Advancing Benalla

Presenters:
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Councillor Barbara Alexander AO, Benalla Rural City Council

Benalla, an attractive, seemingly prosperous rural city in north-east Victoria. But the 2007 Vinson report says otherwise!
How could Benalla change its future?

The Vinson report rated Benalla in the top 5% of most disadvantaged postcodes in Victoria. However, Vinson proposed that the presence of a relatively high degree of social cohesion could mitigate the effects of disadvantage.

Benalla had:
- above average levels of volunteering,
- a high number of active service groups, recreational and sporting groups
- a proactive council who acknowledge a responsibility to help bring about change
- a Community Foundation whose purpose was to build local strength and prosperity

In 2008 Benalla Rural City Council initiated the Benalla & District Community Taskforce coordinated by an Executive made up heads of major agencies and organisations, business, government and non-government across Benalla.

The Vinson Report highlighted the strong link between low educational attainment and intergenerational poverty.

The first working groups formed by the Executive were the:-
- Education, Training & Employment Action Development Team
- Benalla Early Years Network, followed by
- Health & Wellbeing Action Development Team

Benalla Youth Service Providers Network was already in place and proved a valuable forum for the gathering of information and data around youth issues.

These groups have now been in operation for over 10 years and continue to meet regularly to coordinate ‘whole of community’ action.
The intention was to quickly 'get runs on the board.
Business Expansion and Retention Program - Councillors and trained volunteers interviewed 80 local businesses to determine their challenges and barriers to success.
This resulted in improved Council processes particularly around planning and consultation.
Also businesses started talking to each other and sharing information and resources.

Council initiated a “Welcome to Benalla” group - Welcome Bus, Welcome morning teas, Certificate for new babies signed by Mayor, Welcome packs to every new resident, Welcome to new businesses
Meanwhile, Tomorrow Today had been researching and developing a program to improve educational outcomes for Benalla's children and young people.

In 2010 Tomorrow Today launched the Education Benalla Program, an initiative spanning family, school and community.

By 2011 Benalla’s efforts had attracted Vic State Government attention. Benalla is included in the Advancing Country Towns project. Benalla received $800,000 to be spent over four years.

A facilitator led a widely-representative focus group in developing a logic map to identify where to allocate funding for the greatest impact.

The focus group determined that we needed to build local capacity across four key areas:-

- Super Services – increasing knowledge, usage and satisfaction with local services
- Fair Start – ensuring all Benalla children started school ready to learn
- Job Readiness – specific skills/training to improve job readiness and employability
- Growth and diversification of local business
Over 500 workers and volunteers trained in Bridges Out of Poverty

Establishment of Benalla West Public Housing Advisory Group
Paid Part Time work Graduation Night
Fair Start - $190K invested in the PEEP program to build the capacity of parents and carers as their child’s first and most important educator
A 2019 PEEP babies group

PEEP Christmas Party
Tomorrow Today partners with NETracks LLEN, Benalla Rural City Council, Benalla Health, Department of Education & Training and more than 140 other partners and volunteers to deliver the Education Benalla Program.
Mentoring for students at Year 9 level of schooling

Year 10 Careers Day – workplace visits
Year 10 Careers Day - ‘speedy talks’ to learn about different occupations

Annual Uni Exploration trips
We proudly employ Benalla’s young people

Benalla Future Work Project ph: 0427 712 634

Increasing participation community activities
As a result of our combined ‘whole-of-community efforts’ Benalla is on track to achieve our aim:-

“That by 2030, education and training completion rates for Benalla’s 17-24 year olds equal or exceed the state average.”
What have we learnt about achieving success?

- Use the strengths already present in your community
- Embed the goals across every agency and organisation
- Keep the focus on the goals
- Emphasise the power of partnerships
- Be alert to new opportunities to support other initiatives or involve others in your own projects
- Spend time maintaining the quality of relationships
- Regularly review what you’re doing to gauge effectiveness
- Document and celebrate what’s been achieved
- It won’t happen without doggedness, determination, patience and persistence
What are the challenges?

- Changes in leadership or key positions within organisations
- Middle-management blockers and finding the can-do people in the organisation
- Changes in Governments or policy
- Insular nature of schools and time constraints on staff
- Reporting obligations
- Maintaining the quality of relationships

What have we achieved so far?

- Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) results for school readiness
  From worst in the state (33%) to 19th worst (24%).
  Greater improvement than 75 of the 78 other Vic LGA's and against the trend for low socio-economic communities
- Gradual improvement in % of students from Years 10 to 12 going on to further studies or full-time employment.
- Benalla’s youth unemployment rate is decreasing and is below state and national averages
- Benalla’s unemployment rate is below regional, state and national averages
- Hugely successful Benalla Street Art project instigated by the local community
- Over $6M in funding attracted to Benalla since 2009 for the Education Benalla Program
- 1000 jobs created for 2019/2020
  - Benalla Precast facility
  - New munitions factory
  - New Freemason’s 125-bed aged-care facility
  - Large hydroponic business
Quarterly unemployment rate


Freemasons Aged Care Facility
Benalla Precast Facility – 400 jobs

Benalla Street Art attracts thousands of visitors each year
Benalla is known and acknowledged regionally as a can-do town.

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Thank you for your interest. We are happy to take questions.

Barbara Alexander AO

Pat Claridge