



EMPLOYMENT LOCAL ► SUSTAINABLE  
» 'HANDS ON' LEARNING → INDUSTRY ASSISTANCE  
AGRICULTURE & HORTICULTURE  
PRACTICAL HEALTH CARE  
WORK \* FUTURE ⇒ COLLABORATION

What's it  
**REALLY**  
Like...

Matching learning with jobs  
Certificate II @ Year 9

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## ANNUAL REPORT PREPARED BY NE TRACKS AND NELLEN STAFF.



The NE Tracks Local Learning and Employment Network supports young people 10-19 years of age and works with schools and other organisations to achieve higher rates of school retention and participation in education, training and employment. It works across the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Benalla, Wangaratta and Mansfield.

<https://netracksnellen.org.au/>



NELLEN improves educations and employment participation, engagement, attainment and transition for all young people aged 10 to 19 years within the geographical boundaries of four local government areas – Alpine, Indigo and Towong shires and the City of Wodonga – particularly focused on supporting young people at risk of disengaging, or who have already disengaged, from education and who have not found an educational, vocational or employment alternative. <https://www.nellen.org.au/>

Project funded by the Development of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, through Regional Development Victoria's Regional Skills Fund.



Regional Development Victoria (RDV) is the Victorian Government's lead agency responsible for rural and regional economic development. RDV operates in partnership with regional businesses and communities, and all tiers of government to deliver the Government's regional development agenda and instigate positive change for regional and rural Victorians. Their work includes enabling businesses to invest to consolidate and grow jobs, strengthen regional economies and enrich the social fabric of Victoria's regional cities and towns.

<http://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/about-rdv/who-we-are>

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# 1. About the Ovens-Murray Workforce Development Project

The Workforce Development Project (WDP) expands on a Year 9 Agriculture/ Horticulture pilot program developed and delivered at Mansfield Secondary College. Commencing in 2009 it is now an integrated part of the school's curriculum. The program addressed the need for a sustainable agriculture workforce by recruiting Year 9 students into agricultural careers through early contact with employers, i.e. farmers, then offering an enrolment into relevant Vocational Education and Training (VET) Certificates presented by a local TAFE provider.

From 2018 to 2021, WDP will introduce this program, colloquially referred to as 'the Mansfield Model', into 24 education sites in the Ovens Murray Region, concurrently extending the student's industry experiences into the Health Care/ Social Assistance sector.

The project has three stages of delivery:

## **STAGE ONE – THE INTRODUCTION PHASE – JUNE 2018-DECEMBER 2018**

Focuses on engaging the project manager and industry-education liaison officers, preparing the evaluation model, establishing and convening the two industry-led advisory groups (Agriculture/Horticulture and Health Care/Social Assistance) and seeking representatives to participate in the government departmental advisory group.

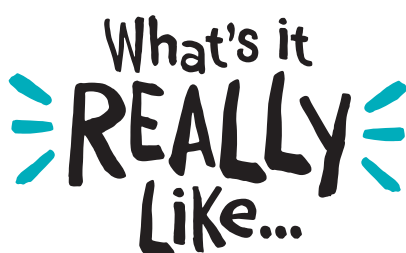
## **STAGE TWO – THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE – JANUARY 2019-DECEMBER 2020**

Is marked by the liaison and coordination activities that engage 18 education sites, 144 business partners and 2,000 Year 9 students. The recruited Agriculture/ Horticulture and Health Care/ Social Assistance employers will provide their 'home school' with taster and placement opportunities that enable students to progress to School-Based Apprenticeship/ Traineeship (SBATs) when they enter Year 10.

## **STAGE THREE – THE SUSTAINABILITY PHASE – JULY 2020-DECEMBER 2021**

Introduces the model to the remaining six education sites whilst supporting all the communities to expand the relationships that have developed during the Workforce Development Project's implementation. The systemic change will be measured by the changes to the curriculum in each education setting, the increased number of SBATs and VET subject delivery by local TAFEs and Registered Training Organisations, and the post-secondary traineeships offered to students upon completion of their secondary education journey.

## **OUR VISION**



Matching learning with jobs  
Certificate II @ Year 9



## OUR OBJECTIVES

- Implement a school-to-industry model that is open to students in Years 9, 10, 11 and 12.
- Support schools and industry to form partnerships that create skilled pathways to employment.
- Support an alignment between VET and Year 9 VELs curriculum.
- Provide a voice for industry need.

### We do this for schools to:

- improve student engagement and school retention through practical learning opportunities embedded in curriculum,
- improve learning outcomes,
- establish pathways for career options through SBATs, subsequent certificates and university courses,
- address STEM imperatives, community engagement and Department of Education and Training goals and initiatives for school improvement,

### so students can:

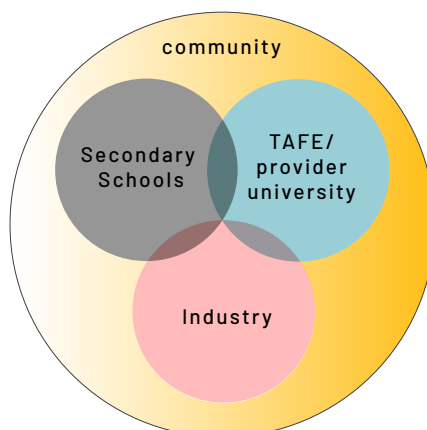
- learn outside of the classroom at Year 9,
- complete Certificate II (contributing to completion of VCE and VCAL) prior to senior subject choices,
- develop work skills and independence,
- have access to career pathway options in unfamiliar employment sectors,
- develop relationships with local industries through mentoring,

### whilst enabling participating industries to:

- strengthen partnerships, allowing better transition from study to employment,
- address their significant need to attract new employees,
- improve up-take of local available career pathways by young people,
- enable students to engage with learning in a practical context,
- strengthen community relationships through the mentoring of young people.

## OUR MODEL

The strategic collaborative model



## 2. The challenge we address is the skills shortages in rural Victoria

The Workforce Development Project is a strategic solution to the mounting need for a resident trained and skilled workforce; it supports young people to enter the workplace early, with the aim to progress their skills and knowledge so they can fill the gaps created by an aging and retiring population. In the Ovens Murray Region, there are critical demands for workers in Agriculture/ Horticulture and Health Care/ Social Assistance (Hume Region Workforce Development Plan 2015-2018). The fastest growing employment sector in the region is Health, Aged Care and Community Service with the "largest contributor to employment in the region" being Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery. In current Regional Development Victoria employment by industry figures, Health Care/ Social Assistance employees total 13,668 and Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery report 8,944 workers. The WDP has the capacity to address shortages in these industries by systemising the mechanisms that lead young people into these local employment pathways – Vocational Education and Training (VET).

### THE MANSFIELD MODEL PILOT

Mansfield Secondary College successfully piloted the introduction of Agriculture/ Horticulture to Year 9 students through a range of Certificate II VET courses, developing the model that forms the basis of WDP. Years of fine tuning the delivery of relevant subjects and experiences established the secondary students' practical work skills and connected them, and their schools, to local businesses and industry mentors. The Mansfield model successfully transitioned 26.8% of the students completing Certificate II into either Certificates III/IV via School based apprenticeships/traineeships or University courses in Agriculture or Agriculture-related fields. Of the original program participants, 98% of the students completed their VET study during their secondary study.

#### Case Study: Mikaela – Mansfield Secondary College

'[Agribusiness] was the best experience I've ever had at school. It opened up opportunities for me that I never knew existed. Now I would like to pursue some sort of future in that line – not necessarily the farm-work itself, but in that area. I formed a very good relationship with my mentors – Bill and Sue – whom I never knew before.'

Mikaela, a Horizon scholar at Charles Sturt University completed her Ag Science degree, is currently doing her Masters in Animal Science and working in dairy nutrition/farm management advisory. Having had no farm experience prior to Year 9, Mikaela completed holiday work on her host farm and still visits her hosts when she comes home. She was inspired to continue a career in the industry in Year 9 following discussions about diseases in sheep with Bill and a conversation with the visiting regional scientist who was on the farm taking samples.

### 3. The impact we've had on this challenge

Since commencing in June 2018, NE Tracks and NELLEN have recruited an experienced and insightful team to deliver the project which includes the creator of the Mansfield Model, Julie Aldous. Joining Julie are Lucie Wallis and Sue Brunskill – the Industry – Education Liaison Officers working under the guidance of the Project Manager, Norm Madden.

The initial groundwork of introducing the model and project objectives to the 24 education sites in the Ovens Murray Region has been achieved. The two industry advisory groups have convened and commenced discussions about their specific training and employment needs. The interdepartmental advisory group has also gathered and shared their perspectives of the project's potential in the region. Businesses and community members have been engaged to support the project's delivery with two interactive 'taster' days for students as their introduction to the program.

#### EVALUATION FINDINGS

Evaluation of the project commences in Semester Two of 2019

#### AT A GLANCE: OUR DASHBOARD FOR STAGE ONE

##### PARTICIPATION

Agriculture Businesses

**20**



Healthcare Businesses

**15**



Education Sites

**17**



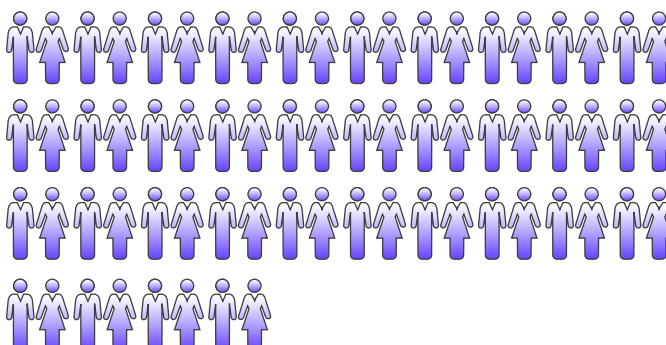
RTOs

**3**



Students

**34**



## PATHWAYS

Community

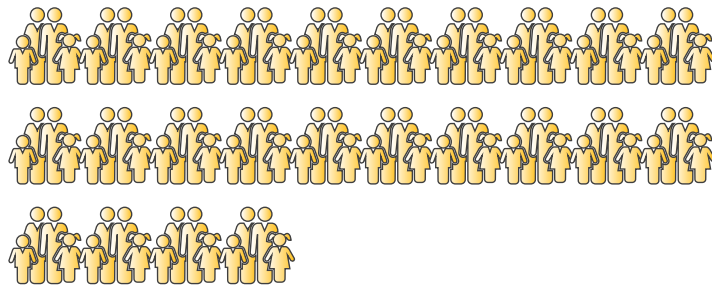
Local Government

5



Community Groups

24



## ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR OUR REGION

Expending \$392,385 of the Regional Development Victoria funds has generated business in-kind investment of 88.5 hours, industry investment of 76.5 hours, schools 117 hours and 248 hours from other sources such as local, state and federal Government, the Victorian Curriculum And Assessment Authority, and TAFE. These hours calculated at an average hourly rate of \$65 per hour resulted in an investment of \$29,177, a total of \$421,652 contribution to the region's future.

## Total community contributions during Stage One



530.5 hours



\$29,267



## 4. Conclusion

The Workforce Development Project goes beyond the well-documented industry need for a skilled and motivated workforce. As the 2017 Report prepared by the Office of the Victorian Skills Commissioner, Neil Coulson, states, "looming skills shortages, an ageing workforce, and variability in the quality of Vocational Education and Training graduates draws attention to the priority that needs to be placed on growing the Apprenticeship and Traineeship system." The Workforce Development Project offers a mechanism for change, one that offers hope to industry, education and community alike.

The project assists students to answer the eternal vocational question, 'What's It Really Like ...' in a workplace? After all, many students don't know what they want to study when they get to their senior school years. Why would they choose an apprenticeship or traineeship, even if it does lead to further tertiary study and the prospect of secure income? Opening a door is only one half of the action to successful education attainment. Young people seek knowledge and information that is outside what they can access in their classroom in order to gauge their suitability for passing through that door.

The 'Transforming Career Education in Victorian Government Schools – Connecting Today's Learning With Tomorrow's Jobs' plan, produced by the Victorian Department of Education in 2018, recognised this important aspect of each student's need to know when it stated "... Years 7 and 8 are a key time for students to learn about themselves – and that Year 9 is a critical time for career planning and decision-making. " Schools in the Ovens-Murray Region contacted by the Workforce Development team have been ready and able to negotiate Year 9 timetables, staffing and transport that expands a student's learning to include what's on offer 'outside' the school gate, achieving the valuable life lesson of being welcomed into an adult working environment and contributing to the maturation process.

The Workforce Development team has also encountered a significant number of empathetic agricultural and health business champions across the region who have said they would offer students the chance to be in their workplaces, if only they knew how to access the system that allows this practice. These employers' willingness to participate in placements opportunities and the co-investment required to enable a student to train on-site, in their business, assures the team that the agricultural and health sectors are ready to 'do things differently.'

So having found students, schools and employers willing, what are the factors that have prevented workforce development emerging naturally and in direct response to industry need? Well, the team has shone a spotlight on an enrolment and funding anomaly that restricts registered training organisations (RTOs) and secondary schools from collaboratively delivering pathway Certificates II. This results in students being prevented from accessing training at a time when they are still motivated to explore, especially when the learnings are linked to potential future employment.

As we know, schools are bound by the Victorian Assessment Software System (VASS) with its distinct parameters for Vocational Education and Training (VET) enrolments. An early-May deadline limits student access to those who are 15 years of age when information is submitted to the VASS Portal, rather than turning 15 during that school year. This age restriction is out of step with the Child Employment Act which allows for young people to join a workplace at age 13 with a permit that guarantees they will be appropriately supervised, take adequate breaks and not work longer than three hours per day. After 15, the permit is no longer required, hence the misconception that 15 is the legal age at which young people can be employed.



VASS enrolments dictate the funds a school has for purchasing VET training from an RTO. This is a set amount, per student, depending on the courses being studied. The cost to the RTO to deliver training is often beyond what finances the rural and regional schools receive due to their small student numbers and the travel expenses charged by the RTO when delivering on-site or paid for by the school to transport students to the RTO premises.

There are two key factors the Workforce Development team now have in their sights. Tweaking VASS enrolments to enable greater student access to VET study during Year 9 and providing equitable funding for RTO delivery of VET study in secondary school settings. These are beyond the project's capacity to change but the development of a strong rural and regional economy, a highly skilled workforce and an education system that meets the needs of all its students depend on these systemic adjustments. We look forward to future conversations and reports that deliver these solutions for our young people.

1. <http://www.vsc.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Victorian-Apprenticeship-and-Traineeship-Taskforce-Report.pdf>  
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