragement from her mum and the insistence of her (to become future) employer, she was soon behind the L2P wheel with her mentor: fast accruing hours and road miles.

‘A girl on a mission’ well describes Lily’s approach and within six months she had accumulated the outstanding driving hours and proudly achieved her probationary licence.

For Lily the L2P process was seamless and the experience, life changing. Her driving practice mapped routes across regional and metropolitan Victoria

building competence and confidence in multiple traffic scenarios. The

catalyst for change and courage to embark on her studies came not solely from gaining her licence, in Lily’s words “the fact that someone unrelated believed in me, gave their time and energy to me and thought I was worthy of their effort, will be something I’ll keep with me always”.

“Whilst her logbook demonstrated persistence and effort, the 120 hours required loomed as daunting”

As a result of the age parameters of L2P several learners emanate from Wonthaggi Secondary College and the program accommodates this by stationing a vehicle and mentor at the school during one day each week. Traditionally this has been a well supported time slot but to the surprised delight of Veronica Dowman this year has seen a reluctance in students to miss class time. Veronica interprets this in a positive light, “this is a great sign” she says, “even our VCAL students are opting for after school driving lessons because they’ve made the decision that education comes first.”

Case Study:

Bass Coast L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program



Not every story has a happy ending and each year there is a level of attrition due to transience or unmitigated life circumstances. But, Vic Roads program analysis demonstrate that the rate of 'drop off' is diminishing with each year, whilst participation rates continue to rise. For many young people engaged in the program it is a three year commitment, with some exceptions. Exceptions are often as a result of developmental delay or behavioural ineptitude and it's not unknown that in these circumstances a participant may clock 250 hours with no imminent prospect of sitting the licence test. These are stories of persistence and compassion. Whilst spacial awareness and technical proficiency may elude them, the greater lessons of human interaction, community engagement, trust and hope are instilled through the mentoring relationship.

Each person who undertakes the program develops an understanding of mutual respect, an appreciation of societal responsibility, insight into cause and effect and an realisation of the relationship between effort and achievement.

“With a current commitment to four years of partnership funding, the foundation is confident that the direct and indirect benefits to community are extensive”

It is values such as these that reinforce the relevance of Bass Coast Community Foundation's ongoing support of the the L2P program. With a current commitment to four years of partnership funding, the foundation is confident that the direct and indirect benefits to community are extensive. BCCF board member Sylvia Davey explains the 'fit' for this regional philanthropic organisation, “There is an immeasurable impact of every dollar we contribute, in addition to the visible and direct result of the program's initiatives,” Sylvia explains. “Of course our roads are a safer place to be but along the way our youth develop a stronger sense of their place in community”. She reflects on the transference of wisdom from mentor to student and believes this brings about a generational connectedness.

“Creating and advancing opportunity sits at the heart of our vision,” Sylvia says, “so more than anything we value this program for removing barriers to the achievement of potential, education and employment.”

Note: The Bass Coast L2P Program has received ongoing funding under the Bass Coast Community Foundation Community Grants Program. To date \$27,000 has been committed to the program with a further

Bass Coast Health Pastoral Care Program

**COMMUNITY
GRANTS
PROGRAM
\$ 9,100 [2014]**



The positive affect of the Pastoral Care Program resonates across the cultural, social, gender and age spectrum and touches many within our community. Conversations are powerful and non more than those which bear no judgement and are offered unconditionally.

Bass Coast Community Foundation.



Community Grants Program

A CASE STUDY >

Within every community there exists infinite layers of opportunity, participation, care and need. Each of these layers knits together the fabric of our social landscape and within that landscape a great expression of our humanity is found in the faces of volunteers. The Bass Coast has a huge volunteer heart and some of the best representation of our region's human goodness can be found listening compassionately in our hospital wards and aged care facilities. Bass Coast Health in partnership with the Wonthaggi and Inverloch Inter-Church Council facilitates the delivery of a program that supports patients, residents and families as a part of caring for our community's spiritual and emotional wellbeing.

A project supported with funding from the Bass Coast Community Foundation.

Case Study:

Pastoral Care Program

A universal human search is underway - perhaps now, more than ever we are seeking the answer to the primordial question.

What is the meaning of life?

Searchers vary in age, gender, culture, and they come from every walk of life. The question is as old as the ages and ironically, as we march toward our own twilight years the need to find this resolution can intensify as each year passes. The roads we journey on this quest usually lead us on an exploration of ourselves and as we discover or construct our life's purpose we often explore our own spirituality. According to Spiritual Health Victoria (SHV) this exploration "is sometimes expressed through a religious framework or a particular philosophy and for others it is expressed within the domains of relationship and connection."

The idea of spiritual health is not new but our contemporary society is certainly paying the concept a great deal more attention. It is commonly acknowledged that spiritual health is important to overall health and in fact SHV says "it is an integral aspect of a person-centred, or holistic, model of care."

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has long recognised the need to nurture all aspects of the human condition in order to achieve health. Since 1948 their constitution has included reference to the fact that "health is a state of complete physical, social and mental wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Just as our cultural and values systems inform and shape our personal beliefs, our level of independence, interactions and relationship expectations and concerns, inform and shape our psychological wellbeing which in turn impacts on our ability to sustain or recover our health.

"Health is a state of complete physical, social and mental wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity".

Case Study:

Bass Coast Health Pastoral Care Program



The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (2011) reports that “patient-centred healthcare is an approach that treats each person respectfully as an individual human being and not as a condition to be treated...It is concerned about the patient’s comfort and surroundings as well as their beliefs and values.” The report advocates for care that is “respectful of, and responsive to the preferences, needs and values of patients and consumers”, and determines that it is particularly important among vulnerable or disadvantaged populations, such as the young, elderly, disabled or mentally ill; those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or rural and remote areas.

The Department of Health and Ageing (2006 Guidelines) identifies the themes and concepts that contribute to the positive experience of aged care recipients and palliative patients and outlines the standards for delivery of a person-centred approach. The standard states that “spirituality is found to be an important predictor of quality of life.”

The six themes of person-centred aged care

- Need for religion
- Need for companionship
- Need for involvement and control
- Need to finish business
- Need to experience nature
- Need for a positive outlook

The concepts critical to responsive care of palliative patients

- Uniqueness of the individual
- Importance of relationship
- Person-centred approach to care
- Preservation of dignity
- Emphasis on compassionate care
- Attending to grief and loss issues
- Reflective practice for staff

As the numerous reports and guidelines demonstrate, this notion of spiritual care is increasingly discussed in mainstream health provision and in aged care facilities across the country, but implementation is still ad-hoc. In the busy acute, sub-acute and clinical care environments of hospitals, hospices and nursing homes where the service gap is evident - who is stepping up to assume this mantle to deliver the necessary spiritual care at the times and in the areas of most significant need?

Zena Liston is the coordinator of the Bass Coast Health Pastoral Care Program and these complex concepts permeate every aspect of her daily work. With an office ensconced right among the clinical care providers in Bass Coast Health’s (BCH) Wonthaggi Hospital corridors, she is acutely aware of the fine balance between the scales of physical and spiritual wellness. Zena is fierce in her belief that person-centred care is an essential component of achieving best outcomes for patients in hospital and residents in aged care. “Finding yourself in difficult medical circumstance or a time of transition” she says, “makes you re-evaluate

how you’ve been doing things, who is around you and how things look for you”.

She is alert to the fact that “sometimes cracks start to appear, these can be personal emotional issues that come to the fore because you are facing some of life’s big obstacles.”

“the great gift of a pastoral care worker is providing a safe, non-judgemental space to have these conversations - to not run away from them”.

According to Zena “the great gift of a pastoral care worker is providing a safe, non-judgemental space to have these reflective conversations - to not run away from them”. She acknowledges that “for all kinds of reasons health practitioners often don’t have the time or ability to stay with the conversation, hear what’s being said and give the person permission just to open up.” “Sometimes all they need is to put their thoughts into words and within that they find their answers,” she says.

Character Snapshot

..... one women wrote poetry and we read her poetry in the time before she died. I say a word as I pass by her cemetery. People like her mark your life.... playing a part in her story, just being there just listening, giving more value to the time she had left. She wasn't a religious person but we met at a deep spiritual level - a poet, an artist a free spirit...

Case Study:

Bass Coast Health Pastoral Care Program



“The values that support patient-centred care as espoused in [the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (2011)] are congruent with the values that underpin a contemporary model of spirituality and spiritual care” Spiritual Health Victoria (October 2013): Australian Aged Care Recipient Right to Spiritual Care: A Reference Index. These concepts are further explored in SHV’s current Capabilities Framework where it states “spirituality may be experienced in a quest for meaning, purpose, connection, belonging, hope. It can become more conscious at major turning points in life - spirituality is always embedded in the unique experience and story of each person.”

Bass Coast Health Pastoral Care

2,300 pastoral care visits (to) 537 individuals or family members (hospital patients and aged care residents) resulting in 685 hours of volunteer and professional time spent over a one year period.

When faced with trauma, transition or uncertainty it becomes even more important that each individual’s story be heard.

The Bass Coast Health Pastoral Care Program team have been quietly and attentively listening to the stories of Wonthaggi hospital patients and the residents at Kirrak, Armitage House, Griffith Point Lodge, and their families, since 2011.

After almost two years of planning this region’s pastoral care program was initially introduced as a pilot with government funding via Spiritual Health Victoria. Christine Hennequin, Manager, Support and Development at SHV recalls that in 2009 her organisation was approached by a representative from the Wonthaggi and Inverloch Inter-Church Council (ICC). “They’re a progressive thinking group” she says, “fully aware that a coordinated approach to providing high quality non-denominational spiritual care was necessary”. Whilst it was usual practice for local church leaders to visit members of their parish in hospital, SHV understood the gap the ICC had identified. SHV’s own research indicates that 51% of Victorians don’t belong to any religion (2011 ABS Census), however seek spiritual care at certain, challenging times. It was the intention of the ICC to see that void filled for residents of the Bass Coast.

Christine is quick to defend the professional health care workers by pointing out, “our work is a collaboration within the health sector environment and our program workers form part of the multi-disciplinary approach.” She goes on to explain that “the model established with the ICC and BCH was the first rural and regional program delivering a coordinated engagement with patients regardless of religious beliefs, and in partnership with their health care team.”



The pilot was as an “opportunity to demonstrate the direct and intrinsic value of the service and during those first three years it became embedded: the mandate for its continued operation was undeniable” Christine says. Funding, established by SHV to support the pilot, was



structured as a diminishing stream in order to facilitate operation whilst the local partners secured alternative, sustainable revenue opportunities. She acknowledges the financial challenges faced by regional health organisations and applauds the Bass Coast group for their tenacity in keeping the service in place. “The ICC are determined and generous in their efforts”, she says, and “within their limited resources BCH lean in to the project with significant in kind contributions and wholehearted appreciation for the partnership.”

Character Snapshot

..... a lovely Irish lady with little recent memory but deep reflection and burning desire to retell her past. Ironically she was missing the green pencil from her colouring set ... little things can get missed, but we notice.

Case Study:

Bass Coast Health Pastoral Care Program



Spiritual Health Victoria remain as the peak body and provide the framework for practice, volunteer training and reporting. Primary funding responsibility and program management is undertaken by the ICC. Rev Ross Stanford from the Wonthaggi and Inverloch Uniting Church explains that “the ICC is a multi-denominational group with representation from all the local churches”. Recently the churches in Cowes have also started providing support. “Our role is to raise funds, facilitate the recruitment of volunteers and support the program coordinator”, he says.

It was, in fact, through the efforts of coordinator Zena Liston, that the Bass Coast Community Foundation (BCCF) Grant was secured. Zena is obviously passionate about this work and the financial challenges to the program’s sustainability, weigh heavily. She describes her approach to the BCCF grant application as “a major undertaking with big stakes at risk.” Zena’s fear for the the program’s survival was replaced with elation when she learned that the foundation had agreed to support the application, “the relief and satisfaction was enormous,” she recalls. Zena cites the symbolic value of receiving the grant as huge...”ordinary people, not church connected, not health network connected, saying this is important and we are going to support it.” “It would have been heartbreaking if we couldn’t carry on” she continues, “so much goodwill and effort had gone into the program, when the funding was approved we were absolutely thrilled to bits - over the moon.”

...fear was replaced with elation when she learned the BCCF had agreed to support the application...

Inter-Church Council (ICC)

- Uniting Church, Wonthaggi
- Uniting Church, Inverloch
- Catholic Church, Wonthaggi
- Catholic Church, Inverloch
- Anglican Church, Wonthaggi
- Anglican Church, Inverloch
- Salvation Army, Wonthaggi
- Baptist Church, Wonthaggi
- Christian Life Centre, Wonthaggi
- Connections (Pentecostal) Inverloch
- Southside Full Gospel Church.

Also supported Phillip Island ICC

Ross Stanford agrees that the quotient of goodwill is abundant. “This region’s churches are good at working together” he says, “we collaborate on a few things over the year: the Easter dawn service at Eagles Nest, the ‘Carols by Candlelight’ at Inverloch and Wonthaggi, and the joyful distribution of Christmas hampers.” He goes on to say that “what one church can’t do alone, we can achieve together, in fact we use the saying ‘better together’.” Ross believes that these activities have a unifying effect across the community and the goodwill and unification is never more obvious than during the ICC’s major fund raising efforts for the Pastoral Care Program. Each year the ecumenical, business, organisational and broader community pitches their commitment toward their generosity to reveal a big, giving heart. Both Ross and Zena are humbled by the community’s favour, “our annual auction attracts fabulous donations and almost without exception, businesses display our fliers and advocate for our success,” beams Ross. Zena is equally

animated and expresses astonishment at bidder behaviour, “people bid far in excess of the item values” she chuckles, “ours is definitely not an auction for bargain hunters.”

Whilst the raising of necessary funds poses a constant challenge, the recruitment, training and management of volunteers delivers a fair measure of demand and with that, enormous reward. Unlike its metropolitan counterparts, this regional program functions with one employed (part-time) coordinator and a workforce comprised entirely of unpaid workers. SHV’s Christine Hennequin has a keen eye on the state’s program network and is confident that “whilst paid professional pastoral care workers are the benchmark”, the Bass Coast model is delivering “a consistently high quality service.”

This is in no small way due to the work of Zena Liston.

Character Snapshot
..... she doesn't remember me arriving five minutes later but just being there for her on her wavelength is what's important. If she sees a pink elephant out of the window our job is to compliment the particularly lovely shade of pink....

Case Study:

Bass Coast Health Pastoral Care Program



The experience and confidence Zena brings to the role are attributes necessary to carving a respected position in clinical environments and to securing the trust of health service professionals, patients, residents, and her volunteers.



Denise Jeffries has been a volunteer with the program since its inception and her weekly presence in the wards of Wonthaggi Hospital, is enthusiastically welcomed. “For a long time I questioned my capacity to do this work,” Denise recalls. “I’ll never forget the first day I arrived at the hospital and immediately thought - ‘what am I doing here’?” “We were the first wave of volunteers in the program” she reflects, “so there was no benchmark, no pre-determined path to follow.” Denise is a gentle but expressive woman who now moves comfortably between aged care, acute, sub-acute, palliative patients, and nursing staff.

Since day one in which she visited her first three patients, Denise has now amassed an impressive 400+ hours of patient contact. Moments of apprehension sometimes join her at the doorway of the critically ill or their families but she credits her personal evolution into a confident carer, to the initial and ongoing training programs, encouragement from Zena, and her personal faith.

“some of my best conversations have been with people taking ‘long service leave’ from their church”

With the foundations of the program so strongly based in faith it’s perhaps not unreasonable to assume a religious message would overlay the dialogue. “This is not so”, says Denise. “When a healthcare team member asks me to visit someone, I head on in and take my lead from them.” Denise explains that patients can be quick to confirm they are not religious or haven’t been to church in 20 years, but neither fact excludes them from the chance to chat. “We offer support whether they belong to a faith community or not, she confirms, “some of my best conversations have been with people taking ‘long service leave’ from their church and that fact may or may not be among the interesting topics we explore”.

Denise has experience on both sides of a diagnosis and understands that a long, lonely day on a hospital bed can exacerbate fear or anxiety. “If you’re unwell and alone it is easy to allow your head to run away with a poor prognosis” she says, “it can become hard to stay positive.” “Coping with this, she continues,” can be as simple as having someone to share the load,” That load is ably shared by a team of around 20 volunteers who listen without judgement, are bound by confidentiality and have time to comfortably converse with anyone who needs a willing ear. Unsurprisingly the storyline woven through the many hours of pastoral care support meanders between grief, loss, transition, occasionally a sprinkling of joy and often layers of humour.

Character Snapshot
...she was trying to come to terms with the situation, cope with the waiting. Treatment wasn't working, the time was imminent - she was trying to keep hope in the equation. She was in her 90's and this was the second child she'd lost to cancer...it wasn't meant to be that way.

“I’d love to chat but I don’t know the first thing about farming”

One such humorous story sees Denise’s face crumple with laughter as she recounts the day she enquired of a patient, after approaching with her well worn self description of ‘pastoral carer’, if he’d like to talk. His unexpected response “I’d love to chat but I don’t know the first thing about farming”, was the ice-breaker to a conversation that endured weekly for his entire hospital stay.

Case Study:

Bass Coast Health Pastoral Care Program



Zena Liston is well aware that confusion can exist around the program's intent and that some people think pastoral care is only about 'the church'. She explains that the funding support from BCCF was an important factor in helping to dispel the misconceptions, "the program was being supported on it's own merit and that reinforces our message that pastoral care is actually about community", she says.

Another misconception that Zena has observed is that people often associate pastoral care with being alone, without family or anyone around for support. She believes it is important to correct this because "sometimes when you are in a personally challenging situation you actually need someone who isn't family" she says. "For complex emotional reasons you may need someone who can listen and support you spiritually, without needing to identify you with who you usually are or the things you do outside of these current circumstance". She is conscious that it can be hard to imagine that this pastoral or spiritual care is something you or a loved one is going to need, but says "when our volunteers appear just when they're needed, the gratitude for our service can be profound."

"the gratitude for our service can be profound"



Recognition and appreciation for the program and its champions has been demonstrated in many ways. A 2014 highlight was an Award for outstanding achievement presented by the Minister for Health and Ageing. Other less public but equally potent acknowledgements come in the form of emotional letters and cards, powerful testimonials and on at least one occasion, a heartfelt thank you in a family bereavement notice.

Whilst personal, familial and community gratitude is mostly directed toward the program, it's management committee are all continuously grateful for everyone who supports their work, but mostly for the increasing pool of volunteers.



These willing workers come from a variety of faith backgrounds: community, professional, health or nursing, and regularly, survivors of their own medical trauma. Zena quotes "emotional maturity" as a critical volunteer characteristic because "it is essential they are able to remain open and available to the patient without taking on what's going on around, not being distracted by the emotion and always having the ability to see the whole person - staying focused on their needs."

Character Snapshot

...she was an older woman, sitting with a knitted beanie on her head - coping with a really poor prognosis. She was one of the most positive people I've met... that kind of strength in adversity is inspiring. Sometimes a diagnosis of terminal illness sends positivity straight out the window - but the chance to talk, find some peace and allow acceptance to enter - those things bring comfort.

This seems a big ask of a diverse group who give up their time and energy to a role some believe should be a professional health sector responsibility. Zena agrees the expectations are high, but is thankful for their relentless generosity despite their need to shape shift among the demands and dynamics of highly charged clinical environments. In the contemplation of an ideal world, Zena dreams of a "fully funded health sector model that delivers qualified pastoral care professionals to all hospitals and aged care facilities as a consistently present element of total patient care."

Case Study:

Bass Coast Health Pastoral Care Program



Until BCH is adequately funded and such dreams have a shot at reality, the structure supporting the volunteer model is carefully managed. Christine Hennequin, Ross Stanford and Zena Liston all believe that the training, group collaboration and personal spiritual practice combine to deliver well prepared carers.

“the training is what turns a listener into a compassionate pastoral carer”

Denise Jeffries agrees, “the training is what turns a listener into a compassionate and reflective pastoral carer” she explains, “the training challenged me: took me out of my comfort zone and I developed new abilities through talking, listening, sharing, recalling - I’m a more accomplished volunteer and I’ve grown personally as well”.

Personal growth is cited by most volunteers as one of the paybacks for time and effort contributed and combined with

the satisfaction of adding value to the days and lives of those they visit, is motivation enough to continue. Both Ross and Zena feel positive the program’s future will be secure.

“The momentum is building” Ross believes, “as more people are engaging with the idea of spiritual pursuit and the clinical environment continues to be receptive, we will be well placed to service a culturally and spiritually diverse population”. Zena agrees and goes on to acknowledge that “multi-faith and spiritual practices open up our service and volunteer recruitment landscapes and that’s powerful.” “Our volunteers currently come from our traditional church community” she says, “but as our local multi-faith communities continue to grow and merge, our volunteer base will expand accordingly”.



Of course, these ideas and opportunities will blossom when the financial foundations are secured for the long-term, but in the meantime everyone is keen to focus on what they can achieve with what they have. “We’ll sow a few more seeds and keep sharing the vision” says Ross, “we’ll keep working at being even more competent at what we are doing and allow our achievements to speak loudly.”

Zena and Christine are ready to add to the voice of advocacy because they know that medical and physical interventions that fix the body and its functions can be limited, if the emotional elements aren’t being attended to. “We see medical teams getting really frustrated because a patient isn’t motivated to do their physiotherapy or they’re not coping with their pain”, Zena adds. “Sometimes, if they can be listened to, enabled to unburden or talk about the whirlwind that it has been and share the grief they’re carrying, they can find the inner resources to cope better - we will keep attending to that part of it.”

Note: The Bass Coast Pastoral Care Program received a \$9,100 grant from the Bass Coast Community Foundation in 2014. The funds contributed to employment of the Program Manager.

**Xavier
Pellin**

**PERFORMANCE
AWARD
\$ 8,000 [OVER 2 YEARS]**



Young performers of exceptional ability are tucked within the towns and villages of our region. Many remain undiscovered but for those whose passion is matched by opportunity, the potential to shine becomes possible. Our whole community then gets to bask in the light of their achievements.

Bass Coast Community Foundation.



Performance Arts Grants

A CASE STUDY ➤



Photograph by: Mr Sergey Konstantinov

There's a boy from Inverloch who can fly. He doesn't look like a superhero in fact he looks pretty much like any other 18 year old, shaking off the last vestiges of adolescent shyness. He is smart and articulate and he's humble. Especially for a young man who has wings.

Xavier Pellin is a ballet dancer and it's not a passing phase. His skill, strength and athleticism has been shaped through years of training. His mental toughness enhanced through the self evaluation that accompanies a departure from stereotypical male career choice. And, his gratitude is founded in a family that sees the possibilities and not the obstacles.

Entering his final year at The Australian Ballet School (ABS) as the newly elected School Captain, Xavier knows his hardest work is ahead of him - he's 'up for the challenge'.

Supported with funding from the Bass Coast Community Foundation - Performance Award.

Case Study:

XAVIER PELLIN The Australian Ballet School

Billy Elliot (2000) has a lot to answer for. The popular film set in a Northern English coal mining town in the early 1980's tells a tale of a young man who challenged the feminine stereotype and fought the social conditioning that prescribed his life choices. The story, which chronicles gender prejudice, class discrimination, social upheaval and family disfunction also beautifully expresses the magic that is created when destiny finds its true path. Billy Elliot was a boy who discovered a passion for dance and fostered his dream to be a professional ballet dancer.

The success of the screenplay and its subsequent adaptation to stage gave rise to a renewal in the conversation about boys and ballet. The performances laid bare the pointlessness of emotional vilification, the purity of a sculptured physical effort and the determination necessary to succeed: Billy Elliot put masculinity in tights on centre stage before a global audience of ten million people.



Xavier Pellin was among those watching and he felt more than a fleeting interest in Billy Elliot. When the stage production first opened in Australia, the seven year old already understood that his legs were designed to dance.

Another boy whose life was changed at seven years old was David McAllister AM. In 1970 he saw Rudolf Nureyev dance (in a TV documentary) and that was the moment that set the trajectory for his career. McAllister, who danced with The Australian Ballet from 1983 until 2001 and since July of that year has held the position of Artistic Director, says that "inspired by movies such as Billy Elliot and reality TV shows like So You Think You Can Dance, 40 per cent of students at The Australian Ballet School are now boys". [Daily Telegraph, March 2013].

Case Study:

XAVIER PELLIN The Australian Ballet School



BOYS	2003	2012		% change
Soccer	301,000	309,700	▲	2.9
Swimming/diving	213,600	235,200	▲	10.1
Australian Rules	184,200	212,700	▲	15.5
Basketball	116,100	131,300	▲	13.1
Cricket	124,200	123,100	▼	0.9
Tennis	128,300	119,600	▼	6.8
Martial Arts	83,900	111,200	▲	32.5
Rugby League	76,200	107,400	▲	40.9
Rugby Union	22,200	50,700	▲	78.2
Dance	22,200	50,700	▲	128.4

Australian Bureau of Statistic (ABS) research confirms the increase in male participation in dance and tracks the rise from 1.7% in 2000 to 3% in 2009, reporting that 41,900 males aged 5 to 14, participated in that year. Of course that number pales compared to the 348,500 females, however, McAllister says that “competition for places at The Australian Ballet School are strongly contested and the higher number of male enrolments has led to higher standards.”

There is nothing new about boys in ballet: a quick reflection on the origins of the dance reveals that in the beginning, ballet was cast entirely to males.

“competition for places at the The Australian Ballet School are strongly contested and the higher number of male enrolments has led to higher standards.”

King Louis XIV of France loved dance. He in fact loved it so much that he demanded that all who attended his court should be accomplished dancers. Upon his insistence the first western world dance institution was established in Paris in 1661 after which he went on to found the first academy of dancing. From there, ballet developed into a true theatrical art and produced the first professional ballet dancers.

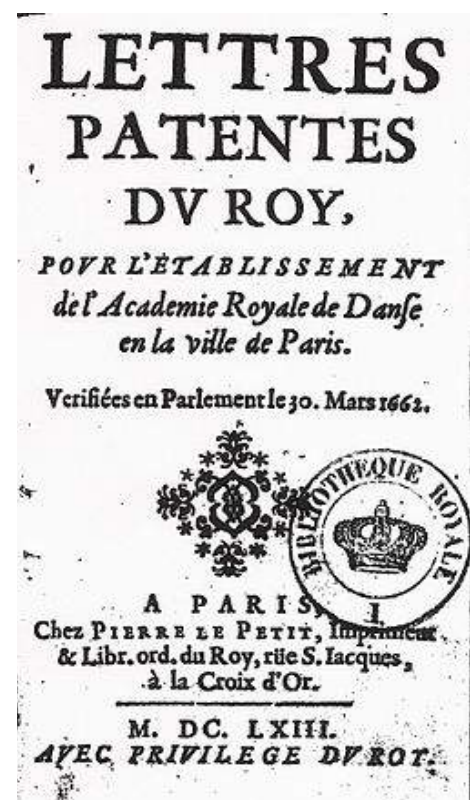
All of them were men.

The young and slim males played female roles and the dancers became superstars of their day. These dancers were in demand throughout the world, commanding large salaries and the friendship of kings.

It took 20 years from the opening of the academy for the first professional female dancers to appear and over the following 300 years women gradually dominated the stage.

(adapted from A brief history of ballet, California Ballet Blog 2010).

It’s unlikely we will see again, a scenario where there are more boys than girls on the stages of dance. Perhaps particularly so in Australia where the male gender associations are primarily around aggressive sports such as AFL and Rugby. Jamilla Rosdahl is a Lecturer in Gender Studies at the University of the Sunshine Coast, she points out “ In Australia, male-dominated sports are often exaggerated through narratives on aggression, body-punishing violence and confrontation. Rugby league (and AFL) are popular sports where the men often display physical and verbal aggression.”



Case Study:

XAVIER PELLIN The Australian Ballet School



These media dominant stereotypes have traditionally shaped the perceptions of what an Australian male does and how an Australian male behaves.

On the blog boysballet.wordpress.com Jamilla voices the opinion of many in her view that “attitudes toward boys in dance vary depending on how we’ve been raised and where we live. Sadly, in some smaller towns, there’s still a fear that boys who take up dancing will be teased.”

“Sadly, in some smaller towns, there’s still a fear that boys who take up dancing will be teased.”

So, back to the seven year old Gippsland boy. From a neighbourhood perspective Xavier was just another kid on a bike. Two older brothers dictated the right degree of rough and tumble and with an ex-dancer and ballet school proprietor for a mum, inevitability found him following his siblings into dance class. That notion of ‘how you are raised’ plays strongly to Xavier’s story. Dad Dan (a secondary school teacher) and mum Lisa embrace and support the aspirations of their three sons. James (24) harboured a love of all things motor that has led him to a career with Nissan Australia and 22 year old Alex streamed his dance enhanced athleticism toward sporting endeavours and a health science degree.



Lisa believes that “creating a foundation of possibility for these kids is what enables them to go to the limits of what they do”. Her own experience standing at the threshold of post school life diminished her dream of being a professional dancer and teacher. “No, no cried the careers teacher, what do you really want to do, what will be your real job...maybe you should do a hairdressing apprenticeship.” These were crushing words for an aspirational dancer and words Xavier has never had to hear. Lisa and Dan work hard to ensure the opportunities not available to them are placed clearly on the landscape of their children. “We’ve instilled in the boys (and the students at our ballet school) to always have a go...give it a crack,” Lisa says. “Even if you’re on the breadline for the first couple of years, just so you know...so you don’t live wondering, what if”.

Xavier concurs and is obviously full of gratitude for the relentless belief and the sacrifices his parents have made. Unlike many kids, his childhood predictions didn’t involve thoughts of becoming a fireman or policeman but nor did he have his heart set on flying through the air in *grande jeté* (grand jeh tay). “He actually wanted to be Tony Hawke” Lisa laughs. Quick to defend his youthful imaginings Xavier explains the link, as creativity. “Skateboarding is actually very creative,” he says “it also requires great skill and balance and fluidity.” “These are high risk careers,” he concludes, “the market for ballet dancers is not that huge either.”

“These are high risk careers,” he concludes, “the market for ballet dancers is not that huge either”

Natural creativity is something Dan Pellin attributes Xavier’s talents to. As a teacher Dan is well placed to comment on his son’s academic ability and he says “he’s a strong student and whilst he was never logistically or scientifically directed, his results at Mary McKillop were outstanding so he could have chosen any pathway.” Father and son have a well tested banter about whether you choose ballet or it chooses you. Xavier explains that his passion for ballet followed his love of dance in general and musical theatre in particular. “My folks call musical theatre the ‘dark side’ and the chances are I’ll spend some time on ‘dark side’ in my future, but ultimately I chose ballet,” he says “that’s where I can push boundaries, test my physical body and challenge my mind.”

Case Study:

XAVIER PELLIN The Australian Ballet School



The connection between dance and the mind is an interesting exploration with surprising findings. According to a report for the Dept. Education and Training NSW, Curriculum support for the creative arts 2001, the author points out that “the art form of dance engages and develops all of the seven intelligences: verbal/linguistic, mathematical/logical, visual/spatial, bodily/kinaesthetic, auditory/musical, intrapersonal and interpersonal. The report goes on to suggest “that this development simultaneously of all intelligences is rare.” There is a special synergy that exists in dance because mind and body are both (always) engaged in the act of performing or composing dance. Given that it is well documented that many boys prefer to learn kinaesthetically, dance provides a unique opportunity for them to develop the other intelligences through a preferred mode of learning.

Xavier’s learning journey has taken a close to idyllic route. Beginning with a sound academic foundation matched with the technical rigour of classical ballet training - to now, with VCE and Level seven completed at The Australian Ballet School and his final year, level eight about to commence.



Lisa Pellin is adamant that the classical training underpins everything. “Jazz, hip hop, tap, that’s the fun stuff they love to do,” she reflects, “but the technical training is what sets them up, protects them and gives them an appreciation for their craft.” It seems that some kids love ballet from the beginning, but most grow a passion for it over time. Lisa knows that for boys in particular, it takes time to develop a deep respect and appreciation for what ballet can provide, and to realise it is an amazing thing to do and an amazing thing to watch. “Some kids dream all their lives of a ballet career but Xavier hasn’t always dreamed that - it has evolved with his development, and that’s a good thing.”

*“ If I just keep
doing this one day I
might be Billy*

The catalyst to ballet as a career for Xavier came in the form of auditions, firstly for a role in *The Boy from Oz* and followed by the stage production of *Billy Elliot*. Lisa recalls her son as “a little singer and dancer: he could tap well, dance well and sing well, but he was just too little.” Xavier’s talent was evident and the company kept him in the process which initially took him to Sydney for ‘Billy School’, and ultimately to New York for a Broadway audition. The prospect of playing Billy Elliot inspired Xavier’s dream and his motivation to keep working and training. “The seed was sown,” he says “ if I just keep doing this one day I might be Billy Elliot.”

It was around this time that Xavier Pellin first auditioned for the prestigious Australian Ballet School. “It was as much for fun and experience that we applied,” reflects Lisa, “at only thirteen Xavier was too young to move to Melbourne full time.” A short time later that proposition was seriously considered when Xavier was offered a place in the school, however both parents and son knew he wasn’t ready for a full time commitment. With encouragement from the ABS Xavier gained access to their (interstate) training program which enabled him to attend classes casually and participate in school activities whenever possible.

In August of 2012 the next opportunity presented itself in the form of a scholarship to attend a three week intensive to the American Ballet Theatre in California. Dancing daily among the best kids from all over the World created a shift that consolidated his self belief and his commitment. Dan Pellin noticed: while he watched his son fire up, he recognised this as the moment that the game changed. “As a dad, I saw his true capacity and I saw the growth in him as a performer,” he said. “I was sitting there thinking oh my goodness these kids are amazing, they are so talented and so skilled, and then it hit me...so is Xavier, my kid is matching it with the best of them.”

Case Study:

XAVIER PELLIN The Australian Ballet School



According to Xavier, “the next steps were pretty simple really - if I can do three weeks here in America training all day every day, I can manage half days for a year at the ABS...that was my thinking - it was like, oh, okay, achievable!” Up until that point Xavier’s fear of sustaining the physical demands of training was the only factor holding him back, now he was ready to go.



Despite missing the next audition round (whilst in America) for full time placement at the ABS, Xavier undertook an assessment performance through the interstate training program, under the watchful eye of the school’s director. “The assessment was daunting,” Xavier recalls “it felt like every eye was on just me but when I opened the envelope to learn I’d been accepted to level five, all of the anxiety evaporated.” Lisa recalls her words at that moment, “I simply said ‘congratulations, you’re now self employed for the rest of your life - you just have to put in and what you put in you’ll get out - you just have to work hard.’”

Xavier has embraced the hard work and although the early days of living away from home were challenging, he knows how lucky he is to live his dream. His maturity is evident as he explains, “I’ve always been someone who enjoys the things I’m competent at so as my strength in this skill has grown, so too has my pleasure in doing it,” “I didn’t like football because it wasn’t in my competency set so I didn’t play sports much,” he adds.

His motivation he says is his “enjoyment of what I’m doing in the moment, I try not to overthink it....every day I put my heart and body into what I’m doing that day, without focusing too much on the future.” He’s quick to point out that following level six (in which he gained a Diploma of Dance), the dynamic heats up so the future did need to be considered. “It gets more intense,” he says, “body shapes are starting to change, career ideas are being forged, some change their mind and for others the work requirements are just too demanding.” Level seven to eight is by invitation so whilst there was no guarantee of advancement, Xavier’s 2015 year level all progressed to 2016. “It’s great that the family stuck together,” he says.

“ I try not to overthink it....every day I put my heart and body into what I’m doing that day”

It is clear that the ballet school family is important and a critical part of these young dancer’s transition to their profession. According to Xavier the ballet school environment is not like regular school - “it’s more accepting at our level,” he says, “no bullying or criticism or judgement: we all know what it’s taken to get here.” He acknowledges that “most of us have been subjected as ballet dancers to all kinds of school yard taunts so once we’re here we look around and know our peers have shared a similar pathway so we can actually just relax on get on with it - the environment is too intimate for little cliques and petty issues, there are not enough people for it - we are one cohort.”

One aspect that reflects regular school is the requirement to complete academic studies. ABS dancers blend with Victorian College of the Arts students, elite swimmers and gymnasts for study timetables designed with an appreciation for their training schedules. With VCE behind him, Xavier will now address all of his attention toward his final year, the achievement of a Graduate Diploma in Classical Ballet, and his role as School Co-Captain.

Case Study:

XAVIER PELLIN The Australian Ballet School



Xavier is mindful that as a co-captain he has a chance to give back to a community that has supported him. In addition to representing the school across a range of internal and external events and functions he is thinking about ways to build on the story, create stronger connections and strengthen that which is good about the school environment.

As a recipient of the Bass Coast Community Foundation Performance Arts Grant, Xavier is acutely aware of the role a supportive community plays in elevating opportunities for regional youth. "Getting the Bass Coast Community Foundation Grant was amazing on so many levels," Xavier says. "A big part of it for me was the validation and acknowledgment: a great feeling to know that it wasn't just my parents who thought I was worth it - knowing the community was embracing my efforts, was enormous." Dan agrees and further explains how the grant application process was enriching, "it was a brilliant process for this whole family, it reinforced and recommitted all of the things we'd been planning and the sacrifices we'd been making - the recognition is superb, but sharing the self evaluation process as a family will deliver rewards well beyond the grant duration."

"Getting the Bass Coast Community Foundation Grant was amazing on so many levels"

A great thing about the grant according to Lisa Pellin is that "it's in a form that really makes such a difference and not just to Xavier - it makes a difference for all of our family because it supports what we are doing and enables us to do that better."



One of the things this family does well is building community connections and using their resources to make a difference. Dan talks about Xavier and his ability to build bridges between regional kids and their dreams. "Doing what he does" says Dan, "connecting with kids from down here, bringing his sense of achievement back, bringing his experiences, good and bad, back here to demonstrate what you can do, to the next wave of kids - it's a brilliant bridge for the local kids." Xavier is less forthright in this discussion and brushes off the praise, but he does acknowledge the importance of the region's vocational performers backstage at the local concert: "It's so important for the young talent to see us kids progress doing what we love, but it's important for us as well because being there backstage at the concert keeps us grounded, reminds us of our roots."

"Having the grant support from the foundation has freed me up to focus most of my attention around what I'm doing," Xavier explains, "I am able to come back and teach other kids, give lessons and private coaching: I've taught solos and choreography and participated in class with senior students in mum's ballet school." "I'm thinking though, that if I'm accepted into the Australian Ballet (AB) - or any world renowned company, I could be a be a role model for other local young folk." There is no doubt this young man will be a worthy and appropriate role model and will undoubtedly shine the spotlight on the region's unsung talent within the arts sector.

For most aspiring professional dancers, being in the spotlight is the main game. Xavier's aspirations are aimed high and he is methodical in ticking off his milestones. His personal role models include Hugh Jackman (hence his love of musical theatre) and in recent years a principal dancer with the AB has become a friend. "We get along well and he gives me his time," Xavier says. "I look up to him and think maybe one day I can emulate his success: It doesn't feel 'a world away', Daniel is in our Company and because it's tangible, close, it seems all that more possible that I can aim to be and do what he is and does."

Case Study:

XAVIER PELLIN The Australian Ballet School



Like all dancers at an elite level, the risk of injury looms large as a potential career ender. Xavier has learned a lot about how his body works and acknowledges the incidence of injury in ballet is high. “You’re kidding yourself if you don’t think it’s a risk,” he says “but in such a professional environment as the ABS you are well prepared and well protected so the risk is mitigated”. Xavier hasn’t been without injury during his ABS training and prior to his first big performance in 2014 he suffered a grade four ankle sprain. He describes it now with humour, “my ankle stepped in and said “there you go, you can’t do that today”. He reflects on the incident as a good learning curve and says “it gave me a chance to go back to basics and do some work on the little things I needed to fix - I couldn’t dance so there was no point focusing on the big thoughts - just the small things I probably would have neglected if I didn’t have the injury.” And, with wisdom beyond his years he accepts that “you’ve just got to look at it as opportunity rather than a big disappointment.”

“ my ankle stepped in and said ‘there you go, you can’t do that today’”

A recent study by Australian Sports Medicine found that ballet training was among the most demanding and gruelling types of exercise undertaken by young people, so young dancers are at a higher risk of injury. New research has revealed the risk to these youngsters is higher relative to other adolescent athletic populations. The report’s lead author Christina Ekegren, Physiotherapist and PhD candidate, Department of Epidemiology and Preventative Medicine, Monash University said more than three-quarters of the dancers monitored sustained an injury over the period of the one year study.



Reports such as these reinforce to Xavier and his family, their good fortune in belonging to The Australian Ballet School. They have enormous confidence in the medical support provided by the school and Dan is glowing in his praise of the the physical conditioning, physiotherapy, phycology and medical assistance provided. Xavier has developed a strong appreciation of how his body works, functions and repairs itself. “It’s so important to read and maintain your body and to manage your injuries,” he says “the physio’s help with that but you have to take responsibility, seek the support, use your strength to protect yourself and if necessary, plan your recovery in the event of an injury.

A message the Pellin’s have consistently reinforced to their sons is that they have to be ‘backed up’. Dan is adamant that when Xavier finishes at the ABS he’ll have to start his education in his ‘back up’ field. “Do whatever you want to do and do it with all your might,” he says, “but have a fall back position.”

“ Do whatever you want to do and do it with all your might, ”

Xavier understands and appreciates the advice but would rather remain positive in his vision for a long and successful ballet career. He is realistic though and has considered how fortunate he will be if offered employment by The Australian Ballet. “The company are regarded as a great employer,” he explains, “and they facilitate their dancers to pursue further studies so if that happens, I will be very happy.”

Dancing is what makes Xavier Pellin happy and as he describes the personal transformation he feels when he is inside a performance you get an insight into how his brain and body connect. “I’ve spent a lot of time analysing myself,” he says, “and I know my strengths: my teachers capitalise on those and support me to develop other areas of my performance.” Not surprisingly it’s the big aspects of dance that this young man mostly enjoys. His stage presence and buoyancy are well showcased by his teachers and his leaps, jumps and turns emphasise the strong stage presence he is developing. Although Xavier’s allegro work puts his head in the clouds, his feet have remained planted in reality.

Case Study:

XAVIER PELLIN The Australian Ballet School



He attributes his pragmatism partly to a rural upbringing but also to the mentors who have nurtured his ABS journey. All those who have progressed through the school know that level the seven year brings with it a 'right of passage' in the form of teacher Simon Dow. According to Xavier "Mr. Dow makes level seven, make sense." "Ballet isn't just physical," he explains, "there is such a strong emotional/mental element to this work and because we are by nature perfectionists and it's almost impossible for everything to be perfect, you need enormous emotional resilience, and Simon builds that in his students." Through Mr. Dow's tutelage Xavier says he "has learned to mediate the stress of this make or break year and to ignore "the story in your head that can subvert your best efforts to remain upright."

"we are by nature perfectionists and it's almost impossible for everything to be perfect,"

It seems that Xavier Pellin's head is pretty well 'square on' and his real story is only at its beginning. Undoubtedly his heart is in The Australian Ballet but as a student of this world renowned training ground, his employment landscape is global. There's a depth and thoughtfulness to Xavier that belies his age and instills confidence in the future of humanity. "In the scheme of things," he says, "what we do is a microcosm of community: I go through all of the highs and lows and work and sweat and laughter of my life, with the people I train with - they're my family, my community and we all know each other's pain and when the pain gets hard, the community comes together." "It's something I've acknowledged and have really learned to value."



In what is now a familiar demonstration of mindfulness Xavier is anxious about turning other young people off the pathway by telling them it's all hard work and no fun. "It is fun," he finally adds, "but you do have to work hard and it will hurt and you will be sweating - it's not always easy but mum says that to be part of the group that reaches the highest levels of success you push yourself to the limit and you put it all on the line! Xavier Pellin is putting it all on the line.

Note: Xavier Pellin applied for and was granted a 'Performance Award Grant' through the Bass Coast Community Foundation grants program. The grant provided \$8,000 over two years to support specialist training and further education in the Performance Arts field.

**Matteo
Gatto**

**TERTIAR SUPPORT
PROGRAM
\$ 8,000 [OVER 2 YEARS]**



As a whole community we share responsibility for elevating the aspirations of our region's youth toward tertiary study. Geographic, generational disadvantage and financial demands can present seemingly insurmountable barriers to university participation. Together, we can progressively dismantle the obstacles.

Bass Coast Community Foundation.



Tertiary Support Program

A CASE STUDY >

Matteo Gatto is a young man with his eye on the end game. While other kids drew stick figures and read comic books during their childhood this Wonthaggi teenager worked his way through the Melways, drawing in new roads, constructing freeways and building bridges. He has been pondering the 'how to make things work better' question since before he could ride a bike.

But now he's getting serious.

As a third year Engineering/Civil Systems student at Melbourne University, Matteo's attention is more intensely focused on finding solutions and influencing change.

He is introspective, a quiet achiever and without realising it, Matteo Gatto is a shining example that Bass Coast kids can follow their dreams.

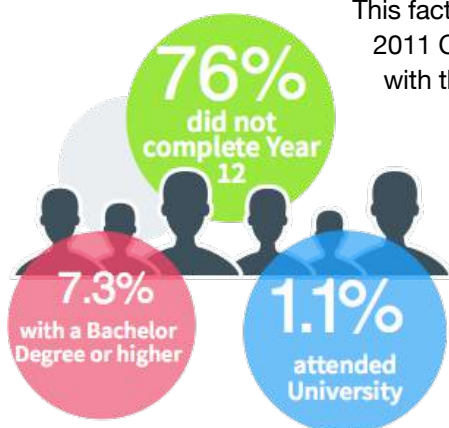
Supported with funding from the Bass Coast Community Foundation - Performance Award.

Case Study:

MATTEO GATTO Melbourne University

For Matteo Gatto there was never any doubt about completing his VCE and going to University. He'd found his passion, created a dream and planned his pathway. Sadly, Matteo's trajectory is not representative of the majority of Bass Coast youth. Of 120 students who completed VCE with Matteo, only 24 entered Bachelor Degrees.

Source: Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC), On Track Year 12 completer survey 2014 (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development)



This fact is consistent with findings from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 Census and the picture it paints suggests our local youth are not engaged with the idea of a university degree.

70.6% of the eligible Wonthaggi/Cape Paterson population in 2011, did not complete Year 12 compared with 52% in Victoria.

1.1% of the Bass Coast population (18 to 24-Y-O) attend university compared with 4.6% for Victoria.

7.3% of Wonthaggi/Cape Paterson residents over 15 have a Bachelor Degree or Higher non-school qualification compared with 20.8% in Victoria.

A 2014 report by the (then) Auditor General John Doyle confirms this scenario is not dissimilar to much of regional and rural Victoria. He states that "students from rural schools generally achieve poorer outcomes than those from metropolitan schools. Academic performance is poorer and students are less engaged with their education: there is no sign that the gap in performance is likely to narrow and indeed, in some areas of performance, the gap is getting wider. "

Case Study:

MATTEO GATTO Melbourne University



Addressing this issue is critical and whilst the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development continue implementation of intervention strategies, John Doyle says, “they are to date, ineffective.”

Setting up the background is important to understanding why the the Bass Coast Community Foundation (BCCF) have taken direct action. It also helps us appreciate how much it was against the odds that Matteo Gatto applied for and was accepted into one of Australia’s most respected Universities, and at Whitley Residential College.

The BCCF are vitally aware of this region’s statistical performance and the generational consequences. Martin Keogh, Chair of the BCCF is passionate about education and believes that “young people with higher levels of education have access to a wider range of opportunities, are more engaged in social dialogue and have a greater chance of making a positive community contribution.” Education makes a difference in regional communities: its attainment has a positive impact on outcomes in health, employment and welfare and is also a contributor to tackling disadvantage. These are big issues that require effective national initiatives but with the BCCF addressing it on an individual level, impact can be immediate. The introduction of the BCCF Tertiary Support Program is a strategy designed to make a direct and real difference for young people who aspire to gain university qualification: to help them breach some of the obstacles identified as barriers to further studies. Matteo Gatto is a grateful recipient of the award and recalls his reaction when he learned he’d been selected for support, “ I was a bit shocked because I didn’t expect it” he says, “things like this don’t usually happen to people going into 2nd year uni.” People like Matteo are a perfect example of the kind of kids who deserve a ‘leg up’ to their dreams.

“young people with higher levels of education have access to a wider range of opportunities, are more engaged in social dialogue and have a greater chance of making a positive community contribution.”



Matteo is a quiet, bright young man who emigrated to Australia (Wonthaggi) when he was three years old. His first three years in an Italian speaking Swiss township have faded from memory but the legacy of his heritage is a French passport and fluency in languages. His typical country town upbringing provided the nurturing for a balanced life and the desire to broaden his horizons and create some forward momentum.

“There’s not a lot to do here when you’re growing up,” Matteo reflects, “the rural environment feels a world away from everything.” He contemplates the contrasts between city and country and explains that “it’s hard to quantify all of the differences, but at an hour and half away from the city you become disconnected from

“I got the marks I needed and applied for the course I wanted, then I was faced with the reality of uprooting my life.””

things.” This disconnect is in part responsible for a reluctance of some young people to move away for education and for Matteo, uprooting his self-defined and knowable life, was a daunting prospect. “It all seemed pretty straight forward,” Matteo recalls, “I got the marks I needed and applied for the course I wanted at Melbourne Uni, then I was faced with the reality of uprooting my life.” Whilst down-town Wonthaggi seemed a restrictive environment for Matteo, it represented everything he was familiar and comfortable with, right down to squabbling siblings, a loyal cat and a place in the town’s Brass Brand. “Being accepted to a residential college at Melbourne Uni (Whitley College) made the transition a lot easier,” Matteo explains.



The challenge of adapting to the enormity of campus and the workload of tertiary study was mitigated by the supportive environment the college provided. “You’re not living at home he says,” but meals are provided and it’s a micro-community full of people in similar circumstance: I was only seventeen and it was the first time I’ve lived away from home.” Whitley College is a small residential community of students from within Australia and around the Globe: according to their website “College life provides abundant academic, sporting, cultural and social opportunities in a truly supportive community, vital for the transition from secondary to tertiary education.”

The emotional wrench of moving away from family is significant but so too are the logistical realities. Costs become layered into education, independent living needs and travel; suddenly family budgets can become stretched. “My folks never make it feel like I’m a burden,” he says “ they always say - hey Matteo we’ll help you and so long as you are happy we will do this.” Matteo’s gratitude is evident but so to is his awareness that with young siblings following behind him, the



“the financial support helps me to keep the focus on my studies”

opportunities must be shared. “The BCCF grant (\$4,000 per year over two years) has made me feel like I can make a contribution in a meaningful way - it feels like I am giving back,” he points out. “It also eliminated other obvious pressures: the financial support helps me to keep the focus on my studies.”

Without doubt a great deal of focus is going to be required for Matteo to continue to achieve his goals. He proclaims to be an average to good student who needs to work hard to do well. A quick glance at the course guide reveals subject requirements that would make an accomplished scholar quake in his boots.

In the initial three year Bachelor program Mateo will be required to complete units in Calculus, Global Environments, Linear Algebra, Geology for Engineers, Engineering Mechanics and Materials, Quantum Mechanics and Spacial Relativity, Earth Processes for Engineering, Real Analysis, Fluid Mechanics, Engineering Risk Analysis, Graph Theory, Systems Modelling & Design, Structural Theory and Design, and Complex Analysis. And, to achieve registration within his desired profession, a Master Degree is a compulsory addition to his study realm.

Far from viewing this immersion in the science of learning as an overwhelming prospect, Matteo lights up with the glow of the final prize. “I’m engaged by the end game,” he enthuses, I’ve always had grand plans for what I want to do and as I progress through the work I can see what I always dreamed of getting closer to fruition.” It was with some relief Matteo put the first semester behind him and moved toward, what was for him, more meaningful learning. “This year,” he says, “we have materials to use, we measure impacts and effects on environment - on the earth, we work with real situations and all of the time I’m seeing it getting closer, it’s more tangible now - the reality of doing what I’ve dreamed of is almost in my sights.”

“expanding capacity doesn’t decrease congestion”

Whilst that scale of thinking is beyond the scope of many teenagers, it is not too far a cry from the small boy with a Melways and a highlighter. This kid has a big brain and it’s filled with ideas and ideals that, on the face of it, give hope that the future of infrastructure development might well be in safe hands.



This conversation has sparked a shift and the quiet, contemplative countenance of the humble student has become electrified with possibility. “I want to build rail,” he fires, “cars are inefficient, they take up space - in the car, on the road and when you get to where you are going - cars take up loads of space.”

Matteo is an observer and he’s been watching recent traffic management debates with a level of interest stemming back to his adolescent obsession with map ‘graffiti’. “When they project traffic,” he continues, they look at congestion and believe they *need* to build or expand, but that doesn’t work.” He shares his view that the concept for Melbourne’s east/west tunnel was flawed, “expanding capacity doesn’t decrease congestion.” He cites a concept called ‘induced demand’ and says, “essentially, if you build it they will come: people currently using other routes will converge to the new route and other people will see the old routes have less traffic so they move to them.” “Expanding and expanding isn’t the way forward, it’s no different than expanding your belt if you put on weight - the only solution is to reduce the weight.”

“It’s my intention to use what I learn to encourage sustainable living”



In addition to his interest in all things traffic, Matteo harbours a commendable sensitivity for the environment. “It’s my intention to use what I learn to encourage sustainable living,” he says “we simply don’t use space effectively and I’d like to encourage a shift in how we think about the built environment.”

Matteo believes we should be building to minimise the affects on the natural environment. He sees a time when we use infrastructure to encourage compact living rather than urban sprawl. “We have to limit infringement rather than expand into green fields to accommodate population growth: there’s got to be a more equitable balance between the built and natural environment.” When asked how he thinks we’ve been doing in the past, Matteo is frank, “pretty crap really”, he laughs “the visionaries weren’t that visionary!”

Among the multitude of aspirations and ideas that reside in Matteo’s head sits a clarity about his professional pathway. “I tend to visualise how I want things to work out,” he says “I think of it kind of like a movie star analogy.” “Firstly, I have to graduate and do the internship and then get a position in a reputable firm - from there I will gradually work my way up.” Matteo has his trajectory well mapped and has created a personal strategy to put himself in a position where his views will be sought by industry and governments. This young man is by no mean arrogant and certainly doesn’t expect a magic carpet ride. “I’ve got so much work to do and so much to learn,” he acknowledges, “I think my expectations are based in reality and I’m working toward the dream: I don’t try and delude myself about how long it will take or how much work I have to do.”

If all goes to plan Matteo’s employment prospects are very sound and with a european passport he may well become an Engineer without borders. Melbourne University’s employment projections for graduating professional civil engineers are filled with good news. According to the faculty website, today’s civil engineers are at the forefront of technology, have a high proportion of full time jobs (94%) and enjoy high earning capacity. The occupation, whilst already large (41,700 employed, Nov 2014), is projected to grow with estimates suggesting between 10,000 and 25,000 positions will opened between now and 2019.

Of course that is in the future and whilst Matteo Gatto is given to thinking long and hard about his, the immediate objective is to continue to achieve his shorter term goals of passing each subject and growing confident among his developing network of peers.



The peer group at Melbourne University is a large one. Matteo estimates around 2000 new students enter the science faculty each year and while he has no aspirations to befriend them all he has had to adopt some personal strategies to cope with a growing number of acquaintances. "I am constantly surrounded by people I don't know on any frequency and have no connection with other than our common environment" he says. This is one of the most taxing aspects of immersion in university life according to Matteo and it has tested his resolve. He describes a first year crisis that resulted as a combination of academic and environment overwhelm as "a bit of a melt-down." "In my whole life up until going to uni I have had a small group of friends and very few acquaintances and now I've got 250 colleagues I see on a daily basis - it's exhausting."



"the great thing about college is the access to guidance and support"

This instant community also brought with it some great benefits. Mateo recalls that when his secondary school practice of 'doing just enough to get by' quickly proved ineffective at university, it was among these peers that he found study direction and support. "Probably my greatest challenge was that I didn't know how to study and actually I didn't even really know how to speak to people - getting to know strangers doesn't come easily to me." he says. None of Mateo's mates moved to Melbourne post secondary school so it was the population of Whitley College that became his village and support network. "I probably wouldn't have done so well if I had lived alone or out with mates," he admits "the great

thing about college is the access to guidance and support in the form of tutors, study groups....even the Dean."

Ready access to his support network is clearly important for the teenager who is slowly but surely acquiring the attributes of adulthood. His difficulty in transitioning to the city surprised him somewhat but he quickly realised that most people go through a similar experience. "Everyone has times when it hits you," he says "big city, big workload, big responsibilities, big everything....and home seems like a distant speck." Working through these issues was a time of personal growth which brought with it some valuable self discovery. "I did some work with a counsellor," Matteo reveals "and we looked at how people react and respond to me." "According to the counsellor I'm hilarious and people enjoy my company - this is really good information for me to know because at least I can stop worrying that I might bore people to death."

During these sessions Matteo also discovered that reaching out to people is a risk worth taking and says that "when you share the load you tend not to put a Shakespearean lens on everything - seeing only the tragedy: you become more grounded and the fluctuations between 'awesome and failure' look more like rolling hills rather than a mountain range." Reaching out didn't come naturally to Matteo and he cites the requirements of the BCCF grant process as helping him "learn to be a bit more willing to step forward." "I got confidence from attending the functions and meeting people who were interested in me and I was lucky to be provided with a great local mentor through the grant program," he explains. He shakes his head at the concept that complete strangers listened to his story, liked his ideas and believed in his capacity to become a worthy grant recipient.

Case Study:

MATTEO GATTO Melbourne University



Far from seeing himself only as a beneficiary of support Matteo has gained insight into how he can help others. “I like to think I impact on people in a calming way,” he explains “if someone is stressed I know it’s not going to help if I try to tell them what to do.” “From my experience I’ve learned it’s best to let them be, keep an eye on them and reassure them its okay - influencing through reassurance is what I try to do.”

Matteo is proving the soundness of the foundation’s confidence in him, on a daily basis. With humility based in strong family values, mindful gratitude, and an unwavering commitment to his dream, success is as assured as success can be. Unsurprisingly Matteo has his own views on success and explains that he’s happy to be judged being who he is and doing what he does - “I’m pretty okay at being Matteo,” he says “so I’ll keep focused on being true to who I am because I’m not going to fail at being me.”

*“ I’ll keep focused
on being true to
who I am because I
won’t fail at being
me”*

Note: Matteo Gatto applied for and was granted a ‘Tertiary Support Program Grant through the Bass Coast Community Foundation grants program. The grant , available for students entering their second year of tertiary studies, provides \$8,000 over two years to offset costs associated with study away from home.

'get involved'

bccf.org.au

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