

**Gwydir Learning Region
Report to Cotton CRC – Community Action Fund 2011**

Gwydir Shire Council was formed in March 2004 with the amalgamation of Yallaroi Shire Council, Bingara Shire Council and parts of Barraba Shire Council.

- It has an area of 9122 sq metres
- It's a long skinny area of land extending from just north of Tamworth to the Queensland border – 160km long and 60km wide.
- It has a population of 5790 people
- It has 2200km of roads to be serviced
- It services two main towns – Bingara and Wialda and seven smaller villages.

The Gwydir Learning Region (GLR) is a committee of that Council.

The GLR's formation was based on the shared goals and visions of a collaborative partnership of education bodies, local council, businesses and community members in the Gwydir Shire. It was a vision which enabled students from a diversity of backgrounds, with wide variety of skills and aspirations to acquire qualifications despite the lack of post-school training facilities in the two towns.

Since its inception, GLR students in both schools – Wialda High School and Bingara Central School have “punched above their weight” in HSC results and vocational education awards, and Council has “walked the training and education talk” as it goes about its core business in the community

1. During the last ten years, students at Bingara Central School and Wialda High School have been successful in securing over 145 School-based part-time traineeships and apprenticeships in a range of disciplines such as:
 - Business
 - Retail
 - Automotive
 - Children's Services
 - Metals and Engineering
 - Horticulture
 - Primary Industries
 - Meat processing
 - Information Technology
 - Building and Construction
 - Community Recreation
 - Aged Care Nursing
 - Acute Care Nursing
2. Wialda High School produces overall HSC results that have historically been above the regional average, and has consistently produced excellent HSC students in Mathematics, Agriculture, Retail, Visual Arts
3. Students from both schools have featured prominently in State and National Training Awards

- 2001 in Adelaide Casey Cobcroft won Gold in the National Worldskills competition for Retail
- 2001 Rebecca Heal won the NSW Vocation Education School Student of the Year
- 2003 Holly-Jo King was a Finalist in the NSW Vocational Education School Student of the Year
- 2004 in Brisbane Jared Welch won a Bronze in the National Worldskills Competition in Business Services
- 2006 in Melbourne Mac Densley won Gold in the National Worldskills Competition in Team Construction
- 2008 Jessica Heal was the New England Region School-Based Apprentice of the Year
- 2009 Eloise Brown was the New England Region Voacational School Student of the Year
- 2010 in Brisbane Jade Dixon won the gold medal in the National Worldskills competition in Retail
- The Gwydir Learning Region won the State Training Initiative Award in 2006

4. Gwydir Shire Council's vision is "To be the recognised leader in Local Government through continuous learning and sustainability." The realisation of this vision is borne out through its training record. Council:

- has gone from having 70% of its work force with no recognised qualifications in 2004 at amalgamation
- to 93% of its current personnel with AQF qualifications of Certificate II and above.
- The communities of Bingara and Warialda have approximately 40 people who have during the last four years become qualified with Certificate IV in Training and Assessment which will enable them to train through an RTO in their own fields of expertise such as:
 - Civil Construction
 - Building and Construction
 - Automotive mechanical
 - Horticulture
 - Risk Assessment and Occupational Health and Safety
 - First Aid
 - IT
 - Acute Care Nursing
 - Aged Care Nursing
 - Hairdressing
 - Heavy Equipment Operation – excavators, back hoes, forklifts
 - Heavy Vehicle Operation
 - Ceramics
 - Local Government Finance
 - Water operations
 - Fitness
 - Retail
 - Hospitality

Some Successful Projects

Aged Care Nursing

The local high school set up a class consisting of school-aged students and mature-aged students who were prepared to enroll as Year 11 students. A course couldn't be provided by the local training providers, so one was sourced from Onkaparinga TAFE in South Australia. This course was delivered by distance.

At a later date, a number of local providers (TAFE NEI and the local Community Colleges) were approached and were able to deliver the course locally, face-to-face.)

To date, we've had 110 graduates from this course, most of whom have found employment either in Warialda and Bingara or in nearby towns.

For many, this has given them their first opportunity in life to work in paid employment, and in some cases, it has given them the chance to break a generational problem of unemployment and to obtain paid work.

Vet Nursing

A Vet nursing class, studying Certificate III in Animal Care was formed and tuition was sought from TAFE Tamworth.

Among its students were a mature-aged woman who'd raised her own kids and had been told by her granddaughter that she was dumb because she didn't know how to work a computer.

She promptly enrolled at Warialda High School as a mature-aged Year 11 student, put on the brown-checked school uniform and attended classes.

She obtained the qualification she's always dreamed of having, and got a job as a Vet nurse with the local vet.

She now works as the Practice Manager for that Veterinary Practice and has had a series of trainees working under her supervision.

Another student of note in this class was a Year 11 boy who had always dreamed of working with "big cats".

He obtained his Certificate III qualification in animal care and secured work as the curator of big cats with a number of Zoos in Great Britain.

He now works as a Practice Manager of a large Sydney veterinary practice.

Hairdressing

Hairdressing was listed as one of the industries in which a shortage of skills existed.

Both schools in Warialda and Bingara commenced classes in Certificate II in Hairdressing, delivered remotely by Tamworth TAFE.

It involved students receiving lessons via a video link from Tamworth.

The link was not always the most effective nor reliable of methods to deliver tuition to 15 Year-old girls

We trained one of our local hairdressers in Warialda in Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and now she works at the High School one day a week as a mentor and tutor to the girls and the system works very well.

We also trained our Deputy Mayor – a recently retired hairdresser – in Cert 4 TAA and she now performs the same function at Bingara School.

Roxy Theatre and Building and Construction

The magnificent Roxy Theatre, situated in the main street of Bingara, is a striking building. It was built in 1936 by three Greek gentlemen, Emanuel Aroney, Peter Ferros and George Psaltis. It has a colourful history, far too involved to deal with it today.

It formally operated as a cinema from 1936 to 1958. The Roxy then remained dormant and untouched for over forty five years, before being faithfully restored to its original splendour and re-opening to the public in May 2004.

As part of this restoration process, it was decided that a “Green Room” was needed behind the stage area.

Council negotiated with TAFE to hire a number of unemployed young people from Bingara to be part of the team that did the construction. As part of the deal, the young people completed a Certificate II in General Construction, delivered on-site by TAFE New England – Moree Campus. This qualification would contribute 12 months towards an apprenticeship.

The room was built. The students gained a useful qualification and 12 months handy experience at working on a building site.

A number of those young people went on to complete a Certificate III Trade course in building – one of them secured employment with GSC as a member of the building team.

We used the same process to build an amenities block at the Bingara Showground and the Warialda Showground.

WOW Gymnasium

WOW stands for Work out Warialda.

It's a community gym staffed by a combination of people:

- ◇ By volunteer high school students who are pursuing Certificate III qualifications in Fitness as part of their HSC course
- ◇ By a paid employee of GSC who supervises the operation of the gym and manages the staff roster
- ◇ By a WHS PE teacher who works on a voluntary basis and acts as a mentor for the gym manager.

Our Gym Manager was Council's school-based trainee in Community Recreation.

She has gone on to obtain her Certificate III and IV in Fitness along with a number of other specialized qualifications like becoming an instructor in Punch Fit training, Group Fitness, Aerobics, Aquarobics, and Zumba.

She has just commenced studies for a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

The HSC students see the potential to gain a qualification that will afford them the opportunity to either secure work in the fitness industry when they go to university, thereby supplementing their student income, or to have a better chance of finding work in the local community if they choose not to go away to university.

The WHS PE teacher delivers the Certificate III Fitness course to his students on behalf of TAFE. He is eligible to do this because he has become dual accredited to teach in the VET sector and the school sector.

GSC sponsored him and another WHS teacher in Certificate IV in Training and Assessment because they could see the potential for building the capacity of the community to deal with the various social and economic pressures that were being exerted on our and other small communities.

This venture is a true partnership between many sectors of the community:

- By the local doctors at the medical centre who refer patients to the gym and conduct initial screenings;
- By the **GSC** who employ the gym manager, who have contributed financially to the project by purchasing new gym equipment and by paying the rent on commercial premises in the early days of the venture and by giving the students access to the financial expertise of Council staff to guide their business transactions;

- By the **New England Institute of TAFE** who agreed to deliver the Certificate III Fitness course in Warialda and provide a teacher to conduct the training, and who contributed a \$5000 seeding grant to purchase new gym equipment;
- By the **Warialda Sports Council** who matched the TAFE seeding grant by contributing \$5000 out of their funds because they could see the potential health and social benefits of such a venture;
- By the **business community** of Warialda who supported the venture in its early days by sourcing a suitable building in which to commence operations and by ensuring that it was suitably renovated and fitted out;
- By **WHS staff** who agreed to take up the slack in the regular school timetable to allow the two PE teachers to be present in the gym from 6:00am onwards each day to help get it going.

Trade Training Centres

The Gwydir Learning Region has been successful in its application to establish a Trade Training Centre in Warialda and Bingara under the current Government's new initiative.

We are in the process of building facilities which will provide pathways to Certificate III qualifications in Automotive Mechanical, Hospitality (Commercial Cookery), and Primary Industry (Grazing and Horticulture)

This project will also exhibit all of the characteristics of a true community partnership:

- GSC will provide assets
 - Land on which to construct a purpose-built workshop for TVET automotive studies
 - A commercial kitchen as part of the Roxy complex which can be extended to allow commercial cookery instruction to take place;
 - A large tract of land in Bingara on which to establish a purpose built teaching/learning complex to deliver courses in Primary Industry
 - Trained staff to deliver instruction in Horticulture, Heavy Plant Operation and Automotive studies;
- TAFE will provide:
 - teaching staff and equipment necessary to deliver instruction
 - Administrative support for teaching staff
- The schools will provide:
 - Teaching staff
 - Agricultural infrastructure to deliver Cert II Rural Studies as a lead up to Cert III

- Hospitality infrastructure in which to teach Cert II Hospitality as a lead up to Cert III
- The business and farming community have expressed their support for the project by way of offering opportunities for work placement as a mandatory requirement of the course. This offer of support has been enthusiastically expressed.

There are many other successful projects which have been undertaken by the GLR over recent years – too many to describe in detail in this report.

They all have the same components as the ones I've just mentioned:

- A vision by the leaders of our educational bodies and our local government bodies that “together we can make it happen”;
- A willingness by Council to commit physical and monetary resources to community educational projects;
- A Council which not only “talks the talk”, but “walks the walk” in the way it approaches the training of its work force;
- A school leadership team which is prepared to think creatively to resource educational projects, to approach each project with enthusiasm and compassion to make sure the kids get the best outcome possible, and to fight to overcome barriers which inevitably are presented by a large bureaucratic organization which finds it difficult not to adopt a “one size fits all” approach in the delivery of education;
- A variety of RTO's which have been prepared to try something different even though it may have posed a threat to their financial viability as they sought to operate in a commercial and competitive environment;
- A business community which has been prepared to support the schools by providing opportunities for school-based traineeships and apprenticeships and work placement and work experience places within their organization;
- A community which is prepared to celebrate the achievements of its students no matter whether they be academic achievements or vocational achievements

It is in this context that I present the report on how the GLR has used the 2011 Community Action Grant of \$2000.

As indicated in our application, our aim is to establish a scholarship fund to assist the youth of our local area to gain further education through a university or vocational training through a Registered Training Organisation.

This fund has been established under the umbrella of the Country Education Foundation of Australia (CEFA).

To do so, we have been required to adhere to the following procedure:

- Form a GLR committee (a sub-committee of Council) to oversee the operation of the fund
- Apply for incorporation of our organisation
- Establish a bank account

This having been done, we have sought interest from suitable candidates.

Our committee has selected as our first candidate, a Warialda student, Ryan Smith. Ryan has just completed his HSC at Warialda High School and in 2012 is studying at the University of New England.

Ryan was selected because of his conscientious attitude towards all of his school work and his willingness to contribute to the community. One of his contributions, for which Council has been very grateful, was as a volunteer in our community gymnasium. As a student at Warialda High School, he was pursuing studies in Certificate 3 in Fitness and as part of that course he was required to assist as an instructor in a gymnasium. During that time he exhibited an excellent attitude towards his work and was always willing to step in at the last moment to fill any vacancies that occurred on the roster.

In addition to this, he has displayed excellent community spirit in being a member of a number of community organizations such as the local P&A Society as well as various sporting teams and cultural organizations such as the Gwydir Learning Region Concert Band.

We have contributed \$1000.00 towards his board at St Albert's College.

We have received expressions of interest from other candidates, and we are in the process of considering them.

You may be interested to know how we have been able to multiply the benefits of your grant us through CEFA's organisation:

Your initial grant benefits us in the following way:

- CEFA provides \$10,000 of seed-funding to our new Gwydir Education Foundations in the first three years' of its establishment. They match locally raised and donated funds: dollar for dollar up to \$5,000 in the first year, 50c in the dollar up to \$3,000 in the second year and 25c in the dollar up to \$2,000 in the third year. So donors who contributed in the first year in particular know their donation will be matched dollar for dollar.
- CEFA's partnerships with education institutions means that students who receive grants from their local education foundation and then study with a CEFA Education Partner can potentially have their local grant matched dollar for dollar. CEFA is partners with all universities in NSW, ACT and SA and we also have partners in QLD and Victoria. As a student at UNE, Ryan will be eligible to receive financial benefits of up to \$1000.00 through their co-contribution
- CEFA's "Social Return on Investment" research in 2011 indicated that for every \$1 invested in CEFA and our local Education Foundations, we generate \$3.10 of social and economical value. This value is mostly directed towards local rural and regional youth however we also benefit the Education Partners, Education Foundation committee members and the communities in which the Education Foundations operate.

As we offer support to other students in our area, we will keep you updated.

We are excited about the prospect of assisting worthy students in our local area, and we thank you organisation for making it possible through this Community Action Grant.

