



CEF Chairman's Address - AGM 2014

Last evening I attended the Boorowa Education Foundation committee meeting. The meeting was held in preparation for interviews from students leaving school and embarking on their studies and careers next year. The conversation by committee members around the table roamed from the difficulties young people were now facing in the tertiary education sector, the increased costs being faced by country students and the increased responsibilities being transferred to the individual.

The combination of these enhanced pressures has confronted a lot of young people in taking the next step into the world of further education and leaving the family protections and local comfort zone that they have developed in their lives so far. It was interesting to reflect on our own committee's conclusion regarding the importance of the work we do. This, simply put, was that we provide encouragement and endorsement for a young person to make the decision to take the next step in starting a career beyond school.

It is to this purpose that the Country Education Foundation (CEF), and the communities that work within it, has dedicated itself. The case for our involvement has never been more compelling.

On the back of this reaffirmation of purpose I reflected on the endeavours and achievements of the CEF for the last year under review. In essence the focus of the past year can be covered by three broad themes: sustainability, consolidation and efficiency.

The appointment of Sarah Taylor as our CEO has been one of the milestones in securing the future of our organisation to pursue our ambitions. While this may be a lofty claim the leadership of Sarah has been focused on creating a sustainable organisation that supports and develops our local communities, enhances the opportunities for students and at the same time broadens the funding base to be able to do so.

After a hectic period of growth this has involved a period of consolidation. The aim to lever off our improving results in delivering to students from the existing community corpus that we have in place.

A natural adjunct to the consolidation has been to focus on our own efficiency and this has involved a significant investment in technology and capacity to streamline all aspects of our operations, including financial reporting. The obligations on charitable organisations, such as us, in statutory reporting and compliance with the Australian Tax Office is considerable and the forensic capacity of Katie Walker to ensure this is done properly is appreciated with gratitude.

I hope to be reporting next year on further plans to adapt our website into a more interactive mechanism for all our communities so as to diminish their workload which is always limited by the voluntary nature of those who work within our organisation.

Having said that our year has been one of consolidation tends to disguise the fact that the value of our local grant giving has risen 29% on the previous year and records seven consecutive years of strong growth, in both numbers and the value of the grants given to young students. This result has been enhanced by the joining of new communities namely Shoalhaven, Gwydir, Hastings and Macleay Valley.

The growth over the last year has been further enhanced by our new partnership with the Loder Foundation that is providing scholarships at Narrabri and Moree. Further, the support of the Eureka Foundation with its focus on Broken Hill has been another example of us as an organisation linking to like-minded philanthropic organisations with ambitions to provide educational scholarships to aspirants in regional Australia.

The fact that we have our feet on the ground, combined with a deep knowledge of local communities, puts us in an absolutely unique position to judge worthy candidates. This connection from philanthropic minded families to the grass roots is a key attribute of the CEF.

Sarah Taylor, in her CEO's report to stakeholders at the AGM, will give more detail of the particular support that we have received during this year. I must confess that at times it is challenging to gain financial support and commitment when so many other demands are being made on both individuals and families, thus it was a rejuvenating affair earlier this year to have the CEF Friends' lunch in Sydney and the opportunity to hear from Tim Fischer on his time in The Vatican.

The event which was most kindly sponsored by Boyce Accountants was one of those warm and reinforcing experiences that keep the batteries charged for a prolonged period. We have developed a wonderful group of Friends with a common spirit to work to redress some of the disadvantages suffered by regional students in Australia.

Such support is headed by the continuing engagement that we find with The Origin Foundation. They retain a partnership commitment to our success that has been both financially generous and morally supportive. During the year their Grants Program Manager, Tom Keenan, committed himself to travelling around Southern NSW with Sarah Taylor, visiting our communities. This was enormously appreciated by these communities and is to be replicated in a similar journey scheduled for later this year around the key Queensland communities working with us.

We could not have made it through the year without our community partners providing pro-bono assistance and this particularly applies to Matt Wilson and Stephen Godbold who advised us on technology strategy along with funding from Origin and Macquarie University to get our website rebuilt. These contributions have been supplemented by a wonderful team of volunteers and young interns who are regularly in our larger Orange office, helping on a myriad of tasks.

This year we farewelled most sadly Quentin Bryce, when she stepped down as both our Patron and Governor General of Australia. Her commitment to regional Australia is profound and her clarity of thought and passion comes through clearly when she speaks to our cause. I enjoyed the opportunity during the year of being with her to present the awards at the Temora and District Education Foundation where all those qualities were on display. She will be genuinely and sadly missed by us along with many others.

Thankfully after Quentin Bryce's retirement we were lucky enough to be able welcome back Tim Fischer after his sojourn to the Vatican. He assumes the role of Patron with the frenetic energy and commitment which he has become renowned for.

His passion for the task of education and providing opportunity for young people to enjoy its benefits remains undiminished and if anything enhanced by his experiences overseas. He is an extraordinary Australian and we are privileged to have his support.

The organisation led by Sarah Taylor is one that features a committed and highly professional team. Katie Walker, who has announced her retirement from the organisation, has been with us since the beginning and without doubt her role in the founding years had much to do with gaining sufficient traction to see us emerge successfully. We thank her most profoundly.

The rest of the team have risen to the challenges and opportunities of the past year with great professionalism. Henrietta Hood, Jane McKenzie Hollows and Kate Staniforth show a level of commitment that is rare and a privilege to lead. They, along with our diligent pro-bono financial team at Boyce Chartered Accountants, have been integral to the success of the organisation.



Nicholas Burton Taylor AM

Boorowa September 2014