



2022

# ANNUAL REPORT

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# MISSION AND PURPOSE

Country Education Partnership (CEP) continues to work for and on behalf of, all rural and remote education communities. We strive to ensure that learners within these communities have access to the highest quality of education provision from 0-18+ years across government and non-government education organisations.

To best service our rural communities we are guided by three main values:

**Collaboration** that fosters inclusiveness, participation, sharing and responsiveness to members.

**Leadership** that is proactive, professional and consultative.

**Achievement** that strives for constant development, and seeks challenge, excellence and celebration.

2022 saw the commencement of new CEO, Mark McLay and the expansion of CEP's media commitment with the appointment of a Social Media Manager. CEP also welcomed a new chair, Peter Greenwell.

CEP acknowledged the impact of outgoing chair Helen Clarke, who has dedicated three years to the organisation.

Former CEO Phil Brown's input was acknowledged and celebrated at the 2022 AGM and Dinner.

In 2022, CEP's focus areas were:

- Advocacy and Representation of rural and remote communities.
- Supporting and advocating for Clusters of schools.
- Delivering the Energy Breakthrough event after a COVID-enforced two-year hiatus.
- Rural Youth initiatives including National Rural Youth Ambassador Programs, a national Rural Inspire initiative and a Victorian-based Local Rural Youth Ambassador Program.
- Working with the Victorian Academy for Teaching and Leadership to promote Academy programs and provide input into the establishment of the Regional Centres of the Academy.

In 2022, it was announced that CEP would have the role of delivering the Teach Rural program throughout Victorian State Schools in 2023 and 2024. This program involves placing Pre-Service Teachers in rural locations as collegiate groups. The staffing and planning for this program commenced in earnest in October 2022.

# CHAIR'S REPORT

It's fitting to start rather than end this report with an expression of gratitude to the staff, Executive and Committee of CEP. We claim to be the leading voice for Rural Education and it's only through all these folks working together as a team that this will be achieved.

Can I single out Mark McLay, who in his first year as CEO has done an amazing job of managing the enormous breadth of activity the CEP encompasses. He has managed a significant changeover in staff and refocussed the organisation on its core responsibilities.

Thanks also to the officeholders, Secretary Jodi Walters, Vice President Jason Whitely, outgoing treasurer Fran Waterman and incoming treasurer Kevin Hill and to all the members of the Executive and Committee for their efforts on behalf of CEP over the year.

2022 will be looked back on as the first post-pandemic year and much of CEP's activity was able to return to face-to-face. The last year that Energy Breakthrough took place was from 2018 to 2019. It was a great success in 2022, largely due to the hard work of Mark, Jason, and the staff responsible. The Rural Youth Ambassadors were finally able to meet face to face.

The year was not without its disappointments and late in November, CEP was informed that the Federal government would not renew funding for the Rural Inspire program which had carried and extended CEP's Rural Youth Ambassador program across Australia.

Through Victorian Government funding the Rural Youth Ambassadors program continues strongly in Victoria. A Working Party established by the Committee is looking at how CEP can team with other jurisdictions and organisations who are interested in providing similar programs so that the national approach to building the aspirations of rural young people is not lost.

As part of the Service Agreement with the Victorian Government, CEP has continued to support particular rural clusters and in the organisation's first meeting with DET Secretary, Jenny Atta, advocated strongly for a concerted effort to lift the profile of clustering as a key plank in overcoming the challenges that rural schools face.

One of the ongoing challenges that rural schools face, a chronic shortage of qualified staff, became a statewide issue as metropolitan schools were also unable to fill teaching and other staff positions.

CEP has been at the forefront of advocating for an enlarged set of incentives to attract and retain staff in rural schools and for the reinstatement of a comprehensive teacher housing program and has worked closely with the Department to support individual schools that have faced particular challenges.

# CHAIR'S REPORT

Bush Voices now has a section where schools can publicise staff vacancies and CEP is responsible for the implementation of Teach Rural, a government program designed to support the placement of students undertaking teaching degrees at rural schools.

Under Mark McLay's leadership, CEP is now reaching out more strongly to our member schools, both government and non-government, engaging with the Departments Regional Staff and Diocesan staff and ensuring that our publications are informative and useful to members.

CEP has also initiated an online professional development program which will deliver online sessions throughout 2023 in areas of need identified by member schools.

The development of the rural campuses of the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership is a potential game-changer for education professionals in rural Victoria and CEP has been heavily engaged with their development and has argued for a broad role for them in providing professional learning for leaders and teachers.

With COVID in retreat, CEP has been arguing for the implementation of the recommendations from the Expert Panel established by Minister Merlino and chaired by Dr David Howes which was released in 2019 just before the pandemic hit.

Arising from one of the recommendations, CEP has put a position to the Department that a comprehensive system of alternative provision be established across rural and regional Victoria catering to the needs of primary and secondary students who are disengaged or disengaging from schooling.

CEP has always been the one organisation that has consistently argued for the support of small schools and has put a comprehensive position to the Department for action to enhance the viability of small rural schools.

This includes the implementation of recommendations from the Expert Panel report about the SRP, providing stability of leadership, supporting clusters and reducing the administrative load of teaching principals.

2022 has been a big year for CEP, a year of transition and a year that provides the foundation for continuing success in being the leading voice for rural education.

# ADVOCACY AND REPRESENTATION

CEP continued to play a vital role in advocating for rural and remote education settings across Victoria. In 2022, CEP provided representation in:

- Meetings with Dep Secretaries of Education
- DE Guiding Coalition
- Marrung Central Governance Committee
- Mental Health Reform Reference Group
- Regional Reference Group
- Secondary School Reform Group
- Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership Reference Group
- Student Resource Package Reference Group
- Staffing Reference Group
- Schools Consultative Committee Reference Group
- Meeting with Ministers of Education

In 2022, CEP focussed its advocacy on three main areas:

- Alternative Settings
- Small Schools Accountability Processes
- Staffing

This advocacy involved raising issues, challenges and ideas with a range of senior DE personnel.



# ENERGY BREAKTHROUGH

First held in 1991, the Energy Breakthrough is delivered in partnership between the Country Education Partnership and the Central Goldfields Shire Council. CEP's involvement in the program is led by Education Team Leader, Nigel Preston, with the support of Lachlan Hickey (IT Systems Manager), Mary Preston (TRYathlon and Junkyard Challenge Coordinator), Laurie Preston (Display & Presentation Coordinator), Rob Higgins (Pushcarts and Robotics Coordinator) and Michael McTigue (Lead Scrutineer).

The 2022 Energy Breakthrough program and event, after two years break due to COVID, - was more epic than most.

This is thanks in most part to the willingness of schools to commit to the EB Management Teams plans, the effective use of great communication systems, along with planning and preparation. These plans and programs were able to work when combined with an amazing team of experienced volunteers and officials who knew their roles and pulled together. The response and feedback from school leaders, teachers, parents and students have been overwhelmingly positive.

## EB Program

The EB program takes place in individual schools across Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales, right throughout the year. All school-based programs align with the individual state's STEM program. After a two-year hiatus, team numbers in each category were down slightly. At an individual school level, many of the staff previously involved in the EB program have changed roles, moved to new schools or are still finding the rhythm of a 'new normal' post-COVID.

# ENERGY BREAKTHROUGH

## EB Event

At the event itself, it wasn't smooth sailing with extremely wet weather prior to the event saturating campsites and then severe weather warnings forecast over the event weekend.

There were:

- Thunderstorm asthma warnings.
- One thunderstorm resulted in a temporary total site evacuation (the first in the 30-year history of the event).
- 77 school campsites relocated.
- A new off-site camping site was secured and created due to existing campsites being declared saturated and unsuitable.
- 35 school campsites were relocated a second time due to severe weather warnings and 100kmh+ wind gusts.
- An electrical fire in the Energy Efficient Vehicle electrical recharging container.

Whilst these issues developed due to factors outside of the Management Teams' control, the team responded extremely well in delivering a safe and largely unimpacted program of assessments and activities.



# RURAL INSPIRE

In 2022, the RYA program was delivered in Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia with two locations (Midwest and Wheatbelt).

National Forums were held in Canberra, Albury and online.

Ernst and Young (EY) was procured to complete summary evaluations in 2020 and 2021, with a detailed evaluation released in May 2022. These evaluations were submitted to the Australian Government as a part of the program evaluation and monitoring process.

## Benefits

In the 2022 Rural Inspire Evaluation report EY reported:

*The Rural Inspire initiatives successfully reached a broad range of young people from diverse backgrounds, and delivered content which met their needs, including in particular, answering many of their questions about future pathways, providing them with opportunities to network with their peers and government stakeholders, and enabling them to reflect on rural education using a strengths-focused approach.*

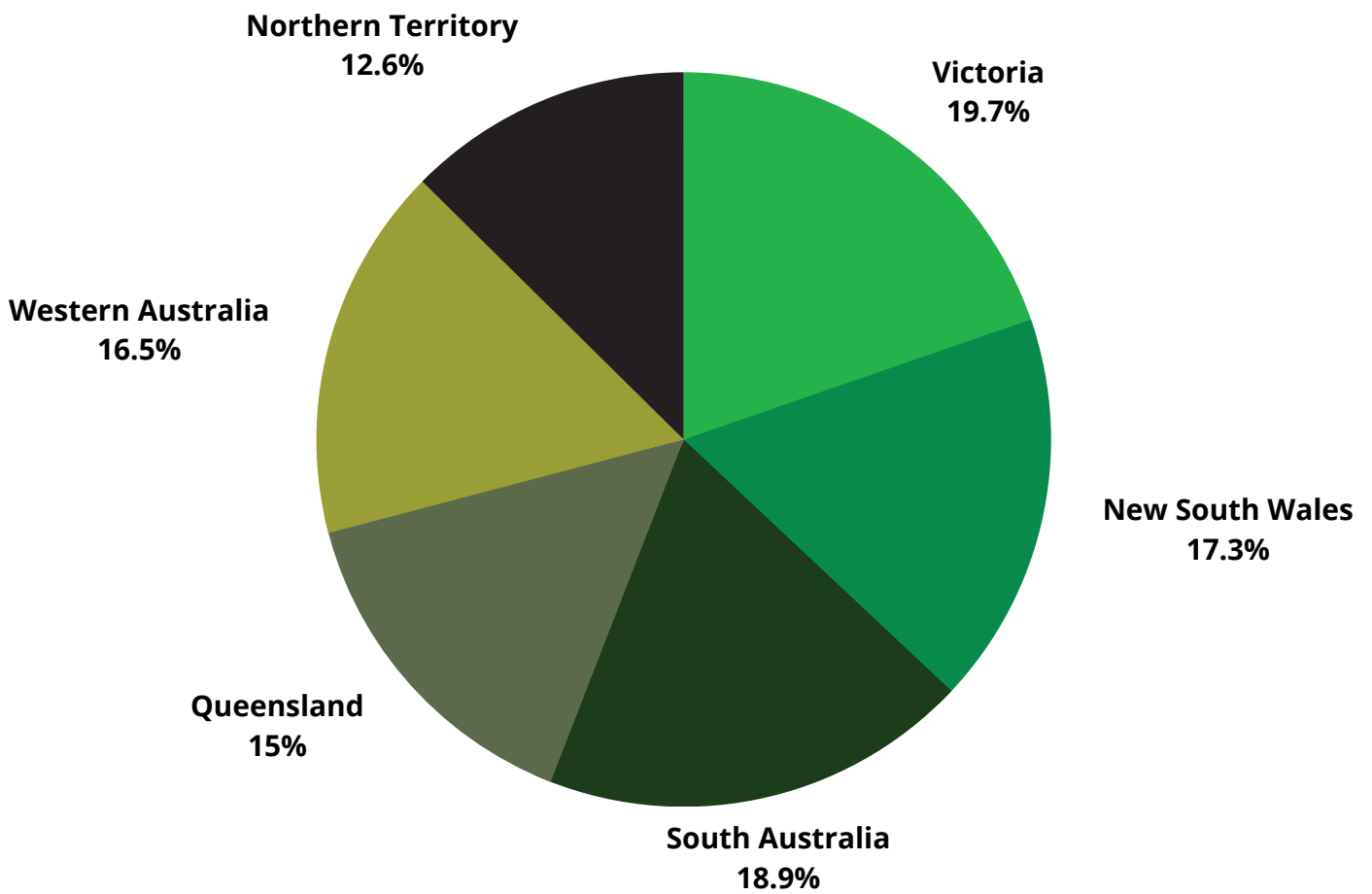
*Although young people broadly reflected that in-person delivery would have been preferred wherever possible, they confirmed that the State-wide RYA Program in particular enabled them to develop valuable skills during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns.*

The Rural Inspire program ensured there was a rural youth voice across Australia from 2020 to 2022. This included forums with both the Australian Government and state and territory ministers, key department personnel, universities, key stakeholders and local communities. Initiatives and proposals were developed and submitted. Policy decisions were influenced.

Most importantly Rural Inspire Australia supported 315 young people through the RYA program and 306 in the LRYA program across Australia to understand they can have a voice and they can make a difference. Moreover, the program gave them the knowledge and experience to understand the processes and procedures required to influence decision-making. The program allowed them to develop peer networks to support them in their future life decisions. The program also allowed the Rural Inspire team to showcase the success stories of Alumni through the expansion of the social media platforms.

# RURAL INSPIRE

## Participants



# RURAL INSPIRE

## Participants

All the young people involved in the programs between 2020 and 2022. Please note, the young people listed under the National Forum section are not a separate group of young people.

Year	Program Element	Participants		Sex			Background		
		Number of schools	Numbers of Young People	Males	Females	Non-Binary	Indigenous	Other Culture	LGBTIQ+
2020 - 2022	National Forums	179	244	72	166	15	42	44	27
	State-wide Forums RYA	199	330	104	219	15	101	32	37
	Localised Rural Youth Ambassadors	67	355	140	191	15	26	34	13
	Journey mates		100	41	59		Data Not collected		
	Workshops and Seminars	66	343	152	191		Data not collected		
	<b>TOTAL</b>		511	1380	509	826	45	170	110

# 2023 AREAS OF FOCUS

- **Advocacy and Representation:** Continue to increase the work in this area through increased contact with member schools, the development of a series of one-pagers and a continued focus on small schools and staffing.
- **Delivery of the PD online series**



- **Digital Updates:** Improvements/refinements to Bush Voices, social media platforms and website.
- **Clusters:** Cluster support for schools including the appointment of a Cluster Project Officer.
- **Youth Work:** Rural Youth and Local Rural Youth Ambassador Programs in Victoria.
- **Teach Rural:** Appointment of staff and the delivery of the program.
- **Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership:** Liaise with The Academy in regards to the opening and potential use of the regional centres.

# FINANCE

Country Education Project Inc.

## Statement of Financial Position

As at 31 December 2022

	Note	2022 \$	2021 \$
<b>ASSETS</b>			
<b>Current Assets</b>			
Cash and cash equivalents	3	317,489	1,109,886
Trade and other receivables	4	620,909	157,996
Other	5	14,830	10,884
<b>Total Current Assets</b>		<u>953,228</u>	<u>1,278,766</u>
<b>Non-Current Assets</b>			
Plant, furniture and equipment	6	56,615	37,303
<b>Total Non-Current Assets</b>		<u>56,615</u>	<u>37,303</u>
<b>Total Assets</b>		<u>1,009,843</u>	<u>1,316,069</u>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>			
<b>Current Liabilities</b>			
Trade and other payables	7	594,904	803,928
Provisions	8	28,551	66,753
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>		<u>623,455</u>	<u>870,681</u>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>		<u>623,455</u>	<u>870,681</u>
<b>Net Assets</b>		<u>389,388</u>	<u>445,388</u>
<b>EQUITY</b>			
Retained earnings		<u>389,388</u>	<u>445,388</u>
<b>Total Equity</b>		<u>389,388</u>	<u>445,388</u>

*The above statement of financial position should be read in conjunction with the accompanying notes.*

# FINANCE

Country Education Project Inc.

## **Committee of management's declaration**

For the year ended 31 December 2022

As stated in Note 1(a) to the financial statements, in the opinion of the Committee of Management, Country Education Project Inc. is not a reporting entity because there are no users dependent on general purpose financial statements. These are special purpose financial statements that have been prepared to meet the requirements of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*.

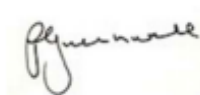
The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with applicable accounting standards and mandatory professional reporting requirements to the extent described in Note 1(a).

The Committee of Management declares that the financial statements and notes set out on pages 2 to 12:

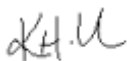
- a) comply with the Accounting Standards and other mandatory professional reporting requirements as detailed above and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*; and
- b) give a true and fair view of Country Education Project Inc.'s financial position as at 31 December 2022, and of its performance, as represented by the results of its operations and its cash flows, for the financial year ended on that date.

In the opinion of the Committee of Management, there are reasonable grounds to believe that Country Education Project Inc. will be able to pay its debts as and when they become due and payable.

This declaration is made in accordance with a resolution of the Committee of Management.



Peter Greenwell  
Chairperson



Kevin Hill  
Treasurer

23 March 2023

# FINANCE

Country Education Project Inc.

**Auditor's Independence Declaration under 60-40 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2021***

For the year ended 31 December 2022

As Auditor for the audit of Country Education Project Inc. for the year ended 31 December 2022, I declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, there have been:

- (a) No contraventions of the auditor independence requirements of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2021* in relation to the audit; and
- (b) No contraventions of any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.

Johnsons MME  
Chartered Accountants



Ryan Schischka  
Director

23 March 2023

## 2022 CEP COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT MEMBERS

Name	Community/School
Kimberley Tempest	Cobram Secondary
Leigh Mellberg	Tarnagulla Primary School
Jo Amott	Balmoral K-12 Community College
Daniel Forrest	Wedderburn College P-12
Jodi Walters	Swan Hill Specialist School
Kevin Hill	Everton Primary School (Dec 2022)
Arn Gorman	Sacred Heart Primary School Yarrowonga
Jason Whiteley	Katamatite Primary School
Lachlan Day	Meredith Primary School
Trish Perry	Lancaster Primary School
Sam Meerbach	Ballarat Diocese
Ashley Marsh	Sandhurst Diocese
Damian Lappin	Loch Sport Primary School
Fran Waterman	Yarrunga Primary School (Resigned Nov 22)
Peter Greenwell	Invited Chair

# THANK YOU

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