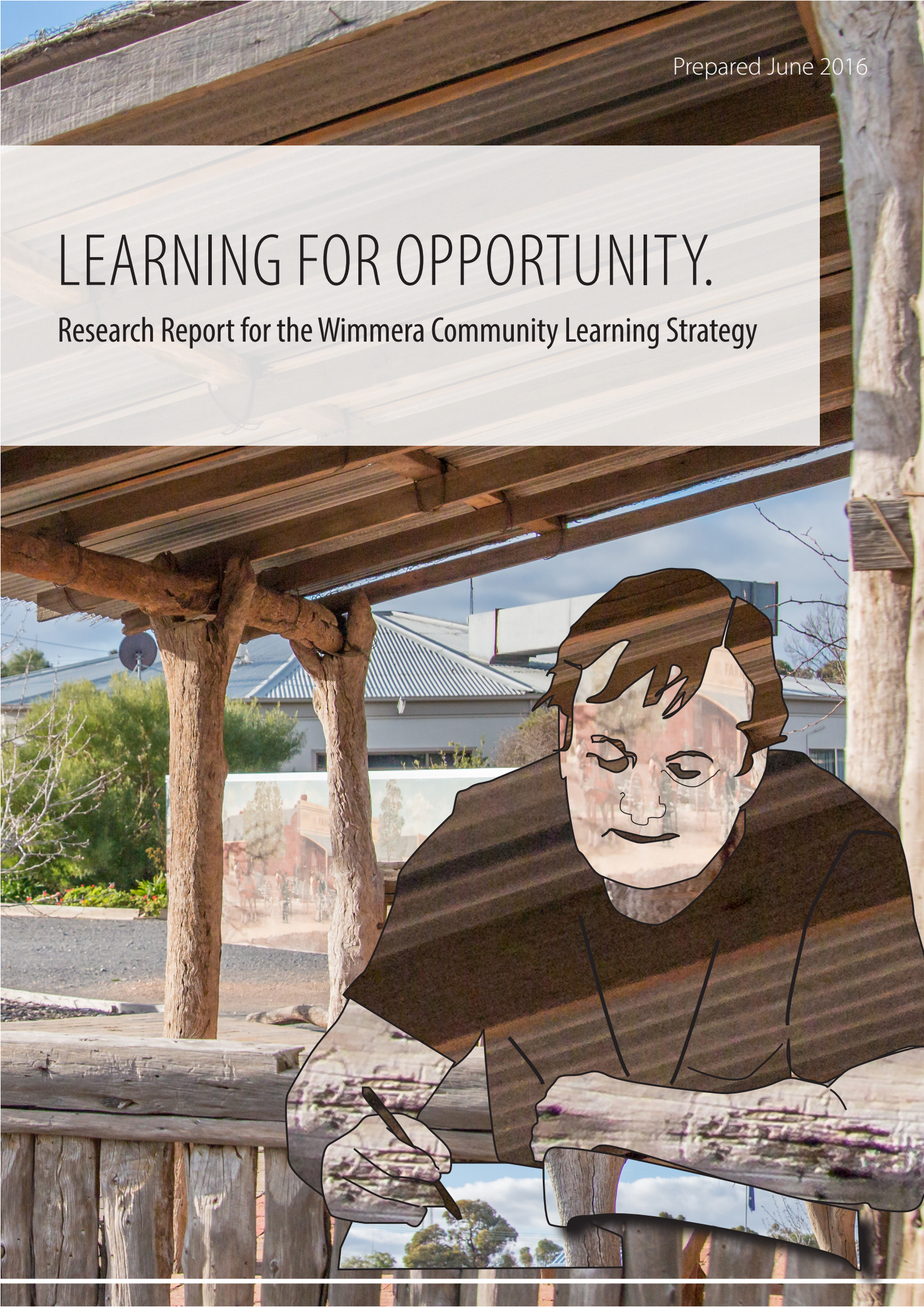


Prepared June 2016

# LEARNING FOR OPPORTUNITY.

Research Report for the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy





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- Stawell Neighbourhood House
- Horsham Community House
- Warracknabeal Neighbourhood House
- Rainbow Neighbourhood House
- Nhill Neighbourhood House Learning Centre
- St Arnaud Resource Centre
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- Suzi Young
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# 1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adult community education has a critical role to play within the education sector. It fills a gap by providing access to education for people that might otherwise not engage with learning. Learning and the ability to learn are essential enablers for individuals to lead productive and rewarding lives and make a contribution to creating just, healthy and prosperous societies<sup>1</sup>. However, adult community education is 'an undervalued community asset'<sup>2</sup> that could provide more value to the community with the right support.

In Victoria, the Department of Education and Training supports adult community education through funding Learn Local courses delivered by community organisations known as Learn Local Organisations. The intent of these courses is to engage adult learners who may have previously experienced barriers to education and support them onto a pathway into employment, further education or training.

In 2015, a consortium of Learn Local Organisations in the Wimmera received funding from the Department of Education and Training through the Adult Community

and Further Education (ACFE) Board and the Capacity and Innovation Fund (CAIF) to deliver the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy (WCLS) project (the project).

The project has been designed in response to the recognition of funding, compliance and effectiveness challenges facing the adult community education sector in the Wimmera. The WCLS project comprised four key components that each contributed to the formation of the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy:

- Research, led by Think Impact.
- Learn Local capacity building, led by the Wimmera HUB Inc. and Stawell Neighbourhood House.
- Stakeholder relationships and partnership development, led by Regional Advance.
- Project communications led by the Wimmera HUB Inc. and Volunteering Western Victoria.

This report constitutes the outputs of the research.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs and Curriculum Corporation, August 2002. 'Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education', Department of Education & Training, State Government of Victoria. 2014, viewed on 20 May 2016, [http://www.scseec.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/Reports%20and%20publications/Archive%20Publications/ACE/ACE\\_Declaration%202002.pdf](http://www.scseec.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/Reports%20and%20publications/Archive%20Publications/ACE/ACE_Declaration%202002.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> National VET Equity Advisory Council, 2010. Equity Blueprint 2011-2016. 2010, viewed on 20 May 2016, <https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/NVEAC-Equity-Blueprint-2011-to-2016-Creating-Futures-Achieving-Potential-through-VET.pdf>

# 1.1 Findings and Recommendations

The research findings and the vision are framed around three key themes *'sustainable, responsive and effective'* to reflect the interconnected and dynamic nature of the system.

These themes have been developed to better articulate the shared vision of the Department of Education and Training, the Learn Local sector, and their stakeholders. The current Department's vision is for the sector to be "sustainable and relevant". The overriding response from the sector asks for the system to be more than just *relevant* to community needs; it asks for it to be genuinely *responsive* to the community needs.

Further, all parties share the common vision for the sector to be *effective* in its ability to drive outcomes for learners, further education providers, employers and communities in the Wimmera (and perhaps more broadly).

Key findings:

- The current business model that is based on delivery hours per student is unsustainable – in particular for organisations delivering in rural and remote locations with higher needs populations. This model does not allow for the necessary learner engagement activities, professional development, partnership building, networking or advocacy required by a sustainable, responsive and effective sector.
- The ability for the sector to be responsive to learner, community and employer needs is limited by the capacity and capability of the Learn Local Organisations. These limitations are further enhanced by external perceptions that the sector delivers "lifestyle courses" and are not an avenue of research or connections for people who are seeking jobs or pathways to further education.
- To be effective and deliver outcomes for learners and beyond requires a broader understanding of the value created by the sector. This includes a recognition of the value created by supporting progress towards a readiness for employment, further education and training that includes an individual's confidence, social engagement skills, English language and communication skills, and self-esteem.

During the conduct of this research, it became clear that adult community education and the interconnectivity of services are not creating the desired outcomes. The findings reveal a large, and growing, number of people who are disconnected from education, employment and participation in society. The adult community education system has been found to be struggling to deliver its goals, yet good people are working with a profound sense of optimism and, with the right support, the situation can be improved.

Therein lies the purpose of the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy.

*'sustainable,  
responsive and  
effective'*

## 1.2 A vision for the Wimmera

The key recommendations for the development of the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy are summarised below.

### **Towards a sustainable sector**

- Recommendation 1: Build a valued and recognised adult community education sector.
- Recommendation 2: Strengthen the capacity of Learn Local Organisations.
- Recommendation 3: Foster sustainable business models.
- Recommendation 4: Advocate for sector reform through cross-government department funding models.

### **Towards a responsive sector**

- Recommendation 5: Understand local learner needs.
- Recommendation 6: Understand local employment needs and trends.
- Recommendation 7: Foster collaborative and community relevant program and partnership design.

### **Towards an effective sector**

- Recommendation 8: Develop an impact oriented adult community education sector based on an outcomes framework at an individual and community level.
- Recommendation 9: Engage learners where they need to be engaged e.g. service or activity touch-points or life transitions.
- Recommendation 10: Create connected learning pathways.

# 2

## INTRODUCTION

In April 1999, Australia's Federal and State Ministers of Education declared:

*"Australia's future depends on each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated and just society."*<sup>3</sup>

The capacity of individuals and groups to participate in developing their own learning is imperative for improvement of their quality of life. Through learning, people acquire diverse skills that can be applied in a variety of circumstances. This supports capacity and confidence building, enabling learners to tackle wider social and economic challenges, contribute to their own communities and experience a more rewarding life.

A just, prosperous and healthy society should enable all of its citizens to develop their full potential and become active and informed citizens. To fully realise this goal, we must evolve into a dynamic learning society, that views community education as central to community and economic development rather than just a sector of education. Adult community education has the capacity to make a critical contribution to lifelong learning and thereby combat social exclusion.

*"The new disadvantaged are those that do not know how to learn."*<sup>4</sup>

Adult community learning opportunities are as important as schools, colleges and universities in realising the vision of a dynamic learning society, but some sectors of the Australian community are excluded from the formal education system. Adult community learning offers essential skills, particularly for those who are excluded. It can increase opportunities to progressing into further and higher education, into employment or into more positive participation in community.

To realise the vision, the whole of the education system, other public services and the voluntary and private sectors must collaborate. Further, local communities must develop productive partnerships and interconnectivity among agencies relating to a wide range of social, economic and health as well as educational needs.



<sup>3</sup> Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs and Curriculum Corporation, August 2002. 'Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education', Department of Education & Training, State Government of Victoria. 2014, viewed on 20 May 2016, [http://www.scseec.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/Reports%20and%20publications/Archive%20Publications/ACE/ACE\\_Declaration%202002.pdf](http://www.scseec.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/Reports%20and%20publications/Archive%20Publications/ACE/ACE_Declaration%202002.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Galbally, R. and Wong, S. 2008, 'How learning Towns Build Social Inclusion: A model of community governance to build strong, cohesive communities', ACFE, State Government of Victoria.



# 3

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

### 3.1 Project purpose

The WCLS project (the project) is a response to the recognition of funding, compliance and effectiveness challenges facing the adult community education sector in the Wimmera. The Wimmera Community Learning Strategy project comprised four key components that each contributed to the formation of the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy:

- Research, led by Think Impact.
- Learn Local capacity building, led by the Wimmera HUB Inc. and Stawell Neighbourhood House.
- Stakeholder relationships and partnership development, led by Regional Advance.
- Project communications led by the Wimmera HUB Inc. and Volunteering Western Victoria.

The purpose of this research is to guide and inform the WCLS by providing deep insight into the conditions that underpin and influence the adult community learning sector.

The research was conducted in parallel to the three other key project components. From the outset of the WCLS project it was acknowledged by the sector that organisations delivering Learn Local courses were experiencing governance challenges and operating in isolation of each other with no formal networks to engage and build partnerships. Exploring the dynamics within all of these components was crucial to enhancing a holistic understanding and building capacity for the adult community learning sector in the Wimmera.

The WCLS is intended to drive genuine region-wide collaboration and engagement and make a significant contribution to the educational, economic and social future of the Wimmera. It will enable expanded and diversified educational offerings to be developed by LLOs in the Wimmera,

and provide recommendations to enhance links between stakeholders, build stronger governance mechanisms and create a flow-through to further education, employment and positive participation in the community.

Specifically, the four key components of the project were designed to assist LLOs in:

- designing and implementing targeted and community-relevant programs in localities which are not well serviced currently
- improving pathways to further study or employment, particularly for those facing social, economic, geographic and other impediments to learning
- empowering communities to engage with the Learn Local sector and community learning
- developing sustainable partnerships between the Learn Local sector and community and industry partners that enable collaborative identification of community learning needs
- increasing the organisational sustainability of LLOs through strengthened governance capacity.

### 3.2 Project scope and structure

The WCLS project was conducted across the Wimmera region of Victoria, inclusive of the following Local Government Areas:

- West Wimmera
- Hindmarsh
- Horsham Rural City
- Yarriambiack
- Northern Grampians

The project structure was established as follows:





Figure 1: WCLS project structure

## 3.3 Project partners

The WCLS project involved collaboration with a consortium of LLOs including the Wimmera HUB Inc. (Horsham), Stawell Neighbourhood House, Volunteering Western Victoria and St Arnaud Community Resource Centre. Project funding was sourced from the ACFE Board through the Capacity and Innovation Fund (CAIF). Independent consultants Think Impact and Regional Advance were engaged as key members of the project team and were responsible for specific elements of the project as outlined above, as well as contributing to the development of the WCLS.

In addition, a Project Reference Group (PRG) comprising 17 various sectors of the Wimmera community was established. The PRG was made up of representatives from Neighbourhood Houses, Registered Training Organisation (RTOs), business networks, schools, Job Services Australia (JSA), Local Government, community services and Indigenous agencies.

## 3.4 Research scope

As a key component of developing the WCLS, research was conducted to inform the recommendations for relevance, capacity and sustainability of organisations that create pathways to further education and employment.

The research component sought to identify recommendations to:

- better identify course needs and offerings
- improve pathways to further study or employment particularly for the socially, economically and geographically disadvantaged
- empower communities to engage with the Learn Local sector (and vice versa) to increase access participation, achievement and stimulation of community development
- build partnerships to improve learning pathways and community interconnectivity.

This Research Report sets out the methodology, findings and recommendations arising from the research component of the WCLS project. The recommendations directly contribute to the development of the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy.

## 3.5 Research approach

Our research approach was based on the principles of action research, which combines fact finding and problem solving, particularly in a sector context. The goal of action research is to improve the quality of action in a sector by creating an involved collaboration between researchers, industry participants and stakeholders. It reflects the principle that full understanding of a sector requires direct stakeholder feedback and contribution.

### 3.5.1 Research methodology

The Wimmera Community Learning Strategy research was undertaken in six key stages as illustrated below.

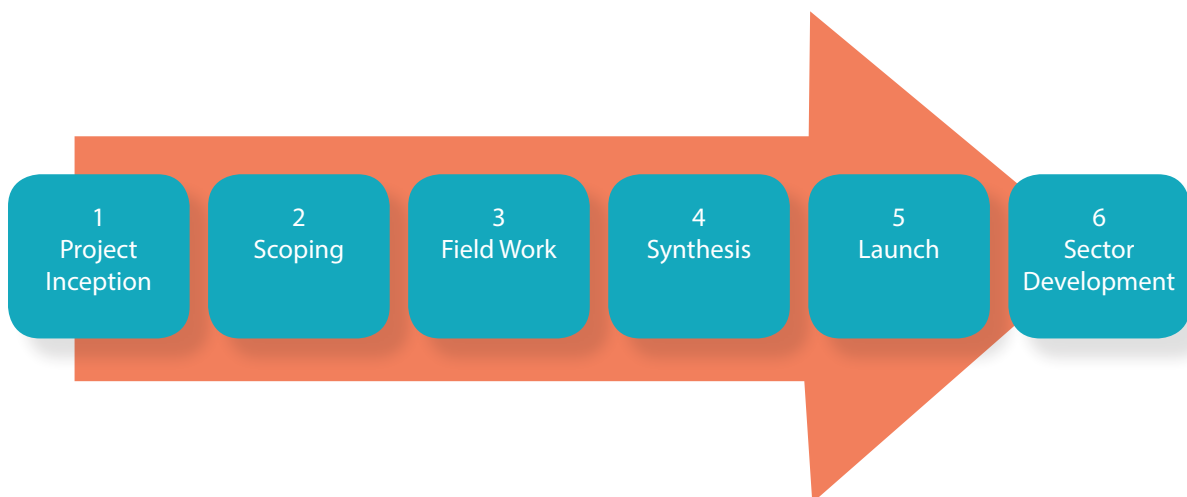


Figure 2: Research methodology



### *3.5.1.1 Phase 1: Project inception*

The inception of the project involved a kick-off meeting between all of the project partners to establish timelines, deliverables and accountabilities. In order to generate region-wide collaboration and engagement, the establishment and composition of the Project Reference Group was discussed.

### *3.5.1.2 Phase 2: Scoping*

In consultation with the Project Reference Group a Research Project Plan was drafted in order to record all elements of the project and formalise the roles and responsibilities of the project partners.

This phase included identification and mapping of stakeholders in the community learning sector, as well as mapping LLO programs and opportunities for collaborative program development within the sector.

During this phase, extensive desktop research was undertaken in academic journal and newspaper articles, ACFE-funded research, research carried out by Foresight Lane and Starfish Consulting, as well as Government reports and documents.

### *3.5.1.3 Phase 3: Fieldwork*

The desktop research shaped our approach to Phase 3, providing the context for fieldwork design and informing selection of stakeholders and method of engagement with them. As a result, a wide range of relevant stakeholders was

activated throughout the Wimmera region and elsewhere. Stakeholder engagement was undertaken using methods including workshops and focus groups, face-to-face interviews, industry consultation, public meetings, in-depth interviews, filmed case studies and via a targeted survey. Perspectives on 'hard to reach' learners were gained through consultation with organisations that work with individuals and families potentially experiencing structural and situational barriers to education, in addition to the existing learner surveys and focus groups.

### *3.5.1.4 Phase 4: Synthesis*

This phase included all activities associated with amalgamating findings, developing reports and ensuring a robust quality process. The results of the synthesis phase comprise the content of this report.

### *3.5.1.5 Phase 5: Research launch*

To ensure the research is influential and results in positive change, a launch event is planned for the end of 2016. The launch will be an opportunity to present the Research Report and its recommendations and simultaneously establish the role of the WCLS stakeholders in strengthening community learning.

### *3.5.1.6 Phase 6: Sector development*

This research is intended to provide the foundation for ongoing sector development as part of the overall Wimmera Community Learning Strategy.

# 4

## ADULT COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN VICTORIA

### 4.1 ACFE Board

The Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board is a Statutory Authority in Victoria, established by the Education and Training Reform Act 2006. The ACFE Board advises the Minister for Training and Skills on matters relating to adult education in Victoria<sup>5</sup>.

Through the ACFE Board, the Victorian Government provides funding to community-based LLOs and two Adult Education Institutions: the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) and Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES)<sup>6</sup>.

The ACFE Board also operates a Capacity and Innovation Fund (CAIF) that provides opportunities for LLOs to develop and implement projects designed to meet learner needs and to increase participation and attainment in pre-accredited and accredited training programs. The Fund has four project streams:

- Stream 1: Engaging Learners on Pathways for Achievement.
- Stream 2: Communities of Practice for Quality.
- Stream 3: Partnerships for Access.
- Stream 4: Strengthening Learn Local Provision.

### 4.2 ACFE Regional Councils

The ACFE Board has eight Regional Councils across Victoria, each with nine voluntary members who are appointed by the Minister for Training and Skills. The ACFE Board (Board) and Regional Councils (Councils) are focused on "increasing the educational participation and attainment of adults to improve social cohesion and to boost the human and social capital of Victoria"<sup>7</sup>.

The Regional Councils comprise:

- **Regional**
  - Barwon South Western, Gippsland, Grampians, Hume and Loddon Mallee.
- **Metropolitan**
  - Eastern Metropolitan, North Western Metropolitan and Southern Metropolitan

The role of the Regional Councils is to:

- provide expertise and local knowledge about adult education needs
- advise the ACFE Board on regional priorities
- implement plans and policies that promote and support adult education provision
- recommend resource allocations to LLOs in their regions in line with priorities and guidelines established by the ACFE Board.

This project is being conducted within the Grampians ACFE Regional Council. The strategic priorities of this Regional Council are further described in Section 6.

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<sup>5</sup>Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE), 2016. Home Page. 12 May 2016, viewed on 20 May 2016, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/structure/Pages/acfes.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE), 2015. 'Fact Sheet - Understanding ACFE'. 12 May 2016, viewed on 20 May 2016, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/acfepublications/rchubfsunderstandingacfe.DOCX>

<sup>8</sup>Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE), 2016. '2016 ACFE Board Pre-accredited training Delivery Guide'.



Figure 3: Map of the Regional Council areas in Victoria

## 4.3 Pre-accredited courses and Learn Local

Learn Local is a brand used to identify Adult Community Education (ACE) providers registered with the ACFE Board. A LLO is funded through the ACFE Board to deliver **pre-accredited** training courses to a broad range of Victorians who are older than the compulsory school-leaving age: young adults, older people, people with special needs, people from diverse cultural backgrounds and particularly those who have had limited prior access to education.

Pre-accredited training does not result in an educational system credit but typically supports skill building. This training often consists of short courses designed for learners who have previously experienced barriers to education and are experiencing difficulties in undertaking accredited training as their first step in education and training. The courses are intended to meet learners' needs and support them onto a 'pathway' e.g. further study in an accredited education program or employment. The types of courses offered support learners to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, gain a qualification, broaden their employment options and learn new skills<sup>9</sup>.

The unique offering of LLOs is their aim to provide an informal and safe setting for learners to re-engage in learning. Pre-accredited training offered by an LLO can be distinguished from non-accredited training in its focus on creating a pathway rather than providing a lifestyle course.

LLOs vary in their size, shape, capability, infrastructure and community relationships. They include Community Houses, Learning Centres, Community Colleges and Neighbourhood Houses. They also include training centres managed by not-for-profit organisations such as Yooralla, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Jesuit Social Services and Melbourne City Mission. There are also a number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) specialist providers.

Providers must meet a range of eligibility and assessment requirements outlined in the Guidelines and Criteria for Registration to be registered, with the defining characteristics of:

- education as a principal purpose
- community owned and managed
- not for profit.

### 4.3.1 What is unique about adult learning?

Whilst there is no theory or model that explains everything known about adult learners, useful theories have been developed to explore and explain adult education. The term 'andragogy' was developed by Alexander Kapp and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, and popularised by Malcolm Knowles, as "the art and science of helping adults learn." For Knowles, adult learning was premised on the following characteristics<sup>11</sup>:

- Adult learners need to know why they should learn something.
- Adult learners want respect and to be seen as capable learners.
- Adult learners are a valuable resource because they bring the richness and diversity of their lives with them.
- Adults are ready to learn when they identify something they want to know or in which they want to gain proficiency, or when they experience something that connects with their life situations.
- Adult learners want to be engaged in life-centred or problem-centred learning experiences.

The learning environment has also been cited as critical for easing a learner's anxiety. This includes creating a place that is 'warm, welcoming, relaxed and non-threatening' that may involve having plants, soft furnishings and open learning spaces rather than divided formal classrooms<sup>12</sup>. In some instances, programs that have been specifically designed to re-engage learners previously disconnected from education even avoid the term 'learning'.

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<sup>9</sup> ACFE, 2015. op.cit.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Education and Training Melbourne, 2015. 'Victorian Training Market Report' 26 May 2016. 26 May 2016, viewed on 20 May 2016, [http://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/market/pages/report\\_s.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/market/pages/report_s.aspx).

<sup>11</sup> Adult Learning Australia, 2016. Adult learning principles. 2016, viewed on 20 May 2016, <https://ala.asn.au/adult-learning/the-principles-of-adult-learning/>

<sup>12</sup> Palmieri, P., 2014. 'Disengaged Youth and ACE', Adult Learning Australia, 2016, viewed on 20 May 2016, [https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Disengaged-youth-paper\\_WEB.pdf](https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Disengaged-youth-paper_WEB.pdf)

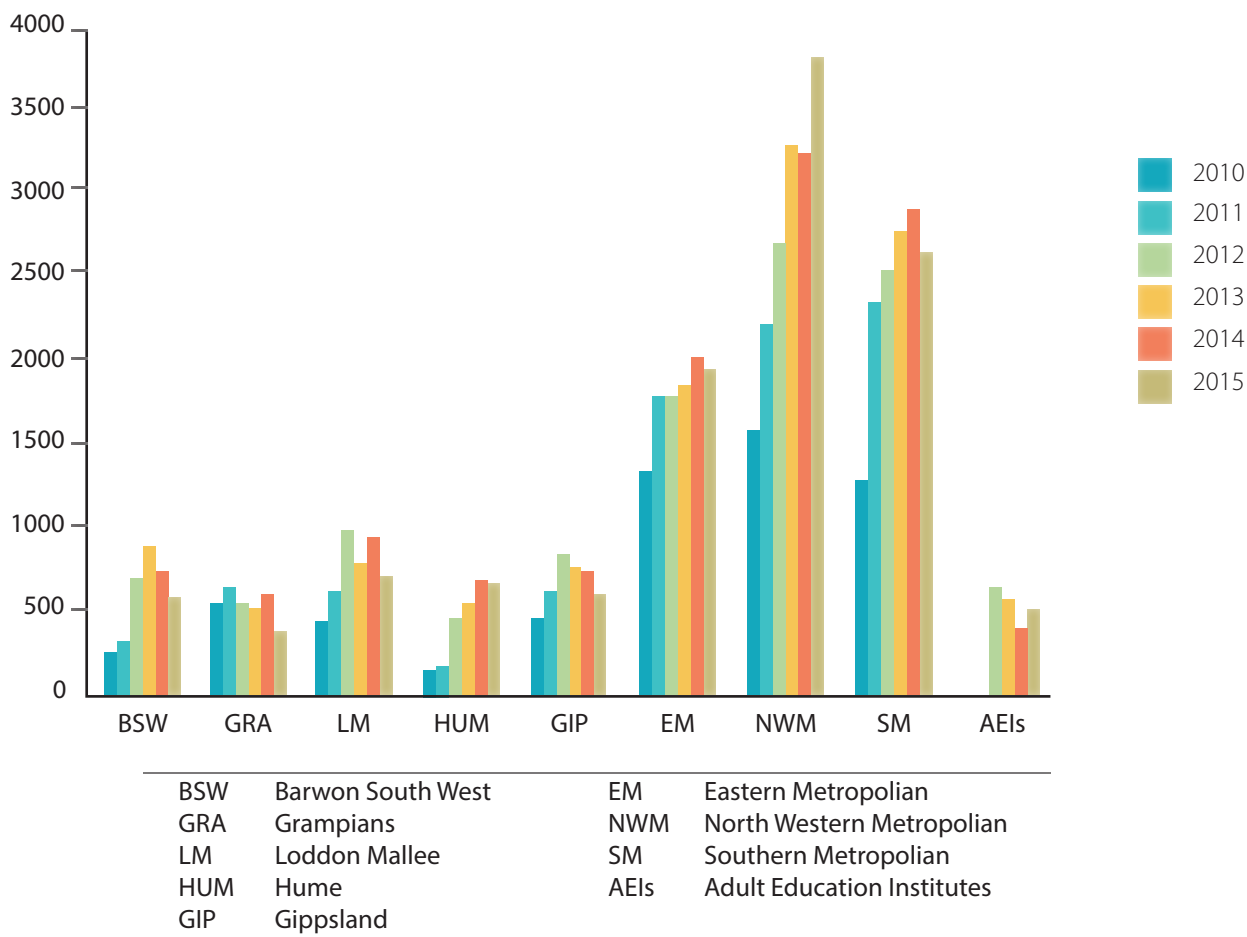


Figure 4: Students enrolled in LLO in Victoria by training delivery area

Figure 4: illustrates the change in number of students enrolled in pre-accredited training from 2010 to 2015 by training delivery area. As illustrated the number of students enrolled in the Grampians region has remained fairly consistent over the recent five year period with the lowest number in 2015.



# 5

## THE WIMMERA

The Wimmera is a region located in the north-west of Victoria and comprises diverse rural and remote communities in a population of over 50,000 people. The region includes popular tourist destinations including Grampians National Park and Mt Arapiles with native vegetation covering 16% of the area. Horsham is the largest town in the region with a population of over 15,000. <http://grn.15728UB24>

The Wimmera includes five Local Government Areas: Horsham Rural City, Northern Grampians, Yarriambiack, Hindmarsh and West Wimmera. As summarised below the regions of the Wimmera feature diverse populations and all are experiencing different changes in their population profiles.

This is a region dominated by agriculture comprising dry land broad acre cropping producing cereals, pulses and oilseeds and livestock grazing<sup>13</sup>. The other significant employment industries are health care and social assistance and retail trade.

### 5.1 Population dynamics

To understand the learning needs of the Wimmera community, it is critical that the learning sector understands the changing demographics and needs of its communities and anticipates and plans for the future. The following section outlines the changing profile of the Wimmera communities.

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<sup>13</sup> REMPLAN, 2016, 'REMPAN Economic Profile – Wimmera', The Wimmera - Southern Mallee Economic Profile, , 2016, viewed on 20 April 2016, <http://www.economicprofile.com.au/wimmera>

<sup>14</sup> Foresight Lane, 2015. op. cit.



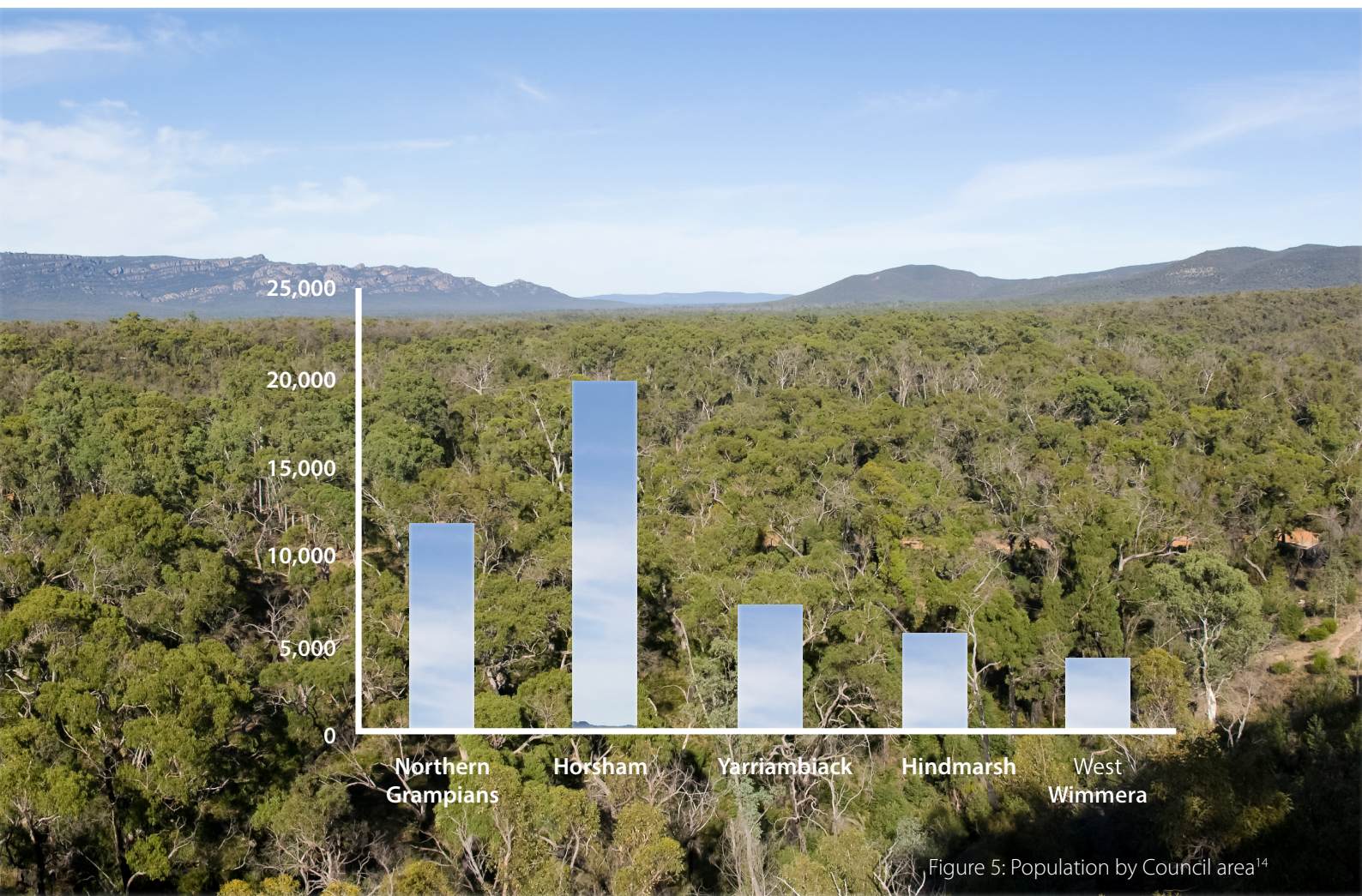


Figure 5: Population by Council area<sup>14</sup>

### 5.1.1 Disability

In all regions within the Wimmera, the percentage of the population living on the disability support pension is significantly higher than the Victorian average (5.4%). The percentage of the population living on the disability support pension on average across the region is 8.4%<sup>15</sup>.

### 5.1.2 Unemployment

All regions also have equal or higher than the Victorian average (4.2%) of people receiving unemployment benefits for longer than 6 months<sup>16</sup>. The Wimmera has a growing unemployment rate, currently 5.3%, which is well above the unemployment rate for previous years<sup>17</sup>. Based on 2014 data, the average age of a job seeker was 38 years and the average duration of registration with Centrelink was just under 3 years (32 months)<sup>18</sup>.

### 5.1.3 Young people

The Wimmera region has a considerably smaller proportion of young people aged between 15 and 30 years than both the Victorian and Australian average, with 15-30 year olds making up only 13% of the Wimmera population compared to 20.8% of Victoria's population. Youth unemployment in the region is also

among the highest in the state, ranked the fourth highest for youth unemployment<sup>19</sup>.

### 5.1.4 Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities

The area has become an increasingly popular destination for immigrants to resettle. A large driver of this growth are the region's employment programs, such as the Wimmera Development Association's Wimmera Southern Mallee Skilled Migration Program, which are attracting professional workers to skilled jobs that cannot be filled locally<sup>20</sup>. The Wimmera region has also seen a 25% increase in the number of immigrants choosing to become Australian citizens<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless CALD groups form on average 8.6% of the total regional population compared to 24.3% at the State level<sup>22</sup>.

To provide greater understanding of the local context and to support local learning planning, a summary of the key population dynamics and demographics are provided on the following page.

<sup>15</sup> Foresight Lane, 2015. op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Wong, S, Wong, I & Walker, J, 2014. 'Labour Market Report', Grampians ACFE Region Research Report 2014, Ballarat, Victoria.

<sup>19</sup> McFadden, E. 2014, 'Wimmera youth unemployment among state's highest', The Wimmera Mail Times, 27 August 2014, Horsham.

<sup>20</sup> Hore, M. 2013, 'Jump in Wimmera immigrants becoming citizens', The Wimmera Mail Times, 14 August 2013. Horsham

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Wong, S, Wong, I & Walker, J, 2014. op. cit.

## 5.1.5 Population dynamics and demographics by Local Government Area

### 5.1.5.1 Horsham

The Horsham Rural City Council is the only area within the Wimmera with a growing population. The population includes a higher percentage of people aged 15-19 not 'earning or learning', 20.1% (or 270 individuals) compared with the state average of 16.2%<sup>23</sup>.

### 5.1.5.2 Hindmarsh

Hindmarsh is experiencing an increase in the population of people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, disability support pension recipients and CALD populations. Yet the overall population is declining and Hindmarsh Shire has the highest average number of people who left school at year 10 or below, or did not go to school (42.1%) compared with other areas within the Wimmera. The area also has the highest number of people receiving unemployment benefits, with 7.3% of the population (or 194 individuals) compared with 6.4% for the Grampians region<sup>24</sup>.

### 5.1.5.3 Yarriambiack

Yarriambiack has an increasing number of residents who receive the disability support pension, and as a percentage of the population, the number of these residents is more than double the Victorian average, 12.8% (or 499 individuals) compared with 5.4% of the State's population. The region is well supported by agencies that provide services and opportunities for people with disability. The area has higher than the state percentage of people who left school at year 10 or below, or did not go to school, 38% compared with 29.4% at the State level<sup>25</sup>.

### 5.1.5.4 West Wimmera

West Wimmera has the smallest population of the Wimmera's regions with a population of over 4,200 people. It has the lowest percentage of people born in non-English speaking countries, (2.4% compared with 19.6% in the state). It also has the lowest percentage of 15-19 year olds who are not 'earning or learning', 10.7% (or 24 individuals) compared with 18.2% for the Wimmera region<sup>26</sup>.

### 5.1.5.5 Northern Grampians

The Northern Grampians has the second largest population in the Wimmera, behind Horsham Rural City Council. The area has the highest number of 15-19 year olds who are not 'earning or learning' with 21.4% (or 160 individuals) of 15-19 year olds compared with 18.2% for the region (the state average is 16.2%)<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Foresight Lane, 2015. Service System Mapping project conducted on behalf of both Grampians and Barwon South West ACFE Regional Councils. Interactive online maps can be accessed through ACFE.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Foresight Lane, 2015. Service System Mapping project conducted on behalf of both Grampians and Barwon South West ACFE Regional Councils. Interactive online maps can be accessed through ACFE.

## Projected employment change by industry 2014-19

North West Region SA4 (includes Wimmera sub region)

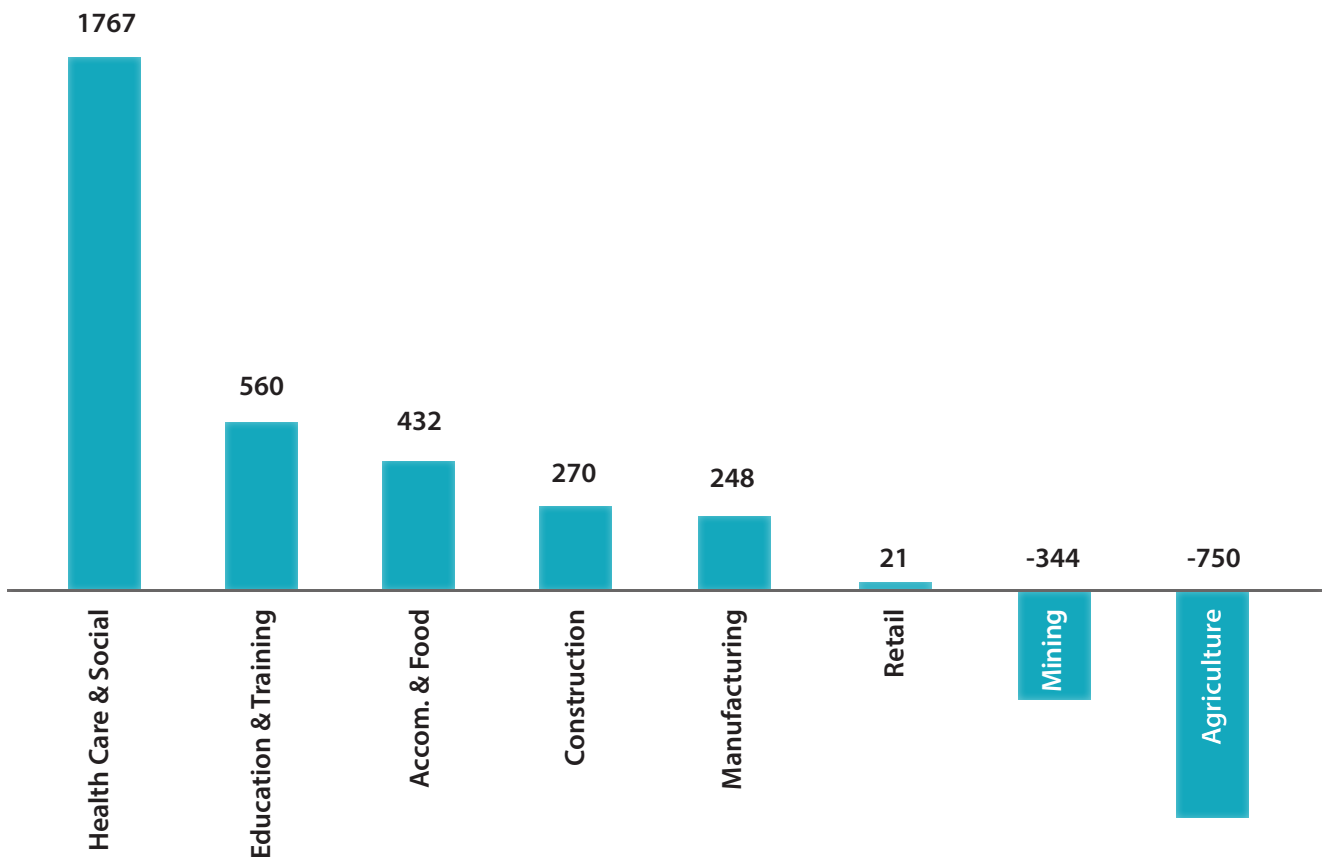


Figure 6: Projected employment in the North West Region<sup>31</sup>

## 5.2 Industry and employment

The major employment sectors are very consistent across the Wimmera. The major industry in the region is agriculture comprising dry land broad acre cropping producing cereals, pulses and oilseeds and livestock grazing. The second and third most significant employment industries are health care and social assistance and retail trade respectively. Northern Grampians is the only area where manufacturing features among its top three industry employment sectors<sup>28</sup>.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors are currently the largest employers of people across the Grampians, comprising 17.8% of all employed population, with health care and social assistance and retail trade comprising 14.8% and 10.4% respectively<sup>29</sup>.

The health care and social sector is forecast to grow by 1,767 positions. This represents a 16.2% growth in employment within the health care and social sector, 14.5% growth in education and training, 14.4% growth in accommodation and food and 5.8% growth in construction. Employment in the agricultural sector is projected to decline by 8.1%<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> REMPLAN, 2016, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> ibid.

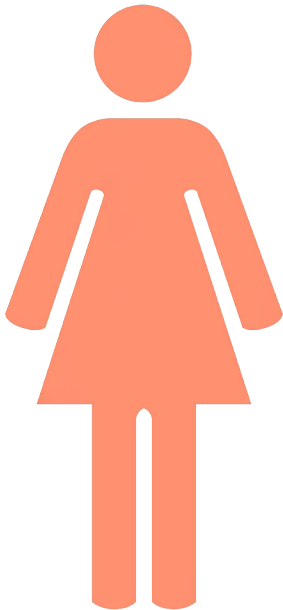
<sup>30</sup> Foresight Lane, 2015, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> ibid.



The top three occupations for males in the Grampians in 2011<sup>32</sup> included:

- Mixed crop and livestock farmers.
- Truck drivers.
- Livestock farmers.



The top three occupations for females in the Grampians in 2011<sup>33</sup> included:

- Registered nurses.
- General clerks.
- Primary school teachers.

# 42.6%

of males aged over 45 years in the Grampians region are considered to be at a high risk of becoming disconnected from the labour market due to low levels of qualification<sup>34</sup>.

This compares to 38.6% at the Victorian level<sup>35</sup>.

Adult community education exists to support both unemployed people and people who are vulnerably employed.

The following section describes the types of adult learning available to people in the Wimmera.

<sup>32</sup> Wong, S. Wong, I. & Walker, J. 2014, 'Decent training for decent work – Appendix C', Grampians ACFE Region Research Report 2014, Geelong, Victoria.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*



## 6

# ADULT LEARNING IN THE WIMMERA

The adult education sector within the Wimmera includes accredited and pre-accredited learning.

Access to accredited tertiary and vocational study is available through Federation University Australia, a multi-sector National University dating back to 1891. Federation University Australia has Wimmera campuses in Horsham, Ararat and Stawell, with students enrolled in Certificate II courses through to PhD candidates, although Horsham is the only operating Campus. Within the City of Horsham and the Shires of Yarriambiack, Hindmarsh and West Wimmera, there are three Registered Training Organisations<sup>36</sup>. A number of the adult community education centres in the Wimmera also offer RTO courses delivered in partnership with RTOs from outside of the region. Up to 26 Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) from outside the region deliver courses in the Wimmera in partnership with local organisations.

Skillinvest (formerly WORKCO and LINK Employment + Training) is a Group Training Organisation (GTO) that provides both accredited training and employment. As one of the RTOs in the region, Skillinvest also provides employment, education and training services throughout Victoria and maintains an office in Horsham. Skillinvest's offerings include Longerenong College, which has provided agricultural vocational education and training for over 125 years in the Wimmera<sup>37</sup>.

## 6.1 Grampians Regional Council

The Grampians ACFE Regional Council provides strategic support to the LLOs within the Wimmera.

### 6.1.1 Pre-accredited delivery priorities in 2016

The Grampians Regional Council has developed a number of key planning considerations for the organisations in the Wimmera that are funded to deliver Learn Local courses:

- Develop partnerships that will support the engagement of vulnerable learners with education and training.
- Form partnerships and arrangements that ensure longer-term sustainability of training provision, particularly in thin markets.
- Develop flexible models of delivery to support take up from potential learners in rural areas.
- Adjust capability in areas with changing population profiles.
- Deliver programs that respond to local industry and business needs.

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<sup>36</sup> Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN, 2016. About. 2016, viewed on 20 May 2016, <http://www.llen.com.au/about/>

<sup>37</sup> Skillinvest, 2016. About. 2016, viewed on 20 May 2016, <http://www.skillinvest.com.au>

*The Grampians Regional Council has outlined delivery priorities for each Local Government Area in their region. The delivery priorities for the LGAs in this study area are summarised below.*

Local Government Area	Delivery Priority
Hindmarsh	Maintain CALD program levels including those to the growing Karen community. Opportunity for expanded delivery into Dimboola and surrounding areas.
Horsham	Increase delivery in literacy and numeracy programs. Develop programs to support Koories to pathways into employment. Development of partnerships to support vulnerable priority groups undertaking training options.
Northern Grampians	Continue provision in highly vulnerable communities including St Arnaud. Develop partnerships with support agencies to assist vulnerable learners to engage with training. Literacy and numeracy continue to be a priority for the community.
West Wimmera	Innovate models for delivery to support provision in thin market. Consideration to opportunities to develop programs to support skill development of the workforce associated to an economy that is based on an agriculture economy.
Yarriambiack	Innovate programs to engage disadvantaged learners into education and support delivery in thin markets. Focus delivery on literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

Table 1: Overview of the ACFE Grampians Regional Council delivery priorities for 2016 by LGA

<sup>38</sup> Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE), 2016. op. cit.

## 6.2 The Wimmera and Learn Local Organisations

**In total, nine organisations in the Wimmera received ACFE funding to deliver Learn Local courses in 2015. Of these nine organisations, five are Neighbourhood Houses.**

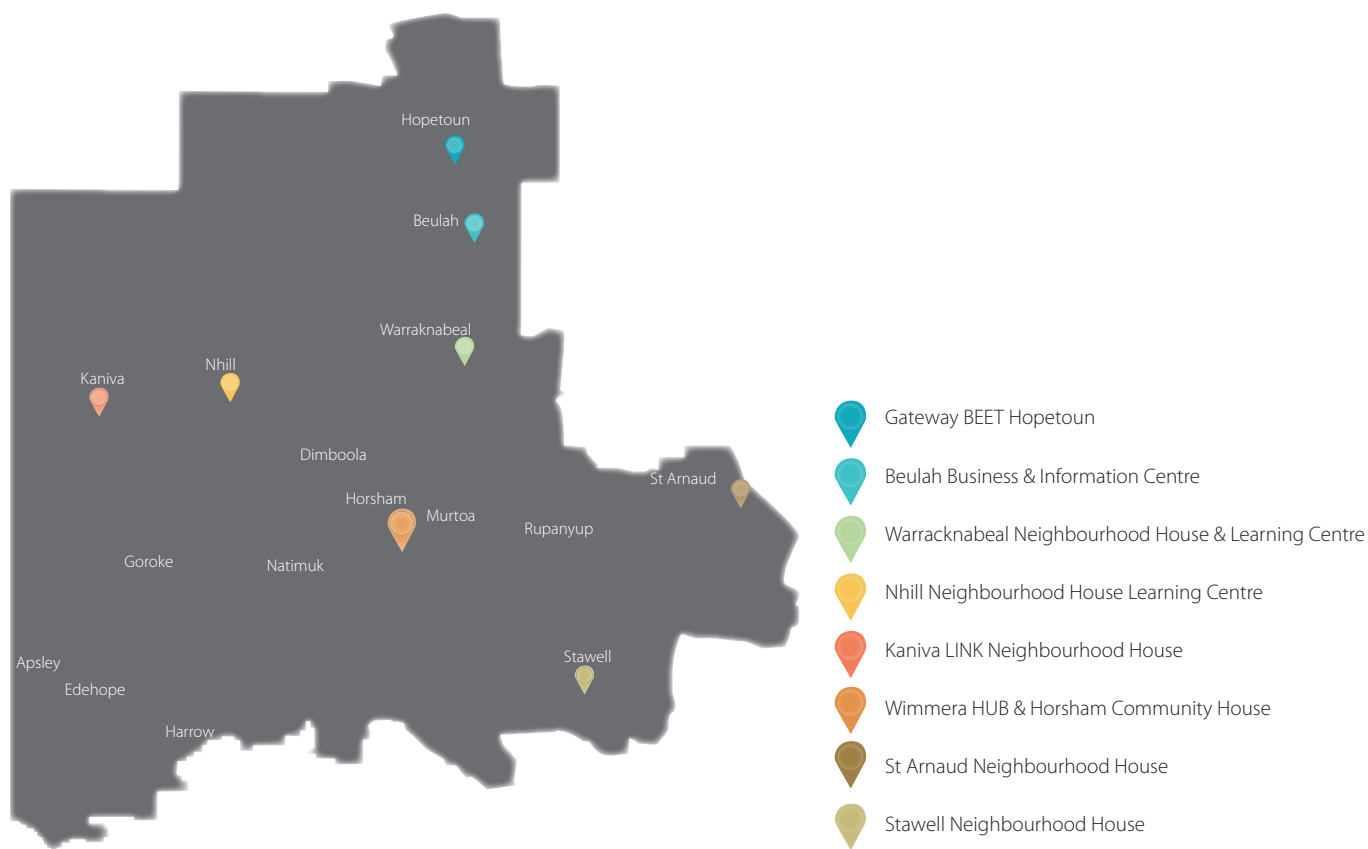


Figure 7: Organisations funded to deliver Learn Local in the Wimmera in 2015

Local Local Funded Organisation	LGA	Courses	Funded Places	% Places in Wimmera
Nhill Neighbourhood House Learning Centre	Hindmarsh	7	141	19%
Wimmera HUB	Horsham Rural City	8	366	50%
Warracknabeal Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre	Yarriambiack	5	41	6%
Kaniva LINK Neighbourhood House	West Wimmera	6	40	5%
Stawell Neighbourhood House	Northern Grampians	4	36	5%
Gateway BEET Hopetoun	Yarriambiack	5	47	6%
Beulah Business and Information Centre	Yarriambiack	3	28	4%
St Arnaud Neighbourhood House	Northern Grampians	4	14	2%
Horsham Community House	Horsham Rural City	1	17	2%

Table 2: Learn Local courses and places offered in 2015<sup>39</sup>

## 6.2.1 Types of courses delivered

A total of 730 Learn Local places were funded in 2015 across the Wimmera region. Of these, the majority were for digital literacy courses (418), while the remaining funded places were for adult literacy and numeracy courses (193), employment skills courses (79) and for vocational courses (40). These 730 places contributed to the development and delivery of 43 courses in 2015<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Foresight Lane, 2015. op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*



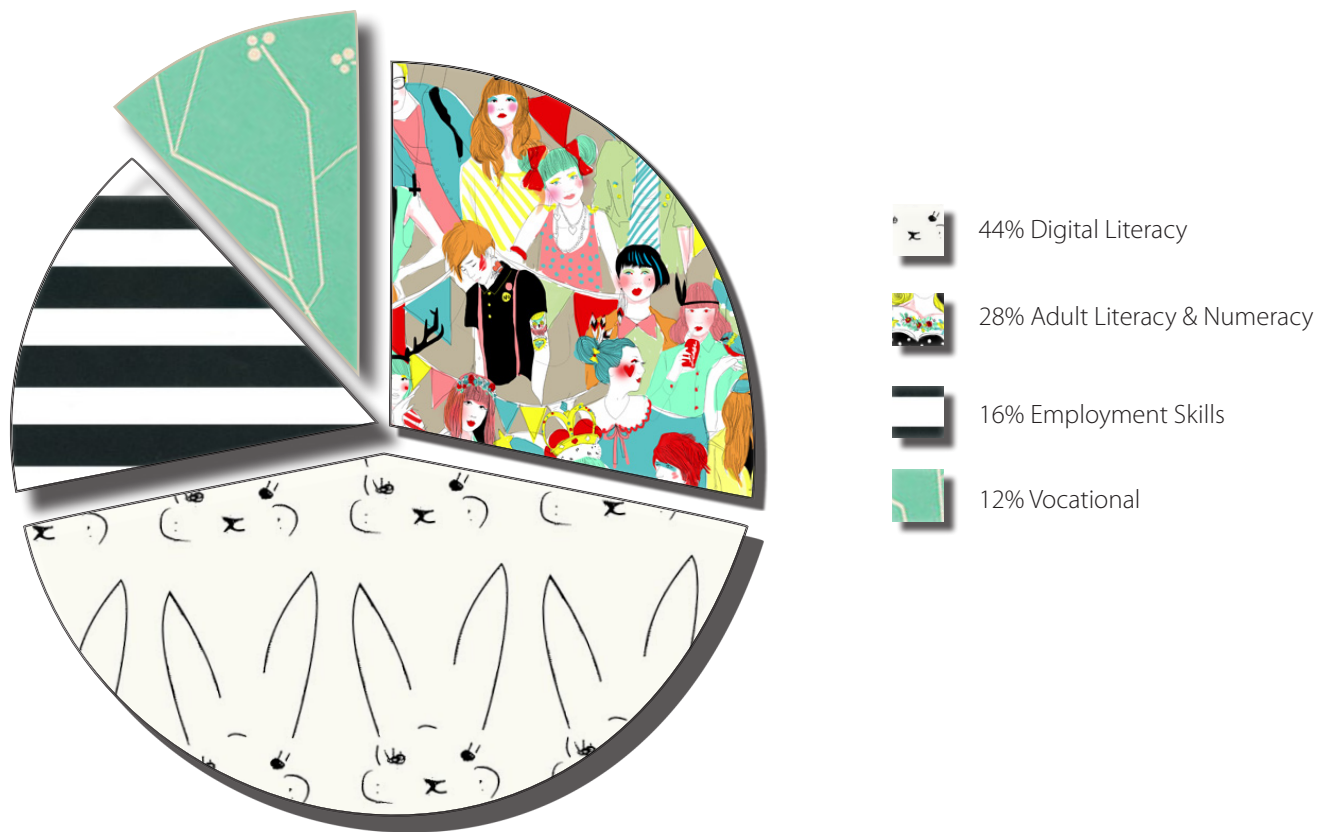


Figure 8: Learn Local Courses by type based on 2015 delivery plans

### 6.2.2 Sources of revenue

Horsham Community House had the highest percentage of revenue sourced from government (91.6%), while Kaniva Neighbourhood House had the lowest (54.9%). The next most significant revenue source for the Learn Local funded organisations was self-generated through operations such as op-shops, childcare fees and bank interest. Beulah generated the highest percentage of revenue from these alternative sources (40.6%) while others including St Arnaud, Stawell and Horsham only self-generated between 3.5-5% of their revenue.

No Learn Local funded organisations received revenue from philanthropic grants from trusts and foundations or corporate sponsorship/grants. Only 0.6% of total revenue in the sector came from individual donations and bequests.

Nhill Neighbourhood House Learning Centre received the most ACFE funding in 2015. Receiving \$93,182, it also has the second-highest number of ACFE funded learners (141). Wimmera Hub received the next highest level of funding, receiving \$73,625 and has the highest number of ACFE funded learners (366). Horsham Community House and St Arnaud Neighbourhood House received the lowest levels of funding in 2015, \$3,666 and \$4,105 respectively and correspondingly have the two lowest numbers of ACFE funded places (17 and 14 respectively).

## 6.3 Former Learn Local Organisations

There are four community organisations in the Wimmera that have delivered Learn Local courses in the past, but have ceased to deliver them in recent years. These include:

- Murtoa and District Neighbourhood House - Shared Learning Activities at Murtoa (SLAMM Inc.).
- Rainbow Learning Group and Neighbourhood House Inc.
- Rupanyup Education Activities Community House.
- St Arnaud Community Resource Centre.

Rainbow Learning Group and Neighbourhood House Inc. has remained a registered Learn Local funded organisation, but has not run courses for some time. If complementary funding is sourced, the organisation may resume the provision of Learn Local funded courses. The other four organisations have all allowed their registrations to lapse.

The reasons for not offering courses were typically based on one or more of the following:

- Compliance requirements were too onerous for the funding available.
- Inability to attract enough learners for financial viability in a small community.
- Learners who were interested did not comply with ACFE's pathway requirements.

One of the organisations (Murtoa) also noted the additional challenge of limited and inadequate infrastructure (venue) for course delivery.

# 7

## PROFILE OF A 'LEARN LOCAL' LEARNER

*"The new disadvantaged are those that do not know how to learn"<sup>41</sup>*

With the intent of providing opportunities for people in the community who have previously experienced barriers to engage in learning, ACFE purchases pre-accredited training courses from external providers. It is an expectation that this learning will provide pathways for individuals into further education and employment.

ACFE defines its target learners as people with higher learning needs including:

- People from CALD backgrounds and those who require assistance with English.
- Learners facing adult literacy and numeracy challenges to participation.
- Those who are marginalised from mainstream communities and therefore have not accessed education, training and employment.
- People who have experienced barriers to education in the past.
- Those who live in remote and rural areas or who have limited access to learning opportunities.
- People whose education and employment opportunities can be enhanced by improved digital literacy.

The ACFE Board has identified the following learner groups for particular focus in pre-accredited programs:

- Early school leavers.
- Disengaged youth.
- CALD learners.
- Learners with a disability.
- Indigenous learners.
- Male learners over 45.
- Vulnerable low-skilled workers.
- People in low socio-economic status localities.
- Unemployed/underemployed people.

Adult community education is thought to be providing value to all of the individuals who engage in courses, however from the research set out below, the offering appears not to be reaching its target learners. While Learn Local funded pre-accredited training courses are a way for learners to re-engage with learning, the needs of the most disadvantaged learners are complex and diverse.

*"It's all about the confidence...it has been great"*  
*Quote from Learn Local learner*

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<sup>41</sup> Galbally, R. and Wong, S. 2008, op. cit.

# 7.1 Profile of a learner in the Wimmera

In addition to the 90 stakeholders engaged throughout the research, an online survey and three filmed learner focus groups were conducted. In total, 28 learners responded to the learner survey in addition to the 21 learners involved in the four focus groups held across the Wimmera. Of the survey respondents who identified as having completed a Learn Local course:

- 60% were over 61 years old.
- 80% male.
- 32% had not completed education past year 10.
- 46% were retired.
- 14% were currently looking for work.
- 93% spoke English at home.
- 54% respondents saw themselves retired in 5 years time.

The three top reasons the learners were most likely to enrol in a Learn Local course was:

- To improve their current job/position (30%).
- For fun/enjoyment (26%).
- To improve computer skills (22%).

The courses completed by the respondents included:

- 42% completed digital literacy course.
- 27% had completed a vocational course.
- 23% had completed an employment skills training course.

The top 4 barriers to study included:

- 29% felt nothing had stopped them from studying in the past.
- 21% felt study was previously too difficult to access.
- 18% didn't know about it.
- 14% had low confidence.

When asked about aspirations in the next 10 years:

- 46% reported "having a job I love".
- 42% wanted to be free of debt.
- 42% wanted to go on a holiday.

Respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:

- 77% felt welcomed by the organisation.
- 71% reported learning something new.
- 68% are now more motivated to learn
- 67% made good friends through the course.
- 65% feel more confident in themselves.

In contrast, the areas in which learners experienced least change related to:

- 11% (0% strongly agreed) saw themselves getting a better paid job in the future.
- 15% (0% strongly agreed) that they now know what to do to get the job they want.
- 22% agreed or strongly agreed that the course has made them feel more confident in their current job.

The survey and consultation findings illustrate that the Learn Local sector is providing value for its learners, however is not reaching its intended learner groups. There are a number of reasons that this is the case, at both the sector, organisation and learner levels. These are further outlined below in our research findings.

## 7.2 Designing courses for learner outcomes

*"All the education in the world is not going to do me an ounce of good if I can't walk into an interview with a smile on my face".* Quote from Learn Local learner

*"If you treat someone as they are, that's how they remain. If you treat someone as what they ought to be and could be, then they will become what they ought to be and could be"* Quote from a filmed interview with Brendan Murray - Principal at Victoria's Parkville College

### 7.2.1 Course design

In September each year, LLOs are required to submit their Delivery Plan to their nominated ACFE regional office. The Delivery Plans outline the proposed pre-accredited programs that the LLO intends to offer in the next contract period and the target learner population<sup>42</sup>. The Delivery Plan is the "basis for the development of the funding agreement and schedule between the ACFE Board and Learn Local Organisation"<sup>43</sup>. Prior approval by ACFE is required before a Delivery Plan may be modified.

The Delivery Plans must include 'A-Frames' (see below) for each of the proposed programs to be delivered and must fit within one of the three ACFE categories: vocational, adult literacy and numeracy and employment skills.

The Delivery Plans also require Learning Outcomes to be stipulated reiterating that the 'learning outcomes of a pre-accredited program must be focussed on providing learners with a pathway to qualification and/or employment.'

*"It's like a door opening on life again...into all sorts of possibilities..."*  
Quote from Learn Local learner

<sup>42</sup> Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE), 2016. Delivery Plan. 4 November 2015, viewed on 27 May 2016, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/learnlocal/Pages/deliveryplan.aspx>

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

# THE A-FRAME MODEL

An A-frame is the core-planning document for pre-accredited course delivery. Its key uses are planning and delivering pre-accredited courses and developing ways of including learners in the planning process. The A-frame can also be used for:

- Professional development and training for staff.
- Introducing and developing learning and pathway planning concepts for learners.

As illustrated below, ACFE's current A-Frame framework for pre-accredited course delivery is based on the four principles: **variety, linking, critical thinking and change**, which are incorporated into the aspects of curriculum. Embedded within these aspects and principals are eight employability skills, which are the key focus of the A-frame and course delivery plan.

- Communication skills contribute to productive and harmonious relations between people.
- Teamwork skills that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes.
- Problem solving skills that contribute to productive outcomes.
- Initiative and enterprise - skills that contribute to innovative outcomes.
- Planning and organisation skills that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning.
- Self management skills that contribute to employee/learner satisfaction and growth.
- Learning skills that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in operations and outcomes.
- Technology skills that contribute to effective execution of tasks.

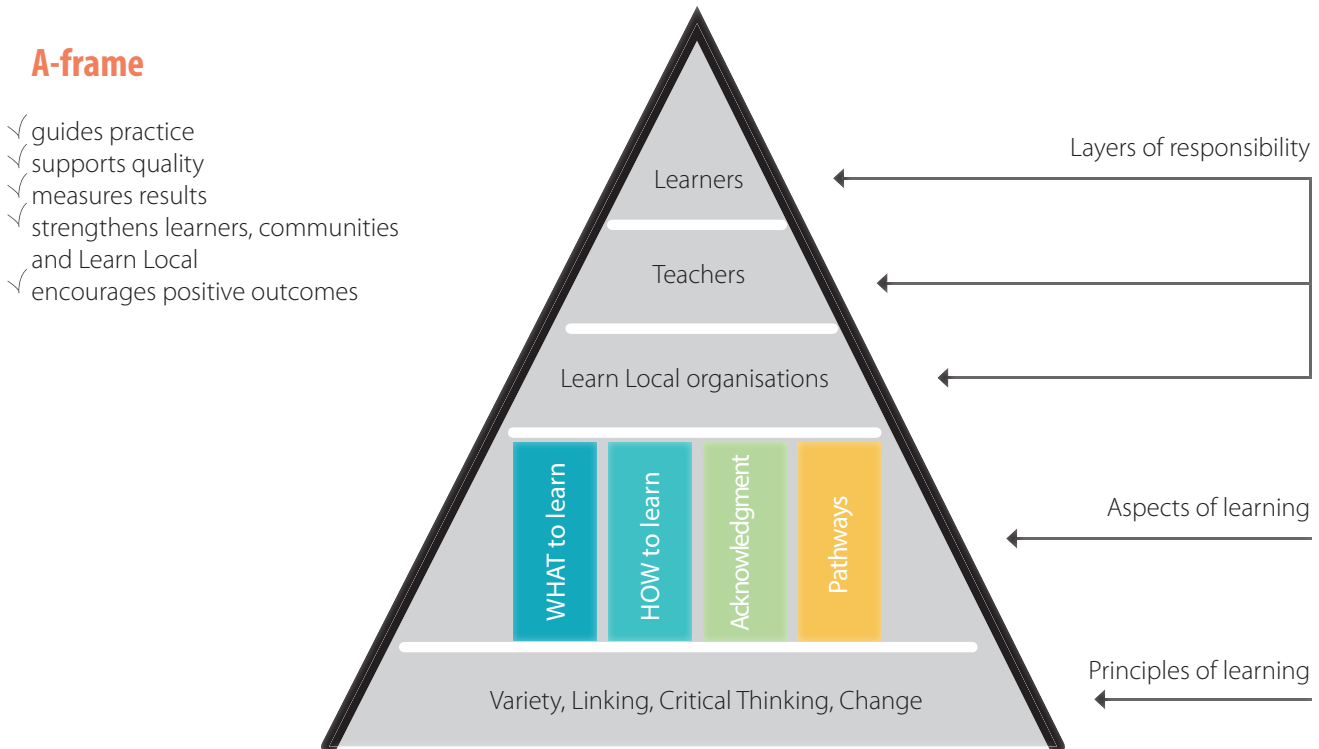


Figure 9: ACFE A-Frame Model

## 7.2.2 What change are we seeking to offer learners?

This study seeks to build upon the definitions provided in the A-Frame templates regarding employability. The resulting model is provided to illustrate our perspective on the elements that create lasting change. It is referred to as the 'Enduring Impact' model.

The diagram below is based on extensive experience accumulated by Think Impact and illustrates the combined dimensions that create enduring impact. Three outcome dimensions should be collectively supported to create enduring change: **Intrinsic** (internally focused outcomes), **Extrinsic** (externally focused outcomes), and **Functional** (knowledge and capability outcomes). The provision of outcomes in only one, or even two dimensions is less likely to result in enduring change than the provision of outcomes in all three dimensions.

If a learner builds skills in the use of computers, but lacks the confidence to utilise those skills and operates in a family that is unsupportive of her goals, will she progress on a 'pathway'? Or suppose she builds confidence but encounters a crisis in the near future - her change is unlikely to endure.

This framework below provides a useful perspective to re-examination of the desired learning outcomes that support the development of people to become confident, connected and capable human beings.

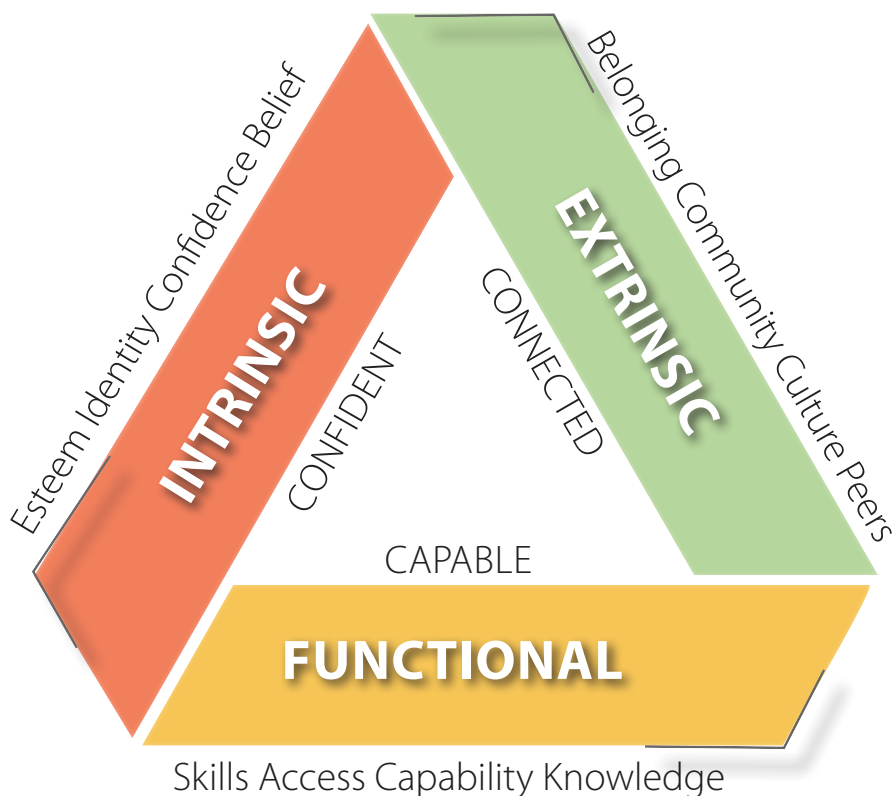


Figure 10: Think Impact's model of enduring impact

*"Instead of wanting to drive the car off the cliff, I want to turn the corner and see what's around the other side"*  
Quote from Learn Local learner

To create lasting change for ACFE 'higher needs' learners, the system needs to fully recognise that the 'pathway' to employment and further learning may be indirect because it is beset with challenges. These learners face complex life-circumstances, identity and esteem issues, limited aspirations, poor previous learning experiences and much more as illustrated below.

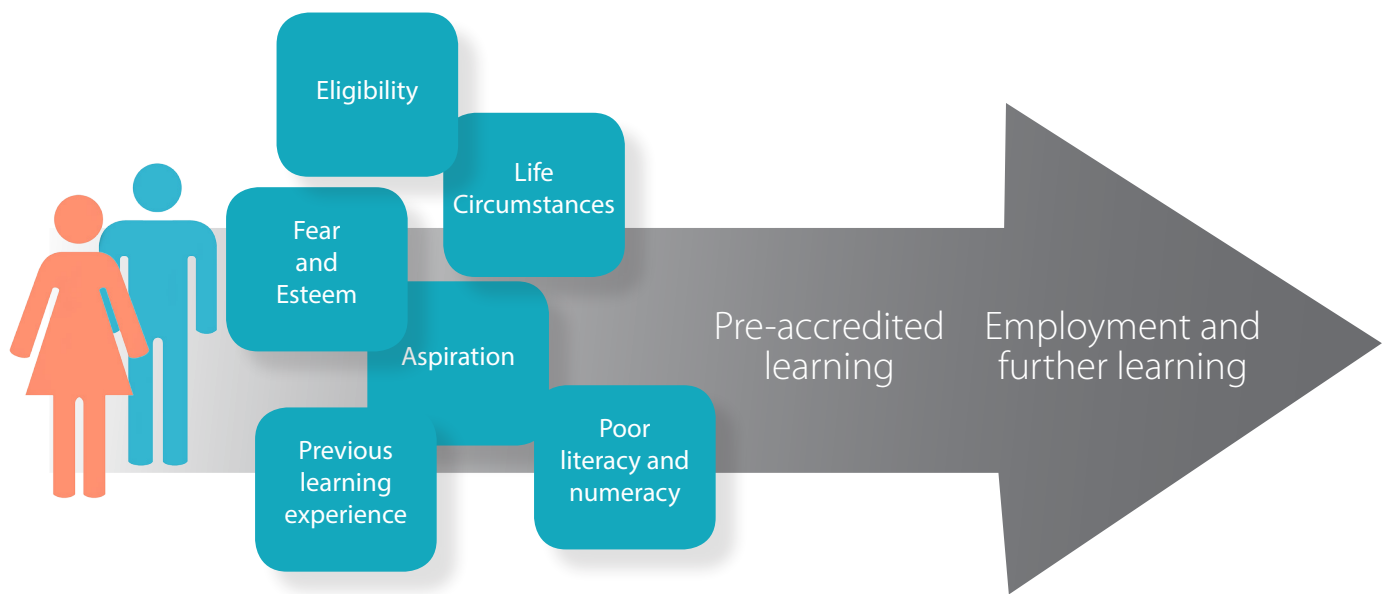


Figure 11: Potential learner barriers to learning

Concentration on functional skills alone (expressed as the “eight employability skills”) is unlikely to create the lasting outcomes the ACFE board seeks to achieve because other capabilities are not addressed. This is a fundamental, systemic limitation. Courses that have been disregarded or considered “lifestyle” courses which build aspirations, help overcome fear, build self-esteem, and create stronger social inclusion could well be the very pathways for ‘higher needs’ learners to begin more functional learning and increased employability.

This poses several challenges to the LL sector that might be expressed by the following key questions:

- What learning environment do we need to create which provides a safe place for higher needs learners to flourish?
- What outcomes does the learner seek? How can the sector support that?
- What will engage potential learners? What are their touch-points?
- How can we design programs that generate intrinsic, extrinsic, as well as functional outcomes?
- Where is the learner now and what reasonable outcomes can they achieve and not feel like they are failing?

To answer these questions we need to consider the concept of ‘distance travelled’.

### 7.2.3 The distance travelled by learners

There are a number of important first steps that need to occur for people to make change and to get on a “pathway” to employment or further study. For each person, the starting point varies. To effectively understand and engage with learners, we need to recognise, value and reward the ‘distance travelled’.

This is reflected by one student who stated that, *“All the education in the world is not going to do me an ounce of good if I can’t walk into an interview with a smile on my face”*.



*“being ready for work is much more than actually having a skill, it’s about being able to communicate, it’s having confidence to deal with other people, it takes confidence to deal with yourself... It takes a very long term view”.*  
Quote from Learn Local provider

# 8

## RESEARCH OBSERVATIONS AND INSIGHTS

The following section summarises the observations and insights gained during research.

This section has been framed to reflect the interconnected and dynamic nature of the system. The key themes through which this research examines the pre-accredited training sector are ‘*sustainable, responsive and effective*’.

This concept has been developed to better articulate the shared vision of the Department of Education and Training, the Learn Local sector, and their stakeholders. The current Department vision is for the sector to be “sustainable and relevant”. The overriding response from the sector asks for the system to be more than just *relevant* to community needs; it asks for it to be genuinely *responsive* to the community needs.

Further, all parties share the common vision for the sector to be *effective* in its ability to drive outcomes for learners, further education providers, employers and communities in the Wimmera (and perhaps more broadly).

The three themes comprising this vision provide a useful lens to examine the sector.

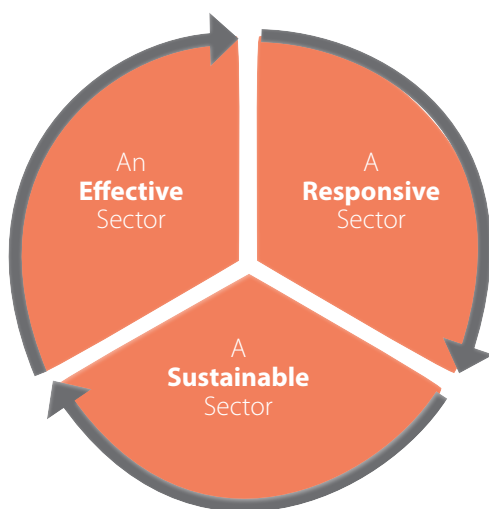


Figure 12: A shared vision to inform the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy: *Sustainable, responsive and effective*

### 8.1 A sustainable sector

The first aspect of the shared vision for the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy is to establish a *sustainable* sector.

A sustainable sector exists where:

- Pre-accredited learning is valued and recognised by the community;
- There are strong organisations delivering pre-accredited training;
- Sustainable business models are widely evident in Learn Local funded organisations; and
- A shared understanding of “value” is recognised by other sectors and opportunities exist for other Government departments to invest resources and possibly jointly fund programs for embedded and long-lasting outcomes.

Looking through the lens of a sustainable sector, this is what we found through our research.

#### 8.1.1 How the pre-accredited training sector in the Wimmera is currently operating

There is no doubt that there are many success stories to be found in the sector. There are many people who have found new directions in life, a new sense of purpose and new ways to participate in the economy and the community. But this appears to be the exception. According to a majority of the broad spectrum of stakeholders consulted, the sector is struggling to deliver outcomes for many learners. These struggles exist for a number of reasons and many occur as a result of the embedded system challenges, in particular the structure of the funding model, the process for developing A-Frames around pathways and the burdensome compliance requirements.

In the Wimmera there are a number of Learn Local funded organisations that have stopped delivering courses because it was “all getting too hard” and many questioned the value of offering courses - from the points of view of their organisations and their communities.

The cohort this sector seeks to serve is also facing significant and complex challenges. Many potential Wimmera learners are struggling to meet basic needs. For some, the idea of





*“We all need to get better at understanding what is our core business and how we get that message out”*  
Quote from local employer

a “pathway” to meaningful employment is far from their lived experience. It is a massive challenge for community organisations with limited resources, limited capacity and limited experience in pedagogy to make substantial inroads with learners whose needs are complex. The current approach needs to adapt to make this a truly sustainable effort.

ACFE has sought to address the issues of sustainability in many ways. One example is the Capacity and Innovation Fund, and a substantial amount of research and investment in the sector that has occurred to address the problem. There is a clear opportunity for research findings to be more effectively shared with the sector, and there is little evidence of change or implementation in response to this research.

### **8.1.2 Brand, messaging and experience**

*“People don’t know what Learn Local is or what they offer”* Quote from local employer

*“I don’t know where our marketing materials come from... we have a few bits left over from the past co-ordinator”* Quote from LLO

In a majority of interactions with stakeholders outside of the Learn Local sector, there was confusion about what Learn Local offers and the brand presented “mixed messages” to potential employers and the community. If the stakeholder was aware of

the brand and offering, the perception of what the Learn Local courses and the organisations provided was often “lifestyle courses” and “...not a market to get people into work.” It was evident from the research that the value of a Learn Local course to other sectors (e.g. as a pool for recruitment of employees or future students) was not well articulated or understood even by the sector itself.

As outlined previously, Learn Local is a course brand, and the training locations are unique in their offerings to the community. Some organisations are converted two bedroom homes in the back streets of a town, some are professional training centres and some are part of community centres and neighbourhood houses that are co-located with other community services such as childcare. Many of the learners interviewed did not know they had completed a Learn Local course, and were drawn to the training because of the place-based brand (e.g. Stawell Neighbourhood House, or the Wimmera HUB Horsham) or frequently, because of individuals within those organisations.

From this research, it is evident that Learn Local needs to improve its communication about what it does. Communication channels need to be directed to potential learners and community and industry partners. When asked about marketing and communication, many LLO staff expressed a lack of time and skill.

*“The board doesn’t really matter, the coordinator matters”*

Quote LLO



## 8.1.3 Towards strong Learn Local organisations

### 8.1.3.1 Capability

*“The Learn Local organisations are not operating from a position of strength”*

Quote from external stakeholder

*“For the sector to live up to its potential – and to meaningfully address the need – you would need to have better resourced, and skilled teachers.”* Quote from Learning Sector

As outlined previously, the intent of pre-accredited training is to engage learners who are experiencing barriers to further education and employment that may be significant and complex.

Typically LLOs include paid or volunteer co-ordinator/managers to run the organisations and trainers to deliver the courses. To deliver pre-accredited training requires a resource of diverse skills: running an organisation and delivering training courses for learners with barriers require different skills.

The skills required of the co-ordinator/manager to successfully manage an organisation may include an entrepreneurial spirit, business acumen, relationship/partnership building skills and community development skills.

In order to engage target learners, teachers need to have a unique set of skills, and according to Brendan Murray, the Principal at Victoria’s Parkville College, (a school located inside a prison) teachers need to be highly personable and have “strong social and emotional intelligence”.<sup>44</sup>

There is currently a wide variation in capability among individuals and organisations in the Wimmera. The adult community education sector struggles to attract high quality staff because it does not have the capacity to pay and as a result sometimes appoints people without the appropriate skills to deliver on their purpose.

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<sup>44</sup>Brendan Murray on how education can change lives, YouTube video, Dumbo Feather, Melbourne, 23 June 2015. <http://www.dumbofeather.com/channel-dumbo/brendan-murray-on-how-education-can-change-lives/>

### 8.1.3.2 Capacity

People working in the sector are also tired and in some instances resentful. They do not feel supported by the system and nor do they have incentives or resources to modify the status quo. There are limited professional development opportunities to improve the skills of staff in the sector because there is not the time or space to do it. Yet high expectations are placed on the individuals and organisations to engage vulnerable learners and achieve positive outcomes.

This finding was illustrated throughout this research by the level of participation of organisations in the Learn Local Alliance established as part of this broader project. A consistent theme for the poor attendance was the lack of availability because the roles are dominated by part-time positions. Competing demands from keeping the centre open to writing funding applications mean “non-essential” demands fall below those required by the community and contractual obligations.

### 8.1.3.3 Compliance

To be a Learn Local provider requires compliance both with statutory framework and the sector’s governance demands such as the Business and Governance Status guidelines and Pre-accredited Quality Framework. Learn Local funding relates only to learner/teacher time and therefore does not allow any time for administrative requirements of centres – the systemic challenges this creates are addressed more extensively below. However, with respect to time spent on compliance many organisations indicated that externally mandated administration and accreditation requirements are burdensome and do not provide value to the organisation itself.

It is acknowledged by the Department of Education and Training that some organisations in the Wimmera display characteristics of weak governance including: badly performing Boards; lack of strategy and planning; and disconnection between subjects offered and local needs. Simultaneously however, the time required for compliance constrains the capacity of organisations to deliver governance responsibilities in full.

While plenty of research and discussion has taken place regarding weak governance in the sector, it is important that governance is not mistaken for management challenges.

## 8.1.4 Reflections on the learning processes of the sector

*“We would love a place for information sharing and genuine collaboration”* Quote from LLO

### 8.1.4.1 Capacity and Innovation Fund (CAIF)

The Capacity and Innovation Fund (CAIF) is a funding stream available to the Learn Local sector to enhance capacity of LLOs and to conduct research to strengthen the capability and quality of the sector. Part of this research project builds upon existing research to gain a deeper understanding of the ACFE priorities, by undertaking a “top line” analysis of the CAIF projects.

In total, 484 projects have been funded in the previous seven rounds of CAIF investment. Each project was categorised by Think Impact into one of four themes and defined by three elements:

#### Understanding supply

- Provision of training
- Innovative learning practices
- Adult learning/pedagogy

#### Strengthening Governance

- Role and value of adult learning
- Learn Local funded organisations capacity building
- Governance and management structures

#### Creating demand

- Understanding the disconnected
- Pathways to learning and employment
- Local community needs

#### Building connectivity

- Partnerships
- Community engagement and empowerment
- Communities of practice

In most instances, the research papers and results were not available to Think Impact. A request was made of the Department of Education and Training (DET), however the DET's knowledge management systems did not enable access to the majority of the research.

Nevertheless, funded projects were categorised by Think Impact based on report titles or abstracts and the results are represented in Figure 13 below.

### ACFE CAIF studies - Rounds 1 - 7

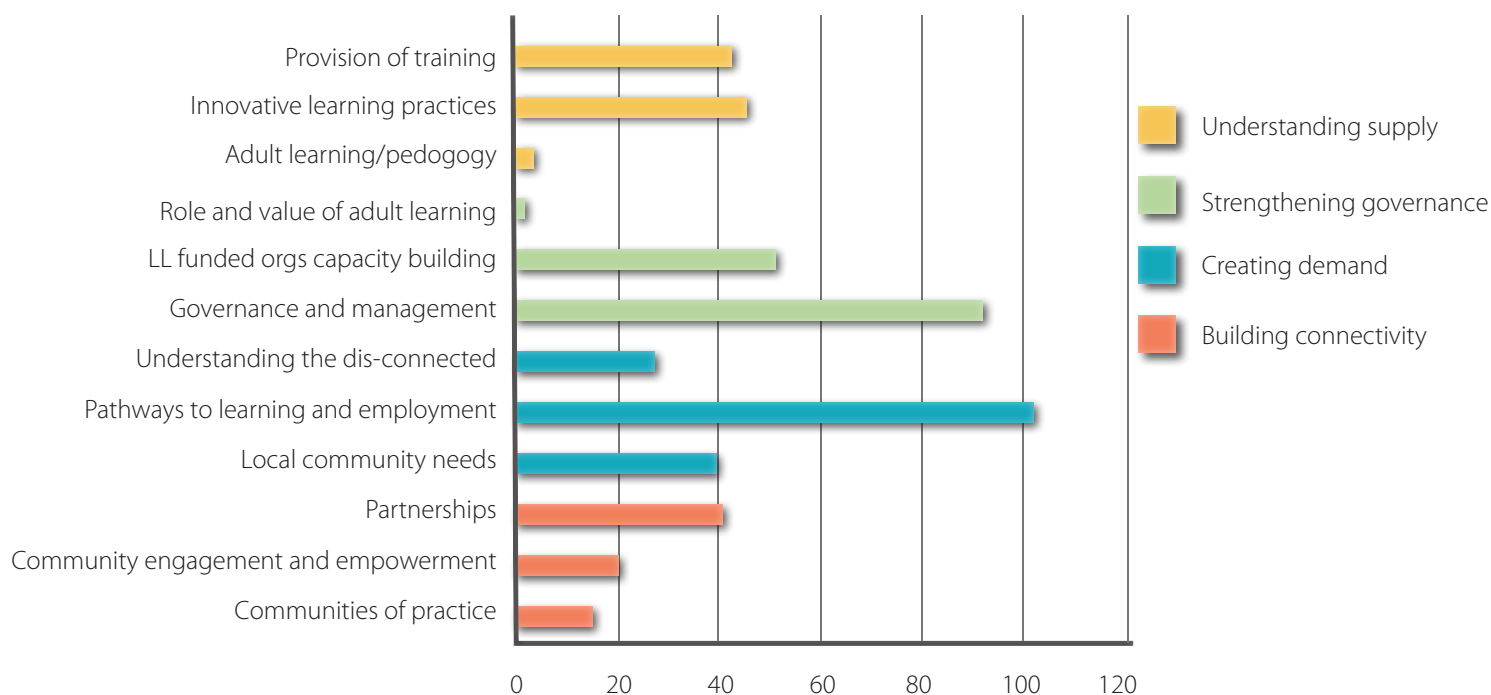


Figure 13: Capacity and Innovation Fund Investment 2009-2016

As illustrated, over 100 projects have been funded by CAIF to create demand by supporting pathways to learning and employment and about 90 projects address governance. The areas that have received the least investment in the past seven rounds relate to connectivity and supply: adult learning and pedagogy, and the role and value of adult learning.

Both the limited access to existing research and the analysis that was possible highlighted a need for the sector to invest in a system that allows for the LLOs to access, understand, reflect and respond to the findings of research and to support effective learning systems for the sector itself and for learners.

An effective learning system has the following attributes<sup>45</sup>:

- Reflects and responds.
- Displays creativity and leadership.
- Values learning in individuals and organisations.
- Is equipped to cope with change.
- Sees opportunities in the unexpected and insignificant.
- Turns weakness into strength.
- Learns to manage change through democratic processes.

These attributes provide a useful guide for the further development of the DET's learning system to ensure the findings of the Capacity and Innovation Fund are fully brought to bear on the sector.

<sup>45</sup> Galbally, R. and Wong, S. 2008, op. cit.



*“The agenda for the ACFE Forums is set by the Department and there is little opportunity for problem solving”*  
Quote from LLO

## ACFE Forums

ACFE supports sharing knowledge within the sector through ACFE Forums that take place up to four times each year. The Forums provide an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and exchange, networking and transferring information between the ACFE Board, Regional Council and the LLOs. While these sessions were found to be vital and valuable opportunities, some stakeholders expressed the desire to increase the time available for problem solving and exploration and less briefing or top-down time allocated to outlining DET’s agenda.

### 8.1.5 Reflections on the current business model

A majority of the LLOs engaged in the Research Project articulated the restrictions created by delivering Learn Local courses on the basis of an hourly rate per student.

The ACFE Board pays pre-accredited course providers \$8.20 per hour per student and the LLOs can charge student course fees up to \$1.08 an hour, up to a \$50 maximum for a concession fee for a course of learning.

The hourly rate funding model must include payment for the teacher, resources and overheads. The rate does not allow for developing or marketing courses, administration or time to support more vulnerable learners. Many organisations are working creatively within the system, meeting the needs of learners and managing their own financial viability and budgets. Methods for doing so include using volunteer teachers to deliver courses, and signing students up to classes in order to provide the real support requested by the learner e.g. social inclusion activities.

In many instances, there are too few course enrolments for a financially viable course. This particularly applies to smaller towns, where as noted above in Section 5, the need for pre-accredited learning is often high. Organisations in this situation are frequently choosing not to offer Learn Local courses resulting in ongoing, deleterious effects on small communities.

The funding model is also often reported to constrain innovation and prevent outreach and marketing to attract ACFE’s target learners because of the limitations it places on paid time for activities other than “face time” with learners.

A ‘one size fits all’ business model, which does not weight course with respect to location, small populations and specific population needs of the population, frequently results in a number of perverse outcomes including:

- Competitive, rather than collaborative behaviour.
- Failure to share knowledge.
- Absence of focus on learner outcomes.
- Co-dependence between the learner and the Learn Local organisation.

**In addition, there is some evidence suggesting that the funding model provides incentives to work 'creatively' around the system, rather than the system working to reinforce and reward innovation and effort, for example in the design of courses using the A-Frame structure.**

The Research Report findings indicate a clear opportunity for incentives to align more with the intended outcomes of the sector. Currently, for example, incentive exists to offer courses requiring low resource investment and to encourage learners into these courses regardless of significant and relevant outcomes for the learner. The financial incentive, as some stakeholders describe it, is to get “bums on seats.” There is little incentive in the funding to encourage the design and delivery of courses based on the true needs of the community.

The result of the limitations in the current funding model is that, in a majority of instances, the LLOs are not delivering courses to their intended adult learner groups. Instead we see many places being offered to those who might not be described as vulnerable learners.

A contributing factor to this challenge is the limited funding of outreach activities, partnership and relationship strengthening and administration. The sector is relying on other funders, in particular the Neighbourhood House funding through the Department of Health and Human Services to support outreach activities.

Some organisations have stopped delivering the courses altogether because the time and effort to comply with compliance requirements was taking away from delivering on their core purpose, vis a vis, the community development activities the organisations are most passionate about.

We acknowledge that DET has recently completed a sector wide research project that has included in its scope an examination and proposal for a new funding model. We have therefore not delved too deeply in this area to avoid duplication. However, we make the following observations:

LLOs are expected to engage and train the most “disadvantaged” learners. These are people with potentially entrenched and complex social problems. Engagement with these learners requires appropriate outreach and therefore

engagement funding and high quality teachers for a positive learning experience.

The current funding model does not differentiate between positive outcomes for learners or the individual ‘distance travelled’ by these learners. While each learner-hour is funded equally, it does not take equal effort to achieve positive outcomes for learners and an outcome does not produce equal value for the individual or society.

### **8.1.6 Business models for consideration**

During the research project it became apparent that there are opportunities for organisations that deliver Learn Local courses, to provide other non-accredited training on a fee-for-service basis in order to fund their Learn Local effort. Examples include courses such as:

- Customer service.
- Workplace diversity.
- Occupational health and safety (OH&S).

A number of organisations expressed a desire to have the management of their mandatory staff training requirements outsourced, potentially to a Learn Local training provider. Mandatory staff training needs could then be leveraged, by providing local fee-for-service training. This would optimise the burden of training time for mandatory training.

There is also potential for organisations to design their intended impact around a Social Enterprise model, i.e. create positive social value through a revenue-generating activity. An example of an organisation that is successfully delivering on training and employment outcomes for people experiencing barriers to learning and employment is Australian Community Logistics (ACL). ACL achieves this by approaching working and learning in a different way. It doesn't train in the hope of future employment. They employ in preparation for further learning. ACL calls it “work to learn.”



## CASE STUDY

# AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY LOGISTICS

Since 2014, ACL has operated a social enterprise focused on individuals in transition to work. Whether their ongoing work is with ACL or elsewhere, the long-term unemployed, school students engaged in vocational education and people with disabilities are provided with the social and technical skills to expand their employability. While gaining skills via on-site Vocational Education and Training (VET) certificate courses and practical job experience, the ACL workforce also provides labour to a 'food rescue' supply chain that alleviates food insecurity among some of Victoria's most fragile community members.

A key success factor is ACL's workplace culture. Diversity and equality are celebrated, and individuals are empowered to give to and teach others. This strengthens re-engagement in employment and further education and re-connection with people.

After originating at its initial warehouse in Hume, ACL's unique social business model now operates from five sites: Hume, Seaford, Kilsyth, Kensington and most recently Ravenhall (Deer Park) with plans to expand nationally.

ACL has demonstrated a flexible business model, responding to ever changing policy and business/funding drivers and has continued to expand its operations to support more communities in need of food, local employment and education opportunities.

## 8.1.7 Government Department collaboration

Several stakeholders interviewed posed an interesting question: Who benefits from the work we do providing Learn Local training? It was noted that the work of the sector has the potential to divert people from criminal activity. It helps improve mental health. It results in better economic participation and it reduces reliance on welfare. This observation that the beneficiaries broadly include the Victorian community and specifically include government departments working in justice, health, economic development and welfare lead many to ponder on the possibilities of greater cross-government collaboration in the development of programs and provision of funding for this important sector.

In May 2000 the Victorian Government launched the Victorian 'Learning Towns' Program that funded ten 'Learning Towns' through the Adult Community and Further Education Division of the Department of Education. This program was based on a model from the United Kingdom that had been developing since 1995 to put 'lifelong learning' as an approach towards 'sustainable economic development and social inclusiveness'.<sup>46</sup>

The regions funded as a result of 'Learning Towns' included Horsham, Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Kyabram, Mt Evelyn, Wangaratta, Wodonga and the Shires of Buloke and Southern Grampians.

The aim of the Victorian Learning Town Network (VLTN) was 'to develop collaborative learning partnerships between education providers, business, local government and community activity and to integrate economic and social development'.<sup>47</sup> Victorian Learning Towns innovated a wide range of initiatives that aimed to contribute to a shift from an education and training paradigm to a learning paradigm.

This Research Project found that very limited community knowledge existed in the region about the 2000 Learning Towns initiative. It is understood by the researcher that 'Learning Towns' suffered from high turnover in the leadership position and strong leadership is required for adult learning to get the traction it needs to thrive.

In Victoria, the City of Melton is a thriving Learning Town that took leadership and a grass roots effort for local government to adopt. As discussed below, the City of Melton provides an example of embedding learning into Local Council's Plans.

***"Local Government need to be a pivotal part of the conversation"***  
*External stakeholder*

<sup>46</sup> Galbally, R. and Wong, S. 2008, op. cit.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*





## CASE STUDY

# LIFELONG LEARNING & LEARNING CITIES

*“Cities are the main engines of economic growth in the modern world, and learning is one of the most important fuels of that growth”* - UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities

The ability to respond and adapt to changing circumstances is critical for survival, and learning and the ability to learn is at the centre of this response. Studies have shown that people who “acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes in a wide range of contexts are better equipped to adapt to changes in their environments” and for communities to continue to evolve and transition to sustainable societies requires a society level approach to lifelong learning<sup>48</sup>.

The Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) exists to:

*“mobilise cities and demonstrate how a city’s resources can be used most effectively to provide learning opportunities to citizens. The goal is to enrich human potential, promote equality and social justice, maintain social cohesion, and create sustainable prosperity.”*

GNLC is coordinated through the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

The Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities defines a learning city as one that effectively mobilises its resources to:

- Promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education;
- Re-vitalise learning in families and communities;
- Facilitate learning for and in the workplace;
- Extend the use of modern learning technologies;
- Enhance quality and excellence in learning; and
- Nurture a culture of learning throughout life.

In mobilising these resources, a learning city will “enable and reinforce individual empowerment and social cohesion, economic and cultural prosperity and sustainable development”<sup>49</sup>.

More than 1,000 cities around the world have declared themselves to be learning cities. One such city is The City of Melton in Victoria that in 2015 won the UNESCO Learning City Award at UNESCO’s 2nd International Conference on Learning Cities hosted by Mexico City.

The City of Melton was presented with this award in recognition of its efforts to implement the UNESCO Key Features of Learning Cities through the Community Learning Plan. Melton’s City Council recognises the importance of lifelong learning for the prosperity of its community and has established a Community Learning Board to advise Council and consult with its community about issues relating to lifelong learning. The Community Learning Board includes cross-sector representation from the community’s economic and civil society pillars and senior people from Council’s staff.

The Melton City Council’s Learning Board Mission:

*“A Learning City generating lifelong learning opportunities to grow our community’s social, cultural, economic, environmental and personal wellbeing.”*

Core to this mission is the individual and community benefits Melton seeks to create for the:

- Individual: skills, qualifications and personal development.
- Community: economic development and social inclusion<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Shire of Melton (2014). Shire of Melton Community Learning Plan 2015-2018. Shire of Melton. Community Learning Plan. 6 April 2016, viewed on 6 June 2016, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/structure/Pages/acfe.aspx>

## 8.2 A Responsive Sector

*“In a changeable context we need ‘change-able’ people, organisations and communities”*

Quote from How Learning Towns Build Social Inclusion

Alongside its goal to be a sustainable sector, the shared vision for the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy is a responsive sector.

A responsive sector exists where:

- Local learner needs are well understood and responded to.
- Local community and employment needs are well understood and responded to.
- Community relevant learning programs are collaboratively developed.
- Effective intra-sector and cross-sector learning partnerships flourish.

In order to create a responsive adult learning sector, people working in community learning need to have a deep understanding of the local community needs and design courses that meet these needs.

Looking through the lens of a responsive sector this is what we found through our research.

### 8.2.1 Understanding the Learn Local learner and his or her needs

*“... we were all pretty much shut down in many ways, so now through each other, we’ve started a journey and we’ll take our own branches out on that journey... the sky’s the limit.”*

Women’s Journey participant

The ACFE Board has identified the following learner groups for particular focus in pre-accredited programs:

- Early school leavers.
- Disengaged youth.
- CALD learners.
- Learners with a disability.
- Indigenous learners.
- Male learners over 45.
- Vulnerable low-skilled workers.
- People in low socio-economic status localities.
- Unemployed/underemployed people.

Responding to the needs of these learners requires LLOs to have an appropriate understanding of specific learning needs and life circumstances together with the appropriate skills to engage the learners. Based on an extensive national and international literature review by Davies et.al. (2011), the reasons learner disengagement can be grouped into four main areas of insufficiency:

- **Achievement** – poor prior experiences of learning, early school leavers, long periods without study, language, literacy, numeracy.
- **Aspiration** – no career plans, limited networks, poor information on work and opportunities, lacking careers advice or planning.
- **Application (circumstances)** – income support needs, family commitments, disability/health, poverty, English language, refugee status, living circumstances.
- **Access** – poor knowledge of study options, no interest in finding out, low aspirations confidence, constraints on access (distance, time, financial).

Over the course of research, Think Impact found little evidence of a systematic approach to addressing the insufficiencies indicated above. This begins with weak processes around identification and understanding the needs of targeted learners in their region. Many individuals are doing a great deal to assist, but there is substantial variety across organisations and towns in the region. Moreover, the learning needs of ‘disadvantaged’ learners are being addressed only as far as the capability and resources of relatively isolated organisations allow.

The current model under which Learn Local is funded exacerbates this situation (as described under Section 8.1.5 above). This research found that the structure of funding often results in insufficient investment in outreach, infrastructure and flexible learning structures.

*“If you can’t engage them in the first place, then you won’t get them into training”.* Quote from Community Organisation Co-ordinator

It is intended that venues delivering Learn Local courses are welcoming and safe community spaces run by trusted staff and volunteers with a genuine commitment to community engagement and development. This addresses the insufficiencies above by

addressing poor prior learning experiences and limited networks and ignorance about opportunities. However, many of the venues are often seen as 'places where old people go' and are not always 'culturally safe'<sup>51</sup> for young people. Some venues have made specific efforts to address cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people but this is not universal practice.

*"For a lot of people who come to us as a Learn Local, this is their very first experience of an education arena. So it's very important that they have a positive experience."* Annette Creek, Nhill LLO.

All stakeholders, with one exception, agreed that face-to-face learning is the most effective approach to engage with local learners. Online learning provides the opportunity to engage with technology and therefore has the potential to address some challenges faced by organisations operating in rural and remote locations with low populations. However, this course delivery mechanism will not fully support the community development philosophy that is intrinsic to a Learn Local course. Increasing social interaction, confidence and community connectedness requires a supportive and interactive environment. Whilst this may change over time, a face-to-face approach will deliver for the current population of people LLOs are targeting.

There is also a group of high need learners with whom the Learn Local sector currently has limited connection: people in contact with the justice system. According to research published in September 2015, in Victoria in March 2015 there were 6,386 people in prison and only 246 of these prisoners had completed secondary school. That is only 3.8% of prisoners in Victoria's prisons had completed secondary school. Also according to this research, there is a strong correlation between reduced recidivism (the likelihood to re-offend), if the offender has had an opportunity for training.<sup>52</sup>

*"I'm not for standardisation of learn local organisations across the country, I think one of the absolute gems of our organisations are that we can adapt to local needs"*. Annette Creek, Nhill LLO.

*"Being ready for work is much more than actually having a skill, it's about being able to communicate, it's having confidence to deal with other people, it takes confidence to deal with yourself. It takes a very long term view"*. Quote from Learn Local Provider

A number of LLOs outlined some of the challenges in the course planning and design process for responding to learner needs while still meeting DET's A-Frame requirements. It is understood the A-frame template is "open to interpretation" by LLOs, in particular the "intent" of the activity towards an employment or further study pathway. However, there was significant uncertainty amongst LLOs as to how far the funding arrangements would extend to support a focus on improving 'employability.' Many LLOs interpret the guidelines and template rigidly resulting in constrained innovation and missed opportunities for creating meaningful change for learners.

LLOs further expressed concern that talking about pathways to employment sets people up to fail by imposing unreasonable expectations.

*"You will scare them off by 'flagging pathways' and then they will feel as if they have failed again"*. Quote from Learn Local provider

It is clear from the research findings, that broadening the notion of learning to include a holistic approach to personal development is often a pre-condition for an employment pathway. Community learning centres that design inclusive and supportive programs can support local people to tap into their passions, hopes and goals to motivate them to try again – addressing the insufficiencies above to design a better future for themselves and their families.

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<sup>51</sup> Cultural safety extends beyond cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. It empowers individuals and enables them to contribute to the achievement of positive outcomes. It encompasses a reflection on individual cultural identity and recognition of the impact of personal culture on professional practice refer Bin-Sallik, Maryann, 2003 'Cultural safety: Let's name it!, Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, Volume 32, page 21-28

<sup>52</sup> Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria, September 2015.

## 8.2.2 Understanding community and employer needs and trends

The core intent of Learn Local course delivery is to meet learners' needs and support them onto a 'pathway' to further study and/or employment. The capacity for a LLO to create employment pathways is dependent on its understanding of, and connections to, local industry and employment needs.

*"You won't get a job unless you are connected".*

Local employer

Research found few examples of any systematic approach by LLOs to engage with local employers and industry associations in ways that might clarify pathways for learners into employment. Any engagement that was done, was undertaken by LLO staff "in their own time" due to the hourly rate per student delivery funding model. Many respondents to research also noted that employment prospects in some towns and regions are very bleak.

Perhaps as a consequence, LLOs do not appear to have a reputation as an avenue of research or connections for people who are seeking jobs and employers are "not seeing the connection between [Learn Local] training and industry."

*"Trainers are not employers...you need to keep currency by getting out in the market".* Quote from local employer

The employers interviewed as part of this research project all made reference to the 'soft' or 'life' skills they require of their employees. These include smiling at customers, punctuality, a positive attitude, being reliable and having confidence. In addition, the development of 'life skills' were often seen as more valuable than traditional 'job skills'.

*"I don't need them to come here with job skills. They can easily learn that on the job. I need them to come here with confidence and the right attitude".* Quote from local employer

*"Being ready for work is much more than having a skill."* Annette Creek, Nhill Learn Local.

## 8.2.3 Collaborative course design

At the time of research, the Wimmera community was in the midst of a severe drought, resulting in a poor harvest. The flow-on economic impact on local businesses and employment was of great concern to local communities as farmers experienced financial stress, and declining physical and mental health. Many LLO employees indicated direct experience with these local challenges, however a coordinated approach to engaging with these issues, offering relevant training or alignment and collaboration with other support networks was not observed. This is likely to reflect the structural barriers to collaboration among LLOs and cross-sector external stakeholder groups arising from the funding model and lack of incentives for collaboration.

While the model is limiting the sector, the A-Frame course planning and design process does, however, encourage peer review and feedback through its moderation and compliance requirements. These requirements result in a peer review process that presents an opportunity for knowledge sharing and feedback. The process itself unfortunately is time-consuming paperwork and an expectation by DET that is not funded in addition to the hourly rate funding provided. This has been reported as inadequate to cover costs.

## 8.2.4 Partnerships and connections across sectors – a marginalised sector

As indicated by the Learning Towns Framework a successful adult learning sector needs to build productive working relationships and mutually beneficial partnerships with key stakeholders. These partnerships should be locally driven and locally engaged to build trust between different sectors and understand the diverse needs of all parties. This includes engagement to understand community needs, but also exploring partnerships with business and industry, employment services, education and training providers, government stakeholders and other community organisations.

The Learning Towns Framework acknowledges that expertise and skills in partnership development and facilitation are essential to ensure focus on learning and not service delivery. Learning Towns requires community stakeholders to learn to be partners, while working on learning endeavours, resulting in more inclusive community partnerships for creative and innovative approaches based on equality of participation, emphasising cooperation rather than conflict.

As noted above in connection with course relevance to employers and learners, a common theme that emerged from the research was the limited evidence of LLOs consulting, engaging or connecting across sectors, in particular industry and business sectors.

*"ACFE don't invest in networkers, that is a gap".* Quote from LLO

*"This is something we could both do better...to create appropriate links but to date we haven't had a lot of communication".* Quote from Group Training Organisation

A lack of a nuanced interpretation of partnerships was also observed. When asked about the existence of partnerships, many LLOs indicated that they did not have any such arrangements in place. However, on further investigation, it became evident that some informal relationships had been created, however these were not recognised as partnerships. The consequences of this may include disengagement of LLOs themselves as a result of overestimating their isolation and underestimating the resources available among a group of loosely aligned agencies or individuals.

*"The sector does not do partnerships well"* Quote from Government Stakeholder

An opportunity exists to gain greater insight into the “touch-points” for adult learners to create or formalise referral networks with agencies that already interact regularly with these people. These may include, but are not limited to: community health services, justice, welfare agencies, job-active providers, schools, TAFEs. Many of these organisations are already well connected in the community and understand the complex needs of their clients.

Job-active providers for example currently deliver to job seekers certain training and support in skills such as resume writing and completing job applications. Understanding how the Learn Local courses can support people to be successful and building referral networks with job-active providers is likely to provide mutual benefit as well as create broader value within the community.



*“I didn’t look for it [the course], it came to me and no other place has ever come to me going ‘do you want some help?’”*  
Quote from Learn Local learner

## CASE STUDY

# WOMAN’S JOURNEY – A NEW BEGINNING

*A New Beginning* is a new pre-accredited training course designed for women who are looking to make positive changes in their lives. The course has been developed by Wimmera HUB and focuses on creating a positive, safe and nurturing learning environment for women. The aim is to support women to gain confidence in setting life goals and ambitions, identify personal strengths, enhance their interpersonal skills and develop effective communication skills.

The participating women come from a variety of backgrounds and personal circumstances. Most face barriers to further education and employment due to poor literacy or numeracy skills, low self-esteem, social isolation or experiences of physical or emotional abuse. Some of the participating women found this course through their own networks, whereas others were referred to the Wimmera HUB by job seeker agencies, Wimmera Uniting Care and Community Corrections.

Though still in the early stages of delivery, this course is already supporting women to become more resilient, strong, positive and happy. The community development model that underpins the course design recognises the importance of supporting women to increase self-esteem, build confidence and trust in others as a precursor to creating future pathways. The intent of the course is to support the development of these softer skills that will then empower participants to aspire to a better life, set goals for the future and work towards further study, employment and ongoing personal development.

## 8.3 An Effective Sector



*“Look after people and society will look after itself”*  
Quote Learn Local learner

To sustainability and responsiveness, the third element of the shared vision for the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy is to establish an effective sector.

An effective sector exists where:

- Providers are focused on meaningful outcomes for their learners and community.
- Active outreach is used to engage targeted learners.
- Learning pathways into the Learn Local and beyond to further learning and employment are well defined.

Looking through the lens of an effective sector this is what we found through our research.

### 8.3.1 The value of adult community learning outcomes

*“It’s like a door opening on life again... into all sorts of possibilities...”* Learn Local learner

The current delivery of Learn Local courses creates economic and social value across the community for individuals, businesses and community groups. The LLOs however had limited ways of articulating the value they create. This was evidenced through the poor brand awareness amongst large employers, peak bodies and community organisations as discussed in Section 8.1.2.

An approach to understanding and communicating this value is through an articulation of the social outcomes created, that is the change created as a result of an activity for individual learners, contribution to economic development and community vibrancy<sup>53</sup>. Social accounting is gaining a lot

of traction around the world because it acknowledges that economic measurement is a limited measure of value and that ‘to increase equality, improve wellbeing and increase environmental sustainability’ requires decisions to be made that take a wider definition of value into account<sup>54</sup>.

The value for learners in engaging with LLOs and undertaking Learn Local courses exists in three key domains:

- **Intrinsic** - (wellbeing and aspiration).
- **Extrinsic** - (connection and influence).
- **Functional** - (skills and resources).

The value for the learner is multi-dimensional and essential for economic participation and contribution to community life. Supporting adults to reach their full potential as confident, capable and connected individuals flows to positive economic and cultural community outcomes.

The Learn Local sector contributes positively to the economy in a number of ways as illustrated below including:

- Community and government savings through reduced welfare needs.
- Increased economic participation and increased capacity to spend locally.
- Innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Business and organisations self-sufficiency and productivity.

A number of local employers reflected on the impact on business of empty shops, families with limited disposable income and connection to community, increasing inequality and disadvantage. Understanding, evidencing and communicating the relationship between the adult learning sector and economic prosperity could be strengthened.

<sup>53</sup> For more information refer to Social Value International ([www.socialvalueint.org](http://www.socialvalueint.org)) and the new economics foundation [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

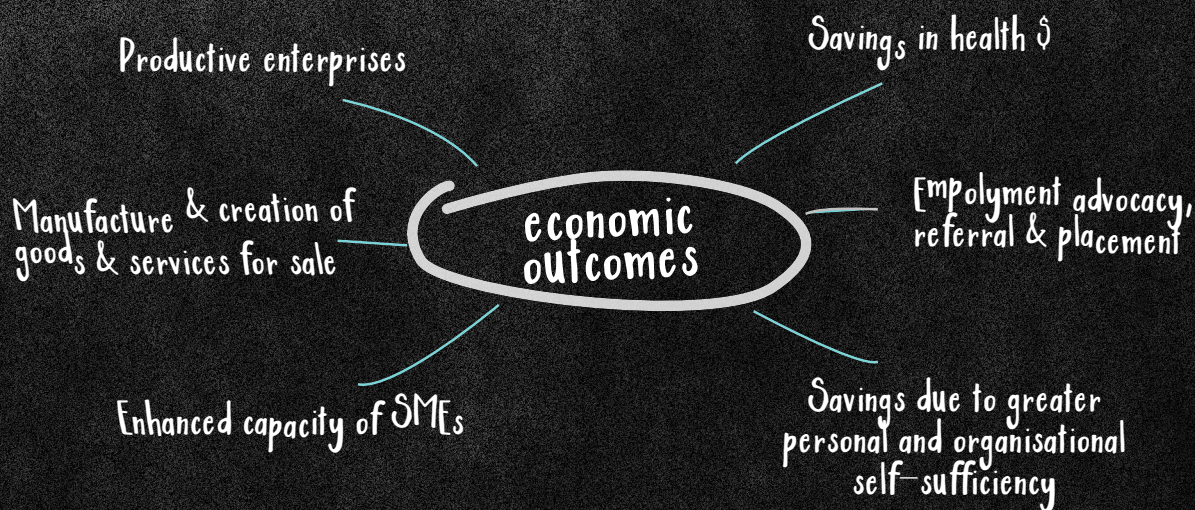


Figure 14: Potential economic value delivered by a sustainable, responsive & effective sector

*“There needs to be a level of maturity to see the connection to economic development”*  
*Local Government representative*

The Learn Local sector makes a number of significant contributions to the community as illustrated below. There is evidence from literature that this contribution includes reduced radicalisation and increased social cohesion, meaningful contributions to community groups and enhanced community identity and renewal<sup>55</sup>. For regional and rural communities this is particularly relevant because the community often resources its own essential services, including those called upon in emergencies such as SES and CFA volunteers, maternal and child health support through playgroups, and support for vulnerable members of the community including meals on wheels services<sup>56</sup> that ultimately results in savings for all levels of Government.



Figure 15: Potential community value delivered by a sustainable, responsive & effective sector

<sup>55</sup> Volunteering Western Victoria (formerly Wimmera Volunteers), 2012. 'Connections, compliance and community, the changing face of volunteering in regional Victoria'.

The “theory of change” (that is, the logic that connects the sector’s activities with the resultant outcomes) might be informally paraphrased as:

...Encourage disadvantaged learners into an informal pre-accredited Learn Local course which will result in them proceeding along a “pathway” to a job or undertake further education...

It was evident from the research project that current support for, and practice in, the sector does not reflect this ideal. The structure of the system does not drive positive changes for learners towards employability or education at the levels required by the learners who experience barriers to education.

Currently, the majority of learners undertaking Learn Local courses are retired people and outside the target learner groups set out in Section 6 above. The profile of the Learn Local learner in the Wimmera included the retired person doing digital literacy courses. The value of this learning should not however be overlooked: digital literacy is critical for meeting basic needs such as banking, Centrelink, paying bills and a way to stay connected with family and friends when distance and time is a barrier for connection. Nevertheless domination of courses by this learner group indicates a shortfall in the sector meeting ACFE’s target learners.

It is therefore proposed that the sector develop an Impact Framework that outlines and articulates what change the sector seeks to create, how it intends to create that change through training activity and for whom it seeks to create change.

To be most effective, this Impact Framework would need to be articulated at a sector level aligned with Regional Council Impact Frameworks and each LLO should have a strategy aligned to these frameworks.

The outcomes of the recommended Framework should be defined by a set of indicators and evaluated against these indicators. Further, an improved focus on outcomes will lead to better targeting of the funding towards disadvantaged learners to assist them to initiate pathways to further learning, employment, and positive community participation.

### **8.3.2 Engaging learners where they need to be engaged**

It is well referenced in literature that to break cycles of intergenerational disadvantage requires early intervention.<sup>57</sup>

Most of a child’s brain development occurs in infancy and early childhood. The synaptic connections are made through stimulation and interaction with the parent or primary carer, and continue to form rapidly during the first 3 years of life. The quality and quantity of children’s experiences during these critical early years therefore has a direct impact on their brain development<sup>58</sup> and in turn has impact on cognition and learning throughout life.

Data from Australian Early Childhood Development Census (AEDC) reveals that almost one child in four enters their first year of schooling “developmentally vulnerable”. That is; they score in the bottom decile in one or more of the developmental domains.

The developmental domains include:

- Physical health and wellbeing.
- Social competence.
- Emotional maturity.
- Language and cognitive skills.
- Communication skills and general knowledge.

Early intervention is the most cost-effective approach and the most successful early interventions target both parent and child<sup>59</sup> and LLOs could play an important role. Some LLOs had connections with early intervention programs, such as the Warracknabeal Oral Reading Development Strategy (WORDS) and Let’s Read program and co-location with child-care and maternal health centres creates ‘touch points’ for creating necessary connections with learners.

A high percentage of young people in the Wimmera are not engaging with earning or learning. At the time of the study, it is understood 182 of the 900 students (or 20%) at Horsham Secondary College are enrolled in alternative programs including satellite VCAL, ConnectED and the McKenzie Creek Program. These programs are designed for students that are disconnecting or disconnected from mainstream schooling for many reasons.

Building aspirations is a critical element for supporting young people and adults to remain engaged in learning and live to their full potential. This includes creating new ideas about what is ‘normal’ not poverty norms. There were limited examples of the LLOs making connections with schools, and earlier connection would be beneficial.

<sup>57</sup> Sawhill, I.V. & Karpilow, Q. 2014, ‘How much could we improve children’s life chances by intervening early and often?’, Centre on Children and Families at Brookings, p.3. cited in Anne Hampshire ‘Addressing entrenched disadvantage in Australia’ Chapter 3 Early intervention: The key to preventing entrenched disadvantage

<sup>58</sup> Perry, B. 2004, ‘Understanding traumatized and maltreated children, the core concepts’, Train The Trainer Series, The Child Trauma Academy [www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org)

<sup>59</sup> Trovillo, T. 2006. Family connection partnership evaluation results report. Jasper County, GA: Jasper County Family Connection.





Based on an extensive literature review examining the key interventions to re-engage adult learners, there were four common elements:<sup>60</sup>

### *Outreach*

Strategies relate to access to information, developing meaningful relationships and targeting high needs groups.

### *Learner wellbeing*

Strategies acknowledge the structural or situational obstacles that affect participation in learning and requires intensive services and support to overcome.

### *Andragogy*

Strategies relate to what works to overcome negative learning experiences, e.g. hands-on learning and integration of technology.

### *Pathways*

Strategies encourage the development of appealing and worthwhile options for learners that reach beyond the course.

These elements can provide guidance for LLOs for re-engaging adults in learning.

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<sup>60</sup> Davies, M. Lamb, S & Doecke, E. 2011, 'Strategic Review of Effective Re-Engagement Models for Disengaged Learners', Centre for Research on Education Systems The University of Melbourne, Melbourne.

## CASE STUDY

# FOLK SCHOOLS IN NORWAY<sup>61</sup>

There are many ways that adult community education can be provided to achieve positive outcomes for both individuals and society. This case study is an example of an alternative model of adult education in Norway that promotes lifelong learning through small live-in learning communities known as Folk Schools.

Folk Schools supplement the regular education system offering a range of non-traditional subjects, as well as academic subjects. The majority of students are aged between 18 and 25 and have opportunities to grow both individually, socially and academically. Folk Schools have been very successful in providing an alternative to and a pathway into traditional further education institutions, with international students traveling to Norway to spend a year in a Folk High School.

The Norwegian government recognise a year at a Folk High School is beneficial to both the individual and society, with the government fully funding these privately run schools. There are 77 folk high schools throughout Norway, each of which offers a unique curriculum specific to the profile of the school and the qualifications of the staff. Folk High Schools do not grant degrees or conduct exams students are instead presented with a diploma detailing what they have participated in upon finishing. Students have no tuition fees and are only expected to pay for board, study trips and teaching materials.

### 8.3.3 Creating connected pathways

This Research Project has revealed an opportunity to substantially improve the focus on outcomes and referral pathways for learners, employers, other education providers and the wider community.

By clearly articulating these outcomes and the mechanisms by which these changes occur, highlights for other sectors that they not only have a role to play in creating change for disadvantaged learners, but that they also have something to gain in the process.

The following stakeholder groups have the potential to experience outcomes as a direct result of pre-accredited learning – and these outcomes could form the basis for articulating a value proposition:

#### **TAFE Institutes and VET providers**

- Increased participation in further learning
- Increased rates of successful completion
- Improved relationships with other adult learning providers

#### **Employers**

- More productive and engaged employees
- Improved access to employees
- Reduced employee attrition

#### **Referral agencies**

- Increased client participation
- Increased capacity of clients
- Improved access to employers

#### **Other partners**

- Increased client participation
- Improved relationships with providers of adult learning

#### **Community**

- More engaged volunteers
- Improved community health (physical and mental)
- More active community organisations
- Improved economic participation
- More advocates and community mentors
- Improved family relationships

Gaining a better understanding of the referral pathways and experiences of the learner will contribute to a more effective sector.

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<sup>61</sup> "Folkehøgskole - What Is Folk High School?" Folkehøgskole.no. N.p., 2016. Web. 6 June 2016.

# A VISION FOR THE WIMMERA

*This section outlines the key recommendations, synthesised from the research that will guide the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy.*

## **Towards a *sustainable* sector**

Recommendation 1: Build a valued and recognised adult community education sector

Recommendation 2: Strengthen the capacity of Learn Local Organisations

Recommendation 3: Foster sustainable business models

Recommendation 4: Advocate for sector reform through cross-government department funding models

## **Towards a *responsive* sector**

Recommendation 5: Understand local learner needs

Recommendation 6: Understand local employment needs and trends

Recommendation 7: Foster collaborative and community relevant program and partnership design

## **Towards an *effective* sector**

Recommendation 8: Develop an impact oriented adult community education based on an outcomes framework at an individual and community level

Recommendation 9: Engage learners where they need to be engaged e.g. service or activity touch-points or life transitions

Recommendation 10: Create connected learning pathways

The research highlights a need for the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy to respond in two parts:

- Advocacy for sector reform and
- A local response by LLOs given their current resources.

Refer to the Wimmera Community Learning Strategy for details.

# 10

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# 11 APPENDIX I: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

*In total over 90 people from a range of regions and across a variety of sectors were engaged. We would like to acknowledge and thank the following individuals and organisations:*

## **Regional LLO**

- Neighbourhood House Networker, Christine Zubrinich, Horsham
- Warracknabeal Neighbourhood House, Karen Fuller, Warracknabeal
- Rainbow Neighbourhood House, Alison Ey, Rainbow
- Beulah Business and Information Centre, Helen Dillon, Beulah
- Nhill Neighbourhood House Learning Centre, Annette Creek, Nhill
- St Arnaud Resource Centre, Committee of Management, St Arnaud
- St Arnaud Neighbourhood House, Heather Stevenson and Ruth Buttler, St Arnaud
- Traralgon Neighbourhood House, Jenny Poon, Traralgon
- The Hub Inc. Robbie Millar, Horsham
- Horsham Community Centre, Kathy Pilmore and Belinda Gossow, Horsham
- Neighbourhood House Network, Conference, Wimmera Region Alliance Committee, Wimmera Region

## **Former LLO**

- Murtoa & District Neighbourhood House (SLAAM inc.), Trish Adler, Murtoa
- Rupanyup Education Activities Community House, Gwen, Rupanyup

## **Local Government**

- Horsham Rural City Council, Angela Murphy, Horsham
- West Wimmera Shire Council, Venkat Peteti, Horsham
- Northern Grampians Shire Council, Justine Linley, Stawell
- Lifelong Learning Coordinator City of Melton, Peter Blunden, Melton

## **State Government Departments**

- Department of Education Training (DET), Georgina Ryder, Geelong
- Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Mandi Stewart, Horsham
- Department of Justice, Tanya Barnes, Horsham
- Grampians Regional Council, Georgina Ryder, Ballarat
- Grampians Regional Council, Karen Monument, Ballarat
- Department of Education and Training, Carol Hankinson, Melbourne Grampians ACFE Regional Council, Ballarat

## **Business, industry and employment**

- Skill Invest, John Ackland, Horsham
- Stawell Gold Mine, Harry Murray, Stawell
- StawellBiz, Chris Waack, Stawell
- Wimmera Development Association, Ralph Kenyon and Sue Boddi, Horsham
- Frews, Daryl Holloway, Stawell

## **Community agencies and support services**

- Eworks, Jay Macumber, Horsham
- Migrant Services, Robyn Murphy, Horsham
- Haven Home Safe, Rick Christie, Bendigo
- Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative, Dean O'Loughlin, Horsham
- Wimmera Regional Library Corporation, Paula Clarke, Horsham
- St Arnaud RSL and St Arnaud Citizens Band, Bob Wooley, St Arnaud
- Volunteering Western Victoria, Christine Picone, Nhill



## Education

- CAE, Maree Baird, Melbourne
- Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN, Tim Shaw, Horsham
- Central Grampians LLEN, James Skeane, Ararat
- Longerenong Agricultural College, John Goldsmith, Longerenong
- Federation University Australia, Geoff Lord, Wimmera
- Horsham University of the Third Age, Bob McIlvena, Horsham
- Horsham Special School, Matt Copping, Horsham
- ConnectED, Horsham College, Adam Ross, Horsham

## Health / Health Care

- Wimmera Health Care Group, Don McRae, Horsham
- East Wimmera Health, Andree Schier and Bonnie, St Arnaud
- Grampians Community Health, Rachel Wittaker, Stawell Wimmera PCP, Geoff Witmitz, Horsham

## Local community needs

In total 21 Learn Local learners were engaged:

- Stawell, x5 participants
- Nhill, x6 participants
- Horsham, x4 participants from A Women's Journey and x6 participants from the Horsham Learner Group

## Research consultants

- Starfish Consulting, Dr Shanti Wong, Melbourne
- Foresight Lane, David McGinness, Melbourne



## 12 APPENDIX II: EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN AUSTRALIA

The Australian Government Department of Education and Training is responsible for national policies and programs that help Australians access quality early childhood education, school education, higher education, vocational education and training, international education and research<sup>62</sup>. There are three major sectors of education and training that operate in Australia: Vocational Education and Training (VET), Schooling and Higher Education.

## 12.1 Vocational Education and Training (VET)

VET is provided through a network of eight state and territory governments and the Australian Government, along with industry, public and private training providers.

The VET sector is focused on the delivery of workplace-specific skills and knowledge over a wide range of careers and industries, including trade and office work, retail, hospitality and technology<sup>63</sup>. The providers of VET include technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, adult and community education (ACE) providers and agricultural colleges, as well as private providers such as Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), community organisations, industry skill centres, and commercial and enterprise training providers. In addition, some universities and schools provide VET.

## 12.2 Adult Community Education (ACE)

Education and Training Departments in Australia have responsibility for ACE policy due to the role of ACE providers and programs in providing pathways to VET and Further Education<sup>64</sup>. Historically the sectors have also received funding in varying degrees from all three tiers of government across a range of portfolios and also gather large proportions of their income through fee-for-service activities.

However, ACE is defined differently in each state and territory of Australia. Some states support a sector of not-for-profit ACE providers, while others use the term ACE to refer to a set of non-formal programs. According to Adult Learning Australia (ALA), the peak body for adult and community education in Australia, this means that ACE has two distinct meanings in Australian policy terms<sup>65</sup>. It refers to both:

- adult learning programs that are non-formal and non-vocational and usually have no prerequisites; and
- a sector of not-for-profit local community-based organisations who offer adult learning programs.

Regardless of the particular nature of each state-based structure, all ACE providers are defined by their strong focus on engaging socially and economically marginalised groups through learning. The adult community education (ACE) sector in Australia is essentially a network of independent, locally based organisations that combine volunteer support, user fees and relatively small amounts of government investment to achieve significant social and economic outcomes. One of the

unifying themes of community provision is that it is organised around adult learning principles at a time and place that suits the business or individual student<sup>66</sup>.

The National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) acknowledges the value of the ACE sector as a significant contributor to the engagement of learners who experience disadvantage or who are disengaged from learning. The Council believes:

***“this sector is an undervalued community asset which, with an increased profile and coherent policy and funding approaches, could further support the VET system’s performance in relation to improving access, participation and outcomes for people with low skills”<sup>67</sup>.***

Types of ACE Organisations operating in Australia include<sup>68</sup>:

- State Recognised ACE Providers
- ACE Registered Training Organisations
- Adult Education Institutions (AEI)
- Community Colleges
- Continuing Education
- Workers Education Associations (WEA)

There are a number of other organisations that are not necessarily registered as delivering Adult Community Education, but are broadly recognised as delivering ACE programs. These organisations tend to operate on a not for profit model and are made up of Neighbourhood Houses, Community Colleges, Adult Education Institutions, Continuing Education and Community Learning Centres<sup>69</sup>.

## 12.3 Registered Training Organisations (RTOs)

RTOs deliver accredited courses through private and fee for service and Government funding. Around half of Victoria’s LLOs are RTOs. This means that they can deliver both accredited and pre-accredited courses. TAFEs and private training organisations are also registered RTOs and can deliver accredited training. There is currently a lot of controversy regarding the funding arrangements for private training organisations. Unlike pre-accredited courses, accredited courses delivered by RTOs provide learners with the skills and knowledge needed to attain nationally accredited qualifications, including certificates, diplomas and advanced diplomas that lead to employment opportunities in a broad range of occupations and industries. There is an element of competition between LLOs and private RTOs with RTOs coming into regional communities and running courses, which Learn Local organisations may also deliver.

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.australia.gov.au/directories/australia/education>

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.australia.gov.au/information-and-services/education-and-training/vocational-education-and-training>

<sup>64</sup> [https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/State-of-Ace\\_Final.pdf](https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/State-of-Ace_Final.pdf)

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<sup>66</sup> Bardon, Ben 2006 Community Education and National Reform Discussion Paper Department of Education, Science and Training, [http://www.acal.edu.au/publications/papers/comm\\_education/Community%20Education%20Discussion%20Paper.pdf](http://www.acal.edu.au/publications/papers/comm_education/Community%20Education%20Discussion%20Paper.pdf)

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