

The story of Tomorrow: Today Foundation



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Written by Leslie Falkiner-Rose



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Foreword

In 2012 one of the major funding partners of the Education Benalla Program encouraged Tomorrow:Today to record the story of the program's evolution. How had a small community foundation in northeast Victoria developed such a ground breaking program? What were the steps needed to see so many different activities working simultaneously? What were the pitfalls? How could other communities replicate the successes of the Education Benalla Program?

Since we began, interest in the Education Benalla Program from communities around Australia has grown significantly. We hope the information contained in this publication will give some insight into our journey and stimulate discussion about possibilities elsewhere. It is also a contribution to Benalla's local history, recording the origins of its community foundation.

When Tomorrow:Today was launched in 2002 it was a tiny organisation with a very clear purpose – to help people work together to create a stronger, more resilient and prosperous rural community. Our vision is of *'a generous community able to deliver a stronger tomorrow by challenging itself today'*. That vision is steadily being realised.

Thank you to the many people who have supported Tomorrow:Today Foundation in a myriad of ways over the last thirteen years. Special thanks to those who agreed to be interviewed and share their perspective for this story.



Sally Gamble

Board Chair



Over 150 parents, babies and young children gathered at the Benalla Rocket Park for Tomorrow:Today's early years Christmas Party, December 2014.

Introduction

In 2013, when the Tomorrow: Today Foundation's Education Benalla Program was listed as one of the Top 50 Australian Philanthropic Gifts of all time, it gave much-deserved recognition to the work at the heart of Tomorrow:Today and its many organisational partners, funders and volunteers.

Since it began in 2010, the Education Benalla Program has been widely recognised for its whole-of-community, innovative approach to improving educational outcomes by working with young people in a disadvantaged community at critical stages in their development.

Like all Tomorrow: Today work, the Education Benalla Program encompasses two clear philosophies: *'it takes a village to raise a child'* and, in a caring, strong community *'all boats can rise on the tide.'*

It's a well-researched, patient, highly strategic, long-term approach to social change; the sum of many co-ordinated initiatives that connect with children and teenagers as they grow from cradle to career, along with their families.

By reaching the children and . . . teenagers and young people, they are having an impact on the whole family and they are hopefully also having an impact on the next generation.

Jill Nicholson, TTF Supporter

Annual independent evaluations by the University of Melbourne highlight the Education Benalla Program's successes, but it is impossible to miss the ways the project changes lives when young people and volunteers relate personal stories at Tomorrow: Today's AGMs.

When someone will stand up and say, 'Oh yes, they've helped me go from going in this direction to going in this direction', you can see people's eyes light up.

Tony Schneider, TTF Board Member

By June 2014, Tomorrow:Today's Community Fund had risen to \$730,000. Money that will generate income for the benefit of the Benalla and District community.

Tomorrow: Today had also attracted a total of nearly \$3 million in project grants since its inception – a significant amount in a community of around 14,000 people.

It's quite astonishing that we get that level of support - from \$50 or \$100 donations from people [for whom] that's a big part of their income, to tens of thousands of dollar donations, and up to hundreds of thousands of dollar grants from the big funders. What we do have now . . . is the support of a lot of other partners. We have forged so many links and networks across Benalla and beyond and I think it's because they see action . . . Very much Tomorrow Today is making it happen.

Pat Claridge, Executive Officer

The following pages describe the evolution of the Foundation (up to June 2014) and the research and development of the Education Benalla Program. It provides detailed information about the program's components with background facts and figures.



FRRR Chairman, Rt. Hon. Ian Sinclair AC – Tomorrow:Today Foundation Launch, 2002.

Tomorrow: Today Foundation

THE EARLY YEARS

February 1999. Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, warns of a potential national divide – a split between city dwellers and those in rural and regional Australia who feel alienated, left behind and no longer respected for their nationwide contribution.

The media runs hot with reports of rural communities battling to survive lower commodity prices, climate challenges and economic restructuring that have “gutted jobs, stripped away services and forced families and young people to flee from the bush”.

October 1999. More than 200 leaders attend the Regional Australia Summit convened by the Deputy Prime Minister at Parliament House in Canberra. The gauntlet is laid down: what can each of you do to make a difference?

Many rural communities were already looking for ways to generate new economic activity, improve and diversify skills, provide access to education, health, better communications and to attract and keep young people. Like the Summit participants in Canberra, the communities knew there was no cavalry coming over the hill. Rural and regional communities had to identify their own solutions and form partnerships to make change happen.

One of the ideas that emerged from the Summit was the belief that philanthropy could play a strategic role in enhancing the assets - natural and human - in regional Australia's economic and community development.

Soon after the Regional Australia Summit, the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) was established to promote a viable social and economic future for Australia's regional,

rural and remote communities. FRRR emphasised the role philanthropy could play in helping communities to help themselves – something that sparked Summit session facilitator, Liz Chapman, into thinking about the viability of establishing a community foundation in Benalla.

Founding a Community Foundation

In 1999, community foundations were well established overseas as a means for people to give to the communities in which they live, but they were relatively new to Australia.

Benalla and District had many community groups and other organisations serving residents yet, like every other inland town and city, it still had chronic problems.

The young adults, as a proportion of population, were in decline. There weren't a lot of well paying jobs so, even if you were entrepreneurial, there wasn't a vibrancy about the place that would make people say: 'Well I'm going to make my business work in Benalla.' There wasn't that strength of seeing our future as robust. Years of drought plus the decimation of the public service sector had taken a real toll.

Liz Chapman, TTF Board Member and inaugural Chair

Liz Chapman raised the prospect of a community foundation with a small group of Benalla residents who contacted others from their own local networks. The idea took off.

FRRR gave Benalla a feasibility study grant; a Community Foundation Reference Group was formed and quickly got to work.

“Community meetings were advertised to discuss the idea of having a community foundation and what it could offer Benalla. Lots of work went into preparing the concept paper and then recommendations for further discussions with a diverse range of local citizens,” Tomorrow:Today Chair, Sally Gamble, says.

By Benalla, for Benalla

From the beginning, the Reference Group benefitted from Liz Chapman's broad rural development experience and from her extensive literature reviews of international rural development programs.

It quickly became clear that a community foundation needed to be independent and built by the locals, for the locals, to address issues in innovative ways.

Governments do great things but they can't do everything, and they never will be able to do everything, so it's important. The community has to pick up some of the slack.

Tony Schneider, TTF Board Member

An important early consideration was the area to be covered by the foundation: it had to be big enough to be financially viable, but small enough to have a strong sense of community. The Reference Group defined the local 'community' as Benalla and District, rather than a broader geographic region -- a decision that meant Benalla would have one of Australia's smallest community foundations, in terms of population.

The Feasibility Study confirmed that a foundation focused on rural development could strengthen the Benalla community.

Benalla district is very much an example of the upheavals being experienced in inland rural Australia . . . Yet, within this, Benalla is unique, and it requires local people fully aware of its uniqueness to articulate, and achieve, a positive and strong future. Transformational change has been achieved before in its proud civic history, affirming the potential of a rural development foundation.

Feasibility Study, May 2001

The Study recognised the foundation needed to:

- Achieve visible results virtually from Day One
- Possibly bring in financial resources from outside the Benalla community
- Definitely use, and recognise, the contribution of locals and thereby help build civic pride
- Then increase the expectation of local gift giving.

It was important not to replicate existing services; the foundation was there to support and develop the capacity of other groups and the community as a whole. But exactly how the foundation would address structural weaknesses, like Benalla's declining young adult population, remained to be seen.

By November 2002 Tomorrow:Today Foundation had quietly dealt with the necessary red tape and was ready to celebrate with a launch.

It had its constitution, it had its tax status and it had a Board. So I kept thinking it was like a butterfly, it just emerged from a cocoon. They did a really good job and . . . they didn't go out to the market until they were fully formed.

*Sylvia Admans, CEO of the R E Ross Trust,
former CEO of the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal*

The Board Setting the Bar

Trust in Tomorrow: Today largely stems from its structure and the calibre of its Board and staff members.

Tomorrow:Today Foundation is comprised of a charitable company that is the 'doing' side of the community foundation and is also trustee of a public fund, able to receive tax-deductible donations.

A community-based Board oversees high levels of governance and accountability, with members combining skill sets, networks and constantly improving knowledge to ensure Tomorrow: Today's success. (It was originally assumed there would be a lawyer and an accountant on the Board however it took a number of years before TTF attracted Board members with those skills.)

The Board Members are very carefully chosen for various skills and what they bring. Mostly, the really important thing, is integrity and the commitment to our local community.

Geoff Oliver, TTF Board Member

Board and staff members recognise the importance of understanding best systems and practices and staying abreast of sector development: reasons why the full Board paid its own way to the Philanthropy Australia Conference in Sydney in 2004 and TTF representatives have been at each of the national, annual three-day Community Foundation forums since 2002, often speaking on topics of interest. Tomorrow: Today is also frugal with funds and diligent about its operations. From 2002 to the beginning of 2010 it was housed (for nominal rent) at the Community Health Centre. Benalla Health's support and human resources expertise helped Tomorrow: Today grow into the strong, independent organisation that now has its own offices in Nunn Street, Benalla.

Developing Community

From the outset Tomorrow:Today identified its role as an active partner in local projects with the capacity to strengthen the community – a development model for building social infrastructure that underpins community resilience.

We had the inevitable questions and comparisons: for instance, is that what local government does? Do you mean you'll fund a toilet block? So when people think of infrastructure, they think of built, not social, infrastructure. It took a long time for people to get their heads around what community development might look like for them.

Liz Chapman, TTF Board Member and inaugural Chair

Tomorrow:Today's purpose is 'to enable the people of Benalla and District to create a stronger, more resilient and prosperous rural community'. Tomorrow Today's Treasurer, accountant Adrian Aldous, says he initially struggled with the term 'resilience' but he now thinks resilience aptly describes TTF's aspirations for Benalla.

It [resilience] does provide the concept of strength and being able to withstand negative impacts and to bounce back from those impacts, and to build a wider base of activities and support services. And that just goes to build the strength of a community.

Adrian Aldous, TTF Board Member and Treasurer

Benalla has a strong tradition of volunteering yet volunteers don't tend to think of themselves as community developers. Volunteering is more likely to be seen as something you do because your child is involved in a particular group or activity, or you have a particular interest in a cause.

People just do what they do and Benalla's fantastic that way. But we were after pushing a little bit further than that. Given that there are all sorts of good ideas, what could people focus on that could help strengthen Benalla in ways that maybe it wasn't already? So it was that additional conversation.

Liz Chapman, TTF Board Member



Aerial view of Benalla's lakeside precinct.

Finding its Place

The opportunity for TTF to support a major project first arose with The Crossing Place Project, a comprehensive plan to further develop the area around Lake Benalla with the Botanical Gardens. The Crossing Place had many project partners - including a dedicated community committee and the Benalla Rural City Council - and Dame Elisabeth Murdoch as Patron.

Tomorrow:Today worked with FRRR and the Crossing Place Committee to enable the receipt of tax deductible donations, something that clearly paid off when the community contributed more than \$70,000 to the project.

Arguably that strong community volunteer and financial support was vital in securing the \$1million of government money invested over three years to undertake major works in the Botanical Gardens and surrounds. These works included an innovative new Rose Garden and completion of the Lake Benalla walking track and boardwalks.

Benalla is one of the most beautiful towns of its size in rural Australia, thanks in large part to active volunteer groups over many years. This project was a great leap forward for the much loved and well used heart of the town.

HIGHLIGHTING BENALLA'S HERITAGE

Local history plays an important part in a community's identity so Tomorrow: Today was keen to emphasise Benalla's heritage by raising the profile of the area's Aboriginal history and through the 150th anniversary of the Victorian Police Force. Perpetual Trustees gave philanthropic funds that allowed TTF to employ Executive Officer, Barbara Alexander, to pursue community development opportunities.

Returning to the Roots

After being approached by local Aboriginal leader, Chris Thorne, Tomorrow: Today coordinated the creation of the Aboriginal Garden that remains a TTF project today.

We looked at the idea [of the Aboriginal Garden] and felt that there was a real opportunity to raise broad community awareness and conversations around our district's history and heritage. Over many years the community has created a unique area, with the approval of Aboriginal Elders for the benefit of all.

Sally Gamble, TTF Board Chair



1. A school planting day at the Aboriginal Garden, September 2008.
2. A school group from Melbourne on a tour of the Aboriginal Garden, 2010.
3. Chris Thorne sharing stories at the Aboriginal Garden.

The project brought together Aboriginal Elders from different clans, community members, the local Lions Club and the Benalla Council. With funding from the Reichstein Foundation, they determined what was required, where the Aboriginal Garden would be situated and how it would be built. Negotiations and development of the Garden took longer than anticipated and initially faced some negative views. However, with strong community and volunteer involvement over many years, the result is a community asset: a garden where school groups and many others come to contemplate the area's Aboriginal heritage or simply to have a few healing moments of peace.



Owning our past – Tomorrow:Today Foundation helped attract attention to Benalla during a year of statewide events to celebrate '150 Years of Policing' in Victoria, September 2003.

Policing the Past

In 2002, a local police officer with an interest in history told Tomorrow: Today that Benalla was one of the first police services in the state, actually formed under New South Wales in 1839 at the Crossing Place on the Broken River. The police force was the town's oldest institution and an integral part of Victoria's story yet it had not been included in the '150 Years of Policing' celebrations planned for the following year.

To remedy the situation, and showcase that largely unknown aspect of Benalla's history, a broad community committee formed, chaired by TTF. Local action led to Victoria Police making Benalla central to the 150th celebrations with a community event attended by the Police Commissioner and other dignitaries. It also resulted in a new collaboration of local groups that included the Benalla and District Historical Society, Benalla and District Family History Group, Local Government and the Benalla Indigenous Reference Group.

SMALL GRANTS FOR GOOD IDEAS

In 2003 Tomorrow:Today decided to focus initially on giving to the community, which was under pressure, rather than trying to raise large amounts of money from local residents to build the Community Fund. FRRR allowed the balance of their first grant to be used for Small Grants - then it was a matter of finding local support.

We knew we had to organise around small grants and that meant tapping people on the shoulder; businesses being kind enough to sponsor small grants in our first few years of operation. Early on the charitable company was the important part of our structure. It was quite hard to imagine a time when we would have a substantial Community Fund that would generate meaningful income to give back as community grants.

Liz Chapman, TTF Board Member

Work went into ensuring that a range of quality applications were submitted. Executive Officer, Barbara Alexander, arranged meetings with many different community groups and participated on committees that had a youth focus. This networking helped to identify individuals and groups with good ideas and the enthusiasm to make a difference.

A small amount of money can go a long way, especially in the hands of motivated volunteers. Groups were encouraged and supported in making grant applications that would achieve the best possible results for all concerned.



1. Small Grant – Pulse Youth Newspaper.
2. Small Grant – Let's Find Your Voice, Cooinda Village partner with FCJ College.
3. Small Grant – Young Mums Support Group.



Small Grants being awarded to local community projects jointly with FRRR, June 2013.



Small Grant – Read Every Day (RED) Tent.



Small Grant – Outdoor equipment for the Benalla Scout Group.

From little acorns big trees grow. It's not only the money that you give, it's also the enthusiasm and the support that you give to people who are trying to do something.

Geoff Oliver, TTF Board Member

In 2010, community grants expanded alongside the development of the Education Benalla Program. New priority areas of 'families with young children' and 'youth development' were added to 'community connectedness' and 'addressing social disadvantage'.

Since 2003 Tomorrow:Today has distributed 69 small grants totalling \$132,000 to 46 different organisations. The injection of resources has given impetus to projects as diverse as a photographic exhibition about Benalla, a community singing group and a youth mentoring program.

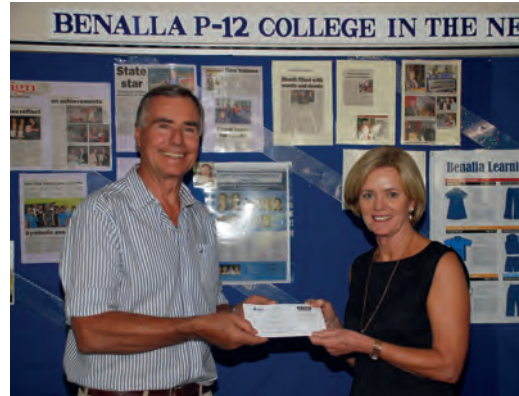
TRUST, CREDIBILITY AND CONNECTION

A new organisation with long-term, big ideas can be seen as ‘a bit of an upstart’ so Tomorrow:Today needed to overcome some community scepticism.

Early projects, large and small, demonstrated Tomorrow: Today’s view that action and results are key elements in gaining and maintaining the confidence and trust of the community.



Collection tins were placed at local eating venues for the ‘Back to School’ fundraiser, November 2005. Executive Officer, Barbara Alexander, and Chair Wayne Weaire, with local cafe owner Andrew Hair.



Board Member Bill Dobson presents 2013 ‘Back to School’ vouchers to the Principal of Benalla P-12 College, Barbara O’Brien.

You have to have projects and do things that show you’re serious, that you are here for the long haul, that you are trying to help do things for the community, make it a better community.

*Cr Barbara Alexander AO, Benalla Rural City Council,
former Executive Officer 2002-2010*

Sometimes it was a matter of supporting projects initiated by others, such as the Crossing Place Project or Creating Community Connections Expo. At other times, TTF took the lead as seen in the Aboriginal Garden, Benalla Social Network or later the Education Benalla Program. All projects were aligned with the Foundation’s goal of creating a stronger community by bringing people together. Many Board members, who oversaw TTF governance, also voluntarily helped paid staff with TTF’s day-to-day operation.

The practical focus of the Foundation and awareness of local needs led to Tomorrow:Today applying for vouchers from FRRR’s Sidney Myer Fund/FRRR Back to School Program to help struggling families dress and equip their children for school.

The \$50 vouchers were both beneficial to families and strategically important for Tomorrow:Today as they demonstrated the Foundation’s ability to attract funds into Benalla and to work with schools that allocated the vouchers. Since 2005, TTF has distributed more than \$175,000 worth of these \$50 vouchers.

Local fundraising to purchase more vouchers, when community foundations could buy one get one free, gave us an opportunity to highlight what the Foundation was all about. And the 'Back to School' program demonstrated to the schools that we were able to provide really useful support with a minimum of 'red tape,' setting the scene for later partnerships as part of the Education Benalla Program.

Sally Gamble, TTF Board Chair

In 2007 Tomorrow:Today highlighted to FRRR the needs of young people who were living independently in their final years of school and were struggling to self-fund their education, accommodation and general living expenses. This resulted in the Myer Family releasing a number of grants Australia wide so that community foundations could provide cash support to help students stay at school.

Building connections between people and groups is a key part of Tomorrow: Today's community development work because it adds value to, and strengthens, what is already there.

Those connections help Tomorrow: Today understand more about the community in which it works and the difficulties faced by those who are doing it tough. It's not always easy to recognise when residents are finding it hard to get food on the table or, like one farmer, can't afford the petrol to come in and collect children if they stay for after-school activities and do not catch the school bus home.

Activities and groups also make locals feel included.



Families engaged in Education Benalla Program early years activities enjoying the 'Monkey Grip' exhibition at Benalla Art Gallery.

People who haven't felt like they've belonged have a greater sense of belonging . . . They can create that greater sense of belonging for other people once they've been able to have that sense of belonging and acceptance created for them.

Jill Nicholson, TTF Supporter

Connections also build bridges. Being an independent entity grounded in the local community has always underpinned Tomorrow: Today's ability to act as a trusted link between government, business, educational and community sector organisations.

A COMMUNITY FUND FOR BENALLA, FOREVER

The first priority for community foundations is generally to build a substantial financial 'endowment' or capital base. This capital, usually called a community or public fund, is retained for the benefit of future generations. The income earned from investments is used to give grants that help the local community.

Tomorrow:Today was quick to establish the legal structure needed to build such a fund but, to attract donations, TTF had to be a credible, trusted and well-understood member of the Benalla and District community

Until a concept can be demonstrated, people just won't really sign onto it. You're asking people to just take a great leap of faith and it doesn't happen very easily, I don't think. There are a lot of other competing needs within communities.

*Sylvia Admans, CEO of the R E Ross Trust,
former CEO of the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal*

Tomorrow: Today started out as a 'doing' organisation, demonstrating how a community foundation could help strengthen the community. Contributions to the Community Fund slowly trickled in. Fundraising made it onto the agenda when TTF Board member, Adrian Aldous, told the 2008 Annual General Meeting that his aim was for the Foundation to double the \$10,000 in the fund over the coming year.

It's easy to ask people for funds to build something tangible like a swimming pool. But building a stronger community? Trying to explain that to people in 10 seconds . . . I still struggle to do that.

Tony Schneider, TTF Board Member and experienced fundraiser

By the 2009 AGM, the fund had reached the \$20,000 target and Adrian suggested Tomorrow: Today should try to double its funds again. Which it did.

A dramatic boost came in July 2010 when Tomorrow:Today's application to the Community Foundation Funding Program was successful. The Victorian State Government gave \$100,000

to the Tomorrow: Today Community Fund and a challenge: if the Benalla community could raise \$100,000 towards the Community Fund within 12 months, the State Government would contribute another \$200,000. Benalla rose to the challenge and reached the target of \$100,000 in only six months.

That was a bit of an eye opener for Benalla – they actually discovered they could raise money. I don't believe building their endowment had been a great priority until that initiative came along so that was a good demonstration . . . It really created a whole self knowledge and self belief.

*Sylvia Admans, CEO of the R E Ross Trust,
former CEO of the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal*

That same year Tomorrow: Today formed its first 'flow-through' named fund – a structure set up to receive and distribute donations for a particular purpose – in this case to support children and young people affected by drugs and alcohol within the family.

One of the great features of community foundations is that they allow people to give where they live to the causes that they care about. And with the work that we've done through the Education Benalla Program I think donors have increasing confidence that their charitable gift can really benefit young people in need if that's the donors' priority.

Sally Gamble, TTF Board Chair

In 2013 another milestone was reached with the first 'capital' named fund called the Education Fund. A Benalla family generously donated \$100,000 to establish the Education Fund within the larger Community Fund. Income generated by the Education Fund will support young people whose educational opportunities are limited by financial disadvantage.



Board Member Geoff Oliver receives a cheque for the Challenge Grant Appeal from generous local pharmacists Jenny Milner (left) and Marsha Watson (right), 2010.



The Community Services team at Benalla Rural City organised regular staff morning teas to raise funds for the Challenge Grant Appeal, 2010.



As part of the 2010 Benalla Festival, Benalla College student Anna Sonogan and friends proposed a Guinness World Record attempt for 'Most People Solving Rubik's Cubes' – Benalla Toyworld and Oliver's Mensland sponsored the event which was organised as a fundraiser for the Challenge Grant Appeal. The Rotary Club of Benalla officiated. At the end of the allocated hour it was a NEW WORLD RECORD with 135 people solving the puzzle.

The Community Fund has continued to grow with the help of a local 'challenge' appeal in which 10 Tomorrow:Today supporters pledged up to \$5,000 each if the community matched their donations in the 2013 calendar year. The challenge was met. This generous response meant the maximum pledged amount was also contributed and more than \$100,000 was added to the Community Fund to bring the total to well over \$700,000.

It is hoped that, over time, donors who want to set up their own named funds and bequests from those who lives have been enhanced by Benalla and District, will augment contributions to the Community Fund to further support the enrichment of Benalla's future.

THE FUTURE

Tomorrow: Today is about believing in a community's inner wealth and its ability to strengthen itself. It shows a rural community's determination to prosper in many ways, to be resilient and viable in the future.

Building deep connections between individuals and organisations while embracing and giving a hand to the more vulnerable, benefits not only those directly involved, but the future of the whole community.

Community foundations, like Tomorrow: Today, represent the positive side of parochialism by providing a vehicle through which people can invest in themselves.

It's about not having to go and ask other people all the time for things but if they build up their own capacity financially, this is about planning for the future, this is actually about believing in rural communities and knowing that they're going to be here in a long time.

*Sylvia Admans, CEO of the R E Ross Trust,
former CEO of the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal*

Regional and rural Australia have gone through, and will continue to go through, extraordinarily challenging times, as they were when the idea for Tomorrow:Today was seeded at the 1999 Canberra rural conference.

However Tomorrow: Today has proven that a small community can punch well above its weight in the way it constantly develops, tests and refines positive ways to address some of its most difficult issues.

Tomorrow: Today has connected with those who live in Benalla and District and has gained national respect for its work.

We're making a difference – I can say that with great confidence – and with the potential to make a lot more difference . . . we're becoming sustainable in the long term, so I'm confident now that the Foundation will still be around after I'm long gone.

Tony Schneider, TTF Board Member



Board Directors of Tomorrow:Today Foundation: Geoff Oliver, Bill Dobson, Liz Chapman, Adrian Aldous, Sally Gamble and Tony Schneider, 2013.



Liz Chapman, Board Member and Education Benalla Program Convenor, Sally Gamble, Board Chair, and Pat Claridge, Executive Officer, work closely to guide the development of the Education Benalla program.

Education Benalla Program

BENALLA: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

I was feeling very lonely at the time just because I was really close with my Dad, and I live with Mum. We just couldn't stand each other and I was so angry and didn't want to be at home. I couldn't talk to her very much so I sort of just bottled it all up and that obviously isn't good for you.

'Amber', a Benalla student whose life was turned around when she took part in the Education Benalla Program

Drive through Benalla, with its picturesque lake, extensive gardens and nice homes, and the town looks both beautiful and prosperous. Many long-established families, who have built their wealth from farming, business or manufacturing, take great pride in their city and give generously in times of crisis.

But there's another Benalla. An underside to the town that emerged from changes to government departments, relocation of government housing, the long-term drought and the economic vagaries of the 1980s and 1990s.

Benalla's population of around 14,000 includes a number of sub-groups comprised of many doing it tough and some who are really suffering.

Even so, many residents were shocked to find that an index produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, as well as studies like the 2007 Jesuit Social Services analysis of socio-economic disadvantage by postcodes, identified Benalla as a 'highly disadvantaged locality'.

“The first thing is that you don’t see much because people work hard to hide it,” says David Dore, a former employee of the Tomorrow: Today Foundation who helped set up the Education Benalla Program.

“One of the things that TTF did was to work very closely with the principals of the schools. As the principals became confident to share some of these things with the Foundation, the stories emerged of kids not coming to school and the really basic things such as no lunch for school. I’ve walked into people’s houses and there’s a mattress on the floor with no bedding, maybe one doona but no sheets, and there’ll be a couple of kids in that room. Families are really doing it tough but it’s hard to see,” Dore says.

TTF Board member Bill Dobson confesses to hearing some “shocking things” from a social worker’s experiences with under privileged people.

“An 11-year-old boy knocked on the social worker’s door at about midnight and said: ‘I’ve been kicked out of the house’. There were about 11 people in the house, including the boy’s mother, siblings and a new man. The boy had been kicked out for the night but still felt he had to go back to protect his brothers and sisters.

“In another instance, a young mother came to the social worker’s door with a baby in her arms and said: ‘Here will you take this thing?’ ... Terrible stories,” Bill says.

I spent the first 6 months in a mental hospital with my Mum because in some cases when mothers develop depression, they don’t want to spend time with their children or newborn and they’ll disown them and stuff, it’s really tough. I guess I grew up with her being sad all the time. She couldn’t really look after me properly and then Dad would come home and they would argue and all that stuff, so there wasn’t really a fit environment for me and I just didn’t really know how to take it. I’ve always had that anxiety about me.

‘Amber’, a Benalla student

Chris Thorne, a local Indigenous leader, puts a slightly different slant on the town.

“The Benalla community is no different to anyone else’s community. We have people who aren’t doing so well. We have people who are doing very well. We have troublesome kids. We have domestic violence. We have all the things that everyone else has but I’ve lived in Benalla for 51 years now and I think there isn’t a better community than this. I wouldn’t move to live anywhere else because this community’s been really good to me and to my children, to my parents who are still here. I haven’t seen a better place.”

Chris recognises that residents become angry about issues, such as thefts of petrol from vehicles, but he tries to see the bigger picture: Why has that person syphoned your car? What environment is that person living in?

The undercover part of the community

“When you start looking and asking, you see a whole lot of different reasons why that poor person might be doing that, because if they didn’t, their father might flog them when they get home because he needs the petrol to get to the pokies or to go and rob another joint in another town. There’s all this undercover part of the community that I seem to know about,” Thorne says.

Rick Martin, Principal of Benalla East Primary School at the time of interview, says the community needs to raise its kids.

“Benalla’s in a really hard spot at the moment because we’ve got an aging community and the young ones haven’t got the opportunities to work as much as they had. Some of the parents aren’t working so there’s a fair number of unemployed,” he says.

“Education is the way of getting these children into jobs and into the workforce, and providing for society rather than them just being people that aren’t giving anything to society in some ways, they’re just taking, taking, taking. We really want to break that mould.”

Local doctor and Tomorrow: Today supporter, Paul Kelly, observes that entrenched poverty brings a whole range of social issues for parents.

“They’re unemployed, unemployable, not interested in being employed. There’s drugs, alcohol, changing partners, multiple partners, kids who have grown up in families where no one’s ever worked – they don’t know anyone who’s ever worked. I don’t know how many generations it goes back.”

It was against this backdrop of Benalla and its disturbing underbelly that the Tomorrow: Today Foundation launched the Education Benalla Program.

IDENTIFYING THE NEED

When Professor Tony Vinson identified Benalla as one of Victoria’s most socially disadvantaged communities in 2007, many locals were stunned. Professor Vinson’s ‘Dropping Off the Edge’ report on disadvantage in Australia sent shockwaves through this rural city and jolted the community into action.

Local community members approached Benalla Rural City Council and a public meeting was quickly convened. “We didn’t understand why we were identified as disadvantaged,” Pat Claridge, then Mayor of Benalla, recalls. “Many members of the community were quite shocked and concerned.”

But the Vinson report became a tipping point for Benalla. The attention of the Board of the Tomorrow: Today Foundation was drawn to his finding that lower levels of educational attainment perpetuate the cycle of disadvantage.

It is difficult to deny the centrality of limited education and its impact on the acquisition of economic and life skills in the making and sustaining of disadvantage in Australia.

Professor Tony Vinson

Tomorrow:Today had its starting point and Liz Chapman, Board Member and TTF's inaugural Chair, used her rural development skills to delve into the issue. Concrete local research was needed, and TTF wanted to investigate how philanthropy could work with public education to improve Benalla student outcomes.

Quite rightly the Board said that really we can't presume to be in this space at all, working on an ambitious program related to education, unless the Hume Regional Office of the Department of Education & Early Childhood Development is supportive. So very early on that was the first conversation. Then came two-and-a-half years of research. Our relationship with the Department of Education grew and developed over that time.

Liz Chapman, TTF Board Member and Education Benalla Program Convenor

The Foundation began with an extensive literature review of the vast amount of international research on education programs for children affected by disadvantage. At this early stage Liz concentrated on the link between social disadvantage and children's learning and life outcomes.

"The evidence was that Victoria's public school system was pretty good, so the question was: 'How come kids from low-socio economic communities like Benalla don't do as well as kids from average or better off communities?'" Liz says.

"The Board needed to consider whether it was plausible that Tomorrow:Today Foundation could make a difference in the educational outcomes of our district's children. So, after looking at the range of reasons for low educational attainment, I followed up with a discussion paper on international experiences of philanthropy in public education" she says.

"There were a lot of lessons on what not to do, but we could see that it was possible for a community foundation such as ours to make a difference."

How had this disadvantage happened?

TTF's research showed a number of issues were either the cause of, or stemmed from, social disadvantage. These included:

- A growing number of children starting school without the range of skills necessary to progress their learning
- A corresponding reduction in their levels of literacy and numeracy in early school years
- Low levels of wellbeing amongst the student population

- A disproportionately high level of school leaving prior to Year 12
- A concentration of Year 12 completers without tertiary qualifications who worked in the least secure low-skilled occupations
- An inability for families to financially support the transition of children to higher education or training.

There was very strong evidence that children from lower socio-economic families and communities grew up to have lower educational, health and 'life' outcomes than their peers.

Differences emerge in two year olds

From as young as two years of age the effects of poverty could be detected in children's language and behavioural development. But the problem was more complex than lack of money alone.

The impact of low socio-economic status (low SES), included:

- Social distress
- Poor physical and mental health
- Low levels of community safety
- Poor economic indicators
- Incomplete education and low levels of post-school qualifications
- Lack of community engagement

The extent of the problem – that affected toddlers through to those aged in their 20s and their parents – called for a whole-of-community approach and innovative solutions.

Tomorrow:Today became committed to finding ways to help a generation of children achieve their individual potential, with no negative impact on their health or education due to a low SES standing. Benefits to all the community needed to be significant, measurable and ongoing.

From the outset, the Board of Tomorrow:Today made the decision that everything we did to address this problem had to be evidence-based. From the initial research through to recording the changes brought about by the program we were developing. Evidence and measurement were essential. We were committed to doing whatever it took to bring about real, lasting change in Benalla – and for it to be replicable elsewhere.

Sally Gamble, TTF Board Chair

After two and a half years of research, collaboration between many government and non-government agencies, and the involvement of many individuals, the Education Benalla Program was launched in 2010.

When I did Connect 9, everything completely changed. Enjoying myself. Believing in myself. Working as teams so helped me. I used to hate school but now I love it. Tomorrow:Today actually picked me up and tossed me straight up in the air, and that's when my grades skyrocketed.

'Allister', a Year 9 student

HOW AND WHERE WAS INTERVENTION NEEDED?

What areas of intervention do we need? Do we need it at pre-school? Is that when it's most important for literacy? Do we need it at Grade 2 or Grade 3, because we're finding that's when young people are stopping coming to school? Do we need it in Year 9 where again they're a bit disengaged and their attendance is dropping off and telling us that school isn't for them, and their parents are encouraging them to stay home?

Sue Oakley, Benalla College Vice-Principal (at the time of interview)

In 2008 the Tomorrow:Today Foundation Board set up a Community Advisory Committee to investigate and recommend an Education Program that could improve Benalla student outcomes.

EBP Convenor Liz Chapman says it was important to have “12 good, honest citizens” of Benalla giving their time to ultimately benefit Benalla’s kids. Members were drawn from many strands of life including the Education Department, schools, the arts, maternal and child health, community development, student pathways, TAFE and students themselves.

Then Benalla Mayor, Pat Claridge, was a member of the Committee. She also led Benalla Council’s establishment of the Benalla and District Community Taskforce in response to the Vinson report findings. Pat’s connection meant that lines of communication were open from the beginning and that TTF became a member of the Taskforce and relevant Action Development Teams.

Trust builds and data is shared

“Each meeting had to be well planned, at the same time keeping it an open inquiry” Liz says. The Education Program Community Advisory Committee examined the research: what the literature was saying, what was happening overseas, what the trends were in Australia, what was happening in Benalla.

Trust was building, and the Department of Education and local schools shared critical data.

“There was a lot of trust involved, because this was very sensitive information and at that stage we didn’t know what the answers might be. We were gaining access to quite sensitive

data for discussion by a community group, so this was quite an extraordinary body of work,” Liz says.

Sifting through data from local schools and the region helped the search for keys to unlock the potential of Benalla’s young. Numeracy and literacy data, retention and attendance data, the effectiveness of (and barriers to) student engagement programs and many other factors were examined.

‘Cradle to career’ programs

All major research pointed to early intervention as the critical starting point. The Education Benalla Program had to start at birth, or even before birth, with young mothers-to-be.

The research all said that the earlier you can start to work with kids and families, the more effective it will be. There’s so much evidence for that now. So I think the core of children’s playgroups and children’s music and rhymes and stories and giving kids confidence to imagine and make their own games is really fundamental. The idea of having kids ready to go to school, as in engaged and wanting to learn, I think that’s really powerful.

David Dore, Community Advisory Committee member and former TTF employee

Every possible area of intervention was considered: from pre-school through the lower grades to Year Nine when young people often stopped coming to school. After Year Nine came the transition to further education beyond school.

Successful overseas programs were closely studied and provided fertile ground.

Long term, whole of community

It was abundantly clear that more than one educational activity was needed to retain all Benalla students in education and training until Year 12 and beyond. Any initiative to address the impact of social disadvantage required a long-term view that looked beyond schooling and took into account all aspects of young people’s lives and opportunities, both within the home and the community.

EBP had to be a whole-of-community program, with family, school and community projects all focused on improving student outcomes.

Desired outcome

The Education Benalla Program’s ultimate goal is to ensure that ‘education and training completion rates for Benalla 17 -24 year olds will equal or exceed the Victorian average for non-disadvantaged districts’ by 2030.

Program Structure

Careful integration of all EBP activities is designed to meet the following key objectives:

- All Benalla & District children start school ready to learn
- Literacy and numeracy levels are measurably improved
- Student-assessed levels of wellbeing improve to moderate or high
- Family and community raise expectations for students to go on to tertiary education or training

TTF Chair Sally Gamble believes the structure of the program will prove to be one of its real strengths.

“The program is working towards a clearly defined outcome and specific objectives. Through our research, we developed four subprograms that each respond to one or more of these objectives” Sally says.

“Within that structure, the Education Benalla Program can actually be quite flexible and responsive to feedback from the evaluation, so that activities can be modified and improved.” Activities within the Education Benalla Program are all designed to fit within one or more of the subprograms:

- School Readiness & Early Years, for 0 to 8 year olds
- Student Wellbeing, for teenagers
- Transition to Tertiary Education
- Community Grants

Each subprogram is a significant undertaking. In combination they offer the prospect of creating long-term change.



Some of Benalla's school leaders meet with Tomorrow:Today Foundation Board Member and Convenor of the Education Benalla Program, Liz Chapman (at right), 2009.

Evaluation essential

Since 2010 the University of Melbourne has provided an annual independent evaluation of the program's effectiveness. EBP is designed as a 10-year active initiative that will be fully reviewed after five years. At that point a decision will be made on whether to continue with the second five-year phase.

From the outset, evaluation has been viewed as essential to describe the context, implementation and outcomes so others can learn from, and adapt elements of EBP for use in their communities.

Whilst the outcomes we seek are all about educational attainment, aspiration and engagement; the Education Benalla Program is really a development project that spans education, economy, child health, family support and rural development. It may not fit comfortably in any one stream, but via Tomorrow:Today Foundation, it makes perfect 'common' sense in our rural setting.

Liz Chapman, TTF Board Member and Education Benalla Program Convenor

What will it take to succeed? Ultimately, the program's success depends on how well the Benalla community – individuals, families, businesses, agencies, schools and community groups – understand and embrace the ambitious scope of the Education Benalla Program.

It takes a village to raise a child – working in partnership towards a common goal.

A COMMUNITY UNITES AROUND ITS KIDS

One of the most extraordinary aspects of the Education Benalla Program is that it got off the ground at all. In many socially challenged areas, individuals, government and non-government organisations may share a common desire to alleviate disadvantage through improved education outcomes. But uniting them can be extremely difficult if vested interests clash, there is competition for annual funding, professionals protect their patches and data is jealously guarded.

How did they do it?

So how was the Education Benalla Program able to unite dozens of organisations and hundreds of people? How did it convince government bodies to share sensitive data in confidence? How was it able to enlist the families, students, mentors and volunteers without whom the program could not start?

Liz Chapman, inaugural Chair of the Tomorrow: Today Foundation and now Convenor of EBP, says the keys were the independence of TTF and the fact that it was created by and for the community.

“I don’t think that any agency, any government or non-government body other than a local community foundation or a local community group, could have done that body of work.”

TTF’s lack of formal authority made access to government information a challenge but in other ways it was a strength.

Liz says: “It’s always challenging because we have absolutely no authority and I celebrate that.”

“We’re not a government body, we’re not a local authority, we rely totally on local government to do what local government does. In that way we’re free of all the obligations of local government, I mean local government has huge obligations.”

“People might say that we’re so inconsequential, why would they do anything with us? But there’s also strength in that because we have absolutely no agenda other than, ‘What does this mean for Benalla kids and how can we make it better?’”

More than three years of developing relationships and working with schools to distribute FRRR Back to School vouchers had established Tomorrow:Today’s track record of providing practical support for local students.

Despite already working long hours, school principals and teachers committed to help shape up the Education Benalla Program. Liz recalls asking them to attend yet another early morning meeting about education content.

“I started the meeting by apologising, as I felt this was just an extra burden on everyone’s lives. I still remember when one principal just looked at me, glared and said: ‘But it’s for our kids. Get on with it.’”

The groundwork done by the Benalla & District Community Taskforce in bringing together a membership of over 30 organisations - government and non-government agencies, schools, service clubs, churches and community organisations – was certainly beneficial.

Trust and program support came through extensive networking, skill development and the nurturing of personal connections in the local community, government and philanthropic trusts.

Whole-of-community approach

The EBP’s whole-of-community approach was also critical. It subscribed strongly to the view that:

- Formal schooling is only one component of the education environment in any district
- Sustainability of the project depends on it being embedded in the community
- Cross-sectoral partnerships (schools, community groups, government agencies, etc.) are

crucial to achieving desired outcomes, and were formed for funding, programming and advice and networking.

“Fundamentally” Liz says, “change cannot be administered – it must be organised.”

FUNDING THE EDUCATION BENALLA PROGRAM: “A HUGE AMBITIOUS PROJECT”

“Benalla is leading the way.”

*Caitriona Fay, former Senior Program Manager, Ian Potter Foundation
and now Philanthropy Services Manager, Perpetual Ltd*

The Education Benalla Program was gaining recognition as a unique ‘cradle to career’ project, with a whole-of-community approach to improving Benalla student outcomes, even before Tomorrow:Today Foundation approached major philanthropic funders.

Today it is credited as a model for innovative, long term, genuinely collaborative funding that will help to drive change in the philanthropic sector.

Philanthropy usually limits grants to timeframes of up to three years, but EBP needed funding for at least five years – a tough call when, in the early stages, EBP content may have been thoroughly researched but was still untested on the ground.



Ian Potter Foundation Governors and staff visited Benalla in February 2010 to discuss the Education Benalla Program proposal. Afternoon tea was hosted by the Mayor and Councillors, Benalla Rural City.

Genuine collaboration is achieved

Major philanthropic funders often co-fund projects, but genuine collaboration, that requires much more than putting money in the same pot, was fundamental to EBP’s success. A broad base of supporters was needed to ensure adequate support to cover funder ebbs and flows.

Catriona Fay, formerly of the Ian Potter Foundation (an early supporter of EBP that committed to \$500,000 funding over three years), says the challenging part of “multiple philanthropic engagement” is ensuring funding continuity.

“Different funders have different expectations around their level of involvement: some want projects badged for their foundation, some can support projects which others can’t and most have restrictions around how they work,” Catriona says.

There needs to be flexibility. “I think this is one of the first programs I’ve been involved with in the philanthropic sector where there was this genuine collaboration, not just co-funding. There were conversations happening in and around the program, talking about the best ways to keep each other engaged, keep each other supported and be supportive of the program,” she says.

“I think we’re seeing the wheels turning to engagement: sitting down together, with single approaches to reporting and allowing investments in people and organisations instead of saying ‘I will only support A, B and C’.

“It’s the exception to the rule. But I think it’s come at a critical tipping point for philanthropy in Australia. We’re seeing more of this coming about, and Benalla is leading the way,” Caitriona says.

A highly engaged way of working

Sylvia Admans, CEO of the R E Ross Trust and former head of the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR), agrees.

“It is unusual because it’s not just about asking a whole lot of different people for funding. It’s a highly engaged way of working.

“It’s a long term project – it was hugely ambitious. When Liz Chapman told me about it, I was really excited and I thought, ‘well if anyone can pull it off, this organisation can because they’ve got the vision to look out that far’. They’d gone away and quietly done the research so the argument they were making was really thorough,” Sylvia says.

Sylvia points out that the cross-sectional nature of EBP is very healthy for philanthropy.

“It’s not just about philanthropy, it’s engaging with government and community partners as well. It’s hugely challenging to pull together a collaboration like that.”

She says TTF has been clever in breaking the project into chunks. “It’s got its phases they will review at particular events. At the R E Ross Trust, which I now head up, we’ve made an initial three-year commitment and we’re looking at a further three years.”

A “nerve wracking” start

Liz Chapman, inaugural TTF Chair and now Education Benalla Program Convenor, says it was “pretty nerve wracking” at the beginning.

“At the same time as trying to find the money, we had to keep developing the program, and by developing the program we were raising expectations. There was quite a burden for some time until we cracked it. It was reaching a crescendo, and if we didn’t get funding it would have died.”

The vital first step was securing a financial commitment from the local regional office of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. An active supporter from the outset, it promised \$150,000 over two years towards the ‘early years’ work.

Liz then called a contact in the philanthropic sector, said she needed to build partnerships and asked for advice on how to start.

Over coffee and cake in Melbourne, she was introduced to the work of the Rural Education Program – established and funded for around 10 years by private donors to help improve outcomes for rural children. Twelve months of funding was subsequently received.

Crucially at this time the R E Ross Trust promised \$225,000 over three years. The Ross Trust strongly endorses work that is place-based and community-connected. It takes a whole-of-town approach to attacking isolation, vulnerability and disadvantage from every angle.



In 2013 the Education Benalla Program was named in the ‘Top 50 Australian Philanthropic Gifts’ of all time. This award recognised the program ‘as a model of community-led investment in rural communities to address inequity and inequality’; it also acknowledged the contribution of the philanthropic organisations that provided the initial funding - FRRR’s Rural Education Program, The R E Ross Trust and The Yulgilbar Foundation.

The R E Ross Trust helped connect TTF with the Ian Potter Foundation. It vouched for TTF and encouraged collective conversations.

TTF’s approach to the Ian Potter Foundation was extremely timely. The Potter Foundation wanted to fund holistic educational approaches that involve strong schools and teaching, a safe community and families with positive educational aspirations.

Education requires a collective approach. It rarely produces outcomes that can be identified as stemming directly from a single action. Changing lives is complex: there are few silver bullets or simple solutions.

Therefore, Caitriona says, the Ian Potter Foundation might never be able to point to one specific thing it supported that ultimately leads to significant change in Benalla.

“But at some point foundations need to put their hands up and say that’s OK, we’re contributing to that collective approach,” she says.

It might also take a decade or two for funders to see the impact of EBP – something that requires a major shift in the thinking behind traditional two or three year granting periods.

“So it takes a level of commitment to say how much we trust the organisations involved to want to commit for five years,” Caitriona says.

Funders show vision

We’re being funded to do things that are still, to a large extent, unproven, so I totally appreciate the risk the funders are taking. Now the data that’s coming in is starting to show that it’s not as much of a risk as it might have seemed. But funding an intangible, I think that’s difficult, as we’re asking for funds to do something that they won’t be able to hold in the physical sense. I take my hat off to them because I think they’re showing a lot of vision.

Tony Schneider, TTF Board Member

Catriona says the structure of TTF and the Education Benalla Program were key to securing Potter Foundation support. She says Potter Foundation wanted to be the “glue between the services that already exist”.

“There needs to be a level of community engagement, service delivery and government commitment. Philanthropic trusts can have confidence in saying that if we can’t continue on in five or 10 years, we’ve laid some groundwork that’s going to be there forever and a day. That’s really important,” she says.

However, Liz Chapman says TTF did encounter many closed funder doors. “I had to learn that some organisations didn’t want to say no, but they were not going to fund us.”

The distinct language and culture of the philanthropic sector also created difficulties: it was hard to interpret some of the more obtuse feedback from potential funders and pinpoint exactly what was required to get EBP funding over the line.

There were also logistical legal issues to understand and overcome. For example, the legal structure of the Ian Potter Foundation and many other philanthropic entities prevents grants being given directly to community foundations, like TTF, of similar (DGR 2) charitable legal status.

One of the technicalities we had to deal with at the beginning was that the structure of our community foundation didn't allow some philanthropic organisations to make grants to the Education Benalla Program. Thankfully we were able to work with the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR), then led by Sylvia Admans, to establish a Project Donation Account specifically for the EBP. That really improved our ability to secure the necessary support from philanthropic funders like the Ian Potter Foundation. It also meant that individuals could make tax-deductible donations to the program, which was very important from the local community perspective.

Sally Gamble, TTF Board Chair

In addition to funds coming on line over a four-year period, a huge number of volunteer hours were donated to help structure and advise program design and development.

It's quite astonishing to me, really, that one small community has attracted the kind of support from within the community and from outside the community. I think, very much, that's attributable to our Board and the amazing work they've done. They took an idea, formed a plan for an education program and then went and sought the funding and managed to secure huge amounts of money to make that program a reality.

Pat Claridge, Executive Officer and former Mayor



Tomorrow:Today staff at November, 2013: Cathy Hair, Pat Claridge, Karen Curl, Sabine Smyth, Cath Warnock, Leonie Daniel and Debbie Rees.

EVALUATION: CRITICAL TO EDUCATION BENALLA PROGRAM'S FUTURE

'Amber', who completed a very successful Year 10 in 2012 [and has since completed Year 12], appears to be a striking success story. First interviewed in 2011, she described her high school years to date as having been difficult. As a result of severe depression and anxiety, caused in part by her parents separating, she "didn't go to school that much".

My older brother dropped out of school early and went a bit feral ... In Year 7 I was heading in the same direction ... hated the teachers, hated my parents. I saw a lot of psychs, doctors ... it was really great talking but every time they tried to help I wouldn't accept that. Then one day I thought – NO I've had enough. I can do this – 'Now look where I am'.

'Amber' readily credits her Connect 9 experience, and her mentor in particular, with being important factors in her revitalisation: "I thought it was great ... something to look forward to every week. Lots of fun ... I met 20 new people and my mentor ... She was a great help. She was an adult I could talk to when I didn't want to talk to my parents. We instantly got along. We still catch up for coffee at the art gallery or dinner and Christmas baking days ... I help her little girl with her spelling. She helped me put together a resume, helped me get work experience by introducing me to the manager of [a local store]"

2012 Evaluation of EBP Program Delivery, University of Melbourne

The annual evaluation of the Education Benalla Program is critically important to the Tomorrow:Today Foundation, its partners and funders.

As Catriona Fay, formerly of the Ian Potter Foundation says: "It's important because it is a significant program in size and scope, and we need to know whether or not we're having the impact we should. We also need to know if we should pivot at certain points in the program.

"Tomorrow: Today has been really good at saying, 'ok we're not wedded to one type of small program within the wider program, so if it's not working, let's discuss why it's not working and if it's not fixable, let's just put it aside'"

"So the ability to pivot, and the ability to make good funding decisions in the longer term, and the ability to go then to other funders and to government and to the community and say, look this is working, is really important. It's critical," Caitriona says.

Evaluation identifies program successes

Melbourne University's Youth Research Centre from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education was appointed at the start of EBP to carry out annual evaluations.

Its independence and expertise are vital for the credible assessment of EBP's ongoing learning and impact.

The evaluation reports provide ongoing accountability and feedback on project elements and will play a large part in the five-year review in 2015 that will determine whether EBP has the runs on the board to continue for another five years.

Ongoing Learning

“What I really want the evaluation to do is to tell us, the designers and the implementers, whether and how the program needs adjusting,” says Liz Chapman, Education Benalla Program Convenor.

“Some things won’t work, so they’re going to need to give some recommendations on whether to just give up on that bit and move on with the good bits, or whether it’s really worth trying again in a different way. I vitally need that information. I’ll have my own view but it needs to be someone external, who hasn’t got the same knowledge and buy-in as I’ve got, who’s giving us their view.”

(There has been) glowing endorsement of program delivery and content by parent attendees . . . a generalised increase in confidence, engagement and capacity among play group parents . . . facilitation of networks and friendships among families . . . growing recognition among parents of the importance of school readiness and of education in general . . . a significant decrease in the number of Benalla children starting school without having previously attended play groups or kindergarten.

2012 Evaluation of EBP Program Delivery, University of Melbourne

What does the evaluation show?

Melbourne University evaluators say: “2012 has been a markedly successful year for the Education Benalla Program as evidenced by multiple success stories across the spectrum of programs, collaborations and support for local initiatives. Solid positive outcomes reflect the skill and capacity of the staff, the strong volunteering ethos within an inclusive local culture, and the breadth and strength of cross-sectoral partnerships.”

Importantly, the ‘whole of community’ delivery has been achieved, with:

- EBP delivering activities
- EBP sharing delivery of activities in a partnership with a government or non-government agency or community group
- Another organisation delivering the activity, with EBP helping shape the activity and providing funds
- EBP resourcing an organisation that is independently delivering an activity.

The Education Benalla Program is running smoothly; it is described as “high functioning and well-structured” due to the calibre and team skills of the staff, commitment to the town and its residents, and the extraordinary level of networking undertaken across Benalla. Community service structures and systems have been strengthened, as have the outputs and outcomes of activities undertaken by various agencies and groups throughout the district. It is now quite likely that a child or parent identified as needing a particular intervention will be introduced and connected to a number of relevant capacity building activities. It is the combination of projects, including mutually reinforcing activities of collaborating agencies, that is predicted to achieve noticeable shifts in measures relating to student attainment levels.

2013 Evaluation of EBP Program Delivery, University of Melbourne

There is wide recognition that EBP has strong potential to become a model that other communities can adopt. Through tracking from year one, with a detailed review of what works and what doesn't, TTF will be able to pass on very valuable lessons and information to other communities.

Government, philanthropic bodies and other organisations will also be able to see EBP as a working model that has proved it can improve educational outcomes. Evaluation summaries are available.

PLAYGROUPS: BIG CHANGES TO LITTLE LIVES

The little boy was four, and had never been to a playgroup or any social activity at all outside of the family. He arrived with his young mother for the first time at Little Giggles playgroup. The mother told the coordinator that she suffered from anxiety, wasn't at all comfortable out of the home and would just leave with her child when she needed to go.

Surprisingly, the pair lasted the whole session. Next week they were back with the little boy's father, who told the playgroup coordinator how thrilled he was that his wife and son were having a good time.

The father said he'd taken his wife and child to a family reunion the previous weekend, and his son had spent the whole reunion encouraging his family to get up and do the hokey pokey.

Liz Chapman, TTF Board Member and Education Benalla Program Convenor

A significant breakthrough

Education Benalla Program Convenor, Liz Chapman, says this story demonstrates a significant breakthrough made in a Little Giggles playgroup at the community house in Benalla.

“We resourced that playgroup for 18 months with low numbers. We knew it would take a long time of turning up every week to get to our target audience of the most vulnerable and marginalised mums and dads and littlies to come to playgroup. We have had that breakthrough,” she says.

The hard part is to get the message through that there are children who are lost and they're very young. Often a single mother is lost, she has a child, doesn't know where to go and hasn't any friends who can be in a playgroup. She has this child and she doesn't really know what to do with it.

Bill Dobson, TTF Board Member

Program staff and parents have confirmed that the three EBP Little Giggles playgroups offered free each week (a fourth is under discussion) are filling a “glaring need” in Benalla. The playgroups are open to all but specifically reach out to lower socio economic status (SES) and more marginalised families who are often uncomfortable accessing such groups.

One Little Giggles playgroup venue is located in the centre of town. The other is on a public housing estate where, the Early Years Specialist notes, it's complex engaging families with long histories of involvement with government services.

“Many are frightened off by the services. There's a strong element of ‘us and them’, and it's a fine line earning their trust,” Liz says.

Interviewer: *So will you keep coming to playgroup three days a week with your littlest?*

‘Brianna’, playgroup mother: *Yeah, ‘cause it gives me something to do.*

Interviewer: *What are you up to the rest of the time?*

‘Brianna’: *Just doing shopping and looking around.*

Interviewer: *If anyone asked you why anyone in the community should support Tomorrow: Today Foundation and what they do, what would you say to them?*

‘Brianna’: *I'd say you should support them ‘cause they're really good. They help a lot of people, like kids, give kids stuff to do and everything.*

Interviewer: *Has it changed your life in any way, do you think?*

‘Brianna’: *I reckon it has because I had nothing to do before I started coming along and now I'm more active and I can talk to people and stuff more. Beforehand I wouldn't talk to anyone ‘cause I was too shy. Now it's all changed.*

An early childhood directory

Liz Chapman says that links with other community organisations have assisted EBP playgroups to extend their reach and influence.



Guest speakers are regularly invited to talk at Early Years programs. The dental visit was a hit with the children as well as the parents.

Little Giggles Playgroup.

“We knew from the start that we had to dovetail with all existing services, and we took the approach that we needed to help community groups and services in every way possible”, she says.

The Early Years Network, an initiative of Benalla Rural City, was a great way to work with all agencies. We have participated to help develop and achieve the Network’s strategic plan for Benalla.”

There are already program effects... that already little people are able to sit on mats, who could never have sat down to listen to a story. That little people who would be climbing up the walls, their parents are now modelling behaviours and just firmly and lovingly putting them on the ground, mimicking our staff saying, ‘feet on the floor.’ The parents who could be heard coming from two blocks away, can’t now be heard coming because they’re quietly talking to their children as they walk with them.

Liz Chapman, TTF Board Member and Education Benalla Program Convenor

To help make connections between families and services, the TTF team undertook a range of activities including:

- Participating in the collation of an early childhood directory for Benalla. This helped parents link into other activities and services like children’s activities at the library and drop-in maternal and child health services

- A partnership with a Young Mums' group run by NESAY (North East Support and Action for Youth) and its Family Liaison Worker to support young mothers and connect them to services
- Dietician visits and cooking classes for playgroup parents that stem from EBP's relationship with Benalla Reach
- The Early Years Network distributing flyers that support playgroups
- A Benalla Public Librarian visiting playgroups for Storytime.
- Visits to playgroups by the Maternal & Child Health staff, dental health, speech therapists and ambulance staff
- Developing a referral form so that local agencies - including schools and kinders - can refer families to playgroup
- Assisting in the development of a referral form so that playgroup families can be referred directly to Benalla Health and Benalla Rural City Council Community Services
- Maintaining a well-stocked stand with information on services available to families.

Changes in children

The Early Years Program's aim is to have all children ready to learn when they start school. The Early Years specialist notes that children have:

- Capacity to sit longer during group activities (some could never have sat to listen to a story)
- Greater capacity to take turns and help others
- Heightened independence during activities, such as scraping paint brushes and putting on paint smocks
- Greater ability to make choices, such as choosing foods at morning tea and serving themselves
- Some children aged 3 ½ or older are now finding it easier to take direction during sessions.

Changes in mothers

Importantly, playgroups have already had some impact on the mothers' own educational aspirations. One mother, who is doing a Diploma in Community Services by distance education, is co-facilitating the playgroup to help meet her course placement requirements.

Another newly arrived mother at the public housing estate playgroup is advertising the group by delivering brochures in the area. In return the Early Years Specialist is assisting her access courses that will help fulfil her ambition of running her own playgroup.

Mothers are also reporting that playgroup skills are transferring to the home: children are eating well when given choices and are taking ownership of what they are eating. Parents are also engaging more meaningfully with their children thanks to the playgroup providing recipes for playdough, paint and 'slime', and encouraging greater interest in books and reading.

Parents are the child's first and most important educators. Parents have their trust, parents have them all the time, parents are the ones who can take most advantage of those opportunities for learning. If parents don't speak to their children, don't play with them, don't read to them, don't encourage them, children actually suffer quite badly in their learning. It can affect their whole life.

Pat Claridge, Executive Officer

“Our Little Giggles Playgroups provide a regular fun learning activity for parents and young children. On their own, they help create happier parents and more engaged children. Additionally, it's how these playgroups tie in with other elements of the Education Benalla Program that provides a fork-in-the-road for life outcomes”, Liz Chapman says.



Parent 'talk time' at PEEP Two Year Old Group.

PEEP: PARENTS AND CHILDREN GROWING

One important component of PEEP (Parents Early Education Partnership) is the parent discussion in the middle of it. We actually take the children away to do an activity and the parents will sit and discuss different issues of parenting. It's not someone telling them how to do it; it's them sharing the knowledge with each other.

So the wonderful thing is parents mentor and help each other. We do have some professionals who come in to give that extra bit. We've had dieticians, some people who show them how to read to a baby, and speech pathologists who might help with some personal issues.

Pat Claridge, Executive Officer and former Mayor of Benalla

It was an instance of perfect synergy when PEEP arrived in Benalla. Liz Chapman of Tomorrow: Today Foundation had discovered the program during her research, and had recommended it in a paper on early years literacy. And a senior regional executive at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development knew of PEEP and was recommending its introduction around Victoria.

The result?

Some \$220,000 in Victorian Government funding over two years for TTF to pilot PEEP in Benalla under the government's Advancing Country Towns (ACT) program. This was done in partnership with Benalla Rural City, which also received funding to provide much needed Family Liaison assistance.

Education Benalla Program Manager, Pat Claridge, and Manager of Community Services at Benalla Rural City, Deb Randich, spent a week in Oxford watching PEEP in action. Two UK trainers then came to Benalla to provide PEEP training for 23 Benalla practitioners and 20 other early years' workers from across North-East Victoria. The trainers then headed to Murrindindi Shire to train further participants as part of the Eildon, Thornton and Alexandra ACT initiative.

Brains built not born

PEEP began in the UK in 1995, and has been shown to have significant effects on increasing young children's cognitive abilities, self-esteem and social and physical skills. It's based on research evidence that babies' brains are 'built not born' and that everything a baby experiences changes and develops their brain.

Because learning starts at birth, parents and carers are central to a child's learning and have the greatest influence in the early years. This home-based and small group pre-literacy program builds on what families already do, focusing on making the most of learning opportunities and reaching babies and toddlers with fun and inclusive activities.

Interviewer: What do you think of Tomorrow:Today as an organisation?

'Brianna', a PEEP and playgroup mother: I reckon it's really good. I had nothing to do before they came along. Now I've got stuff to do every week.

Interviewer: How often do you come to playgroup?

'Brianna': Well they have it on a Tuesday. I go there every now and then. Wednesdays I've been coming so we go to PEEP as well and we normally went every Thursday but now I go Wednesdays as well.

Interviewer: Have you learnt much from the people who actually conduct the playgroup?

'Brianna': Yeah. Teaching your kids, for one. Reading. Writing. Maybe the behaviour as well.



PEEP families on an expedition to Jaycee Island.



Reading aloud to young children is important for language development and it's fun. Benalla Health professional Sally Matheson with a PEEP family.

How other parents pull up their kids at playgroup if they're naughty. Just sit them in a corner for the amount of time of their age. I've been doing that or trying to.

“PEEP is quite a fun program where parents and children sit on the floor together and sing songs, tell rhymes and listen to stories,” Pat Claridge says. “It sounds really basic, but that early interaction between parents and children has been known to have a very positive effect. Parents take those activities home and they’re encouraged to recognise opportunities for learning, such as when you’re cooking, get children measuring and pouring; when you’re hanging out the clothes, get children to count the pegs.”

The goal is to make PEEP part of everyday life in Benalla, thus reducing the number of children entering school without the basic skills required to further their learning.

‘Samantha’, PEEP and playgroup mother: *I needed to get out of the house more and ‘Molly’ needed to mingle with other kids more too, not just me.*

Interviewer: *Were you spending a lot of time at home?*

‘Samantha’: *Every day we were at home. Only if I needed to go down the street.*

Interviewer: *Is it good having somewhere to go?*

‘Samantha’: *Yeah, where you don’t have to worry about your kids making a mess and stuff, yes. It’s harder when you go to someone else’s house and you have to pull them up.*

Interviewer: *How did ‘Molly’ take to it?*

‘Samantha’: *She was a bit shy at first because they were sitting down and doing songs and stuff and she wanted me to sit down with her otherwise she wasn’t, she’d just stand back for a while, but now she’s getting used to it.*

Interviewer: *So you started with that play group . . .*

‘Samantha’: *Yep, and then I got told about a Wednesday one and a Thursday one here so then I started coming here. Then they said that they’d do a PEEP for 2 year olds so then I started coming to that too.*

Interviewer: And how does that make you feel?

'Samantha': Yeah good. It gets me out of the house too instead of being home.

By the end of 2014, PEEP is proving to be such a positive change agent in the lives of Benalla families with young children that playgroup sessions are being converted to the PEEP format - including time for songs, rhymes and parent discussion.

READING BUDDIES: MORE THAN SIMPLY ABC

We just needed some volunteers within the school. We were having trouble getting parents involved, because most of our parents are working or unable to come in and help. The Tomorrow: Today Foundation encouraged us to start with the Reading Buddy system. We've now got 12 to 14 people from the community coming in, both male and female, which has been really good for a lot of the kids who don't have a male role model at home. The boys don't see reading as a fantastic thing sometimes, and just a male reading with them is really good.

Rick Martin, Benalla East Primary School Principal (at the time of interview)

It can be extremely hard for young children to catch up once they fall behind in their learning. Statistics show they really struggle when they're from a disadvantaged home or lower socio-economic family. Sometimes education is not valued at home, parents are time poor or a single parent is working full time. When there's an evening meal to prepare, homework takes a back seat.

"Some of them don't get a lot of one-on-one time. They're in a family of three or four, money is difficult, time is difficult," Rick Martin, former Benalla East Primary School Principal, says.

"Ten years ago, there were always a number of parents who were not working mums. Schools are now full of working mums, so we didn't have a lot of support for those children whose reading wasn't being heard at home or weren't being helped with homework," he says.

These children often have low self-esteem because they're not performing well in literacy or numeracy. They lack confidence, even to try something new in class, because they see school as a place where they fail.

"There was a bit of truancy with these kids. Because they've learned school's not a place for success, they try to dodge it," Rick says. "That's why we really target Grade 1 and Grade 2, because we want to get them before that attitude sets in."

By the end of Grade 1, the expected reading level is 15 to 20. The children the Education Benalla Program works with may have a reading level of only five to eight (equal to Prep).

Tomorrow:Today Foundation's research identified school and community based early years literacy projects that worked. It showed that extra help during the first few years of school could have long term benefits and that Melbourne's Ardoch Foundation was a great example of an organisation that recruited and trained community volunteers to provide that help.

Ardoch generously shared details of its work so Tomorrow:Today was able to develop the best volunteer literacy program for Benalla by combining lessons learned from a number of literacy projects.



'Reading Buddies' are making a difference in children's literacy skills.

Reading Buddies started at Benalla East Primary School in mid-2012. It provides one-on-one reading with Prep to Grade Two children who are struggling with their language development and reading skills.

The 'Buddies' range from young people to grandparents who come from diverse backgrounds. Some are former primary school teachers. One Reading Buddy is devoted to each child for a designated time each week.

Relationships as important as new skills

EBP Convenor Liz Chapman says: "We knew from looking at what was out there that child wellbeing was important in literacy development. The relationship between a child and a constant adult, additional to their parent, is the basis of Reading Buddies".

The relationships formed are proving to be just as important as the literacy skills. In some cases school attendance has improved because children are looking forward to spending time with their Reading Buddy.

Rick calculates that in one semester alone, 450 hours of volunteer time was clocked up. In the second half of 2012 Reading Buddies was working with 16 to 18 children, providing nearly a week of one-on-one time for each child.

Some children are also supported with integration aids or reading teachers, but there is insufficient funding to match the large amount of time given by volunteers. It's highly valued time that can be the impetus for children showing marked improvement in their levels of literacy.



Avon St students thank their Reading Buddies with morning tea. Volunteers are crucial to Tomorrow:Today Foundation programs.

Reading Buddies enjoy making a difference

The Reading Buddies also get a lot of satisfaction from spending time with the children, assisting them with their schooling and seeing them progress.

Leonie volunteered for the first time when she heard about the Education Benalla Program. She works with two Grade One boys, spending two hours with each of them every week. She noticed a big improvement in their reading after two terms.

“Their words are great. I said to Michael: ‘You’re actually a very good reader, but you only do it when you want to do it.’ I got a personal card from Cameron with a photo of us, and a letter

just to thank me. I've found Cameron has come on in leaps and bounds. He's such a cheeky little devil, he's just got that big grin, it lights up the room."

"I've really enjoyed it, so I'm going to continue. I found it very hard at first, because it's so different from when I went to school. But I've got it now. I've finally got it," Leonie says. Like all Reading Buddies, Leonie was trained by TTF, and the outcomes of the program are being formally evaluated.

"From the information coming back, they are making a difference. They're actually making a difference to kids' lives in Benalla," Rick says.

You've got to let them find their space and they've got to know that they can't put it over us. They've got a lot more confidence with their reading and with the words they don't know. My son has dyslexia and that's what I had to do years ago so that's how I learned to help them catch up on the words. I'm really pleased with what I've done. I feel good about it.

Leonie, Reading Buddy for two terms, who is continuing with the program

HANDS ON LEARNING DELIVERS A BIG HELPING HAND

I think that I would not be where I am now. I would not be living at home with my family because I couldn't deal with it; I would not be working; I wouldn't be at school. I'm 100% positive I would not be at school because I didn't care. Hands on Learning gave me the time to take a break from things and make me learn about myself and what's good for me. When you're sitting there digging a hole, or cutting down a tree or rendering, it gives you a lot to think about. You think, wow, I need to pull my head in, this is my life and the only person who's hurting from this is you in the end.

'Cassie', Hands on Learning participant

Hands on Learning (HOL) has dramatically turned around a number of young lives since its 2010 introduction at Benalla College. Some students have stayed on at school instead of dropping out, one achieved his first-ever 'A' grade and many have gained apprenticeships.

School absenteeism of 12 to 16 year olds who participated in HOL has dropped, attitudes to school have improved, as have classroom engagement and student wellbeing. HOL has been identified as one element in the plummeting school suspension rate - from 356 suspensions in 2008 to 92 suspensions in 2011.

Students say they've discovered new skills, gained confidence, learned about teamwork and respect, developed strength and become proud of themselves. Some have achieved far better family relationships.



1. Hands On Learning students contribute to the Benalla community through the many practical projects they undertake. Here students help the Rotary Club to install exercise equipment on Jaycee Island, next to Lake Benalla.
2. Building seat.
3. Students learn practical skills and group work at Hands On Learning.

How the program works

HOL is based on the successful Hands on Learning program in Frankston, Victoria. It is a creative, flexible program that provides a 'hands on' way for students to reconnect with school and community. After identifying Hands on Learning as a very good fit for the Education Benalla Program, Tomorrow:Today offered to take the Benalla College Assistant Principal to Frankston to see the program in action. In a funding partnership with Tomorrow:Today Foundation, Benalla College started Hands on Learning in 2010 while a funding partnership enabled FCJ College to begin the program in 2013.

Between 70% and 80% of Benalla College participants have literacy and numeracy problems, and 90% are male.

Guided by a teacher and experienced local tradesman, students work in small teams on a practical project one day a week, gaining skills and knowledge that can assist them to find employment. Students spend the full day together, sharing recess and lunch breaks. They start with an informal group meeting at the 'Shed' (renovated and decorated by participants on the school site), then undertake hands-on maintenance and construction projects around the school and in the community.

So far they've completed tasks like erecting a cyclone fence, acquiring and setting up a camp oven, building chicken sheds, constructing a table and a pizza oven and constructing seating in the children's area of Benalla Cemetery.



Hands On Learning students.

Lunch preparation - including decisions on the day's menu, shopping for ingredients and continuing to spend time as a group - is a key element of the program. Cooking, like the construction activities, provides opportunities for negotiation, division of tasks, practical maths such as measurements, practical literacy and other incidental learning opportunities. Training in safety is reinforced by online 'Safe at Work' modules.

Individual student goals and desired outcomes are negotiated weekly with the supervising teacher. Typical goals might range from "getting to class on time" and "getting sent out less" to "getting help with maths".

A condition of enrolment is the agreement that the student will attend regular classes the rest of the week, so HOL has become a useful lever to improve overall school attendance. Staff would like to see formal assessment criteria incorporated into program delivery to align HOL to the general Year 9 and 10 curriculum.

Outcomes and progress

- In 2011, the Assistant Principal at Benalla College said HOL led to decreased absences, improved attitudes to schooling and improved well-being.
- 14 out of 15 students felt their schooling had improved since joining HOL, and rated their effort as higher in HOL than in their schoolwork in general.
- All students said they enjoyed coming to HOL more than school in general.

- A student with a ‘woeful’ school history was able to prepare a superior Powerpoint presentation on HOL for his final English assessment. He achieved an ‘A’.
- A student with a history of chronic school failure had been diagnosed with a severe behavioural disorder and was described as a ‘special case’. He’d had a 1:1 aide, but had been expelled from his previous school in Year 6. He was initially enrolled at Benalla College for one day a week. The boy connected so well with the HOL group that his attendance increased to four days a week: two days in the HOL program and two days in general classes with his teacher aide.
- A student drew on trade and social skills learned in HOL by winning a full-time cabinet-making apprenticeship. The HOL tradesman mentored him in requirements of the job.
- One HOL student successfully nominated the program for a GOTYA Youth Award in 2011.
- Maintenance and construction projects around the school have enhanced students’ sense of ownership and pride in Benalla College.
- Staff reinforce co-operation, teamwork, successful completion of projects and opportunities to utilise local resources.
- Senior staff recognise that “just making the kids want to come to school” is a breakthrough. HOL has also shifted teacher perceptions of some students, and gives teachers a break from some disengaged students.

Young people who go through the Hands on Learning program, their attendance at school improves, their attitude to school improves, their classroom behaviour and involvement usually improves, and their whole self worth improves.

Pat Claridge, Executive Officer

MENTORING UNDERGOES A METAMORPHOSIS

I think just getting the mentor, someone chosen just for me and all the great activities. At that time I was really scared because I didn’t really know anyone else that was doing it but it turns out there was heaps of people from my school. So I felt comfortable there and I sort of grew closer to the people who I wasn’t so close to. We developed a really good bond to each other and to each other’s mentors and everything.

An EBP mentee

Mentoring of teenagers is a critically important component of the Education Benalla Program’s student wellbeing sub-program. Research shows that young people who have a mentor are less likely than non-mentored peers to leave school early and are more likely to have improved school performance and better relationships with their teachers and families.

Mentors are not replacements for parents nor are they counsellors. Mentors become role models who can assist students gain self-esteem, improve their educational opportunities and make better connections with their community, friends and school.

A number of mentoring programs were trialled in the first years of EBP. Since then programs have evolved in response to feedback, logistical changes and program amalgamation.

Mentor induction, training and ongoing support ensure that mentors and students gain the most benefit from the relationship.

Tomorrow: Today now has an enviable corps of prospective volunteers. There's a 50/50 mix of men and women with backgrounds in teaching, agriculture, consultancy, pharmacy and business.

Mentors undertake a two hour training session that is a modified version of the Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance Training Package.

Program evolution to date includes:

Benalla Mentoring Program 2010

This was originally visualised as a 12-month program with weekly or fortnightly mentor/mentee sessions. Evaluation showed the program was too long, there was an over-reliance on schools to promote the concept, and a stronger focus on activities was required to build productive mentoring relationships.

However, useful contacts were developed with local industry, which opened up work experience options for Year 10 students. There were positive individual outcomes too: a 'troubled and disengaged' teenager was successfully paired with a mentor who shared his enthusiasm for fishing. The Tomorrow: Today Foundation funded the boy's membership of the local anglers' association, and he attended meetings with his mentor.

The Four B's and More than Words

This 2010 Benalla Library pilot was based on the State Library of Victoria's Boys, Blokes, Books and Bytes (the Four B's) initiative. With eight to 10 weeks of library-based talks and demonstrations, it was designed to encourage local fathers and sons to explore library experiences together. Mentors were recruited to interact with boys who were unaccompanied by fathers.

However, the August pilot was poorly advertised and scheduled at a time when schools were already heavily committed. The Four B's was replaced with More than Words, a four-week program of talks and presentations aimed at encouraging students to make better use of library facilities.



'More Than Words' at Benalla Library with author Kevin Burgermeestre. A range of different activities were trialled in the first few years of the Education Benalla Program.



Ready Set Join! in action at FCJ College at the 'come and try' session.



Connect9 Library session.

The Chief Librarian says the program provided an initial opportunity for the six boys and mentors to socialise and inter-relate. They reportedly stayed together as a group for some time, enjoying a range of activities and in some cases increasing their use of the library.

More than Words also reinforced community connections, with the Friends of Benalla Library providing refreshments for each session. Book and cash donations enabled students to choose books to take home after each session.

Ready Set Join!

Designed to link students with community groups and clubs, Ready Set Join! arranged a series of visits by community groups to local secondary schools in 2010. Students had the opportunity to try a range of activities, and could receive financial support from TTF if they wished to join a group. More than 150 Year 9 students from Benalla's two secondary schools attended visits by local groups that included air cadets, an anglers' group, camera club, rock and roll club and motocross club.

Barriers to the participation of 43 students were overcome once the costs of transport, club membership fees, equipment, uniforms and activities were covered.

EBP continues to provide assistance to young people from financially disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in local groups and clubs.

Connect9

Ultimately, Ready Set Join! and More than Words both informed the development of Connect9, by demonstrating that an activity-based program was a very effective way to develop mentor/mentee relationships.

There were teenagers who, in the first round of interviews, were saying: 'I can't wait to leave, school's not for me, I'm going to get a job.' Their second interview, a year later, they're saying: 'I know I said that but I'm going on to Year 12 because I've got brains.' Connect9 has a great many components, all of which add up to a focus on the individual mentee. It might be that we were able to offer some backup tutoring, free of charge. Or that we put them in touch with a volunteer at one of the sport's clubs who was very happy to pick them up for Saturday morning sport. It's everything, it's a total approach, and that's not divisible.

Liz Chapman, TTF Board Member and Education Benalla Program Convenor

CONNECTING YEAR 9 WITH THE COMMUNITY

She had disengaged from school and had no goals. I was pleased she wanted to do the Connect9 program when I got a letter about it at home. After the group activities she was always excited and seemed engaged – her self-esteem lifted, I reckon. The tutoring has been great and she tells me she really enjoys it.

Mother of a Connect9 participant

Year 9 is a critical stage when students can derive real benefits from mentoring. But suggesting mentoring to 15 year olds can be an extremely hard sell.

The Education Benalla Program learned some key lessons from its first mentoring programs, particularly Benalla Mentoring 2010 and More than Words. So, when it launched Connect9 in June 2011, the new program was better structured around activities, shorter than some previous courses (10 weeks) and involved closer attention to ensuring mentors and mentees were well matched before the program commenced.

Connect9 was designed to 'connect' students and their mentor to:

- A different sport or activity each week
- A skill the student wanted to learn
- Interesting people who could become part of their new network
- Opportunities for work experience and part time work
- Career investigation

The program was promoted in the local paper and through the Victorian Youth Mentoring Network, Benalla Youth Services and NESAY (North Eastern Support and Action for Youth). Fifteen students were selected and matched with mentors.

I loved it. It's perfect for any kids and mentors as well that you just get a good point of view of what they're talking about and you get more options in Tomorrow: Today Foundation than you ever will in your life. Even though you've got parents and that, Connect9's a big step for your life. It's changed mine completely.

'Allister', Connect9 participant

Most mentors are recruited through Tomorrow:Today Foundation's network of contacts. All complete either a formal induction and training module or a personal one-on-one training session. These are accompanied by workshops based on components of the Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance Training Package, the development of individual program plans, a post-program debriefing session and guidelines for disengaging with mentees.

Mental health emerged as a significant issue in the 2011 program, so TTF organised for a number of parents, mentors and TTF staff to complete a 14 hour course in mental health, sponsored by North East Health and its Integrated Primary Mental Health program. The course was offered again in 2012, funded by EBP, and was attended by some of the parents, mentors and the new addition of staff from Benalla College.

The course has delivered significant benefits. It will continue to be offered to future mentors and Connect9 parents.

Success builds on success

The inaugural program in 2011 hit the mark with participants, and continues to be offered in both Term 2 and Term 3 each year.

I was very lost at the time and going through a very tough time in my life and I just thought that it would give me something to look forward to each week and just get my mind off everything. Just have a life with my new friends and mentor. Really good activities were provided for us, which is good. I've worked my butt off in school this year and I've got Student of the Term twice. I've got a number of awards and I've been in the paper a few times.

'Amber', Connect9 participant

In the first three weeks of the program, participants get to know each other and connect with local facilities. A number of Benalla organisations are supporting partners: including Benalla Library, Benalla Aquatic Centre, Benalla Performing Arts and Convention Centre, the Gliding Club of Victoria, the Benalla campus of GOTAFE, Benalla College and FCJ College.



The first weeks of Connect9 provide 'getting to know you' time and a great opportunity to connect to our local facilities such as the Aquatic Centre and the Library.



Connect9 sessions offer the chance to try out different Benalla clubs and activities.



Preparing a meal together during Connect9.



At the final Connect9 session students get to experience one of Benalla's highlights – a glider flight, followed by a celebration with mentors and families.

Initial activities comprise an introduction at the Aquatic Centre; a Masterchef session; and a race around and treasure hunt at Benalla Library.

Week four, the pivotal session of the program, provides a workshop which focuses on personal development and wellbeing. Mentors and mentees then plan out each student's personal component of the program.

From week five, individual activities are chosen by each pair. These have included a visit to the equine course at GOTAFE, movies, bushwalking, work experience with a photographer, camp fire meals, pottery, pistol shooting, constructing a kayak, archery, kendo, gym, swimming, the RSPCA in Wangaratta, table tennis, spotlighting and rope climbing.

The final session is a highlight. All students are given the opportunity to enjoy one of Benalla's famous glider flights, followed by a celebration bbq with mentors and families.

Connect9 runs two programs per year and is continuing to adapt and respond to feedback to create the best possible experience for Benalla's young people.

80% of mentors happy to continue

Sue (mentor) was fantastic. She just clicked really well with my daughter and they got along really, really well. They'd ring each other up and say, 'do you want to meet for a milkshake?' or something like that and off they'd go. She's actually ringing her right now to have a talk to her about some challenges she's having. It gives them a different perspective.

Father of Connect9 participant

Eight out of 10 mentors have expressed interest in staying involved with Connect9. Nine out of 10 say they will assist with recruiting new mentors and recommend the experience to their friends.

It helped my granddaughter so maybe I can in some way help someone else. It was a big thing for me because I don't really do a lot of that stuff. I met a lovely girl, she was my mentee. We're still really good friends now. She was a very withdrawn girl, when she was in the group, she was always the fun of the thing, but you could see that really deep down, she wasn't, it was just a front. We became pretty close because she tells me a lot of things that I don't think she tells other people. Like I said to her, 'what you tell me will never go past me.'

Grandmother of a Connect9 participant, who then became a mentor

Positive outcomes for students

These include:

- One very shy student prepared a resume, attended an interview and successfully applied for a part-time job at Safeway.
- Another young woman accessed four weeks of work experience at a local florist through her mentor.
- One student used experience working with a mentor on a small farming property to learn to drive. Describing Connect9 as “better than school ... a better way of learning things”, he has talked about the program to his peers and thinks he is now getting on better with people outside school.
- A family member confirmed he gained “a real sense of achievement” from Connect9, noting that he surprised both his family and his peers by speaking about the program at TTF's annual general meeting. (“We were all so proud . . . his mum was so proud that he spoke in front of so many people and that he did such a good job”.)
- Two young women were persuaded to access tutoring sessions at TTF. One of them dropped out early in Year 9 but was accepted to undertake VCAL at TAFE in 2012. Her

mother comments: “I believe TTF has changed our lives by offering tutoring. She has just been diagnosed with a severe learning difficulty and the fact that someone continued to believe in her, give her some help and direction, has been so good. I can’t thank [TTF] enough”.

- A number of students, who had not thought about future careers, reported they were now considering various options.

The community mentor is the absolute key to it. To have an adult that the young people respect, that’s another voice that is not their parents, is not a teacher, is not their older sibling; it’s very powerful. And it’s also wonderful for the mentors because part of what Tomorrow:Today is about is improving the face of young people in the town and for the mentor to come and tell me, I met this lovely young girl and we went and did this (activity), that’s wonderful to hear. That somebody who didn’t know this young person before has developed so much respect. It works. I suppose it’s an injection of faith in our future generations, which is exceptionally powerful.

Sue Oakley, Vice Principal Benalla College (at the time of interview)



Connect9 mentors and families celebration.

BENALLA COLLEGE’S CONNECT GIRLS PROGRAM

Benalla College’s Connect Girls Program, which is supported by funding from Tomorrow: Today Foundation, grew out of the difficulty of engaging Year 9 girls in school.

“Probably the thing that surprised us was the Year 9 girls as a cohort in terms of their attendance at school. That is a real problem, and a problem not just at our school,” says Sue Oakley, former Vice Principal of Benalla College.



A Connect Girls program visit to the Aquatic Centre.

The Connect Girls Program, which runs one day a week for up to 15 Year 9 girls, aims to improve their attendance and engagement at school. Activities focus on health, physical fitness, personal grooming, career planning and career pathways. Program evaluation shows significant improvements in the students' school engagement and overall school attendance.

Benalla College has invited families to be part of the school's volunteer team that joins students on excursions or afternoons when the girls are cooking at school.

"Bringing the family into the school environment is such an essential tool in all of this," Sue Oakley says. "What has really surprised me is the big difference that can actually make."

She (Year 9 girl) was a chronic poor school attendee – perhaps 10% - yet she has attended 90% of Connect Girls. She has engaged, identifying for herself what she can and cannot do, and she has developed real ideas about the future. We've been surprised at the extent of her personal growth.

Sue Oakley, Vice Principal, Benalla College (at the time of interview)

All Connect Girls are invited to participate in Tomorrow:Today's Connect9 mentoring program.



The Connect Girls program includes a range of development activities, including the chance for students to practice an employment interview.

Shared Aspirations

New funding in 2014 allowed the principles of Connect Girls to be extended to the whole Year 9 cohort. Tomorrow:Today's Executive Officer contributed to the program design and the successful funding submission. The new program, Shared Aspirations, provides Year 9 students with intensive planning of their individual career pathways and then tracks the most vulnerable students into Year 10 and beyond.

Parent engagement strongly influences student levels of school attendance and engagement so Shared Aspirations is focusing on bringing parents into the program.

Tomorrow:Today provides some funding and its Student Wellbeing and Transitions Coordinators support program planning and delivery.

BEYOND YEAR 9: A FOCUS ON TERTIARY EDUCATION

The pathway, graphic design, we thought, 'OK she has to go to university straight away after school and she's not terribly keen on going'. But you can also do graphic design at a TAFE, you can start off on a pathway that way. We didn't know that. It's only half an hour away at Wangaratta and then you've got Shepparton the other way. Especially for her because she's got a brother and sister who've been to university and she said: 'I don't necessarily want to go to university'. But to think of going in on another pathway... she'll probably end up there but it can be any way that she wants to do it.

Mother of Connect9 participant

The challenge of leaving home and community for tertiary education is just one of the factors that conspire to reduce the number of Benalla students going onto tertiary education. Low aspirations, lack of money, lack of knowledge about tertiary options and inadequate support also play their part.

The Education Benalla Program tackles the problem on several fronts, with strategies designed to broaden students' horizons as well as raise family and community expectations about the uptake of tertiary education or training.

In Year 9, the Connect9 mentoring program focuses on career exploration and information. A motivational coach conducts a planning night when mentees think about their personal characteristics, values, interests and career options.

Later in the year EBP provides the opportunity for parents of students from Year 9 to 12 to attend an information night called 'Parents as Career Advisors'. Teenagers regularly turn to their parents for career advice but parents often lack confidence in this area. Practical information, presented in a 'speed dating' style, prepares parents to support their children in the years ahead.

Students creating stronger pathways

"It's a school requirement that all Year 10 students complete a Career Action Plan (CAPS) in preparation for choosing their Year 11 subjects," EBP Manager, Pat Claridge, says . "We've worked with the two Benalla secondary schools, funding our Connect9 motivational coach to help their students complete these plans. The coach has worked very successfully with students in a number of other schools in the region.

"Students complete their Career Action Plans in time for Benalla Careers Day, so they can make informed choices about the most beneficial workshops to attend. At this early stage in Year 10, they're already thinking about the future and the subjects they will need to get there. It really is setting them on the path to where they want to be."

Benalla Careers Day, initiated by NE Tracks Local Learning & Employment Network, is held each year usually during National Career Development Week with local organisations working together to ensure its success. The day focuses on essential skills needed for career development, and local and regional opportunities for study, training and employment. For a number of years TTF has provided both funding and staff support. In 2012 EBP added a new session - 'Can my wallet afford it?' - to help parents understand the costs of attending university and the assistance available.

From 2013, EBP is funding bus trips to Melbourne Universities for Year 11 and 12 students and their parents. Over two years, students will be able to visit four universities to learn about university study and familiarise themselves with campus life and accommodation, dining and recreation facilities.



Benalla Careers Day helps Year 10 students to make more informed choices about their futures.



Senior secondary students from Benalla explore Melbourne Uni during a normal Uni day. The bus trip is part of a suite of activities funded by the Education Benalla Program, 2013.

Community supports the move to tertiary

Some students have the dream and the ability, but not the necessary resources, to undertake tertiary education. To assist these students, since 2011 EBP has awarded annual \$1,000 scholarships at both Benalla secondary schools.

“The Benalla community wants to support our young people to strive to be the best they can be,” TTF Chair, Sally Gamble, says. “The Foundation is pleased to be able to bring together funding from local families who want to make a difference with students with a plan for tertiary study who will really benefit from some financial support.”

This final ‘Transition to Tertiary’ sub program continues to evolve as EBP pursues significant and sustained improvement in the number of students finishing Year 12 and then completing an apprenticeship, diploma or degree.

“A successful transition to tertiary education relies on a combination of many small interventions over a number of years,” EBP Convenor, Liz Chapman, says. “Working across schools and agencies helps establish a community environment of supportive expectation. In addition, we make sure that teenagers have a number of points at which their natural interests are encouraged and specific needs addressed. In the end, if the young person has set their sights, and if the family is keen, it becomes achievable”.

IMPACT OVER TIME: SOME PERSONAL TESTIMONIES FROM THE REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT EBP EVALUATORS

ALLISTER has had many major disruptions in his life. These have included erratic (and less than ideal) periods living with one or other parent or older siblings, and times of relative stability living with his grandmother.

But Allister has participated in Education Benalla Program activities for two years – Hands on Learning (HOL) at Benalla College and the Connect9 mentoring program. This has enabled him to undertake a range of sporting activities, learn to drive within the confines of a farm, and learn some agricultural skills.

In a Year 9 interview, Allister expressed some interest in eventually training as a cabinet-maker. Although a sociable young man - a self-described chatterbox - he hinted that he had resisted school due to being bullied. He credited HOL with inspiring a change in his attitude.

“I didn’t come because I was being picked on ... I’m here every day now, basically”, Allister says.

Allister said HOL had helped him get on better with people. He welcomed the practical nature of the program - the fact that the group “didn’t do the same thing every time - the opportunity to get to know new people, and “learn more stuff”.

He proudly spoke about Connect9 at a public event and, at one point, made a number of suggestions for future delivery of the program, like the incorporation of bowling, a pool table and computer games.

When re-interviewed, Allister admitted that the year since his first interview had been rather “ordinary”. Noticeably less gregarious this time, he explained his reserve as “just one of those days”. Where he had previously seemed committed to the idea of seeking a school-based apprenticeship, he now insisted “I don’t know” when asked about his future aspirations. At the same time, he noted that his school absences had almost halved, that he was doing “much better” in English, that he still intended to stay at school, and that he had maintained friendships with his fellow HOL participants.

HOL staff confirmed that Allister has been going through a difficult period and that this was temporarily affecting his usually up-beat interactions with others.

Allister, and fellow HOL participant Ben, have been identified by HOL staff and TTF as probable initial participants in the proposed Transitions program, After School Part-Time Work. This program will be specifically geared towards young people who have never tackled part-time employment and who lack the skills to prepare resumes, promote themselves at interviews or access employment networks. The program aims to augment participants’ schooling with an after-school part-time job or a school-based traineeship or apprenticeship with local employers. The literature identifies there is a close connection between paid part-time work and higher levels of student engagement at school and that undertaking paid part-time work during the school years enhances positive transitions to employment, post-school.

AMBER, (who has now completed Year 12) appears to be a striking success story. When first interviewed, in relation to Connect9, a mentoring project that is a component of the Education Benalla Program, she said her High School years had been difficult. She had

severe depression and anxiety, caused in part by her parents separating, and “didn’t go to school that much”.

“My older brother dropped out of school early and went a bit feral . . . In Year 7 I was heading in the same direction . . . hated the teachers, hated my parents. I saw a lot of psychs, doctors . . . it was really great talking but every time they tried to help I wouldn’t accept that. Then one day I thought – NO I’ve had enough. I can do this’. Now look where I am,” she says.

Amber readily credits her Connect9 experience, and her mentor in particular, as being important factors in her revitalisation. “I thought it was great . . . something to look forward to every week. Lots of fun . . . I met 20 new people and my mentor . . . She was a great help. She was an adult I could talk to when I didn’t want to talk to my parents. We instantly got along. We still catch up for coffee ... or dinner and Christmas baking days . . . I help her little girl with her spelling. She helped me put together a resume, helped me get work experience by introducing me to the manager of [a local store]”.

Previously, Amber described herself as still a bit unsure about her future, and still somewhat prone to anxiety attacks. Her ambitions were relatively modest - she was thinking about becoming an apprentice tattooist.

However, a year later Amber said she had completely turned around. “Everything’s just falling into place . . . school’s improved . . . I’m doing subjects I like and my subjects [for next year] are sorted out psych, PE, biology, maths methods, VET automotive”.

The personal changes Amber reports are also readily apparent to Tomorrow:Today Foundation staff and the evaluators. They include markedly increased self-confidence, a strong friendship and social network, a much-improved relationship with her family, and acknowledgement that she may have been limiting herself in her earlier aspirations.

Neither her father nor mother went beyond High School, but both believe Amber can achieve anything she wants, and will support her choices.

“Dad said if he could go back to school he would . . . He listed a whole lot of jobs he thought I’d be good at . . . he thinks I’m a good healer and could be a nurse, masseuse, or something with animals,” Amber says.

“I know now that I’m intelligent. I think I’ll end up having many jobs . . . I’d like to do a trade . . . One of my teachers says I get bored once I learn something. I’ll probably move around a lot of things . . . that’s why my subjects have always been mixed . . .

“Dad says ‘Just try your best’ . . . Not many people listen to that. They get told that 1,000 times and never do anything about it. That’s what I admire about myself”, Amber says.

BEN’S anger management issues brought him into conflict with a number of teachers and other students. But Ben was offered a spot on the Hands on Learning (HOL) program

after a discussion between the school and his parents. Ben has found the relative freedom and physical nature of HOL reassuring – a change from being uncomfortable with formal classroom learning, in part because of a diagnosed learning difficulty.

When interviewed at the end of his first year with HOL, a school based program supported by the Education Benalla Program, Ben was pleased with his newly acquired gardening skills and maintenance tools. He praised the flexibility of a learning environment in which he was able to “wear off” his emotions by finding his own physical space. Particularly noticeable was Ben’s strong pride in the HOL program: he was keen to show visitors the workspace, tools and completed projects. One teacher said: “He has a real sense of ownership of our work.”

When interviewed, at the end of a second year with HOL, Ben says he is “just plodding along”, still not particularly enjoying other school subjects. He concedes, however, that his attendance has improved and (reluctantly) agrees with his peers that his overall attitude is better.

“Considering when I started ... if I can keep doing this, I can bring some of it [response to HOL] to my other classes”, he admits. Ben is unequivocal about the program itself: “HOL is awesome”. Ben’s peers describe him as “a different person at HOL to other sessions”.

For his part, Ben credits HOL with the determination to help him overcome his learning difficulty and with providing positive interactions with HOL students and staff that have improved his confidence in talking to other people. As examples, he cites fruitful conversations with the community cemetery caretaker and his ongoing enjoyment of friends who have since exited HOL.

There are strong indications that HOL has given Ben the incentive to stay on at school rather than leave Benalla, following a series of family crises in the past year.

“Some teachers don’t help you with problems ... Ed is a good bloke to talk to. I had a problem [at home], wasn’t going home ... he sat down and talked to me and persuaded me to [stay]”, Ben says.

Ben concedes he needs to stay at school if he is to become a mechanic, a butcher, or get an apprenticeship as a kitchen hand.

In 2014 Ben successfully completed Year 11 and received an Excellence Award in one of his subjects.

CASSIE is one of a small number of girls who have undertaken Hands on Learning (HOL) at Benalla College. She participated in the program for 15 months. In her first interview for the Education Benalla Program evaluation, she gave HOL credit for a complete turn-around in her behaviour and attitude.

HOL staff had said Cassie was a “real handful” with a history of absenteeism and classroom disruptiveness. Cassie said she was “hard work” and seriously underperforming in Year 8.

“I just didn’t come [to school] and then they put me in HOL”. Previously Cassie cited the combination of teamwork, supportive people she could talk to, encouragement and forbearance displayed by HOL staff and peers as influencing her journey from “wanting to drop out the second I could” to wanting to go on to university.

“I want to get a teaching degree. Take the experience with me and turn around little turds like myself . . . HOL has made me become a better person”, Cassie says.

“I used to fight with people. Some people I wouldn’t talk to, they’re my best friends now . . . You make awesome friendships . . . My grades have flipped around and I don’t disrespect people now”.

Cassie did have a rocky year following those comments. She thought seriously about dropping out after transferring to Benalla College’s senior campus. But she is pleased to report having “stuck it out”.

Cassie realises she has only one more year of “sitting in classrooms all day” and seems determined to complete Year 12, “Otherwise”, she says, “all that hard work goes down the drain”. The close bond she developed with HOL participants and staff continues to pay dividends. Cassie says: “You make friends and keep them.” She values still being able to occasionally chat with HOL staff, Peter and Ed, about day-to-day problems.

She also acknowledges that teachers at the senior campus have been sensitive to her experiencing “a bad spot” and have “been there to support me”. Just as reconnection to mainstream learning helped to substantially improve her Year 10 English results, her Year 11 maths result “went through the roof”.

At the time of writing, Cassie has secured an apprenticeship as a chef at a local restaurant.

CLINT was a reluctant transfer to Benalla College. “I just wanted to leave . . . hated everybody . . . didn’t get on with people”.

When Clint was first interviewed by evaluators, together with his Hands on Learning (HOL) peers, he had been a HOL participant for four terms. While clearly very shy (he had to be mildly coerced by a staff member to join his peers in the focus group), and a hesitant speaker, Clint was able to describe his day-to-day progress as “really good now ... with [HOL] I love coming to school”. His enthusiasm for HOL, which is supported by the Education Benalla Program, extended to renewed interest in some other classes. He wanted to stay with education and eventually secure a carpentry apprenticeship.

A year after his first interview, Clint arrived for the second interview ahead of his peers and offered to help set up the meeting room. He exhibited a major growth in self-confidence, readily chatting while waiting for the interview to get underway.

Clint credits HOL with providing “a different environment” that gave him responsibilities, built his confidence, and enabled him to form strong friendships.

“It’s totally changed my attitude ... helped me feel I’m part of the school ... I’m much more confident about speaking up in class ... I’ve got friends ... I get along better with most of the teachers”. Clint reports that his enjoyment of HOL has improved his school attendance 100%.

His yearlong HOL experience has taught Clint a lot about patience, particularly when working with people who might ‘snap’ easily. It has enriched his people-skills and knowledge of life.

In the past year, Clint successfully applied for, and is now enjoying, a part-time job that requires him using those improved skills. He relishes being paid, hopes to save up for a house and successfully complete an apprenticeship. He has some thoughts about becoming a diesel mechanic.

“Otherwise”, he says, “I’ll do Year 12”.



Hon. Alex Chernov AC QC, Governor of Victoria and Mrs Elizabeth Chernov visit Tomorrow:Today Foundation. Pictured with Pat Claridge and Liz Chapman on left and Sally Gamble and Cr Barbara Alexander AO, Mayor, on right – November 2013.

More about Tomorrow: Today Foundation

VISION

A generous community, able to deliver a stronger tomorrow by challenging itself today.

PURPOSE

Enable the people of Benalla district to create a stronger, more resilient and prosperous rural community.

AIMS

- Stimulate the development of Benalla district
- Raise funds and resources to build a substantial Community Fund to benefit Benalla district, forever
- Demonstrate the benefits of community philanthropy
- Provide a responsible and accessible way for donors and volunteers to resource a range of community development initiatives

VALUES

Introduction

Benalla district has been able to sustain itself over generations through effort, community involvement, hard work and productivity. Tomorrow:Today Foundation embraces these local traditions as our way of working to achieve our vision, purpose and aims. We are an agile and responsive organisation, run with minimal overheads.

As well as living these local traditions, our values are stated below for all those individuals and organisations who may seek to donate, work or partner with us to help achieve a stronger, more resilient and prosperous rural community.

Leadership

We have the courage to lead change and accept the responsibility to inspire and deliver positive change.

Always for the benefit of community

Our motivation is always to work with the community to benefit the community. Whilst our methods of operation will be flexible, we will not deviate from our purpose.

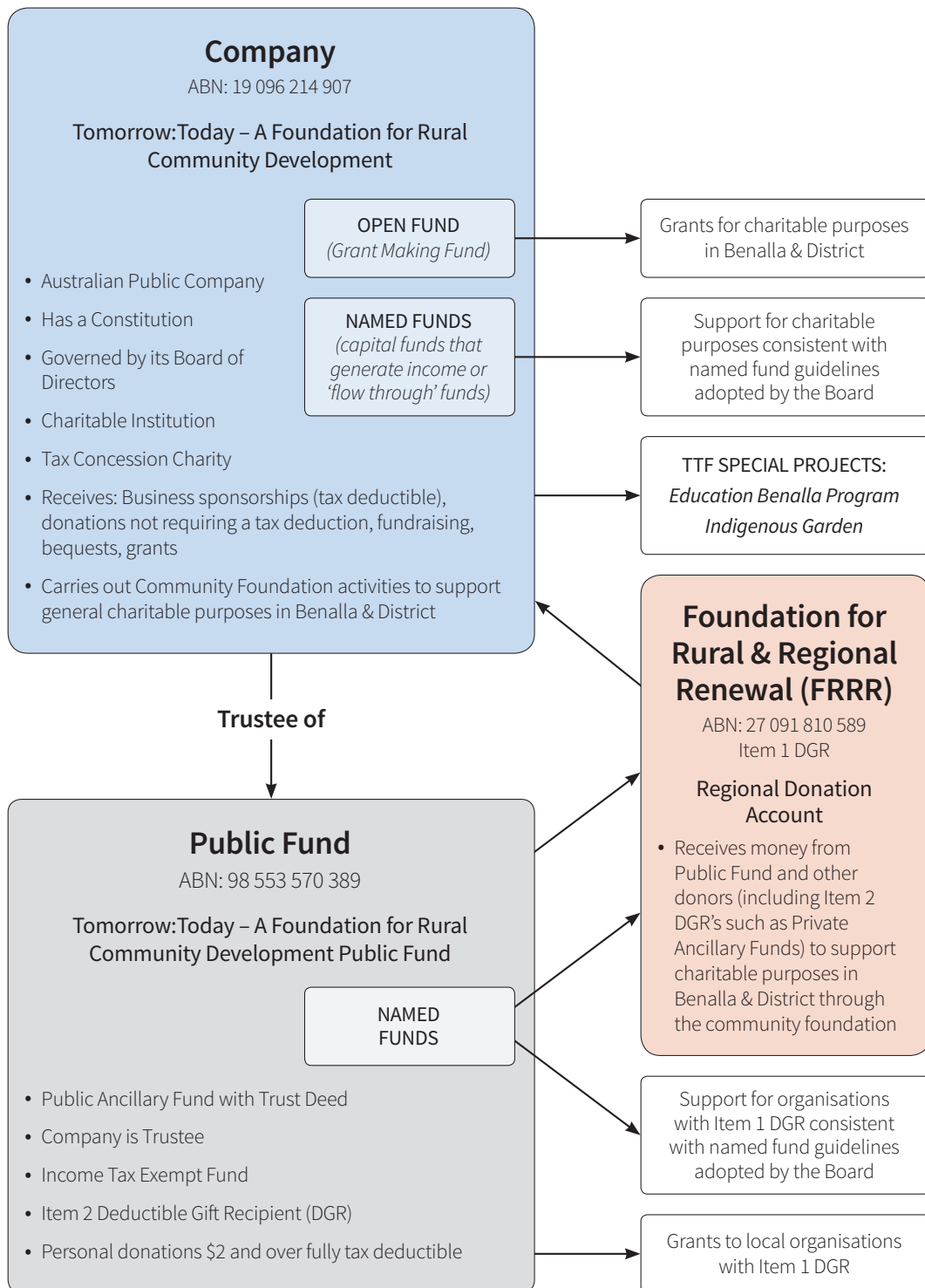
Partnerships

Cross-institutional collaboration and knowledge sharing are essential to the achievement of long lasting benefits. We value partnerships that are equitable and results-focussed with government and non-government organisations, community groups, other philanthropic bodies and commercial organisations.

Integrity

The organisation, represented by its staff, Board of Directors and volunteers, acts with honesty and integrity in all actions and decision making. We value trustworthiness, and can be relied upon to meet our obligations.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



BOARD & COMMITTEE STRUCTURE – JUNE 2014

Board of Directors

Chair	Sally Gamble
Deputy Chair	Liz Chapman
Company Secretary	Tony Schneider
Treasurer	Adrian Aldous
Director	Bill Dobson
Director	Geoff Oliver

Board Sub-Committees

Audit

TTF..... Tony Schneider
 TTF..... Sally Gamble
 TTF..... Adrian Aldous
 Com..... Colin Tatterson
 Com..... Ken Wood

Ex-officio:

Accountant (Vicki Dosser)
 Auditor (Simon Law,
 Metzke & Allen)

Purpose: To assist the Tomorrow:Today Foundation Board to fulfil its oversight responsibility on its compliance with statutory obligations, company policies and procedures.

Finance & Investment

TTF..... Tony Schneider
 TTF..... Sally Gamble
 TTF..... Adrian Aldous
 Com..... Frank Bartlett
 Com..... Terry Trounson

Purpose: To make recommendations to the Board on investment strategies supported by appropriate evidence and information. Monitor the Foundation's investments and report to the Board.

Small Grants

TTF..... Sally Gamble
 TTF..... Liz Chapman
 TTF..... Pat Claridge

Purpose: To oversee the Small Grants Program and make recommendations to the Board for funding consideration.

Special Project Committees

Education Benalla Program Program Management Committee

TTF..... Liz Chapman
 TTF..... Sally Gamble
 TTF..... Bill Dobson
 R E Ross Trust..... Sylvia Admans
 Ian Potter Fnd Alberto Furlan
 DEECD..... Marian Lawless

To guide the development and implementation of the Education Benalla Program. This includes receiving advice from local advisory groups, considering evaluation reports, and making recommendations to the Board of Tomorrow:Today as determined appropriate.

Advisory Committees

Named Fund Advisory Committee

The structure of TTF allows organisations, individuals or families to support charitable projects that benefit Benalla & District by establishing a Named Fund. A Named Fund is a management account within Tomorrow:Today Foundation under the control of the Board.

The donor may request the establishment of an advisory committee to assist in making requests to the Board. The committee would consist of at least one TTF and one donor representative.

DIRECTORS OF TOMORROW:TODAY FOUNDATION

	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14
Liz Chapman		C	C	C	C			CS	CS		DC	DC	DC	DC
Sally Gamble		T	T	T	T	T	T		C	C	C	C	C	C
Alana Johnson														
Rowena Mann														
Anthony Schneider					CS	CS			CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS
Wayne Weaire		CS	CS	CS	C	C	C	C	C					
Graeme Kettle														
Margaret Dillon														
Jane Grimwade														
Tanya Mitchell							CS	CS						
Adrian Aldous							T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
Gareth Patterson														
John William Dobson														
Geoff Oliver														

KEY: C = Chair, CS = Co-Secretary, DC = Deputy Chair, T = Treasurer

*Current directors are listed in bold

SMALL GRANTS AWARDED SINCE INCEPTION

Year	Group Name	Project Name	Amount	Total
'03/04	Benalla Botanica Conference	"Community Spaces & Private Places"	\$5,000	
	Benalla Camera Club	Photographic Exhibition	\$600	
	Pulse Youth Newspaper	Pulse Youth Newspaper	\$1,000	
	Young Mums Support Group	Establish Young Mums Support Group	\$300	
			\$6,900	\$6,900
'04/05	Benalla Community Singing	Benalla Vocal Nosh Group	\$1,000	
	Ovens & King Community Health	2 x Club Wild Scholarships	\$500	
	Young Mums Support Group	Swimming, St Johns & Educational Activities	\$1,000	
			\$2,500	\$9,400
'05/06	Benalla & District Family History Group	Preservation of Howship Plate Collection	\$750	
	Benalla Business Network	Education Program	\$500	
	Benalla Community Singing	Continuation of Group and Banner	\$750	
	Club Wild	Benalla Goes Wild	\$1,000	
	Waminda Inc.	Bike Repairs and Maintenance Training	\$1,200	
	Young Mums Support Group	Swimming, St Johns & Educational Activities	\$750	
			\$4,950	\$14,350

<i>Year</i>	<i>Group Name</i>	<i>Project Name</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Total</i>
'06/07	Benalla Schools	Benalla Leadership Forum	\$800	
	Benalla West Primary School	Community Links Veggie Garden	\$500	
	Delatite Community Health Service	Community Connections	\$500	
	Little Footprints Community Playgroup	Little Footprints Community Playgroup Sign	\$1,000	
	Peter & Scott Schneider	Youth in Arts - Talent Showcase	\$703	
	Waminda Inc.	Community Luncheons	\$400	
			\$3,903	<u>\$18,253</u>
'07/08	Benalla Toy Library	Party Packs	\$945	
	Cooinda	The Hub	\$500	
	NESAY	Party Safe Program	\$1,250	
	Peranbin Primary College	Peranbin Community Garden	\$1,000	
	The Centre	Slingshot Youth Mentoring Program	\$6,000	
	The LLEN	YB-MAD Youth of Benalla Making a Difference	\$2,500	
			\$12,195	<u>\$30,448</u>
'08/09	Anglican Parish of Benalla	Homework Club	\$2,000	
	The Centre	Slingshot Youth Mentoring Program	\$6,000	
		\$8,000	<u>\$38,448</u>	
'09/10	Anglican Parish of Benalla	Homework Club	\$2,000	
	The Centre	Slingshot Youth Mentoring Program	\$6,000	
		\$8,000	<u>\$46,448</u>	
'10/11	Benalla College	Study Camp the Best Start for Success	\$4,000	
	BPACC	Live Theatre Experience	\$1,683	
	BRC Community Services	RED (Read Every Day) Tent	\$300	
	Central Access Limited	A Taste of Nature	\$1,600	
	Little Footprints Community Playgroup	Little Footprints Multicultural Development	\$2,213	
	NE Tracks LLEN	Benalla Careers Day - Get the Life You Love	\$1,500	
	Swanpool & District Community Development Association	Swanpool Women Gathering in Changing Times	\$1,500	
	Thoon & District Progress Association	Wheelie Bin Festival	\$550	
			\$13,346	<u>\$59,794</u>
	'11/12	Benalla College	Year 12 Study Camp	\$2,365
Benalla East Primary		Benalla Music Camp	\$1,500	
Broken River Potters		Relocate kiln and connect 3 phase power	\$5,000	
Life Youth (Life Church Benalla)		Multimedia Equipment upgrade	\$2,944	
NE Tracks LLEN		Benalla Careers Day - Get the Life You Love	\$2,000	
Preschool Partnership - Bernard Briggs		Upgrade of sandpit	\$1,400	
Preschool Partnership - Munro Ave		Refurbishment of dramatic playspace	\$4,128	
Tatong Young Bloods		Tatong Playgroup	\$3,430	
Waminda Inc.		Welcome new residents to Benalla	\$720	
Waminda Inc.		Benalla West Community Festival 2012	\$2,000	
			\$25,487	<u>\$85,281</u>

<i>Year</i>	<i>Group Name</i>	<i>Project Name</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Total</i>
'12/13	Baddaginnie Community Inc.	Playgroup Equipment upgrade	\$750	
	Benalla Health	Benalla West Community Festival	\$2,000	
	Benalla Music Camp	Benalla Music Camp	\$2,250	
	Benalla Rose City Band Inc.	Stands Up for Music in Benalla	\$903	
	Benalla Toy Library	Focus on Early Childhood Literacy	\$500	
	Benalla Uniting Church	Community Lunch Program	\$700	
	Benard Briggs Kindergarten	Building blocks & educational equipment	\$5,000	
	Broken River Potters	Equipment for Community workshops	\$398	
	Cooinda Village Inc.	Let's Find our Voice	\$2,500	
	Munro Avenue Pre-school	Preschool information technology resource grant	\$2,200	
	Waminda Inc.	Refurbishment of sandpit & shade sail, cubby house	\$2,800	
		\$20,001	<u>\$105,282</u>	
'13/14	Benalla Scout Group	Canoeing & Abseiling Equipment	\$2,288	
	Upper Murray Family Care	Establish Kinship Support Group	\$1,348	
	Munro Ave Preschool	Purchase large story books for group reading	\$500	
	Rotary Club of Benalla	Community Drinking Water Station - Lake Benalla	\$5,000	
	Ride Ave Preschool	Stove & cooking utensils plus worm farm	\$978	
	Little Footprints Community Playgroup	Outdoor blocks & play furniture	\$3,000	
	Children with Special Needs Support Group	Celebrate International Day of People with a Disability	\$1,200	
	FCJ College	VCAL students Winton Wetlands project	\$3,240	
	Benalla P-12 College	Walk in My Shoes - experience life with a disability	\$3,000	
	Winton Primary School	Play equipment for new Playgroup	\$3,000	
	Australian Christian College Hume	A Sense of Belonging - specialised teaching resources	\$3,000	
			\$26,554	<u>\$131,836</u>

COMMUNITY FUND

Community Fund Total by Financial Year

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
\$												
												727,470
720,000												
700,000												
680,000											665,038	
660,000												
640,000												
620,000												
600,000												
580,000												
560,000												
540,000												
520,000										504,343		
500,000												
480,000									460,734			
460,000												
440,000												
420,000												
400,000												
380,000												
360,000												
340,000												
320,000												
300,000												
280,000												
260,000												
240,000												
220,000												
200,000												
180,000												
160,000												
140,000												
120,000												
100,000												
80,000												
70,000												
60,000								40,799				
40,000							21,302					
20,000	600	3,780	4,248	5,750	7,840	9,796						

KEY: **number** Total amount in Community Fund corpus

 Open Fund

 Community Fund

Income from the Community Fund supports charitable purposes in Benalla & District.

EDUCATION BENALLA PROGRAM SUMMARY

Aims

Significant and sustained improvement in:

- Number of students completing Year 12
- Number of Benalla's young people (17-20) transitioning to tertiary education
- Number of Benalla's young people (18-24 years) completing a diploma or degree
- Number of Benalla's young people successfully completing an apprenticeship

Objectives

1. All Benalla & District children start school ready to learn
2. Literacy and numeracy levels are measurably improved
3. Student-assessed levels of wellbeing improved to moderate or high
4. Family and community raise expectations for students to go on to tertiary education or training

Desired Outcome

Education and training completion rates for Benalla 17 – 24 year olds will equal or exceed the Victorian average for non-disadvantaged districts.

Methodology

A whole-of-community development program (“place-based”) that spans family, community and school life.

Sub-Programs

1. School readiness and early years (0-8 yrs)
2. Student Wellbeing
3. Transition to tertiary education
4. Community grants

INVESTMENT FROM BEYOND BENALLA

Tomorrow:Today Foundation has received funding assistance from the following sources, in some cases over many years:

To support Tomorrow:Today Foundation

- FRRR – Feasibility and Community Foundation Sustainability grants
- The Ledger Charitable Trust managed by Perpetual – Grants for community development projects
- Victorian State Government – Community Foundations Program
- The R E Ross Trust – The Story of TTF

To support local students

- FRRR's Sidney Myer Fund/FRRR Back to School Program
- FRRR Stay at School Program

To support the Aboriginal Garden project

- Reichstein Foundation
- FRRR 'Seeds of Renewal'
- Goulburn Murray Catchment Management Authority
- Central Hume Primary Care Partnership

To support the Education Benalla Program

- Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- The R E Ross Trust
- The Ian Potter Foundation
- The Ledger Charitable Trust managed by Perpetual
- The William Buckland Foundation
- FRRR's Rural Education Program
- The Yulgilbar Foundation
- Newsboys Foundation
- The Jack Brockhoff Foundation
- George Hicks Foundation
- Victorian State Government – Advancing Country Towns
- The Kimberley Foundation
- The Dick & Vera Bertalli Educational Program

Tomorrow: Today Foundation Timeline

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|-------------|-----------|---|
| 1999 | Oct 27-29 | Benalla's Liz Chapman attends the Regional Australia Summit, Canberra, as a session facilitator |
| | Nov/Dec | Informal discussions on the value of forming a Community Foundation |
| 2000 | Jan | A group of local people meet and decide to seek funding support from FRRR to undertake feasibility study, submission made |
| | June | FRRR approves grant for a Feasibility Study |
| | June | First meeting of Benalla District Community Foundation Reference Group |
| | July 31 | Public meeting at Civic Centre to discuss Concept Paper prepared by Liz Chapman (previously distributed) |
| 2001 | Jan | Project Worker employed part-time in an office at Delatite Community Health |
| | May | Feasibility Study for Benalla Community Foundation is submitted to FRRR |
| | July | First Tomorrow:Today Foundation Board meeting at Delatite Community Health |
| | July 27 | Public meeting at Civic Centre to report on progress. Community support for concept of a Foundation |

- 2001** Aug Investigation begins into ways of supporting the Crossing Place Project – a local community project that could benefit from formal links to TTF
- 2002** June Position of project worker is expanded to Executive Officer (EO)
 June Commencement of discussions re an Aboriginal Garden
 Oct TTF invited to participate on Benalla Police Memorial Committee – 150th anniversary of the first police presence in Benalla
 Oct Crossing Place donations start to come in
 Nov 8 **Launch of Tomorrow:Today Foundation** by Rt Hon Ian Sinclair AC, Chair of FRRR, at Benalla Art Gallery, attended by over 100 people
 Dec EO involved in planning for Healthy Communities Project and Innovative Youth Services Project
- 2003** Mar Philanthropy Australia Conference in Sydney – attended by all Directors and EO
 Sept *Benalla Police Commemorative Celebrations*
 Oct 24 **Inaugural Small Grants presented** by Lady Southey at Benalla Art Gallery
 Nov TTF's Aboriginal Community Garden Advisory Committee members walk around Lake Benalla with landscape architect and select preferred site at Moira Park



Uncle Wally Cooper and Chris Thorne discussing the Aboriginal Garden project, 2003.



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1. Lady Southey, as President of Philanthropy Australia, attended the inaugural Tomorrow:Today Small Grants awards ceremony in October 2003. Here she presents the Pulse Youth Newspaper grant.
2. Board members and staff outside TTF's new office in Cecily Court, February 2010.
3. Foundation supporters at the Open Garden fundraiser, November 2009.

2004	Feb	Presentation to Council Planning & Development Committee on preferred site for Aboriginal Community Garden
	Mar	Community Foundation Forum in Bendigo, TTF present on recruiting new directors
	Oct	<i>Creating Community Connections Forum at the Drill Hall</i>
	Nov	Meetings with numerous service providers, parents and schools about resourcing families of children with special needs with a better service delivery model
	Dec	Liz Chapman, Chair, invited to present at international symposium on Community Foundations in Berlin
2005	Jan	FRRR Back to School Vouchers distributed for the first time
	May	Plans for Aboriginal Community Garden displayed at Council for public comment; subsequently approved at Planning & Development Committee

2005	June	Small Grants community input workshop – highlights issue of young business and professional people who are socially isolated
	July	First meeting of what would later be named ‘Benalla Social Network’ at Georgina’s, organised by TTF
	Sept	Aboriginal Community Garden site set out by landscape architect with council staff and TTF
	Nov/Dec	Back to School Fundraiser – collection tins at local eating venues
2006	Apr	Information evening at Benalla Art Gallery for Accountants, Lawyers and Financial Planners
	Aug	Community Foundation Forum in Mooloolaba, TTF presents on Role of Boards in CF’s
	Oct	Construction of Stone Wall at Aboriginal Garden begins (completed Feb 07)
	Dec	FRRR ‘Stay at School’ funding to support year 11/12 students who are living independently
2007	Feb	Vinson Report released - <i>Dropping off the edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia</i>
	Aug	Community Foundation Forum in Albury/Wodonga co-hosted by TTF
	Aug	Literature Review: Education and Social Disadvantage prepared by TTF
	Oct	Benalla Social Network relaunched
	Nov	Discussion Paper: Philanthropy in Public Education prepared by TTF
Nov	Small Grant Presentation evening	
2008	June	First meeting of Education Program Community Advisory Committee convened to investigate, debate, define and make recommendation to the Board regarding the design and cost of projects to make up an Education Program that would improve Benalla student outcomes
	Sept	Ambassador Program launched
	Sept	Planting at Aboriginal Garden involves five schools and local community members
	Nov	Report from TTF’s Education Program Community Advisory Committee
Nov	Open Garden fundraiser during Benalla Festival	
2009	May	DEECD confirms two years funding support towards Education Benalla Program
	May	First annual fundraising appeal
	Sept	Philanthropic briefings on ‘Education Benalla Program’ in Melbourne
	Oct 22	AGM at Fareholme Cafe, Good News Night, Ambassadors invited
	Nov	Open Garden fundraiser during Benalla Festival
Nov	Project Donation account established with FRRR to help TTF raise funds for Education Program	



1. Guest speaker at Tomorrow:Today's AGM in November 2013 was Dr Diana Leat, former Trustee of the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund in the UK.
2. Minister Lily D'Ambrosio, pictured with Tomorrow:Today Board Member Geoff Oliver, announced the '\$100,000 Challenge Grant' at Benalla Art Gallery in July 2010.

2010	Jan	'Lonsdale Fund' established by local family, to support young people whose opportunities are impacted by drug or alcohol abuse in the family unit
	Feb	Office moves to Shop 10 Cecily Court
	Feb	Education Benalla Program implementation commences
	Feb	EBP: Hands On Learning begins at Benalla College
	Apr	Open Garden fundraiser
	Jul	Ministerial announcement of State Government 'Challenge Grant' at Benalla Art Gallery
	Oct 28	AGM at Olivers Restaurant, Goulburn Ovens TAFE
	Dec	Small Grants for Benalla & District awarded jointly with FRRR
2011	Feb	EBP: Little Giggles Playgroups begin
	Apr 12	Event to celebrate successful 'Challenge' Appeal and receive additional \$200,000 from State Government for Community Fund
	Jul	EBP: Connect9 begins
	Jul	Philanthropic briefing on Education Benalla Program in Melbourne
	Sept	TTF wins the 'Marketing Excellence' Award at Benalla Business Network Business Excellence awards in recognition of community fundraising campaign 2010-11
	Oct 26	AGM at Olivers Restaurant, Goulburn Ovens TAFE, Guest Speaker: Mrs Eda N. Ritchie AM Trustee of the R E Ross Trust
	Dec	Small Grants for Benalla & District awarded jointly with FRRR
	Dec	EBP: Presentation of first tertiary scholarships to two Year 12 students



2014: Parent and child activities are run four days a week on site at Tomorrow:Today Foundation and at other venues in and around Benalla.

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| 2012 | Mar | TTF prepares Report to the Steering Committee of Advancing Country Towns initiative: Home-based literacy program - design elements |
| | May | EBP: Reading Buddies begins at Benalla East Primary School |
| | Sept | EBP: PEEP (Parents Early Education Partnership) begins |
| | Sept | Community Foundation Forum in Mackay, TTF presents on Education Benalla Program |
| | Oct 25 | AGM at Oliver's Restaurant, TAFE, Guest speaker: Ms Alexandra Gartmann, CEO, Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal |
| 2013 | Feb | Joint grant information evenings with BRC and various government and sporting organisations – Thoona & Benalla |
| | Apr | Philanthropic briefings on Education Benalla Program in Melbourne |
| | June | 'Education Fund' established by local family, to support young people whose educational opportunities are limited by financial disadvantage |
| | Aug | Government briefing on Education Benalla Program in Melbourne |
| | Sept | Community Foundation Forum in Barossa Valley, TTF presents on Education Benalla Program |
| | Oct | Education Benalla Program named in the 'Top 50 Australian Philanthropic Gifts' of all time |
| | Nov | The Governor of Victoria, Mr Alex Chernov AC QC and his wife Mrs Elizabeth Chernov visit TTF on a trip to Benalla |

2013	Nov 28	AGM at Lakeside Community Centre, Guest speaker: Dr Diana Leat, former Trustee of Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund
	Dec	Local 'Challenge Appeal' raises \$100,000 during 2013
2014	Feb	TTF presents at Collective Impact conference in Sydney – Education Benalla Program presented as an Australian case study of 'collective impact'
	Feb	Regional Donation account established with FRRR to help TTF raise funds for charitable projects in Benalla & District
	Mar	Donor function to celebrate successful 2013 local Challenge Appeal
	May	Education Benalla Program receives generous support from the 'Dick & Vera Bertalli Educational Program' established in memory of a well-known Benalla family
	Sept	Education Benalla Program is one of the projects recognised in 'The Ian Potter Foundation, 50 Years - Looking Back, Reaching Forward' book
	Oct	TTF wins the 'Business Commitment to the Community' Award at Benalla Business Network Business Excellence awards
	Oct 30	AGM at Lakeside Community Centre, Guest speaker: Mrs Janet Hirst, CEO, The Ian Potter Foundation

