



# Annual Report

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**2021**

The Country Education Partnership (CEP) continued its support and representation of rural and remote learning communities in 2021. It continued to work across all education sectors, advocating for, and supporting them in building their capacity to provide quality and responsive learning opportunities and improved education within a place-based, collaborative approach.

CEP acknowledges that all our communities are on the land of a variety of indigenous people. We wish to express gratitude to those who reside here, and to honour the Indigenous people who have lived and worked on this land historically and presently.

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# CEP in 2021

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The impact of COVID-19 continued to see communities presented with challenges that are becoming all too familiar for rural and regional schools and communities.

Many of our educators played a significant leadership role within their community throughout these challenging times – highlighting the important role that our educators (and especially our education leaders) provide in the overall economic and community development of rural communities.

As an organization whose membership is made up of many of these communities, we would like to acknowledge the amazing work and leadership that many of our education people have provided.

Staff shortages continue to be a major challenge in all rural communities. We commend rural and regional education settings for their innovative and creative approaches towards ensuring classes have a quality educator each day.

Throughout 2021, CEP staff consulted with numerous rural education communities to gain information and feedback on the challenges they faced throughout the year and to also explore the creative approaches developed to support the learning of young people within their communities – a report of these discussions was documented and presented to both State Government and Catholic Education sectors.

Country Education Partnership would like to acknowledge the amazing work and commitment that our rural education communities have undertaken throughout 2021 not only in providing an education throughout this time, but also the key role that they play in sustaining their communities.



# Chair's Report

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Pictured: Helen Clarke

CEP continued its support for rural and remote education communities in 2021 giving children and young people the best opportunity to acquire knowledge and pathways for a satisfying career and economic security.

CEP maintained its engagement with schools encouraging them to work in clusters; supporting leaders, particularly regarding their own health and well-being and, advocating for them when there were issues related to program delivery. Despite COVID requirements, CEP delivered most programs with minimal interruptions. The rural youth ambassadors program continues to shine, a program of which we are very proud, providing young people with opportunities to express their needs and a voice that reaches decision makers. Importantly it also prepares them to contribute to social, political and community endeavours.

CEP's advocacy is important work. The respect that CEP has within government and education sectors was hard won over many years and underpins our success. Our staff, the Chair and Committee of Management and members work hard to maintain our status as well respected, effective advocates whose advice is worth listening to and acting on.

This year CEP completed a new Strategic Plan focussing on our long term direction, governance, and organisational capability. With the support of Deloitte consultants, we clarified our core business, important partners and future plans. Deloitte spoke with key stakeholders and identified areas where we are clearly succeeding and areas of focus ensuring CEP's future is sustained. The new strategic plan will be finalised and released by mid 2022. Thanks to all those who participated especially to the Deloitte team led by Mark Dingle for their generosity and support.

We continue to assess the best governance arrangements for CEP, but any prospective changes will be fully canvassed with the membership. We have made some constitutional amendments to be presented at the 2022 AGM that ensure our constitution meets regulatory requirements.

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Succession has been an issue addressed by the committee of management over the past few years and following the resignation of Phil Brown we embarked on an independent process to fill the CEO role. Mark McLay was appointed as our Chief Executive Officer, Mark is a CEP stalwart, an experienced principal in rural schools and is keen to continue to expand CEP. As part of this succession Phil Brown agreed to continue at CEP and is now managing the flagship rural inspire program.

Given Phil's long-standing role at CEP as Executive Officer it is appropriate to formally thank him for his commitment and dedication to the organisation. Phil's motives have always been very clear; to enhance learning opportunities and improve education opportunities for children and young people in rural and remote communities. He has been a staunch advocate for school leaders and teachers in those communities and instrumental in developing many learning and support programs designed to ensure their professional satisfaction and effectiveness. CEP is extremely fortunate to have benefitted from Phil's leadership, stewardship and dedication over the last 18 years and we wish him all the very best.

Thank you to our funders, especially the Victorian Department of Education and Training who are very generous in their support for our organisation and our ideas. The Australian Government's support for the Rural Inspire program is vitally important to CEP and has enabled us to expand our work nationally. The Catholic Education office provide financial and in-kind support for which we are very grateful.

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Our Committee of Management who volunteer their time have done a great job maintaining the organisation as well as steering CEP through significant change.

Farewell to Sally Baker and Cathy Grace

Finally, it has been a privilege to chair CEP, it is an effective member-based organisation that is clear about its purpose, has a great future and I think will continue to have an impact in rural education communities.

# Advocacy and Representation

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## Snapshot of Country Education Partnership

- 382 rural education settings across three education sectors
  - 11 independents sector settings
  - 61 catholic education settings
  - 310 government education settings
- 45,200 student enrollments across all education sectors
- 38 P-12 Education Settings
- 4 K-12 Education Settings
- 36 Secondary settings
- 302 primary settings.

## Statewide Working Groups

The Country Education Partnership has continued to be involved in a number of state working groups and forums representing the interests and needs of rural communities:

- The Education State Guiding Coalition and its various Working Groups
- Student Resource Package Consultative Group
- Initial Teaching Education Working Group
- Marrung State Governing Council
- Rural and Regional Education Working Groups in Victoria
- Cleaning Consultation Group.

## Key Stakeholder Partnerships

At a state level, Country Education Partnership has maintained strong links with a range of key stakeholders within Victoria including principal organizations, education unions, peak parent organization, state school governance groups, and student representative organizations.

At a national level, the Country Education Partnership has maintained strong links and relationships with key organizations relevant to rural and remote education. This includes the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia, Country Education Foundation, Foundation for Regional and Rural Renewal, Isolated Children's Parents Association, Gonski Institute and various rural and remote state organizations across a number of other states.

## Government Meetings

The Country Education Partnership Committee of Management has continued its relationship with both State and Federal Governments.

Country Education Partnership has had numerous meetings with the State and Commonwealth Ministers for Education throughout 2021. Country Education Partnership has provided input into a number of reviews and working groups that have operated throughout 2021. The review of Mental Health within Victoria and the review of School Resourcing for Rural Education at a national level are two examples.



Pictured: CEP staff and Rural Youth Ambassadors meeting virtually



Pictured: Rural Youth Ambassadors

## Rural Youth Ambassadors

The Rural Youth Ambassador program continued to provide a strong student voice focused on the needs and interests of young people within rural and remote education communities.

Operating across South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria during 2021, over 60 rural young people provided a strong student advocacy for rural and remote communities.

The Rural Youth Ambassadors demonstrated a commitment at a level that was a credit to themselves and their rural communities. In 2021 the program still involved some online Forums which, whilst still effective, do not have the same impact as face to face.

They met with state Ministers for Education, and many education sector personnel advocating for the needs of rural young people and presenting many creative ideas as to how they believe rural education can be improved.

The National Forum was planned to take place in February 2022 due to COVID19 related delays. The RYA program is expected to expand into Western Australia, Queensland, Northern Territory and Tasmania in 2022.

CEP also ran local RYA programs across six rural Victorian communities.

## Energy Breakthrough

The Energy Breakthrough Festival did not occur in 2021. EB Education Group met online regularly and discussed ideas for the future, developed and coordinated EB HUB events, structures for modified onsite Pushcart events and the refinement of curriculum documents. A memorandum of Understanding between CEP and Central Goldfields Shire was developed and is expected to be finalised in early 2022. In 2021 a CEP employee was given the specific role of Energy Breakthrough Education Leader.



## Reviews and Research

Country Education Partnership contributed to a number of research pieces and investigations throughout 2021.

- Ongoing discussion with the Commonwealth Government in relation to the outcomes of the Commonwealth Review of Rural, Remote and Regional Education.
- Representation on the Rural and Regional Education Working Groups in Victoria.
- Supporting the South Australia education department in the development of a country education strategy.

## Communication and Information

The Country Education Partnership produces Bush Voices twice a term, highlighting supports available for rural and regional schools, exciting innovations, rural human interest stories and the latest from our Rural Youth Ambassador Program.

## Professional Development

One of the highlights in 2021 was the international professional development sessions offered online. The Power, Potential and the Practice of Resilience was delivered by Maggie Farrar. This was a joint collaboration with the Victorian Principal's Association.



Pictured: Maggie Farrar

CEP also delivered 'Learn to be an Imperfect Leader' with Steve Munby and Marie Claire.



Pictured: Steve Munby



Pictured: Marie Claire

Both programs were well received with over 75 rural schools registering for the PD.

# Rural Learning

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The Country Education Partnership has continued its commitment to supporting rural and remote education communities to develop and provide quality education experiences for their young people, thus ensuring they gain the learning they need and desire to realise their career pathways and dreams.

The work that CEP undertakes in enhancing rural and remote education focus on:

- Supporting rural and remote communities in developing place based, locally determined partnerships of education organizations as a key strategy in providing quality learning for their young people;
- In partnerships with local rural and remote communities, facilitating the development of innovative learning initiatives, especially in those curriculum areas that these communities find challenging to provide.



**bastow**

## Victoria's Bastow Leadership Institute

While the challenges faced by education settings throughout 2021 meant that many rural staff were unable to access the "traditional" professional development opportunities provided through Bastow Leadership Institute (now Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership), CEP continued to promote the various online professional development activities and webinars provided by Bastow.

Via regular Bush Voices articles and across social media, Bastow programs were circulated to the CEP network, with many schools taking the opportunity to be involved in the variety of online programs offered. With Bastow officially delivering programs under its new identity, The Academy, from January 2022, CEP will continue to work to partner with The Victorian Leadership Academy as they establish regional settings.

# Thanks

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As an organization, the strength of CEP lies in its people. We would like to acknowledge and thank:

Those in schools who work tirelessly to educate our rural and remote children and young people by providing opportunities and experiences to help them create their future, especially given the challenges that 2021 presented;

Those working across schools to provide better educational opportunities and enhanced professional development;

The State Minister for Education, The Hon James Merlino; Secretary, Department of Education and Training, Jenny Atta; The country Directors of Catholic Education and the many personnel within the various education sectors who have supported the work of the Country Education Partnership;

The Federal Government, along with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, for their support of the Rural Youth Aspiration work of CEP.

Key Stakeholder groups who have worked in partnership with CEP to improve education across rural Victoria

Philanthropic organizations who have worked in partnership with the Country Education Partnership throughout 2021 - especially The Buckland Foundation.

Our Committee of Management and Board Executive who are generous of their time, expertise and wise counsel;

Our Staff – Phil Brown, Trish Hodge, Britt Ditterich, Matt Copping, Julia Enter, Joe Collins, Dana McDonald, Catilyn Britain and Jemma Walsh whose work in their specific areas of responsibility, and all the behind the scenes activities, contribute significantly to the success of our operations;

Our Consultancy team, especially Kevin Philips, Steve Munb and, Maggie Farrar for their knowledge, expertise and lived experience;

Our Executive Officer, Phil Brown for his boundless energy, enthusiasm, knowledge, expertise, insights, educational leadership and unshakable commitment to supporting rural and remote students, educators and their communities.

# Committee of Management

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Helen Clarke  
**Chair**

Mark McLay  
**Deputy Chair**  
**Avoca**

Jodi Walters  
**Secretary**  
**Swan Hill**

Fran Waterman  
**Treasurer**  
**Beechworth**

Jason Whiteley  
**Katamatite**

Arn Gorman  
**Yarrawonga**

Kimberley Tempest  
**Cobram**

Joanne Amott  
**Balmoral**

Leigh Mellberg  
**Tarnagulla**

Lachlan Day  
**Cape Clear**

Trish Perry  
**Lancaster**

Cathy Grace  
**Murtoa**

## **Representation and Co-opted Members**

Sam Meerbach  
**Ballarat CEO**

Kaye O'Connor  
**Sandhurst CEO**

Sally Baker  
**Co-opted**  
**South Gippsland Shire**



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