

## OUTBACK STORY

*Limestone Coast Community Leadership Program participants Hayley Burzacott and Henry Norcock at the Mount Gambier saleyards. Photo by Neil Newitt.*



# LEAD TIME

*The presence of strong leadership is a key reason why some rural, regional and remote communities are able to thrive, despite significant challenges. But what is community leadership and how can it be encouraged?*

STORY TERRI COWLEY

Great community leaders rarely admit that's what they are – the very nature of community is about being part of a group and giving others a voice. Jan Smith of Girgarre, Vic, is a shining example. What she and her fellow community members have achieved for their little dairy town (population 180) over the past 15 years is nothing short of astonishing.

"About 15 or 16 years ago the community went in to the Millennium Drought," Jan says. "We were shell-shocked because we'd never learnt to farm without water. People retreated – particularly men. We got a small council grant to put on a community barbecue – we thought we'd be lucky if we got 100 – well, we got 300. That was a wake-up call – a real light-bulb moment. People came and they stayed and stayed. They just wanted to talk."

Jan and others realised they needed to gather the community together on an ongoing basis, so they formed the Girgarre Development Group, a group of local volunteers who agreed to meet once a month. A friend of Jan's from another town suggested holding a produce market to fundraise and socialise. "At that first market we had not a lot of stalls but 1000 people! We ran three markets, stopped for winter and started in the spring again, and the market has continued on all those years," Jan says. They wanted some music to add a bit of atmosphere, so one of Jan's friends rounded up some musicians in Melbourne. Fast-forward >



to 2020, and Girgarre has this year held its 14th Moosic Muster. But just to be clear, this is no busk in the park. It ran for four days, included approximately 50 workshops covering just about every instrument you can think of, and included evening concerts with leading bands.

“The community has never questioned – they’ve always said, ‘What have we got to lose?’” Jan, 77, says. “The music festival has found its own place. It’s something we’re really proud of, but when it’s over we’re so stuffed we can hardly spit. There were people everywhere singing and jamming, we had jazz and blues sessions, guitars, tin whistles, banjos.”

Everyone pitched in to supply fresh, local food to about 1500 people, including the footy club, the CFA and the RSL. “It doesn’t matter which group of people, they all put up their hand to have a crack,” Jan says. “It’s that understanding that nobody owns anything. It’s not mine, it’s ours. A happy, engaged community can achieve a lot.”

The festival has spawned a \$400,000 soundshell and amphitheatre, and the community is now in the process of creating its own botanic gardens with a grand avenue and cafe. But it was a different story in the early 2000s when many businesses left town, including the post office, service station and produce store. The railway station had closed some decades before, as had the regional milk factory. What could have been the final nail in Girgarre’s coffin was the closure of the Heinz tomato-paste factory and the loss of more than 140 jobs in 2012. Ironically, this turned out to be a lifeline.

“They came to us and offered \$50,000 because they were leaving and wanted to give something back to the community,” Jan says. “We got around the table and we talked about it. After everything else that had gone, we wanted something they couldn’t take away. We wrote a submission to the board asking for the land and Heinz said, ‘We love your dream. Yes, you can have the 24 acres [9.7ha] plus three house blocks in town, plus the water right on the property’, which was an amazing donation to our town’s future.” The donated land will be the site of the gardens, which are currently being designed.

“We’ve been able to dream so big because, along the way, the community has owned it all,” Jan says. Community assets now include a car, a cottage with plant nursery, and event equipment such as a coolroom and portable toilets – all funded by the markets and the music program. The town is sustaining a kindergarten, primary school, recreation reserve and football club.

The revival of social aspects of the Girgarre community has borne fruit of the commercial kind. Last year, Australian Consolidated Milk opened a new factory there and is now working on a cheese plant. “They looked around and came back to Girgarre,” Jan says. “We had community forums for them to discuss what would happen. The planning process became so much simpler; no-one was worrying.”

A \$140 million solar farm with 360,000 panels has been approved to the west of town, and other businesses are looking to set up. “The welcome mat is out,” Jan says. “This has come about from being opened-minded

and having a really solid forum where people are safe to express their opinions.”

Jan arrived, reluctantly, in Girgarre as a young teacher in 1962. “I hated the place,” she says. “I was dumped here. I didn’t drive. I came from Echuca [46km away] and I’d never heard of the place.”

She met Garry, they had two daughters, and they built up a dairy farm from 50 to 630 cows. Garry passed away four years ago and Jan has retained 60ha of the property. “Now I wouldn’t live anywhere else,” she says.

Fellow community member, dairy farmer Athol McDonald, says Jan has good natural leadership skills that have enabled her to bring people together and help them “get organised”. “She has facilitated a real sense of community,” Athol says. “She has a passion for the community, she’s very intelligent and is able to get the feel of the community, and she knows how to handle

# “THE COMMUNITY HAS NEVER QUESTIONED – THEY’VE ALWAYS SAID, ‘WHAT HAVE WE GOT TO LOSE?’”

people. She’ll have a different style for different people.” Athol says his son Angus, 35, returned to Girgarre six years ago, after working as a builder, and is now helping on the farm. He’s part of a trend Jan has happily observed. “Ten to 15 years ago people were retiring in Girgarre,” Jan says. “But I’ve noticed in the past 12–18 months that a lot of the houses being sold are to younger people and that’s really good for our future,” Jan says. With only about a third of dairy farms left, land use is changing towards ventures such as flower-growing and goat farms.

Jan has seen many other community leaders emerge through this process. “I’ve seen individual growth of people too shy to speak at a meeting who are now quite happy to have their say,” she says. “The potential was always there but when a lot of things shut down, the sense of community became camouflaged. Once we struck the match, it was up and going again.”

It’s clear that good community leadership has created a new future for Girgarre. “When we started we were really on our knees,” Jan says. “We learnt as we went along. >

Musician Graeme Leake conducts the Girgarre Junkestra (an orchestra with instruments made from found objects), which performed at the opening of the soundshell in 2018, and (below) Jan Smith outside Girgarre Town Hall touting the town’s musical attractions.





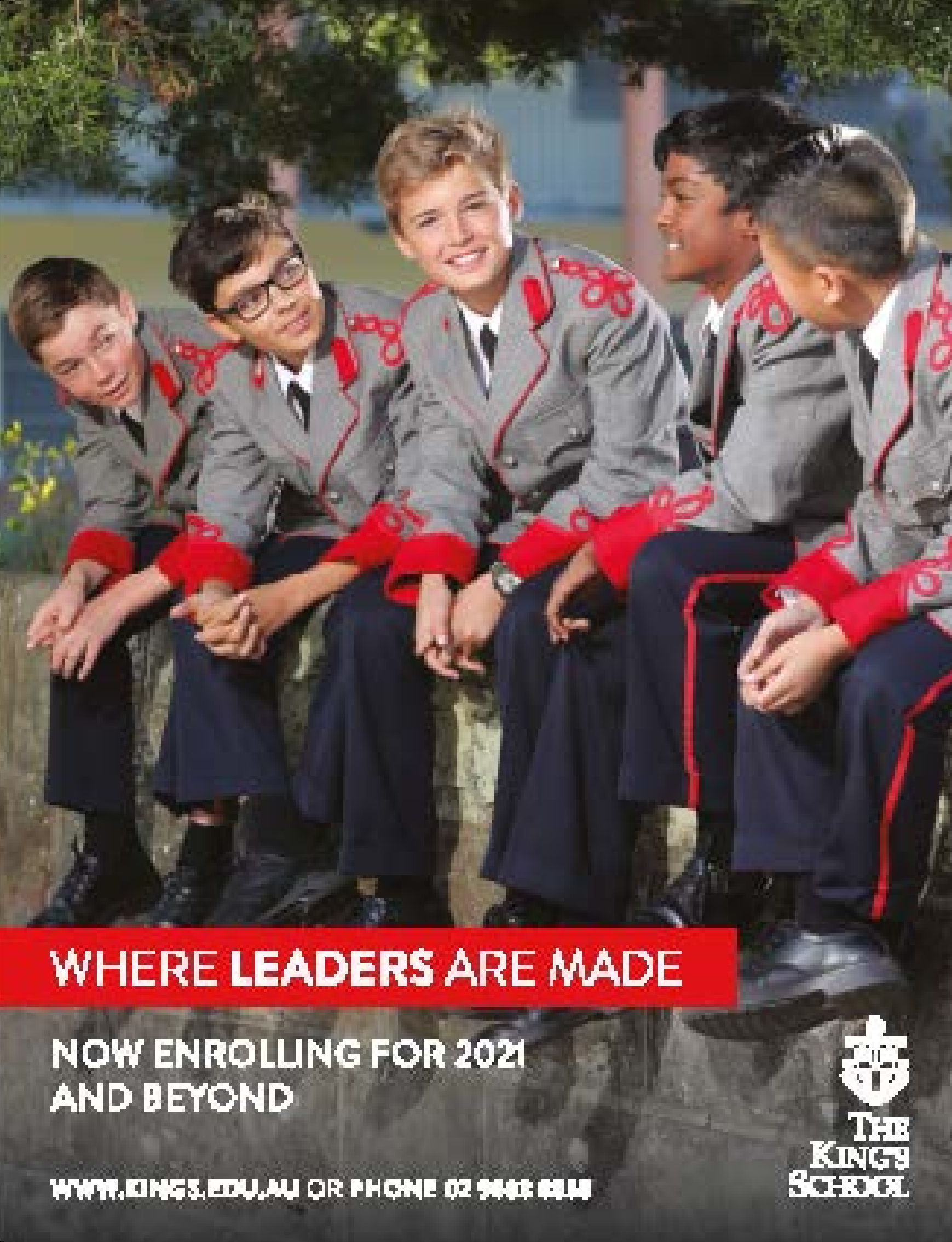


*SES volunteers demonstrate the work they do as part of the Leadership Great South Coast program.*

It all starts with that engagement; that conversation about what we can do, not what I can do or what I want. We were patient. We met every month and it melded us into a community that learnt to listen, share, rejoice, celebrate and say thank you.”

There are reasons why smaller communities such as Girgarre are more integrated and can work collectively for the common good, according to Professor Bronwen Dalton, head of the Department of Management at the University of Technology, Sydney. “There’s social capital theory, which shows there is a high degree of reciprocity that comes with a lot of face-to-face contact that you don’t get in big cities,” Bronwen says. “It’s about bridging social capital: people from different walks of life still have a lot to do with each other in rural locations – there’s the social clubs, the RFS, etc. This builds social cohesion among people from different backgrounds. They are more tolerant of difference and work together for the common good because they get to know each other. “The other theory – resource mobilisation theory – recognises that there are a lot of barriers to acting collectively, and these are broken down if you have a highly integrated community. This not only brings people together, it gives them exposure to charismatic leadership. In a small community everybody gets to see that kind of leadership and experience it. It’s a wonderful leadership that is altruistic and empathetic – people see others as leaders if they pass the test that they care about others.” Bronwen grew up on a sheep and cattle property

between Orange and Dubbo, NSW, and oversees the Master of Not-for-Profit and Social Enterprise, a 30-year-old postgraduate course undertaken by people seeking to increase their community leadership skills. “[French historian Alexis] de Tocqueville calls community organisations the schools of democracy,” she says. “It’s where people learn how to practise democracy. People who are in community organisations are more likely to participate in other organisations and contribute to democracy in other ways.” New approaches to strengthen and grow regional and remote communities are increasingly being explored. Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is a not-for-profit organisation that works with partners to alleviate disadvantage in Australian communities. Dan Code, SVA manager, consulting, says nearly one-third of Australia’s 24 million people live outside the nation’s metropolitan capital cities in regional and remote communities and, increasingly, these communities are dealing with unique social and economic hardships. “In many cases, people in regional and remote Australia experience higher (and rising) unemployment rates, lower life expectancy and lower educational outcomes than those living in urban Australia,” Dan says. “Communities, governments and social purpose organisations are seeking policies and projects that can promote social and economic development in these areas. It is increasingly recognised that approaches need to be community-led to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability. A community taking a central role helps to ensure solutions are adapted and



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*Martu senior law man Mukki Taylor came in from the Western desert in the mid-1960s and is a senior cultural advisor to Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ). OPPOSITE FROM TOP: KJ rangers put small mosaic burns into the landscape to protect it from wildfires and increase the biodiversity of the landscape; Martu ranger teams from Jigalong and Parnngurr meet at the McKay Range to undertake mosaic burning and visit important cultural sites.*

developed for the community’s specific characteristics. It can also contribute to the community’s greater sense of ownership of the solutions, and leverage its strengths, existing networks and infrastructure.”

Dan says good community leaders have a deep understanding of community issues, leadership skills to bring community members together, broad networks to draw on for input and support, and the self-confidence to engage and lead discussions. “These leaders help build a community’s capacity to contribute to its own development; they provide important input during the development of solutions, help galvanise community support and shepherd through their effective implementation,” he says. “A lack of investment in building this capacity and limited opportunities for leaders can create a leadership void ... There is great leadership potential in these communities, but it needs to be stimulated and fostered through more conscious investment in leadership skill development.”

Intentionally investing in expanding a community’s leadership capacity has the potential to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of that community’s solutions. Dan cites the Martu Leadership Program, a focused community education and development program designed to build broad-based capacity and create opportunities for Martu communities in the Pilbara, WA, as a great example of this. It is run by Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ), a Martu organisation established in 2005 to look after Martu culture and help build sustainable Martu communities. Since its establishment, almost 100 Martu have been able to participate.

“The program aims to support Martu men and women to build knowledge, skills, practical experience and relationships,” Dan says. “These will help the Martu community to engage effectively with government and other mainstream stakeholders, address social issues and

develop economic opportunities to shape a new future for Martu. The program has been an overwhelming success in building the leadership capacity of its participants and the community more broadly. It has empowered Martu, and improved their confidence, knowledge and social connections with each other and mainstream Australia.”

Slim Williams, a Martu man who took part in the program, says it gave him confidence to actively participate in meetings with other community organisations. “This leadership, it’s really strong,” he says. “We’re getting all our ideas from leadership.”

Manager, Strategy and Governance, Peter Johnson, who has worked for KJ for the past 12 years and lives in Newman, says many Martu elders grew up in the desert. “These elders are an expert in their society but have never had an opportunity to see how mainstream society operates, yet it has a great effect on their lives,” Peter says. “Understanding this is critical to community wellbeing.”

Peter says while the Martu have a very clear cultural hierarchy, they are constructing their own definition of community leadership. “We’re not building whitefella leaders,” Peter says. “We’re picking the Martu who are going to be leaders in future and investing heavily in them. It’s a generational program.”

Rural Youth has been a vital part of encouraging community leadership among young Tasmanians since it was first established as the Junior Farmers’ Clubs of Tasmania in 1950. Current president Jake Williams, 25, an auto-electrician from Sprent, north-western Tasmania, says members aged 15–30 belong to 14 youth clubs across the state, which organise community events. All members, plus a small paid staff, join together annually to organise the huge agricultural and machinery field day Agfest over three days at Carrick, near Launceston, which in 2019 was attended by more than 63,000 people and raised \$3.3 million.

Jake says he got involved as a way to lend a hand in the local community and also to make new friendships. He was just 23 when he took on the role of operations manager at Agfest, interacting with exhibitors, contractors, patrons and volunteers. “I wouldn’t be here without it,” Jake says of his experience with Rural Youth. “The skills I’ve been taught are unrivalled.”

Jake says without the work of the clubs, young people may lose interest in their rural communities. “It gives them something to hold on to and be proud of,” he says. “It broadens your connections.”

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DAVE GROVES PHOTOGRAPHY

*The vast site of AgFest, organised by Tasmania's Rural Youth.*

Jake is a volunteer firefighter with his local brigade, which he describes as “the central hub of our local community”. “Being exposed to different types of leadership throughout the brigade is certainly an eye-opener, whether it’s at a house fire or helping out farmers after the floods. Having great leaders within our brigade creates a positive vibe that keeps members coming back and ensuring the community stays safe.”

Rural Youth also offers study tours overseas and on board the *Young Endeavour* as a way of building leadership skills, as well as short courses covering subjects such as governance, leadership and agricultural training.

As chairperson of the Tasmanian Community Fund (TCF), Sally Darke is also in a position to encourage leadership in the island state. In 2016, board members of the TCF held regional forums in which communities expressed concern about where the next leaders were coming from. “Whether it was the footy club or the rotary club ... there was a lack of people stepping up,” Sally says. So, the TCF made a five-year commitment to do something about it, birthing the organisation’s Emerging Community Leaders Program in 2017.

“It’s not based on age – more on where they see themselves in regard to their leadership journey,” Sally says. A 12-month course includes 10 residential days in different parts of the state. “We work on them developing themselves as leaders, then developing others and also on developing volunteers,” Sally says. Participants pay about \$250 and get \$8000 worth of training, subsidised by the TCF.

Sally lives in the rural community of Relbia, just out of Launceston and, after years in the corporate world working in human resources, is now a non-executive board member of TasWater, TasPorts and the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association. “Leadership is a skill and some people haven’t necessarily had the opportunity,” Sally says. “Maybe a generation ago your parents were leaders in the local community, so you would be. We went through a period of time when people got busy and we haven’t had the same level of volunteering. Maybe some of the organisations people are involved with aren’t big enough to have a pool of funds for training and development. We’ve been able to fill a gap.”

Since 2000, TCF has assessed around 9100 applications for funding, and awarded more than \$106 million to more than 3000 projects run by organisations that are seen to be enhancing wellbeing and improving social, environmental and economic outcomes for their communities.

Community projects in 2019 included an art program to engage rural youth in the town of Smithton, a project providing social and cultural participation opportunities for homeless young people, and another giving parents practical tools to encourage reading among children.

As a result of the support TCF has been able to give emerging leaders, Sally has seen individuals putting up their hands to stand for local government and presenting at international conferences in their fields of work. “There is a collective impact of them all working together and bringing people along from their own community to work

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Regional Leadership Australia's Kat Baddeley at the farmers' markets at Clunes, Vic. OPPOSITE: Ali Auld (left) coordinates the Limestone Coast Leadership Program with 2019 participants (l-r) Henry Norcock, Hayley Burzacott and Chris Eastwood.

together, for whatever the issue is in that community at that time," she says. "Communities that have been vulnerable, struggling ... we're starting to see some change."

One of the country's longest-running leadership programs is the Gippsland Community Leadership Program (CLP), established in 1996. During the recent bushfire crisis, the Gippsland community turned to its alumni. Katrina Baddeley, CEO of Regional Leadership – a member-based organisation established to support regional communities to strengthen leadership in rural, remote and regional locations – says the leaders were quick to act. "Organisations were reaching out to alumni to help on the ground because they're recognised leaders," Kat says. "They know they've got a conduit into a group of leaders that will hit the ground running."

Graduate of the Gippsland CLP – former police commissioner Ken Lay – heads up the new agency Bushfire Recovery Victoria. Kat describes Ken as "all about listening to the locals". "He's really good at adaptive leadership," she says. "It's not about a top-down approach; it's really inclusive. He naturally gives people that comfort to want to take part. He doesn't come across as a teller, but as a doer and an inspirer."

In 2019, Regional Leadership became a national organisation (previously it only covered Victoria), with the aim of helping professionalise community leadership

qualifications and training, and to help leaders connect across states. Every region of Victoria is covered by a community leadership program, with 4000 alumni, and Kat wants to see this replicated nationwide. She is working with Bank of IDEAS, Charles Sturt University (CSU) and Rural Aid to develop a national regional community leadership program. Last year CSU offered an inaugural graduate certificate in community leadership.

"I'm overwhelmed year after year with the strength of what people can learn from each other, when they are with people they would never usually have connected with," Kat says. In smaller towns, there is a heavy reliance on the same people to show leadership. "Some people in these towns don't see themselves as leaders, but they naturally dig in and do what needs to be done," Kat says. "All of us have the ability to lead – you don't need a formal title. It's getting in and doing something that makes a difference."

Five years ago the Limestone Coast Economic Development Group in South Australia conducted a survey about what was needed for its region. The result was a Mount Gambier-based community leadership program hosted by Limestone Coast Local Government Association, which kicked off in 2019 with 16 participants. A further 17 people are undertaking it in 2020.

Program coordinator Ali Auld says even at this early stage, the flow-on effects to the community are obvious. "One participant last year, who is legally blind, has

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*Shorewell Presents – an event for the residents of Shorewell Park, near Burnie, Tas – was assisted by FRRR through its Small Grants for Rural Communities program.*



*FRRR's Sarah Matthee and Natalie Egleton at the Fire Fight Australia concert in Sydney in February. FRRR was a major beneficiary of the concert, held to raise funds for national bushfire relief.*

been invited to join advisory boards, which has enabled a better perspective on disability,” she says. “This can improve services for people with disabilities. Inclusion and accessibility are important because people are able to have a say about their community.”

Ali says every participant stepped out of their comfort zone. “Our aims are really around creating diversity in leadership, while also developing and supporting a lot of people who have the ability to think adaptively,” she says. “This is about helping those people who are not necessarily in paid leadership roles and for them to recognise that they can influence and advocate for change, just as easily as anyone else.”

Last year’s cohort ranged in age from 23 to 62 and came from various backgrounds and towns. As part of the program they worked on community projects such as waste management, support for local start-up businesses and transport improvements.

Ali says while government funding was used to set up the program, it is sustained by support from business and community organisations. “We did a lot of research on leadership programs prior to bringing one to our region,” she says. “It’s important to understand our regional issues and opportunities. The more people around the table that have an understanding about what the key issues are, the better.”

The Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) embodies what successful communities all over Australia know – that what communities need to survive and thrive already exists within them. FRRR CEO Natalie Egleton says that early on in its 20-year history the organisation supported “big ticket items” such as infrastructure, but found this didn’t always lead to lasting outcomes. “What we’ve found over time is that the thing that drives prosperity is the people,” Natalie says. “You can have all the great infrastructure in a town, but if you don’t have the people, they’re just buildings.”

Today, every grant given by FRRR is aimed at strengthening relationships and leadership capabilities. “If you take the example of a grant for a community hall, we’re really investing in those leaders involved – the movers and shakers behind the scenes: often those who don’t call themselves leaders,” Natalie says. “It’s about resourcing a community group to better do its work; supporting volunteer committees to go through governance training, for example. Building on the strengths of those communities. Often building capability and capacity is helping them to do what they do better.”

In 2018/19 FRRR gave out \$11.6 million in 677 grants, ranging from \$500 to nearly \$1 million. Natalie describes the smaller grants as being “a bit like microfinance” that

will “spin out lots of different things”. “It’s not about seeking the biggest, sexiest things. It’s really about seeding and the community running with the thing,” she says. “Smaller places can feel quite forgotten. They can make a small amount of money go a long way. Our grant can be a vote of confidence for other funders.”

Natalie says there is often an opportunity for renewal and engagement after natural disasters, which is what occurred following the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires. “The leaders were there, of course, but they weren’t supported,” Natalie says. The establishment of the Rivers and Ranges Community Leadership Program in 2011 was the direct result of an FRRR-funded study into how to build strong regional leaders to face future challenges. In the five municipalities affected by the disaster, there was a growing awareness of volunteer fatigue among people who stepped into leadership roles without having the networks or skills to support them.

“There is fatigue among some volunteers, so there is a big issue around succession planning that we need to work on to get the next generation involved,” Natalie says. “It’s something we’re actively and strategically thinking about. Community groups may need to be more viable, agile and responsive, such as having umbrella committee structures for different organisations, with shared supports and back-

end functions, and using smart technologies. Maybe even coming up with micro-sized roles for people to do specific tasks for set amounts of time.”

Natalie says there is deep concern about the survival and viability of some areas in rural and regional Australia, particularly in relation to climate challenges. “But there’s also a lot of optimism,” she says. “People in communities are finding solutions. It’s an attitude of, ‘This is our place, this is our country, we’re going to make this work.’”

Disaster was a catalyst for community renewal in the South Burnett region of Queensland following floods in 2013. The alumni of a Department of Primary Industries course approached the local Red Earth Community Foundation and, with the help of FRRR, a community leadership program was born. Seven years down the track it’s going strong, with well-known cattle farmer and ABC director Georgie Somerset as its chair. She says the community’s investment in nurturing local leaders has led to positive changes.

“They’ve had the confidence to apply for new jobs, or expand their businesses and some are running for local government,” Georgie says. “I talk about it being a cross web of threads. It’s very easy to live in a silo in a community. When you bring together people from industry, from the social sector, mining, natural resources



– all sorts of areas – and develop those relationships and trust, you see people working across the community, not just up and down. People gain a real understanding of other people’s perspectives, and by providing a safe environment in which to explore these perspectives we can remove filters and understand people. That’s really valuable in a world where more and more of the discussion is black and white. We need a ‘grey space’, a safe space for conversations – where people aren’t wedded to one view or another. Then perhaps they will give up something for the gain of all because they’ve been exposed to other people’s views.

“Rather than being a community that says, ‘Come and rescue us’, the community says, ‘This is the kind of future we’d like to design’, and then collaboration can lead to a pathway to get there. If a community can determine its own future in a robust manner, it will be much richer and more likely to attract people to work with it.”

Community leaders Georgie admires include cattle industry champion Larry Acton, the first president of AgForce Queensland, who has two blind daughters and was determined to give them every opportunity to reach

their potential when they were growing up. “Sometimes leadership can be unintentional – they start with one thing in mind, but their ability to connect, communicate and collaborate, and enjoy doing that, means they have a large impact,” Georgie says.

Georgie grew up with strong role models in both of her parents, who volunteered for the pony club, the local show and the picnic races in New England, NSW, and then Winton, Qld. “We grew up knowing communities function because people turn up and help,” she says. “It’s how regional Australia ticks. My parents seemed to have a lot of fun doing that. It wasn’t that they saw it as a chore. You gain great friends. You move through seasons of your life and volunteer in different roles.”

Three decades ago, when Georgie moved to the South Burnett after marrying husband Rob, she found very few local people her age [early 20s] and even fewer running their own businesses from home, as she was. So she jumped at the opportunity to help establish the Queensland Rural Women’s Network in 1993, which has fulfilled a vital role in empowering communities. >

*Community leader of Queensland’s South Burnett and beyond, Georgie Somerset. Photo by David Kelly.*

“COMMUNITIES FUNCTION  
BECAUSE PEOPLE TURN  
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## OUTBACK STORY



Lynnelle Seiler (front, right) teaches tai chi at Boondooma, Qld, providing a focal point for her community.

"For me, community leadership is about people who see a need in their community and they can see a solution and they find a way to make that happen," Georgie says. "It's critical to bring along like-minded people to help you." She says one such local person is Lynnelle Seiler, who took a leap of faith when she left her job as a physical education teacher to set up a gym in the district of Boondooma. The gym is still going strong 20 years later and has become a focal point for the community, offering classes tackling osteoporosis, incontinence and farm injuries, as well as yoga and tai chi.

"It's made healthy living more acceptable," Georgie says. "We've had a resurgence of babies in our community because of young people who have come back. I think it's things like that that make a difference, because someone had the courage to take her skills and meet a need. It's people like that who provide community leadership because they change the conversation. They give people an opportunity to congregate around something. They make the community more liveable."

The sign as you enter Santa Teresa (Ltyentye Apurte Community), in the East MacDonnell Ranges, NT, states, 'Many voices, one dream, building a quality desert lifestyle'. And it appears this community has the recipe right. In 2019 it beat all comers to win the title of

Australia's Most Sustainable Community at the Tidy Towns Awards. Santa Teresa was also winner of the Dame Phyllis Frost Litter Prevention, Environmental Communication and Engagement, Community Health, Wellbeing and Interest and Young Legends: Group categories.

"Santa Teresa represents a comprehensive working model of a community driven to strive to create a vibrant sustainable environment for themselves and future generations to live and work," says Gail Langley, judge of Australian Sustainable Communities – Tidy Towns. "As a community, they continue to evolve through necessity in a changing world, they are willing to learn and adapt in a unique environmental, social and political arena."

Annalisa Young has lived in Santa Teresa all her life and is the MacDonnell Regional Council's service coordinator. "Council got together with the local Aboriginal population and school and talked about what was needed to make the community healthier and more sustainable, especially for our kids," she says. "It wasn't that hard. We had a couple of meetings and community working bees. Kids would go out with a group leader from each of the working groups and pick up rubbish."

She says the solutions to problems or challenges in communities need to be found within. "They need to be looking at people actually out on the ground," Annalisa says. "People who know what's going on in our remote >



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OUTBACK STORY

communities. Those are the kinds of people that need to be targeted. The leaders are already here, but they're not really being identified in the bigger picture."

Face-to-face meetings are particularly important in building good relationships in Indigenous communities. "Young people stay in the community – elders try really hard to keep them," Annalisa says. "If you keep leadership going, you will end up with a better place to live in."

This community of East Arnernte people was established as a Catholic mission in the 1950s and Christianity still plays a big part. "The elders that are here are really good leaders," Annalisa says. "There is good communication and relationships with community members."

Annalisa says stable, continuous community leadership has led to positive outcomes. "It's about building trust and good relationships," she says. "The leaders organise community meetings and encourage each other on how to do good things for the community." One example of this is an annual three-day community sports carnival. Another is a partnership between the local Atyenhenge Atherre Aboriginal Corporation, the Northern Territory Government, the Central Lands Council, the Melbourne Cricket Club and the Melbourne Football Club to turn the town's oval from dirt to grass, with the aim of creating a regional sports hub (issue 127, p22).

"It's all coming from the people and people taking control – that's really important out on community," Annalisa says. She says community leaders are working to address other issues, including better housing and roads. "We don't look to outsiders coming in, telling us what's best for the community or what we need. What we've learnt out here is we've had so many non-Indigenous people come out to the community. Once they leave, everything they've worked for goes as well. That's why community people have learned it's time for us to take control and take the lead on what we need."

Back in 1991, a range of bodies including the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (now AgriFutures Australia), the National Farmers' Federation and the Country Women's Association came together to look at the challenges facing rural industries and communities. An issue that concerned all was population decline. They determined there were several factors that would help change this trend, but that the most critical of them was community leadership.

The result of this was the formation of the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation (ARLF) the following year and Matt Linnegar has been its chief executive for the past six years. "We've had a really good chance to look critically at that issue," Matt says. "Eighty percent of Australia lived >



Council employees and Santa Teresa residents, Graham and Annalisa Young.

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